Eye of the Beholder

by TheOddTiger

Summary

Life is how it should be for our two Parisian heroes. But when one of them accidentally discovers the other's identity, will she be able to handle the truth? And, what will her partner do after he finds out for himself who she is when he shouldn't know? What will happen once they get together and risk everything they have by knowing their greatest kept secrets? All will be seen as it is in the eye of the beholder.

Notes

Well here we are, first work on AO3! I'm new here, but I hope to make some nice memories! I also hope you enjoy this fic, I plan to keep it as true to the show as possible with some character development from my perspective and my own theories, and of course a roller coaster of emotions. I will also warn you that some things from seasons 1 and 2 will be mentioned in here, so if those are spoilers for you, go watch the episodes first! And there will
be some strong language and/or suggestive themes throughout the fic as well, I find it makes it easier for older readers to connect with the characters and adds to the humor. Ye've been warned. Comments welcome, please ignore any grammar mistakes though ^~^', most of this fic is or will be written with Word on my phone because life has me constantly on the go and autocorrect is none too kind. Anyway, enough of my rambling, onward to Eye of the Beholder!

See the end of the work for more notes.
The Boy with no Freedom

“Chat!”’, his name slipped out passed her lips, into an atmosphere that suddenly felt colder than usual, despite the impending Winter that drew nigh. She ran to him, a red blur from where she stood to where his limp body lied in a heap, bloody and battered. Why had he put himself in that kind of danger?! Her miraculous magic had gone to work just before she sprinted to his side, repairing the damages left by the recent Akuma. But, could it repair the dead? Was he even dead? The thought crossed her mind, but she refused to believe it. No, her partner was stronger than this, and he should be waking up to greet her with his usual grin and a pet name he’d specifically made for her, and perhaps a cat pun too…Right?

But he didn’t.

She scooped him into her arms from the chest up, holding his head close to where her heart felt like it might burst from her very being.

And even at that close range to his Lady, he still didn’t move.

The miraculous magic passed them by, purifying his body of his wounds until they were no more, as if he’d never been touched. And she half expected him to open those big green eyes of his, yet there was nothing. Was it too late?

“Chat? Chat?! CHAT!”’, she cried, giving him a shake in hopes of getting him to wake up. A lump she’d been all too familiar with rose into her throat and she found it hard to breathe passed the tears that began to spill from her bluebell eyes and beyond the boundaries of her mask. He looked as if he’d been sleeping there in her hold, but she couldn’t even hear him breathing. Her earrings beeped their warning as her transformation began to wear thin, but she ignored it, all of her senses numb.

“No. I need you…”, her voice, once a cry in the stillness of the air, became only a whisper. She bowed her head, nose on his chest, tears falling far from dry. Her grip on him tightened as her own body began to quiver from the hard truth that seemed to be setting in. He was gone, and there was nothing she could do about it.

“You stupid cat…”, at first it was a mumble, but it’d quickly turned into a roar. “You! Stupid! CAT!”.

Which then became a cry of anguish that’d been building up within her set free to the heavens.

“CHAT! YOU STUPID CAT!”.

Several days earlier…

“Hey Marinette!”, it was that usual cheery voice that called out with a wave of his hand to accompany it, one that made said girl, Marinette Dupain-Chang, melt wherever she stood. It also made her heart race uncontrollably and caused her to fluster.

“It’s Adrien! Alya, hide me!”, Marinette jumped as she looked towards the blonde boy that had called her name, then hid behind the girl that stood next to her in hopes of not being seen. Well too
late for that, she’d been spotted. His face was always more perfect in person than on any magazine cover or billboard his photo was plastered to. But no matter how much she thought so, she could never say so. The shyness is strong in this one.

“Get a grip, girl!”, Alya, Marinette's best friend since the beginning of their tenth grade year and going strong into their eleventh grade year, laughed at her best friend's antics. Marinette only wished to be as brave as Alya. “It was just a hello! He says hi every morning and has since last year! Why you being such a chicken?”, she'd asked, waving the boys down, Adrien and Nino, to join them much to Marinette's distress.

“I think I’ll just stay back here”, Marinette whimpered, biting her lip without giving an inch from hiding behind Alya. However, Alya had different plans. She sidestepped away and turned Marinette around so that she was facing the boys fast approaching, to which she began to panic further with her hands on her head.

Too late to run and hide somewhere.

“Yo!”, Nino greeted with a lazy wave to the girls as he and Adrien came to a stop in front of them.

“S'up?”, Alya threw back, giving her own lazy wave to Nino and a nod to Adrien.

“H-hi, A-Adrien…”, Marinette squeaked, giving a shy wave of her hand with a grin that might have been too wide and cheesy to be a greeting. If anything, it might have been something just a little short of creepy. It was full on awkward, though. Nevermind that, Adrien seemed to be okay with it and returned Marinette's wave with a shrug and a kind smile. A strange noise came from the dark haired girl when she was elbowed in the side by Alya, perhaps a little too harshly.

“Get your act together, girl! Have a little more confidence, will you?!”, Alya whispered into Marinette’s ear. Words of encouragement from her best friend were always welcomed and appreciated, but no amount of that was going to help her when it came to Adrien. She was doomed.

“What’s all the hush hush about?”, Nino asked curiously, looking between the girls from one to the other.

“Oh nothing, just girl stuff”, Alya waved him off, but chuckled with a hearty smile as if nothing was wrong. Well, nothing was really. Unless you counted Marinette's rapid beating heart as a possible heart attack and feeling like she was going to faint. Then something might be very wrong. “Hey, what are you two doing for lunch?”, Alya asked them, earning a panicked yell from Marinette as she tried to shush her friend, knowing EXACTLY what her question was leading up to.

“Nothin'. Why, you got somethin’ in mind?”, Nino shrugged after looking to Adrien and getting only a shrug as an answer.

Alya pushed Marinette's hands away, threatening to bite them if she tried to cover her mouth to keep her from talking. “Same. I was thinking the four of us could go grab something together. Sort of like…A double date”, Alya said, nodding with certainty at her choice of words and crossing her arms over her chest. She’d said it suggestively, eyeing Adrien and looking towards Marinette, then back at Nino which she’d already had a bit of something with. Ever since she’d got locked up with him inside of an animal enclosure during an Akuma attack, Nino hadn’t had any interest in other girls. And it was all because he’d slipped up trying to confess to Marinette.

Adrien looked from Alya to Marinette as the idea was thrown out there, and was met by surprised bluebell eyes. He gave a sideways smile at her, eyebrows arched up in a furrow. Damn those beautiful green eyes of his, that handsome but cute face of a cinnamon roll! Marinette tried to copy
his expression, but she was sure her version looked nothing like the original and was probably worthy of stalker material. A double date? No, more like double homicide. She was going to kill Alya for doing this and setting her up with the boy she could hardly utter a word to, and then die from Adrien overload. And here she hoped to be in her best dress in her final moments of life.

“Yeah, I’m game! You?”, Nino nodded, looking to Adrien again as he passed the question to him.

“Sure! Beats sitting at home and having lunch by myself!”, Adrien nodded, that sideways smile turning into an ear-to-ear grin.

Wait. Had he, Adrien Agreste, famous teenage model and son of famous fashion designer Gabriel Agreste, and quite possibly the hottest boy Marinette had ever laid eyes on, just agreed to go on a date with her? Albeit a double date, with Alya and Nino, but a date nonetheless. She wanted to leap for joy, but to save herself the embarrassment she settled for one, long, internal scream. A long internal scream from on the moon, that is.

“Awesome! We’ll meet up at lunch then!”, Alya gave a thumbs up to the boys and patted Marinette on the back kind of forcefully to pull the girl from the daze Marinette obviously wasn’t aware she was in. Or was she? Sometimes for Alya, it was hard to tell.

“Cool!”, Nino mirrored the thumbs up with a grin on his face, glad that Adrien was actually going to go along and not stick to his usual routine of eating alone in a house that hardly ever seemed lived in. The only thing that could stop his friend, however, was…”Dude, what about your old man?”, Nino asked with the sudden realization.

“My father?”, Adrien asked, breaking his gaze away from Marinette to look over at Nino. Having lunch with friends sounded so nice and exciting that Adrien seemed to have forgotten about those strict rules his father had him caged under like a trapped cat. He frowned at the thought of being refused that kind of freedom.

“If it’s any trouble, we don’t have to meet. I just thought it’d be good for us to do something together”, Alya said, also not having taken Adrien's restricted freedom, which she couldn’t even call freedom, into consideration. That boy was a prisoner in his own house, on parole.

“Yeah, and by that you mean you’re going to glue me next to Adrien and then run off cackling like the maniac you are while leaving me to fend for myself…And we all know THAT will be the disaster of the century!”, Marinette thought to herself.

“No, no. It’s fine. My father is away right now. You know, fashion designer business”, Adrien said with a shake of his head, as he rested his hand on the back of his neck and that little sideways smile with those arched furrowed eyebrows came back to his features. “I’m sure I can convince Nathalie to let me go”, he added.

“Gotta break those chains at some point, dude. Glad to see you’re finally growing a pair!”, Nino laughed.

“No!”, Adrien scolded, giving his friend a frown. If there was one thing that was the most embarrassing to any teenage boy, model or not, it was insulting his manhood. Or for some, a lack thereof.

Alya giggled at them. Even Marinette had to bite back a small chuckle.

“It’s settled, then! We’ll meet on the front steps at lunch hour!”, Alya nodded, taking mental note of it. The school bell rang, telling them that they will all be late to first class if they didn’t get their butts
in gear. With the boys following behind the girls, they all headed up to their classroom.

Nino let Alya go in first with a gentlemanly gesture, or as gentlemanly as a DJ could be at least. It seemed enough for Alya and that’s all that mattered. He entered in behind her and took his seat, which happened to be in front of Alya, one level down.

Adrien looked from his friend as he disappeared into the classroom to Marinette who waited next to him to go in.

“Heh, you first”, he laughed cheekily, scratching the back of his head with one hand and gesturing towards the door with the other.

“Oh no, I couldn’t possibly go first! You’re only the most awesome person in the school- I mean, most amazing- I mean! Obviously you’re greater than me so it’s only natural that you go first- I mean!! Hrrrm…” Marinette spoke, trying to save herself from what she was saying and failing miserably as usual, giving a groan of defeat as she slouched over from where she stood, arms and head hanging from her person.

Adrien wasn’t quite sure what to make of her babbling. He’d heard some pretty random- and some pretty strange-things fly out of her mouth as she tries to recover from stumbling over her speech, so it was nothing new. But he couldn’t say he was used to it either. He just looked at her with wide eyes. Awesome? Amazing? Greater than HER?! He would argue the complete opposite! Marinette was a nice girl, everyone enjoyed her company including himself, and he would admit that if he didn’t have the feeling it’d turn her into a stumbling mess. She was awesome, and amazing, which he’d told her that once before. Greater than her? No, he couldn’t agree with that. She was greater than him, having more friends than he could hope to have, parents that actually loved her, and a home that was lived in. He just laughed at her defeated posture. It was no use trying to correct herself, she could never win.

“Come on, we’ll to in together”, he said, taking her hand in his, with one last look into her eyes-those strangely familiar eyes, before pulling her along through the door.

Marinette couldn’t believe it. “He’s holding my HAND!” she squealed on the inside, looking bewildered on the outside. She approached the door with him, side by side, as they proceeded to walk through.

Whether it was Marinette’s karma or Adrien’s streak of bad luck, neither of them made it through the door at the same time. They bumped into each other, causing one another to look sheepishly at one another all flustered. Here comes the apologizing profusely train, pulling right up into the station of Idiotopolis, all aboard!

“Sorry!”, Adrien was the first to board that train.

“No no, I’m sorry!”, and Marinette was the second.

“My fault!”, Adrien insisted.

“No, it was totally mine!”, Marinette wasn’t going down that easily.

“Sorry!”, both said at the same time, voices mingling together in the tight space they felt they were in. Was it getting a little cramped?

With that last word, both of them moved from the doorway into the classroom and took their seats, Adrien next to Nino and Marinette next to Alya behind him. They both sat down almost in sync, both a nervous wreck from the encounter. What would Ladybug have done if Adrien had done the
same while he was Chat Noir? What would Chat Noir have done if Marinette had done the same while she was Ladybug? Both wondered, and imagined how such scenarios would go. Ladybug wouldn’t be too impressed, and Chat would just make a pun and proceed to flirt with her. Their heroic personas might have been close friends, trusting one another with their lives and sometimes ignoring the meaning of personal space, but neither of them would have reacted the same. Then again, as far as either of them were aware of, Marinette wasn’t Ladybug and Chat Noir wasn’t Adrien. If either of the two knew who the other was underneath their disguises, maybe things would be different. Marinette didn’t want to think about it. She groaned again and slammed her forehead down on her desk, lying there and mumbling past the desk’s surface.

“Just kill me now Alya…”, she mumbled in a whine.

Alya's only response was a chuckle and a pat on Marinette’s back. She’d seen the entire scene between her friend and her crush unfold on the doorway, and Alya had been facepalming the whole time at them. Yep, those two idiots were definitely made for each other.

Nino had also been watching, pinching the bridge of his nose. Adrien Idiot Agreste, his best friend, a heap of model and social awkwardness. He’d been told by Alya about Marinette's strong liking for Adrien, and given he wanted only the best for the girl he used to have a thing for, he volunteered to nominate his best friend as the best boyfriend material Marinette was going to get. Whatever Alya would plan to do to get them together, Nino would be in on it right along with her. Adrien needed some coaching anyway, by the looks of it.

“Bro”, Nino just shook his head at Adrien. “What was that?”, he asked, sounding a bit disapproving of what’d just happened.

Adrien just shrugged his shoulders, unsure of what it was himself.

“You, my friend, need some serious help”, Nino shook his head again, crossing his arms over his chest.

The last bell rang and all of their attention was directed to the front of the room as Madam Bustier walked into the classroom to begin the day's first lesson.

Marinette had been antsy the entire time up until their lunch hour, unable to sit still in her seat, fidgeting, and jumping any time Adrien so much as sneezed in her general direction. At least she could say now that he sneezes like a kitten, which was pretty adorable. He blamed it on Chloe because she’d been wearing feathers with her outfit.

Come lunch hour, there wasn’t really much need to meet up on the front steps, the four had left the classroom at the same time. But upon arriving at the arranged meeting sight, Adrien saw that all too familiar vehicle pull up to the side of the road, and that all too familiar woman with the dark red hair and pointed suit, tablet in hand, glasses fixated almost too perfectly on her face, step out of the passenger side. Her gaze found him immediately, and Adrien flinched. Nathalie wasn’t exactly the softest woman he’d ever met. In fact, she was mostly about business and obeying his father, keeping Adrien in line and up with his schedules. She was also the one that made sure Gabriel's rules that kept Adrien so restricted from a healthy social life in place. Adrien didn’t hate Nathalie, but at times like this, she wasn’t particularly his favorite either. His three friends that waited with him on the steps looked from Nathalie to Adrien, back and forth, wondering what one was going to do and how the other would react. Was it going to be Adrien first? Or Nathalie? Odds were, it’d take just one sharp look from her that would have Adrien backing out from their plans and leaving with her. But his father was the kind you didn’t want to anger or cross, Nathalie and Adrien both had that much to agree on, so who could blame him?
Adrien sucked in a breath to calm his nerves, although it didn’t do him much good, and began to approach Nathalie with a sad frown upon his face. Marinette had noticed, that he wore that frown a little too often.

Once Adrien was close enough to speak with Nathalie, she leaned forward, ready to open his door for him so that he may get into the vehicle, but she’d stopped mid-action as she stared at him intently. The other three leaned in a little from where they all waited back on the top of the front steps, as if they were going to be able to hear the conversation, but they weren’t that lucky.

“What do you think he’s saying to her?”, Nino asked.

“I’m not sure, but I don’t think he’s being very convincing”, Alya shook her head. Being a reporter and admin of the Ladyblog, she was normally pretty observant of a lot of things, facial expressions and reactions being two of them. Nathalie’s face told Alya that Adrien wasn’t going to get the answer he was hoping for.

“Tsk, that woman is a prickly B-I-T-C-H…”, Nino muttered with dislike in his voice and features. He wasn’t very fond of any of the adults in Adrien’s life, and especially Gabriel.

“Nino! That was uncalled for!”, Alya rounded on him with a glare. While she could agree that none of the adults Adrien lived with on a daily basis were healthy influences, to go out and call them something do vulgar was a little over a line even she wouldn’t cross. Unless it was about Chloe, she’d be at least a few miles passed that line then.

“Hmph, if you’d had seen her when Adrien's father completely dissed me, you would know it's true!”, Nino argued, still bitter about that day he’d tried talking Gabriel into letting Adrien have a party for his birthday, and was utterly refused and sent away, unwelcomed in the Agreste house. He blamed that on why he’d been Akumatized.

“Well honestly in Adrien’s dad's defense, you were sort of trespassing on his turf and pushed the subject a little too much even after he’d said no. You just don’t argue with those kinds of people, they aren’t worth the time”, Alya shrugged. Nino was about to rebuttal, but Alya shushed him and looked back towards Adrien and Nathalie.

Adrien was slouching in defeat, while Nathalie held his door open for him. He looked back at his three friends with a sad and disappointed gaze, hands gripping tightly to his bag strap that hung across his shoulder, before reluctantly getting into the vehicle. Nathalie closed his door, gave the other three teens a pointed look that had Nino cursing her out under his breath, and pretty soon got into the vehicle herself. Adrien didn’t even glance out his window at them as he was driven away by Nathalie and his bodyguard, back to the Agreste manor for his lunch hour.

“Well so much for that”, Alya shook her head. She wasn’t disappointed in Adrien, he was just doing what he was told, but he didn’t look too happy one bit about it.

“Poor Adrien…”, Marinette said softly with the utmost sympathy in her quiet voice. That look he’d given them just before he got in the car, she’d seen it before many times, and it always broke her heart. She wished he could have the family he wanted. She knew his father wasn’t the loving kind, that his mother had long since disappeared, and he was alone almost all other times. She always felt sorry for him, more than he would ever know. She also wished she was braver, so that she could talk to him about these things, maybe give him an ear that would listen to his troubles and a shoulder for him to cry his woes away on, or help him find closure about things. But alas, she was not so capable of such things, being too head over heels to even make something coherent of herself in front of him.

“Well what now?”, Nino asked, throwing his hands up in the air in his own sigh of defeat.
“We can still go grab something, though I’d hate to go on without Adrien”, Alya suggested.

“There isn’t much we can do about it now, babe. He’ll be back at the end of lunch hour”, Nino said, Alya nodding in agreement. They both began to walk off to find a place to get lunch, but Marinette didn’t follow. She was still staring at where the car driving Adrien away had disappeared around the corner of the street.

“Hey Mari! You coming or what?”, Alya yelled up to her, now at the bottom of the stairs waiting with Nino.

Marinette broke from her stare and looked down at the two. “No thanks, you two go on ahead, I’ll see you later”, she waved, and began heading towards her parents’ bakery, already having ideas of things she could bring from there to Adrien after lunch hour to maybe cheer him up. He seemed to enjoy sweets, especially when she made them herself.
War Zone

Chapter Summary

As Marinette finishes tackling some much overdue homework, she is reminded just why she has overdue homework. An Akuma attacks the city, and she has to join her partner in taking it down.

Chapter Notes

I'm not so great at writing Akuma attacks or battles so I hope this chapter doesn't bore you and at least makes some sense.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She rushed out of the door of the bakery, a small box tucked under her arm American football style. “I’m going to be late!”, she thought to herself in panic.

Lunch hour was over, and Marinette had spent the entire time making a special treat for Adrien, after she had explained to her parents what had happened and that she wanted to cheer him up. She didn’t set any of that time aside for herself to eat something, determined to make his treat herself, because he seemed to enjoy the baked goods better when she was the one that made them. There had been a few times when she'd brought some goods she’d made herself to share with her friends, Adrien included, and he complimented her for it pretty much every time.

And now, she had just thirty seconds to get from the bakery to her class before the tardy bell rang. But, try as she might, she didn’t quite make it. She’d been a few feet from the classroom door when the bell rang, and was sprinting inside about five seconds after.

“Ms. Dupain-Cheng!”, Ms. Mendeleiev yelled scoldingly as she turned around from the chalk board at the sound of Marinette's stumbling and huffing. “I’m late! Again I see! I have no choice but to send you to Mr. Damocles's office! Off you go!”, she said. Chloe and Sabrina were snickering about the scene, and doing a very poor job at trying to keep quiet.

Marinette shot a glare at the two girls that laughed at her, but it did nothing to phase them.

“With all due respect, madam, I had to help my parents at their bakery during the lunch hour. You know, with everyone off for lunch break and all, there’s usually a flood of customers…”, Marinette panted, hunched over when one hand resting on a bent knee while the other still clung to the box that held Adrien’s treat inside.

“Hmm…”, Ms. Mendeleiev thought, putting her hand to her chin and staring at Marinette analytically, which made Marinette give a sheepish grin and a nervous chuckle. “Well…I suppose that’s a valid enough reason. Fine! But if it happens again, I’m sending you to the principal's office! Now take your seat!”, she said, then pointed sternly at her seat next to Alya’s in the classroom, before turning back and returning to her task on the chalk board.
Marinette did as she was told, but while Ms. Mendeleiev wasn't looking, she took the opportunity to quickly deliver the box of goodies to a rather confused Adrien, who didn't understand why she was giving him something. She smiled kindly at him before going to take her seat next to Alya at the other side of the classroom, taking out the necessary materials for the class. Physics was one of her least favorite subjects.

Adrien watched Marinette sit down and then looked back at the box left in front of him by her in confusion. He could see it had the bakery's logo on the top, so he figured it must be from there. While Ms. Mendeleiev still had her back turned, and he did look up to make sure of it, he slowly opened the box to peak inside. He caught a whiff of something fresh and sweet, so he opened the box a little more as his curiosity urged him on, and inside he saw a few homemade chocolates with a note attached to the underside of the lid. He opened it enough to retrieve the note and it read:

“Sorry you couldn’t have lunch with us, so I made you these to make you feel better! I hope they cheer you up!

- Marinette”

Adrien couldn’t fight the smile from spreading across his face at the sweet gesture. Literally. He looked back over at her while still smiling and he caught her smiling back at him, but she quickly tore her gaze away in her usual embarrassment and didn’t look back again. He looked back down at the box in front of him, reattached the note to where it had been stuck, and quickly stole himself one of the chocolates before Ms. Mendeleiev turned towards the class to start lecture, making him have to hide the box of special goods. The chocolate he ate melted so smoothly in his mouth, and it was the perfect balance of richness mixed with heaven. Marinette always made the best things! He knew he’d have to thank her later.

The school day finally came to an end. Adrien hoped he’d catch Marinette in time to thank her for the treat and let her know it did the job and cheered him up quickly. She was always so thoughtful. It was a little strange that she gave him gifts at random times for no special reason, but he'd grown a little used to it now. He was a celebrity, he was showered in gifts a lot of the time, so it was something he didn’t particularly like very much. But Marinette’s gifts were always meaningful, regardless of how random, and it made him appreciate her as a friend.

He spotted her at her locker just in time, and so strolled up to her. He tapped her on the shoulder to get her attention. She looked over her shoulder to see who it was and when she realized it was him, she spun around quickly with a squawk and did the awkward praying mantis.

“A-Adrien! Hi! You how are?! I mean, are you how?! I MEAN, how are you?!” she stuttered, fidgeting in place and suddenly unable to stand still.

Adrien chuckled. “I just want to thank you for the chocolates, that was really nice of you, I think they cheered me up pretty good!”, he said.

“Oh! Great that’s! I mean, very that's good! I mean! That’s very good great!”, she stuttered again, then slapped her hand to her forehead at her seemingly endless failure. Why couldn’t she say anything right around him?! “Oh good grief…”, she muttered with the shake of her head.

“It’s okay, I understand what you meant”, he chuckled again, and reassured her by patting her on the shoulder.

“You’re w-welcome!”, she managed out, smiling awkwardly at him.

Adrien laughed and smiled back at her. As weird as she sometimes was, she was a nice person that
he liked being around.

“Well, I should get going now, I’ve got a photoshoot to get too. See you later Marinette, and thanks again!” he said, waving goodbye as he began to walk away.

“O-okay! S-see ya! Have a food- I mean! Good day!”, she waved back to him, hoping he would understand what she meant that time too. She groaned at herself in her head at her stupid inability to speak straight when she was talking to him. He disappeared around a corner and she whipped back to her open locker with a big grin on her face.

“Did you see that Tikki!? He came up and thanked me!”, she said, seemingly to nobody, but a little red blur zoomed out from her bag to float in front of the dark haired girl's face.

“I heard it too. You really should work on talking to him better, Marinette”, the red blur, a certain bug-like godly creature, said encouragingly to her chosen, Marinette.

“I don’t think it would matter. Every time I’m around him I just lose myself and forget how to do things! I could practice what to say to him a million times, but no matter what, I’ll always come unglued near him. He’s just so charming and handsome! And dreamy! I really can’t help it!”, Marinette sighed.

“You’re never going to get anywhere with that boy if you can’t even talk to him! Have some courage! A lot of past Ladybugs had a little bit of trouble with communicating with others, but you are having the worst trouble yet!”, Tikki chimed, buzzing in amusement.

“Don’t remind me!”, Marinette groaned, then motioned for Tikki to hide in her purse again, closed her locker, and headed for home. She wasn't looking forward to the homework she had to do, and would probably be working at it for the rest of the night. She only hoped there wouldn’t be any Akuma to waste her time between now and tomorrow.

“So did Adrien like his chocolates?”, she was questioned by Sabine, who was manning the register while Tom worked in the back, upon walking into the bakery.

“Yes mama, he thanked me at the end of school”, Marinette nodded with a smile.

“See? I told you he’d like them. You really do make good sweets, honey. You get it from me”, Sabine smiled back with an approving nod, as she served a customer by ringing up his pastry order and giving back the change.

“Mama”, Marinette sighed with embarrassment at the compliment. She passed through the back of the bakery, waving a greeting to her father on her way, and headed up the stairs to the building’s second level where their apartment was. From there, she went inside and up into her room. She tossed her school bag onto her desk, and set her purse down more gently, mindful of Tikki, who zipped out as soon as Marinette let it open.

“Your mother is right, you know. You’re really not that bad at baking”, Tikki said.

“You’re just saying that because I give you cookies all the time!”, Marinette laughed. She held her hand out to the kwami as an invitation and Tikki flew right into her palm happily.

“Maybe so. But I still mean it in a good way!”, Tikki giggled.

Marinette brought her kwami up close to her face and nuzzled her with her nose as a sign of affection. Then she set Tikki down and pulled out her school work to begin the long painful process of getting things done, including the work she’s missed from being late. She sighed and groaned in
frustration at some of the work when she didn’t understand it or got stuck on what to do, but with Tikki there to coach her on, she kept moving forward with it. Eight o’clock in the evening rolled around as Marinette finished the last of her homework, and by then, was mentally exhausted. She organized her papers into a neat stack and shoved them back into her school bag, knowing she would forget them later if she didn’t. After that, she ascended the stairs to her loft and fell backwards onto her bed with a hum and a sigh, stretching her arms and legs from sitting at the desk for too long.

“Glad that’s over”, she huffed.

“Sometimes I think you work yourself a little too hard, Marinette”, Tikki said, hovering above Mari.

“Sorry Tikki. But with being Ladybug and trying to balance that with being a normal collège student and manage my grades, I can’t not work too hard. When I’m not doing homework I’m saving Paris, and when I’m not saving Paris I’m slaving away at getting caught up on school. Sometimes I wish I could pause life and take a break”, Marinette said a bit miserably, flopping over from her back to her stomach, pulling a pillow up to herself and burying her face into it.

“Oh Marinette…”, Tikki sighed, floating down to pat her chosen’s shoulder softly with her tiny paw as a means of comfort. She knew how hard it was for someone to be Ladybug while also keeping up a regular civilian life, especially for those so young like Marinette.

“Don’t take it the wrong way, Tikki. I’m glad to have met you, and I like being Ladybug, but sometimes I wish life wasn’t so hard. I’m lucky enough to even keep my grades up!”, Marinette’s head popped up from the pillow as she spoke.

“It’s okay. A lot of past Ladybugs had their own lives to live too, they struggled just as much to maintain it all in a balanced way. But that’s the sacrifice to being a super hero, and one who was chosen for it that. We all have to make sacrifices sometimes, even if we aren’t ready to. Just remember that while things may be rough now, they’ll get better later”, Tikki smiled kindly, bouncing and buzzing around in the air.

“Yeah, I know. I accepted those terms when I put on the earrings, I guess. I didn’t think it would be this hard, but if I just persevere, I’m sure things will get better later too”, Marinette nodded.

“That’s the spirit!”, Tikki hummed.

Marinette was about to say more when she stopped after hearing a sudden rumble from outside. Thunder? No, it sounded too low to the ground to be thunder. Curious while exchanging a concerned glance with Tikki, she climbed up onto her balcony through the hatch door above her bed to have a look at what was going on. No clouds, the night was clear. And she didn’t scent rain at all. It couldn’t have been thunder. She was about to go back inside when she heard the sound again, this time she felt it in her feet, which told her it was closer this time. She turned back around to try and see what was making the noise. And that’s when she spotting what looked like human sized toy soldiers marching in the streets below.

“An Akuma!”, she thought with realization. She looked around more until she saw a large burly looking figure on a rooftop a few buildings over, dressed from head to two in a French war uniform, and he seemed to be the one turning people into the toy soldiers she saw a moment ago!

Without hesitation, she called on her kwami. “Tikki, spots on!”, and in a flash, the familiar black spotted red heroine stood in Marinette’s place on the balcony. She whipped out her yoyo and launched it at the next building in her sights, then took off towards the villain.

A few short minutes later, as she was in mid-swing from one building to another, she suddenly
collided with something in the flank, and it sent her off course to the side. Whatever it was she got hit with, she and it got tangled up in her yoyo string, left to hang upside down.

“Fancy to see you swooping in, m’lady”.

She recognized that voice to be none other than Chat Noir. She then realized he was the thing that had interrupted her flight, and now they both were tied together by her yoyo with the blood rushing to their heads.

“Great to see you too, Chat Noir”, she said a bit sarcastically. “Mind filling me in on what’s going on?”.

“The Akuma’s name is War Zone. He’s turning everyone into those little toy soldier figure things and making them into his army! I think I know who he is, some war veteran that probably had his honor a little offended recently, guessing by what he’s droning on about”, Chat explained.

“Soon, all of Paris will be my army! We will show the world just what war is like and what it can do! I will be the leader of it all!”, the Akuma yelled out.

“Great…I don’t know about you, but I’m not too keen on having to fight for France in another world war. We have to stop this Akuma before he goes and attacks another country!”, Ladybug sighed.

“Agreed, m’lady! But we have to get out of this first”, Chat said, then wiggled himself a little in a feeble attempt to get free from her yoyo string. “Not that I’m complaining or anything. I’d happily take being tied with you over fighting Akuma any day!”, he winked.

Ladybug rolled her eyes at him. Typical flirt. She pulled at the string and was able to free themselves. And now that they were back on their feet, they began to form a game plan.

“Did you happen to see what the Akumatized object was?”, Ladybug asked Chat.

“I haven’t been able to get too close to him yet, he’s tried to make me into one of his minions already and to be honest, I’m not really a uniform style kind of guy. But my guess is the badge on his uniform. Just gotta get close enough to rip it off and purify the Akuma”, Chat explained.

“How is he turning people into the toy soldiers?”, Ladybug asked, a bit confused.

“I think it’s from his rifle. Any time he shoots it at someone, they’re surrounded by a smoke screen and turned into a toy soldier. He’s a long range Akuma, easier to defeat if we can get closer than what he’s comfortable at fighting, but harder if we can’t get close at all”, Chat said, putting his hand to his chin thoughtfully.

“The Akuma might be in there then. Most Akumatized objects are what gives the villain their power, like Animan’s bracelet or Mr. Pigeon’s bird whistle”, Ladybug said.

“But the Akumatized object is also the one thing the victim might have been holding at the time that they felt strongly about, or had a close connection to their negative feelings. We won’t know for sure until we get close enough”, Chat countered.

They realized that while they’d been standing around talking and debating, they’d failed to notice that they were being surrounded by the toy soldiers. They both managed to escape to the rooftops just as the soldiers were about to attack.

“Right. You get the badge, and I’ll go after the rifle!”, Chat said to Ladybug, and then began vaulting off towards the villain before Ladybug could protest or disagree. Always so impulsive to
fight and eager to please, that cat! Ladybug sighed exasperatedly while facepalming, but there was no time to dwell on it, she had an Akuma to purify!

Chat Noir played the distraction, grabbing the villain's attention so that Ladybug had a chance of getting close without being noticed.

“Hey! You!”, he called out to the villain, and as expected, War Zone turned around to see who was talking to him. “You know, it’s never a good idea to go Russian into things, and war is one of those!”, Chat said.

The Akuma scrunched his face up at the leather clad hero and pointed his rifle at Chat, but Chat ran out of the line of fire at the right moment and avoided being turned into a toy soldier minion. Narrowly, that is.

“Sorry, wrong country! I’m not too caught up on my world history so I General Lee don’t get war puns myself!”, Chat rambled on with a grin on his face, because now he had the Akuma’s focus, and was also having a bit too much fun telling puns.

“You ignorant kitty cat! Hold still so you can be a part of my army!”, the Akuma yelled furiously as he continuously tried to take aim at Chat but couldn’t get a clear shot.

“Hate to inform you, but recruiting me would be a claw-ful mistake and an absolute cat-astrophe!”, Chat said.

The Akuma growled with frustration, becoming rather annoyed by his moving target and the puns. That familiar sign of the butterfly appeared over the Akuma’s face, which told Chat he was communicating with Hawkmoth. The sign disappeared a minute later and now the Akuma had a new goal. “Give me your miraculous!”.

“Uh, sorry, but this ring doesn’t come off! I ain’t kitten either!”, Chat said, holding the hand with his ring on it close to him protectively. It was always the same old routine eventually; victim gets Akumatized, they fight villain, villain wants miraculous, they defeat villain and save the day. Chat was so used to it by now that he could probably fight Akuma in his sleep.

“Then I will just have to take it off by force!”, the Akuma smirked.

“Over my dead body!”, Chat hissed.

“That can be arranged”, the Akuma spoke sinisterly. He raised his arm and pointed at Chat, a silent command that told his toy soldiers to go after him.

Before Chat knew it, the soldiers were appearing right and left on the rooftop they stood on, and that’s when Chat realized he was in a real dangerous situation. He couldn’t use Cataclysm on the soldiers because they were still people inside, he couldn’t get close to the Akuma without the soldiers getting in his way, and he’d already determined before Ladybug arrived that taking on the soldiers by the dozen was not in his forte. He fought knights, the entire Parisian police force, even shapeshifting dinosaurs and giant toddlers! But none of that experience prepared him for this. He removed his baton from where it sat on his back and extended it into a staff, twisting it around defensively. He would be damned in Hell before he even thought about giving up during a battle!

That’s when he noticed his black spotted red partner trying to approach the Akuma from behind as quietly as possible, tip-toeing her way up to him with her body as low as it could be. She began to reach for the badge attached to the shoulder of the Akuma’s uniform, but she had to stop short when the Akuma turned his face to her, smirking all the while.
“Gotcha!”, War Zone laughed. Ladybug had only enough time to let out a small gasp at being discovered before she was sent flying backward by the blunt of the Akuma’s rifle. Having taken the hit to the gut, it forced all of the air she had out of her, making the flight and the fall backwards that much more hard to take. Hers and Chat’s suits did provide some protection from pain and injury, while also healed them at the same time in a rapid rate, but sometimes there was just no escaping the feel of the impact of a rifle to your abdomen.

She finally hit the ground and tumbled a foot or two before coming to a stop on her side, back to the Akuma. And Chat.

“LADYBUG!”, Chat cried in distress at seeing her be thrown off of the rooftop and into the street where she momentarily lied unmoving. Now with daggers on his eyes and pupils slit thin, Chat glared at the Akuma as his cat ears flattened to his head and a growl escaped his throat with a hiss, teeth clenched and bared in a snarl. Now with newfound ferocity and strength to match, Chat swung his staff at the soldier minions to clear his path, making sure he didn’t leave even one standing. The Akuma was going to pay, but first he had to get to Ladybug and make sure she was okay.

When his path was clear enough, Chat vaulted to one rooftop over and sprinted towards where Ladybug was, using his baton as a means of getting down into the street without breaking a leg.

“Ladybug!”, he called her name, fast approaching her. He could see she was just beginning to push herself up, but slowly. “M’lady! Are you alright?!”, he asked with genuine concern on his face as he knelt down beside her, helping her sit up and keeping a hand on her back for the support.

“I’m fine, Chat”, Ladybug huffed, looking from him to where the Akuma stood proudly on the rooftop as his soldier minions began marching towards the heroic duo.

“Uh oh, looks like the cavalry's on its way!”, Chat commented.

“I don’t think plan A is going to work”, Ladybug shook her head.

“Plan B then?!”, Chat asked her with a hopeful look in his eyes. Ladybug was headstrong, he knew he could count on her to keep trying until the job was done!

“Do we really have a choice, minou?!”, Ladybug asked with a smile at him. She then gripped her yoyo and tossed it into the air, calling upon her lucky charm to aid in their battle. The result was not what she expected at all. “A…toy windup plane?”, she looked the black spotted red item over inquisitively with confusion. Sometimes of her lucky charms didn’t always make sense about their significance to the battle, but this one surely took the cake!

“Great. It’d be wonderful if it was more, y’know, life sized like his minions!”, Chat said.

“Do you know how to pilot a plane?”, Ladybug asked him in slight irritation.

“…No, not really. Pigs fly, cats don’t”, Chat admitted after a moment of thinking.

“Okay then!”, Ladybug nodded once, then began looking around to try and spot a sequence of action to take using the lucky charm and defeat the Akuma. Her vision highlighted the Akuma and his rifle, Chat Noir, a building, and finally the windup toy plane in her hands.

“Any day now, bug!”, Chat said as the soldiers began closing in on them.

“We need to get up there!”, Ladybug pointed to the building her vision highlighted.

“No problem!”, Chat nodded, extending his baton into a staff and swiping it across the ground to
down the first wave of soldiers so that they had enough time and wiggle room to escape. He took Ladybug by the waist and held her close, which she instantly clung to him to hold on. His baton extended further as it took them to rooftop level where they were temporarily safe and needed to be. “Thank you for choosing Air Chat Noir”, Chat said with a bow once they touched down at the rooftop.

Ladybug smirked a small bit, then began to give him the rundown of her plan. “Alright, I’m going to wind this thing up and throw it from here. While the Akuma is hopefully distracted from it and looking up, you come in from below and disarm him of his rifle. Then as he’s looking down again I’ll come on from above and steal the badge. Hurry, we don’t have much time! As soon as he looks up, go for his rifle!”, she explained to him.

Chat wasn’t sure how well this plan would work, seeing as she couldn’t sneak up on the Akuma from behind. But then again, her lucky charm’s vision almost always worked, and he trusted her judgement the way he trusted her with his life. “I’m on it!”.

Chat took off, making sure he went unnoticed by War Zone, who’d gone back to turning more civilians into his army of soldiers, and awaited his chance to make a move.

Ladybug twisted the toy plane’s propeller until the rubber band connecting it to the body kinked in a few places from being twisted so tightly. She looked up to study her aim for a moment, and then threw it towards the Akuma. Although it was obviously fake, the ‘engine’ noise the plane made got War Zone’s attention and he looked up to study it closely.

That’s when Chat took his chance and scaled the building the Akuma was still standing on, coming up from below when the Akuma wasn’t looking. One lucky swoop from the ground landed Chat the rifle in his claws, and he leapt away out of close range. War Zone was made infuriated by this intervention, as Chat stood on another rooftop looking back at him smugly with the rifle propped on his shoulder.

“You dumb cat!”, War Zone growled.

“Hey!”, the Akuma heard someone say, looking up to see Ladybug coming straight for him from the air. Her foot met his chest as she kicked and pinned him down, then ripped the badge from his uniform.

“NOOOO!”, War Zone screeched.

Ladybug looked at the badge and then at Chat, giving a nod to him for his work, and he knew what to do then.

“Cataclysm!”, Chat called on his power to the hand that held the rifle, and in a matter of seconds it turned to rust and dust, and disintegrated to nothing. No Akuma, which told Ladybug one thing.

Ladybug tore the thread badge in half, and so appeared the familiar black butterfly. With the spinning of her yoyo, she captured the Akuma and purified it of the evil it held, letting it go and waving it goodbye as her normal routine. She found her lucky charm lying discarded on the rooftop and threw it into the air, while yelling “Miraculous Ladybug!” to call on the restoration wave and make everything right again. Civilians were returned to their normal selves, the damage from War Zone’s attack was reversed, and everything was safe again. The Akuma victim was released from Hawkmoth’s grasp and turned back into who he was.

Chat joined Ladybug at her side, smiling with victory.
“Pound it!”, they both fist bumped as celebration. Then Ladybug turned to the man that had been standing there as War Zone minutes ago.

“What happened?”, he asked, looking around wildly.

“I could ask you the same thing”, Ladybug said as she approached him, with the amended badge in her hand. She knelt down onto one knee and held it out to him.

“I’m not sure. All I remember is some kid, probably collége age, going on about how the French army, and I quote, “totally sucked in the second world war”, unquote”, the man explained, and took the badge back. “My grandfather fought in that war, he used to tell stories about it to me all the time when I was a kid. He just recently passed away, and this badge was his…”, he said.

The duo were then able to deduce how the Akuma happened and why.

“We are sorry for your loss”, Ladybug said sympathetically while patting his hand with hers.

“Young grandfather was a great man for fighting for his country. You can’t let someone else’s opinions tarnish his memory”, Chat nodded, now also kneeling down on one knee so that he was eye level with the man.

“Thank you Ladybug, thank you Chat Noir”, the man smiled gratefully at them. The heroes helped him to the ground, bid him adieu before news reporters and media crews could show up, and before their time ran out.

“See you later, Chaton!”, Ladybug yelled over her shoulder, heading for home.

“Later, bugaboo!”, he too said his goodbye, and disappeared into the night.

Ladybug soon reached home, landing on her balcony with a soft thud just as her transformation wore off. Whatever the suit kept her from feeling during the battle, she now felt in her aching civilian form.

“Good job Marinette! You stopped that Akuma just in time!”, Tikki praised.

“I need cheese, feed meeee!!!”, Plagg groaned from there he was lying on the floor of Adrien’s bedroom.

“I need cheese, feed meeee!!!”, Plagg groaned from there he was lying on the floor of Adrien’s bedroom.

“Do you always have to be so dramatic after every Akuma we defeat?”, Adrien grumbled, slipping out a container of camembert and giving it to Plagg.

“Cataclysm takes a lot out of me, kid. I’m always so physically and even mentally exhausted after it’s been used!”, Plagg claimed while he broke open the cheese container hastily, and began scarfing his fill.

“I’m beginning to think it’s not as exhausting as you claim it to be and that you’re just a glutton who
doesn’t know when to stop”, Adrien shook his head while crossing his arms.

“I am offended! Cheese is life!” Plagg hissed, but Adrien just waved him off with a scoff and left him to his cheese as he went and sat at his desk in front of the large monitor screen that was his computer. He opened up the Ladyblog in his web browser to review whatever latest footage Alya might have posted from that night’s events, as he was sure he’d spotted her a few times trying to get a scoop during the Akuma attack earlier.

Adrien navigated to the newest post on the blog, and to his delight it was indeed about the most recent Akuma. He played through what footage there was, cringing at when he’d been thrown into Ladybug and when Ladybug had been thrown off the rooftop away from War Zone. He caught Alya’s murmured curses in the background of the video, too. But most of all, he observed himself and his partner as they put plans A and B into action and eventually defeated the Akuma. He sighed with satisfaction at their achievement.

“She’s so amazing…”, he said to himself.

“‘But if only she returned my feelings’. Blah! I don’t get why you humans gawk over each other like that! Cheese is way more worth gawking over!”, Plagg intervened, coming up to float beside his chosen while holding a piece of camembert in his paws.

“What would you even know about love, Plagg?! How many past Chat Noirs have you actually helped achieve love?!”, Adrien frowned.

“I know a lot about love! For instance, I love cheese, I love camembert, and I love it so much that if it didn’t exist I would die from starvation because I’m just that devoted!”, Plagg countered, crossing his arms over his chest and nodding a few times like he knew everything.

Adrien just rolled his eyes at the cat kwami before him. While he knew they had their similarities and certainly their differences, he never understood the logic behind Plagg’s thinking. Most of the time, anyway. On some rare occasions he actually made sense. This was no such occasion, even though it was perfectly valid for someone to love food like Plagg did.

“And to answer that other question, none! They never asked for my help and didn’t really need it. Besides, most of them died before they ever could achieve love, because they all just got to be too… Careless…!”, Plagg said grumpily, turning his back to Adrien after he trailed in his sentence. This made Adrien sit up in his seat a bit with interest, frowning in suspicion. He knew Plagg sometimes had mood swings, having been on the receiving end of them a few times and nearly getting his face clawed to shreds, but it was unusual for the kwami to mention any of his past chosen.

“What do you mean, ‘too careless’? Have any of your past Chat Noirs ever for long after receiving their miraculous?”, he asked.

“I’m really not supposed to tell you…But, no. Kid, why do you think a miraculous is passed on from one chosen to the next? The only reasons why a new chosen would be needed is because the current one either died, became corrupt with power and evil and therefore had their miraculous taken from them, or they were no longer needed. The power of destruction is a powerful force, child. It’s not something to go and use so recklessly like some of your predecessors. I’ve seen a lot in my years, I’ve even had a chosen that fought in the second world war for all of France, but he ended up being one of the many that didn’t come back home. And the last before you, well…”, Plagg paused, hesitating on what he should say next. He was already regretting having said too much now.

Adrien waited for Plagg to say more, curiosity and the eagerness to know about past Chat Noirs ebbing away at him, green eyes wide with impatience.
Plagg gave a sigh. He'd already said a lot more than Adrien should be allowed to know, and he couldn't stop now or else the kid would constantly bug him about it until he finally spilled the beans, so there was no point in trying to avoid it now. “Hawkmoth got a hold of him. It wasn’t the same Hawkmoth you and Ladybug fight today, but it was a different Hawkmoth. The poor kid didn’t know how else to resist it, and he didn’t want to make his Ladybug fight against him, because he knew he’d kill her and he couldn’t do that. So in order to destroy the Akuma, he destroyed himself with Cataclysm. He didn’t survive”.

“And you saw the whole thing, didn’t you…”, Adrien muttered.

“I didn’t just see it, I felt it. He’d been transformed at the time he’d been Akumatized, so I was there with him. I felt everything from the damage of the Cataclysm to the stopping of his heart and his last breath…It broke his Ladybug to pieces, because she witnessed it too”, Plagg said.

Adrien took a minute to ponder things, and let it all set in. So it was true, it was possible for a miraculous holder to fall under Hawkmoth’s control. But to think that someone would be dedicated enough to destroy themselves with their own power, ultimately committing suicide to save others, actually scared him that it’s happened before. Because he’d do exactly the same thing to save Ladybug in a heartbeat.

“What was his name? The Chat Noir before me?”, he asked after thinking through how to ask, knowing that that kind of information was even more sensitive than just knowing about them.

Plagg hesitated again before speaking. “The kid's name was Felix. That’s all I can tell you. I’m not allowed to disclose any more about him”, he shook his head and then turned back away from Adrien again.

“You must have gotten attached to him with the way you’re acting at bringing up his name”, Adrien said.

“Of course I did! He was the greatest Chat Noir of his time, and probably the greatest ever! And he didn’t have any family, so don’t ask! Not like I could tell you anyway”, Plagg said a bit snappishly, as if by questioning his bond with Felix was a great offense. “But you know what kid?”.

Adrien blinked with some confusion.

“I think you’re owning up pretty well to his legacy. At this rate you’re going to outdo him as Chat Noir, and since I’m being the most honest I ever am and will only say this once, I must admit that I am proud to call you my chosen, Adrien. But I swear, if you get to be too careless and get yourself killed, be it by your own hand or otherwise…I’ll never forgive you”, the little kwami said, in a much calmer voice.

“Do you really mean that Plagg?”, Adrien asked as a grin slowly began to creep onto his face.

“Of course I mean it you ignorant fool! Otherwise I wouldn’t be saying it!”, Plagg hissed. Yep, that’s how Adrien knew when he meant what he said, because he usually got defensive when questioned about the sincerity of his words.

“It's okay, I appreciate you too. Not a lot of people can say they’re a human cat dressed in skin tight black leather. But I’m happy I got to be your next chosen”, Adrien said, bringing Plagg close to him with his hand and hugging the kwami to his chest.

“UGH! You know I hate it when you do this! Stop this lovey bodily contact right now or I’ll bite your hand off and take the ring with it!”, Plagg spat, struggling in Adrien’s grip.
But Adrien only laughed about it. This was the Plagg he was used to, and he wouldn’t have it be any other way, even if he did sometimes wish the kwami wasn’t so needy and demanding. He let Plagg go and turned off the monitor’s screen before standing up from the chair and stretching slowly. He could feel a dull ache in his muscles from that night’s battle, and he just knew it was going to be worse in the morning. He yawned and quickly switched out of his street clothes into something more suitable for bed and crawled in for the night.

“Goodnight, Plagg”, he said passed another yawn.

“…Yeah, goodnight kid”, Plagg said. Adrien didn’t see him smile after that.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the read! See you again in chapter 3! :D.
Oblivious is the mind

Chapter Summary

Paris’s heroes are as oblivious as ever to the obvious coincidences, it's a wonder they haven't been able to figure things out sooner. While Ladybug goes out for a late night patrol, she's met by Chat Noir, and together the two spend the evening talking about some tidbits of their personal lives, which are all too similar to a couple of civilians they know...

And in the meantime, Marinette does what any other teenager does; stays up late at night, only to realize it's a bad idea in the morning.

Chapter Notes

Wow, I honestly didn't expect this fic to reach a little over 100 hits after being up for only a few days. That's good progress to me! Anyway, when I said I had most of this written out, I meant that I had the first two chapters and some middle chapters, but I'm still writing the 'bridge' chapters that will connect them all, so this could take a while. Anyway, this is chapter three which I was going to wait longer to post but I kind of couldn't help it. A little bit of casual LadyNoir, anyone?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

That next morning, Tikki had to remind Marinette that she had an alarm clock and that if she didn’t obey its chimes, she would be late for school. Having trained herself from routine experience of being late on the daily, Marinette flew out from bed with a panicked yelp. Seeing the time, she had ten minutes to get ready and be on that classroom before she would be officially late.

“I’ve gotta put on my teeth and brush my pants! I mean, put on my pants and brush my teeth!”, she said frantically, and went about getting herself dressed and ready in as quickly a rush as possible, hoping she would look at least half decent and presentable. Tikki assisted her by making sure her school bag was packed with what her chosen needed; text books, tablet, homework. Seven minutes later, Marinette was sprinting from her bedroom down into the family room and out the door, downstairs, to outside and across the street to the school. She could only thank her lucky stars that she lived so close by, or else being late would have far worse consequences. She would rather arrive to class in a tired disheveled mess just a few seconds short of being late, than try to sneak her way into the classroom when the teacher wasn't looking and risk getting caught. Two minutes, she was rushing up the front steps and into the courtyard of the school, up the stairs to the second floor where her classroom was. There’s the door, just a few feet away, at one minute and thirty seconds left. She was going to make it!

Until she tripped over her own feet and took a nosedive into the floor, causing the contents of her school bag to fly and scatter around her. With another panicked yelp and cursing herself out under her breath, Marinette quickly pushed herself up and gathered all that she could in her arms. No time to shove it all back into the bag, she was down to forty five seconds left! Up on her feet and away
she went, hugging her stray papers and school materials to her chest, without looking back to see if she had grabbed everything. She flew in through the door, and immediately took her seat next to Alya. She let out a big sigh of relief as the bell rang only seconds later.

“Good timing!”, Alya said with a grin.

“Naturally”, Marinette laughed a little, looking back at Alya, and then turning her attention to reorganizing her things back into her bag.

“Oversleep again?”, Alya asked.

“How could you tell?”, Marinette turned back towards her.

“Well the most obvious thing is those dark circles under your eyes”, Alya said, pulling out her phone and turning on the front facing camera, then facing the screen towards Marinette to act as a mirror, so that Mari could see what she was talking about. Marinette took the phone to look at her photo reflection a bit more closely. “Are you getting enough sleep, girl?”, Alya asked.

“I guess not. I was…Up really late doing homework”, Marinette said with hesitancy.

“And fighting an Akuma”, she thought to herself.

“You and Adrien both look like something an Akuma chewed up and then spat back out”, Alya whispered, pointing down at said blond boy. Marinette looked down at him and saw him slouching a little in his seat, head resting on his hand with his elbow propped up on the desk in front of him, and he yawned. “I guess all that model work and keeping up with school takes a lot out of you, with him being late about as often as you are”.

“Yeah, I guess so…”, Marinette nodded, rather absentmindedly while staring down at the tired Adrien.

“Bro, you gonna make it through the day? You look like something the cat dragged in”, Nino whispered to him.

Adrien tensed a little at the cat joke, unsure of whether he should laugh or feel offended because after all, his alter ego was a cat boy clad in black leather and no doubt did the joke have some secret literal meaning in it. Adrien decided to shrug it off with a chuckle, telling himself that Nino didn’t know better and never could, so he couldn’t be mad about it.

“Yeah, I’ll manage. Whether or not I’ll be awake enough for my after-school photoshoot or not is a different story, but it has to get done”, he said wearily, and smiling weakly.

“Don’t worry dude, if you fall asleep in class I will personally volunteer to drag you out by your ankles”, Nino smiled at him and patted him on the back.

“Thanks. Just make sure you don’t damage my good looks”, Adrien laughed at him.

“No promises”, Nino snickered.

When Madam Bustier arrived and asked for the attention of her class, Adrien, and Marinette, tried hard to fight the sleepiness that ebbed at them.

“I am going to kill Hawkmoth for his late night Akuma attacks!”, Marinette thought to herself. If she hadn’t of had to go out and fight the night before, she might have gotten a decent enough sleep to wake up in time and still feel rested.
“I swear, if I ever can get my claws on Hawkmoth, he will regret those late night Akuma m’lady and I fight against!” Adrien thought at the same time, for the same reason.

Thirty minutes into lecture, and the two were starting to become bobble heads, nodding off to sleep where they sat. Alya and Nino took it upon themselves to try and keep their best friends awake, but their attempts were slowly becoming futile. Marinette had been leaning forward when her forehead hit her desk as sleep finally took her. And simultaneously, Adrien’s hand slipped and his head went down onto his desk with a thud as well. Alya had to stop herself from laughing hysterically at the two and how in sync they were, to her it was priceless. When Madam Bustier turned around upon hearing the sounds of them falling asleep, the DJWifi duo had to explain for them what was happening. Being a bit more understanding and sympathetic than Ms. Mendeleiev, Bustier let it slide just this one time. But if it happened again, there would be punishment to follow.

“Honestly if you can’t stay awake, why even show up to school? If Marinette Dupain-Cheng didn’t let herself get so far behind on school work that she has to sacrifice her sleep, and believe me she could use some for her horrible complexion, maybe she wouldn’t be so tired!”, Chloe snorted, as her and Sabrina laughed humiliation towards Marinette.

“Oh, and I suppose Adrien is innocent and that being tired isn’t his fault?”, Alya sneered at them, crossing her arms.

“Babe, please don’t…”, Nino muttered. He knew just how much and how easily Chloe got under Alya’s skin, after having had her first year with the snob. Not just Alya, but everyone who knew Chloe before that and had spent a few school years in misery because of her. But he also knew that once Alya got fired up, there was no dousing the flame.

“Well of course! Even I know it's not easy work being perfect and beautiful! I can only imagine how tiring it must be for Adrikins since he is a model!”, Chloe retorted.

Alya’s face scrunched into a scowl. Though she herself didn’t doubt Adrien’s occupation was demanding enough to run someone down with sleep deprivation, having said so herself to Marinette earlier, she couldn’t stand the thought of that being why Adrien had a right to sleep during class and Marinette didn’t. Alya thought Adrien and Marinette both had perfectly valid, acceptable reasons for why they were so tired, that they just simply worked too hard at living life.

“I’m about to come over there and beat the beauty right out of your-!” Alya began to stay as she stood up abruptly, though Bustier was quick to stop the confrontation.

“Ms. Césaire, please sit down! And Ms. Bourgeois, please have some couth! If the two of you can’t get along then I will have to send you to Mr. Damocles”, said Bustier. Alya sat down as she was asked to do, but continued to glare daggers at Chloe.

“As if!”, Chloe scoffed. “My daddy would not be happy to hear that I got sent to the principal's office for no reason! I could have him fire you for such poor judgment!”, she threatened.

“Why that spoiled little good-for-nothing!”, Alya growled under her breath.

“On the contrary, everybody here is a witness and is perfectly eligible to vouch for Madam Bustier in her favor against such atrocious claims, lest you forget that. Your father would need hard evidence for it to be a legal action”, Max spoke up from the back of the room, where he sat with Kim, who nodded in agreement even though he didn’t understand much of what Max was saying. Kim may have liked Chloe, but he believed Max’s statistical observations were almost never wrong.

“Like he would ever listen to you! My daddy is the mayor of Paris, he can do whatever he sees fit
without needing any proof or evidence! And I bet I could even get Ladybug involved! She would agree with me!”, Chloe snarked.

“No she wouldn’t! Ladybug has more important things to worry about than getting wrapped up in your tricky little lies and schemes, like protecting the city with Chat Noir!”, Alya jumped in

“I have to agree, those two are too busy fighting Hawkmoth and keeping people safe to even think about getting involved. A lot of us wouldn’t be here as ourselves to even argue about this if it wasn’t for them”, Nino said, unable to disagree with Alya, let alone stay silent about it. He thought he owed his life to Paris’s heroes for saving him from Hawkmoth’s possession. Him, and practically everyone else in his class, who have all been a victim before. And after saying that, the others nodded their heads in agreement with him, even the ever so quiet Nathaniel.

It was too bad that said heroes were too busy sleeping through the argument to know what was being said about them.

“Students, please! That is enough! No more arguing in my class! I do not want to have to report all of you! Back to the matter that started this, I trust Ms. Césaire and Mr. Lahiffe will make sure Ms. Dupain-Cheng and Mr. Agreste get caught up on today’s lesson. And Ms. Bourgeois, your father may be the mayor, but I am afraid Mr. Kanté makes a good point. Now, let us all drop the subject and move on”, Bustier stepped in once again, getting the class to settle down.

Chloe was not happy with being shut up like that when she was, as she would put it, ‘defending herself’, but she didn’t egg anyone on any further. Alya and Nino nodded at being addressed for being responsible in making sure Sleeping Beauty and her K.O’ed prince were caught up on things later, as they always did when things like this happened. And Max only smiled thankfully about being accredited for his side of the argument. The rest were just happy for it to be over and that Chloe had finally shut her big mouth.

The lesson continued on until the bell rang and everyone left for next class. Alya and Nino had to be the ones to wake up Adrien and Marinette.

“What happened?”, Marinette asked drowsily.

“Did I miss the lecture?”, Adrien asked while rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

“You and Mari both, dude”, Nino said.

“I took some extra notes for you, and also got a copy of the homework for you too”, Alya said to Marinette.

“Oh, thanks…”, Marinette yawned.

“Yeah, you can borrow my notes bro”, Nino said to Adrien.

“Cool…”, Adrien nodded with half focus. He forced himself to wake up more so that he could shuffle on over to next class. Hopefully he wouldn’t fall asleep again, Ms. Mendeleiev wasn’t as forgiving as Madam Bustier.

“You guys have got to get a better sleep schedule going”, Alya pointed at them.

“The day that happens is when I’ll stop being late, which will probably be never”, Marinette said.

“What’s your excuse?”, Nino asked Adrien.
“Me?”, Adrien pointed to himself innocent-like.

“Yes, you”, Nino nodded.

“Well…”, Adrien thought back to the activities of last night, trying to find a believable alibi. Graveyard shift modeling? No, most of his photoshoots were during the day. Insomnia? That would probably just make his friends worry for him, and he didn’t want that. Think, think, think! “Before I went to bed I flipped on the news last night and saw there was an Akuma attack going on so I was… Uh, kind of scared and stayed up watching the feed on the Ladyblog”, he answered with, shrugging his shoulders, and hoping in the back of his mind that it made him sound sincere and not like a dork. He knew he could be a dork at times, but it was always when he didn’t intend to be so.

“Oh yeah! That Akuma battle was awesome like usual! LB and Chat were amazing!”, Alya beamed, a wide grin spreading across her face.

“There as an Akuma last night?”, Marinette asked with faked surprise, acting as if she were oblivious to it.

“Yeah, there was! You didn’t see it on the blog?”, Alya turned to her with her hands on her hips.

“No. I was too busy doing homework”, Marinette smiled apologetically.

“One of these days I should take you on a scoop hunt during an Akuma attack. At least then I can make sure you don’t miss out on all the action!”, Alya said, putting her arm around Marinette’s shoulders.

“Uh, I think I’d rather live, thanks. Besides, I don’t want to get in Ladybug’s and Chat Noir’s way”, Marinette refused, pushing Alya away but playfully.

“Suit yourself! It really is a blast!”, Alya just shrugged, and began walking away, out of the room the four of them stood in and to their next class. Next to follow was Nino, then Adrien, and then Marinette.

Once in the hallway, Adrien slowed down so that he was side by side with Marinette.

“So, you fell asleep too, huh?”, he asked.

“Y-yeah! Ha! I g-guess I did! You too? Uh, wait…”, Marinette suddenly perked up a bit at being spoken to and went into another one of her nervous fits.

“Yeah…?”, Adrien gave her a side glance. Didn’t he say ‘too’, meaning to imply that he fell asleep as well? Nevermind, Marinette confusing herself was a Marinette thing, and had nothing to do with what he said. But when it came to him trying to talk to her, one question did linger on his mind. “Listen, um…I don’t make you uncomfortable or anything, do I?”, he asked while scratching at the back of his neck.

“What?? Uncomfortable make you me?? I mean! You, make uncomfortable me?? No, of course not! Whatever idea gave you that?? Ehehe…”, Marinette tensed up and started tripping over her sentences again.

“Funny, she’s never like this around Chat Noir…Or anybody else for that matter”, Adrien thought to himself, looking at her with an unconvinced expression.

“I-if you’re still mad about the whole gum thing from last year, I'm-“, did he just stutter?
“N-no! No! It’s not that!”, Marinette waved her hands at that idea, shaking her head.

“Well I’m just curious why you have problems talking to me normally. If you’re uncomfortable around me then all you have to do is say so. I don’t want you to feel intimidated if that’s what’s it”, he said, placing a hand over her shoulder like a friend would to give condolences. He wouldn’t even be mad if that were the case, he met people that felt intimidated by him through his modeling career, it wasn’t anything new. Though he would be upset to lose Marinette as a friend, he was ready to accept the truth and leave her be.

“No, I’m not intimidated or anything, it’s just that…Well, I really, really l-li-“, she began to say, struggling to finish the sentence, until Alya peeked out from around the door to their next classroom.

“C’mon slowpokes! Don’t want to be late now do you?”, she called to them.

Saved by her best friend. Marinette sighed quietly in relief at not having to finish her confession.

“I guess we can talk about this later”, Adrien said.

“Yeah! S-sure!”, Marinette agreed. She entered the classroom first with Adrien right behind her, and both quickly took their seats before Ms. Mendeleiev arrived and started the day's lesson.

The rest of the day felt like forever. It was as if time became warped and took longer to pass than usual. When lunch hour finally rolled around, the four tried again to have a lunch together, but Adrien had been denied that right by Nathalie and was driven home where he would inevitably have lunch alone, while the other three were left to split off their own ways. Alya with Nino, and Marinette by herself to the bakery. She wanted to make Adrien something again, but had second thoughts and figured she’d probably seem too clingy if she did, so she settled for bringing him a coupon for something half off at the bakery this time, and asked for a couple extras for Alya and Nino too, to make it look like she wasn’t treating Adrien like anything special as much as she wanted to. The end of lunch hour came and Marinette found herself racing back to school again, only this round she made it back on time. She handed out the coupons to her three friends, giving a verbal apology to Adrien about not being able to join them, and then took her seat, where she and the rest of her classmates continued with Mendeleiev’s next lecture.

A few more classes with Bustier after that, and the day was done. Everybody went home, and after a bit of a frustrating photoshoot, Adrien started to get restless.

“Sometimes I wish we didn’t have to wait until sundown to go patrolling. I really want to see her again”, he said while pacing his room with impatience, as Plagg munched on camembert.

“Man you’ve really got it bad, don’t you? You sure it’s not, like, Lupus or something? Whatever that human disease is called”, Plagg piped in.

Adrien stopped dead in his pacing and gave a deadpan look at Plagg. “It’s not Lupus. It’s never Lupus!” he said in all seriousness, but then looked rather confused and a bit horrified. “Maybe I’ve been watching too much of that show about the doctor named ‘House’…”, he said as he put his hand up to his head.

Plagg cackled, almost choking on his camembert in the process. “That’s what happens when you watch too much of anything! Like that ‘anime’ stuff, for instance!”, he teased.

“Oh shut up! You don’t know how much she means to me”, Adrien muttered, walking over to the windows that was a wall of his room, and leaned against one of the panes with a sigh.

“So then tell me, kid. Because being fused with you while you’re with her apparently isn’t enough to
know how much she means to you”, Plagg said, stating the fact sarcastically as he came up to float beside his chosen and crossed his little arms over his fluffy chest.

“Well…To me, she’s the sun, and I’m the earth. I’m drawn to her by gravity, and I don’t care how much it burns me to get too close. But in terms you would understand, she is to me what camembert is to you”, Adrien explained.

“Oh, that makes so much more sense! Why didn’t you just say that before?”, Plagg asked.

But Adrien didn’t answer his question. Instead, he was leaning his back against one of the window panes and staring at the outside over his shoulder with a look of longing, one Plagg saw often on his chosen’s face. Adrien let out a sigh and shook his head.

“She knows how I feel…But I respect her enough that I don’t expect her to feel the same. That still doesn’t make it hurt any less though. But it doesn’t matter, she deserves happiness too and if choosing someone else over me is what makes her happy then I will accept that. I’m happy as long as she’s happy”, he said, with a miserable shrug that didn’t go unnoticed by Plagg.

“Well, what about that bakery girl? She seems nice. Could always use her as a fallback”, Plagg suggested.

“Marinette?”, Adrien looked at the kwami questioningly, and then down at the floor while trying to choose his next words carefully. “Yeah, she is nice and all, but…Even if I did, I think my heart would still be loyal to Ladybug, whoever she really is. I mean it’s not that I wouldn’t put any effort into a relationship with just anyone…But it wouldn’t be the same. And I don’t want to hurt Marinette like that, she’s too kind to be treated like such. Besides, I never actually got to talk to her like I wanted to today to find out if I make her uncomfortable or not…I don’t understand why she’s so jumpy when I’m around. She definitely wasn’t like that around Chat Noir, and never is when she’s around other people in our class”, he said, turning away from Plagg and leaning forward on the window he’d been leaning on before.

“Kid, I am an over five thousand year old godly being, and I’ve seen many things in my time. One of those things is nervous women, and that bakery girl shows all the signs”, Plagg crossed his arms with a smug look about him.

“What signs? For what? Why would she be nervous around me?”, Adrien asked with some sudden interest as he turned back to face Plagg once again.

“Jumpiness, stuttering, incoherent speech, not to mention her awkwardness. I’ve learned that when the females of you humans show all of these signs, it usually means that she’s nervous because she’s interested”, Plagg said.

“Interested?”, Adrien looked really confused.

“Of all people to get stuck with as my chosen it’s the one kid who doesn’t know a thing about the normalities of the outside world…Okay, what I mean is she’s into you. But a lot of the time, these signs of nervousness mean she’s unable to express how she feels. I guess for you humans, it would be like learning how to ride a bike without knowing how to stop or if you ever will, and believe me I’ve seen your kind learn before and let me tell you you’re horrible at adapting! But back to the point, it’s nothing you did, but it’s all her. She’s just-”, Plagg explained until Adrien finished the last word for him.

“-afraid…”, Adrien said while looking to the side in thought.
“Bingo”, Plagg nodded.

“I guess that makes sense of things. But what if you’re wrong? What if that’s not it? Marinette has a lot of admirers, and some of them are guys, nice ones at that. Out of all of them, why pick me?”, Adrien asked.

“Out of all the girls in Paris, the ‘city of love’ as you call it, and all of your female admirers, why pick Ladybug?”, Plagg asked to make a point in their conversation, puffing out his chest under his crossed arms to straighten his posture and eyed at Adrien with a quizzical look.

Adrien thought again and realized he couldn’t argue. Sometimes he didn’t know why he had the hearts of many adoring female fans, just as he sometimes didn’t know why Ladybug had a grip on his so hard. But she just did, and he knew she hadn't ever meant to, just like he never meant to attract love from those in his fanbase. He loved everything about her. Her laugh, her smile, the way the wind blew through her hair while they bounded across Paris’s rooftops. Her eyes, the light of the city on her skin at night, the way the moon and stars make her glow. Her sweet voice, and her caring heart. He didn't care who she was underneath the disguise he knew her only by, because he knew she had to have been picked to be Ladybug by the fact that she is all those things even as a civilian; simply perfect and pure of heart. And it pained him that he couldn’t know who she was.

“Was Felix ever as conflicted as I am?”, Adrien suddenly asked, but without looking at Plagg.

Plagg stiffened, the little hairs of the fur on the back of his neck standing up at his previous chosen’s name being brought up again. “…He…Was a little. He made sure to keep himself and his alter ego far apart, like they were two different people. Unlike you, who lets both of your egos show a little through each other. But Bridg- Uh, Ladybug’s heart had already been captured by someone else and so she refused him as Chat Noir. She didn’t know who he was until the… Accident… So he never got to hear her say how she returns his feelings…”, the kwami said after a pause, his ears, tail and arms drooping down.

Adrien glanced at Plagg, with sad sympathy as he realized how mentioning the previous Chat Noir was a mistake. He looked back out the window, the sun having long since set beyond the horizon. He could almost hear his heart beginning to split, because he would without a doubt do the same as Felix had done to protect people, even if it sent him to heaven. And to die before getting a chance to be with his Lady forever, however small that chance was, made him feel empty at the thought. Not just because he would miss it, but also because he knew Ladybug would still miss him though she didn’t love him like he wished she did. Adrien gave a final sigh and decided to let the matter rest for now.

“It’s time to go. Claws out”, he said calmly, glancing at Plagg again who soon disappeared into his ring and transformed him into Chat Noir, and left to begin patrol.

Upon reaching their normal rendezvous point at the top of the Eiffel Tower, Chat looked around for the familiar black spotted red figure, but didn’t see her. He wondered if she might have found trouble on the way over, or if he was a little late in getting there and just missed her. As he was about to take off and patrol on his own, he heard something swinging through the air, and looked behind him to find Ladybug dropping down onto the platform with him from where her yoyo had caught the very tip of the tower.

“Evening, m’lady”, he greeted her with a smile and in relief seeing her.

“Evening, Chat”, she greeted back to him. He approached her and took her hand in his, bowing as he brought it up to his lips and kissed the backs of her knuckles.
“Was beginning to think you might have started without me”, he said with amusement in his eyes as he looked back up at her.

She chuckled at him. “Never. I won’t patrol without my partner”, she said.

“Well then, shall we?”, he asked, gesturing to the city below that awaited them.

“Yes we shall”, she nodded, walking passed him as he let her go first and swung away with her yoyo, Chat following close behind with his baton.

Like usual when patrolling, they scoured as much of the city as they could cover in one night while making sure to look as thoroughly as possible so that they didn’t miss anything. Nothing was out of place, everything was peaceful and quiet. With nothing else to do, they decided to sit and keep each other company for a while, talking about little details of their personal lives that weren’t too revealing. Which didn’t always leave very much to talk about.

“Yeah, I kind of passed out during class today because of last night’s Akuma”, Chat laughed at himself while rubbing the back of his head in slight embarrassment.

“Oh, is that so?”, Ladybug looked over at him with a smirk.

“Ehehehe…Yeah. Oops?”, Chat shrugged.

“I did too”, Ladybug said, though without thinking. She could never be too careful with what details she did and didn’t share with her alley cat.

“Really??”, Chat looked a bit awed as he tilted his head.

“Yeah. Guess we were both a little exhausted, huh? It’s kind of funny because a…Friend of mine also fell asleep, during the same class as I did”, she just smiled and brought her knees up to her chest.

“No joke? That’s ironic! This friend of yours wouldn't happen to be a super hero I don’t know about, would they?”, Chat asked teasingly, wiggling his eyebrows under his mask with that mischievous grin of his.

“No. He’s just got a really demanding occupation is all, and I guess he got a little spooked by last night’s Akuma attack. I highly doubt he’s like us”, Ladybug shook her head.

“Oh, this friend's a he is he? You know him well?”, Chat teased me, scooting a little closer to her.

“Maybe not as much as I’d like to, but yes. He’s a pretty nice guy”, Ladybug chuckled at him.

“Is this guy my love rival? The one you said something about the night we fought Glaciator?”, Chat raised a brow.

Ladybug tried hard not to smile a little, but it didn’t work. “Maybe he is”, she said. Even though she said ‘maybe’, it was a definite ‘yes’ to Chat.

“And his name?”, Chat asked.

“Sorry Chaton, this girl tells no secrets. Nice try, though”, she booped his nose and pushed him away, but gently.

“Just thought I’d give it a shot. Don’t worry bugaboo, I wouldn’t do anything to hurt him, I’m not a vendetta kind of cat”, Chat shrugged but smiled still.
“As if I’d ever tell you his name anyway. You know we can’t know anything personal about each other’s civilian lives like the names of people we know”, Ladybug laughed at him.

“Well maybe I know him too? We would probably get along pretty nicely, actually. Just because I’m a stray alley cat doesn’t mean I don’t play well with others”, Chat said.

“Maybe you do, maybe you don’t. That’s for me to know and for you to never find out”, Ladybug shrugged at him.

“Such a tease, you are”, Chat sighed with captivation as he stared at her with all the love he had for her.

“Silly minou”, Ladybug rolled her eyes at him. With knowing how he really felt, she didn’t try as hard to stop him from expressing it. He’d become too close of a friend for her to feel uncomfortable by it anyhow. She felt him nudge his head against her arm much like a cat, and in return, gave his head a few pats with her hand, earning a few purrs from him.

Together they sat and listened to the things around them. The crickets, with their symphony of chirps, and the whooshing of the breeze that blew by them, with the sounds of a sleeping city. It came the time for them to depart and leave for home, once they realized how late it was getting, and at this rate neither of them were going to be up in time for school in the morning.

“See you later, Chaton”, Ladybug waved goodbye.

“Until next time, m’lady”, Chat bowed to her.

Ladybug left first, swinging away on her yoyo until Chat could no longer see her, and he left shortly after she was out of his sight.

Ladybug soon landed on her balcony, letting her transformation once she did. Marinette stood up and entered her room through the hatch door, closing and locking it behind her. She’s glanced at the alarm clock she had on a nightstand next to her bed, and groaned when she saw it read half past one in the morning. She was going to be tired for school, even more than she had been the day before.

“Tikki, why do I do this to myself?”, she asked the kwami half rhetorically.

“All a part of the job, Marinette. It’s always best to be vigilant so you can keep Paris safe. Not just from Hawkmoth and his Akuma, but from mundane dangers too”, Tikki answered when Marinette flopped face down onto her bed, and groaned when she saw it read half past one in the morning. She was going to be tired for school, even more than she had been the day before.

“Tikki, why do I do this to myself?”, she asked the kwami half rhetorically.

“All a part of the job, Marinette. It’s always best to be vigilant so you can keep Paris safe. Not just from Hawkmoth and his Akuma, but from mundane dangers too”, Tikki answered when Marinette flopped face down onto her bed.

“I know…But every time I’m up late like this, I realize just how bad of an idea it is in the mornings after. Why couldn’t I have been chosen to do this when I didn’t have school to worry about?”, Marinette groaned again.

Tikki giggled. “Don’t worry, a lot of the other Ladybugs before you had a hard time balancing their life with being a super hero. Be lucky you didn’t get chosen when you have a family of your own to care for. Being Ladybug while also being a mother can be extremely difficult”, she patted Marinette’s shoulder, then kissed her chosen’s cheek softly to comfort her.

“I guess you have a point there”, Marinette chuckled with a small smile. She sat herself up and stretched her arms while yawning as she started to begin feeling sleepy. She got up and went down the stairs of her loft to change into her pajamas. And once that was done she went back up into her loft and crawled into bed. She made sure her alarm was set and that her phone was put on charge, then curled up under her blankets. “Goodnight Tikki”, she whispered.
“Goodnight Marinette”, Tikki said back, and nuzzled her way in underneath Mari’s chin and tucked herself into the blanket for sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the read! Maybe I’ll have chapter four up by next week? We’ll see how things go.
Another day, another tardy slip. As Adrien and Marinette rush to school, they both run into a little problem, and quite literally in fact. Whilst this is happening, Hawkmoth is out on the prowl for a new victim to prey on. Will Ladybug and Chat Noir be able to stop the Akuma in time?

Or will the waters rise too high?

Chapter Notes

Chapter 4! It's a bit lengthy, but so are a few other chapters that have already been written, so I hope the read is enjoyable! Again, I hate writing about Akuma attacks and making up new villains for these two dorks, because even though I try hard to make it legit I feel like my attempts are epic fails heheh. So I hope this one isn't too boring or illogical ^^'. Although, this chapter's Akuma was made from inspiration and is actually a secret cameo from a much older generation of shows. Can you name it? :D.

“Hey Nino!”, Alya, sitting on a bench, waved as Nino came up to her while they were both waiting for the first bell in the school courtyard.

“Morning, beautiful”, Nino greeted and flashed a grin, then looked around a bit confused. “Mari’s not here either, huh?”, he asked.

“No, not yet. I’m guessing Adrien is a no-show too?”, Alya shook her head at him.

“Yeah. Usually the dude's here by now! He’s going to be late if he doesn’t show up in the next, like, five minutes”, Nino said, looking at the clock on his phone.

“Marinette too. I wonder why she isn’t here yet?”, Alya said, scanning the courtyard with her eyes to see if she could spot either Marinette or Adrien, or both.

“Man I don’t know how he even gets away with being late to much when his father is so strict with pretty much everything else he does”, Nino shook his head again and crossed his arms.

“Marinette doesn’t get away with it as easily. Her parents know about it, she’s been grounded because of it before”, Alya said.

“Sometimes I wonder if Adrien’s old man even cares about his son. Without his mom around and his dad always somewhere else, Adrien feels pretty lonely sometimes. And I kind of know how he feels too. My old man walked out on us when I was like two years old and hasn’t been seen or heard from since, and my maman works a lot to make ends meet, so most of the time it’s just me and my little brother. But that’s just it, I have a brother, Adrien…He’s got no one when he isn’t at school with us”, Nino sighed.
“Do you know what happened to his mom?...”, Alya asked in a saddened tone and a frown to match upon hearing the information from Nino, her inner reporter nagging to know what details she could.

“Nope. Adrien says she just disappeared one day and didn’t leave any trails to follow, and nobody knows why or where she is. She'd been missing for about a year before he started attending public school, and still hasn't turned up”, Nino told her.

“That’s too bad”, Alya looked down at her hands in her lap, then decided to check her phone for any possible new messages from Marinette, but there was nothing. “Come on Mari, where are you?”, she grumbled, and tried calling Marinette’s phone, but after a while of it ringing, got no answer.

“Adrien wouldn’t pick up either, I’ve already tried three times”, Nino informed her.

“Those two dorks must still be sleeping”, Alya facepalmed.

“We gonna try covering for them?”, Nino asked.

“Sure. Any ideas?”, Alya looked up and asked him.

“Uhm…No, not really”, Nino gave it some thought but came up with nothing.

“Great. Looks like we’ll have to make something up on the fly again”, Alya shook her head with an annoyed sigh. The first bell finally rang and she and Nino made their way to the classroom and took their seats.

Back at the Dupain-Chungs, Marinette was still snoozing through her beeping alarm.

“Marinette! Marinette, get up! You’re going to be late again! Marinette!”, Sabine yelled from the downstairs while knocking loudly on the hatch door to her daughter's room. The knocking and muffled yelling jostled Marinette a little out of her deep sleep, and she looked around drowsily after sitting herself up, rubbing the sleepiness from her eyes to try and clear her vision. When she finally came to enough and looked at the time, she flew out of bed, tossing Tikki aside with the blanket in the process, and going into panic mode as she scrambled to get ready. She threw on her clothes, fixed her hair, grabbed her school bags and called for Tikki who appeared from the heap of blanket on the bed and hid in Marinette’s purse. She would have to skip breakfast again as she made her way downstairs from her room.

Meanwhile at Agreste manor, Adrien was still tucked away and dead to the world in sleep, with his alarm screaming at him to wake up. Plagg was quickly becoming annoyed by the noise.

“Kid! KID! ADRIEN! Get UP and TURN THAT THING OFF! It’s giving me a headache over here!”, Plagg hissed, cupping his tiny paws over his ears to try and block out the constant beeping and chiming.

Adrien rolled over from his side onto his back and stared up at the ceiling sleepily while his eyes adjusted to the light that was flooding in from the other side of his bedroom. He blinked a couple times and sat up, rubbing his face, then reached over and silenced his alarm.

“Oh sweet cheese and crackers! Finally!”, Plagg sighed in relief.

“What were you just yelling about?”, Adrien said in a yawn.

“Your alarm was starting to annoy me, Sleeping Beauty! You should have woken up sooner to shut it off!”, Plagg replied.
“It was? For how long?”, Adrien said in another yawn and finally looked at what his clock actually read. That’s when his eyes widened after what time it was clicked in his mind. He jumped out of bed quickly as his body instinctually kicked in to Chat Noir mode and he stumbled about to get ready as quickly as possible. “I’m late!”. 

“Aww what’s the rush? Can’t we take a sick day or something? Stay home and sleep in for once?”, Plagg complained.

“No! We can’t!”, Adrien said simply, packing his school bag after putting on his usual clothes and gussying up as little. He motioned for Plagg to hide in his overcoat.

“I don’t wanna!”, Plagg whined, rolling onto his side so that his back was to Adrien and curled up to go back to sleep.

“You lazy cat! We have to get going!”, Adrien grumbled and snatched Plagg off his pillow, sprinting out of his room and into the manor’s main corridor, where Nathalie happened to be with the gorilla.

“Adrien, you’re-”, Nathalie began to say, but Adrien ran right passed her for the front door.

“I’m late, I know! Don’t worry about driving me I’ll just run! See you later!”, Adrien said before disappearing to the outside, where he then sprinted for the school. It didn’t take him too long to get there at the constant speed he was able to keep. Thank you, super hero life and its endurance building activities! He could see the front steps to the school in his sights.

Marinette crossed the street quickly and ran up the front steps two by two, unaware what a certain blond boy wasn’t too far behind her. She made a beeline for the furthest set of stairs that were closer to the classroom she needed. Adrien had taken the stairs closest to him once he set foot in the courtyard, which were the furthest away from the classroom. Both of them climbed their chosen stairs swiftly to the top, and sprinted from there towards the classroom.

Marinette had her eyes closed as she mentally pushed herself to go faster, determined to beat that tardy bell. Adrien had his focus on his feet as he forced himself to go faster and tried to take longer strides to accomplish that. Neither of them were paying attention to what was ahead of them, until…

“AHHHH!”. 

“WAAAAAHHHHHHH!”.

CRASH!

They both collided in front of the classroom door, chest to chest, Marinette’s head under Adrien's chin, knees knocking together and arms stretched passed the other from the momentum. Then they both fell backwards away from each other, leaving them on their backs and sprawled on the floor. The last bell rang, telling them they were officially late.

“Did you hear something?”, Nino asked Alya, inside the classroom, when he heard a commotion outside the door.

“Yeah. Sounded like someone screamed and then ran into a wall or something”, Alya nodded. Madam Bustier had already been in the classroom, and it became apparent to Alya that she’d heard it too. Without a moment more, Alya jumped up and ran to the closed classroom door with Bustier behind her, and then opened it to see what the cause was. She put both her hands to her mouth as she tried very hard not to let out a cacophony of laughter.

Because there before her eyes were Adrien and Marinette, who were beginning to sit up from their
crash course ordeal, and she thought it was one of the funniest things she'd ever seen.

“Ow…What'd I hit?”, Marinette asked with her hand to her forehead, where she’d met Adrien’s chin.

“Ouch. You should be asking who”, Adrien said as he rubbed the back of his head tenderly from hitting it on the ground when he fell backwards.

Marinette recognized his voice instantly and her eyes widened at him. “A-Adrien! Omigosh! I’m so sorry! You I run mean didn’t! Gah! I meant I didn’t mean to run into you!”, she rambled.

“It’s okay! I wasn't really watching where I was going, to be honest. Though, I do think we should stop meeting like this before we knock each other out!”, Adrien said, giving her a forgiving smile and laughing at himself. There'd been a few other times they’d crashed into each other like this, always from being late. The worst of it had been when they were both racing to get to class and he’d tripped coming in through the door, which caused Mari to trip over and fall on him, and in turn it’d made a big disruption in the middle of class. Mendeleiev’s class, that was. He shuddered at the memory of Ms. Mendeleiev and her very unforgiving scowl, and being sent to the principal's office with Marinette.

“Are you two okay?”, Alya asked while still biting back her laughter, with Bustier, Nino, Chloe and a few others behind her peeking over each other's shoulders to see what was going on.

Adrien stood up and brushed himself off, then retrieved his school bag from the floor. “I’m okay”, he said, then lent a hand to Marinette and pulled her to her feet after she took it, with some embarrassed hesitance. “Are you okay?”, he asked her once she was standing.

“Y-yeah, I am. I’m…Used to it”, Marinette nodded, quickly getting lost in his green gaze as he looked into her bluebell eyes and smiled at her.

“Psst! You should kiss her!”, Alya whisper yelled at him, causing him and Marinette to blush.

“Alya!”, Marinette bristled, which was the breaking point for her best friend and made Alya laugh.

“Ms. Césaire”, Madam Bustier cleared her throat, though she didn’t seem upset by Alya's behavior. She then looked to Marinette and Adrien. “Now that you two are here, would you care to join us?”, she asked them.

“But of course! Wouldn’t miss it!”, Adrien nodded quickly, turning to face the door and the waiting class with a nervous sideways grin.

“Gotta get that knowledge right?!”, Marinette did almost exactly the same.

Bustier chuckled at her two students and then moved away from the door to take her place again at the front of the classroom. Everyone else moved away from the door to let them in, going back to their seats. Marinette entered first and Adrien second. Mari took her seat next to Alya as usual, as Alya brushed off some dust from her jacket for her. Adrien was about to take his seat when Chloe suddenly bounded up to him as loud as can be.

“Omigod Adrikins are you alright?! Are you hurt?! You don’t have any broken bones, right?? That Marinette Dupain-Cheng can really do some damage when she wants to!”, Chloe said, coming up to Adrien and snuggling into him against his will, closely inspecting him for wounds or injuries, though she wouldn’t even know what to look for. Adrien was the least bit amused.

Marinette sat straight up at hearing her full name come out of the mouth of the person she disliked the
most and frowned, then stuck her tongue out at Chloe when the blonde wasn’t looking, making Alya
snicker.

“I’m fine, Chlo. It was just an accident, I wasn’t paying attention so I’m just as much at fault. You
can’t blame Marinette for everything. And stop saying her last name every time, it’s really not
necessary”, Adrien said, pushing Chloe away and sitting down.

“Ms. Bourgeois, please take your seat”, Bustier said politely but sternly, and surprisingly Chloe
listened.

Marinette watched Chloe sit back down over next to Sabrina, and then looked down at Adrien in
small surprise. He stood up for her? She just witnessed Adrien, the love of her life, telling Chloe to
stop using her name in such bad tone. It made her feel warm and fuzzy inside and she smiled about
it. But she hadn’t been expecting Adrien to turn around and look right back up at her with a smile of
his own and wink at her, almost as if he knew. She quickly grew embarrassed as the heat of a blush
rose into her cheeks. She pulled the collar of her jacket up to hide the blush. Adrien chuckled at her
before turning back in his seat to face the front of the classroom once Madam Bustier officially began
the lesson.

“Yo dude, why were you late this time?”, Nino leaned over and whispered to Adrien.

“Uhm…Too much anime?”, Adrien offered with a shrug.

Nino looked straight at him with a serious poker face and then leaned away while shaking his head.
“Bro. Priorities”, he said.

“What? Anime is a priority!”, Adrien laughed quietly.

“No, dude. Music, girls, school, and homework are priorities, in that order from most to least”, Nino
listed off.

“Well do anime girls count?”, Adrien asked with a grin. “They are pretty kawaii”.

“Dude, you did NOT just say that…”, Nino looked very much unamused, and when he looked up at
Adrien, he was met by an even bigger grin and the usual eyebrow waggle Adrien made when telling
a joke or saying something funny, which Nino could never act serious around. “You are such an
otaku”, Nino shook his head at him with remnants of a laugh he was trying to keep in.

“Oh, I’ll show you otaku. The next time you’re able to come over to my place, if ever my father
allows it, I will o-tak-you, with an anime marathon”, Adrien smirked at him.

“Pffft”, Nino dropped his writing utensil he was using to take notes with and covered his mouth
with both hands to keep from laughing out loud and causing a distraction. “Dude, if you ever meet
Chat Noir. You and him would be a perfect match in a pun battle!”, he said.

“I don’t doubt that. I’d probably win”, Adrien chuckled, but with confidence, as if battling against
yourself with puns was the easiest task in the world. For him, it would be.

“Yeah right. I don’t think even Adrien could win anything against that cat, as perfect as he is. And
especially in a pun war”, Marinette thought to herself after overhearing the conversation, and rolled
her eyes while shaking her head but smiling to herself. She was lucky Alya didn’t notice or else she’d
probably be accused of knowing something in regards to Chat Noir. Although Ladybug was Alya’s
and the rest of Paris’s idol more, Chat still had his fair share of the fame, and if there was ever a
chance for Alya to get to talk to either one of the heroes she would take it.
They all went on about their day, going from class to class and sitting through lectures, until lunch hour rolled in again. Adrien of course had to leave the school instead of getting to sit down and have lunch with his friends. He'd known them for a whole year and yet, he hasn’t been able to actually have a lunch, just one, with people that cared about him. He knew Gabriel cared about him too, in his own way, but Adrien craved to be with people that made everything worth it again.

Marinette was about to leave to her parents' bakery until Alya stopped her by blocking her path.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Alya asked with a quirked eyebrow.

“Uhh…Home?”, Marinette said with confusion.

“Girl, after this morning, I think it’s best you stay here so you aren’t late to class again. Honestly, you have to work out a better schedule for yourself or else in gonna have to start coming over to your house in the mornings and drag you out of bed, and I’ll bring you here in your pajamas so don’t tempt me”, Alya shook her head at Marinette and began pushing her through the courtyard away from the entrance of the school.

“Oh, okay then? Where’s Nino?”, Marinette shrugged and submitted to Alya’s antics, allowing herself to be pushed wherever her friend wanted her to go, which took them to one of the benches and they sat down. Marinette took out a small box of goods from the bakery she’d packed with her small lunch and shared them with Alya, and Alya shared what she had for her lunch; leftovers from dinner the night before. Marinette did so enjoy Mrs. Césaire's cooking.

“Nino has to spend his lunch hour in the library because of some detention he forgot to serve last week”, Alya sighed with annoyance.

“Oh yeah. I forgot about that. What was it he got in trouble for again? Listening to music during Ms. Mendeleiev's class again, right?”, Marinette said.

“Yep. I’ve told him before it’s a bad idea but he didn’t listen, and this is the fifth time it's happened, so maybe he’ll learn his lesson this time”, Alya nodded.

“We can only hope”, Marinette smiled and laughed with a nod. Nino could be stubborn sometimes, just like Alya. She couldn’t think of anyone more perfect for her best friend to date than someone who could match up to Alya's hard headedness, and Nino fit that description perfectly.

“Yeah, I’m not going to get my hopes up either”, Alya laughed along, but then repositioned herself on the bench so that she was facing Marinette. “So, care to tell me why you and Adrien were late this morning?”, she asked with a sly smirk.

Marinette froze and her eyes widened at the question. She hadn’t thought of a believable excuse for it yet. She didn’t know why Adrien was late, but she certainly knew why she was, and that was something she couldn’t say anything about or else Tikki would have her head on a silver platter. “No, why would I know anything?? Adrien being late at the same time I was is just a funny coincidence! It’s happened before, why would this morning be any different?”, she laughed nervously.

“That’s just it Mari, it has happened before where the two of you are arriving to school at the same exact time any day you’re both late. Is there something going on between you two that I should know about?”, Alya said.


“Like, are you two secretly together spending some alone time, or…?”, Alya elaborated.
Marinette knew what that question implied and it made her blush a little at the thought, which would probably make her next answer even less believable. “N-no! We’re not…together. Not at all. Why would I not tell you about it if we were?”, she said.

“I guess you have a point there. You’d probably be too excited to keep something like that to yourself anyway”, Alya chuckled.

“You're probably right. Besides, don’t You think I’d be a little less nervous around him if I had finally confessed my feelings?”, Marinette smiled again.

“I don’t know girl. With how weak-kneed you get around that boy, it wouldn’t surprise me if that nervous awkwardness of yours still stuck around even after that”, Alya laughed a bit teasingly.

“Thanks for having so much faith in me”, Marinette said sarcastically, but laughed too.

“What are best friends for?”, Alya asked with a grin. “But seriously, what was the reason you overslept your alarm again, and don’t tell me it's because you were up late doing homework again, I know you couldn’t possibly have that much homework to do!”.

“Alright, you caught me. I was up working on a new design I’ve had in mind for the last couple days and I couldn’t stop thinking about it last night, so I couldn’t sleep because of it. You know how these things are, once I get an idea for a design I can’t think of anything else!”, Marinette explained. A total lie, but there had been some times when that was the real truth, and that was evidence enough to back it up and make it legit.

“Really? Can I see?”, Alya’s eyes popped with curiosity and interest. Marinette’s designs were unlike anything she had ever seen before, and she loved it when Mari shared them with her.

“Sorry, I was in such a hurry this morning that I left my sketch book at home. Maybe tomorrow”, Marinette shook her head. That ought to throw Alya off her case for a bit.

“Have you ever thought about making merch for the Ladyblog? Ladybug and Chat Noir themed clothing and accessories? Think of how amazingly awesome that would be! How awesome it would be if Ladybug and Chat Noir themselves wanted to buy your stuff!”, Alya beamed.

“Don’t we have to have a commerce and brand license for that?”, Marinette asked.

“Hey! A girl can dream can’t she?”, Alya defended.

“Yeah, it would be an awesome idea, and a great way to get myself out there in the fashion designer world, while gaining your Ladyblog even more popularity at the same time. And also just amazing if Ladybug and Chat Noir noticed. But I don’t think we’re old enough for that yet”, Marinette laughed at her.

“Maybe in the future? I think it'd be pretty fun co-owning a merchandise business with you on the blog! And you could get Adrien’s help too, I’m sure he’d be willing to model for you!”, Alya said, elbowing Marinette suggestively.

“Now you really are dreaming! The chances of that happening are next to nothing!...But it would be the perfect life with him”, Marinette said, her face turning into an expression one made while daydreaming about the perfect reality they wished they lived in, her imagination showing her images of her and Adrien being the greatest couple and selling Ladyblog merchandise while being happily married with two, maybe three kids, and a hamster.

“Never say never! It could happen!”, Alya said in determination.
“Sure, when pigs fly!”, Marinette retorted.

“Make a pair of convincing wings while I find a pig and we can make that come true!”, Alya told her.

Marinette laughed again. “Okay, I’ll get started on them tonight”, she said playfully.

“Sounds like a plan! My mom knows someone in America that owns a ranch, maybe he can ship a pig over to us!”, Alya went along, laughing all the while.

“That could work!”, Marinette agreed.

“You and me, girl! We’re going places! We’re going to make pigs fly and nothing can stop us!”, Alya said as she put her arm around Mari’s shoulders and pulled her close while gesturing her hand across the sky as if it was an endless open horizon of possibilities and opportunities. Marinette looked at the sky in amusement, and then smiled at Alya with appreciation. Alya was probably the greatest friend she ever had, besides Tikki of course.

But then, there was a loud rumble sound outside the school and it caused the ground to shake. It made Marinette tense at the possible cause of it that she was sure it to be.

“What was that?!”, Alya asked, half afraid, half excited.

“I don’t know”, Marinette said, looking up towards the top of the open-roof school building as if searching for the answer.

“C’mon, let’s go check it out!”, Alya jumped up from the bench, grabbed Marinette's wrist and started to drag her along towards the school entrance to see what the sound was about.

“Alya! Wait! What if it’s-!”, Marinette protested, but before she could finish speaking, Alya had already dragged her to the outside of the school and they were met with the sight Marinette was afraid of.

Just down the street from where they stood was a large robot about three or four stories tall, and with every step it took, the ground shook with the rumbling sound they heard before. No doubt, this was an Akuma.

“Get back inside! Quickly!”, Marinette said, pushing Alya back into the school's courtyard, when she had already began to record live footage for the Ladyblog. Once she had Alya inside, Marinette went and pulled a small lever on the wall nearby, sounding an alarm the school had installed for when there were Akuma attacks. As the alarm went off, everyone scrambled for safety within the classrooms, locker rooms, and even janitor closets, and the school went into a lockdown mode.

“Darn! Now I don’t get to have a scoop and see Ladybug and Chat Noir in action!”, Alya complained.

“You still could document from here where it’s safe!”, Marinette told her, ducking and covering her head when there was another rumble and the ground shook more, looking up towards where the top of the school’s roof met the sky and seeing the robot's head just a little beyond that. “Well, as safe as you’ll be, anyway!”, she said, then took off running towards the bathrooms where she hoped nobody would be, while Alya headed for the library to find Nino when she realized Marinette was going in the complete opposite direction.

“Hey! Where are you going?!”, Alya yelled.
“To go hide! Where else?!”, Marinette yelled back.

“In the bathroom?!”, Alya asked with confusion.

“Well everywhere else is probably full of people! I don’t want to wait and find out if they can fit one more person!”, Marinette shrugged. It was a poor excuse, but it would have to do, and before Alya could question her methods or protest any more, Marinette continued for the bathroom in a sprint.

“Honestly that girl is probably even more stubborn than I am sometimes!”, Alya shook her head while pinching the bridge of her nose, then going on to the library to find Nino.

Marinette sprinted into the girls’ bathroom, quickly checking around for other people to make sure she was alone, before letting Tikki out from her purse once she was sure it was clear.

“We’ve got a problem!”, Marinette said urgently.

“Just say the words and we can go take care of it!”, Tikki bounced around in the air.

“Spots on!”, Marinette commanded, which allowed Tikki to be absorbed into the earrings and transform her into Ladybug. She peeked out from the bathroom to make sure she wouldn't be seen, before making a beeline for the main entrance of the school. And upon passing through it, she looked around for the giant robot she’d seen earlier, but didn’t see it.

“Where did you go…?”, she wondered aloud, searching and listening vigilantly to find it. Nothing. She was beginning to wonder if she’d just imagined the whole thing. Maybe she fell asleep in class again and she was dreaming? No, couldn't be. Everything felt too real to be a dream. Then, the sound of a mechanical, unnatural roar caught her ears and drew her eyes to over across the bridge of locks near the Eiffel Tower. And that's when she saw it, a car transforming into the robot she’d seen before. She almost couldn’t believe her eyes but then again, she’s seen a man shapeshift into the entire animal kingdom with dinosaurs included, and jumped into the mouth of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. She shouldn’t be surprised by a robot that could change into a car.

“ROBOTICON! I AM ROBOTICON!”, the Akuma yelled in another roar of a machine. It looked towards where Ladybug had been standing and she had a feeling it was looking right at her, with it's red glowing eyes that sent shivers down her spine. “LADYBUG!”, it roared yet again, telling Ladybug that she’d been seen.

With determination igniting in her eyes, Ladybug launched her yoyo at the top corner of a nearby building and swung for the rooftops to get off the ground where she knew she’d be the most vulnerable against this Akuma. Once she was on the rooftop and able to turn back to look at the Akuma again, she saw it begin to change shape again, this time it looked like a motorcycle. Driverless, the motorcycle drove itself back across the bridge at a high speed and towards the building Ladybug stood on. With not much idea of how to handle the situation until Chat Noir showed up, she gave in to being chased and swung across the rooftops, letting the Akuma follow her through the city.

She reached the Louvre and had to stop for a quick moment to assess things, and also catch her breath. The Akuma was relentless and didn’t give up in following her. A figure wearing black leather landed next to her and caught her off guard to the point that it scared her and she jumped.

“Am I late to the party?”, Chat asked while crossing his arms and leaning an on his baton with his elbow, grinning at her.

“No, you're right on time”, Ladybug said, relieved to see him.
“What’s the situation?”, Chat asked, kneeling down beside her to get a closer look at what was going on.

“Some sort of giant robot that can change into other types of machines, and it calls itself Roboticon. So far I’ve only seen it change into two types of vehicles, a car and a motorcycle. I haven’t gotten a close enough look yet to see what the Akumatized object is”, Ladybug explained, and as she did, the motorcycle turned back into the robot she’d described, further confirming her observations to Chat.

“Great, an angry forty foot shapeshifting robot straight out of Transformers. Who went and pushed its buttons?”, Chat said, unable to help himself from grinning at the pun.

“Not now Chat Noir! We have to take this thing down and fast!”, Ladybug sighed in exasperation at him.

“Right. So, what’s the plan m’lady?”, Chat said. It didn’t really faze him anymore when she expressed her dislike for his puns and jokes.

“I’m not too sure. We need to find what the Akumatized object is and where it’s at. We'll hit it with everything we’ve got until we can figure out how to defeat it, maybe we can find a weak spot while we’re at it”, Ladybug said, spinning her yoyo until it began to glow and looking ready to fight.

“Got it! One fury attack, coming right up!”, Chat nodded, taking his baton up into both his hands, ready to launch himself at the Akuma.

“Chat, you're a human superhero dressed in a cat suit, not a Pokémon…”, Ladybug groaned at him.

“Sure I am! Just call me Meowth!”, Chat grinned again.

“LADYBUG!”, the roar of Roboticon broke their playful bantering, and they both looked up just in time to dodge a swing of the robot's hand at them. Chat landed to the right, while Ladybug to the left, at the feet of Roboticon.

“Alright you iron giant! Time to take you down!”, Chat said after landing on his own feet, then proceeded to attack the robot using his baton. He leaped into the air with all his might, ready to strike downwards on Roboticon's head, however his attack was intercepted by a counterattack and he was knocked away.

Chat was sent flying threw the air and into the side of a building not too far away, his back and head crashing against the brick surface, causing the wind to be cast from his lungs. It'd hurt worse than when he’d gone up against Guitar Villain and had the same thing happen. Now feeling a sharp ache in his body and lacking breath, Chat fell from where his body had left a bit of an indent in the bricks and to the ground where he let himself go limp before landing. He allowed himself a minute to try and get some air in his lungs before slowly pushing himself up onto his hands and knees.

“Chat! Are you okay!?”, he heard Ladybug shout to him, looking up and seeing that she managed to get passed Roboticon to get to him, and she knelt next to him with a worry stricken face.

“I’m...Fine!”, he said between gasps. He would definitely be feeling the aftermath of that strike, if Plagg doesn’t murder him for it first. He shifted positions to move from his hands and knees to kneeling on one knee with the other foot underneath him. His green gaze flicked up to Roboticon as it started to approach him and Ladybug. Something caught Chat’s eye, something he could see swaying around in the Akuma’s neck by a wire or some sort of rope. It was small, but his excellent animal-enhanced vision picked up on it well, and he didn’t know how he didn’t notice before, and he pointed it out to Ladybug only to realize that was a bad idea when the sharp pain in his shoulder
made him wince.

“Look! I bet you that’s the Akumatized object!”, Chat said.

Ladybug followed where he was pointing and spotted the item he saw. “…A lugnut?”, she said with confusion.

“Ohhh, so m’lady knows a thing or two about cars”, Chat quirked and eyebrow and grinned at her.

“Helped my papa with a flat tire once. You learn a few things when it’s hands-on”, Ladybug told him, but then looked back at Roboticron when she heard the sound of the robot changing forms again. “And speaking of cars…”, she said, when the robot now appeared as another vehicle, a car like before.

“MOVE!”, Chat ordered, as the driverless car began to speed towards them. He pushed Ladybug out of the way, and jumped at the last second as the car crashed into the brick building behind him.

Ladybug turned around quickly to look for Chat, hoping he got out of the way in time. When she didn’t see him and the car nose first in the brick, it nearly made her heart stop. “Chat?! Chat!”.

“I’m okay. We need to figure out a plan to get the object away from Roboticron before he turns the city into his personal crash course!”, Chat said, landing a few feet away from her, although a bit unsteadily. He still felt a little winded from being thrown into the brick wall, and then having to dodge a car with a mind of its own just an inch from being hit.

“I know we’ve handled large Akuma and shapeshifting Akuma in the past, but how do we handle one that is both of those things and made of metal?”, Ladybug asked.

“aren’t you supposed to be the brains of this outfit?”, Chat asked her.

“If I was, what does that make you?”, Ladybug questioned back.

“The brawn!”, Chat answered.

“I could weightlift ten of you! I do believe I am both brain and brawn!”, she corrected him.

“You’re right, without a doubt! Although I would like to see you prove your point, I like strong girls so I’ll happily be a weightlift for you any day!”, he grinned and winked.

“Keep this up and you’ll be a dead weight!”, Ladybug smirked, standing up and spinning her yoyo to prepare for attack once again.

“Can’t kill someone when you already have their heart!”, Chat smirked back at her, which was a little surprising to her, but for a shameless flirt like him it was nothing too different from the other things he’s said to her, just a little too smooth.

It didn’t take long for the robot turned car Akuma to right itself from the wall and turn itself around to face Chat and Ladybug. Although they couldn’t see Roboticron’s eyes, they could feel it burning a hole right through them through the headlights.

“How are we supposed to get the object away from it when it’s in a different form?”, Ladybug asked Chat after she got closer to him so they wouldn’t have to talk loudly between them.

“Animan’s bracelet was what gave him his shifting powers and it transferred over between each form he took, so maybe the same logic applies here?”, Chat suggested.
“That would make sense. But then what are we supposed to do to get it off of a moving vehicle, let alone a giant robot?”, Ladybug asked another question.

“Can’t you use Lucky Charm or something to stop it? I saw you jump into a T-Rex’s mouth with a car jack once before, and those two things are completely unrelated!”, Chat said.

“That’s provided my Lucky Charm is something that can be useful in this situation, Chat! And I can’t predict what it’s going to give me, it could give me something that’s completely useless in stopping something that’s in motion, not to mention the five minutes I’ll have left before I detransform”, Ladybug told him, shaking her head at the idea.

“I know that, but-…”, Chat nodded, looking at the robot car that stared menacingly back at them, and he stopped short in his sentence when his eyes caught something again.

“Chat?”, Ladybug tilted her head at him curiously.

“Maybe we won’t have to stop it from moving, m’lady. Look”, Chat smiled and again pointed towards the Akuma.

When Ladybug followed his directions again, she spotted the Akumatized object hanging from the same kind of wire or rope through the windshield from the rear view mirror, above the dashboard. After seeing it, she realized what Chat meant.

“If we can find a way inside, we can destroy the object from there and win!”, Chat said.

“Brilliant, Chaton!”, she praised him.

“See? If you can have brawn, then I can have brain!”, he grinned.

“You sure it’s brain and not just a bunch of air?”, she teased.

“Rude”, he frowned at her, and it made her giggle. His attention went back to the Akuma when he heard it’s engine rev, telling him that it was about to charge at them again. He put his hand around Ladybug’s torso and reattached his baton to its place on his back. “Get ready to jump”, he told her.

Ladybug looked at his hand on her and then at him in minor surprise, but nodded because she trusted him. She looked back at the Akuma and waited for the moment to jump.

And not a moment too soon, the Roboticon car began to speed towards them again, tires screeching on the ground. Ladybug felt Chat tense up next to her.

“JUMP!”, he told her, and together they jumped into the air, landing on the roof of the speeding vehicle. They’ve handled runaway buses before, a car that was actually an Akuma racing through Paris wasn’t much different.

The Akuma did a hard brake, causing Chat to slip, but Ladybug caught him in time by the wrist and pulled him back up next to her. The Akuma sped off again and they braced themselves by finding their center of gravity.

“How do we get inside?”, Ladybug asked him.

Chat looked around, and of course the Akuma didn’t leave any openings for them, so he would have to make one. First he tried the handle on the door, and it didn’t budge. Removing his baton from its place on his back, he extended it enough to be used as a pry bar and forced one of the doors open.
“Now! Get in!”, he told Ladybug.

Ladybug slid passed him and into the Akuma vehicle, taking the driver’s seat. Chat climbed in after her and sat in the passenger side, slamming the door.

“So you’ve worked on a car before, but I hope you know how to drive one m’lady!”, Chat said.

“Not exactly! Do you?”, Ladybug asked him.

“Haven’t really been able to work on getting my driver’s license yet!”, Chat shook his head.

“No matter, we’ll just purify the Akuma and get this over with”, Ladybug sighed with slight exasperation, then began to reach for the lugnut that hung from the rear view mirror. But, both her and Chat were suddenly pulled back into their seats. “Hey! What’s going on?!”. 

“The…Seat belts! They’ve…Pulled us in!”, Chat said, while he struggled to break free from his, as it was practically strangling him from being so tight over his chest. Add that to the fact that Chat hates being confined and unable to move freely, and you’ve got a struggling cat.

Ladybug too tried her best to get the seat belt holding her hostage to slack, but it wouldn’t budge and she was as strapped in as Chat was. She tried the release button on the belt buckle, and no dice, it was jammed. Then she heard the Akuma’s doors lock. “It’s trapped us in here! Now we’re at its mercy!”, she observed.

“If I used my Cataclysm we could—“. 

“No! You can’t use Cataclysm in here! This may be an Akuma, but it’s still a citizen on the inside, using Cataclysm on anything that’s attached to the Akuma would cause too much damage!”. 

“Then what do you propose we do bug? It’s not like this thing has an off switch anywhere!”. 

“I can’t reach the object!”, Ladybug attempted to reach for it again, but it wasn’t in range for her.

Chat tried reaching for it, his range being a little further. His claw just barely brushed the object when the vehicle turned a hard right and sent him into the passenger side window. “Damn!”, he muttered.

“Where is it taking us?”, Ladybug asked aloud, trying to make sense of the city scenery outside in hopes of determining where they were at and where they were going.

“I’m not so sure I like this. I wouldn’t complain about being strapped into a car against my will by you, but you’re not the one driving!”, Chat said.

“Pretty sure I wouldn’t keep you like this!”, Ladybug told him.

“I’d still let you!”, Chat responded.

Both of them watched the city pass them by quickly, perhaps a little too quickly for them to see any significant signs or landmarks to tell them where they were. Chat looked ahead of them and the blood in his veins ran cold as his ears drooped and his eyes widened with pupils constricted from fear, brows furrowing upward under his mask with worry and his slightly parted lips frowning. He tapped on Ladybug’s shoulder to get her attention without moving otherwise.

“What is it Chat?”, Ladybug asked him after her attention was gained and she noticed his fearful worried look. Without a sound or change in expression, Chat simply pointed a claw straight ahead of them to show her what he was seeing. And Ladybug could swear, her heart bottomed out a little at
seeing it too.

The Seine.

The Akuma was taking them right to the Seine! And locked doors combined with not much room to move, only one thought crossed both of their minds; they were going to drown.

Now that they were aware of how at risk their lives were, they began to put up even more of a struggle to get free. Though it only seemed to make matters worse, the seat belts felt like snakes wrapping tighter and tighter around their bodies and making it difficult to breathe, holding them to the seats, and the Akuma vehicle gained more speed. Ladybug and Chat instinctually grabbed for each other’s arms and vice gripped one another for dear life as they let out screams when the vehicle went over the edge and plunged into the Seine river.

The vehicle began to sink nose first until the trunk end caught up. Water began to rise, both on the outside and in, and fast. Chat tried yanking on his seat belt with all of the strength he had, as the water reached his ankles, and then his knees, and then his waist. Ladybug tried twisting herself out of the ordeal, but she couldn’t get the seat belt to slack enough for her to wiggle herself out, and the panic set in with the rising water.

“If this is it, it’s certainly a clawful way to go! I was hoping we’d be married first and only death do us part!”, Chat said.

“Save your punny wedding vows for later Chat Noir! We’ll get out of this!”, Ladybug told him.

“I can just see the news headlines now! ‘Ladybug and Chat Noir drowned in the Seine by Akuma’. And robots don’t need to breathe, so I doubt biding our time until Roboticon takes us out of here will save us!”, Chat said.

“We’ve been in tighter situations before!”, Ladybug replied with.

“Last I remember, the words ‘tight situation’ weren’t so literal!”, Chat said, hissing out a choke when he tried to move and the seat belt cut into his throat. He tried the belt buckle and, like Ladybug’s, it was jammed and wouldn’t release. He pulled on it to try and loosen it even just a little one more time, but that didn’t work either. With nothing else to do and Cataclysm being out of the question, he did the one thing he could think of as the cat in him kicked in. He began using his claws to try and tear at the seat belt while also biting at it in as much force as his jaw could use. With how thick the material was, he wasn’t making very fast progress, and the water had already reached up to his chest.

As dangerous as it was, Ladybug attempted to roll her window down. Although it would have only let in more water, it would still give her and Chat a way of escape once they got free. If they ever did. But the window was not budging, and none of the other buttons on the door seemed to work. She couldn’t get it to unlock either, and anything else that would possibly help them was out of her reach with how limited her movement was. She figured now was as good a time as ever to call on her Lucky Charm. Her yoyo was strapped around her waist between her and the crushing seat belt, making it difficult to pull it from her person for the summoning. She thought that as long as her hand was on the yoyo, it would work.

“Lucky charm!”, she yelled out, a glow forming in her hand as two related objects appeared. As she examined them, she was left rather perplex as to what they were to be used for.

“A hammer and a chisel? Are you going to make it a statue of ice or something?”, Chat asked, just as perplexed as his partner.
“I’m not sure what these items would have to do with a car…”, Ladybug shook her head and stared at the objects in her hands intensely.

“If only they could have been a pair of scissors!”, Chat growled while motioning to his seat belt. Ladybug looked around to see what her Ladybug vision would highlight for her so that she could form a plan, and the only thing that highlighted in her vision was the window next to her, as well as Chat’s. But she didn’t understand what it meant. She’d seen such tools used for shaping wood, metal, and other hard materials like ice such as Chat mentioned. But the window of a car? She was left too confused, and that confusion caused distraught to stir up within her.

The water had rose up to their collarbones by now. With a glance at each other, they both took in deep breaths and held them as they became completely submerged.

With only the sound of water in his ears, Chat continued to try and cut his seat belt with his claws, gritting his teeth while slowly losing air in his lungs that caused adrenaline to course through him and his heart to race. He didn’t want it to end like this, and he wasn’t going to let it happen for as long as he could do something about it. He could see that the seat belt was beginning to come apart at where he cut his claws into, but it wasn’t tearing fast enough. The longer he took in getting himself free, the less air Ladybug would have to hold once he was able to help her, and they still had to try and break their way out of the vehicle in order to get to the surface. If only he could use his Cataclysm without worrying about harming the Akuma victim too much, he would have had them free much sooner than this. He could see Ladybug putting up her own struggle for freedom out of the corner of his eye, but she was losing strength and energy to do so as fast as she was losing air, and Chat cursed at himself on the inside to work faster.

Finally in what felt like forever, Chat’s seat belt gave away to his claws and he was able to move again. He leaned over to help Ladybug, trying to cut the threads if her seat belt as fast as possible, because they were both running low on oxygen and he had reached that point of feeling dizzy with a racing heart from holding his breath for too long. He could hear the blood pounding in his ears with each heartbeat. He locked eyes with Ladybug and saw her fear that she’d been trying to hide before, and it was something he didn’t see from her often. He placed a hand on her cheek gently to reassure her and told her with his green eyes that he was going to get her free and stop at nothing. She gave him a nod to show she understood and trusted him fully. Chat put his attention back on her seat belt and clawed as hard as he could until it tore under his force. Now they had to find a way out.

Chat looked around, the water making things less clear for him. He moved towards the passenger door and tried the handle, then the lock manually, and still nothing. The Akuma had them locked in pretty well. Too well. Breaking a window was the only thing left for Chat to do, or think of.

“Wait a minute…That’s it!”, Chat thought to himself, looking at the tools Ladybug’s Lucky Charm had summoned. He picked up the chisel in one hand and the hammer in the other, then wedged the chisel in between the window and the seal of the door.

“I’ve only seen this work in movies, so I hope it works in the real world!”, he thought, taking the hammer and bringing it down on the chisel.

Whether or not it hurt the Akuma victim, he knew it couldn’t hurt any more than using Cataclysm, tempted as he was. After a few strikes of the hammer down on the chisel, Chat saw the window begin to crack. He switched to using his foot and kicked at it with as much might as he could, until it shattered.

Ladybug was on her last few seconds of air before her lungs would give out, Chat knew he would have to get them both to the surface. He took her arm and draped it over his shoulders, while putting
his around her waist. He yanked the Akumatized object off from where it hung sunken on the rear view mirror above the dashboard, and then swam his and Ladybug’s way out through the shattered window, just as the waterlogged car began to transform back into Roboticon, or perhaps a vehicle that was more suitable for water. Either way, Chat didn’t want to stick around to find out. Now that they were free and had the object in their clutches, they had to get it purified before Roboticon could retaliate and trap them again.

They finally broke through the Seine’s surface and took in much needed gasping breaths, welcoming the fresh oxygen that filled their lungs.

“It worked! Are you okay m’lady?” Chat coughed out.

“I think so. Good thinking Chaton!”, Ladybug responded, spatting out what little water she accidentally took in from being under for so long.

Chat kicked his feet to propel them both to the sidewalk that was the bank of the Seine. He climbed up out of the water and lifted Ladybug along with him, setting her down gently on the concrete.

“What about the Akumatized object?”, Ladybug asked, looking back down at the river, almost like she was about to go back in and look for the object so that could break the victim from the Akuma’s spell and save the day. She suddenly heard her earrings beep at her with a warning for how much time she had left.

Chat grinned, tossing her the corrupt lugnut at her, with the Lucky Charm items. “Do your thing, bugaboo. And hurry, you only have three minutes left!”, he said and winked at her.

Ladybug nodded with that smile of victory and stood to her feet, stomping her heel over the Akumatized object to break it, setting free the familiar black butterfly of evil.

“Alright little Akuma, you’ve done enough for one day”, she said while beginning to spin her yoyo in her de-evilization ritual, capturing the Akuma and locking it within the yoyo for purification. She soon released the butterfly, now white and cleansed of its evil, and waved it goodbye as it fluttered away. “Bye bye, little butterfly”.

Chat handed her the tools that her Lucky Charm had summoned, and she tossed them into the air while shouting “Miraculous Ladybug!” and incurring the miraculous cleanse of her powers to repair whatever damages the Akuma left behind.

“Pound it!”, she and Chat smiled at one another as their job was done. But then Chat looked back at the water of the Seine with perked senses, focusing on a few bubbles of air that floated up to the surface from the depths of the river; where they had left the Akuma victim that had been Roboticon.

“I don’t know about you, but I personally would prefer not to be charged with manslaughter. Being a wanted cat when Rogercop took over was enough of the fugitive life for me”, he said, before diving back into the water and disappearing for about a minute, then appeared again with the victim in his grasp. He swam to the edge again and Ladybug helped both of them up out of the water. The Akuma victim turned out to be a man that worked as a mechanic at an auto parts store somewhere in the city.

“What happened? Where am I? And why am I soaked?”, the man, who’s nametag read ‘Eli’, asked while looking around and then at the two supers. “Hey, you’re Ladybug and Chat Noir! You two save the city from Akuma! But if you’re here, then that must mean…”, Eli then said, and horror set in on his face as he made the connection and realized what he must have done. “Oh my God, I’m so sorry! I-it was an angry customer who needed his car fixed and thought I wasn’t doing my job right,
so he started to ridicule and tell me that I didn’t I bow what I was doing and-!

“Hey, it’s okay. Sometimes we can’t help how we feel when being told how to do something right. It was all an accident and a misunderstanding I’m sure”, Ladybug said reassuringly, kneeling down in front of Eli and handing him the restored lugnut on a string, which she assumed was an item of sentimental value to Eli.

“No big deal, we forgive you. I think I know how it feels to be ridiculed for something you do or want to do, and it can be really frustrating sometimes when people don’t understand you. Can’t really say I blame you”, Chat said in agreement.

“Merci Ladybug! Merci Chat Noir!”, Eli bowed his head in respect to Paris’s heroes; his heroes.

“De rien!”, Ladybug and Chat both said, and then Ladybug’s earrings beeped another warning.

“Better get going, m’lady. I think I’ve got it from here”, Chat told her.

“Thanks Chaton! Stay out of trouble, alright?”, Ladybug stood up, walking away from Eli and over to Chat.

“Cat’s honor”, Chat said, putting on hand to his chest and holding up the other like he was taking a pledge or an oath. With that, Ladybug took off, swinging up to a rooftop and away over many others until she disappeared. Chat looked back down at Eli and went over to him, lending a hand to help him up and slinging the man’s arm over his shoulders to support him. “So, any particular destination this cat can take you to?”, he asked.

“Perhaps back to the shop I work at? I should probably get back to working on that customer’s car, and this time explain to him what’s wrong in a calm manner. I hope he’ll still understand”, Eli said.

“I’ll hang around for a few minutes, just to uh, make sure things go over smoothly between you two”, Chat offered with a nod.

“Merci Chat Noir, your services are much appreciated”, Eli smiled gratefully.

“No problem!”, Chat smiled back, before taking Eli to the workshop the man worked at, and did as he promised by waiting around until the conflict between Eli and the customer were resolved.

Once things were settled and everyone was within understanding of one another, Chat disappeared, just in time for the last class of school.
Remnants of the Past

Chapter Summary

Marinette reflects on the aftermath of the recent Akuma, Roboticon, and its attack. As she does, she learns from Tikki some secrets she isn't to know about the past holders of her and Chat Noir's miraculous; secrets Tikki hopes will shed some light on the real dangers of being a miraculous holder and prevent history from repeating itself. After learning something so sacred, Mari is visited by the very familiar black cat that rules the night, just before the sky breaks into a storm.

However, said black cat will not be making it home as safely as he would want to.

Chapter Notes

It's chapter 5! By far, this one is the longest chapter for this story, topping at 11,139 words! That's HUGE, since my average chapter length for any other fic I've ever written before is about 2,500. So I hope this chapter is enjoyable! We get miraculous lore in this chapter! I did some deep thinking and a little bit of digging to come up with it, and it's what makes this chapter one of my favorites to have written! I know the lore in this chapter is likely to be proven wrong by the show, but I don't mind that. I would like to know what your thoughts are about it, because I tried to make sure it made sense when I was writing it and to me it does, but that doesn't mean it will to anyone else. And also, WE GET MARICHAT! THIS IS MY SHIP! I LOVE THESE DORKS YOU HAVE NO IDEA!

“That was a close call today, Tikki. I think a little too close”, Marinette shook her head while seating herself at her small porch table, on her balcony, with a mug of warm tea in her hands and a light blanket draped around her shoulders. The surrounding city lights illuminated her face and the cloudy sky above. There was a bit of a chill, hence the blanket, and the scent of rain lingered in the air.

“We were lucky to have Chat Noir with us, weren’t we?”, Tikki nodded her big round head, settling down next to Marinette on the table to munch on a cookie.

“Yes, we were…”, Marinette smiled, looking to the side and down at her mug of tea, a bit of a smile curling her lips.

“I know that look Marinette. Did Chat do something that bothers you?”, Tikki said after observing her chosen for a moment, moving closer to Mari and resting her tiny paws on her sleeve.

“No, he didn’t do anything…It’s something I’ve thought about before”, Marinette reassured. She brushed her thumb over the brim of her mug as she thought.

“What about?”, Tikki asked curiously.

“If Adrien wasn’t here…If he wasn’t here, maybe I would give Chaton a chance. I do like him, he’s
really sweet and very kind, and I will admit that he does have a good sense of humor. But my heart is stuck on Adrien, and the sad thing I realize is…I know Chat better than I know him. Maybe if they were the same person, things would be so much easier to figure out”, Marinette said.

“Oh Marinette. I know love can be hard, a lot of the Ladybugs before you had some of the same conflicts as you do. But you should always follow your heart, no matter what. You’ll figure things out one day. I have confidence in you”, Tikki consoled, fluttering up to Marinette’s face and kissing her cheek.

“Thanks Tikki. With you here, I have confidence I’ll figure things out too, someday”, Marinette smiled, setting her mug down on the table and bringing her hands up to cup them around Tikki, kissing her kwami’s head in return.

“Your heart is part of the reason why you were chosen to be Ladybug, so I don’t doubt your heart will know which one you love most; Chat or Adrien”, Tikki said.

“I hope so. Otherwise I might just give up the whole idea of love altogether and ignore both of them. I wonder if I’d be able to love Chat and his civilian form if Adrien wasn’t around?”, Marinette chuckled, then looked to the side again in thought before glancing back at Tikki. “You wouldn’t of happened to see him detransformed when we were both trapped in that containment unit while fighting Dark Owl…Would you?”, she asked with an innocent look.

“You know the rules Marinette. Even if I do know, I’m not allowed to tell you, it’s the rules to being a miraculous user. You can’t know the identity of your partner nor the people that know them as a civilian, and nobody else including family and close friends can know yours. It’s for your and everyone else’s safety, remember?”, Tikki left Marinette’s hands and bobbed around in the air as she explained.

“I know Tikki. I should know better than to ask. But sometimes I think about what it’d be like to know who he is, and if I’d still see him the same way or not. Again, if he and Adrien were the same person, that would make everything so much easier…”, Marinette sighed, looking down in shame. Out of her and Chat Noir, she was the one that always enforced the rules of a miraculous user the most, always denying Chat his wish to know who she is so that she could keep them both and those around them safe. She felt out of place for asking Tikki such a thing.

Tikki looked at Marinette with sympathy, and smiled a little as she buzzed. “One thing I can tell you is he wasn’t very bad looking and you would have liked him as a civilian”, she said with a giggle.

“That clears things up a lot”, Marinette laughed along while speaking sarcastically. She picked up her mug again and sipped at her tea, and Tikki floated back down to eat her cookie again. “If Chat and Adrien were the same person, I would be happy, but at the same time…I think I’d be scared”, she mumbled.

“Why is that?”, Tikki asked.

“Because if something happened to Chat and I lost him…I’d lose Adrien too. And if something happened to Adrien, I would lose my partner. I may be capable on my own but there are some things that Chat is better at than me, which is why we make such a great team. To lose either one of them would hurt, but to lose them both at the same time would be worse”, Marinette said, her smile falling into a bit of a frown.

“Don’t think of it like that Marinette. Chat is a pretty strong person, and Adrien is respectful but persistent in his own way. I don’t think you’ll lose either of them so easily”, or so Tikki hoped, as she frowned sadly. What Marinette didn’t know was that Tikki did know who Chat was, and to hear
Marinette speak about such grim thoughts made her wish things weren’t what they were. Because she knew that if something did happen to either boy, Marinette would suffer from the loss of both.

“I hope you’re right Tikki. I don’t know what I’d do without them. Chat is my best friend, and Adrien…Well, Adrien is the one I love. I can’t imagine living without them here”, Marinette sighed again, taking another sip of her tea. “With the threat of Hawkmoth around, I worry about it all the time, and today was one of those days that made me worry the most. I think Chat might have seen my fear”, she added.

“I know how you must feel, I worry too about either of you getting hurt, because being a miraculous user can be very dangerous when met with the right enemy. Or the wrong one. But you should always have faith in others and yourself. You just have to believe in your luck”, Tiki said.

“My luck, huh? I think we both know my luck is the worst. I can’t be lucky if I ran right into Adrien today. Literally”, Marinette laughed.

“Things happen for a reason. We don’t always know why, but believe me when I say everything has a purpose. Maybe you running into Adrien was fate’s way of trying to get you two to kiss or something?”, Tikki giggled with her.

“Fate sure works in funny ways”, Marinette smiled down at Tikki. “But I think karma works faster”.

“Only for the kindhearted it seems. Karma hasn’t hit Chloe fast enough”, Tikki nodded.

“I hope it will be moving faster than the subway when it finally does”, Marinette laughed. The two grew silent again as Mari continued to slowly sip her tea while Tikki sat and enjoyed her company after having eaten her cookie.

Marinette looked up at the sky, half expecting to see stars but completely forgetting that there were none, seeing only the clouds. She’d almost thought about doing patrol, but the events of the day were enough to keep her home for the night. Which was fine with her. It wasn’t like Hawkmoth and his routine to send out another Akuma so soon. She wondered sometimes how physically draining it was for him. Did he have a special power like her Lucky Charm and Chat’s Cataclysm? Was sending the Akumas his special power? And why did he want hers and Chat’s miraculouses so bad? Her mind reeled back to the conversation she’d had with Master Fu after taking the book to him; when combined, the power of the ladybug and black cat miraculouses could grant anyone a wish of any desire they wanted. Did Hawkmoth want world domination? Or was there something else he was after? Based off of some of the comic books about superheroes she’d read with Alya countless times in Alya’s search for how to figure out Ladybug’s identity, Marinette had learned that the supervillain of every superhero story did what they did because they either wanted to rule the world, or because they’d lost something very dear to them and wanted it back. In their own minds, their actions were just as justified as the heroes’ reasons for defeating them.

What could Hawkmoth have lost that was dear to him?

She thought back to her previous assumption of Gabriel Agreste being Hawkmoth. Though it had seemed she was proven wrong, she couldn’t shake the feeling that they’d been fooled. If Gabriel was Hawkmoth, the only thing she could think of that would cause such a person as him to wear the mask…

“His wife?...”, Marinette thought, her fingers gripping around her mug tightly. For Gabriel to be Hawkmoth, that had to be the reason. It wasn’t what he lost, but who. “Tikki, I think I might know who-“, she began to say, until another voice cut in from in her room through the open hatch door to the balcony.
“Marinette?”

“It’s papa! Quick Tikki, hide!”, Mari whispered, motioning for Tikki to hide in her blanket, which the kwami obeyed and hid out of sight. “I’m up here, papa!”, she called once she knew Tikki wouldn’t be seen.

Tom’s head popped up through the hatch door a moment later, he looked around for a second before spotting Marinette. “Just thought I’d bring up some fresh pie for you!”, he said with a smile to her, handing her a small saucer with a fresh, warm piece of pie and a fork.

“Thank you papa!”, Marinette said, happily accepting the treat, setting her mug down on her table and taking the saucer from Tom.

“Is there something the matter, sweetie? You’re normally not up here unless you need to clear your mind?”, Tom asked, bringing himself up to sit on the edge of the open hatch.

“Nothings wrong papa. I came up here because I felt like it, and because it looked like it might turn off and rain soon so I wanted to enjoy what I could without getting poured on”, Marinette told him.

“Alright then. Just making sure you’re okay after today. It’s a good thing Ladybug and Chat Noir got there in time, huh?”, Tom said.

“Yeah I know! Those two are so amazing at fighting those Akuma! Amazing and awesome! I’m glad we have them to protect Paris!”, Marinette smiled again. She felt Tikki buzz against her from underneath the blanket.

“Me too. They do make a pretty good team, don’t they?”, Tom smiled back with a chuckle.

Marinette looked down at the piece if pie on the saucer she still had in her hands, smiling to herself at her father’s words. “…Yeah, they sure do”, she said softly. She couldn’t even begin to ask for a better partner than Chat Noir, even if he was an annoyance to her with his puns and jokes on the battlefield, he still made sure their job as heroes got done and that people were safe. That was all that mattered.

“Alright well, don’t stay up too terribly late. Your mother and I are turning in now, we’ve got to get up early so we can get to working on a large order that came in today, so we’ll see you in the morning”, Tom said after a moment, sliding himself back down through the hatch so that just his head was visible again.

“Okay. Night papa, and tell mama I said goodnight too”, Marinette looked back up at him.

“I will. Goodnight sweetie”, Tom nodded, and with that he disappeared, leaving her room to go back to the downstairs that was their living room, where Sabine was waiting for him and the two headed for bed in hopes of getting a long night’s rest for the task that awaited them in the early dawn.

Marinette however remained in her balcony, eating the piece of pie little by little with her head leaning in her hand, propped up by her elbow on the table, and with a distance look on her face.

Tikki flitted out from her hiding spot and looked up at her chosen with a tilted glance. She knew that look. It was often the look Marinette made when she was either in deep thought or daydreaming about a life with Adrien. The thoughts of Hawkmoth and his drive to steal the miraculous were but momentarily lost, pushed to the back of her mind where she could forget them until she would be reminded again.

“Hey Tikki?”, Marinette spoke up, softly, but audible while bluebell eyes looked up at the red kwami.
“Yes Marinette?” Tikki responded with endless patience. Or at least, it was endless when Chloe wasn’t around.

“I know I’m not supposed to ask, but were any of your previous chosen ever as conflicted about love as I am? You don’t have to answer, I’m just curious”, Marinette asked, looking back down at the pie and fiddling with her fork around it on the saucer.

Of course, her question was met by silence, no doubt because Tikki was debating her own thoughts on what to say and how to answer it. Though she never did speak much about her previous chosen, part of her wished she did. But she couldn’t. The rules forbade it. It was for her safety, her current chosen’s safety, and out of respect for the long gone that could no longer tell their tale for themselves. She loved all of her chosen, even if some of them hadn’t lived for too long after receiving their miraculous for Tikki to really create a strong bond with, except for one, which Marinette reminded her a lot of.

“You remind me very much of Bridgette…”, Tikki mumbled. It was supposed to be only a thought, not spoken out loud. But it was too late to take it back now. She covered her mouth with her tiny paws at the realization of her mistake.

“Bridgette?”, Marinette echoed the name, sitting up with slightly widened eyes.

“Yes”, Tikki sighed in defeat, shoulders slouching forward as her paws fell from her mouth. “She was my chosen before you. You look, think, and act a lot like she did. And she also had a crush on someone at her school, and she rejected her Chat Noir’s feelings because of that. But…Then there was an accident, and…She wasn’t the same afterward”, she explained.

“What was the accident?…What happened?”, Marinette asked, sympathy for Tikki overtaking her voice and the way she looked at her kwami. She couldn’t remember ever seeing Tikki look so sad, and it made her worry.

“I’ve said too much. You aren’t supposed to know about previous miraculous holders, and I’m afraid I’ve told you a lot more than I should have at all”, Tikki shook her head, letting herself sink down until she was sitting on the table again.

“But you said things happen for a reason, right? We may not know why, but there’s always a hidden motive. So you telling me would be for a reason. What happened to the previous Chat Noir?”, Marinette persisted. She hated to pry her business into where it didn’t belong, but now that she knew about it she was sure to be haunted by her imagination and the scenarios it could conjure up, thus creating more worry and fear for herself and Chat. Anxiety was a very unforgiving thing, and like glitter, it never went away.

Tikki sighed again and looked down, thinking of her options. If she told Marinette, it would make her worry for sure of the possibilities, but the upside would be that she’s more aware. And awareness was what prevented most things. If she didn’t, she knew Marinette would be bothered by what it could be and let her imagination take it out of control. Awareness versus the mind. Tikki would rather take her chances with awareness.

“Alright. But if I tell you, you must promise not to tell anyone. Not Alya, not the Ladyblog, not even Chat Noir. You aren’t supposed to know about past holders of your miraculous, and definitely not about the past holders of another’s miraculous. I’m only going to tell you this to ease your mind and hopefully help you, but it’s not a very pretty story, it has no happy endings like in fairy tales”, Tikki warned, then took a deep breath and sat in more silence as she thought of her next words carefully.

Marinette could only wait with as much patience as she possibly had. Her fingers gripped the edges
of her table in anticipation until her knuckles turned white. She leaned in the moment Tikki began to speak again.

“As you already know, a Ladybug and Chat Noir are chosen to wield their miraculouses when the time comes that they’re needed. This is how it’s been for centuries, going as far back as beyond five thousand years, into ancient Egyptian history as you’ve learned before and still further. Miraculous holders have been involved in many worldly conflicts, including the world wars and a few others… Not very many of them survived those times. One Chat Noir died in the time of world war two, and a Ladybug was lost to the cold war. But aside from that, this isn’t the first time Hawkmoth has appeared to wreak havoc. Like Master Fu told you before, the butterfly miraculous has been missing for a very long time, and we don’t know who has it now, besides whoever this Hawkmoth is”, Tikki began to explain, and as she paused, Marinette cut in.

“This Hawkmoth? You mean there’s been more than just one Hawkmoth?”, Mari asked.

“Many of the miraculouses have had at least two wielders in their existences, and the butterfly miraculous is no different. Though it has often been dormant, there have been one or two Hawkmoths before the one you and Chat Noir fight today. The last one that appeared was the one the last previous Ladybug and Chat Noir had fought. They were close to taking the butterfly miraculous back, but because of the accident, that Hawkmoth was able to get away and the butterfly miraculous has been dormant again since. Until now. The accident was…terrible”, Tikki nodded, trailing with a shudder at the memory.

Marinette waited in silence again, cupping her hands around Tikki once more and running her thumb over the top of the kwami’s head to comfort her.

Tikki buzzed at Marinette’s touch and nudged her little head into Mari’s hand, appreciating the comfort she offered. “I’m not sure what happened but somehow, Chat Noir had become Akumatized. Anyone, miraculous holder or not, can be influenced by the power of another holder, directly or indirectly. But Chat Noir still had his consciousness, and didn’t want to fight his Ladybug, nor did he want to hurt anyone else. So, he used Cataclysm on himself. It was the only way to destroy the Akuma, and his only escape”, Tikki explained.

“Really?…”, Marinette’s eyes grew wide again, and she looked to the side for a moment before speaking again. “Couldn’t his Ladybug have used Lucky Charm to help him? Or if he still had his consciousness, couldn’t he have just handed her his Akumatized object or something?”, she asked.

“Well, it wasn’t that easy, unfortunately…The object wasn’t just any regular mundane everyday item. It was his ring”, Tikki said.

“His miraculous? But I thought-“, Marinette began before Tikki interjected again.

“A miraculous can be manipulated by another miraculous, in any way, shape or form. But the only thing that can’t happen is one miraculous destroying another, and especially if they are as equal in power as the ladybug and black cat miraculouses are. It’s a way for the miraculouses to protect themselves, their magic prevents other forces, including the same kind of magic, from destroying them, to preserve themselves and the kwami that are bound to them. Even if Ladybug had wanted to break Chat Noir’s ring to release him from Hawkmoth’s grasp, she wouldn’t have been able to. And she didn’t want to face her partner as an enemy either, so Chat Noir did the only thing he could do”, Tikki corrected.

“Destroy himself so that the Akuma didn’t have a host…”, Marinette said softly. “I don’t get it, though. If the ring was the object of his Akumatization, and it couldn’t be broken, then how did it get purified? Wouldn’t it still be tainted with evil?”, she then asked.
“Without a host for the object to be connected to, the Akuma cannot remain attached to it. In a sense, the ring purified itself the moment Chat Noir…”, Tikki began to explain, trailing again, her little lip quivering.

“He…Didn’t survive, did he?”, Marinette saw the hurt in Tikki’s eyes, her own heart aching for the kwami before her, whom she had always known to be happy, optimistic, and high-spirited. To see Tikki hurting in any kind of way was just as heartbreaking.

“I’m afraid not. Your powers, and Chat Noir’s, are the greatest forces on this earth. And the power of destruction is a force that should be used wisely, for reasons like this. It can be fatal to a living creature, just as easily as it can destroy inanimate objects. The wielders of such power are no exception to this. Possessing a miraculous and wearing the mask do not make you immune to your own power. Not every chosen is able to handle their powers either, some have succumbed to it and died by letting it overtake their bodies, others abused it and paid the ultimate price with one mistake. How the previous Chat Noir figured any of this out; that his ring can’t be broken to be purified, that an Akuma cannot stay attached to it without a host, that Cataclysm was his way out - I’m not sure. His kwami would have never told him any of that either. My other half, since we are Yin and Yang, may be a trouble maker but he is not a breaker of the sacred rules we kwami have kept in place since the dawn of our existence. And his chosen then was a bright kid just like his chosen now, but even he wouldn’t have been able to think of it himself. My only other explanation for it is that he did it out of a whim in hopes of saving lives and defeating Hawkmoth. It did save lives, and although the butterfly miraculous wasn’t retrieved, Hawkmoth was still defeated. But it broke Bridgette’s heart to lose her partner the way she did…Especially since that was how she learned her partner was actually her school crush…and after that happened, she lost her light and her way. She lost herself. But because the butterfly miraculous went dormant again, she had no reason to keep being Ladybug, so she gave up the miraculous and returned it to the guardian Master Fu. She was the first of my chosen to have somewhat succeeded in her mission for being chosen, and to have given up her miraculous at will when there was no longer a need for a hero. That was many years ago. I do not know what happened to her, where she went, or if she’s even still alive. But wherever she is, I hope she is happy and at peace with herself. The loss was hard on all of us, but I don’t think anyone took it as hard as Bridgette and Chat Noir’s kwami did…To lose a chosen when neither of us are ready is a very hard thing for us kwami to cope with, and my other half has lost more chosen than me”, Tikki responded with.

“That’s so sad…”, Marinette said quietly. “How did that Chat Noir become Akumatized in the first place though?”.

“I don’t know that either, and my other half won’t tell me what happened. See, when you’re transformed, we fuse with our miraculous’s holder, and because of this we can feel the same things you do and your life force. But we tend to take the brunt of it all to keep you protected. We can’t however absorb our own power because, as part of being bound to a miraculous that cannot be destroyed by that of another including our own, my other half was unable to save his chosen from the power of the Cataclysm. But he also felt it as his chosen did. The pain, like intense electricity racing through his body, and even the stopping of his chosen’s heart as he took his final breath…That’s all he’s told me about it. It’s too painful for him to talk about because it’s the first Chat Noir he’s ever lost that way, and he’d grown just as attached to him as any of the other Chat Noirs he’s had”, Tikki explained.

Marinette looked solemn with the information she’d just learned. She wondered if things could have been different had they not happened the way they did, if she would still be Ladybug had the previous Chat Noir survived and not broken the previous Ladybug’s heart. She also wondered if she and her Chat ever got into that kind of situation, would she be able to handle it? The part that Tikki had said about the previous Ladybug named Bridgette learning that her school crush was in fact her
Chat Noir through the circumstances of the accident kept repeating itself in her mind, and she began to imagine what it’d be like if Adrien was Chat Noir and if they had been placed in the same situation. Under those circumstances, she wouldn’t be able to handle it, unless Chat Noir was someone else instead. She cared for him like any friend would, but she wouldn’t be able to live if he were Adrien too and a tragedy such as what Tikki told her had happened. All wishes of the two boys being the same person to make it easier for her had been dashed by the story and replaced with the fear. Though the thought that such a pun loving street cat like Chat Noir could also be perfect model Adrien Agreste was a ridiculous one at its best, Tikki’s story also made her more cautious about brushing that possibility off so easily. Simply because it’d happened before.

“I hope that by telling you this, you are more aware of the things you each are capable of and will use your abilities more wisely. You may have the power of creation, but even that can be just as deadly as the power of destruction if ever used wrong, or in the wrong hands. And quite possibly for the sake of keeping history from repeating itself. I don’t want to see my other half go through that again. And I also don’t want to see you suffer the way Bridgette did. I have only the utmost confidence that you will make the right choices Marinette, so don’t think I don’t believe in you or your better judgment, but even the best of us can and do make mistakes”, Tikki said, floating up from the table again and hovering in front of Marinette’s face.

“I think I am Tikki. I’ll make sure it doesn’t happen again. I know you weren’t supposed to, but I thank you for telling me. I don’t think Chat would let himself become Akumatized, we’re both pretty careful about that. I trust that he will keep himself Akuma free, and so will I”, Marinette told her.

“It’s safer to take precaution as if it will happen than to just assume that it won’t. I believe in Chat Noir just like you, my other half can be a good guide when he wants to be and Chat Noir is a smart boy on his own. But you have to remember that Hawkmoth only needs the negative emotion, it doesn’t matter who it is, and we all feel negative sometimes. And all it takes is the right person to make you feel negativity. The right people are usually the ones closest to you, like friends or family, because they can make you hurt the most. The only one that is a threat to you is yourself if you can’t control it. And sometimes we can’t”, Tikki said.

“Right. I’ll try my best, for you and for Chat Noir”, Marinette nodded and then smiled reassuringly at Tikki.

Tikki smiled back with pride in her eyes for her chosen, and buzzed with happiness as she hugged Marinette’s cheek. But then, she suddenly disappeared and hid within Marinette’s blanket again, leaving Mari looking down rather confused.

“Speaking of that cat”, she said softly up to Marinette.

That’s when Marinette’s attention was drawn elsewhere the moment she heard what sounded like silver toed boots landing upon the metal railing of her balcony, and there stood Chat Noir in all his black leather ‘boyfriend material’ glory. He was smiling down at her with his arms crossed over his chest.

“Evening purr-incess. To what occasion are you out here on such a chilly rain scented night by yourself?” he said.

“Chat Noir! I didn’t expect to see you here! Where’s Ladybug?”, Marinette asked, acting surprised with wide eyes and then looking around for Ladybug to sell the act.

“M’lady’s not out tonight, so it’s just your knight in shining armor. I was in the neighborhood on my way home when I saw you sitting here, so I thought I’d check up on my second favorite civilian”, Chat said, jumping down from the balcony railing with ease thanks to his reflexes and walking up to
the table Marinette sat at, taking the other chair that was there and sitting down.

“Your second favorite?” Marinette raised a brow with an amused smile at him.

“Sorry, m’lady is my first. Just because I don’t know her identity doesn’t mean she isn’t my top favorite civilian”, Chat said.

“I should have known”, Marinette laughed while putting her hand to her forehead in a light facepalm.

“That’s okay, not everyone has the privilege to be my favorite anyway”, Chat laughed along.

“So then why am I so privileged? You’ve only saved me maybe three times and it’s not like I’ve done anything special for you?”, Marinette asked.

“That’s easy! Because we’re friends, aren’t we? I mean, it must be pretty awkward having a superhero as a friend, but that’s what I would consider you. Let’s just say I’ve got a few insiders that have seen what you can do and how amazing you are, so if there’s anyone that’s privileged here it’s me”, Chat answered.

“How sweet”, Marinette chuckled. Then, she offered him the partially eaten pie by scooting the saucer towards him on the table. “Here, help yourself if you want. Baked fresh right here at the Dupain-Chengs!”, she smiled kindly at him.

At first Chat blinked disbelief at her, eyes flicking from her to the pie and back with his cat ears perked in a cute way. But then the smile returned to his face as a grin and he accepted, gladly. “I’m sweet? Tell me who’s being sweet now purr-iness!”, he said cheerfully, then took a bite of the pie and instantly he stiffened with wide eyes at the taste. “Omigod this is like heaven on a plate!”, he commented.

“Do they not feed you at home?”, Marinette asked while laughing at his reaction.

“Oh no, I’m fed quite well, but I’m not exactly allowed to eat very much sweets and pie is one of those. And to top it off, the few times I have been able to sneak a sweet or two by myself have always been…Uh, lesser quality goods. None compare to yours!”, Chat told her.

“So you have had something from our bakery at least once before then”, Marinette said with observation.

“Definitely! Whenever I have a bit of a sweet tooth, goods from your bakery are ones I pre-fur! Of course, you wouldn’t know it was me if I walked in without the costume. Secret identity and all”, Chat said. He looked down at the pie again and realized that he’d eaten all but one bite left. He looked back up at Mari, a bit apologetically, but also with the look of a begging cat. When she laughed again and waved her hand for him to go ahead, he happily ate the last bite, savoring the flavor until it was gone.

“I’m glad one of Paris’s heroes approves”, Marinette giggled at him.

“On a scale of one to ten, I give it thirty! By cat years!”, Chat said. “It’s just pawsitively that amazing!”.

Marinette rolled her eyes at the pun, but his happiness was contagious nonetheless so she still smiled about it. If she was honest with herself, his puns and jokes were actually funny during times that weren’t serious. Even if he did use them a bit excessively.
“Hey Chat Noir, what’s it like for you being a superhero? All these times we’ve talked I’ve never asked you that question before”, she asked.

“What’s it like for me?”, Chat repeated the question, then sat there giving his answer some thought, claw to his chin and face contorted to show for it. “I guess for starters, it’s a real thrill. I love being able to feel free when I’m out here flying across the rooftops, without the fear of falling or making a wrong step. The cat in me comes as second nature and natural instinct, which means landing on my feet if I do happen to make a wrong move, such as estimating the distance between two buildings as eight feet when it’s actually ten feet. I’m better at that now, but when I first started out I was misjudging that among other things. Even us supers make mistakes sometimes. And when it comes to facing down Akuma, the feeling of the adrenaline rush that comes with it is something I would call indescribable, it’s fun to mess with them during battle by irritation because that’s when they tend to lose their focus. Sure, sometimes I’m afraid for my life and m’lady, we may be superheroes but we’re not superhuman when it comes to feeling emotion; we still feel normal human emotions like fear. I like my superhero life, it’s the only time I ever get to be myself, and I’m more than comfortable to be that much around Ladybug. She may think my puns are **clawful**, but I know she secretly likes them”, he told her.

“I remember the night you showed me the surprise you had for Ladybug when that ice cream Akuma appeared, you’d said you loved her. Do you still?”, Marinette asked.

“More than anything. But that same night was when I’d learned that she wasn’t interested because she has her eyes on someone else. It kind of hurt a little, but I was willing to accept her friendship. She is my best friend after all, one of them anyway. If having me as a friend is good enough for her, then it’s good enough for me too. And I’m glad she was honest with me, she only told me about being interested in another person to protect my feelings and I admire that very much. My heart is still hers and always will be. Granted, sometimes it does hurt to realize that I won’t ever have my feelings returned, just a second best option if all else fails with the first, but I’ll be there for her anyway regardless. I cherish any kind of relationship I can have with her. Friends, or lovers, it doesn’t really matter as long as I get to be with her while saving the day”, Chat said, glancing to the side a couple times.

The pain that flashed in his eyes was not unnoticed by Marinette, however. She squinted at him as she listened, trying to make more of his expressions, to read him. She remembered how bitter he was acting after meeting up with him to take on Glaciator, all because she as Ladybug hadn’t shown up for the surprise he had for her; she’d hurt him unintentionally. And the expression she saw on his face when she told him she had eyes for someone else, the way he kissed her briefly and then took off into the night without further questions, she knew now that it was because the truth did hurt him as she had feared. And she hadn’t wanted to hurt him. Of course, he was humble enough to accept being just friends, and it didn’t bother her as much to know that he still loved her. Loved Ladybug, that is. She never understood how he could love someone he didn’t really know.

“I’m…Sorry it didn’t go as you’d planned…It really was an amazing surprise, and I’m sure Ladybug still appreciated it. If she values you as a friend, then she probably did”, Marinette said, a bit awkwardly, trying to fain ignorance and hide the guilt she felt.

But whoever said ignorance was bliss?

“Ah, it’s not your fault princess”, Chat said with a scoff, making Marinette feel all the more guilty, because it was her fault and she knew it. She’d been too upset over Adrien not showing up to join her and her friends for André’s ice cream, that she’d completely forgot about Chat’s invitation to an evening with him. She couldn’t blame him for feeling bitter about it. Chat didn’t see it and continued, “but I think you’re right. M’lady isn’t the ungrateful type, and she even said it was a great surprise,
before telling me she had another interest and saying she didn’t want to pretend and therefore hurt me. Like I said before, I value any kind of relationship I can have with her, so to me it doesn’t matter. Still a shameless flirt as usual, still the king of puns, still her cat and her cat only. And she accepts that”, he said.

“She’s really lucky to have a friend like you. Always looking out for her, giving her someone reliable to lean on, and being true, loyal and trustworthy to her. I guess you really do have all the qualities it takes to be a hero huh?”, Marinette said.

“Maybe I do. Maybe I don’t. What actually makes someone a hero? Are they born, or are they made? Are they famous, or are they in the minority? Is it their personality, or the things they’ve done?”, Chat said while shrugging his shoulders at her.

Marinette narrowed her eyes at him in confusion. “What do you mean? I thought heroes were-“, she asked him, but he interrupted her before she could finish speaking, as if he already knew what she was to say.

“Heroes can be anybody. And it doesn’t matter who, because we perceive anyone as a hero if they’ve made an impact on us in some way, even if it’s not life changing. And even villainous people think that their actions are justified and that they’re a hero of something. Heroes can be the people we look up to, the people we respect, or the people that have saved us. My mom is my hero because she showed me how to dream. My best friend, who’s like a brother to me, is my hero because he gave me companionship. And Ladybug? She’s my hero because she gave me something I’ve needed for a long time; the feeling of being loved and wanted, however platonic or romantic it is between us. So don’t ask me if or assume that I’ve got what it takes, because maybe I do in the eyes of some and maybe I don’t in the eyes of others. Instead, tell me. Do I or do I not? What is your perception?”, Chat explained.

“I guess I never really thought of it that way…”, Marinette said while looking down at the table.

“Heroes are something we see in others”, she thought to herself as she reflected on his words.

“I would think you’re a hero, not just because you’re dressed to look like one, but because of your kind nature and willingness to help people. That’s something I do admire about you, and I’m sure Ladybug does too. And I can call you my hero, because without you I don’t think I would be here”, she then said, smiling at him.

Chat smiled back with his Cheshire grin and a chuckle. “Having superpowers doesn’t make you a hero. Well, unless you’re a radioactive sub sandwich. Because people like Hawkmoth have superpowers and he is no hero in my perception. It’s what you make others think of you that counts”, he nodded.

“I’ll be sure to keep that in mind”, Marinette said with a giggle.

“Glad we could have this chat and provide you with some new insight, purr-incess”, Chat said with a sly grin at making the puns.

“You’re im-paw-ssible”, Marinette laughed and rolled his eyes at him.

Chat put his hand to his chest, over his heart, and stared at her in awed disbelief. “Why princess, did you just make a pun?”, he gasped.

“I did, didn’t I?...Shit- why did I do that?! He’s rubbing off on me a little too much! Damn him and his puns!”, Marinette thought to herself.
“Is there a problem with that? Or are you the only one allowed to do such a thing?”, she asked him with a raised brow.

“Anyone who can make a pun is def-fur-inately on this cat’s friends list, though you were already a friend before that so I guess that would make you a best friend!”, Chat said with a happy grin and leaned towards her over the table, his belt tail twitching with little excitement.

“How many best friends do you have?”, Marinette asked while holding back a small laugh at him.

“Three. You, Ladybug, and the one I said was like a brother to me. Three’s a lucky number in Chinese tradition, you know!”, Chat said.

“Actually I do. My mama and great uncle are Chinese! I don’t really speak Chinese as fluently as my great uncle and a friend from school, but I do understand some words, and I know a bit about the culture from mama”, Marinette told.

“Oh, I know that princess. I watched your great uncle on that one show when he made his soup. Specifically, the soup he renamed after you, correct? Wang Cheng is his name isn’t it?”, Chat moved to sit on the edge of the table, moving the empty saucer that once had a piece of pie on it over so that it was out of the way.

“Why am I not surprised? Chat’s pretty good at knowing things…”, she thought to herself. “Yeah, he’s a famous world renowned Chinese chef!”, she told him.

“So what’s it like to be related to someone famous?”, he asked.

“Well, it’s really no different feeling than not being related. I don’t see my great uncle very often, so I guess I can’t really get a sense of sharing the same blood. But to know someone famous I think is a very special privilege”, she said.

“Oh? How many famous people does this knight’s princess know?”, Chat grinned again.

“If I told you, I think you’d be jealous”, Mari said with her best smug face.

“Try me”, Chat challenged.


“No kitten? I know those guys too! Well, maybe not your great uncle, I’ve only ever been to China once in my life and I don’t think I ever met him then. But I’ve met Jagged Stone and- wait, did you say Adrien Agreste?”, Chat turned his head to the side in a cute way at first, but then leaned in toward her again.

“Yeah? I go to school with him. Why, is there a problem with knowing him?”, Mari crossed her arms and arched an eyebrow at him again.

“No problem at all, princess! I knew he was famous but I didn’t think you would see it as a privilege to know him. I’ve saved his life a time or two so I’ve had the chance to meet him myself. Actually, just today I ran into him after the Akuma attack was over with. I guess he’d been heading back to the school when the Akuma attacked so he decided to hide somewhere, and when he saw me he felt it was safe again. He was asking about you, y’know”, Chat explained.

Marinette’s guard suddenly dropped at that and her eyes widened with absolutely surprise. “R-really? He was asking…About me?”, she stuttered.
“Yeah, he looked really concerned. He was asking about all of his friends, but something about you made him really worried. I let him know that the Akuma hadn’t touched the school so everyone in it was safe, including you. That seemed to calm him down quite a bit. But I couldn’t help asking him why he was so worried. He explained to me that you were his friends and he loves his friends very much. I guess it was a dumb question to ask but, you know how cats are when they’re curious. That’s why they say ‘curiosity killed the cat’”, Chat nodded.

“but satisfaction brought it back’, don’t tell me you don’t know the entire saying Chat Noir. Is that why Adrien was late getting back to school?” Marinette said.

“My dear princess, you underestimate me! But yes, I guess that’s my fault. He told me how much of an idol Ladybug and I are to him. But then, aren’t we idols to all of Paris? To make up for the time, I brought him to the school the fast and easy way. I hope he didn’t get into trouble for being late?", Chat said. He thought back to earlier that day after he’d helped Eli, the most recent Akuma victim, and the reprimanding he’d received from Ms. Mendeliev for being late, regardless of the circumstances. But that was always a given.

“Well…Kind of. We don’t exactly have the friendliest teacher at that time of the day”, Marinette shrugged. “So then how do you know Jagged Stone you stray cat?”, she then asked.

“How you wound me so, I’m no stray! Mangy, maybe. Suave, most definitely. And very much a tomcat. But I do have a home, something that strays don’t have!”, Chat corrected her. “But to answer that question, I fought the guy when he’d gotten Akumatized. You wouldn’t happen to remember Guitar Villain, would you? I don’t know if people actually keep track of each Akuma by name, but ‘Ole Stone had in fact been a victim once thanks to his target, Mr. XY or whoever he was. He had his guitar as his weapon, and a dragon, but I fought pretty bravely. Because you know, where there’s a dragon, there’s a knight who must be there to slay it. M’lady fought bravely too of course, like a warrior, but that dragon was so afraid of me that it flew away!”, he began to brag.

Marinette had to bite back a laugh, but proved unsuccessful and she couldn’t hold it in, which left Chat looking confused. And a little humiliated.

“What’s so funny?”, he asked.

“That’s not really how I remember it!”, Mari said through her tears of laughter, wiping them from the corners of her eyes with a wide grin on her face.

Chat’s confused expression changed to one of suspicion. As far as he was aware, there wasn’t much media on the Ladyblog from the Guitar Villain attack for Marinette to make such a claim, and there hadn’t been anybody else there on the battlefield but him, Ladybug, and the Akuma. What could Marinette possibly remember? And it didn’t take long for her to notice his suspicion either.

“I was hiding nearby and saw everything happen. Sure you fought bravely, and there was someone that’d went flying, but it wasn’t the dragon. I specifically remember you flying face first into a traffic light before Guitar Villain got away”, Marinette explained. She felt Tikki poke at her side for nearly giving herself away, despite the swift recovery.

Nonetheless, Chat suddenly felt hot with embarrassment under his mask as red rushed to his cheeks, the look on his face like that of a cat caught in a trap. Someone had actually seen that? He knew Ladybug had seen it, but he didn’t think anyone else had been around. He thought his dignity and honor were safe. But he was wrong.

“Uh…Y-yeah, well! I-in my defense, that traffic light came outta nowhere! It just got in my way, that’s all! Cats always land on their feet unless there’s something that gets in their way!”, he said,
scratching at the back of his neck sheepishly, then cursing at himself under his breath for scratching too hard because of his claws. He couldn’t maintain eye contact with Mari now as she sat there looking up at him, lips pursed and the victorious expression of “gotchya” written on her features.

“Sure it did. Don’t worry Chat Noir, I won’t tell anyone. Haven’t told a soul since the day I saw it and that was almost a year ago. Your little secret is safe with me”, Marinette laughed.

“I appreciate that very much princess. I wouldn’t be your knight if I wasn’t dignified, nor could I without my honor. I suppose for that, I owe you a few of my nine lives”, Chat sighed, half in relief and half in the feeling that he knew he was still in trouble with her knowing. One wrong move to get himself on her bad side and he was sure she would tell someone then. What’s worse is if it ends up on the Ladyblog. He just had to make sure he didn’t ever give her a reason to blackmail him.

A clap of thunder boomed overhead, grabbing the attention of both teens as their wide gazes shot to the sky. Chat scented rain again, and this time it was stronger than before, which that combined with the thunder told him the coming downpour was drawing nigh. The first few drops hit their faces and they glanced at each other briefly.

“Better get inside princess, don’t want you catching a cold from the rain”, Chat told her, moving himself off the table quickly. He gently pushed her towards the open hatch door to her room from the balcony the moment she stood up, and then turned to take off.

“Chat, wait!”, Mari turned back around, reaching a hand out to him but stopped herself short with a moment of hesitation.

“What is it?”, he asked over his shoulder, and when she bit her lip instead of speaking, he gave a small shrug and went about his way. Just as he was about to climb over the railing of her balcony, he’d suddenly felt a pair of arms wrap around his torso from behind, locking him into place and stopping him from moving any further. With a quiet gasp of surprise, he turned and looked at her over his shoulder again, only to find that she had her head against his back and she was hugging him with a grip so tight he was sure she would never let go, or else snap his spine in half.

“Please... Be careful, okay? I would hate to lose a friend like you...”, she whispered. It stunned Chat a little, because he didn’t know where this was coming from. Did that day’s Akuma attack spook her so badly? Or was it... Something else?

The rain began to fall faster.

At first, he put one of his hands over her own and held it like that. Then, finding a way out of her grasp he slowly turned himself on his toes so that he was facing her once again, smile kind and eyes showing with gratitude.

“Don’t worry, princess. You won’t lose me”, he whisper back. Still with a hold on her hand, he held it up closer to him. “I usually only do this to m’lady, but you’re also someone who’s become something special to me. I couldn’t ask for a better civilian friend. So”, and with that, he brought her hand up to his lips and kissed the backs of her knuckles softly, similar to how he would greet Ladybug. She’d never realized until up to that point how soft his lips felt against her skin, now that she’d been paying attention to detail. “I bid you adieu”.

Without any more hesitation as the rain began to intensify, Chat spun back around quickly and leapt away to the next building, landing ever so gracefully on the neighboring rooftop. Marinette stood watching him in a shocked stupor, meeting his green eyes when he’d turned back to look at her once again from the rooftop he now stood on. With a wink and a two-fingered salute as a final goodbye, he turned back to continue on his path home.
Unfortunately, rain created slippery surfaces that were none too kind and did nothing to help him in the boots he wore for the costume. Just as he was about to begin moving again, he lost his footing and slipped. Marinette saw him disappear behind the top ridge of the rooftop.

“I meant to do that!”, she heard him shout, which was his way of telling her not to worry. She chuckled, finally noticing the tiny poking in her side from Tikki urging her to go back in the house and get out of the rain.

“Goodnight Chat Noir”, she said aloud to herself, before turning back towards her opened hatch, grabbing the empty saucer and now empty mug along the way, climbing down and onto her bed which the rain surprisingly had yet to touch, and then closed the hatch. She was a little soaked, but she didn’t mind it. Tikki flew out from hiding while Marinette removed the blanket from her shoulders.

“He’s such a softy”, Tikki giggled with a squeak.

“When he wants to be. He can be a little rough around the edges sometimes, like when he’s agitated. Otherwise, he’s typically pretty gentle and mindful”, Marinette nodded as she explained. “Kind of almost makes me feel bad that Ladybug doesn’t return his feelings”.

“Almost?”, Tikki questioned a bit rhetorically while crossing her little arms and giving Marinette a look.

“Okay, I do feel bad. But even if I did consider Chat as more than a friend, I don’t think my heart would allow itself to love anyone more than Adrien”, Marinette shook her head, flopping back on her bed and hugging a pillow to her chest.

“Why do you love Adrien? I still don’t think I really understand”, Tikki asked while hovering above Marinette.

Mari turned to her side to stare at the image of aforementioned teenage model boy. “Well, he’s handsome for one. His hair is like the sun, and his eyes are such a beautiful dreamy green that I get lost in them just thinking about him! And he’s just so flawless and perfect! But his looks aren’t the only thing I like about him. He’s got a good personality and something in him that I can just tell is pure and genuine. He’s caring, and kind. You don’t often see that in the celebrity world, most of them tend to be a little arrogant or stuck up, they let their fame go to their heads, and some don’t acknowledge the talents of others. But Adrien isn’t like that”, she said while reaching up to the photo with her hand and running her fingers over it softly.

“You mean, like Chat Noir”, Tikki said, again rhetorically, as it was much more of a statement of observation than a question. This caused Marinette to sit up and look at Tikki with squinting confusion.

“What do you mean by that?”, Mari asked.

“Well, they both have similar looks; golden hair, green eyes. I think the only difference is their choice in outfits and Chat Noir being a bit more…Fit looking than Adrien. And they’re both caring and kind, with genuine personalities and that pure aura you sense. And Ladybug and Chat Noir both have become celebrities within Paris, yet neither of you have let that go to your heads like you say most do, you both are actually mindful of others and their abilities including each other in a good way. I’m not saying Adrien is or could be Chat Noir, but I am saying that they both have the same kind of qualities you see in just one of them. I guess the point I’m trying to get at is that you shouldn’t overlook one for something the other has, when they both possess what it is you look for in a significant other, and you already know Chat Noir loves Ladybug when you don’t know Adrien’s
feelings or who he might love. But you should always follow what your heart tells you, as I’ve said before”, Tikki then explained.

“I suppose that’s a good point. But that’s just it. Chat loves Ladybug, he doesn’t know me outside of that name…How can he love someone he only knows one half of?”, Marinette sighed.

“You shouldn’t underestimate how far one’s love goes, Marinette. Love itself can go a long way, and I don’t think Chat Noir is one to just give up on someone like that, without good reason. With how anxious he is to know who you are, I don’t think you have much to be afraid of. Take it from me, I see Ladybug in you all around, not just when you’re transformed. You are brave, when you want to be. And you’re strong too, emotionally. You’re passionate about what you do, and talented in it as well. The things that make you you, are what make you Ladybug. You could never disappoint anyone with who you are and just being you”, Tikki said, smiling the whole time, bouncing around in the air enthusiastically as she explained, buzzing while she did.

Marinette brought hands up and cupped them again around Tikki, bringing the kwami close in a warm hug. No words were needed, Tikki knew Marinette meant thanks with the hug, and so returned the gesture wholeheartedly.

“Better get some sleep so that you aren’t late tomorrow”, Tikki said, releasing herself from Marinette’s grasp so that she could float up to her chosen’s forehead and kiss it.

Marinette only nodded and yawned while stretching her arms up above her head. She felt the tiredness suddenly, and didn’t even bother changing into her pajamas. She lied back down on the bed, curling on her side with the pillow hugged close to her. With one last glance at the photo of Adrien on her wall, she smiled blissfully and sighed while closing her eyes and uttering only three words.

“Goodnight my love”.

And within a matter of minutes, she was fast asleep, with the rain and thunder breaking through the night.

And meanwhile on the outside, one certain black cat was still making his way home. The slick rooftops and downpour of rain made it harder for him to not only navigate, but see his way too, even with his night vision which had become blurred and he was finding himself constantly running water out of his eyes. The Thunder and occasional blinding lightning strikes didn’t help him too much either. Though he didn’t live too far from Marinette’s, it seemed a lot harder to travel by rooftop than by sidewalk, given the current weather. The thunder was loud on his ears, louder than what is humanly normal thanks to his heightened cat-like senses, and it scared him with each clap. It was a fear he could not control, and blamed it on the feline instincts, as something inside of him that told him to run and take shelter anywhere possible. The lightning was bright against his night vision, the intense and drastic sudden change in the light around him from dark to flash and back to dark again was what blinded him, he had to shield his eyes each time. To make matters worse, he was beginning to feel the cold air, made colder by the rain that drenched him, through his suit. When he would stop for a quick breath, he would be shivering until a clap of thunder sent him along once again.

There’d been a couple times when he panicked because he’d thought he missed his footing or miscalculated the distance of a jump, sliding on a few roof shingles and causing his heart to race with the kind of adrenaline that is brought on by the feeling of falling. Chat came to one rooftop that allowed him to see the Agreste manor in the distance a few more rooftops away, though spotting it hadn’t been as easy a task. He looked at the rooftops he had to clear in order to get to the manor, and tried to estimate how far he’d need to jump. Backing up a few steps to give himself a head start, yet
another clap of thunder rolled overhead and sent the hairs on the back of his neck standing up, which startled him into motion and he was sprinting while readying himself to make the distance. He reached the edge, launching himself forward as he jumped the moment his toes left it, and flew through the air. However, half way across, he realized he had calculated two feet less than what he needed to jump, and horror struck his face as he realized that instead of heading for the building he was aiming for, he was heading for the ground below. Without Ladybug there to save him, and with him being already too close to use his baton and break his fall, he braced for the impact.

His hands met the concrete first, and the rest of his body followed, landing in his stomach and knocking any air he had out from his lungs. Every nerve in his being suddenly screeched in protest at the discomfort, causing his body to sting and ache and hurt, on top of having no oxygen left to breath out. Taking a sharp breath in, Chat slowly began to get up, hissing when he felt pain far more searing in his right wrist and it gave out on him. He knew the pain to be familiar; he’d sprained it. The pain was hot enough to make it feel like it was broken, but he was still able to move his hand and his fingers, so it couldn’t have been. Shifting his weight onto his right elbow instead, Chat attempted again to get up, first one leg up under him and then the other. Then a foot, and then another, until he was standing on his feet again. He hugged his injured wrist to his chest, hissing again with a wince.

Looking around to make sure he hadn’t been seen by anyone, Chat decided to make the rest of the trek home on foot by sidewalk. It’d only became a problem to him when he realized that he still needed to make it over the gated wall and up to his bedroom window.

“Damnit! Why now, of all times!?” he cursed aloud. He let his injured wrist fall to his side and grabbed his baton with his left hand, which felt a little unnatural given he was right handed for most things. The baton extended upon his command and lifted him up over the gated wall, and he made sure to avoid the cameras as he dashed for the wall of the manor that would take him up to his window, which he hoped was still open. He used his baton as a lift again, hanging on tightly to it with his left hand since his right was currently useless. The next clap of thunder caught him off guard and he almost let go out of instinct. All he wanted to do was get inside and out of the storm. A few feet further up and he was right outside his window, still open to his luck. He climbed in with a struggle, and landed on his bedroom floor with a thud he hoped wouldn’t alert anyone in the manor. For safety measures, he let the transformation go, and out flew Plagg from his ring.

“You okay kid? That was a pretty hard fall back there”, Plagg asked.

“Yeah, I think I’ll be fine. It’s just…a sprain”, Adrien winced, pushing himself up onto his feet again. He walked to his bathroom in hopes that the bandage wrap he’d stashed away from other injuries was still there somewhere. It didn’t take him too long to find it either, and he eagerly wrapped it around his injured wrist.

“Good. As long as nothing’s broken, you can give me my camembert!”, Plagg said as he followed Adrien in.

“Glad you care so much”, Adrien said sarcastically.

“I care about you more than you think. But if I don’t get my cheesy sustenance soon, I’ll wither away and won’t be able to be here and care for you at all!”, Plagg told him, swaying around in the air like he was going to faint. Adrien just rolled his eyes and took out a container of the stinky cheese and held it up to Plagg, who accepted it happily and packed off with it.

“You sure you’re a cat and not a pack rat?”, Adrien asked, trailing behind him from the bathroom with a towel to dry off his hair one-handedly, his wrist wrapped snuggly in the bandage and beginning to ache from being restrained.
“I feel insulted, but I’m too hungry and lazy to care”, Plagg snarked back.

Adrien chuckled, but jumped when he heard another loud crash of thunder accompanied by a flash of lightning that lit up his room. Now that he wasn’t transformed, his senses were human again, so it wasn’t as bad as before. But it still scared him.

“It’s going to be a long night”, he mumbled, and flopped down into his bed.

He handed even bothered to close his window, the exhaustion overtook him too quickly, so it didn’t take him too long to fall to sleep.

The storm rolled on for the rest of the night.
Chapter Summary

Storms bring to light a new day. But nobody expects Adrien Agreste to walk in with his arm in a sling, much less his reason for why. Left on their own by their friends, Marinette and Adrien decide to enjoy each other's company, which later leads to her attempting to help nurse his arm back to health.

Plans for recovery change when Ladybug and Chat Noir are called out to make an appearance by a request from Alya on the newly improved Ladyblog. What will our heroes do when one is currently crippled?

Chapter Notes

Adrienette chapter, everyone! Wow, 200 hits since posting chapter 5! That's amazing! That makes me happy! And just a note, this story does promise a reveal, it just hasn't happened yet. And I know it's taking a while to get there, but I like that it's working up to that point instead of jumping right into a reveal or taking place after one has happened. And a reminder because I feel it needs to be said, this story takes place one year after the first (and second) season of the show, so references to past known Akuma are not recent events. However, due to when this was started and how things are going now, this story will most likely not take any episodes beyond "Gorizilla" into account. This also means Luka will probably not make much of an appearance, or otherwise insignificantly (sorry Lukanette shippers XD). I can't promise anything, but chapter 8 is planned to go up next Friday, which means 7 will probably be posted some time during this coming week. Anyway! Let's see how many hits this can get with chapter 6! :D stay miraculous my readers!

The next morning was a lot easier on Marinette than they have been as of late. She woke up a little earlier than she needed to, which allowed her to take her time in getting ready and actually making sure her things were in order. Most of them, at least. And she hummed while she did. It must have been the storm that kept her lulled to sleep. Even Tikki commented about how much more well rested her chosen looked.

As Marí’s father had promised, he and her mother had gotten a much earlier start and were already downstairs in the bakery, because neither of them were waiting for her in the living room, but a breakfast croissant had been left for her. And after sitting down to eat it since she had time, she left the apartment and down to the bakery, where her parents were still preparing the heavy order they had to fulfill. Only a quick ‘good morning’ was passed between them. Marinette knew better than to pester her parents while they were working, despite however many times they’ve told her she isn’t a pest. She was on a good schedule anyway, she didn't want to chance ruining that luck, and so left for school.

“Well look who’s here early!”, Mari heard someone snicker the further into the school courtyard she
got. She turned her gaze up to see Alya sitting on a nearby bench, and immediately went to join her friend.

“I could say the same about you. You’re not usually here this early”, Marinette commented while taking a seat next to Alya.

“The storm knocked the internet out at my house last night, so I couldn’t update the blog. I had to come here and use the school internet for it. I’ve been here for maybe an hour now”, Alya replied, then turned her laptop towards Marinette so that she could see what work was being done.

“You’re changing its design?”, Mari asked, inspecting the blog she saw on the laptop screen.

“I thought it could use some spiffing up! I’m fixing a few layout bugs to make it more organized and easier to navigate for fellow Ladybloggers! And I’m using one of your design ideas for it too, with your name on it for credit of course! First you designed an album cover for Jagged Stone, then you won Gabriel Agreste’s contest, and now your name is on the most famous blog in Paris! Before you know it, you’ll have your own fan base just like Ladybug and Chat Noir!”, Alya exclaimed.

“I’m not so sure about that. Ladybug and Chat Noir are pretty famous, I don’t think anyone can compete with them”, Marinette laughed.

“I guess you have a point there, but you’re still awesome enough to be famous in my world girl!”, Alya said, then smiled at Mari.

“Aw, thanks Alya”, Marinette smiled back. The two shared a best friends hug and pat each other on the back.

“Class will start in twenty five minutes, so Nino should be getting here any time now. Adrien too”, Alya then said when she looked at her phone for the time, and packed away her laptop, making a mental note to pick back up work on the blog later.

Marinette looked down and blushed at the name, with a smile.

“Girl, when are you gonna tell him how you feel?”, Alya asked, elbowing Mari to get her attention.

“I don’t know Alya. At this rate, probably never. I just can’t find the courage in me to tell him, I get so nervous and anxious every time, and it makes me mess up my words”, Marinette said.

“Or lack thereof!”, Alya snickered. “But seriously Mari, you have to tell him at some point. We won’t be in school like this forever, and before you know it that boy will be gone like a fart in the wind! Take your chance now while you still have it, because who knows what fate has in store for the both of you in the future. Even if he doesn’t return your feelings, at least he’ll know how you feel, and maybe you won’t be so nervous around him then”, she said, resting a hand on Marinette’s back.

“That’s just it, Alya. I think I’m afraid of the rejection. What else could it be? I could watch an entire perfume ad with him in it from start to finish all day, and believe me I’ve done that until I had it burned into my memory! So it can’t be his looks that make me nervous. I think I’m just afraid of having my feelings crushed”, Marinette said, pulling her legs up onto the bench and hugging then to her chest.

“The thing about a crush is, sometimes you get crushed. I think it’s because this is something new for you and you don’t know how to react. We all have to start somewhere, even Ladybug. When she and Chat Noir first appeared, she didn’t know what to do either, and freaked out. But then when she realized how much people really needed her, she ignored her fear and did what she felt was the right
thing to do, she gained courage from the one thing she feared most; failure. And that is just one of the
many things I truly admire about her. You can be like that too Marinette, you won’t know you’ve
failed if you don’t even try. And even if you do, you can still get back up and try again, harder than
before, like Ladybug. A broken heart is still mendable. With ice cream and chick flicks during a
sleepover at a best friend’s, that is! But just remember that the only things we’ll regret in the end, are
the chances we never took”, Alya told her, now slinging her arm over around Marinette’s shoulders
and pulling her close to her side.

Marinette didn’t say anything, but Alya’s words brought pricks of tears to the corners of her eyes and
she smiled up at her friend.

“You really are an amazing girl, Mari. You’re one of a kind! And if Adrien doesn’t see that,
someone else will, and they will love you for it”, Alya smiled back at her. She gave Marinette’s
forehead a kiss, in the best female friend kind of way, not anything beyond that.

“Hey girls, how’s it goin’?”, a new voice said. Both Alya and Mari looked to see who it belonged to
and they were met with Nino. Only Nino, no Adrien.

“Sup Nino!”, Alya greeted.

“Hey babe”, Nino greeted back, holding his arms open for her. Alya jumped up from the bench and
ran to hug him tightly, then shared a quick kiss with him.

“Marinette and I were just talking”, Alya explained to him, and Mari waved to Nino in greeting
when her name was mentioned.

“Lemme guess. About Adrien again?”, Nino raised a brow, but he looked amused about it.

Marinette just made a sheepish grin and shrugged her shoulders with a giggle.

“You know you’ll have to confess to him eventually, right? Otherwise it’s going to start driving you
stupidly crazy!”, Nino told her.

“That’s what I just got done telling her. If she doesn’t make a move soon, he’s going to be gone to
who knows where”, Alya said, doing the anime glasses push to fix her glasses on her face and
crossing her arms with her weight shifted to one foot.

“Trust me, I know how hard it can be to admit to a crush. Remember when I was crushing on Mari
there for a bit? Man, that was tough trying to get things out”, Nino said with a voice of sympathy.

“Maybe we should set her and Adrien up for a date at the zoo!”, Alya suggested mischievously.

“No you don’t!”; Marinette squeaked, jumping up from the bench and charging up to Alya. “If you
did that, I would die from my nerves! And then I wouldn’t get to confess to Adrien, we wouldn’t get
married, and we wouldn’t be able to have a family with three kids and a cat! No, dog! No, hamster!
No wait, all three!”, she freaked, gripping her hair in her fists tightly.

“Girl, calm down! You know I wouldn’t do that to you. Not with you standing right here to listen in
on the plan, anyway!”, Alya laughed at her, putting her hands on Marinette’s shoulders to keep her
still. She looked to Nino. “Speaking of Adrien, where is he?”, she asked.

“Dude said he might be a little late getting to class today. Something sprang up I guess and he had to
talk to his pops’s assistant about it”, Nino informed.

“Well, I guess it will do us no good by waiting up for him then. We’ll see him when he gets here”,
Alya shrugged. She was the first to begin heading for the classroom, now that they had ten minutes before the day would begin.

Marinette was the last to move and follow Alya and Nino, looking back at the school entrance a bit worriedly wondering what could have happened to Adrien that would make him late for school, and hoping it was nothing bad. She reassured herself in her thoughts that everything was fine, if only to offer her peace of mind. Following her friends up and into their classroom, she quietly took her seat in her usual spot next to Alya and bided her time, pulling out her sketchbook to give her something to focus on as she waited, hoping to see Adrien there today. The closer it got to the time class would start, the more and more of their classmates would file in through the door, all familiar faces devoid of one, golden hair and green eyes missing from the pack. Madam Bustier was the last to walk into the room and to the front where she stood waiting for the bell to ring.

And ring it did.

“Bonjour students. First I would like to inform you that due to recent weather conditions, I was unable to grade last week’s test papers properly, the internet went out and I was unable to access my digital grade books. So you will not be getting them back until Friday, next Monday at the latest”, Madam Bustier announced.

“Guess I wasn’t the only one to lose internet”, Alya whispered to Marinette.

“Should we consider ourselves lucky? I was beginning to get anxious about the grade I might have gotten on the test”, Marinette whispered back.

“I would say so!”, Alya laughed quietly.

“First I’ll call role and then we will begin with chapter six in your textbooks!”, Bustier said, picking up the clipboard of names to call from, beginning first with the back row of people and working her way down to the front.

“Juleka”.

“Here”.

“Rose?”.

“Ooh, Present!”.

“Nathaniel”.

“Present”.

“Max”.

“Presently here!”.

“Kim?”.

“Here!”.

“Ivan?”.

“Present…”.

“Alix”.
“Here”.
“Mylène”.
“Present!”
“Marinette?”.
“Present, ma’am”.
“Alya?”.
“Present, madam!”.
“Sabrina”.
“Present!”.
“Chloe?”.
“Ugh, here!”.
“Adrien?”.

This time, no response. Everyone looked to the empty seat at the front of the room, where said boy was not. Nino looked on nervously and raised his hand to speak.

“Du- uh! Ma’am! I was texting Adrien earlier this morning, and he told me something came up. I don’t think he’s going to be-“, he began to say, until someone interrupted. Everyone was rather relieved that that someone wasn’t Chloe for once.

“Here! I’m here!”, Adrien said from the doorway, waving his hand, and quickly taking his seat. Marinette noticed that his right arm was wrapped up in a bandage, and in a sling, just before he sat down. Her eyes widened.

“Nice of you to join us Adrien! And Nino is here, so that makes everyone accounted for! Alright, please go to chapter six in your text and begin reading the material. Turn your tablets face down when you are finished”, Bustier instructed, and the class fell silent as everyone did what they were told.

“Bro! What happened?!”, Nino whispered to Adrien, pointing at his arm in the sling.

“Oh, that! I’m kind of afraid of thunder…So I was woken up by the storm last night and sort of panicked. When I did, I fell out of my bed and landed on the floor just right to injure myself. At first I thought it was just a sprain, but when I woke up this morning it felt and looked much worse, so I told Nathalie and she called the doctor to the manor to have a look. Without any way to take x-rays at the house, he just said to treat it like a fracture, but he doesn’t think it’s anything more than a sprain in my wrist. I won’t be able to do much with it for a few days. But on the bright side, no photoshoots until then!”, Adrien explained.

Marinette of course listened in on the conversation and felt bad for him, wishing there was something she could do to make him better. Alya elbowed her in the side with a grin.

“You should offer to help him with things today! Carry his bag, give him a hand, maybe even sit next to him in Miss Mendeleiev’s class!”, she whispered to Mari.
“I don’t know if I can do that without fainting every ten seconds!”, Marinette responded with.

“Dude! You are just accident prone, aren’t you?”, Nino shook his head with a scoff.

“Yep. About as lucky as a black cat. Or I should say as unlucky as one”, Adrien said with a nod.

“I should not hear any talking during this time!”, Madam Bustier warned. The four quieted down to complete the task assigned to them as a class, but Marinette couldn’t stop herself from glancing up worriedly at Adrien periodically.

The end of the class period came faster than either of them had expected. It was the normal routine of being assigned homework, everyone leaving for next class, and the usual chitchat. Adrien, however, did struggle with one arm being unmovable and in a sling.

“Now’s your chance, girl!” Alya said quietly to Marinette.

“You need any help bro- hey!?”, Nino offered, but Alya swiped him away before Adrien could even comprehend the offering. She locked her arm with his and dragged him along. “Babe, what are you doing?! I was just about to help Adrien!”, he protested.

“Let Mari handle it! She’s got it covered!”, Alya winked. Yet another one of her schemes to get Adrien and Marinette together.

Marinette on the other hand, didn’t have things covered. She was left standing by herself, a shock stricken face as she blinked a couple times. Of course Alya would whisk away any other option of help besides her! And watching Adrien struggle with adjusting things so that his injured arm wasn’t in the way, only made her all the more sympathetic for him.

“H-hey, um…Adrien?”, she finally squeaked.

“What’s up Marinette?”, Adrien turned to her cheerfully, before dropping his bag back on the ground and sighing in defeat.

“Here, let me help you”, Marinette said, and reached for his bag. Once she had it in her grasp, she slung the strap over her head and shoulder so that she could carry it for him. She smiled back up at him kindly with a blush. “That is, i-if you don’t mind the extra hand?”.

“Can’t really say ‘extra hand’, more like a replacement for the one I’m lacking right now. Thanks! I really appreciate it!”, Adrien chuckled.

“N-no welcome, you’re problem! I mean, uh! Problem welcome, you’re no! Uh! Ohhh…”, she rambled again, slouching forward, once more, in that usual ‘I give up’ posture.

“Don’t worry, I know what you meant”, Adrien smiled sweetly at her and patted her shoulder.

“Still babbling like an idiot, Marinette Dupain-Cheng? Honestly, you might as well go back to grade school, so you can get a refresher on your alphabet! Here Adrikins, let me help! Marinette’s too clumsy, I wouldn’t trust her to carry my school bag!”, Chloe butted in, coming in between Marinette and Adrien, then turning to face him so that her back was purposely to Mari.

Marinette opened her mouth to make a retort, but Adrien beat her to it.

“Uhm, sorry Chlo but, I’ve already got a helper. And it’s okay if she’s clumsy, I’m pretty clumsy myself. I probably wouldn’t be in an arm sling if that weren’t the truth”, Adrien said, pushing Chloe out of the way so that he could stand at Marinette’s side.
“Ugh, whatever! If she breaks or loses something of yours, don’t come crying to me about it, because I offered to help like the nice person I am and you know you can trust me! C’mon Sabrina! Let’s go!”, Chloe sneered, and walked off with her nose turned up in the air, Sabrina following close behind in the same fashion.

“…I’m sorry she’s like this. She never used to act this way when we were kids. I don’t understand why she acts it now. Anyway, thanks again for the help! I know I’ve said it before but, you’re amazing Mari!”, Adrien sighed, once Chloe was out of earshot of course.

“High school drama. Typical. It’s all about image and reputation to her, and if it’s something she can’t benefit from then she sees it as something beneath her. She really gets me riled up sometimes with that attitude of hers! Sometimes I wish she would get a taste of her own medicine for once!”, Marinette spoke as she watched Chloe and Sabrina walk away, clutching tightly at Adrien’s bag’s strap in her small rage.

“Can’t say I don’t agree. Some of the things she does are really messed up, I can’t sugar coat any of it even if I wanted to. And I feel bad for the people that are on the receiving end of it too. It only makes more work for Ladybug and Chat Noir with her going around and causing Akuma”, Adrien shook his head and crossed his arms.

“Yeah, no kidding…I mean, uh, yeah I know right!? Ladybug and Chat Noir seem to always have their hands full these days!”’, Marinette mumbled at first, but saved herself by acting like she didn’t know how it felt to be a black spotted red heroine fighting Akuma that Chloe provoked. Yeah, what a save.

“Hands, and paws. That’s something Chat Noir would say, isn’t it?”, Adrien chucked with a grin.

“Don’t let him hear you say that. You’d probably never here the end of it with those puns he makes”, Marinette said.

“And that’s really a bad thing? I like most puns, to be honest. I just don’t get as much opportunity to make them”, Adrien said, putting his free hand to his chin like he was thinking.

“No no, it’s not bad at all! It’s great that you like puns! I mean, I’m sure yours are way better than Chat Noir’s, you are only the most perfect person here so it’s really no matter of competition because you’re awesome and amazing and- eh, wait, did I say that out loud?!”, Marinette rambled again.

“Loud and clear, pri- er! Marinette! But don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone”, Adrien laughed at her. For a moment, his alter ego shown a little too much and he almost slipped up by calling her the pet name Chat Noir used, almost like how he’d done just the same after Ladybug saved him from becoming a pancake during Gorizilla’s attack.

Marinette only grinned sheepishly at him as a reaction.

“Come on, we should head to next class before we’re late”, Adrien suggested, patting her shoulder and then heading for the door of the empty classroom they stood in. Marinette followed him closely, in case he needed her immediate help with anything else.

“And by the way, we never got to talk like I wanted to”, Adrien suddenly said.


“That. The way you stutter and mix up words when you’re around me. Why is that? I know you started to give me an answer the first time I asked but time cut us short”, Adrien said.
“Oh, that…Well, you see…”, Marinette looked down with embarrassment, gripping the strap of his bag tighter than earlier, and she hesitated on her words. He stopped walking, and so did she. Now they stood in the middle of the hallway between their classes.

“The truth is I…I’m sorry Adrien, but I don’t think I can tell you why. Not yet at least…”, she bit her lip.

“There’s no rush, but I just wanted to know if it’s something I did, and if it is then how can I fix it?”, he said.

“No. You didn’t do anything wrong, it’s me. Maybe someday I’ll be able to tell you why, but not today. Not here. Not now”, Marinette said quietly, then finally had the courage to look him in the eye. “You’re not mad, are you?”, she asked him.

“Why would I be? If it’s something you feel you can’t explain right now, then don’t. I won’t force you, I understand that things take time”, Adrien shrugged at her, letting out a wince when he felt a sharp ache in his arm from the action.

“Be careful, or you’ll make it worse!”, Marinette jumped at his wince, placing one hand on his injured arm and the other on the shoulder it was attached to, to keep him from moving it much more than he should. It was a natural reaction, her Ladybug instinct, to spring to his aid like that. And she didn’t have time, nor a thought of hesitation, to stop herself. Before she knew it, her hands were holding him still, and the concern melted into shock as she looked up into his green eyes with her own wide bluebells. There was a blush in her cheeks and her heart raced, before she suddenly realized how invasive she might be to him and backed off. “S-sorry! I just don’t want you to hurt yourself”, she said, fiddling with her fingers in embarrassment and looking down at her feet.

“You don’t have to apologize for being a concerned friend, Marinette. Besides, me not hurting myself? Kind of too late for that”, Adrien chuckled, albeit a bit nervously, scratching at the back of his head with his free hand. It felt rather unnatural to be using his left hand for the things he was used to using his right hand for, but he figured it wasn’t any harder than learning to play a piano with both.

Although, as if their day couldn’t be any more awkward, the school bell rang. Telling them that they were now late to class. What made it ridiculous was that they were standing in the hallway and no more than five feet away from the door to the classroom. And the worst part? It was Miss Mendeleiev’s class. Both shared looks one would have during an “oh no” moment, and then sighed in defeat at their failed attempt to be on time.

“We have to go to class eventually. Might as well face it now and get it over with”, Marinette groaned, picking pace up again and walking for the door.

“I don’t suppose you have any alibis up your sleeve for this one?”, Adrien asked her while he followed behind.

“Well you have an excuse. I could just say I had to help you pick things up after seeing you drop your bag, or something. Not the actual truth, but at least it isn’t a total lie”, Marinette just shrugged, and then opened the door to their classroom. Almost instantly, Miss Mendeleiev’s seething gaze fell on the two of them and burned holes through them like laser vision. Mari shrunk under the hard stare and Adrien looked like a frightened kitten.

A few of their classmates laughed at them, and it was the humiliating type of laugh nobody wanted to hear be directed at them, the loudest of the crowd about it being Chloe. But given they were late to class almost daily and sometimes together at the same time, Marinette’s obvious crush on Adrien and
the fact that a majority of the class knew about it along with Adrien’s legendary obliviousness to it, a laugh of humiliation was to be expected.

Miss Mendeleiev fixed her glasses in her face with one hand on her hip, and then crossed her arms at the two teens. “Care to explain yourselves?” she asked sternly.

“Uh! Well, um, you see Adrien hurt himself yesterday and so was struggling with his things in the hall and…Dropped stuff. I decided it was my responsibility as still current class president that I stop and help”, Marinette explained, avoiding making eye contact with the teacher, whom she swore was the devil in disguise sometimes. She pointed to his arm in the sling, and to his bag which sat securely on her shoulder by its strap.

“Yeah, heh. Silly me”, Adrien went along with it. Like Mari had said before they walked through the door, that wasn’t the complete truth, but it also wasn’t a total lie. She really did offer to help him. Well, kind of. Alya had some influence on the matter, but Mendeleiev didn’t need to know that little detail. Speaking of Alya, he noticed from the corner of his eye that Alya was sitting in her usual spot, grinning the whole time during the exchange between her friends and the teacher, and there next to her was Nino who just shrugged to show he didn’t have an understanding of what was happening now. Adrien wondered why Nino would be in Marinette’s seat instead of his own. That left the desk he and Nino usually shared completely vacant.

“I suppose it’s excusable this time. But don’t let it happen again!”, Mendeleiev mused, then pointed to where there were empty seats as an order for them to sit.

“Isn’t that what she said the last time?”, Adrien whispered in Marinette’s ear while they made their way to the vacant desk, and Marinette jumped from surprise.

“Y-yeah! Wait, no. I-I don’t know!”, she said back quietly, handing Adrien his bag back. Her body had autopiloted itself to where she usually sat but was stopped by seeing Nino in her place. She looked to Alya for answers and was responded to with a sly smile and a finger that pointed at the open seat next to Adrien. Marinette looked back at it, and then at Alya again with a look of sheer terror at what the gesture meant.

“Alya, no!”, she whispered across the desk passed Nino.

“Alya, yes! Go sit before Miss Mendeleiev notices you!”, Alya snickered. Marinette looked to Nino for help and was met with denial.

“Sorry Mari, Alya won’t let me move. You’re on your own for this one”, Nino shrugged.

Marinette had no choice. If she didn’t sit somewhere soon, even if it was next to Chloe, Miss Mendeleiev would surely send her away to pay Mr. Damocles a visit with a detention slip and neither Alya nor Nino were budging. So reluctantly, she sat in the empty seat next to Adrien flustered as ever, and scrambled through her bag for her homework if not to keep herself distracted from the hotness that was sitting mere inches next to her. Though, she quickly noticed something was amiss her school bag, and panic set in when she realized her homework was not there.

“Oh no! I left my assignment on my desk at home! The one day I actually have a decent morning and I go off without it! Miss Mendeleiev isn’t going to be happy!”, she said aloud.

Adrien, on the other hand, had his finished homework sitting in front of him already. And he noticed Marinette beginning to freak out, overhearing her loud and clear. Generously and in the most casual way possible, he slid his homework over to her with his free hand. He was used to sharing with Nino, any time Nino forgot there was homework, so he didn’t mind sharing with Marinette.
But Marinette only looked at it confused, wondering what he was doing and why he was passing his homework over to her. She wasn’t one to take the easy way out when it came to school, so copying off of someone else when it wasn’t for notes she missed wasn’t an option for her. And there wasn’t a need for it, either. It’s not that she didn’t to it at all, but she just simply forgot to take it with her that morning. She knew she’d been forgetting something! That morning was just too good to be true anyway.

“Scribble down what you can before she asks for us to turn it in! At least you’ll have something to give her right now”, Adrien leaned over and whispered, which proved to be a bad idea on his part when another sharp ache in his injured arm reminded him why he needed a sling. He had to bite back the wince this time, because he didn’t want to worry Marinette any further than he had already.

“I can’t do that! If she sees how similar our answers are, we could both get into trouble!”, Marinette shook her head at him. It was kind of him to offer, but she couldn’t bear bringing him down with her if Miss Mendeleiev suspected her of cheating. She would rather turn hers in late and have the consequence be a lower score than land them both in hot water. If it was a partner assignment, she might have considered otherwise.

“Do you have any other options? Trust me, I let Nino copy from me all the time and she hasn’t noticed that yet!”, Adrien said.

“Sorry, but I don’t want to risk it. I think I’d rather go on a blind date with Chat Noir before I copy someone else’s homework!”, Marinette pushed his homework back towards him as she said.

“You say that like it’s a bad thing, I don’t think I would complain too much…”, Adrien muttered, and perhaps a bit too loudly, because a confused pair of bluebell eyes looked over at him with the most lost face of all time. He sat rim rod straight and began making his swift recovery in a nervous wreck.

“If I was you, that is! Chat Noir’s a pretty good looking guy! I don’t think he’d be too horrible of a blind date! I mean I’m not that kind of person to like a guy that way but that Chat Noir is both model and boyfriend material!”, he said with the grin of a guilty conscience.

“Ladybug’s going to kill me for sure!”, he thought.

He felt tiny paws scratching at his t-shirt from underneath his overcoat and he knew immediately that it was Plagg. Adrien reached into his overcoat with his free hand and meant to grab Plagg to get him to stop, but it only resulted in him getting his hand bitten by the sassy little kwami and he pulled it away instantly, like he had been poked by something sharp.

“Did Plagg just BITE ME?!”, Adrien wondered to himself while inspecting his hand for puncture marks or blood. It wouldn’t have been the first time Plagg bit him for one odd reason or another, but it certainly took him by surprise.


“I’m straight I swear!”, he said suddenly in defense. This caused Alya, who was sitting on the other side of the room, to burst with laughter. She must have been listening to their conversation the entire time and couldn’t take it anymore at how awkward but, humorous, it was becoming. “Did I just say that out loud?”, Adrien asked, a lot more quieter than before as he shrunk down in his seat, hot with embarrassment.

Even Nino was biting back a snicker at him, and was doing a poor job at trying to keep Alya’s laughter contained. Everyone else was either stealing glances at Mari and Adrien, or doing their best
to ignore it completely. Some, like Chloe for example, were simply too bored or distracted to even be paying attention to what was going on and being said.

Miss Mendeleiev was not quick to dismiss the small disruption either. “What’s so funny?! There should not be any laughing in my class!”.

An embarrassing and awkward rest of the morning later, lunch hour finally came around and Adrien couldn’t be any more relieved. For once, he felt happy to get to go back home for a short break, now that almost everyone in his class knew he was straight but also thought Chat Noir was attractive. What made it worse in his own head was that by that definition, he was technically checking himself out. Talk about a guilty conscience. As expected, Nathalie was out waiting for him with the gorilla in the car. He waved upon seeing and approaching them.

“Hey Nathalie”, he greeted.

“Adrien. Your father is in a meeting with a personal client back at the manor and wishes not to be disturbed, so he has requested that you be here today. And given your current state, it is probably best that you not go very far”, Nathalie dipped her head and explained to him.

“Wait, what kind of disturbance could I make? It’s not like he ever joins me for lunch anyway, and I don’t exactly bother him to”, Adrien asked, looking a bit confused. Any other day he would be ecstatic to get to spend lunch with his friends for once and without needing to ask for the permission, but today was not that day. No, he wanted to go home where he could recollect his thoughts about the awkward situation he’d been in earlier and hope everyone else would forget about it too. It seemed he could never get what he actually wished for.

“I’m sorry, Adrien. Mr. Agreste’s orders”, Nathalie said shortly and a bit curt, and then opened the door to the front passenger and got into the car, which drove away, faster than he could protest any more.

“Yeah…Orders…”, Adrien muttered in disappointment, and gave a frustrated sigh.

“You know, you make it really hard for me to understand you sometimes. I thought this was what you wanted, and now that you finally get it you don’t want it? What’s up with that? Ugh, you humans are too confusing!”, Plagg spoke up as he peeked out from underneath Adrien’s sling.

“Yeah? Well sometimes I can’t understand you! You bit me today! What was that all about?!”, Adrien scoffed while Plagg nestled himself within the sling instead of hiding beneath it.

“You almost gave your identity away to the bakery girl! And you know Ladybug would not be happy with you if you did that! So I saved you from her wrath by stopping you myself! You’re welcome!”, Plagg crossed his arms.

“Says the one that used a ‘scratch attack’ against the Copycat Akuma!”, Adrien told him.

“Wha- that was different! He wasn’t trying to reveal our identity as much as he was trying to get our miraculous, which would have been revealed if he had been successful! And I didn’t have my baton, so what other option did I have? It was cat against cat! And what do cats do when they fight? Thanks to you it’s a natural instinct anyway”, Adrien argued.

“Still the same thing! You scratched at Copycat to stop him from attacking and taking your miraculous, I scratched and bit you to stop you from revealing yourself to the baker girl! The only
difference is the situation and the reason. You’ve really got no ground here, kid”, Plagg laughed.

“The other difference is that *that* was superhero work! I was only doing my job because heroes will do anything to make sure their mission is successful, just like the villains they fight. This time I wasn’t transformed and was just simply talking to a friend. That’s not superhero work!”, Adrien said.

“And like a superhero, I did everything I could in that situation to stop you. It was a big enough distraction to shut you up, wasn’t it? So, you’re welcome!”, Plagg replied.

“I think you just take enjoyment in torturing me! Why am I even still arguing with you?!””, Adrien groaned at him.

“Well would you rather Ladybug bite you for it instead?”, Plagg asked with a grin as he floated up from the sling and into the air where he hovered in front of Adrien’s face.

Adrien quickly swiped Plagg out of the air with his free hand and pulled him back down and close to his person again, glancing around to make sure nobody saw him. It was peculiar enough seeing him talking to his arm sling while he was by himself. “Honestly, I think I would! At least she might have an ounce of mercy on me before going through with it! And who said Ladybug would even have to know in the first place?! Mari can keep a secret I’m sure, and I’ve been able to keep it for a whole year! You on the other hand are turning out to be the bane of my existence!”, he said.

“Of course you would. Can we go eat now? I’m hungry!”, Plagg just rolled his bright green eyes, not really bothering to struggle getting out of Adrien’s grasp and instead just accepted it because he was lazy.

Adrien gave him a glare, which softened into a gaze of forlorn. He looked back up towards the entrance to the school and gave a sigh. “I don’t even know where to begin looking for everyone. And besides, I didn’t bring any lunch with me today. I guess I never really realized that would be a problem if I ever got to stay here for once. I don’t want to go back in there anyway, not with what happened earlier”, he said. Then he began to walk up to the stairs just before the door to the school courtyard, and sat down on the second to top step, feeling more alone than he ever usually was at home during this time.

“Did you at least remember to bring me my camembert? If you did I promise I’ll share with you”, Plagg asked, now free from his chosen’s grasp and sitting on Adrien’s knee.

“Not really interesting in eating your stinky cheese for lunch, Plagg. But thanks for the offer”, Adrien shook his head, and reached into his left pocket with his free hand, pulling out a round container of camembert and breaking it open for Plagg the best he could with just one hand, then he give it to the kwami.

“Suit yourself kid! You don’t know what you’re missin’!”, Plagg grinned at receiving his cheese.

“I think I’d rather not find out what I’m missing either”, Adrien sighed, fanning his hand in front of his nose at the slight whiff he caught of the cheese’s stench.

Alone, he sat in silence, with the only sound closest to him being Plagg’s munching while he gulped down the cheese. Adrien propped his elbow on his leg and rested his head in his hand, letting his injured arm hang in the sling as it ached and throbbed. He scoffed at his own stupidity. He should have none better than to stay out for so long the night before when he knew it was going to rain. He should have also not gone home in the middle of the storm by rooftop when he couldn’t see, and either bunkered down at Marinette’s until it blew over enough to be safe or let his transformation go and taken the long way home, even if he would have ended up sick with a cold then. But no, he just
had to be stupid about it and do it the dangerous way. Now his arm was injured and he wasn’t sure if he’d be able to take on an Akuma the way he was, should there ever be one soon. And he didn’t realize until now how difficult it would be to perform Cataclysm, given he was more right hand oriented and that the hand his ring was on was the hand the attack generated into. Couldn’t he just switch his ring to his left hand? But then it’d be on the wrong finger, or else it would look like he was married, and for Ladybug’s sake he didn’t want to do that and give civilians the wrong idea. His left wasn’t the hand he used naturally anyway, so it would just feel awkward to him during battle and would probably result in just as much failure against an Akuma as his injured arm would.

“Way to go, Agreste! You’ve gotten yourself in deep this time! I just hope Hawkmoth doesn’t decide to take another victim faster than I can heal, or else Ladybug might be more on her own even with me physically there. In this condition, I’m useless!”, Adrien scolded himself in his thoughts.

“A-Adrien?”, there was suddenly a voice, a squeak, that came from behind Adrien and he jumped when he heard it. Plagg hid in his chosen’s overcoat again at the presence of another person approaching them. Adrien turned his head to look over his shoulder and found Marinette standing just a few feet from him, a look of concern and slight confusion as to why he was there instead of at home written on her face.

“Marinette! Hey! I didn’t know you were- how long have you been standing there?”, Adrien said, forcing a smile and acting perky, so that she wouldn’t notice the sadness he was feeling before. Needn’t she be concerned with something neither of them had control over.

“Not too long…B-but I was just walking by and-! Well I saw you sitting here and you’re usually at home right now s-so I got confused and curious and-! Uhh, I’m not bothering you am I?”, Marinette stammered. Though she had expected him to turn and answer her when she said his name, she still hadn’t been prepared for him to. Then again, she never really was.

“No, not at all! You can join me if you want, it would be nice to have some familiar company right now”, Adrien said, then pat a spot next to him on the step he was sitting on as a way to tell her to sit with him.

“O-okay!”, Mari answered, half nervously but half excitedly. She stepped towards him and then sat down, on the second to top step, next to him. “So why are you here?”, she asked after biting her lip about it.

“I guess my father had some sort of meeting with a fashion client of some sort. Probably just someone asking to sell the Gabriel brand. Anyway, Nathalie informed me he didn’t want any disturbance and because of my sprain it’s best I don’t go far from school until the end of the day. So here I am”, Adrien explained.

“Oh, I-I see. Were you…not wanting to stay here?”, Marinette asked.

“Well…After today’s rather awkward conversation that our entire class heard, not exactly, no. Sorry about that, by the way. The, uh, doctor had me take something for the pain earlier this morning before I came to school. I must not have been ‘all there’, because of that. Medicine tends to have weird effects on me sometimes”, Adrien said, being quick to think on his toes of an excuse. But he probably didn’t need to explain himself, because Marinette was generally an accepting person. He wasn’t sure why he doubted that enough to feel like he needed a reasonable explanation.

“It’s okay. It wasn’t any more awkward than I am on a daily basis. But we all have weird moments sometimes, and to err is human”, Marinette smiled, though she didn’t look at him. She was having a hard time making eye contact, but it wasn’t because of the topic in question. She just simply felt too nervous.
“Yeah…I guess you’re right. Maybe I shouldn’t worry about it so much. After all, if I don’t forget that it happened, nobody else will”, Adrien shrugged.

“So you like Chat Noir?”, Marinette asked, which was something Adrien hadn’t been expecting and he tensed up a little. If he had been an anime character, he would be sweat-dropping.

“Again, not in the way I made it sound before! I like Chat Noir and Ladybug both! I wasn’t lying when I said Chat would make a good model though, he really does have the qualities one needs for the job!”, Adrien laughed and his voice cracked a little.

“Qualities that are?”, Marinette asked, holding her breath to keep from laughing because she couldn’t imagine Chat Noir on a runway modeling a line of clothing for a fashion designer. Not without it being funny looking, at least. And she wouldn’t mean that in a bad way, but she knew Chat wouldn’t be able to take it seriously without making at least one pun and striking a pose.

“Good looks, good posture, photogenic, an eye for fashionable apparel and the ability to be suave especially in a crowd. He’s pretty good at all of it from what I’ve seen on Alya’s blog”, Adrien chuckled.

“No heels! Those are the evilest kind of shoe I’ve ever- I mean, that poor Chat Noir has ever had to wear! Yeah, I saw the Reflekta attack. And when Chloe and I were little kids, she’d make me play dress-up with her. Guess who had to wear the heels a time or two?”, Adrien said with wide eyes, and he could feel Plagg scratching at him again for nearly giving himself away a second time, but Adrien was smarter than that to reach in and get bitten twice. Instead, he nonchalantly pat the spot Plagg was hiding in a few times, and a bit roughly too. That ought to teach him!

Marinette laughed that time. But it was with Adrien, not at him. Well, maybe it was at him slightly, but what she was laughing at most was the memory of Chat Noir in heels complain up a storm about them. Pink might not have been his color either. “So how’s your arm feeling?”, she asked, deciding to change the subject.

Adrien looked down at the sling, and gave his hand a small wiggle to test how it was feeling. When a sharp pain shot through his wrist and made the throbbing worse, he knew it wasn’t any better than it had been all morning, and he winced. “Still not too good, I’m afraid. And at this rate, it doesn’t look like it will be for another week, maybe more. I think father might be angry with me too, because an injury like this means no photoshoots, no piano lessons, and no fencing. The best I can do is keep up on my Chinese lessons, but that’s it. Him being angry with me would explain why he didn’t want me at home for lunch today…”, he said, trailing at the end of his sentence and getting a distant look in his eyes as he stared ahead with that sad face from before.

Marinette’s smile disappeared and she looked at him with deep sympathy. She often wondered if Adrien accepted being ignored most of the time by his father, and how. But maybe he never actually did?

“I’m sure he isn’t mad at you. Injuring yourself like this wasn’t your fault, so he doesn’t have a right to blame you for something you couldn’t stop from happening”, Mari said.

“Yeah, if only you could know the truth…My own stupidity is nobody else’s fault but my own”, 
Adrien thought to himself.

“Would you mind if I had a look?”, Marinette asked him, jarring him from his thoughts. He gave her a look of shocked confusion and saw she was serious.

“Uh, sure. I guess. But I don’t know what good that’s going to do?”, he nodded, and slowly slipped his injured arm out from the sling, biting his tongue to keep from wincing more. He unwrapped the bandage, and then turned his body so that he was sitting facing her and rested his injured arm on his leg for her to see.

Marinette carefully looked at his arm, seeing that it looked swollen and red, the signs of a bad sprain. She reached for it calmly, ready to pull back if he shied away from her, and very gently took it up in her hand. With his wrist resting in one hand, she softly placed the other over the top of his wrist and made stroking motions like she was petting a fragile animal. She looked very attentive and focused on it, so Adrien didn’t dare speak or move. Her touch actually felt nice on his skin, and she was so gentle that it didn’t make his arm hurt worse being handled the way it was.

“You’ve definitely done a number on it. But it looks like you fell from a greater height, are you sure falling out of bed did this?”, she told him, looking up at him with questioning eyes.

“Uhhh…Well…”, Adrien stammered, scratching the back of his head, which he seemed to do a lot when he was nervous. He could have sworn he heard Plagg laughing at him from underneath his overcoat.

Marinette was undeterred and the question lingered in her features, while she patiently awaited an answer.

“Okay, you caught me. I didn’t fall out of bed last night, but I did fall down the stairs. When the storm woke me up by scaring me out of my sleep, I decided that maybe a glass of water would calm me down, so I got up to go get one and missed a step because the thunder made me jump and startled me…I just thought it hurt so bad because I landed wrong or something, until I saw it this morning”, Adrien lied. He hated having to lie, because he was horrible at it, and compulsive lying was worse when the lies made a story that didn’t make sense. He could consider himself lucky that this one did, to an extent.

“That sounds more likely. It’s going to be pretty sore for a few days at least, I’d say after a week and a half it will be much more functional like before with little to no soreness. But that’s just a guess”, Marinette said, obviously satisfied with his answer, which made Adrien let go of the breath he’d been holding. She looked back down at his arm and continued the soft stroking motion while she spoke, as if that was going to magically heal it.

And it was working. Not by magic, but Adrien didn’t feel a twitch of pain the whole time, and it baffled him. Was it even possible for something so simple to feel so soothing? And oddly familiar. Her strokes were as consistent as Ladybug’s when he was given an occasional head scratch as Chat Noir. Maybe it was just a girl thing? Or maybe because he was close to both Mari and Ladybug as his feline alter ego, he thought only the best of them and therefore anything they did was wonderful and pure. Marinette was fiery at times, with the kind of witty attitude that said she wouldn’t back down without a fight, but she was also kind and giving. Yet he didn’t know she could also be this gentle, and to him of all people.

“How do you know these things? And how are you doing that?”, he asked, blinking like a curious cat.

“My mama was a part time nurse before she met and married my papa, she’s taught me a thing or
two about taking care of injuries and sicknesses. I’ve also sprained my ankle pretty badly once when I was little, and it took a while to heal. And this? This is just one of the things my mama taught me. It’s a psychological thing, our brains will focus on the pain areas more than anything else, which is why things like a sprain tend to hurt so much. By giving the mind something else to focus on, the pain eases and eventually goes away. So doing something that feels good, like me stroking your arm like this, causes your brain to release endorphins or the “feel good chemicals” that also numb pain and can even help the healing process go faster. Whenever I got sick or hurt, mama would sit with me for hours and stroke my head or rub my back to make me feel better, and it always worked”, Marinette explained, smiling up at him cutely.

Adrien mirrored her smile and looked down with eyes at half-mast, as a fond memory crossed his mind. “…My mom would always sit at my bedside and watch over me when I wasn’t feeling good either. She would be there until I fell asleep, and when I woke up, until I was feeling right again. She didn’t necessarily do what yours did, but she would talk to me in this warm voice that made me feel safe, and tell me stories or read me a book, maybe even play a movie. It made me feel better every time”, he said.

“It doesn’t always have to be through physical contact, it’s whatever makes you feel good. Whenever mama couldn’t take care of me, papa would instead. He and I would play video games all day which also helped me get my mind off of being sick or in pain. Our favorite was the Ultimate Mecha Strike series”, Marinette said.

“You must have been sick or hurt all the time then, for you to be so good at Ultimate Mecha Strike III!”, Adrien commented.

“Nah, papa and I played it even when I wasn’t sick. I just got a lot of practice in for it is all. It kind of became our father daughter thing”, she chuckled.

Marinette went silent again, and helped him by re-wrapping the bandage around his arm and wrist, then slipped it back into the sling for him, all the while being easy about it and as gentle as was humanly possible. She made sure his arm sat snuggly but comfortably inside the sling so that it would not cause him any more pain, at least for the time being.

“Ya’know, we ought to have a match again sometime. I’ve been practicing to beat you at it!”, Adrien spoke while she bandaged his arm again and put it back in the sling, helping her when she needed it but otherwise let her handle it for herself, because he was sure she was doing a much better job than he would have done if he tried doing it alone.

“Oh really? We’ll have to see about that. Remember that I beat both you and Max once before, and I’ve had time to get practice in too”, Marinette laughed when it was all said and done.

The two fell into silence after sharing a laugh and when both of them chose not to speak anymore. Marinette reached for her school bag and removed from it her lunch. But, seeing that Adrien didn’t have anything, she offered it to him first. It wasn’t sweets, like what she usually gave him when she could, but there was her favorite Chinese dish and a few croissants. “Here. I make sure to bring enough for me and Alya to share, but she’s busy doing some more work on the Ladyblog right now. I don’t think she would mind if I shared with you”.

Adrien looked down at the offered food and then at Marinette in surprise. “Are you sure? About sharing, I mean. You really don’t have to”, he questioned, though his stomach had other ideas and made the very well known ‘dying whale’ noises of hunger, and it turned his cheeks bright red in embarrassment because he was sure the sound was loud enough for Mari to hear.

“Positive! Take what you want”, Marinette smiled at him with a giggle.
He figured he wasn’t going to change her mind, because Marinette was the type that once she had her mind set on something, she was determined to fulfill it. And that combined with her giving nature, there probably wasn’t a single thing he could do to sway her; not in a way that wasn’t rude at least, and she didn’t deserve to be treated that way after what she’s done within the last half hour. He reached for the offered food and took a couple croissants, making sure she still had a couple to herself.

For the next few minutes, they both continued to sit in silence and ate next to one another. Marinette offered Adrien more of what she had, since two croissants weren’t exactly enough to keep one satisfied for the rest of the day, and after some hesitancy he gratefully accepted. Mari couldn’t believe she was actually having lunch with Adrien! She’d hoped and dreamed of such a moment for the time she’s crushed on him, and although it wasn’t of his own will to stay for the day, he seemed to have liked having her company. He looked much happier than he did when she discovered him sitting alone on the stairs.

But her internal thoughts were interrupted when she felt her phone buzz in her pocket. Marinette reached for it and pulled it out to look at what the notification was. She was a little surprised when she saw it was from the Ladyblog.

“Someone text you?”, Adrien asked her curiously.

“No. It looks like Alya posted a status update on the Ladyblog”, Marinette shook her head, eyes trained on her phone as she opened the notification and was taken to the mobile site of the Ladyblog where she could read what the new status was.

Adrien scooted a little closer to her with interest and looked down at her phone from over her shoulder. With him so close, Marinette blushed and felt her breath hitch in her throat as her heart pounded and she tried not to squeal. She kept her focus on her phone in hopes of not making a fool out of herself.

And the status read this:

“Hello fellow Ladybloggers! Like the new layout? I have my best friend to thank for the design idea! Anyway, I’ve just been contacted by Sol en Si, a local orphanage located right here in Paris! They want Ladybug and Chat Noir to make an appearance for the children there and teach them about public safety for when they find a family to go home with.

So I’m making a shout out to our two favorite superheroes as a special request! It would mean so much to the children and the rest of Paris if the both of you could attend! I hope to see you there so that I can record it for the blog! Thanks and stay miraculous fellow Ladybloggers!”

“Visit an orphanage?”, both Mari and Adrien thought to themselves.

“You think they’ll show up?”, Adrien asked Marinette.

“I guess we’ll find out when Alya streams it, if she’ll be able to”, Marinette shrugged.

“Well, I don’t think Ladybug and Chat Noir are the kind to turn down a special request like that. They have attended a few events held and organized by city hall, after all”, Adrien said.

“Even if one of us is injured. At least it’s no Akuma”, he then thought to himself as he glanced down at his sprained arm.

“That’s true. And because it’s for a good cause, maybe they will”, Mari nodded.
And then the first bell of lunch hour’s end rang, catching both of their attention as they looked back over their shoulders towards the school courtyard.

“Looks like it’s time to go back to class”, Marinette groaned a little, not looking forward to having to see Miss Mendeleiev again as first class after lunch.

“Think we can keep it less awkward this time? That is, if Alya and Nino make us share a desk again”, Adrien asked, much like a friend would when wagering a bet.

“We’ll see. But no promises”, Marinette chuckled. She packed her things away into her school bag while Adrien stood up. He lent his free hand to her and she took it hesitantly, while screaming internally, as he helped her to her feet. She saw him begin to reach for his bag, but she beat him to it and picked it up first, throwing the strap over her shoulder to carry it for him.

“You’re not going to heal fast enough if you lift a lot too soon”, She warned him.

Adrien only blinked. She’d been quick, and he hadn’t been expecting her to do that, so to him she seemed ten times faster than she actually was. “Okay then”, he accepted.

She began to walk, leading the way back to class with him in tow. She might as well be of assistance to him for the rest of the day, because she would probably never get another chance like this again.

“Hey…Mari?”, she heard him speak up from behind, and so stopped to briefly turn to him and see what it was he wanted.

“Yeah?”, she prompt him to speak his mind.

“Thanks”, he told her.
Chapter Summary

The day is done and everyone is back home. Adrien finds disappointment the moment he sets foot in the manor, but years of cold conditioning from his father has made him used to such things, and he waves it off. He decides to go out and meet Ladybug, against Plagg's wishes, but suspicion sets in when Ladybug learns that Chat Noir is hurt; exactly like Adrien Agreste earlier that day.

Ladybug goes home, and begins running her mind in circles as she tries to decipher the meaning between the similarities of Chat and Adrien's injury. Will she figure it out?

Chapter Notes

(SEASON 2 SPOILER HERE! If you haven't seen "Gorizilla" yet, be warned there is a bit of a spoiler in this chapter!)

Here's chapter 7! Another LadyNoir(ish) chapter! I wanted to post this chapter sooner but it's been chaos for me lately because I'm going on vacay with some family and we've all been running around like chickens with our heads cut off. ^^' I'm working at trying to get chapter 8 written so I can post it tomorrow like I want to, but we will see how things go. Things start to take the first downhill in this chapter >:D.

“I do not understand! No matter what I throw at them, they out best me every time! They are practically kids! Children! This is outrageous, and I’m running out of time!”.

“Mr. Agreste, please. You should think more reasonably about-“.

“There is nothing reasonable about this, Nathalie! My wife has been gone for three years! I cannot accept defeat! I have been longing- yearning -to have her back! To have my family back again!”.

“I understand Mr. Agreste, but-“.

“I don’t think you do, Nathalie! This isn’t a game and I cannot lose to a couple of children!”.

“What are you going to do?”.

“If you want the job done right, you have to do it yourself, they say!”.

“Haven’t you already tried that sir?”.

“And they managed to defeat me! If I Akumatize myself again, they might become suspicious. If only I knew their identities, I could target them at their most vulnerable time!”.

“I thought you said Adrien was possibly Chat Noir?”.
“That idea was dismissed long ago. It was absurd to think my own son could be one of my worst enemies!”.

“Of course. What is your plan for action, sir?”.

“I will have to continue finding fodder for my Akuma. I will find the perfect victim and make sure that Ladybug and Chat Noir are put an end to! Persistence is key, and I shall not be deterred!”.

“Sir, if I may ask, what will you do with them once you have their miraculouses?”.

“I could care less what happens to them when that time finally comes. Even if I’ll be left with ripping their miraculous from their cold dead hands! I need the powers of the ladybug and black cat to make this work! And once I have them, I will bring Emilie back!...Just as I have wanted ever since I received those case reports”.

“Understood, sir”.

“Adrien should be getting out of school soon. See to it that he knows I am not to be disturbed for the rest of the evening. I have important work I must attend to and cannot be interrupted”.

“Uh, sir, if I may suggest?”.

“Go on”.

“Perhaps you should take the time to spend an evening with your son? If you continue to keep him at a distance, he may begin to act out upon his emotions. Without his mother he-“.

“I do not need to be informed about how to properly raise my son! He should learn not to be so dependent, for such dependency will not do when he takes over the Agreste company! He may be without his mother now but I can assure you that he won’t be for long, not while the ladybug and black cat miraculouses are still active!”.

“But sir, he’s only fifteen, soon to be sixteen. Don’t you think it’s a little harsh to force independency on him like this? You are all he has until Mrs. Agreste’s return. And if the resurrection turns out unsuccessful-“.

“It will not be a failure! I have planned too much, for far too long, to let this opportunity slip through my fingers! Emilie will come home! Until then, your only concern is keeping my son safe and making sure he is where he should be! Do I make myself clear?!”.

“Yes Mr. Agreste. Crystal clear”.

“Good! Now get out of my sight!”.

“As you wish, sir”.

Nathalie left swiftly through the door if Gabriel’s office as she’d been ordered to and made sure it closed behind her. She left with the gorilla to pick up Adrien from school. And in the meantime, Gabriel was still brooding as he stared up at the large painting of his wife that hung on his wall, until he was joined by a small lavender colored figure adorned with butterfly wings.

“Master, please, you have to understand that the wish will take a sacrifice and-!”.

“Be quiet, Nooroo! Nothing you say shall dissuade me!”.

“Master! For every action there is an equal reaction! Wishing to bring back something that’s been
lost means something else will be taken in return!"

“I said *be quiet*! You are not to defy me Nooroo! You will do as I say and you will abide by *my* orders! Your miraculous belongs to *me* and that is how it will stay! Such nonsense is no matter to *me*! Do you understand?!”

The butterfly miraculous kwami lowered his head in shame and in sorrow, while his wings drooped with it. He could not understand why his master was so cold and abusive to him, when all he was trying to do was give guidance. In a quieted voice, Nooroo spoke the answer demanded of him.

“…Yes…Master…”

Wishing not to hear any more of Nooroo’s preaching, Gabriel removed his ascot and unpinned the miraculous jewel he kept hidden under it, setting it back in a box for safe keeping.

“I am temporarily renouncing you again. You can come out when your services are needed”.

And with that, Nooroo disappeared.

Gabriel stuck the small box with his miraculous into his pocket where it could be close at hand when he may need it. After another long and contemplating stare at the painting, Gabriel let out a grunt and turned heel to go back to his desk.

“One day Emilie, my love…One day, you will be with us again. And we can be the family we were meant to be”.

He got to work on the stack of papers he had sitting unattended to on his desk, and that is where he will remain for the rest of the day forward unto dawn.

Whilst Gabriel worked, Adrien was just getting out of school, as his father predicted. And there waiting for him like usual was Nathalie and the gorilla. Adrien had been talking with Nino on the way out and down to the bottom of the stairs, with Marinette and Alya trailing them.

“Look dude, you gotta take an easy and lie low, or else you’re never gonna get your arm back!”, Nino said while patting Adrien on the back.

“I know. I can’t do much anyway like this so you’ve got nothing to worry about”, Adrien smiled at his friend, returning the pat on Nino’s shoulder to reassure him.

*Hawkmoth better not have other plans either, for his sake*, he thought to himself.

“Good!”, Nino nodded with approval.

There was the honk of a car horn that caught their attention and Adrien noticed his chaperones were waiting for him.

“Gotta go, Nathalie and the gorilla are waiting for me”, he then said to Nino.

“See ya later bro!”, Nino saluted him goodbye.

Adrien started to walk towards Nathalie and the car when he realized he didn’t have his school bag with him. Just as he turned around to ask where it was, Marinette was already rushing up to him with it in her hands. She’d helped him through the day, despite it turning her into a nervous wreck, except for lunch hour.

“Thanks, again”, he told her with a smile, taking his bag back from her when she held it out to him.
“Oh it was nothing really, it was no big deal! Actually I’m quite forgetful sometimes so it’s a good thing I remembered to give it back to you or else you would have left without it and I would have had to take it to you and probably leave it at the front gate of your house or something because your father doesn’t really welcome guests in his house but who could blame him I mean he is a famous fashion designer and all and I’m not a celebrity like him so why should he be expected to let me in hehe…eh… What were we talking about again?”, Marinette rambled in what seemed like one breath. Adrien just blinked at her a couple times, unsure of whether he should be confused about what she just said or impressed with the fact that she was able to say all of it without getting winded.

Alya and Nino facepalmed simultaneously at Marinette with exasperated sighs.

“She’s doomed”, Alya grumbled.

“Not as doomed as Adrien. He’s such an oblivious dork, it’s unreal”, Nino added to that.

“No, I mean, thanks for everything you’ve done today. Really I, I appreciate it a lot. It was nice to get to sit down and talk with someone for lunch, and it was pretty cool of you to share a desk with me so you could help me out when I needed it. I know I’ve said this before but, you’re amazing Marinette”, Adrien said.

“I know”, she heard him say in her ear, before he pulled way with one last glance at her and then turned back towards his waiting chaperones, climbing into the backseat of the car, and leaving with Nathalie and the gorilla back to the Agreste manor.

Marinette was left standing in a stupor, her brain unable to process what’d just happened, while a bright red blush filled her cheeks.

“Uh oh, better go make sure she doesn’t overload!”, Nino commented with a chuckle.

“Wouldn’t be the first time. See you tomorrow?”, Alya laughed with a roll of her eyes.

“Yeah, see ya babe”, Nino nodded to her, before they shared a quick kiss, and he went off in his own direction homebound.

Alya went up to Marinette, routinely waving a hand in front of her best friend’s face to try and get her attention.

“Hello, earth to Marinette! Headquarters says come back, your moon mission is over!”, Alya said.

“He…hugged me…! And spoke in my ear…! Again! I felt his breath on my EAR!”, Mari began to exclaim, as her stupor turned to excitement.

“Yep, I saw it all happen from where I was standing!”, Alya laughed at her.

Marinette didn’t say anything more, just stood there with her wide lovestruck grin and a hand over her ear, staring up dreamily at the sky. Him speaking into her ear was about as big as him kissing her on the lips.

“You’re never going to wash that ear again, are you?”, Alya asked with the serious ‘are you serious?’ expression, and looked unimpressed.
“Nu-uh!”, Mari said with giddiness, not paying much mind to Alya otherwise.

“C’mon girl, let’s get you home before your head explodes all over the sidewalk!”, Alya shook her head, taking Marinette by the shoulders and pushing her along towards the Dupain-Cheng residence. They got as far as the door into the bakery before Marinette started moving on her own. Once inside, they greeted her parents.

“Mama! Papa! I’m home!”, Mari said cheerfully.

“Hello Mr. and Mrs. Dupain-Cheng!”, Alya said after her.

“Hi girls! Did you have a good day?”, Tom, who’d been working the counter at that time, asked them both with a smile.

“Yes! See, Adrien sprained his arm somehow, so Marinette got to help him throughout the day by carrying his things for him and stuff! And I got to finish the new layout for the Ladyblog, one of Marinette’s ingenious designs of course!”, Alya explained.

“Ehehe, yeah, Adrien”, Marinette sighed in that happy dreamy way.

“I see. Adrien’s the one she likes, right?”, Tom said with an eyebrow arched, bending down to Alya so that he could speak more quietly to her.

“You know it! That girl’s got the worst case of boy crush I have ever seen! Nino and I made them sit together for the whole day, and she went and had lunch with him on her own! Socializing with him is getting better, but she still needs work!”, Alya said back even quieter to Tom.

“Good work!”, Tom said, holding up a fist to Alya, and the two fistbumped for her success.

“I told you I would work some magic!”, Alya laughed.

And how Marinette didn’t notice this was going on was beyond anyone’s comprehension, even the author’s. She was too busy daydreaming again. Alya managed to snap her back into reality and said her goodbyes before leaving. Marinette went up to her room then, setting her things down, where she and Tikki were safe to talk openly.

“We’re doing patrol tonight. I need to speak with Chat about Alya’s little arrangement. I think it would be nice to visit the orphanage!”, Mari said, sitting down on her bed to do her homework straight away so that she wouldn’t have to worry about it later.

“Do you think he knows about it also?”, Tikki asked, coming to rest beside her chosen’s open textbook atop the comforter of the bed.

“Even if he doesn’t, I’ll explain it to him. But he’s pretty good at keeping up with the Ladyblog, so I’m sure he’ll know when we meet up tonight. Or at least, I hope he’ll be out for patrol. We didn’t patrol last night, and we try to every other”, Marinette said, but her attention was on her school work.

“I wonder what Chat Noir will say about it? A lot of people look up to the two of you, and children at a young age are very impressionable, so you’ll have a chance to make a really good impact on them!”, Tikki smiled.

“I know. That’s why I don’t think Chat will turn it down. Not only is he a sweetheart but he’s also supportive and willing to help all he can in whatever way he must. Plus, I don’t think he would deny the fame of it either. Also, he seems to like children, and I think it’s because of the joy he brings them when they see him. I mean, what little kid wouldn’t get excited when they see a big goofy cat like...”
Chat Noir?”, Marinette said, chuckling at the end.

Tikki giggled, and then stayed quiet to let her chosen some peace while she sat and watched her work on her homework.

And back at the Agreste manor…

“Your father has requested that he not be disturbed for the rest of the day until tomorrow. Your schedule has been cleared for the day as well”, Nathalie said while she, Adrien, and the gorilla entered the manor.

“So he won’t be there at dinner. Great. Not that he ever is any other time. I don’t know why I even expect it of him anymore”, Adrien sighed with disappointment, keeping a tight grip on his school bag in trying not to let it slip off his shoulder, but his injured arm seemed to get in the way every time.

“I’m sorry. It is Mr. Agreste’s orders. Shall I tell the cook to prepare something for you?”, Nathalie said, though her face lacked sympathy, and any other emotion for that matter.

“No, it’s fine. I’m not really hungry anyway. I think I’ll just skip dinner altogether. Thanks, though”, Adrien shook his head, heading up to his room where he could be alone with his thoughts. Maybe Plagg would cheer him up.

He entered his room and shut the door behind him, he thought about locking it but decided against the idea, just in case his father or Nathalie needed to see him for whatever reason. With a long sigh, he gently tossed his bag to the side where it landed on the floor next to him, and then kicked off his shoes. He shuffled over to his couch and sat down, staring out through his wall of windows.

“You sure you wanna skip dinner? You should never turn down free food!”, he heard Plagg ask, and the kwami soon joined him at his side.

“Maybe if I was like you. I think I’ve lost my appetite for the day”, Adrien responded, but his gaze didn’t move away from the windows when he did. Then he frowned down at his arm, wishing he would have been more careful out in the rain. But you can’t change what has already happened, only be prepared to act upon your mistake the next time.

“Really? You seemed to really like the food the bakery girl brought for lunch today”, Plagg pointed out.

“It was good food! Even I can’t deny that anything that comes from the bakery her parents own is amazing and really delicious! If I could eat there every day for the rest of my life, I think I’d be in heaven”, Adrien fired back.

“Yeah, and fat”, Plagg retorted.

“Oh, like a strict diet of nothing but stinky cheese is any healthier than croissants and other pastries?”, Adrien looked at him pointedly.

“Hey, you don’t see an overweight cat god around here, do ya?”, Plagg grinned, gesturing to himself to make his point.

Adrien only scoffed then in response, getting up from the couch and walking over to the wall of windows to stare out at the cityscape.

“We should go out and see if we can meet with Ladybug tonight. I’d hate to leave Alya’s shout-out for us unanswered, I want to know what m’lady thinks of the idea of visiting an orphanage”, he said.
“But you’re hurt. You really shouldn’t go out like that, you could end up making it worse. The suit doesn’t give you magic healing abilities and I’m not as good at healing as Ladybug’s kwami is. I think it’s a bad idea!”

“Plagg stated.

“If I took that advice then I might as well give up being Chat Noir for a week! And we both know I can’t do that with Hawkmoth around! Ladybug may be able to handle herself but the truth of it is we need each other to take down Akuma, so even if I skipped out on going on nightly patrols, I’d still have to transform for that much and it’s a lot more vigorous physical activity fighting an Akuma than it is leaping from building to building”, Adrien turned around to look at Plagg with narrow eyes.

“And what happens if you two find trouble while out on patrol? You were lucky enough to even fight when you injured your ankle back during Reposte’s attack, so do you think a sprained wrist is going to be any different from that?”, Plagg said, flying over to Adrien and sitting on his chosen’s shoulder.

“No. But what choice do I have? The city depends on Ladybug and I to keep everyone safe. Superheroes can’t take sick days when every citizen looks up to them for protection. And I can’t just abandon Ladybug without telling her why either, it’d probably make her really worried, or she’d hate me for leaving her in the dark and dropping off the face of the earth. I accepted that responsibility when I put on the ring, I’m not about to go against it”, Adrien explained with a slight shrug, the nerves in his injured arm protesting when he did and it caused his wrist to shift a little in the sling.

Plagg floated from Adrien’s shoulder to in front of his chosen’s face. “That’s still no reason to go out and be reckless when you don’t have to”, he said, concern flashing in his bright green eyes.

“I’m not being reckless, Plagg. I’m just doing what I think I should do”, Adrien said calmly, catching the concern in his kwami’s gaze.

“I hope you know that with your wrist being injured like it is, you won’t be able to create a Cataclysm as easy as before. That could be even more dangerous than Cataclysm itself to us and those around you. There’s no telling how you’ll get yourself out of a tight fix in this condition”, Plagg said, pointing a tiny paw at Adrien’s arm in the sling.

“I can’t leave Paris or m’lady unguarded, so it’s a risk I’ll have to take”, Adrien said, looking from Plagg to down at his arm and back up to Plagg.

“It’s a pretty stupid risk if you ask me!”, Plagg crossed his arms and turned his back to Adrien with his nose up in the air.

“Then I won’t ask you”, Adrien smarted off with, smiling slyly and chuckling.

Plagg only grumbled at the remark and flew off up to the second level of Adrien’s room, most likely to go eat his cheese in peace.

Adrien just shook his head at Plagg’s behavior. The kwami had a problem with being spoken to the way he spoke to others, but he sure didn’t with dishing it out himself. What a hypocrite. He turned back to face the windows again and watch the city, wondering to himself what he could do to keep occupied until it was time to patrol, since he was physically unable to do any of the things he normally had to. He almost thought about going out now, but he knew Plagg wouldn’t be happy with the idea, and it would only greatly the possibility of hurting himself more between that moment and when it was time to meet with Ladybug. Playing any kind of game he had would be impossible with only one hand, so that was out of the question. He could read a book, but he didn’t feel he was in the mood, and he’d already read some of his books several times before anyway. There was no way Nathalie or his father would allow him to go take a walk outside and especially alone, so he
sighed when he dismissed the thought. What was a boy to do when his options were limited?

Sighing again to himself after a few moments, Adrien returned to his couch and sat down, taking up the remote in his free hand and switching on the TV in front of him, skimming the channels for something good with a face of boredom. How he managed to live a life like this but worse before attending a public school, he didn’t know. Finally he settled on the news channel with Nadja Chamack hosting it, and it looked to be about the status Alya posted earlier on the blog. Of course, news crews and TV producers would be all over Ladybug and Chat Noir making an appearance at an orphanage.

“Will our heroes answer the call of our own Alya Césaire, owner of the most well known blog in Paris? Or will they stand it up? We’ll find out tomorrow, live, and see for ourselves! I’m Nadja Chamack and I say don’t be bemused, it’s just the news!”, Adrien heard the TV say, but he didn’t really care much to listen. He’d come to expect being followed by the news crews when out as Chat Noir. Him and Ladybug both. But that didn’t make it any less annoying sometimes.

He flipped through more channels to try and find something better, giving up when he couldn’t find anything other than a channel for old shows. At least they were airing something he liked; old Pokémon reruns.

And that’s what he watched until it was dark enough to go out on patrol.

“Plagg, you ready? It’s time to go!”, Adrien called for the kwami, expecting to see a little black blur zip down from the second level of his room.

“Plagg’s not here, please leave a message after the ‘go away, I’m napping!’. Go away, I’m napping!” Plagg said in an annoyed hiss, not exactly fond about getting his sleep interrupted.

Adrien didn’t look at all amused. “Come on you lazy cat! We’ve got to go meet with Ladybug!”, he said, standing up from the couch and walking over to the spiral staircase that led up to the second level, choosing not to go up unless he had to, if Plagg chose to be particularly stubborn and had to be physically retrieved.

“You have fun with that kid, you go on while I stay here and sleep”, Plagg said.

“Going to be a lot harder to do that if I can’t jump twenty feet to save my life, or wield a baton, or even be careful like we talked about earlier. On second thought, why don’t you stay behind and sleep. I’m sure Ladybug would be happy to talk to the famous Adrien Agreste himself whom would then explain to her that the reason why he’s there is because he is secretly Chat Noir, but his kwami needed a nap so he came as himself. It should all work out just fine”, Adrien said, half sarcastically, but half seriously, all while grinning to himself. That was sure to draw Plagg out, because if there was anything the kwami was against, it was getting severely hurt as the first thing on the list of do-nots and revealing his identity as a close second.

“Alright, alright! I’m up! Let’s get this over with so we can come back and I can get back to my napping!”, Plagg growled, floated down in a lazy drift to Adrien and looking miserable about it.

“What? Not too fond of the idea of me going out just like this and possibly revealing myself to Ladybug while also possibly hurting myself even more? What is there to worry about?”, Adrien asked smugly.

“Cut the sarcasm and wipe that stupid smug grin off your face, kid! I’m only doing what I’m supposed to do and that’s to keep you from exposing yourself and making sure you don’t get hurt or killed!”, Plagg crossed his arms.
“Amazing how well that worked last night”, Adrien said while looking thoughtful. Now he was just trying to get under Plagg’s fur.

“You’re not funny”, Plagg only grumbled.

“You’re right. I’m hilarious!”, Adrien laughed at him.

“Just say the words already!”, Plagg whined.

“So soon? I was beginning to have some fun with this conversation. It’s not nice to be messed with, now is it?”, Adrien raised a brow but looked at Plagg in smug victory.

“Yeah yeah sure fine whatever I promise I won’t do it ever again now just say the words so we can go and get this done!”, Plagg said grumpily, waving Adrien off with a paw and rolling his little green eyes.

Adrien chuckled at him before finally calling the command. “Plagg, claws out!”, he said, though had to resist striking his usual pose and instead only stood where he was and didn’t move. Plagg was sucked into his ring as the transformation took place on its own.

His injured wrist was no longer wrapped in the bandage, though strangely enough the sling still remained. Knowing it would be much harder to move and travel with it, and that it would give Ladybug suspensions, he discarded the sling to the side and flexed his hand to see how it felt. Pain shot through his wrist and he winced while gripping it close to his chest. He should have known his suit wouldn’t numb the pain, like Plagg had explained before. He would just have to do his best to deal with it.

Chat turned and walked to the wall of windows, exiting through the one that was open and leaping from the sill to the rooftop closest to him. He surveyed the area to determine what the easiest way of travel was going to be for him. He supposed he could just jump from building to building and leave his baton out of it, but then it would limit his path. And using his baton required both hands, he wasn’t sure how much of a grip he could maintain with his injured wrist, or if he’d enough be able to twirl his baton fast enough to helicopter from building to building.

Grumbling to himself and shaking his head, he decided to go with the leaping first. With as much might as he had, he bunched up the muscles in his legs and sprung from the rooftop he was standing on over to the next, and then the next, and then the next.

“Are you almost finished Marinette? It’s dark out, and I’m sure Chat Noir is already out there waiting for you!“, Tikki buzzed as she asked her chosen about her homework.

“Just one more equation, and…Done!”, Mari said as she scribbled down one last equation for her physics homework, and then looked proudly down at it.

“Then let’s go! You don’t want to be out too late tonight if you want to be on time to class and be rested enough to go to the orphanage after school tomorrow!”, Tikki urged.

“Okay then! Tikki, spots on!”, Marinette jumped up from her bed, calling the command that pulled Tikki into her earrings to ensue her transformation into Ladybug. She left through the hatch door in her roof and used her yoyo to swing over to the building next door.

She came to a stop after a few rooftops and looked around in search of a familiar black cat. She had a feeling he was out tonight, so it was only a matter of finding him. She was about to head for the Eiffel Tower there they had their usual rendezvous, but stopped when she caught a glimpse of movement nearby
Chat was making his way through the city best he could without causing more injury to his wrist, until he spotted his Lady on another rooftop neighboring the one he landed on. He leapt over to her and greeted her cheerfully.

“Good evening m’lad’y!”, he bowed, trying to hold in the wince that caught in his throat from using his right hand for the gesture, cursing at himself in his mind at the bad idea that was.

“Hello, Chat. It’s good that I ran into you! There was something I wanted to talk to you about!”, Ladybug smiled at him.

“Oh is that so? What a coincidence, because there was something I wanted to talk with you about as well. See? We think so alike, we are definitely made for each other!”, Chat grinned at her through his wince, taking her hand with the one that didn’t hurt, and kissing the backs of her knuckles softly.

“Don’t get too ahead of yourself, minou. Just because we think alike doesn’t mean we’re meant to be. Ever heard of ‘opposites attract’?”, Ladybug chuckled, pushing him away by his nose with one finger.

Chat rubbed his nose from her touch, but didn’t frown at being pushed away. He may not ever stop with the flirting, even if he did know she has eyes for someone else, but he did respected Ladybug’s personal space.

“Anyway, I wanted to talk to talk to you about the recent status posted to the Ladyblog earlier today. You keep an eye on it too, right?”, Ladybug began.

“Of course! Gotta keep tabs on all our fans and my favorite bugaboo! What was the name of the blog’s creator? Alya Césaire, wasn’t it? And her friend Marinette Dupain-Cheng is a brilliant designer! The new layout looks great on the blog! Should you even have to ask?”, Chat nodded, tail tip twitching a couple times.

Ladybug was about to speak again but bit her tongue when she realized Chat had mentioned her civilian name along with the compliment. But she had to shrug it off, figuring she would have heard it from him while she was detransformed anyway. At least now she would see it coming and be able to respond properly.

“No, I guess I should know you better. But about the post, we’re being asked to visit an orphanage tomorrow”, she said.

“Ah yes! Sol en Si, I believe!”, Chat nodded again.

“Right. I don’t think we should say no, it could be a very good opportunity to have an impact on children and help keep them safe in the future. And how great would it be for them getting to meet the heroes of Paris? So are you up for it?”, Ladybug asked him, tapping his bell on the collar of his suit, causing it to ring.

“Wherever you go, I go m’lad’y! I also think it’s a great idea, we’ll get to make the kids happy. And of course, a safety lesson or two is always good. Wouldn’t want there to be a bunch of Akuma causing adolescents like that Chloe Bourgeois overrunning this city now would we?”, Chat agreed.

“My thoughts exactly, minou”, Ladybug smiled.

“Seriously, a match made in heaven!”, Chat grinned at her again, put a hand on her shoulder. Unfortunately, it happened to be his injured arm, since it’d become natural for him to favor using his right over his left. But if he shied away too quickly because of the pain, Ladybug would know he was hurt, so he held out for as long as he could and tried to use his grin to mask his discomfort.
“In your dreams!”, she laughed at him, brushing his hand off of her shoulder. “Should we do some patrolling toni-?”, she began to ask when she noticed Chay wince under his breath, and gave him a confused but worried look. “Are you okay?”.

“I-I’m fine! Just! Fine! Don’t worry about me m’lady, this cat’s as fine as a piece of Vincent Van Goth art!”, Chat told her, but the nervous grin he had on his face didn’t have her convinced.

“Your hand, let me see it”, Ladybug pointed to his injured arm, brows knitting in a furrow underneath her mask.

Chat quickly hid said hand behind his back and pretended not to know anything. “Hand? What hand? There’s no hand here! I actually only have one! Yep, I’ve been a lefty this whole time! I don’t have a right hand!”, he said.

“Chat Noir”, Ladybug crossed her arms and narrowed her gaze at him.

When she did that and said his full name, he knew he was in trouble, and aggravating her any further from this point was a death sentence.

Chat sighed with defeat and brought his injured arm out from behind his back and let her examine it. It hurt when she moved it around sharply, so she looked at it more gently.

“What did you do?”, she asked him.

“I…May or may not have been going home in the storm last night and fell off a rooftop…”, he admitted, but didn’t look her in the eye. He was embarrassed over anything else.

“I thought cats always landed on their feet?!”, Ladybug exclaimed.

“They do! But this cat’s got enough skill to land on his face from time to time”, Chat said jokingly.

“This isn’t funny Chat! You’re lucky you didn’t break anything!”, Ladybug scolded.

“Which is saying a lot considering my power is the very definition of bad luck”, Chat said.

“This isn’t funny Chat! You’re lucky you didn’t break anything!”, Ladybug scolded.

“I’m serious! How would you fight Akuma if you had broken your arm?! How are you going to fight now if an Akuma appears?!”, Ladybug raised her voice a little, causing Chat to shrink back like a kitten being scolded the way he was, his ears flattening back against his head.

“I didn’t want to worry you bugaboo. We can’t have you distracted over me being hurt when in a battle. You’re the only one who can purify the Akuma”, Chat explained himself.

“But not telling me these things makes me worry more, Chaton. We’re partners and will always be a team, you can tell me anything. I don’t like it when you hide things like this from me. You trust me, don’t you?”, Ladybug said, more calmly now, seeing how afraid she was making him.

“Of course I do! Until I’m dead, I will always trust you, with my life and my heart! I just didn’t want to make you worry too much, or think that I can’t take care of myself alone, that’s all. I should have had more faith in you and told you right as I got here”, his eyes widened at the hinted accusation that he didn’t trust her. Why wouldn’t he? How could she think he wouldn’t?

“Well you are about as reckless as they come, but I wouldn’t think you couldn’t handle yourself. I worry for you all the time because you’re my partner, but most importantly my friend. No matter what you do, I will always worry for your wellbeing. Just because I’m the only one who can purify the Akuma doesn’t mean you’re needed any less than I am. This city needs both of us”, she spoke
Chat quickly gave her a small kiss on the forward when she wasn’t looking him in the face, hoping that might make up for not saying anything to her in the beginning. “I’m sorry”, he said, in just as soft a voice as hers.

Ladybug looked up at him with shocked surprise, just like when he had kissed her on the cheek the time he actually admitted his feelings to her. Even after being openly rejected and friendzoned, he was still so sweet and loving to her. And that was something she couldn’t understand.

“Should we cancel tomorrow? Maybe we can visit Sol en Si some other time…”, she asked, looking back down at his arm, so that she could hide the blushed that peeked beneath her mask.

“No, I think I can manage. If it’s not broken then there’s no reason to back out on anybody. If I just keep it close to my person and not do any rash stunts, then it should be fine”, Chat smiled.

“I wouldn’t be so sure. Children love you, and because of that you may have to do a stunt or two to keep from getting tackled”, Ladybug said, with a half-hearted chuckle, but her focused remained on his hand.

“Well then I guess I’ll just have to deal with it”, Chat chuckled.

Silence fell between the two for several moments, as Ladybug continued to look at his hand and arm, even though there wasn’t much to look at. Chat had to be the one to break the silence, because it made him uneasy that she wasn’t speaking.

“M’lady?”, he tilted his head curiously like a cat at her.

“With your suit on I can’t tell what’s wrong with it, so I can’t do much to help you. Just try to be extra careful, alright? Let’s hope no Akuma appear anytime soon”, she told him, finally looking back up into his eyes again.

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll be meticulously careful, cat’s honor”, Chat said, holding his left hand up to swear to the oath.

“Looks like no patrolling tonight, minou. Can’t have you make it worse before tomorrow. We should probably avoid staying out late anyway, so that we’ll be well rested”, Ladybug said to him with sympathy. She let go of his hand and let him drop it to his side.

“Really? Not even just around the block?”, he asked, with that pleading kitten look he knew she oftentimes just couldn’t resist. But he could feel something tugging at the back of his mind, like claws in his skin. It had to be Plagg, letting him know to listen to Ladybug and go home for the night, for his sake. “Right. Okay then. I guess I’ll see you tomorrow, m’lady”, he shook his head.

“See you tomorrow. Goodnight Chat”, she smiled at him, and then zipped away on her yo-yo.

Chat blew a kiss after her and watched her go. “Sweet dreams, m’lady”, he said, even if she was no longer within earshot of catching his words. He turned tail and began to trek home, difficult as it was.

It didn’t take Ladybug as long to get home, and was soon back in her room detransformed into Marinette, who didn’t look all too happy.

“Is something the matter Marinette?”, Tikki asked.

“Chat Noir. He…He was hurt...Just like Adrien”, Mari said with a look of slight disbelief. She shook
her head to try and dismiss the thought that was coming next, but it wouldn’t leave her alone. “Could Adrien be Chat Noir?”.

“Let’s not get too far ahead here, okay? I’m sure there are perfectly valid reasons for why there is such a coincidence!”, Tikki said to try and calm her chosen down before she had a chance to get worked up.

“But it was the same hand! I couldn’t tell much from under his suit but I think it was a sprain, and Adrien sprained his arm!”, Marinette exclaimed. It was apparent enough that Tikki’s attempt to calm her down was futile.

“Alright then, let’s look at the facts. Adrien said he fell down the stairs at his house because of the storm last night, right? And Chat Noir said he fell off a rooftop because of the rain! You’ve only got two hands and two arms, so if two people were to fall from a certain height to cause such an injury, then you shouldn’t be too surprised if it’s the same hand”, Tikki explained.

“But, he- wait! You’ve seen Chat without his mask! So then tell me, was he Adrien?!”, Mari looked confused but terrified, and then beamed at Tikki when she remembered that one little detail.

“I’m not supposed to tell you. You know that. Nobody is at fault if either of you figure it out yourselves, but the kwami would be breaking sacred rules if they told their chosen the identities of other miraculous holders. As it is, I’ve already told you about past holders, and that is one rule broken in and of itself. As your friend, I wish I could say. But as your kwami and guide to being a successful Ladybug, I can’t say a word. I know his identity, but for his and your safety, I cannot disclose it”, Tikki told her. She had to put her tiny paw down on this one this time. Marinette already knew more than she ever should that wasn’t approved by Master Fu, and that alone was dangerous enough.

“I don’t know how to feel about this. Happy? Afraid? Excited? Terrified? I feel even more emotionally confused than I do trying to figure out if it’s Adrien or Chat Noir I love! Like I said last night, I would be happy in a way if my crush turned out to be my partner this whole time, but I would also be afraid because then I would know that Adrien has been risking his life to save me and Paris from Akuma! It makes me worried when Chat does something stupid and reckless and life threatening, but for that to be Adrien makes me horrified! Tikki, what am I going to do?!”, Marinette panicked.

“Don’t jump to conclusions until you have solid proof. You’re always taking things at face value and assuming the worst of it, and without proof that’s all it will ever be; an assumption. Despite the similarities between Chat Noir and Adrien being hurt, it’s never safe to assume anything so big or rash until you know for sure”, Tikki advised.

Marinette didn’t like being accused of taking things for what she saw them without knowing more about them, but she know the kwami was right. One perfect example of this was when there had been gum stuck to her seat and she’d seen Adrien there next to it. Because of that, she thought he was the one who put it there and would assume nothing else, until she’d been proven wrong by his kindness later that same day. But the similarities were just too hard to ignore and it bugged her.

“Are you encouraging me to find out Chat’s identity?”, she asked Tikki.

“I’m encouraging you to follow your heart, and do what you think is best. To say that two people are one in the same based off of having injured themselves in the same place is like saying that sprinkling salt into regular water is the same as ocean water when in fact they are not the same at all. You’ll know what to do, I have faith in you. For now, let fate decide”, Tikki smiled that knowing smile at her chosen, buzzing and then kissing Marinette’s cheek to comfort her.
“I don’t know Tikki. What if I turn out to be right? What if Adrien really is Chat Noir?”, Mari asked, now a little calmer, but still panicking inside.

“That is simply something you can’t control, Marinette. You can’t change who is and who isn’t Chat Noir, nor can he change who is and who isn’t Ladybug, because you two were specifically chosen by Master Fu himself to be holders of the ladybug and black cat miraculouses. Knowing his identity will have its consequences, but after it’s all said and done, there’s nothing you can do about it”, Tikki said.

“I’m just afraid. As I said before, I’m afraid to lose him- them- Adrien Noir- Chat Agreste- you get the idea! I’m not really afraid of the rejection, but I am afraid of what that could do to what we already have between us as partners. If I was to tell either one of them how I feel, that is. And I’m also afraid of what a safety hazard knowing his identity would be. What if I got Akumatized and went after Adrien, or Chat, while knowing his identity and therefore every weakness he has? I could seriously hurt him because of that! Or if Hawkmoth ever found out through me, he’d know how to defeat Chat and take his miraculous! And if anyone else ever found out because of me, then they too would be in danger and he would be at even greater risk!”, Marinette explained.

“It’s okay Marinette. Just trust your gut instinct, because it’s hardly ever wrong. Fate and the universe uses it to speak to us, and we have to be willing to listen to it, or else we won’t know what’s coming in the road ahead. Listen to what it’s telling you”, Tikki buzzed, resting on Mari’s shoulder and giving it a couple pats.

“I think it’s telling me to find out for sure if Adrien is Chat Noir. But I don’t want to know. It’s just too dangerous”, Marinette sighed.

“Then let fate decide. If you are meant to know, you will know. Now, you should go to bed and try to get some sleep. You’ve got a big day tomorrow!”, Tikki said, flying up from Marinette’s shoulder to in front of her face and then kissing her chosen on the nose.

“I’ll try”, Mari shook her head. Her mind was too exhausted to think on it any further, but she wasn’t sure how much sleep it would allow her to get. The only thing she could do was try. She readied for bed and was soon climbing under her comforter, resting on her side, with Tikki by her head on the pillow. She lied awake and stared at nothing for a while, before closing her eyes and hoping sleep would take her.

As Marinette was trying to sleep, so was Adrien back at the Agreste manor.

“Are you sure it was a good idea to let her know about your arm?”, Plagg asked his chosen.

“Couldn’t exactly lie my way out of it when she clearly saw I was in pain. What was I supposed to do? Just parkour away from my problems like nothing happened?”, Adrien said from the bathroom, where he was getting ready to brush his teeth.

“But what if she’s someone you know outside of the costume? Now she’s probably suspicious about who you are”, Plagg argued, flying in from where he’d been sitting on Adrien’s desk.

“Eh coulnf jush of meed iff er. Anf jee woulf sheen ooner er ater dat eh ush urt”, Adrien responded, toothbrush in his mouth full of toothpaste.

“Kid, rinse first and then talk. I can’t understand what you’re saying”, Plagg told him while facepawing and shaking his head.

Adrien shrugged and spit out what he had in his mouth, rinsing with water and spitting that out too,
then he looked at Plagg to speak.

“I said that I couldn’t just not meet with her. And that she would of seen sooner or later that I was hurt. At that point, why even really try to hide it?”, he said. He turned the bathroom facet off and left after flipping the light switch, then flopped back on his bed ready for sleep.

Plagg didn’t have any argument to that, because unless Adrien went a whole week without being Chat Noir and heaven knows he wouldn’t go that long without the freedom it gave him, Ladybug would have known eventually. And Adrien was right about what he’d said earlier. Paris needed its heroes. Adrien had been chosen by the guardian because a Ladybug and Chat Noir were needed to combat the threat of Hawkmoth and protect the city, so he couldn’t just abandon his duties and especially not without telling anyone why. The only person he would have been able to tell anyway was Ladybug herself, so it would only defeat the purpose.

“All I’m saying is you should be a little more careful about what you let her know. If you let her in on a little too much, your identity will be compromised and she’ll figure you out. Chat Noir and Adrien Agreste having sprain the same arm over the same storm on the same night is just too much of a coincidence, and if it does so happen that she knows your civilian identity personally, a coincidence like that is all she needs as a lead to the truth”, Plagg said while following Adrien and going back to sit on the desk again.

“I am very aware of that thought. But I can’t just assume anything. Acting like she’ll figure out who I am may only cause her to be even more suspicious because Chat Noir is anything but skittish, and acting like she won’t may not be the greatest idea but at least it won’t cause tension between the two of us. I just have to trust her”, Adrien agreed, folding his hands up under his head while he lied on his back on his bed and stared up at the ceiling.

“Look, I get the whole partner and teamwork dynamic between you both, but why do you have so much trust and faith in a girl you don’t really know much about otherwise?”, Plagg asked, helping himself to his cheese before bed.

“Well, I believe in this thing called fate. If something is meant to be, then I won’t question it. And I have to trust her, because we both save lives including each other’s. I don’t have any reasons not to, so why shouldn’t I?”, Adrien answered.

“How will you ever know if something is meant to be? You humans can’t even tell a fake Chat Noir from the real one!”, Plagg nagged.

“In my defense, Copycat looked exactly like my own reflection and sounded just like me too! And the public didn’t know any better either!”, Adrien propped himself up on his elbows and glared over at Plagg. The Copycat incident was one of the Akuma he really hated, next to Mr. Pigeon and Animan. Copycat impersonated him, Mr. Pigeon was a problem for his allergy to feathers, and Animan practically ate Ladybug. It wasn’t really anything against the victims, but the things Hawkmoth made them do.

Plagg laughed at him. “Calm down kid! I was only teasing about that! But you should see your face when you get defensive about something, you look just like a bristling cat!”, he said.

“Fitting then that I am the holder of the black cat miraculous”, Adrien said while looking down at his ring. “Anyway. How you’ll know if something is meant to be is…Well, you’ll just know”, he added.

“You humans are sad strange little creatures. You have my pity”, Plagg said before gulping down a bite of cheese.
“How gracious of you”, Adrien rolled his eyes at him. He lied back down and yawned, staring back up at the ceiling again until his eyelids felt heavy, and he closed them when sleep finally overcame him.

But little did either Adrien or Marinette know, the day that would follow was going to be far more eventful than they had planned.

And quite possibly, even more traumatic too.
Intuition

Chapter Summary

Intuition can speak to us in funny ways, but are we willing to listen to it?

Adrien foresees the terrible fate of his beloved bugaboo in the depths of his nightmares, yet he is unsure of whether or not he should believe a dream the way he believes reality. What could it be foreshadowing?

Marinette tries to reason with herself, and also listen to her gut instinct as well about her assumptions; that Adrien is Chat Noir. But nobody ever said logic and instinct went hand in hand.

If intuition is trying to tell these dorks something, then they better listen hard.

Chapter Notes

FIRST OF ALL! I want to apologize for the slight wait! It seemed like there was updates maybe every two-ish weeks and then suddenly none! This chapter, DEFINITELY breaks 5’s record, at 14,464 words! I know! That's very long! I didn't intend to write so much, and it didn't go the way I wanted it to, but I managed to make it work. And hey, I guess you can consider this as a treat for the wait! I also want to apologize if it seems really repetitive with things too, because I was working on this one about every two days or so, I had such killer writer's block that it became painful to try writing this out at one point but I hope it's still good! SECOND OF ALL, there is a concept in here that I sort of borrowed from a few other sources, so just want to put it out there that I didn't come up with the original idea but it was good lore material for this story so I used it! I hope you enjoy the read and look forward to reading your comments if you have any! :D.

He felt free.

Free, like a bird high in the clouds.

He felt weightless, like he could soar.

Any and all burdens he ever carried had been lifted from his shoulders. He felt no bonds or like he was bounded to something, nothing tying him to reality.

And best of all, he didn’t know it was a dream because it felt so real. He felt touch, tasted the air, heard the sound of the wind, and saw everything.

“Yes!” he yelled excitedly as he took a leap from one rooftop to another, sprinting as fast as his dreamscape would allow.
Paris was as beautiful as ever, and a little more. There was warmth from the sun as if it were Summer. Clear blue skies, a sweet scent lingering on the breeze, and peace radiating in waves all around. All of it made him forget who Adrien Agreste was.

Because right now, he was only Chat Noir.

“Chaton!”, that amazing angelic voice called him. He knew it anywhere. His Lady.

Up ahead, he could see her waiting for him, with a welcoming smile and open arms. With happiness and infatuation igniting in his chest and eyes lighting up upon seeing her, Chat sprinted faster, dropping to his fours because it felt easier and natural to cover more distance that way. He wanted to be next to her, to hug her and hold her, and kiss her. The gap between them was soon closed as he took another leap from the building he’d been on to the one she currently stood atop of, and stopped with only an inch keeping them apart. He looked down into her gorgeous bluebell eyes that were framed by her red black-spotted mask. He could feel a purr rumble up into his throat when she stared back up at him.

“Hello Chaton”, she said so softly, yet it echoed in his ears so vividly. It made the butterflies in his stomach stir.

“M’lady!”, he said so blissfully with a wide grin and eyes shining with the deepest love he had in his heart for her.

Ladybug stepped forward and put her arms around his torso in a tight grasp, pulling him into her, and resting her head on his chest. It made his heart swell even more. He didn’t hesitate in embracing her in his own old, his tail coming up and around both of their waists. His purring became louder and more prominent, and he didn’t care how embarrassing it was that he even had that ability. What mattered to him most in that moment was that he had his Lady and he was the happiest he could ever feel. Even if she didn’t love him the way he loved her, it still felt right.

“Chat?”, he heard her soft voice say, and he felt her pushing against him to try and look up at him. He loosened his hold on her so that she may do as she pleased, looking down at her with a smile.

“Yes bugaboo?”, he asked, waiting patiently for what she might have wanted to say to him.

But when he saw her face, things looked...Different. He could see a red liquid substance dripping from the corner of her mouth. He squinted, wondering if he was just seeing things. Then he looked down and could see that her suit was being saturated by something of a darker red than the suit itself, starting from her chest and spreading to her abdomen. His eyes widened.

“Ladybug?!”, he said with fear at seeing that her eyes were shadowed and she wasn’t looking at him anymore, placing both of his hands on her shoulders, tail lashing out behind him in response to his rising panic. When he reached a thumb up to the corner of her lip to wipe away the red substance, his fear was confirmed by the way it smeared across her skin.

Blood.

“Why weren’t you here to protect me, Chat? Why didn’t you save me?”, she said, looking up at him again and this time, with tears in her eyes. “I thought we were partners?”.

Chat couldn’t believe what he was seeing. His chest tightened and he felt like he was being choked. “W-We are partners! We ARE partners! A-and I always protect you! Ladybug, what’s happening?!”, he gripped her shoulders tighter, but was careful not to dig his claws in.

“Why did you let me get hurt?”, she asked him. Chat noticed something protruding from her back,
and slowly he stepped around her to have a better look. Nothing could have prepared him for the sight he was about to see.

Knives. Scissors. Broken shards of glass. Just about any and every kind of sharp object known, all stuck in Ladybug’s back, causing her to bleed which was what made her suit begin to turn a darker shade of crimson. Chat put a hand up to his mouth, eyes widening further, pupils shrinking into slits with his own tears starting to spill. His cat ears pinned flat against his head, and his tail fell limp.

“Ladybug, no…”, he shuddered.

“You couldn’t save me, Chat”, she told him, turning to face him. The blood from her mouth was dripping from her chin now and onto the surface of the rooftop below their feet.

“I…I didn’t know! I didn’t know I was supposed to-!”’, he began to sob. She began to faint, and he caught her just in time. Slowly and gently he set her down while kneeling next to her, the blood from her back wounds bleeding out onto the rooftop, creating a pool around her. “No! Ladybug!”’, he cried.

“You weren’t fast enough, Chat. You didn’t save me in time”, she choked out, and she went still in his arms, the light fading from her eyes.

“No…No no no no no no NO NO NO! Don’t leave m’lady! Please stay with me!”’, he cried again, trying to shake her awake, but she did not move a muscle.

He could feel a darkness closing in on him. It was cold, and empty, and numbing all except for his aching heart. He could hear whispers, growing louder into voices.

“You couldn’t save her!”.

“N-Nino?”, Chat looked up, searching for what sounded like his best friend.

“You let her die!”.

“Alya?”, but he still couldn’t see anyone. Paris had turned dark, the opposite of the bright day of sunshine it once was before, and not a single light or star shown. A desolate and broken wasteland it had become.

“Why did you let her go?”, that third voice was one he hadn’t heard in so long, and it tore him to pieces when the tone of it sounded like utter disappointment and devoid of the warmth it used to carry.

“M-mom?!”, he whimpered.

“You couldn’t save her!”.

“You let her die!”.

“Why did you let her go?”.  

“Why didn’t you protect me, Chat?”.

All of the voices seemed to be talking, shouting, at once. They rang loud and clear in his ears, and it only grew more intense from there. He gripped his head while staring at Ladybug’s corpse and let out a yowl as his tears flooded freely from his wide terrified eyes.

“No! I didn’t mean it! I loved her, I could never let her get hurt!”’, he screamed, trying to be louder
than the voices, but to no avail. He couldn’t scream over them, and they just continued to yell back at him, the closing-in darkness making him feel more and more claustrophobic.

“YOUCouldn’T SAVE HER!”.

“YOU LET HER DIE!”.

“WHY DID YOU LET HER GO?!”. 

“WHY DIdN’T YOU PROTECT ME?!”. 

They sounded angry. And the more they yelled at him, the more Chat felt like it was his fault. A fragment of his mind knew he wasn’t responsible for it, but it was all his fault. Ladybug just died, because he couldn’t save her. He couldn’t protect her.

“YOU Can’T PROTECT EVERYONE! YOU Can’T SAVE HER! IT’S OVER CHAT NOIR!”, now they sounded like they were all in unison, all one voice.

“NO! NO!”.

“NOOO!”, Adrien shot up off his pillow, his hand reaching out in front of him for something, but he didn’t know what. And his face was soaked with tears that continued to fall. He panted, heart racing, staring into an endless black void with panic in his eyes. He was visibly shaking. His mind reeled back into reality and he realized where he was, looking around his dark room, back in the safety of the safest haven he had. He gripped his chest over his heart, feeling it beat as if it were to burst from his body.

“Only a dream. It was only a dream!”, he told himself in a thought, trying to slow his heavy breathing and calm himself down. Though he knew it was only a dream, he couldn’t help that it all felt so real to him. Too real. Her touch, her blood, her body going limp in his hold. Too real to be a dream. It was a nightmare.

“Kid, it is four in the morning! You better have a good reason for waking me up with your screeching!”, Plagg griped drowsily and in the worst mood possible.

“I-it was just a dream, Plagg. About…About Ladybug”, Adrien said between his breaths, wiping the tears from his eyes with the heel of his hand.

“Ugh. Alright, what are you gonna ogle on about her this time?”, Plagg asked in annoyance.

“It wasn’t that kind of dream. In my dream she…she died…And it was my fault!”, Adrien explained, voice gruff. Remembering the moment his dream became a nightmare, he put his face into his hands and shut his eyes tight while his lip quivered.

“Kid, what happened?”, Plagg asked, now sounding more concerned than annoyed. This hadn’t been the first time Adrien had a death nightmare about Ladybug, however. He had nightmares for two weeks straight after Animan’s attack, always about Ladybug being eaten by the T-Rex and never making it out alive. But aside from that, such nightmares were few and far between. His nightmares the rest of the time were about his mother, sometimes his father, and sometimes himself being Akumatized.

Adrien had to take a few more minutes to calm himself and slow his breathing down. Once he did, he began explaining.

“Well, everything was all fine in the beginning. We were both hugging each other when she
suddenly looked up at me and I saw blood. After realizing that, I saw her with sharp objects stuck in her back, she kept asking me why I wasn’t there to protect her and why I didn’t save her, and she died. I heard voices yelling at me saying it was my fault, that I let her die, and asking why I let it happen. Then they told me I can’t save everyone, and I can’t save her. Those voices sounded like Alya, Nino, and…and Mom… I felt everything closing in on me, a dark and cold empty feeling, and I was terrified! I didn’t know what to do! She died in my arms, Plagg! And I couldn’t save her! It was all my fault and I just-!”, Adrien said, beginning calmly at first before exclaiming and sending himself into another fit of heavy breathing and sobbing. He had stopped abruptly in his speech and gripped his head with his hands once again, like he’d done in his nightmare, leaning too far forward on himself for Plagg to see what kind of raw emotion he had on his face.

Plagg had grown used to seeing Adrien cry, but even still, it was a very saddening sight to behold. Because the kid either cried a river, or didn’t cry at all; it was never just a few tears. Quietly the kwami floated from in front if his chosen down to his lap and looked up at him with condolence.

“Look kid, being Chat Noir has its streak of bad luck, but unless you’re under the influence of an Akuma you could never harm Ladybug”, Plagg said.

“Is that supposed to be helpful?”, Adrien asked through his tears while forcing a small smirk and a little bit if a laugh, trying to sound like he meant it as a joke, but in all seriousness he wanted to know what motives Plagg had to tell that to him.

“I’m trying here! I’m not very good with these things and you know that! I’m sorry you had the nightmare, but there isn’t much else to do about it. Ladybug’s good luck counters your bad luck. They cancel each other out kid, that’s why when there is one of you two running around there must always be the other, because too much of one can be dangerous!”, Plagg hissed at first, but dulled his tone down to something lighter but still stern. He should know not to get so offended when he knew he just wasn’t good at handling such situations emotionally. He really was trying.

“How can too much good luck be a bad thing?”, Adrien asked in a dry sob.

“Ever heard of Yin and Yang? You and Ladybug are exactly that, you keep each other and the universe around you in balance. Of course, it’s plain obvious why too much bad luck is a bad thing, because in a matter of hours this city would be in complete ruins. But too much good luck can throw everything out of wack just as easily, just by constant exposure to the stuff! If the world was put out of equilibrium like that, there would be much more chaos than the destruction five Cataclysms can cause”, Plagg explained.

“Has there… Ever been an imbalance between a Ladybug and Chat Noir before?”, Adrien asked. He seemed distracted from his nightmare, though Plagg wished it was a different topic than this.

“Almost. For a while, there wasn’t a Ladybug when there was a Chat Noir, and he didn’t know what to do without one. Little idiot!”, Plagg sighed.

“How bad?”, Adrien asked with a chuckle.

“They don’t really call it the Black Plague for nothing, kid. It wasn’t just a lack of cleanliness that started it”, Plagg crossed his arms.

Adrien stopped smiling and his eyes widened in shock. He looked down at his ring and the hand that was wearing it, wincing when he was reminded of his sprain by a shot of pain. He looked at it like he held the touch of death in his palm.

“…Yeah, it wasn’t a very pretty mess. And it wasn’t the easiest one to clean up either. One third of
the entire human population, gone because of my idiot chosen. Not that I can really blame him though, a lot can happen when there isn’t ‘balance’”, Plagg nodded.

“For the love of all things pure…”, Adrien muttered, staring his hand over as if he’d never seen it before. The thought of a Cataclysm forming in his palm and causing something so disastrous crossed through his mind more than once, and imagining himself being the cause was a nightmare alone. One in a few nightmares similar that he has had before, he might add.

“Ah don’t think too much on it, kid. That was like seven hundred years ago. I think. I don’t know, I’ve never been very good at math”, Plagg shook his head and waved a paw at Adrien to dismiss the entire thing, offering a shrug with his response.

“Still! Your chosen was the cause to the Bubonic Plague epidemic?!”, Adrien asked with a bit of a panicked look on his face.

“Technically it wasn’t all his fault. The world was out of balance even before he was chosen anyway, and he just made one little mistake. All my chosen have, that’s why they’re the chosen of the past”, Plagg shrugged again.

“I didn’t even know that I- I mean, that Chat Noir was capable of something like that! What else should I know?! That William Shakespeare was a chosen of yours too or something?!”, Adrien stared wide eyed at him, even if he was without Chat’s night vision and unable to see much of the black blur in the dark that was Plagg.

“You aren’t supposed to know, actually, but yes. The guy was too much of a romantic, and his plays were really secret messages to his Ladybug which like you, he was head over heels for. Do you really think “Romeo and Juliet” was about two random star-crossed lovers?”, Plagg just grinned.

One would think Adrien’s wide gaze couldn’t get any wider, but it did the moment Plagg confirmed his suspicion. “What about “Hamlet”?”, he asked.

“Just a trapped soul who knew a secret far too heavy to share directly. He didn’t think she’d understand”, Plagg explained.

“Julius Caesar”?”, Adrien pressed.

“Betrayed by a close friend of his that they both knew, and neither one of them could see the signs of it coming. It made him feel like death”, Plagg twirled around in the air with boredom.

“Oh my god”, Adrien beamed at the ring on his hand, and not like the way Alya beamed about Ladybug either. “Who was his Ladybug?”, he asked, knowing he wasn’t supposed to know, but it looked like Plagg was about to answer anyway.

“Anne Hathaway”, Plagg put simply, as if it were the most obvious answer in the world. And it should have been to Adrien, with his prior learnings from being home schooled, because William Shakespeare was only ever married once.

“This is crazy”, Adrien shook his head, wondering for a second if he might be dreaming again and none of this was real. It made him a little excited to think that his ring was once worn by one of his favorite English poets, but it was still a fact he was finding hard to believe. Was Plagg just toying with him? The kwami didn’t often pull pranks as much as he demanded cheese because he was just too lazy to, and of all times to do so, why now?

It also made Adrien wonder just what other celebrities there were in the line of previous Chat Noirs. He always thought he was the first one to be famous in his civilian life. Never would he have
thought someone like William Shakespeare was a black cat.

“Can we go back to bed now?” Plagg’s yawning voice snapped Adrien out of his thoughts and he looked down at what he was able to make out of the kwami in the dark, bright green eyes being the only really visible feature.

Adrien was silent then, remembering the whole reason why he even woke up, and in a fit of screams and tears at that. He was reluctant to go back to sleep again, but he knew that if he didn’t then he would be dead tired for school later, and he wasn’t about to have another unexpected nap in class twice in one week. Especially not if Ladybug’s death was plaguing his nightmares again. With a nod, he gripped the edge of the blanket that covered his legs and pulled it over the rest of him as he laid back down, head plopping into his feather free pillow. He felt Plagg curl up next to his head, and before long the little kwami was snoring again. But sleep didn’t take Adrien right away, his mind was whirling too fast over his dream. And it all came down to one thought.

Was it only a dream?

Or was it his intuition?

The next morning came, glaring Adrien in the face and waking him up before his alarm clock. He was groggy, his eyelids heavy from the earlier disturbances. He had only managed to finally sleep an hour before now, and his body as well as his mind were in protest to having to wake up again, but he knew he had to. He should be used to it by now anyway, with having those rare photoshoots before school and balancing that with being Chat Noir in doing late night patrols. But knowing that didn’t make him any more or any less tired. With a tired groan and a sigh, he rolled out of bed and shuffled his way to his bathroom, hunched over with sleepiness like a zombie. At his bathroom sink, he splashed cold water into his face to wake up faster, and it only seemed to work so much. It didn’t help hiding the bags under his eyes.

With a yawn, he brushed his teeth, and dressed himself into his usual clothes, as carefully as he could with his sprain. Jeans, Agreste brand black t-shirt, and white overcoat. Though with how chilly it was growing by the day outside, he figured he should start dressing warmer, but for the sake of making his morning simple he chose not to this time. He might regret it later, but he wasn’t usually bothered much by the cold.

Next, Adrien packed his school bag, wrapped his injured wrist in its bandage, and then called out for Plagg.

“C’mon you lazy cat! It’s time to go!”

“Already? Can’t you just leave me here for once while you go to school by yourself?” Plagg griped.

“No. If an Akuma appears, I won’t have time to run back here and get you. You should feel lucky you’re not the one who has to stay awake, you can nap in my bag all you want!”, Adrien crossed his arms.

“I guess that’s true. But wake me up when you don’t actually need me for an emergency, and it will cost you some extra camembert”, Plagg yawned, floating lazily over to Adrien and then disappeared into his chosen’s bag.

“As if I don’t feed you enough already”, Adrien just rolled his eyes and mumbled.

He stuffed his arm sling into his bag at the last minute, just in case he would need it again but choosing not to wear it now, and continued with his morning by making his way downstairs for
breakfast. As he sat down to eat, Nathalie approached him.

“Your father has instructed me to inform you that he will be leaving again for another business trip later tonight, and is expected to return within a week”, she said, tablet held firmly in her hand and looking as businesslike as ever

“Okay…”, Adrien agreed at first with passiveness, but then something inside him grew curious to know where Gabriel was going to be for that long. Perhaps it was his inner cat. “Did he say where?”. Nathalie looked thoughtful as if she was contemplating on whether or not she should tell Adrien his father’s planned whereabouts, and after a moment to think, she finally spoke. “Germany”, she answered.

Adrien frowned and looked down at the table in regret for asking. Going to Germany had been something he wanted to do, with or without Gabriel. In fact, his mother had wanted to take him there at one point as a birthday trip but with his modeling career, Gabriel forbade it. And unless Gabriel needed his son to model a new line of Agreste brand, Adrien typically wasn’t allowed to accompany him on his business trips. He knew it wasn’t the first time his father had been to Germany, but the last time he had been, Adrien had wanted to know what it was like there and since then has wanted to go there himself. At that time, he’d been a little too young to travel at all with Gabriel. And his presence has never been needed there in Germany for the whole time he’s been modeling for his father. He felt hurt that his father was going somewhere he’d always liked to see for himself, without him.

“Oh…Okay…I guess tell him I wish him the best of luck and a safe trip then”, he said softly, trying to keep his hurt from Nathalie by avoiding her gaze, though his voice betrayed him. Without allowing Nathalie to say much more to him, he got up from the table he sat at and gathered his things, heading for the car where the gorilla sat waiting for him out front.

The drive to school was short, like usual, but to Adrien the time it took seemed to pass by very slowly. His mind was lost to other things, and so he had been distracted. His dream, where his father was going, the thought of being even lonelier than normal at home for a week. Maybe he could use his lonesome time talking with Marinette after patrols, if it wasn’t too late at night. She never seemed to mind Chat’s company, and he could honestly say he enjoyed talking with her, because she showed him a side to herself when he was Chat that he didn’t get to see very often as Adrien. And if Marinette didn’t want him around, then maybe he could convince his Lady to sit and talk with him for a bit instead. He felt he should tell Ladybug about his latest nightmare anyhow, because maybe she could help him find out what it means and how to deal with it. She was good at that.

For a moment he hadn’t even realized he’d arrived at school until Nino was there tapping on his car window. Adrien blinked as he came back to reality and quickly got out of the car.

“What’s up, man? Something eating you or what?”, Nino asked with concern the moment Adrien closed his car door. The gorilla left until he would be needed again.

“Just thinking a little too hard, I guess. I got distracted. I’m also kind of tired too, I didn’t get much sleep”, Adrien told him, but smiled to show Nino it was nothing to really worry about.

Still, being the good friend that he was, Nino asked anyway. “Again? Bro, what kept you up?”. “Thinking about my mom again”, Adrien shrugged. And it was a lie, but a valid excuse. It was one he had used before a few other times when it was something he couldn’t tell Nino about.
“Oh. Dude, I’m sorry. If there’s anything you’d like to talk about, you just let me know, okay bro?”
Nino frowned and placed a hand on Adrien’s shoulder.

“Thanks Nino, you’re the best”, Adrien smiled again at him.

“Like a brother, man!”, Nino grinned, offering Adrien a fist bump, which he gladly returned. Nino
then put his arm around Adrien’s shoulders so that he would walk with him up to the school. “Come
on dude, the girls are waiting inside!”, he said.

Adrien smiled at the thought of getting to see his other friends, and especially Marinette. She may
have acted strangely around him as Adrien, but he’d come to really appreciate her as Chat Noir, and
was happy to call her a friend in both of his lives. He walked alongside Nino until the girls were in
sight, and they greeted them like normal.

“Hey guys!”, Alya waved at them with her peppy morning attitude.

“Mornin’, babe!”, Nino smiled at her, giving her a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“Hey”, Adrien returned Alya’s wave and remained where he stood.

“H-hi Adrien! Hey Nino!”, came Mari’s usual stutter.

“Whoa, Adrien, you don’t look so good. Another bad night or something?”, Alya blurted, eyeing
Adrien suspiciously.

Before Adrien could give his answer, Nino waved his hands in front of his chest as a sign to Alya,
and then whispered into her ear. “Dude said he was thinking about his mom again. It’s happened
before, and believe me, he’s looked a lot worse because of it!”

“Oh…”, Alya then looked at Adrien with sympathy and put her hand to her mouth. She felt bad for
pointing out how he looked and asking why.

“Don’t worry, it’s okay. Happens a lot”, Adrien just shrugged.

“I-I see you’re not wearing the sling today”, Marinette squeaked feeling the subject should be
changed, fiddling with her fingers and looking down at the ground, stealing quick downcast glances
at him.

“Yeah, I didn’t feel I needed to. My wrist still hurts, but not as much as it did yesterday. Just an ace
bandage for today. But I did bring the sling with me just in case!”, Adrien chuckled, smiling at her.

“I-I’m glad you’re feeling a little better!”, Mari smiled shyly.

“Sounds like you’ll have your hand back in no time flat, bro!”
Nino said while making finger guns at Adrien.

“Yeah, which means back to boring old photoshoots, modeling, and piano lessons. The only upside
to it is I’ll be able to do fencing again”, Adrien only sighed with a small roll of his eyes. He could
care less about photoshoots, they always took time for doing other more enjoyable things away from
him, like hanging out with his friends and other normal teenager stuff. Fencing was a favored sport
of his, it was something he always looked forward to and did with vigor. Piano wasn’t so bad, but he
wasn’t sure if it was an instrument of choice for him, partly because it also invoked memories of his
mother that hurt to remember. If he could choose fencing or something else more worth his while
over doing photoshoots and modeling or piano, without being a disappointment to his father, he
would.
“Oh. Guess I sort of forgot about that part. Still, I think I’d rather have both of my hands and be stuck doing something boring than to only have one and be left unable to do anything at all”, Nino said.

“You make a good point”, Adrien shrugged back at him.

“It would make being Chat Noir easier again too”, he thought to himself.

The four of them nearly jumped when they heard the bell.

“Time for class!”, Alya said to them with her bright smile.

“Babe, I don’t get how you can like school at all! Half the time I don’t even understand it!”, Nino shook his head as he followed Alya to their first class with Bustier.

“Anything can be likeable if you just apply yourself, Nino! You seem to apply yourself in getting distracted, do you like that?”, Alya fired back at him. What Nino said next was something neither Adrien nor Marinette were able to catch as they got to be a little too far away.

“Are those two always like this?”, Adrien asked Mari.

“Ever since they got together”, Marinette chuckled, but her eyes were trained on her best friend as she walked away with Nino. She couldn’t be happier for Alya, because Nino was a good friend and she knew he would treat Alya the way she deserved to be treated; the right way.

“A perfect match, then. Opposites attract, I suppose”, Adrien said with another shrug.

This jolted Marinette and she remembered saying something of the same lines to Chat Noir the night before, and her eyes widened at Adrien, also remembering the small connections she’d made between the two. It was a common thought among everyone that opposites attract, but to her, it was too much of a coincidence that she would say something about it to Chat and then Adrien repeats it the next day with what coincidences there already were.

“N-no”, she stuttered again. “I-I mean yes, opposites do attract, but I think i-it’s just because Alya is happy about today. Ladybug and Chat Noir were asked to visit Sol en Si, remember?”, she said.

“Oh yeah! Totally forgot! I’m guessing she’s going to be there to get something for her blog?”, Adrien stopped and spun around to face her. It was something he had momentarily forgotten ever since his nightmare and earlier events of the morning.

“Mmhmm”, Marinette nodded to him with her hands folded behind her back.

“You gonna go with her?”, he asked.

“I-I thought about it, but…I’ve kind of got something going on after school, so I don’t think I’m going to be able to”, she explained.

“Oh, that’s too bad. It’d be kind of exciting to meet Paris’s heroes personally like that at a time when they aren’t saving you from danger, but I don’t think I’m going to go either. Father wouldn’t be too happy with me if I did, being hurt and all”, he said and scratched the back of his head. “We’ll both just have to watch whatever Alya posts to the Ladyblog about it, I guess”.

“Yeah…”, Marinette trailed, trying to study him and envision him as Chat Noir. The vision didn’t come easy to her, because she was still unconvinced. Or rather, she didn’t want to be convinced. Adrien with cat eyes, and ears, and a belt tail all in black leather. With a mangy alley cat look to him,
and puns falling like rain from his mouth. No, the two were just too different in personality, she couldn’t really believe it. Yet something in her conscience told her it was true, that the boy she loved was also the cat boy that loved her and she kept at arm’s length.

Adrien gave her a smile and turned away again to head for class. Before he could get too far ahead of her though, Marinette called after him.

“A-Adrien, wait!”, she said while taking a step forward, with hesitancy.

“Yeah?”, he stopped and turned his head to look over his shoulder at her curiously.

“Um!...D-do you want me to carry your things for you today? I…I don’t really mind if you do”, she shied away from him. It wasn’t what she initially wanted to say, and inwardly she cursed at herself for it. Though she had called for his attention, she still hadn’t been expecting him to give it to her, not so quickly at least. She just said the first thing that came to her blank mind.

“That’s very kind of you Marinette, but I think I’ll try doing things myself today. Besides, I won’t get the strength back in my wrist if I don’t use it when I’m able to! It’s not as sore as yesterday”, he said, offering a kind smile with his response.

“O-oh. Okay then. Well, i-if you need anything, you can just ask”, she twirled her toe around on the ground and rocked her shoulders back and fourth in her nervousness, hands folded behind her back again.

“You’ll be the first one I ask then, if that’s okay”, Adrien chuckled. Then, he turned back once more, but didn’t fully face her. Instead, he turned enough to bow. Bow, with his arms held open towards the path to the classroom, accompanied by the signature “after you” that any gentleman would say to a lady. After all, it was ladies first right?

But for a glimpse, Marinette didn’t see Adrien. She saw Chat Noir. Bowing to let her by and lead the way. Of course with Adrien being a model, she’d be able to chalk up such behavior as him using well trained manners and being kindly like he should, but that was a similarity she just couldn’t brush off. The little voice in her consciousness from before was screaming at her now.

Adrien Agreste was Chat Noir.

She was frozen in place, like a deer caught in headlights.

“Marinette?”, Adrien looked at her confused and tilted his head.

He didn’t get a response at first.

“Mari. Hey, Mari!”, he waved a hand in front of her face. That seemed to have knocked her back into her body, because she moved with a small gasp.

“You okay? You look pale all of a sudden”, Adrien said, placing his left hand on her shoulder.

“Y-yeah! I-I’m fine!”, Marinette jumped when she finally realized the close proximity he was to her. She tried pushing the thoughts of him being Chat Noir to the back of her mind, but they wouldn’t go easy.

Adrien then put the back of his hand to her forehead, without a warning, while looking concerned. “Do you feel sick at all? You’re a little warm”, he said.

She froze again under his touch and caring demeanor, and not because of her suspension of him
being Chat Noir, but because he’d never done something like that before. It was her crush on Adrien that was making her nervous, and her nervousness was what was causing her to warm up under his hand.

“F-f-fine! I’m-! Fine! Class go should we to we’re before late!”, she stuttered as a heavy blush rushed to her cheeks, and she tried to hide it with the collar of her jacket, like a turtle.

“You’re right! Wouldn’t want to miss today’s lesson in Bustier’s class would we? But you first”, Adrien chuckled. Though she made zero sense in her jumbled speech, he still understood perfectly what she meant. He stepped aside once again to let her pass and she quickly did in a frantic power walk, but he kept up with her.

They both made it just in time, no more than one foot in the door before the last warning bell rang. They took their respective seats, and like a moth attracted to a lantern, Alya was leaning over to Mar with a big wide grin.

“So what’d you two talk about?”, Alya whispered.

Marinette however did not give an answer with words. Instead it was one of her flustered groans as she threw her head back and then let her forehead collapse on the desk in front of her. Alya only laughed at her friend’s response, as it was as good an answer as any. And not too long after, Bustier began the lesson. But Marinette’s thoughts wandered back to her earlier discoveries.

“Both Chat and Adrien sprained their right wrists, on the same night because of the storm”.

“Adrien bowed to me much like Chat does to me as Ladybug. If he had said ‘m’lady’ along with it, I would have probably lost it”.

“I’ve heard Adrien make a few puns, but not nearly as much as Chat does. Still, does this mean he is just as much a pun lover?”.

These were all the things she was thinking over and over again, trying to imagine the two as one. The only thing that kept stopping her was the near polar opposites in Chat’s and Adrien’s personalities. Adrien was friendly and open to others but wasn’t a big flirt nor much of a jokester, didn’t often speak what was on his mind just from learning where that gets him with his father, and he knew where everyone’s as well as his own boundaries were. Chat on the other hand was very outgoing and outspoken, a hopeless flirt and very much the jokester, and sometimes he did cross boundaries but he never meant it to be an act of disrespect.

Adrien was humble. Chat was smug. How could two opposites such as those come from one person? She always thought Chat acted the same as a civilian the way he does on hero business, but she did suppose there was the possibility of a duality; the possession of two different personalities, a persona, bipolarity. Those made more sense to her than Adrien Agreste being her Akuma fighting partner Chat Noir.

Marinette had become so distracted with it all, that she hadn’t even realized she’d been called on to answer a question from Bustier pertaining to the day’s lesson, until Alya elbowed her in the ribs and snapped her back to the now.

Seeing that she was finally paying attention, Bustier smiled and awaited an answer. “Well?”, she prompted.

“C-could you maybe repeat the question for me? I didn’t quite hear it”, Mari asked with embarrassment. It earned a laughing snort from Chloe, but it was nothing new to her, and she tried to
pay it as less mind as possible despite the annoyance that it was.

“The question was, what was the significance and moral of English poet William Shakespeare’s story “Hamlet”, and how can you relate it to us?”, Bustier stated.

“Ehhh…”, Marinette stared and blinked a couple times with wide eyes at her teacher. Hamlet? What was that about again? Although the play had been translated into the French language, it had still been a struggle to read with the way it was written. They called it Shake-speak, the way Shakespeare worded things. “Um…”, she bit her lip and tried to think.

Adrien turned in his seat to look up at her, and when he saw how lost she looked, he winced with a cringe at her being put in the spotlight. He knew the answer, he could save her the trouble. After all, it was the least he could do after what she had done for him the day before out of the kindness of her heart and without being asked to. He turned back in his seat and raised his hand.

“Ma’am, if I may, I know what the answer is!”, he spoke.

It surprised Marinette that he did, she hadn’t been expecting anyone to come to her rescue, Adrien no less. But instead of choosing to be stubborn and deny him the chance, she let him take it. She gave a nod to Bustier to show her approval. Bustier of course, accepted the switch-off, and gave Adrien the permission he was asking for.

“Well at first I thought that the story was about misunderstanding, miscommunication, and simple revenge. I had to read it multiple times in an attempt to find something more of it but couldn’t understand more than that, until last night when I…Had a thought occur to me about it and sudden everything made sense. I now think it is about a trapped soul that knew too much about a secret too heavy to bare, as well as the seven deadly sins, and each character represented at least one of the sins.

King Claudius was greed and envy, having killed his own brother for the throne because he wanted what his brother had. Gertrude I would say was sloth, because although she knew what Claudius was doing was wrong and unethical, she didn’t try to stop him and instead obeyed. Ophelia was either lust or gluttony, for her love of Hamlet despite the warnings from her brother Laertes and initially her father Polonius, which she ignored. Both Laertes and Polonius themselves were shown to have displayed a little bit of pride which is another one of the sins, Polonius for his officious and impertinent demeanor, and Laertes who later also shows wrath for his stance on the opinion of Hamlet as a person. And Hamlet was none other than wrath, because he wanted revenge against his uncle Claudius so he planned to kill him in return for killing his father. I could go on about the other characters but I’ll keep it brief.

I think the moral of the story is that revenge only leads to more revenge, and in truth there is never true satisfaction nor does one ever find peace when acting upon such desires. It relates to us because we should all remember that everyone makes mistakes and bad decisions, but it is no reason to want to attack or strike back at them for it. Our actions can easily be taken out of context, and when we do act upon the desire for revenge, we only end up hurting more people than we intend to and it inspires others to take revenge against you. It’s a very vicious cycle, but through Hamlet, Shakespeare told us what the consequences are of following it”, Adrien explained.

The entire class, including Chloe and Sabrina and even Bustier, seemed to stare at him agape with wide eyes. Not only was his answer in depth, it was also wise, and perfectly summed up the story that some of his classmates didn’t even finish reading if they had read it at all. They always knew Adrien was smart and even ahead of them in some things because of his homeschooling background, but even that was an answer one would expect from a knowledgeable scholar that knew very much about Shakespeare’s plays, and Adrien might as well be considered one.
“Very good Adrien! I never expect anything less from my students!”, Bustier said, then gave an applause, which the class followed and clapped along.

Adrien turned back to look up at Marinette again and smiled at her when she actually returned the glance. She was in shock, but he couldn’t really blame her for it. He had to admit that he did go just a little overboard with his response. He chuckled, and then winked at her with a smile as his way of saying that he had her back, and then turned to face Bustier once again. He turned too soon, but Marinette wouldn’t think it a bad thing, because he didn’t see the tomato red blush that filled her cheeks.

“Dude”, Nino looked over at his deskmate, but unlike the rest, he didn’t seem too impressed. Rather, he seemed a little envious. “You are such a bookworm!”, he said.

“It’s called reading a book, Nino. Maybe you should try it sometime”, Adrien just grinned while taking notes.

“Reading isn’t really my thing, books just put me to sleep. I’d rather be making something more alive and full of feeling, like music!”, Nino shook his head moving his hands like they were moving scratch records in a DJ performance.

“Well, maybe you can find some books about music? I’m sure there’s a few out there”, Adrien laughed.

“Call me when you do”, Nino looked unconvinced, making the telephone sign with his hand, and then resting his head on his desk in boredom.

The rest of the lesson with Bustier flew by, and lunch hour rolled around in a blink. Everyone went their separate ways as usual, though Adrien was left a little lost when he found that his driver hadn’t been waiting for him outside, and a moment later he received a message from Nathalie stating he was to stay at school for lunch again. To know these things in advanced would be wonderful, at least he could have had the chance to prepare himself something to bring with him this time. A sigh of frustration escaped his lips.

He knew his father was a hard man to figure out, but this was something he just couldn’t understand. What was so much more important than ordering his son to come home for lunch, like he had always done since Adrien started attending public school? Or had Gabriel finally had a change of heart and was giving him the freedom he desperately craved? Either way he didn’t want to complain, because his father was sometimes a man of whim, and could easily change his mind.

Sometimes Adrien didn’t know when it was alright to complain, and when he should just accept things the way they were. Complaining was something he was raised not to do.

Though upon hearing some laughter nearby, he lifted his gaze up at the familiarity, and looked behind him to spot his three closest friends walking by in the school courtyard. They were all laughing, probably something Nino said, he was usually a funny guy. Adrien watched them as they went about with him unnoticed to them, but he had that look that said he adored his friends and seeing them so happy.

That is, until it finally occurred to him that they were walking away without him and here he was all alone. His eyes shot wide and he quickly sprung to catch up to them.

“Hey guys! Wait up!”, he called to them.

All three of them turned with looks of surprise. Marinette looked more nervous than anything and
anyone who was not Adrien would understand why, but Alya and Nino were completely unsuspecting.

“Yo, dude, you’re still here?!”, Nino asked, but with a grin that welcomed Adrien into the group.

“Yeah. I uh…I’ve been told to stay here, again”, Adrien explained while scratching the back of his neck.

“Sweet! You can hang with us!”, Alya said excitedly and then eyed Marinette with that look.

Marinette knew the look. She knew that with Alya around and Adrien in the mix, things were going to go down in flames. She shrank under Alya’s gaze.

“Please don’t try anything like you usually do”, Mari mumbled with a bit of a pout lip.

“Girl, you should be over this after what happened yesterday!”, Alya grinned at her.

“Why do you torture me?”, Marinette asked in a squeak.

“You make it too easy. You’ll be fine!”, Alya only laughed, taking the leader role and having the group follow her to one of the benches they usually ate their lunch at.

Adrien didn’t really want to be a burden to any of them, being the only one without a lunch. It made him feel a bit uneasy and nervous to be there. It was one thing to have been with just one of them, Marinette, and her offer something to him. But another for him to be with Mari as well as Alya and Nino and ask for them to share what they had. At that point he almost thought of backing out, maybe find a safe place to transform unseen and vault around some buildings as Chat Noir, or perhaps let Alya catch him and give her a scoop that he knows she’d want. It would be better that way, he thought.

“Actually if you don’t mind me, there’s something I need to go do”, he said, and tried not to look suspicious as he began walking away from the group

“Dude? What do you have to do?”, Nino asked him.

“Nature calls?”, Adrien stopped and looked back to answer, pointing a thumb towards the boys bathroom, and then he shrugged and continued on his way.

“Oh…Okay then bro, we’ll be here!”, Nino replied. Adrien waved a hand in the air to show that he heard him.

Marinette had almost been tempted to follow Adrien, thinking that it might lead her to finding out if he was Chat Noir or not, but previous events prevented her body from moving. She had followed him into the bathrooms one other time, and if he really did need to use it then she didn’t want another encounter like that ever again. She had to shudder at the memory because of how humiliating it was, and just stayed where she was at. Still, curiosity ebbed at her.

Adrien slipped into the boys bathroom and checked around to make sure he was alone, and saw no one.

“No other male peer in sight. Perfect! Plagg?”, he spoke with a grin, then opened his school bag to look for the kwami.

“Plagg’s not here”, the kwami said in a snore from the bottom of the bag, and rolled over so that he could curl up and have his back to Adrien.
“Haven’t you slept enough?”, Adrien asked, grabbing Plagg and taking him out of the bag, then held him in front of his face.

“Cats sleep like eighteen hours a day. Has it been eighteen hours yet?”, Plagg grumbled with groginess.

“No?”, Adrien shook his head and looked at his kwami with a raised eyebrow.

“Then I’m going back to sleep”, Plagg answered, and began floating from Adrien’s hand and back to his chosen’s bag, but Adrien stopped him by grabbing him again.

“I promise you can sleep later”, he told him.

“Didn’t I say it was going to cost you more camembert if you woke me up when you didn’t actually need me? Why do you want to transform now anyway? Don’t you want to be with your friends?”, Plagg grumbled again.

“I do, but I don’t want to be a burden to them. I don’t want them to think they have to feed me just because I’m here without a lunch of my own”, Adrien explained.

“But they’re your friends. I’m sure they won’t mind sharing, not that baker girl at least! She did yesterday”, Plagg pointed out.

“Mari? No, I couldn’t. Not for a second day in a row. I would feel awkward asking. So how much is this going to cost me?”, Adrien furrowed his eyebrows together and glanced away, then looked at Plagg again as he raised the question of cost.

“Two containers for the unpleasant wakeup call, another for transforming here and now, and one more for the thing you and Ladybug have to do at the orphanage today. So four containers of camembert for my services, take it or leave it!”, Plagg told him.

“You drive a hard and pricey bargain but it’s a deal. Claws out!”, Adrien nodded once and then called the command. Plagg was sucked into his ring and he became Chat Noir in a green flash.

“Now, to figure a way out of here without being seen”, Chat said aloud to himself, looking around the bathroom and finding a window that led to the outside of the school. He went over to it and scaled the wall to reach it with the painful reminder that his right wrist was still hurt, and to his luck he was able to open it instead of destroying it. “Purr-fect”, he grinned, taking his leaving through the window and up to the roof of the school. Just in time too, before one of his male peers walked into the bathroom.

Chat strolled the school rooftop nonchalantly while whistling to himself a tune, acting like he didn’t just transform in the bathroom and escape through a window. He looked down at where he saw his friends, still sitting and waiting for him. He felt bad about abandoning them like this, but not as bad as he would making them feel like they had to share some of their lunch. He could deal with the hunger, so long as he wasn’t there for them to try giving him anything for it.

“Man, where is he? Did he fall in or something?”, Nino said in his wonder, looking up every now and then to see if Adrien was walking back to them.

“Maybe breakfast didn’t agree with him?”, Marinette piped in.

“Well…The dude is lactose intolerant, or at least he acts like he is. Wonder if he had something he wasn’t suppose to and now it’s biting back?”, Nino speculated.
“Someone’s lactose intolerant other than myself? Seems I’m finding more and more things in common with my fellow Parisians! But then, most cats are lactose intolerant anyway”, Chat said while descending from the roof to in front of them with his baton, and he grinned at them. “Sup?”.

“Chat Noir!”, all three exclaimed when they saw him, and then Marinette suddenly looked petrified.

Chat Noir shows up out of nowhere just as Adrien disappears. Come to think of it, she’s never seen Adrien and Chat in the same place at the same time, except for once during Gorizilla’s attack. Even then, Chat kept her from making sure “Adrien” was okay. Why? Was that even the real Adrien she saw?

And to add, Alya didn’t know anything about Chat’s nighttime visits to her, or that they’ve sat and had conversations with each other like old pals. There wasn’t anything she could do to let him know not to call her anything but Marinette, without looking suspicious to the others. She crossed her fingers behind her back, hoping that upon noticing she was there he wouldn’t say-

“Hey, purr-incess! Fancy meeting you here!”.

Goddammit Chat!

“’Princess’?”, both Alya and Nino echoed him as they looked at Marinette with confusion.

Mari pulled her jacket collar up again to hide her blushing face, and beamed a hard stare at Chat.

“Oops…I wasn’t supposed to say anything, was I?”, Chat winced with a grimace at his mistake when he saw Marinette’s reaction to being addressed by the nickname in front of their friends, who obviously had no idea about it.

“Now ya really done goofed up this time! Way to go you stupid cat!”, he thought to himself, though he couldn’t help but feel like there was a second voice in that thought, probably Plagg putting in his two-cents.

Alya got up and marched up to Marinette with her hands on her hips, glasses fixed perfectly on her face, and gave a bit of a hardened glare one would when scolding another. Marinette stood up straight like a stiff board and gave a big cheesy grin in response with a nervous giggle and her hand on the back of her head.

“Details. Now”, Alya demanded, pointing at the ground as a gesture that Marinette lay it all out in front of her this instant. She wanted to know everything.

“Uh, well-“, Marinette began to explain, but Chat cut in and spoke for her.

“I’ll explain, since I’m the one that let the cat out of the bag. Mari and I are pretty good friends! I’ve had to save her a couple times from Akuma, and at first that was the only bond we had. But I started catching her out on her balcony at night when I’d be heading home from a patrol with Ladybug, and that’s how we got to talking with each other more often. Now I visit pretty much regularly and we hang out on her balcony talking about random things! Isn’t that right purr-incess?”, Chat said, putting an arm over Marinette’s shoulders and pulling her a little closer to him, and smiling down at her.

Marinette looked up into his green cat-like eyes, trying to find Adrien in them, but it didn’t work. All she saw was the pun telling alley cat. Even if Adrien was kind and a friend of hers, she wasn’t sure if he was as open about much as Chat.

“Yeah…Sure…“, she mumbled in response to his question.
“And you didn’t tell me?! Girl! Do you know what kind of help this would have been to the blog?! I could have gotten the interview of a lifetime!”, Alya ranted.

“Calm down babe. You don’t wanna cause a scene”, Nino tried to consult, coming up behind Alya and placing his hands on her shoulders.

“One of Paris’s superheroes and idols is standing right in front of us, and you’re worried I’m going to cause a scene?! Don’t be ridiculous Nino!”, Alya countered.

“She does have a point”, Chat nodded, drawing the attention of the arguing couple to himself again. “Nino, was it? Maybe you should just listen to your girlfriend for once. I mean, she is the creator of the most famous blog in Paris, no? And the blog is amazing, I might add”, he explained.

“See?!”, Alya threw her hands to gesture at Chat while looking at Nino, who backed off with his hands up in surrender. If Chat Noir himself agreed with Alya, then who was he to argue? Alya turned towards the feline hero and gushed with excitement. “You actually follow the blog?!”, she questioned.

“But of course! Mari here tells me all about the amazing things you do for the blog, and I do recall you being caught in the middle of an Akuma attack or two. The Pharaoh, for example? And the new layout you two made is awesome, by the way! Really likin’ the new look”, Chat nodded to her with his Cheshire grin, tail swishing behind him.

“See? I did something for you, at least give me that much!”, Marinette piped in again.

Suddenly Alya perked up and crossed her arms over her chest, fixing her glasses on her face again and then giving Chat and Marinette a look with a smirk.

“Are you two, like, dating or something?”, she asked them both, pointing from one to the other and back, chuckling at the end.

Chat’s grin disappeared, and both he and Marinette went a little pale as their eyes widened.

“N-no! No, of course not!”, Mari exclaimed.

“It’s not like that! Marinette is just a friend! Besides, my heart already and always will belong to m’lady”, Chat added, placing one of his hands over his heart to emphasize his words.

*Just a friend.*

That was the exact thing Adrien said to Kagami after she and Chat stopped Reposte. Well, his true words were *very good friend*, but that didn’t matter. It was still the same thing. Marinette was beginning to wonder where her logic ended and her overthinking began, because she was beginning to see many more similarities between Chat and Adrien. But she still wanted more proof. Simple speech habits and the coincidence of one disappearing just as the other appears was not enough.

“If you both say so”, Alya shrugged.

“It’s true! Chat and I are just friends! Nothing else! He may visit often but it’s getting him to leave that’s the trick. He’s a lot more talkative than you think!”, Marinette said, crossing her arms as well and smirking into her last sentence while side glancing at him.

“Myouch. You wound me yet again, princess”, Chat commented.

“So why does he call you ‘princess’ then?”, Alya questioned.
“That’s just his thing. Remember the Evilillustrator? Because that Akuma was after me, Ladybug told Chat Noir to protect me. And since then he’s called himself my ‘knight in black shining armor’ all on his own”, Marinette told.

“And what’s a knight without a princess?”, Chat grinned again.

“Riiiiight”, Alya raised a brow again at them, but then shook her head. “Oh, what am I doing?! I’ve gotta get an interview from you Chat Noir! Please?!”, she then said, taking out her phone and setting it up for recording.

“I don’t see why not? I’ve got some time. After all, m’lady and I have got plans to go and visit Sol en Si later, so might as well do one now before my paws are tied again”, Chat agreed with a single nod. This was his plan all along to help pass the lunch hour time.

“Man, if Adrien wasn’t held up in the bathroom, he’d probably be ecstatic to meet you!”, Nino said, looking back towards the bathrooms again. “Maybe I should go ask if he’s okay”, he suggested.

“No!”, Chat said suddenly to stop Nino before he could leave. The three looked at him with suspicion and confusion, especially Marinette, which prompted him to explain his outburst. “I mean uh- If he’s having lactose issues, then I’m pretty sure he’d like to be left alone! You know, privacy and all? Take it from me, it’s kind of an embarrassing issue to have, and I would imagine it’s ten times as much for a model like him. Besides, he’s met me a time or two already anyway!”, he saved himself with.

The three exchanged glances with each other as they thought of the plausibility of Chat Noir’s explanation, but neither of them said anything to counter or question it, so it must have been believable enough.

“I didn’t really think of that, so nice save bro! I guess we’ll just have to wait for Adrien to come back on his own”, Nino said.

“When are you ever thinking though, Nino?”, Alya asked with that sly playful expression and a smirk.

“Babe. Ow”, came Nino’s reply to her comment and acted like he was in pain.

Chat let out a quiet sigh of relief, but when he stole a glance at Mari, he could tell she was still suspicious. Why? Did she know something he didn’t? She’s never really had reason to give him that look before, so it threw him off to see it. When Alya spoke again, it took Marinette’s attention off of him, and the tension that had slowly been building was eased.

“Chat Noir, you sit there, and I’ll sit here so I can ask you a series of questions and write down your responses for this interview!”, Alya instructed, pointing to a couple places on the bench to direct him and Chat did as he was told, then waited for her to do her thing.

Meanwhile, it looked like his presence was drawing in a crowd. Other students were slowly and loosely gathering around with big eyes and smiles, pointing at him and looking excited.

“I hope you don’t mind an audience?”, Alya grinned at him.

“I’m used to it by now”, Chat laughed at her.

“Alright, first question! How long have you been doing the whole superhero gig?”, Alya began, phone in one hand with the camera trained on him, and a pen in the other hand hovering above a notepad on her knee.
“Truthfully, only two years. Well, technically a year and a half-ish but we’ll just say two years to make it even. I wasn’t Chat Noir before that”, Chat answered, watching Alya jot down his words quickly, while still keeping the camera steady on him. It was a wonder she had that much multitasking skill.

“Next question! We all know you’ve a thing for Ladybug, but for how long?” Alya asked.

Marinette stood stiff board straight again and looked at Chat for his response.

“Since the very first day we met! That was the first time I’d ever seen the sun up close”, Chat replied with his Cheshire grin.

Of course it would be that way. Marinette was well aware of his feelings for Ladybug after he had told her about them, but she still hadn’t known how long he had those feelings until just now.

“Some of the fans have asked a few questions on the Ladyblog before! Questions like what is your favorite movie?” Alya said.

“Hmm. A little mundane I suppose, but if it’s a fan question, I’m happy to oblige and answer it”, Chat responded.

“Don’t overdo it you stupid cat”, Marinette sighed inwardly to herself with a small role of her eyes. Favorite movies had one their topics of conversation a time or two during his visits, and she had learned that he had far too many to count.

“I have many, but if I had to go with one based off of storyline and how well done it was, I’ll have to say Jurassic Park. It really is a nicely done movie for its time. Classics are always best anyway”, he said with careful thought.

“Another fan has asked what you have for hobbies. Do you have any?”, Alya smiled.

“Oh yeah! Besides doing hardcore parkour over Paris on my free time between patrols and fighting Akuma, fencing is a favorite of mine!”, Chat lit up.

“Dude, I asked that question! My bro Adrien’s hobby is fencing too!”, Nino exclaimed with a happy grin, making finger guns at Chat.

“I’m really not all that surprised. It’s a good hobby and an even better skill!”, Chat shrugged with a finger gun and a wink in return at Nino.

But Marinette was. Chat never told her what hobbies he had. Given the circle she was running in with the thoughts of Adrien possibly being Chat Noir, she found this umpteenth coincidence to be too much. No wonder his skills in close combat on the battle field were so good, and it explains how he was able to take on Darkblade’s knights by himself! Mentally, she was screaming.

Mari turned her back to the three, then remembering the few students that were watching the interview, she sneaked off to a more secluded spot where nobody would see her. And once she was clear, she opened her purse in which Tikki usually hid.

“Tikki, I’m still not sure about all this, but I’ve got a heavy feeling Adrien is…”, she said to the kwami, looking back up toward where everyone else was, hearing laughter. Chat must have told a funny joke, or probably a pun, and Nino found it humorous. She was surprised yet not, that they hadn’t noticed her gone.

Tikki however remained silent. She knew the truth, but she wasn’t allowed to say anything to
Marinette. Leading her chosen to figure things out for herself were bad enough, but at the same time, that meant she wasn’t breaking sacred kwami rules directly; never share information that of which you know about other miraculous holders with your own. That was how they kept everyone involved as safe as possible for many centuries past.

Marinette looked back towards the purse at Tikki. “I want you to go and see if Adrien is where he said he would be. If he is, then I’ll know he’s not Chat Noir, but if he isn’t...”, she said, and trailed again.

Tikki flew out from the purse, but with an inquisitive look at her chosen. “Are you sure, Marinette? Just because he may not be there when Chat Noir is here doesn’t prove he is Chat Noir. And you even saw the both of them at once in the same place after taking care of an Akuma, right?”, she spoke.

“I don’t think that was the real Adrien, Tikki. And if it wasn’t, it would make sense why Chat would use a fake, that particular Akuma was after Adrien that day. It also explains Chat’s strange behavior for not letting me go up to him and ask if he was okay, whoever it was that had both I and the Akuma fooled. And besides, you’ve seen him once before detransformed, so you already know. If you know it isn’t Adrien, then why are you asking if I’m sure or not?”, Marinette countered.

“I just don’t want you to make a mistake. I know I said last night to follow your gut about this and so far you’ve done just that, but you still have to take precaution as well. Don’t be so hasty. But if it will make you happy and at ease, I will go check. Wouldn’t want you walking into another boys bathroom again anyway now would we?”, Tikki told her, giggling at the end.

“If I could fly and phase through walls or other solid objects like you can then I would do it myself!”, Marinette smiled at her and giggled along. “Thanks Tikki”, she then nuzzled the kwami just before Tikki zipped off to do as her chosen requested of her. And all Marinette could do was wait.

Tikki knew Adrien wasn’t going to be there, because he was Chatting it up with Alya and the others as his alter ego. She had to shake her head at Plagg for allowing him to do so. But, like genies, kwami were to obey their chosen regardless the wish. So the best Plagg could have done was talk the boy out of it, and she knew with how lazy of a cat he was that he didn’t really try to, only unless it was something he was really against and obviously this wasn’t one of those things. And she was doing this to avoid telling her chosen the truth, letting Marinette make all the connections instead.

The red bug kwami passed through the closed bathroom door, making sure she wasn’t seen by anybody. The place seemed empty. No male students, no male friends of Marinette, and no Adrien. Just as she thought, but on the hope of it being an off chance it was someone else posing as Chat Noir like Copy Cat had done and finding that hope to be in vain, Tikki was still surprised. She flitted back the way she came, phasing through the bathroom door and returning to Marinette, who held her hand open for Tikki to land on them.

“Well? Was he there?”, Mari questioned when she brought Tikki close.

Tikki only shook her head to indicate a no, and so Marinette looked back towards Chat Noir with that knowing look.

“Then he is Adrien! He has to be!”, she said

“How else are you going to know for sure? All the proof you do have is just observations and nothing very solid”, Tikki asked.

Marinette looked back down at Tikki, and then to the side as she bit her lip with a look of
uncertainty. “…I don’t know. For right now, I don’t know. I can’t even talk to Adrien much without getting too flustered about it, and it would be way too awkward for me to just walk up to him and say ‘hi I know you’re Chat Noir because of this and that and other things I really like you and I know you like me too because by the way I’m Ladybug’. How well do you think something like that would go?”, Marinette rambled.

“Not too well, I would assume”, Tikki laughed at her chosen. “Not very many miraculous holders take too well to someone just blurtng out about knowing their identity. One of my Ladybugs didn’t like that too much”, she added with a giggle.

“Exactly! I don’t want to confront him about it. What would he think then? After all this time of me making sure we keep our identities a secret from each other, even knowing that he hates secrets. That would just make me look like a hypocrite!”, Marinette nodded.

“Marinette, you should know Chat Noir better than that. He doesn’t judge you for anything, whether you’re standing in front of him as Ladybug or as yourself, and Adrien isn’t the judging type either. I know that possibly finding out his secret identity is a big thing, but you shouldn’t be so worried about what he’ll think of you for that. It is only an accident that you find him out anyway, he can’t blame you for an accident right?”, Tikki consoled.

“Whether he thinks more or less of me if I tell him what I know, it still doesn’t dismiss the fact that he’s in danger by me knowing. And what’s more, is that means Adrien has been putting himself in danger to protect me, I’ve lost him before to Akuma in various ways, and I’ve rejected him many times…Wait a minute!”, Mari said after giving Tikki’s words some thought, peaking back around towards Chat and the others, then back at her kwami as she put her hands on her head and then all over her face in a panic that was beginning to grow.

“That means my partner jumped off a four hundred foot skyscraper detransformed and almost became a pancake! He- wait I just called Adrien my partner!”, she squealed as quietly as possible, and not the good fangirl kind of squeal, but a squeal one lets out from terror.

“Calm down Marinette, or someone will see you”, Tikki chuckled at her chosen while trying to calm her.

The school bell rang, signaling the end of the lunch hour, and causing Marinette to jump with a squawk from the surprise. With the noises that came out of her, sometimes she wondered if she was even human. Quickly, after Tikki hid in her purse again, she made her way back over to the others.

“Where did you disappear to?”, Alya asked with a grin.

“I, uh- phone call! Yeah! I’ve, uh, gotta make a delivery run after school and my parents wanted to make sure I knew!”, Mari explained.

“But you live like fifty feet from the school? Was calling really necessary?”, Alya asked and looked at Marinette questionably.

“Marinette’s pretty honest, I’m sure her story isn’t phone-y in the slightest! I believe her”, Chat said and grinned smugly.

“Don’t you have somewhere else to be you stupid pun loving cat?!”, Mari glared at him and yelled, though immediately covered her mouth in instant regret because through her discoveries, she may very well be yelling at Adrien.

“You’re right, I should probably get going, and it sounds like you’ve got baked goods to cell later!”,
Chat winked at her.

“Stooooop!”, Marinette groaned at him. She heard Nino trying hard not to laugh but when it got to be too much, he let out a cackle, and she got at him for it. “Don’t you encourage him!”, she yelled again.

“She’s right you know. Encouraging me is like feeding a stray cat; you do it once and they keep coming back”, Chat said.

“Sometimes I regret ever feeding you anything”, Marinette turned back to Chat again.

“Sometimes”, Chat echoed. “I’ll take that as an empty regret. But in all seriousness I really must away, maybe find a place to wait up for Ladybug for that thing we have to do today. Should I expect to see you there, Ms. Journalist?”, he said, and then turned to Alya as he asked.

“Count on it!”, Alya nodded to him.

“Yeah, I should probably go get tall, blond and famous from the bathrooms now. He’s been in there for quite a while and class is about to start again. Ms. Mendeleiev does not like late students to her class either!”, Nino said, again heading for the boys bathroom and this time without being stopped.

“Uh! Okay then! Maybe I’ll see you guys around some time! See you later princess!”, Chat said wide eyed and did a quick two finger salute like always before taking off in a hurry.

“That. Was so. AWESOME! Look at the views this interview has gotten after being posted just five minutes ago!”, Alya beamed with such excitement that Marinette could feel it coming off in waves, and she showed Mari the video in question on the blog from her phone. “It’s about damn time I got something from him!”, she added.

“Now you have personal interviews from him and Ladybug both!”, Marinette smiled at her friend’s joy.

“Yes but now the next thing on my bucket list is to personally interview them together! I want to know more about LadyNoir from both of them at the same time!”, Alya said.

“Lady…What now?”, Marinette asked and blinked with confusion.

“LadyNoir! It’s what fans and other Ladybloggers call Ladybug and Chat Noir’s romantic relationship with each other”, Alya explained.

“You mean the relationship that’s practically non-existent?”, Marinette laughed and sassily put her hands on her hips.

“You don’t know that! But clearly there is something between the two of you. Would you rather me ship you with him instead? What would that one be called? MariChat?”, Alya grinned slyly at her.

Marinette paled a little. If her assumptions were correct and Adrien was Chat Noir, then technically the ‘MariChat’ ship had some truth in it. “What?! No! Don’t be ridiculous!”, she said with exaggerated body language, waving her hands.

The only response she got from Alya then was mocking laughter as they went to class instead of waiting up for the boys.

Chat made his way back to the window of the boys bathroom he’d escaped through before Nino could get there and find him missing. He climbed in after taking a quick glance inside to determine
nobody was there, and let his transformation go. He gave Plagg a sliver of cheese before he could complain and hid him in his overcoat.

“Adrien, bro, you still in here?” Nino asked as he peeked in from the door.

“Yeah! I’m here!” Adrien responded, running his hands under the water in one of the sinks to avoid looking suspicious.

“Dude! You missed it! Chat Noir was just here and Alya got to interview him! And get this bro, he likes fencing as a hobby like you do!”, Nino said with a smile and walked the rest of the way into the bathroom.

“What?! And I wasn’t there?! Aw man, that’s a shame! It’s pretty cool to have something in common with one of Paris’s superheroes! Wish I could have been there to see him myself!”, Adrien acted surprised and exclaimed.

“Yeah dude! What had you held up in here for so long?”, Nino asked.

“I guess something didn’t agree with me. You know, being lactose intolerant and all”, Adrien shrugged.

“I knew it! I guess Chat Noir is the same as you, bro, so there’s another thing you two have in common. I’m kinda jealous!”, Nino said. “Well c’mon then, class is about to start and you know how Ms. Mendeleiev is about tardiness!”, he added, and left the bathroom with Adrien following. Adrien was laughing to himself at how convinced Nino was that his best friend and Chat Noir shared a lot in common and yet he hasn’t been able to figure out that they are the same person. He was grateful for that at the same time.

They arrived to class to find the girls already there, and just before the bell rang too. They sat down at their usual table, Nino being happy to not have to force Marinette to sit with Adrien again. She looked very nervous the last time and he felt bad for letting Alya talk him into it. Speaking of Marinette though, Nino managed to catch her staring, and at first he thought it was at him. But then he realized, she was staring right through him, and straight at Adrien. Intensely. Nothing like her stares from before. This confused Nino, and so he elbowed Adrien and then pointed at their midnight haired friend once he had his attention.

“Dude, she’s staring at you again”, Nino whispered.

Adrien looked at Nino and then at Marinette, who surprisingly didn’t shy away under his glance this time. He gave her a smile and a little wave, and that’s when she looked away.

“Did you know she knows Chat Noir?”, Nino asked him.


“No dude, I mean on like a personal level, as a friend. Apparently he hangs around her quite often, and they talk and stuff like friends do. Neither of them said whether or not she knows his identity, but I guess she’s closer to him than anyone else besides Ladybug”, Nino explained.

“Really? That’s awesome! I bet Alya’s jealous?”, Adrien said.

“Oh, dude, you have no idea! When Chat Noir accidentally let his tongue slip and called Mari ‘princess’, Alya almost flipped her lid! And when she gets jealous of somethin’, man you better take notice quickly or else she will make sure you know, and probably destroy you”, Nino said with a
chuckle.

Adrien looked past Nino again and at Marinette with a bit of a grin at the mention of the nickname, then down at his desk while he began to take notes as Mendeleiev began the day’s lesson.

“But if you ask me, I honestly think the whole ‘princess’ thing between Chat Noir and Mari is more of a kink than anything”, Nino whispered again.

Adrien then stopped abruptly and choked on his own spit when he took a sharp inhale at Nino’s assumption, sending him into a coughing fit.

Marinette had also caught wind of what Nino said and was blushing madly, her red face a shade darker than Nathaniel’s hair. And where Adrien was coughing because of the breath he took, she was lacking in it and left breathless. Next to her, Alya had both her hands over her mouth and tears in her eyes, face red like Marinette’s but by far a much lighter shade, as she fought so hard not to laugh. It was apparent that she, too, had overheard.

“Pfffffffft!”, Alya let out in her resistance.

“Whyyyyy?...”, Marinette said in a whiny groan.

“Whoa, dude, you okay?!”, Nino asked with concern looking at Adrien, patting his back in an attempt to help with the sudden coughing.

“Y-yeah! Just…Down the wrong pipe!”, Adrien tried to smile while speaking in between his coughs and pounding on his chest with a fist. After another minute he was finally able to breathe again and cleared his throat. “I may not know Chat Noir personally like Marinette but I’m pretty sure it’s not a kink. A lot of friends call each names, don’t they?”, he added.

“Yeah? Name one of ours that does so”, Nino dared with a smirk.

“Well? You and Alya, for example. You are more than friends, but you still call her ‘babe’ all the time. Is that a kink for you or is it only because you love her so much?”, Adrien countered with a smirk of his own.

Nino’s smirk disappeared and he looked over at the girls again, catching Alya’s glare and ducking his head from it. He could feel her hazel gaze burning into him with the words “don’t you even dare!” engraved into it. He turned back to Adrien.

“Touché dude, touché”, he said pulling his baseball cap down to try and hide his face from Alya’s glare, shrugging his shoulders and taking notes to ignore her until she looked away.

“I should not be hearing any talking!”, Miss Mendeleiev turned and let loose a hissing command, stern as can be in tone. The rest of the class sat up straight in their seats with surprised faces, but the main four jumped and shot wide beady stares at her. They apologized under their breath, and she turned back to the lesson teaching on.

Class finally let out after some time, and the group of four walked with each other through the hallway, talking about that day’s lesson.

“So like, apparently coral die when they get stressed out? Dude, what does coral have to be stressed about?!”, Nino said.

Neither Alya nor Marinette had much of an answer to give, or at least one that Nino would be able to understand, when they exchanged glances with each other and shrugged.
Adrien however was on Nino’s other side and grinning at his golden opportunity left wide open. Marinette could see him, and only one thought crossed her mind.

“Don’t. You. Even!”.

“Current events. What else?”, he said smoothly with a touch of cool.

Nino had to stop mid step to think about Adrien’s answer and when he finally got it he made a laugh.

“I swear to god bro, your puns are Chat Noir worthy sometimes!”, he breathed out.

“You’ve got to be kidding me…”, Alya had to pinch the bridge of her nose about it, but she was still smiling in amusement all the while.

“Dammit! He’s definitely Chat Noir! Only one person can think of that kind of pun and it’s that black cat! Adrien is Chat Noir!!”, Marinette thought while cringing to herself. She had to face-palm to stop the groan that rose into her throat. She peaked passed her fingers and stared at Adrien as he laughed with Nino, and for once she could see it. A black mask over his face, wild untamed blond locks with cat ears nestled on his head, bright green feline eyes and a cheesy grin to match. She could see he was Chat now, as clear as crystal.

“What am I going to do about this?”, she thought worriedly.
Scissor Hands

Chapter Summary

A new Akuma appears after Ladybug and Chat Noir have payed their visits to the children, and this one proves to be the most dangerous they've ever faced!

Can the heroes reign victorious before one of them pays the ultimate price?

Chapter Notes

Nya! Fricken writer's block! >.< sorry this one took a while, I had started it just before finals week and ever since I've had a hard time trying to get it finished. But here it is! Things get hairy in this chapter and brings us to the current timeline from the beginning of the fic! After this, expect to see more fluff and more angst! This chapter is another along one (with A+ puns ;D), and originally I was going to split it into two, but that would have left one of them much shorter than the other and I wanted to hurry and get this one posted, so I figured the length would be a good reward for the wait yes? I hope to start on next chapter soon and not take as long to post it. But enough of my rambling, I'll let you go read, so enjoy!

Sol en si.

Ladybug stood atop the roof of a building that overlooked the aforementioned orphanage she and Chat were to visit today.

And speaking of Chat Noir.

She wasn’t sure how easy it was going to be to face him while, possibly, knowing his identity. She was for certain that she had him figured out and it scared her, but a small fragment of her didn’t want to believe it and demanded more proof. She knew she was a person that took things at face value, but she was also the type that needed to see it to believe it. Until she physically saw Adrien transform into Chat Noir, her partner and dear friend, that one fragment of her just didn’t want to believe it. However, she still couldn’t deny what evidence there was, and it all made too much sense not to be the truth.

She stood there, waiting for him to appear, looking forward to but also dreading the moment he does. She felt butterflies flutter in her stomach that was weighed down by a rock. It left her emotionally confused.

“You look nervous? Are you okay, bugaboo?”, and so the devil himself has spoken.

“Hello minou. What makes you think I’m nervous?”, she turned and smiled at him, though it faltered.

Chat jumped down from the spot he sat perched on, and approached her with his serious observant face. He circled her, humming to himself inquisitively with a claw tapping his chin, looking her up
“What are you doing?”, Ladybug asked him with a chuckle, watching him walk around and analyze her.

“Tensed up body. Arms pulled in towards your chest. A timid posture, and visibly you’re shaking. C’mon LB, I’ve known you long enough to know when you’re nervous, so what’s up?”, Chat said in his observations, coming to stand in front of her and then placing his hands on her shoulders, looking into her eyes.

She crossed her arms, raising one brow and lowering the other, smirking at him. “Reading me like a book now? I knew you were attentive to detail but I didn’t think you were that observant, Chaton”, she said.

“Well it doesn’t take a physics genius to interpret your body language, m’lady. Especially when I know you pretty good”, Chat responded, mimicking her by crossing his own arms, wincing a little when it pained his wrist.

“I see. And speaking of physics, how was school today?”, Ladybug asked with an even wider smirk.

“You saw the interview, didn’t you?”, Chat said as more of a fact than a question. It was rhetorical.

“Of course. You aren’t the only one that keeps tabs on the Ladyblog, minou. I bet you made that Alya girl’s day”, she chuckled.

“I was the one that practically walked right up to her and her friends, I was in no disposition to say no when she asked for one. Besides, she’s gotten a one-on-one interview from you, so today was my turn”, he smiled.

“And what about your wrist? Is it feeling any better today?”, she then asked with more concern, pointing at said injury. She reached out to it and gently took hold of it in her hand.

“A little. Don’t think I can do any gymnastics yet though. It’s still sore but it’s getting there, I didn’t wear a sling today because I thought I didn’t need it, so that’s good progress!”, he said, letting her look over it even though it hurt.

“Right…”, came her quiet reply, and she seemed lost as she stared down at his hand with soft eyes.

“I’ll be fine. I won’t get the strength back in my wrist if I don’t use it when I’m able to! It’s not as sore as yesterday, I can handle things”, he said, resting his good hand on her shoulder again, and her eyes shot up to meet his again almost instantly.

Because those were the exact words Adrien said to her earlier. There were no excuses, Chat saying the same thing Adrien did was no coincidence, it was Adrien repeating himself. He just wasn’t aware it was to the same girl.

The butterflies fluttered stronger, and the rock sank further.

“W-well, that’s no excuse to go off and do something that could potentially do worse damage and slow the healing process! Do that and it will never get better!”, she said, hating that she stuttered because she only ever stuttered when she was Marinette, hardly ever as Ladybug. But this was different, her Ladybug façade was beginning to weaken and crack under the pressure of knowing Chat’s other side.

“I know. But with being a superhero, it can’t really be helped. You need me just as much as I need
you when it comes to kicking Akuma tail, I can’t just leave it all to you alone. That is what partners
are for, right?”, he countered her argument. He was far more aware of these facts than she realized,
and especially since he had the pain to remember them by. But he could understand her concern. If
she had been the one hurt instead of him, heaven knows he’d be all over her and acting like she
could break from a single touch of his claw, when she would be looking at things the same way he
was now.

“I know Chat, but crippling yourself isn’t worth the ri-“, she began, but he stopped her right there.

“I can’t lose you, LB. I have to protect you. Not just because the city needs your cleansing powers to
fix any damages made, but because I need you too. I would rather risk crippling myself than risk
losing you all because I couldn’t fight. After last night I…”, he went on, but then he stopped,
realizing what he was about to say and dropping his gaze to the side as his cat ears pinned against
this head in response. He reached up with his good hand and rubbed the back of his neck while
chewing on his lip, and when it got to be too much for him to face her, he turned his back to her and
walked a few steps away with his tail flicking behind him.

“Chat?”, Ladybug titled her head at the way he was acting so suddenly, eyes narrowing and brows
furrowing.

After there was a moment of silence between the two where Chat lacked a voice, she approached
him, her turn to place a hand on his shoulder this time. She tried to twist him around so that he would
be facing her again, but the stubborn cat wouldn’t budge, so to solve that problem she simply stepped
around him where she could see his face. He was looking down, so his eyes were cast by the
shadow of his hair. She went to speak again when he then lifted his head up and drew in a long
sharp breath, exhaling in what sounded like a shudder, like he was trying to hold something back.
Was he trying not to cry?

“Never mind what I said. I’m being ridiculously emotional right meow”, he said with his best grin,
wiping one of his eyes with a gloved hand. Though he tried to look happy, his voice told her
something else.

“Are you okay minou?”, she asked.

“No, I’m not actually. But it’s fine, it’s nothing to worry about”, he shook his head. As he went to
turn away from her again and focus on Sol en si, he felt her grasp his arm firmly and pull him back to
face her. It wasn’t in the demanding or a controlling sort of way, but that much more of what a
worried friend would do.

“It’s not fine! I’m going to worry about you now because I rarely see you like this! If you’re not
okay then you should tell someone, it doesn’t have to be me but at least tell someone you
know you can trust, because not being okay is something you shouldn’t keep to yourself!”’, she scolded a little,
if only purely out of concern.

Chat was silent again, glancing into her eyes and then avoiding them, swallowing harder than he’d
intended to. He didn’t want to tell her for fear of what she might do. Will she laugh at him? Will she
be angry with him? Will it make her afraid, or will she ignore it? He wasn’t all that much sure of the
outcome, but with how insistent she was, he might as well spill.

“I…I have…Nightmares”, he admitted rather embarrassedly, looking down at his silver toed boots
and letting his tail sway from side to side like a pendulum.

“And…Sometimes…Actually most of the time, it’s either me hurting someone I love, or losing
someone I couldn’t bear to live without. And you…You’re one of those people. I see things, okay?
And I can never prevent the bad things that happen to you and everyone else I’m associated with. It’s just... A part of my bad luck”, he then explained, looking down at the open palm of a clawed hand of his, almost as if there were a Cataclysm forming and waiting to be used.

“I can never control them, they just... Happen. And all I can do is watch. Some of it just feels so real, too real to the point that I wake up screaming, or even crying or both. Doesn’t do good for my kwami in the late hours, either. I think I annoy him too much with it. That’s why you have to understand m’lady, with how real some of these nightmares of mine are, I can never be too sure of when one of them might actually come true. That’s why I have to protect you, why I can’t leave you”, he continued, finally looking back into her gaze.

“Chat, why didn’t you tell me about this? I could have helped you”, she said while looking solemnly back into his eyes. He had expected her tone to sound betrayed, but it actually sounded more perturbed. It was a relief to know he wasn’t in trouble with her about it.

“I don’t see how much help you could have been. Purr-etty sure you would be opposed to the idea of watching over me while I sleep, and there’s just some I can’t tell you about, for the sake of keeping my promise not to reveal my identity to you. Do you have nightmares too?”, he said, and then asked with a brow raised at her from underneath his mask, cat eyes fixed on hers.

Ladybug hesitated at first to give her next response some quick thought. “…Maybe not as bad as yours, but yes I have. Sometimes it’s me running from something in the dark and being unable to see what it is, sometimes it’s us going up against Hawkmoth himself and getting our miraculous ones stolen away, sometime it’s about my parents and friends either being attacked by an Akuma or becoming Akuma themselves. And sometimes it’s about something going wrong and I’m unable to fix it with the Miraculous Cleanse”, she explained.

“How do you deal with them?”, Chat asked.

“Well, if it’s something I can be discreet with being Ladybug about, then I’ll talk to a friend about them and that usually helps. If I can’t tell a friend, then I’ll talk to my kwami, she’s pretty helpful too”, she replied with a sweet smile at him.

“Then I could ask you the same thing; why didn’t you tell me?”, Chat said and gave her a grin when she wrinkled her nose at how he turned it against her. “I’m only kitten bugaboo! I never expected you to tell me anything about them. You know I don’t like it when we keep secrets, but I’ll understand if they’re just too purr-sonal”, he smiled at her.

“So what was last night’s about? You started to say something about it but never explained. That is, if it isn’t too “purr-sonal” for you to tell me”, she then asked him, repeating his pun in hopes it would cheer him up, as much as it hurt her to pun the way he did.

Truthfully she didn’t hate the puns, it’s just sometimes they’re too ridiculous and what she hated was how he used them to try and impress her. Aside from that, she’d honestly admit that Chat just wouldn’t be Chat if he ever stopped punning, any time he did was always a sign that something was terribly wrong with him. She couldn’t imagine a world where he never punned or told a joke, or in other words, a world where he wasn’t on the outside who he was on the inside.

Chat’s smile faded and his posture slouched a bit, cat ears drooping a little too. He bit his lip again. “Sorry bugaboo, but it’s something I can’t tell you about. At least... At least not yet. While the other nightmares have been pretty easy to understand, this recent one I still haven’t figured out the hidden meaning to, and I would like to try making sense of it myself first”, if there was any sense to make of it, that is. He felt that if he understood the message, he’d be able to explain it better to her, and she would understand too. For now, he would only stick a pin in it and leave it there.
“Okay then, minou. You can tell me when you’re ready”, Ladybug smiled softly again, patting him on the shoulder to assure him.

His smile returned and he gazed at her with such appreciation and affection that it couldn’t be described in words, and something in the back of her mind reminded her, that this was Adrien looking at her in such a way. Of all people in Paris, Chat Noir just had to be Adrien Agreste, boy of her dreams. She retracted her hand and pursed her lips together with furrowed brows.

“Chat…I…”, she began to say, slightly fidgeting in place and trying to summon the courage to look him in the eye.

“Yes, m’lady?”, he prompted after she’d paused, taking a step closer until he was but mere inches in front of her, and at that moment he was looking down at her with how much taller than her he was.

“I…um…I really think we should quit dilly dallying around! After all, we both came here for a reason today, right?”, she spat out. Not what she wanted to say. It wasn’t even close to the words that were dancing back and forth on her tongue a second ago, but those words were held back by the chains of her mind. She wasn’t sure how she could admit to him about knowing his identity.

“Yeah, that’s right!”, Chat snapped his fingers. Never mind what she wanted to say, he didn’t seem to pick up on the fact that what she had said in her thought’s place was the completely wrong thing. But she didn’t care, it kept him distracted and now his attention was on the orphanage across the street, instead of on her.

“Are you sure your bad arm can handle things today? I babysit on a pretty regular basis, children can be quite a pawful”, Ladybug said with a bit of a smirk at him.

“Anything you can do, I can do too”, Chat grinned again.

“As long as you don’t do it better”, Ladybug laughed.

“You’re miraculous, and simply the best!”, Chat laughed along.

“And don’t you forget it, minou! I wouldn’t be my best without you”, she said, stepping up to the edge of the rooftop, glancing at him, and then swinging off down to Sol en Si. Naturally, Chat followed.

The moment they both stepped foot into the orphanage, it was an instant stampede of children, of all ages and sizes. They were all happy to see their heroes. The two of them were swarmed, hugged at the knees and the waist and the shoulders, by their young fans.

“Ladybug and Chat Noir are here!”, one child said excitedly.

“I want to get Chat Noir’s paw-tograph!”, another said, catching Chat’s attention very quickly with the pun. Paw-tograph. That was brilliant! Why couldn’t he have thought of that one?!

“I hope I can be just like Ladybug when I grow up! She’s so awesome!”, a third chimed, a young girl maybe a year behind Manon, causing Ladybug to smile.

“I know right? She’s amazing, isn’t she?”, Chat grinned, looking from the child to Ladybug.

“Don’t encourage the cat, little one. His head is big enough with my awesomeness as it is”, Ladybug chuckled.

“They’ve been looking forward to your arrival all day”, a woman said when she appeared. She
stepped up to the two heroes with her hands folded neatly in front of her and bowed her head. “It is an honor to meet you Ladybug, Chat Noir, I’m Julianne. I’m one of the caretakers here. The children have been talking about you non-stop today, once they learned that you might be making an appearance. I’m so glad you’re here”.

“Our pleasure, madame. We’re glad to be here”, Chat bowed back to her.

“We saw on the Ladyblog that you wanted us to teach the children about safety and how to stay free of Akuma?”, Ladybug asked in a statement, just to confirm that’s what they were there for.

“Oh, yes. We all admire your hard work in keeping Paris safe for us, so in return we were hoping to teach the children how to stay safe from becoming Akuma, as well as what to do when there is an attack”, Julianne nodded.

“We’ll do just that! These kids will be anti-Akuma experts in no time flat!” Chat nodded.

“You can count on us, we’ll make sure to tell them everything they need to know”, Ladybug nodded too.

“Merci, the two of you. I’ll be in another room just down the hall and to the right, so that I’m out of your way. If you need anything, just call for me. Behave, children”, Julianne bowed her head, and left them to their work as she disappeared down the hall she said she’d be in.

Ladybug and Chat Noir looked back at the children, who awaited the lesson with undivided attention and wide, bright eyes.

“Well, first thing’s first”, Ladybug began. “You should always be kind to others. You may think some people don’t deserve it, but kindness goes a long way, and if you’re kind to someone then you may inspire them to be kind to others. It’s very important to keep your mind open. Someone may try to hurt you, but you should never take their words to heart. People become Akuma when they feel great anger or sadness usually caused by someone or something else. Be honest about your feelings, but don’t let them rule your actions”, she explained.

“And always help others too. You never know when something will happen and someone needs you. If you see someone in trouble, help them yourself if you can, because the sooner they are assisted then the better. But if you can’t, find someone like an adult who can help instead, like a police officer or a fireman”, Chat added.

One child raised his hand, and Ladybug pointed at him to speak.

“What if I need help? What do I do?”, he asked. At a glance, he looked to be about five or six years old.

Chat and Ladybug shared a look with each other before proceeding to answer the question.

“You should always call for help if you need it and if you can. Only in emergencies do you call a police officer or fireman, their time is also important because they have to be able to help the people that need them, just like Chat Noir and me. If it isn’t an emergency, ask an adult or someone old enough to help you”, Ladybug explained.

“What do we do when there’s an Akuma?”, another child asked.

“If an Akuma appears, then you should stay indoors where it’s safer, unless told by us or someone with the authority like a police officer. Ladybug and I do our best to make sure everyone is safe and out of range, but it makes our job harder when there’s a lot of people to get out of the way. If you’re
outside when an Akuma appears, run to the nearest building and take shelter inside”, Chat spoke this time.

“What if the Akuma is after us?”, another, this time older than the last two, child asked.

“If an Akuma is after you then find a good place to hide and wave us down when you see us. We will get you to a safe place far from the Akuma. And if you see someone being targeted by an Akuma, only then is when you do not help them. The less people an Akuma has to target, the better and easier it is for us to handle. It is easier and faster for us to save just one person an Akuma is after, than to save two, three, or more at a time. This is another reason why you should never leave the safety of being indoors until you are told to”, Ladybug answered.

“Who should we call if we see an Akuma?”, another child asked.

“If you see an Akuma, then you should always report it to the Ladyblog. Ask an adult if you don’t know how. The Ladyblog is the quickest way to let us, and other people, know there is an Akuma attack. Report it as soon as you see it with a location so we can prevent people from getting hurt”, Chat told.

Then, Chat felt a tug on his tail. It wasn’t a very hard tug, but he could tell it was one for attention. Surprised, he at first looked at Ladybug, but her hands were nowhere near him, so it couldn’t have been her. That’s when he turned around to look behind him, finding that there was indeed someone there. Another young child, which Chat estimated to be about four years old with the way the child hugged her teddy bear— notably a black cat —to herself and looked up at him shyly, that wanted his attention.

“What if I turned into a scary monster?”, she asked, in that little kid voice that can’t quite pronounce some letters or words, so it made her speech sound a little slurred but still understandable. It made Chat’s heart melt at the cuteness, but break at the same time from the question being asked. Because it meant she understood what a person becomes when they’re Akumatized.

Again, he and Ladybug shared a glance, each contemplating their answers and communicating with their eyes. Ladybug broke the gaze and turned back to the four year old girl, looking like she was about to speak. But, Chat held up a hand in front of her, and knelt down so that he was eye level with the child.

“You aren’t a monster, and you never will be. Nobody chooses to become an Akuma, so just because they turn into one doesn’t make them monsters. Deep inside, they’re still people”, he said softly, looking from the girl to Ladybug, and back. “Ladybug and I will do everything we can to make sure you are safe and sound, we’ll come to your rescue when you need us”, he smiled.

Ladybug stood and watched him speak to the little girl with a softness even she never saw from him before now. It touched her heart, which she could feel swell in her chest, because if Chat was this sweet with children then so was Adrien. Which made her proud to know that he was nothing like Gabriel; cold, insensitive, and distant. She wondered how much it hurt to live with someone like that.

“Adrien…”, she thought, flashes of memory about the first day they’d met when he’d given her his umbrella because of the rain, reflecting his sweet and caring personality. One of the main reasons she had ever fallen for him in the first place.

“He’s right, little one. We’ll be there to help in any way we can. And the only one who is a monster here is Hawkmoth, he is the one that makes the Akuma against people’s will. But you will never be like him”, she said, also kneeling down and scooting in closer to Chat.
The little girl giggled and hid her grinning face with her stuffed black cat, which Chat noticed had a tiny bell tied around its neck with a piece of string when she moved and it jingled. A bell, just like his.

“What is your name, sweetie?”, Ladybug asked, smiling at the giggle.

“Ame”, the four year old answered as she twirled back and forth with more shyness. “I’m four”, she added, holding up only three fingers to show them, making it apparent that she didn’t quite know how to count yet. It saddened the two heroes to be reminded that the only reason this sweet little girl was there was because she had nowhere else to go, no family to turn to, no mother or father to love her. It struck Chat the hardest.

“And who’s your friend there, Ame?”, Chat asked, pointing to her stuffed black cat she’d been clinging to the whole time.

“This is Jinx! He’s a kitty, just like you! But he’s my kitty”, Ame smiled and held Jinx out to Chat to show him.

“Nice to meet you, Ame and Jinx!”, Chat grinned, taking the stuffed cat’s paw and giving it a handshake. Or rather, a pawshake.

This made the little girl giggle again, and then she looked intently at Chat.

“Are you a real kitty?”, she asked. Chat didn’t know what to say at first, he hadn’t been expecting to be asked that question and he’d never been asked it before. Or at least, not in the context of a four year old.

“Mmhm, sure am!”, was his answer as he nodded. He loved seeing Ame’s face light up with a wide smile and wide hazel eyes, as if he’d suddenly turned into a wish-granting unicorn from the planet Reespa right in front of her. And before he knew it, Ame had her arms locked around his neck after she jumped forward to give him a hug.

“Kitty!”, she said happily, snuggling her head into his shoulder and squeezing tightly.

It reminded Chat of an old memory, when he was a small child about the same age, back when his mother was very much a part of his life and his family was still whole. He’d found a stray cat on the street while out with his mother Emilie, which he could remember calling the cat “kitty”, and had brought it home. But he had not been allowed to keep it, so Emilie helped find a new home for it. All because Gabriel was allergic to cats.

Remembering a time in his childhood like that brought on the rumble of a purr, which grew into a storm that rattled his chest. He gently put his arms around Ame, hearing her giggle at his purring.

Ladybug also giggled to herself at Chat and his cat-like tendencies. She would say, if asked at all, that he hadn’t entirely lied to Ame about being a real cat because there were times where Ladybug swore he was more cat than he was human. And the line was often blurred between how much his kwami influenced his actions and how much of his actions were his own.

“I wanna hug Chat Noir!”, one of the other children said.

“Me too!”, another exclaimed.

And the rest followed. Chat was soon surrounded by them and eventually knocked over, but he was laughing all the while. He was on his back, being piled onto by the children and thus trapped, unable
to get free.

“Aw no! M’lady, help!”, he feigned fear and reached up for her to take his hand, the only freely moving limb he had, though it happened to be the one that was injured.

“I don’t know minou, they look pretty harmless to me”, she laughed at him, looking down from where she stood.

“Are you trying to imply that you’re abandoning me in a time of need?”, he asked, with a smirk.

“I wouldn’t assume that, but as an experienced babysitter, I would say that I’m implying you’re on your own for this one”, she knelt down and tapped his nose.

“That’s basically abandonment, m’lady”, he raised a brow at her.

“Not if I’m still here to watch you suffer. Abandonment would be leaving you behind while I walked away freely”, she shook her head.

Chat’s smirk grew wider when a light bulb turned on in his head. “Hey guys!”, he lifted his head and addressed the children piled on and around him. “You should give Ladybug hugs too! She’s a great hugger, Chat Noir approved!”, he said, looking back at Ladybug with a wink.

He could tell by the look on her face then that she was mentally screaming at him, and he found it humorous.

“Why you little…”, she mouthed, and before she could say more, she was being tackle hugged by Chat’s tiny attackers.

Now that he was free again, Chat pushed himself to his feet, careful to only use his left hand for assistance. He laughed and smiled when he saw Ladybug in the middle of a large group hug.

“Phew! I thought I’d never get out of that one!”, he mocked her by pretending to wipe sweat from his brow and standing with his arms crossed. “Don’t worry though m’lady, I’m not going anywhere, just gonna stand here and supervise”, he added to the mocking.

“Chat!”, Ladybug yelled, but it didn’t seem she was bothered about being hugged by about twenty or thirty children at one time. Chat didn’t know, he hadn’t taken a head count.

“We love Ladybug!”, one child said excitedly.

“And Chat Noir!”, another chimed.

“They’re the best superheroes ever! Better than Superman!”, a third added.

“We love you guys too”, Ladybug only chuckled at their enthusiasm, giving Ame and one other child closest to her a hug in return.

“Let’s show them the pictures we drew!”, a young one said.

“Yeah!”, another agreed with a gasp.

The children took the heroes by the hand and began to drag them both into another room of the orphanage, where there were tables lined with as many chairs as they could fit on all sides, and each table was littered with various art supplies from markers to pencils to paper and even scissors. The safety kind, of course.
The heroes were made to wait just inside the doorway as the children, most of them being on the younger end of the age spectrum, each ran to where their seat had been before Ladybug and Chat’s arrival to grab whatever it was they had been making while the older kids went back to their more sophisticated tasks like drawing, painting, writing and so forth. They ran up to the two Parisian protectors again and shown to them their drawings with pride. Almost every drawing depicted Chat and Ladybug standing side by side with big smiles, either holding hands or saving the day. It couldn’t have made either of the two more proud to see such a thing.

“These are amazing!”, Chat complimented while taking one of the drawings from a child that was handing it to him to be looked at more closely. He looked over the details, every profound scribble, and the use of colors. Or at least, whatever colors his cat vision would allow him to see.

The drawing itself showed him and Ladybug standing together with a little boy in the middle, no doubt the artist responsible, all three smiling. It very much reminded him of the drawing he’d made years ago when he was young and small, still in a frame somewhere in his father’s office, last he saw. Though, the memory of the drawing that showed how whole his family used to be was bitter sweet to remember. His smile of admiration remained, but in his eyes surfaced the sadness he often tried to keep covered.

And that was the reason why Ladybug was eyeing him closely from the very moment he even took the drawing to look at it. Being hyperaware of his identity and the familial issues he currently suffered from more than he’d like to admit, made her keen on reading into his reaction that now made a lot more sense. She was watching him, to be the first to notice if he’ll need her shoulder, and in hopes that he’d be able to keep himself together. Losing family was never an easy barrier to leap over, in fact it was just too tall to make the jump.

But Chat fell through. She heard that laugh of his which told her if he was okay or not. He was handing her the drawing before she had a chance to smile, so when he turned to her and handed it over, that smile was what he was greeted with. Perhaps it was better that it happened that way. Her smile brought the light back to his eyes again and that sorrow in them disappeared.

The other children then tried handing their drawings off to the heroes as well, all at once, and one even asked for Chat to autograph the drawing they’d done which he granted them their wish. After being shown fanart from their young fans they were invited, or rather pulled, to the tables and asked to draw too. Ladybug didn’t hesitate, given designing was a passion if hers and with that came a knack for drawing, which wowed the children with awe at her skill. Chat on the other hand wasn’t so lucky as to be equally artistic, using whatever utensils the children gave him as his tail twitched in his concentration, but he still tried his best. The result ended up being one step up from the one he’d done years before, but still much simpler and scribblier than Ladybug’s, however he was just as proud.

Everything was going fine and dandy with the visit, until the sounds of a squabble broke out and both Ladybug’s and Chat’s attention were immediately brought to it. At one of the tables were a couple of young children fighting over a pair of scissors. One didn’t want to share while the other demanded to use them, and it took the fight to something more physical, to the point where both had their hands on the scissors and were locked in a mad competition of tug-of-war.

Chat jumped to his feet faster than Ladybug did, and perhaps for good reason too. “Hey you two! There’s no need to fight now!”, he said as he separated the two by putting his hands between them and pushing them away from each other, biting back a wince when the child on his right forced his wrist back in an angry lash at the rival child. “What did Ladybug and I say before?”, he asked them as he looked from one to the other and back.
“You should always be kind to others…”, the two mumbled in broken unison as they looked away from him in a way a child would when they know they’ve been caught red handed.

“Kindness goes a long way, and if you’re kind to someone, then you may inspire them to be kind to others too. Remember that”, Chat said as he too quoted Ladybug, taking the scissors from them.

“And you should always share with each other as well. Sharing is like kindness, it too can go a long way and has a positive effect on the people you share with. You must understand that fighting over something when both of you want to use it is how people get hurt and get turned into Akuma. If someone is using something you want or need, wait your turn and thank them when they’re done”, Ladybug said when she approached.

“Yes ma’am”, both the children nodded, again in broken unison, also avoiding her gaze as well and instead stared down at the table in front of them.

Chat stared at the scissors in his hand with a face that was all too serious, images from his nightmare flashing behind his eyes. That feeling of happiness the dream brought him that turned into a sense of dread on a dime. Ladybug, being stabbed to death in the back by many sharp items and objects, dying in his arms. And the voices, telling him he failed to save her, when he didn’t know he was supposed to try. He wondered now if it really was a vision about a future Akuma attack, and that was what he just prevented from happening by ending the children’s quarrel over a pair of scissors, one of the named sharp items in his nightmare. Naturally he looked around vigilantly for any familiar black butterflies coming to take another victim under Hawkmoth’s wing and control, but luckily, he saw none. It wasn’t until then that he noticed his Lady giving him a squinted stare as she tried to decipher his sudden behavior and study his facial expressions, her own written with suspicion and worry.

Chat offered her a smile. “Sorry. Just couldn’t help but think of what might have happened had we not stopped the fighting over these”, he lied with a shrug while holding the small pair of scissors out to her.

“Were you just looking for an Akuma?”, she whispered to him, so not to alarm the children.

“Is it wrong to say yes? I can’t help it, watching out for a potential opportunity that a victim is infected with one has become a habit of mine, and a child’s and teen’s emotions are so raw and more genuine than an adult’s by far that Hawkmoth would definitely target them! We should always be at least two steps ahead of the game, m’lady! So we can tell Hawkmoth’s killer butterflies that they butter fly away!”, he said while grinning at the pun.

“And besides, you don’t want another Sapotis incident to happen again, do you?”, he then asked with that raised eyebrow look he always gave her when he asked a question that he already knew the answer to.

“No, I’ll admit I do it too. Anytime I see someone that Hawkmoth might go after, I find myself searching for the Akuma and expecting it to come fluttering by any second. And Sapotis round two? Definitely not! That attack alone was a nightmare in itself!”, Ladybug shook her head and looked to the side, then crossed her arms over her chest.

“Exactly. You never know when he’s going to bring a new minion up onto the stage”, Chat nodded before setting the scissors back down and glancing at both of the children to make sure they got the final message of no fighting, only sharing.

“Well so long as we have a couple of tomatoes to throw, we can easily boo them off the stage and save the show”, Ladybug made a smirk with a laugh.
“I hope you mean the actual fruit and not some poor un-fur-tunate soul with red hair”, Chat eyed her with a bit of suspicion.

Of course, Nathaniel was the first to cross Ladybug’s mind at that notion, and she frowned at Chat. “I would never! What makes you say that?”, she asked.

“Well you have been known notoriously for throwing me across Paris and at Akuma. I’m no redhead but I’m the only tomato you have before you summon your Lucky Charm”, Chat chuckled.

“Name one time!”, Ladybug exclaimed. It is then her brain began to break down the fact that she has thrown Adrien across Paris and at Akuma. No wonder why Chat was always so lightweight! He had the dietary regime of a model!

“I’ll name a few times, m’lady. You threw me at Dark Cupid, you threw me at Stoneheart which was our first day as heroes might I add, and I’m pretty sure it’s safe to assume you’ve thrown me around a couple times while I was under an Akuma’s influence besides Dark Cupid but those don’t really count because I don’t remember them. That is just a small list of the most significant few, not counting the times you’ve done it between then and now during any other typical Akuma attack or dangerous but mundane civilian situation. I do believe through those means and circumstances, we have both proven that cats don’t always land on their feet. Or at least, this cat doesn’t”, Chat listed off to her, then pointed to himself.

She didn’t think he’d remember so many details from more or less every Akuma attack or civilian dispute they’ve been through since becoming heroes. Then again, this was Chat Noir, and if her assumptions of who he was underneath were for sure true then that explained it a lot more. If Adrien could remember physics where she struggled, he could remember anything.

“Okay fine, so I may have launched you at a few Akuma in the past. All for good cause though, Chaton. And I’ve never heard you complain before either”, she sighed in frustrated agreement.

“I’m not complaining m’lady, I’m just trying to make sure you don’t go and throw an unsuspecting civilian because you mistook them for a tomato. I’ll happily volunteer in their place”, he laughed with a big grin, and winked at her.

“Don’t get too much enjoyment out of it minou, I might just throw you off a building to really test that ‘cats always land on their feet’ theory”, she told him.

“Please don’t”, he shook his head, causing her to laugh at him.

“Chat Noir! Ladybug!”?, they both heard someone call to them, and the voice belonged to a very familiar face. “Sorry I’m late! I meant to be here sooner but I got cornered into babysitting two certain little troublemakers at home! So, did I miss anything?!”, Alya stood doubled over in front of them to catch her breath. Obviously, she had ran the entire way to Sol en Si, and was now paying for it with a lack of oxygen.

“You missed LB getting hugs of death earlier”, Chat chuckled.

“Yeah but I’m not the one that got pinned to the ground and buried in a pile of children”, Ladybug said, pointing at Chat.

“Touché”, Chat shrugged.

“Dammit! I knew I was going to miss something good!”, Alya frowned, cursing under her breath with the awareness that she was around small ears.
“You also missed the big lecture about safety. I know that’s what you were after for your blog, isn’t it?” Chat said.

“Yeah, it was! Damn! Of all the amazing opportunities to miss, why this one?”, Alya fretted, pushing her glasses back up the bridge of her nose and talking to the sky as if the answer would be there.

“You could still do an interview. Y’know, ask a few questions like why did we agree to do this, or something to that extent. It’s not the end of the world, you’re already here so might as well give you some new blog material, right m’lady?” Chat suggested, coming up to stand closer to Ladybug and then elbowing her lightly in the arm.

“Alright, let’s do that!”, Alya smiled with excitement, whipping out her phone and setting it to record.

“Okay then Mr. Publicity, since you’re so eager to do another interview, why don’t you go first?”, Ladybug elbowed Chat back, and waited patiently for Alya to begin asking him her questions.

“So, why did you agree to come to Sol en Si? Aside from getting to teach the younger generations something about keeping safe from Akuma and during attacks, what else motivated you to say yes?”, Alya began.

“Well for me I just think it’s fun to make the little ones smile when they see Ladybug and Chat Noir for real. Nothing feels more pure than getting to make a child’s day by letting them meet their heroes. I had the privilege of meeting my hero when I was a kid, but I never got to show her how much I really appreciated her, and then she disappeared…”, Chat answered. He held that solemn expression that only Ladybug would recognize, though it was just long enough for her to notice before he switched gears again and put on a happy face.

“Does he mean his mom?…”, Ladybug wondered to herself.

“And what about you LB? I can call you LB right?”, Alya turned the camera over onto Ladybug.

“Sure”, Ladybug nodded with a smile to Alya, then went on to answer the question. “Honestly I have to say my reason is the same as Chat’s. The children were happy to see us when we arrived, and making someone’s day is always rewarding in some way or another. But I also think practicing good safety skills is important while Hawkmoth is still around, too, so being invited to speak to the children about it was an opportunity neither I nor Chat should ever turn down. Keeping Paris safe is what we do best”, she said.

“I see!”, Alya beamed, but then she made that mischievous grin that Marinette was never the more familiar with, and the only thought to cross Ladybug’s mind upon seeing it was but two words. “Oh no”.

“So when’s the wedding? And since it’s so apparent that you two like children, how many would you plan to have if any at all? All in the future, of course, when Hawkmoth isn’t a threat and Paris is safe again”, and there it was, the question Ladybug knew was coming just by the grin, flying from Alya’s mouth.

Ladybug still stiffened. But Chat, on the other hand, was smirking at her. He was going to have fun teasing her about this.

“M’lady’s heart has been captured by another, so I’ll have to win her over first, possibly by fighting my rival in question to the death. And technically there can’t be a wedding until I propose, which I
can’t do until I’ve won because really it’s disrespectful to propose to a woman whose heart doesn’t beat for you, and I’d prefer to prove myself by challenging my rival instead of beating him to it. Proposals and death matches aside though, I’m thinking the wedding theme should be something that is a mix between subtle and fancy. Nothing too formal or flashy, but nothing casual. Color scheme should resemble yours truly, of course, red with black and maybe a hint of green and blue somewhere. But it shouldn’t be overpowering, to help with that subtleness. And I vote we have croissants instead of cake! While anything and everything made at the well known Dupain-Cheng bakery is a delicacy, their croissants are paws down the best I’ve had the privilege of tasting for myself. Oh, and for party favors? How about kittens? Cute little stray kittens in need of a good home, because you can never adopt too many cats and kittens are really adorable!”, Chat said.

“I involuntarily adopted you and just one of you is enough!”, Ladybug groaned at him.

“But kittens, m’lady! You can’t deny their cuteness! And anything that cute deserves a home!”, Chat argued.

“I don’t hear her opposing!”, Alya chimed.

“Isn’t being partners in justice with this cat about the same as being married to him?! A wedding isn’t needed when he’s already glued to my hip!”, Ladybug retorted.

“Alright then, let’s skip ahead to after the honeymoon! How many little troublemakers of your own would you have?”, Alya laughed.

Chat smirked again.

“I’m thinking three”, he answered. But that’s when Ladybug reached down and grabbed him by the wrist—the injured one -and held a very firm grip on it, to show her disapproval. Adrien or not, she didn’t find it very endearing of him to answer the question so openly to potentially all if Paris through the means of the blog. This made Chat clam up instantly as he closed his mouth to stifle a whimper and tried to mask it with a smile.

“Or…None…We are superheroes after all and we can’t really be too far apart from one another when danger is afoot and nobody can know our identities so a babysitter is out of the question ergo no children is probably best!”, he said really quickly with a strained voice, in hopes that the sooner he showed his Lady that he got the message she was sending, the sooner she would let go and he could have his wrist back.

“Oh, that’s too bad, but you raise a good point”, Alya said.

Ladybug let go and Chat held his wrist to his chest and protected it with his other hand, while looking at her with a pout and mouthing “ow” to her silently.

“Sorry, but being a superhero is a full time job on its own, I don’t think Chaton and I would have much time to care for one child let alone three. And he and I aren’t anything beyond good friends anyway, so something as serious as parenthood between the two of us is very unlikely to happen”, she crossed her arms while she eyed him.

“One day! One day I will win your affections and send the other guy packing! And I won’t give up until I lose!”, Chat claimed.

“Just don’t cause another Copycat in the process!”, Ladybug rolled her eyes.

“But then it wouldn’t be a very fair fight if he and I aren’t equally matched, m’lady”, Chat joked.
Ladybug was silent for a moment before speaking her next words more carefully, and rather soft. “Actually, you and him are pretty equal in just about everything…”, she said, not meeting his gaze.

“Although it would be kind of amusing to see you try to fight yourself instead of a lookalike Akuma, like a cat when it sees its reflection for the first time”, she thought with a giggle to herself.

And Chat’s stunned face didn’t help her much in keeping the giggle a secret, as when she looked at him again, it morphed into a laugh. She knew Chat never thought he was better than or above anyone else just because he was a hero with powers and her partner, but she wouldn’t put it past him to fight whatever rivals of love he had in order to be the last one of them standing, just to win her heart in a rite. To have one as equal in all aspects as himself was obviously a surprise to him.

“What’s the matter minou? Cat got your tongue?”, she laughed at him.

His face went from stunned shock to deep red, flustered, not quite embarrassment but something of the sort. He did the turtle neck, where his shoulders shrugged up to his cheeks and his chin turned downward, making it look like he didn’t have a neck at all. And with that, came a slur of muffled but incoherent words from his tight lips, and his gaze wandered to anywhere but her. His cat ears were drawn backward and nearly flattened against his head, and the last few inches of his tail was kinked in several places to show what he was feeling.

Both Ladybug and Alya laughed at his reaction. Ladybug had one arm crossed over her stomach and the other held her hand to her mouth in a very feeble attempt to hide it, whereas Alya was the complete opposite and was nearly doubled over as she laughed hard and yet tried to keep her phone steady in her hand. Chat made a pout face with a frown towards them at first, but then smiled and joined in their laughter. It wasn’t meant to humiliate him, but he did have to admit that he was easy to tease when the right words were used, such as when Ladybug uses one of his own puns against him in a bit of a flirtatious way.

“You two certainly act like a married couple! It really confuses the fans about your relationship!”, Alya said when she finally had a moment to breathe.

“That’s just our friendship dynamic. Chat is pretty sincere but other than that it doesn’t really mean anything, only the kind of banter best friends have with each other”, Ladybug explained, Chat nodding along with her.

Then Alya turned the camera onto herself. “I still ship these two religiously!”, she said with a grin, and turned it back onto the heroes once more.

Ladybug let out a short huff through her nose and shook her head, but had a crooked smile anyway. Alya shipped her with Chat Noir about as much as she shipped Marinette with Adrien. When she turned to look at Chat, she saw his attention was elsewhere. Another one of the children brought to him a drawing they’d made of him and Ladybug saving the day.

Chat oohed and awed at the drawing and acted very impressed with it, as if it were one of Vincent Van Gogh’s works. It made the child happy to see Chat so excited by something they made, clapping to show for it.

“You’ve signed it and everything! Would you mind if I took this home and put it on my wall, Jake?”, Chat asked, knowing the child’s name just by the sloppy but still legible signature on the crayon drawing.

“Can I trade it for an autograph Mister Chat Noir?”, Jake asked a bit shyly.
“Just Chat Noir is fine, Mister is my father. Do you have a crayon and a piece of paper?”, Chat shook his head and then winked.

“Uh huh!”, Jake nodded excitedly and bounced away to get what Chat had asked for, bringing the things back to him in a hurried manner and handing them to him immediately.

Chat tucked the drawing in between his flank and his belt so that it was safely out of the way, and took the paper and crayon. Though, he no sooner realized that giving an autograph was the hardest thing to do when your writing hand was too injured to use properly. He cursed at himself and switched to writing with his left, an unnatural feeling that made him grind his teeth. Mustering up what he could remember about writing with his left from his homeschooling days and using as fluent a motion as he could possibly manage, he slowly signed his name onto the paper with the crayon, which was ironically noir in color. He dotted the i in his name with a cat paw as a finishing touch, and then handed the paper as well as the crayon back to Jake. It wasn’t his best work, but so little about it could be helped. And it didn’t matter, because as long as it was still his signature, it made Jake a very happy kid.

And during the exchange between her partner and the boy she judged to be about seven years old, Ladybug had that soft smile of pride on her face, and love in her eyes if one knew to look for it. It was the sweetest thing she’d ever seen.

“I don’t know how I didn’t see it was you before…Adrien”, she thought to herself.

Their visit went on a little longer. Ladybug sat down and drew pictures with the children and wowed them with her artistic abilities yet again. Chat was dragged into playing a game of tag, with the made up rule that he had to give at least one of the children a ride on his shoulders when he was it. And Alya let a couple children have the spotlight as a bonus to her interview with Ladybug and Chat for the blog, asking them simple questions like why they liked Ladybug and Chat Noir and which one of the two was their absolute favorite, and if they enjoyed the visit. But eventually, all good things must end. The three teens bid their farewells, got in some last minute hugs from Ame and a few others, and left.

“See you later LB! And thanks for your time!”, Alya waved them off when she and the two heroes went their separate ways.

Chat and Ladybug waved back to her as they parkoured away and came to a stop on top of a building.

“That was quite the interesting experience. I didn’t think kids appreciated us that much. I hope we made the impact we were asked to make with teaching them a few things about safety”, Chat was the first to speak.

“And I didn’t think you were that good with kids, Chaton. I think you made them really happy just being there”, Ladybug smiled at him.

“So did you, bugaboo. You were amazing too!”, Chat mirrored the smile back to her.

“How is your wrist?”, she asked with new concern.

“It’s fine. Though if you had squeezed it a little harder back there, it probably would have snapped in half!”, he answered.

“I’m sorry. But it was the fastest way I could think of to keep you from saying those things to Miss Reporter! Not everyone on the Ladyblog needs to be given any ideas about what we are!”, she
apologized.

“It’s okay m’lady, I definitely understood your point. I would rather it be my sprained wrist than my throat!” he said, then grinned and laughed.

“I’m not *that* violent!”, Ladybug tapped his bell, making it jingle, and smirking all the while. “We both should go home to let our kwami recharge before patrol tonight, I’ve got some things I need to do anyway”, she then added while beginning to walk away from him.

But she didn’t hear a response. No pun, no witty remark, no adieu. She turned back to look and see if he was even there, or if he had run off. He was still in the same spot he had been standing in, but was looking off to the side at the distance, a frown on his face.

“Chat?”, she tilted her head, turning around fully to face him again and carefully walking up to him. “Chat, if I said or did something that upset you I’m sor-“ she began to say, until he cut her off.

“Do you ever get the feeling that something is about to happen? Something bad, but you just don’t know what it is?”, he asked her, looking back at her with the most serious expression she had ever seen on him. That’s when she knew he wasn’t fooling around.

“Is something wrong?”, she spoke quietly to him and looked around for anything suspicious.

“I don’t know. Everything just feels…Off. Call it cat’s intuition, but I can feel it in the air and my body. Something is about to happen and I don’t think it’s something good”, he shook his head.

The two turned and put their backs against one another, keeping an eye out where the other couldn’t see. However, the only thing they were met with was silence.

And that was the problem, they realized.

There were no birds chirping, no hustle and bustle on the street, not even a breeze blew and that left the air statue-still. It was just too quiet.

Chat’s cat ears twitched like radars to try and pick up on a sound or movement, while his eyes scanned across Paris keenly without a blink. Ladybug had her hand on her yoyo, ready to bring it into use, as she too panned her gaze across the area as far as she could see. After a few more minutes of being a couple of edgy vigilante, they turned around once again to look at each other.

“I didn’t see anything. Did you?”, Ladybug asked with a shake of her head.

“No. Must have been a fluke”, Chat shrugged.

“Well, if you feel something is wrong again, call me and I’ll-“, she went to leave again, when Chat suddenly tackled her to the ground of the rooftop.

“LOOK OUT!”, he shouted as they went down. Ladybug landed first, with Chat beside her, and his arm across her back protectively.

They both looked up and behind them to see what it was Chat made them dodge. A pair of abnormally large scissors, metallic in color and shiny enough to hold their reflections, were stuck in the roof where they had been standing only moments ago. Ladybug got to her feet immediately and was prepared to do battle, but Chat…

Chat was staring at the sharp projectile intensely with wide eyes, his heart quickening in his chest, his blood pounding in his ears. It brought more flashbacks of his most recent and unpleasant nightmare
into his mind once again, just when he had started to forget about it. He couldn’t stop his breath from hitching in his throat.

And he was practically a sitting duck.

“Get up, Chat!” Ladybug ordered him, quickly spotting their assailant responsible for nearly decapitating them with a giant pair of scissors, spinning her yoyo in readied defense. “You were right, there’s an Akuma!”

Hovering in the sky was said Akuma, seeming to possess some sort of antigravity power, a control over flight. He was dressed in a white uniform, embroidered with Hawkmoth’s signature colors of purples, fuchsia, and blues, and he wore an apron blacker than the night itself that held various weapons and tools in its pockets. The Akuma also sported a handlebar style mustache that had long ends which curled over in an upward circular fashion. He had his hands behind his back while he stared down at his enemies, Ladybug and Chat Noir, with a sinister smirk.

Chat struggled to his feet. Not just because of his injured wrist, but because he was shaken up by the attack they had just narrowly missed. When he was finally up, the only thing he did was stare at the Akuma in sheer horror. He felt his chest tighten when his heart skipped a beat upon seeing the Akuma remove his hands from behind his back, revealing each of his fingers to have been replaced by blades of scissors.

“Behold, I am Scissor Hands, and I believe you have something that I need! Give me your miraculous, and this situation won’t get hairy”, the Akuma spoke.

“Is that the barber from Beau Cheveux & Barbe?! Why did he get Akumatized?!”, Ladybug questioned.

“I d… I don’t know! Maybe another not so happy customer like with Roboticon?”, Chat answered, his voice cracking at first, but he corrected his tone. Yet when he looked at her and she back at him, there was still the fear in his eyes and she caught it.

“Well whatever the reason, he’s not taking our miraculous! Can you fight?”, she asked him.

He knew what she meant by the question and looked down at his injured wrist, flexing his hand to test the limits of movement he had with it. His hissed when he felt sharp pain, but other than that it was enough for basic maneuvers.

“Not like I have a choice in the matter now! I’m gonna have to wing this one and just hope we can beat him!”, he explained, removing his baton from where it sat on his belt and extending it into a staff for defense.

Ladybug’s attention drifted from the Akuma above their heads to the orphanage they’d just came from, and then back to the Akuma who called himself Scissor Hands. She analyzed what weapons he had access to, and it looked like mostly scissors and sharp objects used for throwing or launching at his adversaries. Hawkmoth must be desperate if he let someone become an Akuma this dangerous. She looked at Chat again.

“We have to run!”, she told him, bringing the spinning of her yoyo to a stop.

“What?! Aren’t we going to stop this guy?!”, Chat asked with bewilderment. The only time they retreated from a battle was when their miraculous was running out of time and their kwami needed to recharge, in which case they were not under those circumstances at the moment, they had plenty of time left until they used their special ability. And Ladybug never ran from a fight unless she
absolutely had to. It was because of Chat’s encouragement during Stoneheart’s attack that she was a very determined fighter intent on winning, no matter the cost.

“We will! But not here”, Ladybug assured him, her eyes flicking from him to the orphanage just long enough for him to catch her drift and then back at him. “We need him to follow us to where there aren’t so many lives at risk”, she said, then cast her yoyo out at a nearby building and swung away.

Chat looked quickly back at Sol en Si when he understood Ladybug’s decision to run, and then up at the Akuma. He made a smirk and sent a two fingered salute towards Scissor Hands, which was something to provoke the Akuma into tailing them, before following his partner across the rooftops.

Scissor Hands did not disappoint.

“Doing this the hard way are we? Guess I’ll have to cut you off from your miraculous by force!”, he yelled at them as he pursued.

“Great, an Akuma who loves puns about as much as I do…”, Chat hissed at that, coming up alongside Ladybug on a stretch of rooftop in a sprint.

“Don’t be so bitter minou, yours are still better!”, Ladybug told him.

“I take that with great purride, m’lady!”, Chat grinned, just before they came to the edge and leapt off together, Ladybug swinging by her yoyo and him using his baton the best he could with what grip he had in his good hand.

But what Chat wasn’t prepared for was Scissor Hands coming up to his left while still at a distance, and throwing a pair of scissors like they were a dagger. Chat noticed the projectile one second too late and didn’t have time to move or evade, as he was in mid-vault. The scissors caught him right in the face, cutting across the bridge of his nose through mask and skin, leaving a bleeding gash. The momentum of being struck knocked out the balance of his vault, which sent him for impact with a rooftop of a shorter building. He couldn’t stop himself, but he did twist his body to land on his side and he tumbled, baton being lost in the process. It left him breathless, slow moving, and momentarily vulnerable.

“I always wondered what a shaved cat looked like. Come here kitty cat, let me trim those wild ends of yours, and I’ll take your miraculous while I’m at it!”, Scissor Hands laughed in victory as he dove for Chat, scissor tipped hands readied to be used as claws.

But his attack was intercepted when Ladybug threw her yoyo and caught him by the waist, pulling back and swinging to the side. The Akuma was flung and thrown off-course. Ladybug joined Chat when she saw he wasn’t moving to get up.

“If you want to see a shaved cat, go look at a Sphynx!”, she told to Scissor Hands, then turned to Chat and knelt down next to him with concern filling her eyes. “Are you okay Adri- Chaton!?”, she asked him, looking on in horror as she almost let his real name slip from her lips. It would have been game over if she hadn’t stopped and corrected herself.

“I will be. I think”, Chat hissed out as he began to push himself up, starting by propping himself up on his elbows. He didn’t seem to notice her little mistake in almost calling him the wrong name. Phew. “How bad is it?”, he asked when he finally looked up at her.

When Ladybug saw the wound on his face, she put a hand to her mouth to muffle her gasp of shock. Blood ran down his nose and one of his cheeks, his mask was shredded along the edges of the gash, and if she couldn’t fix it with her Miraculous Cure then it was sure to leave quite the scar. And she
would hate for Adrien to have to explain that to Gabriel.

“Judging by your reaction, I’d say it isn’t good. Plagg isn’t going to be happy with me when this is over”, Chat shook his head, pushing himself up the rest of the way to his feet, staggering a little in the process. His wrist was aching and his face stung. When the blood touched his lips, he tasted the bitter metallic flavor of iron and copper, and spat it out in disdain.

“It doesn’t matter where we lead him to, this Akuma is too dangerous and needs to be defeated as soon as possible”, he then said. Maybe he was a little salty because of the injury he’d just been dealt, but if the Akuma was able to do that much to him, then Scissor Hands needed to be stopped soon before they and the rest of Paris got cut into ribbons. There was no telling how many people he may have already successfully attacked.

“Alright minou, but just be careful!”, Ladybug told him while handing him his baton, which he gratefully accepted.

“Don’t worry. One good thing about cats is we have sharp reflexes when we have time to use them. I’ll be sure to be careful while protecting you at the same time”, he smiled at her.

“So where do you think the Akuma is hiding?”, Ladybug managed to ask before Scissor Hands came back and hovered above them, looking angered now. She spun her yoyo again so that she was prepared to deflect more attacks.

“Probably in one of those tools he has in his apron, I’m guessing a special pair of hairdressing scissors or something”, Chat answered, turning his baton into a staff once again and gripping it tightly with his left hand. He wasn’t going to attempt at twirling it around like usual, considering he needed both hands for that and he wasn’t sure his injured wrist could handle it. He would just have to dodge and evade best he could, strike when he must.

Ladybug was about to respond, but Scissor Hands didn’t give them another moment to spare. He threw more sharp projectiles at them, and Ladybug jumped in front of Chat to protect the both of them, the spinning of her yoyo being their shield that the objects simply bounced off of.

“What was it you were saying about protecting me, minou?”, she smirked at him over her shoulder.

“Har har”, he laughed sarcastically, and didn’t look all that amused. He hated feeling useless, or being unable to do things he normally should be capable of, like being the one to have shielded them. But since he was down to just one hand that wasn’t hindered in any way, it left him with less purpose than usual in a fight.

“Don’t be such a sour puss Chaton, I was just teasing. You’re a great protector. You ready to take this guy down?”, she chuckled.

“With pleasure, m’lady”, he smiled again.

Both of them turned their gazes onto the Akuma with new determination.

Chat charged first, leaping into the air at Scissor Hands and taking a swing with his baton, only to miss and be swiped at. Luckily gravity took place before the swipe could connect with his body, and he landed below the Akuma.

Ladybug went in next, launching her yoyo at the Akuma, which it wrapped around his body and pinned his arms to his sides. She pulled until the string was taut, and then yanked to pull Scissor Hands out of the air. He landed on the rooftop where it was equal between him and the heroes.
“I’ve got him! Chat, get the Akumatized object!” she yelled as Scissor Hands struggled for freedom, so she had to use her strength to keep him there.

“I’m on it!”, Chat said when he pushed himself up back to his feet. Taking up his baton, he ran towards the downed Akuma to retrieve the object.

“Not so fast, kitty cat!”, Scissor Hands scowled, before a small army of his weapons came flying through the air at Chat, and Ladybug, manipulated by the Akuma himself.

Chat stopped in his tracks, looking up with wide eyes at the hurling weapons of scissors and sharp razor blades that were heading for him, and at the last minute he jumped up to get out of the path. The projectiles flew right under him as they narrowly missed him in the groin.

“Are you trying to cat-strate me?! For shame! M’lady and I would have such beautiful children too!”, he said to the Akuma, rather unable to keep the grin off his face when he punned.

“Chat, we’ve been over this, focus on the Akuma! One more word out of you about that and I swear I will neuter you myself!”, Ladybug growled at him through gritted teeth, ducking when the projectile weapons came for her, a couple of loose strands of her bangs falling from her forehead from the attack she barely missed.

Chat stopped grinning immediately as he looked over at her, eyes wide and brows raised in a furrow, cat ears flattened to his head. He moved his hands to cover his groin area protectively in fear of her.

“Please no, I do believe I am very attached to my kittyhood!”, he whimpered.

While the two teens were distracted momentarily with each other, Scissor Hands sent his flying weapons around and back at them again with the twitch of his hand.

“Remember to take their miraculous when you’ve taken care of them, Scissor Hands. Do not fail me!”, his master commanded from the other end of the mind link he shared with Hawkmoth.

“Do not worry Hawkmoth, their miraculous will be as good as yours soon, and they will be at your mercy!”, Scissor Hands grinned in reply.

Chat’s attention turned back to the Akuma when he heard him speak to an invisible entity, just before he noticed more scissors and razors coming for him from the air like a flock of birds. Out of conditioned instinct, he retreated by doing backwards handsprings, forgetting about his wrist and nearly losing his balance mid handspring when it gave out on him in a painful reminder.

Ladybug wasn’t going to be able to dodge and still keep a hold on the Akuma at the same time this round, so she dropped her yoyo string and jumped back to land beside Chat, who was doubled over on his knees and holding his wrist close to him in a tight grip and brought nearly to tears. Concern for him filled every fiber of her being and she knelt down beside him, one hand on his shoulder and the other across his back.

“Are you okay?!”, she asked.

“I’m…Fine! But the Akuma is free!”, Chat hissed, glaring up at Scissor Hands who was no longer bound by Ladybug’s yoyo and was back in the sky above them where they couldn’t strike him from.

Scissor Hands sent another array of projectiles towards their way, yet again, and smirked sinisterly. The heroes split from each other in order to evade. Ladybug leapt to the right, and Chat rolled to the left. Without their baton and yoyo, they had no means of defensive shielding, and it’s not like they could block the attacks with their own bodies without facing dire consequences. When the cloud of
blades came back around again, they dodged again.

“Stay still!”, Scissor Hands commanded them in anger.

“What’s the matter? Run out of puns? I’d give you some of mine, but first I mustache you to stop trying to kill us! It would be purr-etty cat-astrophic if we die and can’t protect Paris!”, Chat asked provocingly, smirking up at the Akuma with a dare in his eyes.

“That’s the point!”, Scissor Hands bellowed, scowling and focusing all of his attention on the leather clad hero, and sent his projectiles straight at Chat.

But that was exactly what Chat wanted, because it gave him a reason to jump forward and dodge without becoming an unsuspecting target, and as he did he retrieved his baton along with Ladybug’s yoyo. He sprinted for his partner when he had them in hand.

“I think you dropped this, m’lady”, he grinned and bowed to her as he delivered her the yoyo.

“You’re crazy, but brilliant, you crazy brilliant tomcat!”, she smiled with gratitude and happily accepted his offering, glad to have her defense back.

“You can always count on me, bugaboo!”, he grinned. “So what do we do? We can’t keep this dodging act up, but we can’t get a hit on him either, we’re just a little too vulnerable”, he added.

“What about Lucky Charm?”, he asked.

“I can’t summon it and have a chance to look for a pattern if he’s going to keep attacking like this. It’d be easier to do it this way”, she shook her head, spinning her yoyo to quickly deflect a few of the projectiles.

“Wouldn’t it be better if I distract him and you try going for his apron with a Cataclysm”, she suggested.

“What about Lucky Charm?”, he asked more when he put his back to hers and used his baton to block the flying blades coming in from behind her.

“You’re injured, Chaton. The sooner we can take this guy down, the better off you’ll be! We can get this done faster with your Cataclysm”, she insisted.

“Oh, right! Okay then!”, he agreed, seeing it her way more clearly. Using Cataclysm would mean he’d have to use the hand of his injured wrist, but any amount of pain would be worth it in defeating this Akuma. He had already done a number on it in trying to get away from being sliced into pieces, so it didn’t matter too much now as long as he was able to perform his attack.

With that, Ladybug split from him again and went her own way, trying to keep the Akuma’s attention on herself. And like a bull versus a matador wielding a red cape, Scissor Hands threw more projectiles her way in a bit of a rage.

“You’re both beginning to get on my nerves! Stop trying to be hair-oes and make this easy by giving up already!”, growled the Akuma.

“Chat Noir and I never give up! You’ll just have to try a little harder!”, Ladybug shouted back, deflecting what she could and evading what she couldn’t in almost like a dance.

While she had the Akuma’s attention all to herself, Chat began to move in from behind, right into the Akuma’s blind spot on the complete opposite side. He decided to wait there for Ladybug to give him
“Cut it out and give me your miraculous!”, the Akuma demanded.

“Missed me!”, Ladybug smirked when she dodged another attack, gaze flicking to Chat for a split second, and he took that as his signal.

Now it was his turn. “Cataclys- ACK!”, he raised his hand to form his attack, however, when he did he felt a pain sharper than before in his wrist. The magic was just too much for his wrist to handle, given it was being summoned from within through his ring. He fell to his knees again and gripped it tightly to his chest in a wince.

Scissor Hands began to turn towards Chat after the teen’s position had been given away by the failed attempt, but Ladybug was quick to stop him with another distraction that brought his attention back.

“Lucky Charm!”, she had no other choice, given that Cataclysm had failed, and was thinking on her feet. But thank god it worked. Her Lucky Charm dropped a can of shaving cream into her hands, and left her a little confused. “What am I supposed to do with this?!”, she whispered.

She looked around for anything that jumped out at her, anything her powers indicated to her, but nothing appeared. She turned her back to Scissor Hands in desperation, and that was the worst thing she could have done.

“Time to say goodnight little bug!”, the Akuma chuckled darkly, sending his weapons straight for her while she had her guard down.

Chat looked up, and his blood ran cold. Everything about his nightmare was beginning to unfold right before his eyes, and this was the part where Ladybug turns into a human pincushion. His body was frozen, he couldn’t get himself to move.

“Dammit Agreste! MOVE! MOVE YOUR GODDAMN FEET!”, his consciousness told him. Time seemed to slow for him until it almost stood still. “LADYBUG! LOOK OUT!”, he screamed to warn her, once he found his voice.

Ladybug, hearing Chat, turned back around only to find herself staring at the blade armada coming straight for her. They were too close, she didn’t have time to deflect, so dropped the can of shaving cream and crossed her arms in front of her face to brace for the impact.

But it never came.

She never felt anything pierce her body through her suit. She didn’t feel herself bleed. She never felt pain. Was she dead? Was death really that quick to take her so that she didn’t feel a thing? If she opened her eyes, what was she going to find? A bright light at the end of a dark tunnel?

No, something much more horrifying than that.

“I promised you…I’d protect you…Bugaboo…”, she heard a strained voice, sounding like it was right in front of her.

She opened her eyes, and was met with Chat’s teary green eyes.

“Chat?!”, she gasped.

He was standing in front of her and facing her as her shield with his arms spread out to the sides, she could see blood dripping down his chin from his mouth, and still he was smiling.
No.

Did he take the hit for her?

No! What was he thinking?!

“And I told you…”, he spoke again, trying to keep from choking on his blood, “that you…can… Always count on me…”, he croaked.

“Chat!”, Ladybug said shakily and reached a hand up to his cheek, feeling him tremble against her palm. He leaned his head into her hand, his eyes looking glossy, and suddenly tired. “Chaton, no!”.

“Sorry, m’lady…”, he let out in a cough, before his eyes closed and his body began to collapse in a limp heap.

“Adrien! NO!”, she felt her own eyes water when her tears started to spill, unable to stop herself from addressing him by his real name when her mind realized who she was really losing. She caught him when he fell forward and gently laid his body down. She could see then the many blades of scissors and razors that had stabbed through him. She had to cover her mouth to keep from screaming.

Chat never moved or spoke again.

“Poor little kitty cat! I guess he just couldn’t make the cut! Oh well. Hand me his miraculous and I’ll go easier on you, bug”, Scissor Hands laughed and smirked down at them.

“You’ll pay for this, Hawkmoth!”, Ladybug growled through gritted teeth when she looked up at the Akuma in tears. She knew it wasn’t exactly the Akuma’s fault, because the victim wasn’t in his right mind. Hawkmoth was the cause, he brought it to this point, and so he was the one to truly blame.

Hesitantly she moved away from Chat’s body, casting one last forlorn glance at him while the blood from his wounds began to pool around his figure, and then sent a glare of bluebell steel at the Akuma as she readied to fight. Now, for Paris and her partner both. She held her yoyo in one hand, and retrieved the Lucky Charm in the other. Her earrings beeped the first warning, telling her how much time she had left; she didn’t have long.

“If you want his miraculous so badly, you’ll have to kill me first!”, she spat with anger.

“Very well then”, Scissor Hands shrugged. He dove for her, arms outstretched in front of him with his scissor tipped hands spread out and ready to grab for her. “Your miraculous is mine!”, he declared.

But Ladybug was pushed beyond her limit. She was outraged, and wasn’t going to be so easy to defeat now. At the last minute, she sidestepped out of the Akuma’s way and let him fly passed, completely unfazed. She threw her yoyo at him and caught him by the ankle, then pulled like before only more harshly, and sent Scissor Hands into a body slam against the rooftop with the force of the Hulk.

The moment Scissor Hands collided with the top of the building, he felt all ounces of air leave his lungs. He even heard Hawkmoth wince in his thoughts from the ferocity. And because of this, he was left temporarily unable to do battle, while Ladybug was making her advances to finish what was started.

Scissor Hands was determined to win, having been promised an even greater victory by Hawkmoth, unwilling to lose out like so many of the Akuma prior to him. Hurriedly, he forced himself to his feet,
and faced her head on with his scissor bladed hands held ready to swipe. Once she was close enough, he lunged forward while aiming for her face, to take the first swipe.

Ladybug ducked out of the way just in time, lest she end up like Chat Noir when he took a blow to the face, though it wasn’t enough to save her from the next swipe. Scissor Hands landed it on her arm, shredding through her suit and her skin underneath as easy as cutting through water, and left behind four large scratches. It stung, but she wasn’t about to let that stop her. She had to save Chat’s life, and she was going to do whatever it took to do that.

“You can’t catch me…”, she said when she dodged again. “If you can’t see me!”, she then found a use for her Lucky Charm by spraying the shaving cream into the Akuma’s eyes.

“ARGHHHH!”, Scissor Hands shouted in agony, hands flying up to cover his face, palms rubbing furiously at his irritated eyes.

Now that the Akuma was rendered defenseless for the moment, Ladybug reached for his apron and tore it away from his person, tossing it out of his reach for her to retrieve later to release and purify the butterfly. Then, she summoned all her strength in a roundhouse kick, landing the blow on the side of his head which propelled him towards the edge of the rooftop. She grabbed for her yoyo, just as Scissor Hands’s foot slipped and he began to fall. The moment he disappeared over the edge, she threw her yoyo, catching him around the waist. When she felt the string tug, she slowly gave it slack to lower the victim down to safety, until he touched the ground. Ladybug retracted her yoyo, and went for the apron, searching the pockets until she found the Akumatized object. Chat had been right when she found it to be a pair of hairdressing scissors.

“End of the line for you, nasty bug!”, she spat when she broke the scissors in half and out flew the black butterfly.

“No more evildoing for you little Akuma”, she said before catching and purifying it, then releasing it back into the open, probably to return to Hawkmoth. “Bye bye, little butterfly”.

And quickly, she tossed the Lucky Charm into the sky, while shouting the two magic words, “Miraculous Ladybug!”. Her Miraculous Cleanse powers went to work immediately, repairing damages Scissor Hands had caused, reversing everything he had done. And she was not to forget about her partner.

“Chat!”, she couldn’t stop the name from slipping through her lips, into the open air that suddenly felt like ice on her skin. Winter was nearing, but it wasn’t near enough for sheer temperature drops. She reached his side, kneeling down to scoop him up into her arms.

Why had he put himself in that kind of danger?!

They were the last things for her Miraculous Cleanse to touch. Chat’s wounds disappeared, as did her own. It was as if they’d never been harmed. Ladybug was half expecting him to open those green eyes of his, grinning while he popped off a cat pun to her and called her “Bugaboo”. He was stronger than this to die…Right?

Was it too late?

“Chat? Chat?! CHAT!”, she cried, giving him a shake in hopes of getting him to wake up. She felt a lump rise into her throat and she found it hard to breathe passed the tears that burned trails down her cheeks from her bluebell eyes. He looked as if he was only asleep in her hold, but she couldn’t even hear him breathing. Her earrings beeped another warning as her transformation began to wear thin, but she ignored it, all of her senses numb.
“Chat! Please wake up!”, she begged. How could she go without her partner? A trusted, loyal friend she hadn’t realized she knew the other side of until just earlier that day? Not even his tail dared to twitch. She’d given him one more shake, as if that was enough to do it and break this horrible spell of eternal slumber befallen on the black cat.

“No. I need you…”, her voice, once a cry in the stillness of the air, became only a whisper. She bowed her head, nose to his chest, tears falling far from dry. Her grip on him tightened as her own body started to quiver from the hard truth that seemed to be setting in. It seemed he was gone, and there was nothing she could do about it.

“You stupid cat…” at first it was a mumble, but it’d quickly turned into a roar. “You stupid cat!”.

Which then became a cry of anguish that’d been building up within her, set free to the heavens where she hoped he could hear.

“CHAT! YOU STUPID CAT!”.
Truth Be Told

Chapter Summary

The effects of Scissor Hands are reversed thanks to Ladybug's Miraculous Cleanse. But it isn't all happy endings. Not even close.

And sometimes the monsters under our beds are the monsters that lurk inside our heads.

Chapter Notes

Oh man! Would you look at that! A new chapter! This one was definitely a challenge to write, between losing motivation to writer's block and being dragged away for family affairs all throughout this past summer (introverts don't do good in social gatherings)!

Classes have started up again, expect slower updates. I'm also taking a fiction writing class in hopes of improving my skills and style, so hopefully you'll get to see that through this fic! In the meantime, enjoy this chapter!

Present day.

“CHAT! YOU STUPID CAT!”, Ladybug screeched to the sky in tears. She held the limp cat boy close to her with an iron grip, wishing he would just wake up already.

Why did it have to happen this way? Why did he have to be the kind of hero that would take her place and burden himself with what was meant for her to suffer? Why did he always let himself fall so that she could fly?

Why?

“Why, Chat? Why did you do it?”, she sobbed, quieter now that she couldn’t find the energy to scream.

“Because…Love makes you stupid and crazy…Everyone knows that”.

She got her wish.

“Chat?!”, she gasped as her eyes widened and she looked down at him with bewilderment. His eyes were open, and staring back at her.

“I may be a clever feline, but love makes me crazy stupid”, he said with a small smile and a mumble of a chuckle.

“Chat!”, Ladybug cried and brought him closer in a hug, unable to stop the river flowing from her eyes. “You’re okay!”.

“Thanks to you, m’lady. I’m glad you’re safe too”, Chat whispered to her and wrapped his arms around her in return.
Ladybug turned her face so that it was hidden by the crook of his neck and his shoulder, sobbing harder with even less control than before. There had been a few times prior where she had lost her partner in different ways to some sort of Akuma cause; Dark Cupid, Timebreaker, Pixelator. And other closer calls like Lady WiFi, The Collector, and Darkblade to name a few. But none of them could compare to this. Aside from Timebreaker’s assault and Lady WiFi nearly freezing him to death, he’d never actually died in her arms a bloody mess. It had never been the case where she felt his last breath leave him, or watched the life wither away in his eyes. In some way or another, he had always still been alive. But this time, it really shook her up, and she never wanted to have to see it happen again.

Especially since now that she knew who he was, someone very near and dear to her heart.

Chat shushed her and pat her back for comfort. “It’s alright bugaboo, I’m here now. Everything’s okay”, he said.

“Everything’s not okay!”, she cried to him. She pushed herself off of him and broke the embrace, looking fiercely at him with watery bluebell eyes.

“Why not?”, Chat laughed a little when he smiled at her, but he quickly realized she was being serious. “M’lady, what’s wrong? Did something happen while I was out? Didn’t you defeat the Akuma?”, he asked, smile vanishing.

“You were more than just out, Chat! You were dead!”, she found it in her to yell again, but had instant regret. She rubbed her eyes furiously with her hands to clear away the tears, but it hardly did her much good, they just kept falling.

Chat looked rather horror-stricken then, making it apparent to Ladybug that he didn’t know. Dead? Just the thought seemed absurd, the use of the word was foreign to him. He actually died? No. After all they’ve been through, even after Timebreaker, death seemed impossible.

“How could you scare me like that?!”, Ladybug’s voice, in the early stages of hoarseness, snapped him back into the now.

He refocused on her face, which wore a frown meant to scold him, tears still flowing strong. It was hard to read what she was feeling, and he was getting mixed signals. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you bugaboo, it’s just…”, he breathed out.

“Just what, Chat Noir?! I thought I’d lost you!”, she yelled, making him wince and duck in shame. He knew then, by the use of his full name, just how upset she was.

“But I’m here now! You saved the day like always and reversed the damages! And it was either me or you, if something happens to you then we’re all doomed because I can’t cleanse the Akuma or repair the city like you, so it had to be me!”, he explained, voice a little louder than necessary, but he wasn’t yelling.

Ladybug scoffed in clear frustration and turned away from him, getting to her feet and walking a few steps away with her back turned and head hung low.

“He refocused on her face, which wore a frown meant to scold him, tears still flowing strong. It was hard to read what she was feeling, and he was getting mixed signals. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you bugaboo, it’s just…”, he breathed out.

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“Please help me understand what’s so wrong with that? What’s wrong with protecting you?”, he asked, not hesitating to follow her, coming up to stand behind her.

“What if something goes wrong and I can’t fix things?! What if Scissor Hands had killed me too because I was by myself?! Your sacrifice would have been for naught and the world would be under Hawkmoth’s mercy, not just Paris or all of France!”, she turned on him and yelled fiercely.
“Given your previous feats, I would say the possibility of you losing are next to none, m’lady! There’s been multiple times where you’ve had to take me on in a fight, including a Hawkmoth generated copy! What about Puppeteer? I don’t remember most of what happened after she stole the Chat Noir doll, but surely you had to face off with me and three other previous Akuma, plus Puppeteer herself! And you did it alone!” Chat countered with.

“That was different! Your life wasn’t hanging in the balance! It never was any time you fell under an Akuma’s spell, and I knew that I could free you by defeating the Akumatized victim, instead of having to worry about whether or not I could bring you back from some unknown void! I don’t know all of what my powers are and aren’t capable of, what if the Miraculous Cleanse didn’t work on bringing back the dead?! What would I do if I’d actually lost you?! Do you really think I want to be the one to have to bury you at your funeral?!”, she fired back at him in disgruntled anger.

“I don’t want to have to bury my partner as much as the next cat, but if it had been you, there’s no telling what would have happened! Remember the talk we had earlier about nightmares? Some of those nightmares are about me being Akumatized because something bad happened to you and it invoked negative feelings in me, and I am afraid of what I become! Paris and the world would be much more than doomed if that ever happens! That’s one of the reasons why I couldn’t let Scissor Hands hurt you!”, he raised his voice in defense, tail beginning to lash in his own frustration. He felt she was being somewhat ungrateful, but he could understand the fear it caused her; after all, he was just the same during Animan’s attack.

“That still doesn’t justify the fact that you died in my arms and seem completely okay with that!”, she turned her back to him again. Her earrings beeped in warning once, letting her know that her time was critically short now. She knew Tikki wouldn’t be able to hold out for much longer.

“But that’s- I’m not- I never said, nor implied, that I was okay with it”, Chat fumbled over his words, trying hard to find the right way to speak his thoughts, without further angering his Lady. “What I am saying, though, is that it was fixed and that’s what matters isn’t it?”

“You’re missing the point, Chat!”, Ladybug let a sob escape her, shrugging her shoulders and gripping her elbows with crossed arms.

“Then what is the point?!”, Chat asked, with a bit of a hiss, frowning at her as his tail lashed again. Beep beep beep.

“I have to go”, she ignored his question, realizing that was her last warning and that she needed to leave immediately if she wanted to keep her identity protected. Although, she almost hesitated, knowing that it wasn’t at all fair to Chat that she knew his identity and without his knowledge of it.

“No! Tell me! What is it I’m missing?!”, Chat demanded, taking hold of her arm before she could get away.

“Let go Chat Noir!”, Ladybug ordered, though chose not to look at him, and only gave her arm a slight tug like she didn’t want to be let go of.

“Why is this time any different from the other times?! Why are you so concerned now than before?! Why is it okay for you to jump into the mouth of a T-Rex but it’s not okay for me to save you?! Do you have any idea how much that scared me?! Tell me why!”, he raised his voice, cat ears flattening to the top of his head.

“Because…”, she mumbled out with another sob, feeling her body beginning to shake from the pressure.
“Because what?!”, he let out another hiss, trying to get her to face him.

Silence met him instead, while she tried to control herself and keep from crying hysterically again, not even daring to meet his gaze.

“Ladybug!”, he pressed in a loud voice, not quite a yell but nearly there.

“Because I can’t lose you, Adrien Agreste!”, she finally burst at him, angrily with a frown to show for it, but tears still fell from her eyes. It wasn’t until the name left her lips that she realized the mistake she had made, and that anger quickly morphed into shock, covering her mouth with her hand.

Chat looked at her like he could hardly believe what he just heard her say, eyes wide and lips parted with his jaw slacked, brows knit together in an upward furrow underneath his mask. His cat wars remained flattened to his head, further emphasizing what he was feeling. Shock, confusion, and a dull ache in his heart. His grip on her arm slowly loosened until his hand fell away from her.

“M’lady, I-“, he began to say in a much more hushed tone, but the second Ladybug was free from him, she turned away and swung off on her yoyo to quickly make herself scarce.

“Wait!”, he yelled and reached out for her, but she had already been gone the moment he was able to speak. Before he knew it, she was out of his sight, leaving him alone to comprehend what just happened. He stood with his hand reaching for what wasn’t there, frozen with the thought that she knew his real name, and she didn’t at all seem happy about it either.

“Plagg…What have I done…”, he spoke softly to himself, lowering his eyes to his feet, cat ears drooping to the sides of his head.

Ladybug knew she wasn’t going to make it all the way home before her transformation ran out, so she found a secluded space in an alley and hid, letting herself detransform back into Marinette. She leaned against a wall and let the tears fall freely. She felt a tightness in her chest that made it hard to breathe, each inhale of breath from a sob hurt, but she couldn’t make herself stop. She put her hand to her mouth again and slid her back down the wall until she was sitting on the ground, bringing her legs up to her stomach, and burying her face into both of her hands.

“Oh, Marinette…”, a tiny voice said shakily, saddened to see the girl cry. “It will all be okay”, Tikki tried to comfort her chosen.

“Tikki…What have I done…”, came Mari’s muffled cry.

Meanwhile…

“Fools! They’re all FOOLS!”.

“Master! That last Akuma just killed the boy!”.

“And yet he still failed to get me the miraculous!”.

“You would rather have the blood of an innocent on your hands if it meant getting what you wanted?”.

“I will do anything to get what I need. And what I need, is to have Emilie back! I cannot do it without Ladybug’s and Chat Noir’s miraculous!”.

“But what if your son really was Chat Noir? Is it worth killing him in order to make your wish?”.
“Quiet Nooroo! I disproved that theory some time ago. There’s no way my son is that petty fool Chat Noir!”.

Nooroo was quiet then for a moment, until he suddenly felt bold and zipped up to Gabriel to hover in front of his illegitimate chosen’s face.

“You and I both know Emilie wouldn’t want this…”.

“SILENCE!”, Gabriel ordered, removing his miraculous to temporarily renounce Nooroo and have peace of mind, as he found his way back to his office and out into the main corridor of the house.

There was something unfamiliar that flashed in his eyes, something foreign, something that had been dead within his emotions for quite some time. He didn’t utter a word when he placed his miraculous into its box and hid it in his pocket.

It was regret.

Regret for what he was doing.

Regret for choosing to favor his wife’s memory over loving his own son.

Regret for letting his family fall apart.

He knew that Emilie would never approve of his actions, it was just a part of her good nature. But he justified himself with the fantasy, which he’d turned into a firm belief, of bringing her back to him and Adrien so that they could be a family again. He justified himself by convincing his conscience that it’d all be worth it when it was over, to have her back in his arms. He was too stuck living in his past to think of what the consequences of his present could lead to in his future.

And the possibility of Adrien being Chat Noir, that he might be right after all, always nagged at him at the back of his mind. It wasn’t that he didn’t believe in the possibility anymore.

He just didn’t want to believe it to be true.

For Adrien’s sake, he wished for once that he could be wrong.

Chat Noir died because of one of his creations, and with the thought of it being Adrien underneath that ridiculous disguise, it only proved to Gabriel that the boy might be about as foolish as his mother. He didn’t doubt that Ladybug undid the grim deed and saved the leather clad hero.

But how many times would it take for the damages to be irreversible and he possibly loses his son for good?

Gabriel refused to believe the fact that he murdered his own son, telling himself, “it wasn’t him. It wasn’t Adrien”.

“Sir”, the voice of his assistant broke him from his thoughts and he straightened up in her presence, all signs of doubt and regret gone without a trace.

“Nathalie”, he greeted her with a single subtle nod of his head and a blink.

“Shouldn’t you be leaving? If you miss your flight-“, Nathalie began, until Gabriel held up a hand to silence her.

“Cancel it. I will not be going to Germany today. See to it that the trip be scheduled for another time”, he said, folding his hands behind his back to keep his straight posture.
“But sir? I thought you said it was imperative that you attend?”, Nathalie looked at him confused.

“I did. If they need me that desperately, I can take a video call. Otherwise, I will not be getting on that flight”, Gabriel explained.

“Understood”, Nathalie nodded, not arguing with or questioning him any further, or else provoke him.

“Where is Adrien?”, Gabriel then asked out of the blue, just as she was about to leave. She turned back around to answer him.

“He informed me earlier of a project he had to work on with his classmates and he needed to stay at school for a few more hours, and insisted on walking home on his own. I tried to convince him otherwise so as not to anger you but he’s just too much like her”, Nathalie explained.

“Don’t remind me. I had hoped Adrien wouldn’t be as stubborn and fiery tempered as Emilie was when pushed to the limits, but it would seem my wish has been left unheard. Very well then, just make sure he is home when he said he would be”, Gabriel answered.

“He should be home any time now”, Nathalie said after glancing at her tablet. And as if by magic in her words, the front door to the manor opened and both of them looked towards it, as Adrien walked in.

The boy looked down in spirits, a saddened frown adorned on his face, and he didn’t say a word as he slowly closed the door behind him. At first he didn’t even notice the presence of Nathalie and his father until he trudged for the stairs to go to his room and was startled by Gabriel clearing his throat.

“Father?”, he said with surprise. “I thought you were leaving on a trip?”.

“I’ve decided against going. I…Know how much you’ve wanted to go see Germany. So if I am to go, it will be at a suitable time when bringing you with me is acceptable. Is that alright with you?”, Gabriel explained, taking a few steps forward, hands folded behind his back and chest out in his tall proud posture.

Adrien was silent at first, and it made Gabriel frown in dismay, thinking he might have disappointed his son anyway. Wouldn’t be the first time, as he was well aware of the other times he’s disappointed Adrien, and some of those times he did feel bad for. But only a little.

Just as Gabriel sighed and was about to say more, Adrien bolted for him and had him locked in a hug around the torso. Jeez, was his boy getting tall, pretty soon there won’t be a need to bend down just to be eye level with him. Gabriel was shocked at first and didn’t know what to do, but the tightening of Adrien’s arms around him told him he should return the gesture before he’s questioned for why he didn’t. He put one hand on Adrien’s back, and the other on Adrien’s head, to complete the embrace. It was really more of an awkward dad hug, but Adrien didn’t seem to care.

“Thank you father”, he heard his son say.

But Gabriel did not reply. He wasn’t quite to used to as much physical contact as he was before in the past, when he still had Emilie. And it also wasn’t the norm for him to do something that made his son happy, if even just a little. There were only those few occasions.

“Right…Well, I would advise you to go practice your piano skills for the rest of the evening to make up for your lost time today. And you have an early photoshoot tomorrow, I don’t want you to be late”, the stoic man finally said after a few moments of silence, as Adrien let go in taking a step back to look up at him, his hands resting on his son’s shoulders.
“Yes father…”, Adrien sighed and glanced away, then turned and began to make his way up the stairs.

“Is there something wrong?”, Gabriel suddenly asked, which again had been something that caught Adrien off guard, causing him to turn towards Gabriel halfway with a look of surprise. Now he was beginning to get the vibe that his father was being a lot more concerned than usual, not that he was complaining.

“No…No, everything is fine. I just…Kind of had a bit of a falling out with a friend earlier today and she’s a bit upset with me. Don’t worry about it, it’s something you probably wouldn’t understand…”, Adrien said, and turned his back to Gabriel once again to be on his way. That is until he felt his father’s hand rest on and squeeze his shoulder, causing him to stop and look back again.

“Are you sure?”, was all his father asked, a look of worry in his eyes that seemed rather unfamiliar to Adrien, as it was a look that he rarely ever saw at all.

“…Yeah, I’m sure. See, we’ve been assigned to put together a play for a class project, and we all agreed on Romeo and Juliet by Julius Caesar. I sort of flunked on my acting today and messed everything up, so my friend got upset at me”, Adrien explained. How much further could he stretch this lie and make it sound true?

“What exactly did you do? I don’t recall you ever having a problem with those sorts of things”, Gabriel asked, putting a hand to his chin in thought.

“I died when I wasn’t supposed to. Everyone pointed at me to be Romeo, and that character dies at the end of the play, but I guess I misunderstood and “died” a little too soon so it threw everyone else’s roles off. I don’t really know why my friend would be upset about something like that but I’m hoping we can make things up between us and cooperate again. I’d really hate to bring everyone else’s grade down for my mistake”, Adrien shrugged. Now if that wasn’t a lie with the most hidden truth in it he’d ever told, then he wasn’t sure what was.

“I see…”, Gabriel turned his gaze away, stroking his chin. Adrien frowned. “I told you that you wouldn’t understand…”, he sighed, looking at the floor of the stair he stood on.

“Perhaps I would if you discussed such matters like this with me more often”, Gabriel answered.

“How can I? You’re never around. And when you are, you don’t ever have time for me in your schedule. Not like you’d know how to help or talk to me about it anyway, so there’s no reason for you to waste your breath”, Adrien said. It angered him a little that his father would say such a thing when all it’s ever been is near impossible to do just that. He has tried talking to his father about things, and has been denied the time and an ear to listen. Now there just wasn’t any point in trying anymore.

But one more glance at Gabriel told him his words hurt. Adrien could see it in his father’s eyes how much those words stung. Gabriel had even receded his hand from his son’s person and clasped it with the other behind his back, returning to his usual posture, though his shoulders seemed slightly more slumped this time. It made Adrien’s chest ache with instant regret.

And he wondered if it really was that his father was just that negligent, or if he’d actually been the one chasing him away.

“Well, I do understand when I am not wanted. I apologize for being concerned. I expect you to be up
and ready by eight o’clock AM for your photoshoot in the morning, Nathalie and your body guard will be waiting to take you there. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have important business to attend to”, Gabriel said, that usual dull and empty expression of his returning to his facial features as he turned and back to walk back to his office.

“Father wait! I didn’t mean to…”, Adrien said after him, but bit back on his words, thinking it was no use to try apologizing. It wouldn’t change a thing, as he had learned before. He couldn’t say sorry for how much he wished his father was there more, or how much he missed him being around, or for how he felt left behind.

Gabriel stopped briefly to glance over his shoulder at his son, but it was far from warm or forgiving. It made Adrien shrink in on himself and bite his lip. With a huff through his nose, Gabriel turned his gaze away and then spoke. “Maybe someday, you will understand as well…”, he left that to hang in the heavy air between him and Adrien, as he retreated back to his office with Nathalie in tow, and disappeared behind closed doors.

Understand what?

Adrien stood puzzled on the steps, wondering what the meaning behind the words were. Was his father talking about how ruthless life could be? No, Adrien was pretty sure he understood that lesson well; things didn’t always go how he wanted, and his streak of bad luck regardless of whether or not he was Chat Noir never helped. He remembered things going really downhill the day his mother vanished.

What else could Gabriel have meant?

No matter, figuring that out was the least of Adrien’s problems, and there was already a lot he didn’t understand about his estranged father anyway. His main concern was about fixing what happened between him and Ladybug. If he didn’t, all of Paris could end up paying the ultimate price for it. Alya, Nino, Marinette…Everyone he knew, and many more. With a shake of his head, Adrien turned away to go up the rest of the stairs and to his room, where he closed the door behind him and leaned his back against it with a sigh. He slid to the floor with his head hanging.

“You know, it could have been worse kid”, Plagg piped, zipping up from underneath Adrien’s jacket.

“How? It all went wrong so fast and now it’s like she hates me! And I don’t even know what I did to deserve it!” Adrien argued. He cradled his injured wrist tenderly to his chest and rubbed at it to soothe the ache that throbbed, feeling lost and more alone than he ever did. He had imagined and reimagined the scenario of when he’d show his real face to Ladybug, but he never thought it’d go like this.

“Nah, I don’t think she hates you. Female humans are always so much more dramatic than males, they even sing about their breakups and love stories! Just wait a few days and she’ll come running right back to you”, Plagg shrugged at him.

“But what if she never does? What if…”, Adrien shook his head, looking up at Plagg with watery eyes and a frown. “…What if I’ve lost her forever?”.

Plagg frowned helplessly at his chosen. Even though he’s had many Chat Noirs before Adrien, and actually learned from them about dealing with human affairs like this one despite contrary belief, there were still some things he didn’t know how to help fix. After all, he and his chosen were the embodiment of destruction, bad luck in physical form. It was an inevitable given that things fall apart. Still, like all his past chosen which he considered his kittens, sitting idly by while Adrien is in pain
was something he hated.

Adrien let out a sigh and got to his feet, careful not to used his crippled wrist, knowing well that it’d been through enough for one day. He kicked his shoes off and went to stand at his wall of windows, looking out at the city as the sun began to set.

“Was she disappointed it was me?...Who even am I? I don’t think I know anymore…”, he asked allowed in a half whisper.

Plagg floated over to Adrien and rested perched on his shoulder, looking at his face to try and read him. He wasn’t wearing a very happy expression, that much was obvious.

“You know, I may have been fused with your miraculous but I do recall her saying something about not being able to lose you. I’m pretty sure you heard it too, unless you were just that deaf”, Plagg said.

“Yeah but…Just the way she said it. It was almost like she actually cared about me, which I’m more than ecstatic about on the inside, but still sounded disappointed to know my real name. And now that I know she really does know me personally, I want to know where from and who she is more than ever. But now I may never find out”, Adrien shook his head.

“Well to be fair in her defense, you were kind of yelling at her and being a little more demanding than usual. I mean if you remember that Simon Says Akuma or whatever his name was, you stood up to your father when Simon sent hypnotized civilians to capture him. That was the angriest and most unlike you I’ve ever seen you be. I saw that again today, kid, and this time it was towards Ladybug”, Plagg explained.

Adrien’s eyes widened at that revelation. He hadn’t even realized how uncontrolled his temper was earlier, and he blew up on Ladybug.

“Quite a temper. You remind me of someone”, he could just see the smirk his father had given when he’d said those words after Adrien, as Chat, became furious at his father’s stubbornness and let his anger show. The person he’d reminded Gabriel of in that display of temperament was Gabriel himself.

That was the last thing he wanted to be. Someone like his father with a ferocious temper when pushed to the right limits. He didn’t want to be like Gabriel at all, but perhaps some character traits were unavoidable.

And now, he’d gone and upset Ladybug with it. The person he wanted to be wasn’t angry and cold all the time, but friendly and loving and open to the world. Realizing how he’d treated his Lady made him feel wrong and sick to his stomach.

“I wasn’t even paying attention…”, he said quietly.

“Well obviously! Or else you wouldn’t have exploded like that!”, Plagg nodded.

Adrien looked down at him with a saddened look, and then back out the window in defeat.

“Look, kid. I know it’s bad now, but things will get better. They do at some point don’t they?”, Plagg told him, coming to hover in front of Adrien’s face.

“I…Suppose…”, Adrien said while avoiding eye contact.

“And neither one of you can avoid each other forever. You’ll both have to see each other again the
next time there’s an Akuma right?”, Plagg continued, zipping down to look up at Adrien so that he would be forced to look back at him.

“Yeah… We would…”, Adrien nodded, meeting Plagg’s eyes for a moment before looking away.

“So then what is there to worry about? Either way you’ll see her again, and then you can apologize and get things straightened out”, Plagg shrugged, once again forcing Adrien to look at him by following his chosen’s eyes.

Even though he didn’t look it, Adrien felt a bit relieved at Plagg’s thinking, which didn’t happen very often.

“That is if she’s willing to forgive you”, Plagg then said with another shrug as he turned his back to Adrien.

That relief dissolved faster than sugar in a pot of boiling water.

“Thanks, you’re so helpful”, he said with a roll of his eyes and a dash of sarcasm in his voice.

“I’m just pulling your tail, kid! Don’t get your fur so ruffled! She doesn’t really have a choice. If you two don’t kiss and make up soon, Paris won’t last long”, Plagg laughed in his sick sense of humor when he turned back around to face Adrien, grinning.

“You need to work on your jokes, because that wasn’t funny”, Adrien scowled a little, pointing at Plagg with the threatening finger of accusation. Then he sighed as his expression eased back into a sad frown. “But I hope you’re right. One thing’s for sure, Paris relies on us too much for this partnership to go up in flames.”.

“If you’re anything like your predecessor, you’ll find a way to fix things. He always did… Even if his ways were a bit questionable and sometimes stupid”, Plagg told him.

“You mean, Felix?”, Adrien asked, perking his head up to look at Plagg curiously.

Plagg stared out the window at the lit up city, just as the sun sank down beyond the horizon, where it would wait to be seen again at dawn. “…Yeah. Felix”, he said a bit woefully. Talking about his past chosen was still no easy task for him, and Adrien picked up on it.

There was silence between chosen and kwami for the few moments that followed, as the name weighed heavily on it.

“…He sounds like he was an amazing Chat Noir. He must have made you very proud since you think so highly of him”, Adrien finally said when the silence became a little too eerie for him.

“He was probably one of the best chosens I’ve ever been given to. And if I’m being honest right now, you’re the spitting image of him. Almost. He was a lot frowner than you. But that doesn’t matter, I’m still proud of you Adrien. You’re a natural Chat Noir!”, Plagg smiled at him.

“It really means a lot to hear you say that, Plagg. At least I know someone is proud of me for who I am”, Adrien smiled back up at his kwami.

“Well someone has to be! You’re a great kid, maybe even too kind for your own good, but then if you weren’t you wouldn’t be so generous about giving me camembert! If anyone’s going to be proud of you for being you then it should be me, because I’m the one that brings out the best in you!”, Plagg said.
“How, exactly? It’s not like you whipped me into a better person or anything, I was already morally good before I even met you”, Adrien asked.

“I gave you freedom, didn’t I? Freedom to be who you are inside without ridicule, freedom to escape this boring house of yours whenever you want, not to mention a purpose in life as a hero of Paris and finding someone you love. Face it kid, without me, you wouldn’t have any of those things and would still be the same old model boy with no friends and a prisoner of his own house”, Plagg explained.

“I’m pretty sure you aren’t the reason why father agreed to let me attend public school, and you weren’t the reason Nino and the others befriended me, so I’d probably still have friends without you. But everything else…you’ve pretty much hit it right on the nose. Becoming Chat Noir has given me all those things and more, I always thought I’d had the worst luck in the world and I still do, but meeting you and becoming a superhero is the luckiest thing to ever happen to me”, Adrien crossed his arms and raised a brow at Plagg, but still smiled all the while.

“Black cats are the symbol of bad luck. For someone as unlucky as you say you are to meet me and become a superhero, I wouldn’t call that luck kid. More like it was just meant to be because of how magnetic your bad luck is”, Plagg shook his head.

“Har har, very funny”, Adrien rolled his eyes at his kwami and turned back towards the windows to look out at the lit up city as the sky finally began to turn black with night. There was silence between them again for a few more minutes until he spoke again.

“You know? I never thought I’d be relying on Hawkmoth to see Ladybug again…”, he said.

“Now that’s a scary thought if I ever did hear one”, Plagg muttered.

“It was your idea to wait until the next Akuma to make things right with her!”, Adrien pointed out.

“I know, kid…”, Plagg muttered again and floated away in search of his camembert, but turned to Adrien one last time to say more. “Felix did too”, was his only reply, with that rare twinge of sadness he usually kept dormant within himself, but his tone didn’t reflect. Instead, his voice held a warmth in it that Adrien didn’t often get to hear, which made it all the more special and powerful. Plagg turned away again and disappeared into one of his hiding places, leaving Adrien to ponder silently about things on his own.

He almost wanted to go out on patrol, maybe it’d clear his head a little and he could let what he was feeling run free. But he knew for a fact that after the events of the day, Ladybug was sure to not make an appearance tonight, so he knew his chances of seeing her at all were slim at best and nonexistent at worst. And knowing his luck, it was much more likely to be the latter than the former. He’d finally decided against going out. His wrist needed a break anyway and Plagg deserved it after his apparent death.

A knock at his door brought him out of his thoughts. But before he could comprehend who it could be, Natalie’s voice filled the room.

“Adrien, dinner has been prepared”, she informed him.

He only shook his head at the idea of food. “I’m not really hungry…I think I’ll just go to bed, I’ve had a long day. If father is expecting me, please tell him I’m sorry”, he said with a sigh and let his shoulders slouch, making the trip of a tired shuffle to his bed. He didn’t exactly feel drained of energy physically, but on the mental level, he was far up in the negatives and probably over -9,000. Who wouldn’t be after taking the hit for his partner, dying as a result, and then being resurrected to
find her upset because she knew his real name?

She knew.

That was the only thought left that still screamed at him.

She knew.

The moment Nathalie left his room he plopped onto his bed face first and lied still like that for what seemed like hours to him. He didn’t even know if he had enough capacity left in his mind to think of how she could know, all that he could think of was beginning to sound like a broken record.

“She knows. She knows. My god, she knows…”.

Meanwhile, the lack of mental energy could not be said for a particular dark-haired girl. While she was curled into a ball on her bed, hidden under the safety of her blanket and not at all moving, her mind was zooming at warp speed.

So many thoughts. So many memories. All of them were of Adrien. Not Chat Noir. Adrien Agreste. The two faces were so blurred together now, but the only one she could depict was Adrien.

Adrien has been the one flirting with Ladybug. Adrien was the one she kissed. Adrien gave her the nicknames of princess and bugaboo and called her his Lady. Adrien talked to her on her balcony during late night visits after a patrol. It was also Adrien that’d seen how willing she’d been to give up her miraculous and save the fake illusion of him Volpina had created.

Chat Noir didn’t even register in her mind anymore. He didn’t exist. It was all Adrien.

And she didn’t know whether to feel ecstatic, or scared witless, or both. Confused, was she.

“Marinette, it’s not as bad as you think”, she heard Tikki talk to her from the other side of the blanket she hid under.

“How Tikki?? I know his identity and I’m not supposed to! I feel like I’ve betrayed him and at the same time I’m afraid to know! But a part of me is glad it’s him? I don’t know anymore! And I… I don’t want to lose him! Not like I almost did today! What if something happens to him and I can’t fix it?! What if I can’t be there to protect him like how he protects me?!” Marinette asked with her frantic voice.

“Well? You two might have had to reveal yourselves at some point anyway, right? You can’t marry him like you talk about all the time and expect to keep your secret from him then. You two aren’t the first time a Ladybug and Chat Noir found out each other’s identities. I know I’ve said it’s important that neither of you know for the sake of your safety, but sometimes things do just happen. Though, I’m not exactly glad for you either, but some things are just out of our control”, Tikki explained, trying to find a way into the underside of the blanket where her chosen was hidden, but all entrance had been blocked off, leaving her no choice by to faze through the blanket effortlessly.

“Still! I’m the one that kept telling him no every time he asked to know who I was! And now I know who he is, I’ve broken my word! He probably hates me for it! Not only did I possibly ruin our partnership but I’ll never be able to look at Adrien the same way again! I’m a failure!”, Mari droned on.

“You’re not a failure”, Tikki told her as she patted her chosen on the forehead. “And I don’t see how he could hate you? After all you two have been through, fighting Hawkmoth together for a whole year now? If anything the poor boy is probably just really confused and lost as to why you reacted so
negatively, but I can tell that hatred is not in his nature, and especially towards you. Freaking out isn’t going to help you wrap your head around the situation so you can think logically about how to approach it”, she added.

“I know, you’re right Tikki…I just can’t believe he’s been closer to me than I realized, all this time…”, Marinette sighed. Her kwami was usually always right and always gave good advice. It was only a matter of whether or not she listened to it and took it to heart.

She removed the blankets from herself and rolled over to face her wall where many photographs of her friends hung, including a portrait of Adrien. She reached up and ran a finger daintily over the photo of his face, along his jawline and cheek more specifically. His portrait was smiling at her, but she saw in it Chat’s cheesy grin.

“I don’t know what to do anymore Tikki…My duty as Ladybug is to protect the people of Paris, and that included Adrien. It always did. But knowing he is Chat Noir, how can I protect him now? I feel so torn and lost and…Confused!”, she mumbled.

“Chat Noir is just as much a citizen as Adrien is, you’ve always been protecting him too, like when you defended him against Copycat for example!”, Tikki pointed out.

“But it just doesn’t seem like enough now. I could have lost him for good today…I can’t lose Chat or Adrien, they’re very precious to me, and irreplaceable. So what would I do if I lost them both?…What would happen if…I didn’t have my miraculous and I couldn’t fix things?…”, Marinette shook her head in denial, grabbing a pillow and hugging it to her chest, burying half of her face as tears pricked her eyes.

“I know you’re afraid. A lot of Ladybugs before you had the same fears as you do, Bridgette mostly. But the moment you start doubting yourself is the moment you fail. Chat Noir has proven that he can hold his own in a battle, many times! You should have a little bit more faith in him, and that means in Adrien too. It was his choice to protect you today, and I’m glad he did, because if it had been you then there really wouldn’t have been anyone to reverse the damages! The Akuma would have gone unpurified and Hawkmoth would have won. You can’t be mad at him for protecting the greater good”, Tikki said.

“I’m not really mad at him, it’s just…Well, maybe I am mad at him for scaring me and making me think for a split second that he was gone for good. I don’t care what it was he was protecting, he shouldn’t have had to lose his life, even if it was temporary! We’re supposed to be a team and protect Paris together! How can we do that if one of us is six feet in a grave? All I want to do for him is what he does for me. Knowing he’s Adrien has made him that much more important to me…I just don’t think I could live with being at fault for his death”, Marinette said as she sat up into a sitting crisscross position, keeping the pillow hugged to herself.

“Did you cause the Akuma?”, Tikki asked, putting her little paws on her hips rather sassily as she buzzed.

“No…”, Marinette answered quietly.

“Did you know about the attack and what was going to happen before it actually happened?”, Tikki asked.

“Not really…”, Marinette mumbled out, turning her gaze away.

“Did you know he was going to jump in front of you to protect you when Scissor Hands targeted you?”, Tikki asked further.
“He’s done it before with other Akuma but no, I didn’t know…”, Marinette answered.

“Did you know he would die?”, Tikki asked her final question.

“Of course not! I… I’m not a psychic…”, Marinette bit her lip.

“Then how could any of it possibly be your fault?”, so maybe that last one wasn’t Tikki’s final question. “The point is Marinette, you had no control over what the Akuma did, or what Chat Noir did. You didn’t know what was going to happen, and you weren’t the cause to any of it at all. You were just in the wrong place at the right time and Chat Noir acted on his own to save you because he loves you. If you want someone to blame, then blame Hawkmoth for creating such a dangerous Akuma!”.

“It’s kind of strange hearing you tell me to blame someone at all, normally you’d be against it”, Marinette said.

“Hawkmoth is going through unnecessary means to get something that doesn’t belong to him. At what cost will he be willing to pay to achieve his goal? If he continues on this path, he’ll destroy himself”, Tikki frowned.

“…”, Mari didn’t answer to that. Tikki’s words sank deep into her mind, which in turn silenced her own thoughts.

Knock knock knock.

“Marinette, dear! Are you coming down for dinner?”, Sabine’s voice came through the hatch door to her daughter’s room after she’d knocked as a warning that she was there.

“No mama, I’m not really feeling too well…”, Marinette answered, that is after having jumped out of her skin from being startled, and making sure Tikki hid out of sight.

“What’s wrong honey?”, Sabine asked as she let herself in and climbed up the stairs to Marinette’s loft where she laid in bed.

“I’m just… Feeling a little sick to my stomach…”, Marinette told her, peaking out from under her blanket like a frightened turtle.

Sabine moved closer and leaned over the bed, with the back of her hand to Marinette’s forehead. “Well you don’t feel warm. Did something happen at school?”, she asked in a knowing motherly tone.

“… You can say that”, Marinette frowned and retracted back to under her blanket to hide again.

“Do you want to talk about it?”, her mother asked with newfound concern as she seated herself on the edge of Marinette’s bed.

“It’s just… I kind of had a fight with a friend. I was supposed to keep this secret from them that I shouldn’t of even known about. I didn’t really mean to yell or get angry! It just slipped out! And now I think I’ve messed things up big time between us. I’d give anything to apologize, but I’m too afraid to see them now, I don’t think I could face them”, Marinette explained, curling into a ball again underneath her blanket.

Sabine lifted the blanket so that she could see her daughter before giving a response. “Well dear, sometimes these things happen. It’s okay to be afraid, but I’ve never known you to not say sorry when the time calls for an apology. The best thing you can do is talk to them when you’re ready,
admit to your mistakes and apologize, and just hope that things are made right again. Sometimes friends fight. I remember when I got into a fight with a friend once, and all over this really cute kimono we both liked! It took us a while to make up, because we were both afraid to face each other. In time, you two will make up as well, I just know it. Is there anything I can do to help?” she spoke.

“No mama, but thanks, that helps a lot”, Marinette smiled sweetly at her mother, which Sabine mirrored.

“Okay dear. Get some rest and see how you feel in the morning, your father and I will save you some leftovers”, she said, leaning down to kiss her daughter’s forehead gingerly, and then getting up to leave. “Would you like the light off?”, she turned and asked.

“It’s fine, I’ll get it”, Marinette reassured her. Sabine nodded and went about her way, soon disappearing through the hatch door back into the family room. Marinette sighed when she was alone again, save for Tikki.

“Your mother is really sweet and kind. I see where you get it from”, Tikki smiled when she came out of hiding.

“Yeah, my parents have always been supportive and nurturing like that… I just wish Adrien could have the same thing in life. He deserves it, with how kind he is and all that he’s done to protect this city with me as Chat Noir”, Mari muttered.

“Well maybe someday you can give that to him. That boy loves you with all his heart, and I’m sure he’d appreciate getting to share that with you”, Tikki giggled while bouncing around in the air with a big grin.

Marinette only shook her head and pulled the blanket back over herself with a groan. The thought both delighted and frightened her. What would happen if they accepted each other’s love and it got in the way of their duty as heroes? She could only imagine things far worse than what happened to Chat earlier that day would occur on a far more regular basis, and she couldn’t bear with that thought.

“Goodnight Marinette”, Tikki sighed at her chosen’s disinterest, and zipped to turn the light off for her, then tucked herself in above Marinette’s head on a pillow.

It didn’t take long for chosen and kwami to fall to sleep from the exhaustion of a long fateful day.

“She doesn’t love you”.

“What? W-who’s there?!”. 

“You saw that look in her eyes, didn’t you? She was disappointed. She will never have feelings for you”.

“Who are you?!”. 

“Who am I? Oh, poor sweet little kitten Adrien”, the voice chuckled with a menacing tone that sent shivers up Adrien’s spine, and when he turned around, he saw a figure in white leather step out from the shadows, wearing a wide sinister grin. “Don’t you know? I’m you”.

“Y-you... You’re...”, Adrien stuttered, shaking where he stood as his eyes widened.

“White looks good on me, don’t you think? So much better than that old black suit. Oh, and the eyes, green is so cliché. I prefer fuchsia, it really brings out the white of my suit”, the figure smirked. “You
can call me Chat Blanc. But you already knew that, didn’t you kitten?.”

“I know who you are…”, Adrien whimpered. “A-and you’re not me!”

Blanc only snickered, leaning upright on his baton with his chin resting on his hands, slit fuchsia eyes glinting with hidden evil. “You just don’t get it, do you?”, he asked with a laugh, as if it were a joke and Adrien wasn’t understanding the point. He stood up straight and approached his good counterpart, circling him like a cat circling it’s pray and waiting to strike.

“I am a part of you. I am that little voice in the back of your mind. I am the devil on your shoulder, the demon in your head, the dark side of your soul. I am you”, he said darkly, nonchalantly propping his baton on his shoulders and letting his arms hang over it.

“No! That’s not true! You’re not me! You’re not who I am! You’re…You’re just a figment of my imagination!”, Adrien shook his head, his legs giving out from under him from shaking so badly.

“Is that so? Are you sure about that?”, Blanc teased with another grin, stopping his circular stalking to stand in front of Adrien, and looking down at him.

“You’re not real!”, Adrien screamed.

“What makes you think Ladybug could ever love you? Mine didn’t. She’s the reason why I became this way. Yours will only do the same, little kitten”, Blanc said with a sudden change in tone.

Adrien quickly glanced up at his alter ego’s evil counterpart with wide eyes and a terrified expression. “Wh…Who ARE you?”, he repeated.

“I told you, I’m you. From another life, of course. A “past Chat Noir”, you might say. Ack! Noir! That word leaves a bitter taste in my mouth!”, Blanc answered, then pretended to gag and double over as if he was in pain.

“If you’re a past Chat Noir, then how are you-?”. 

“Talking to you like this? Easy. Through that pretty little ring of yours, kitten! It was mine at one time. Was. In fact, it was mine before any of the others’. I’ve been around for as long as that ring, I only appear to you like this because it is the most current incarnation. By the way, don’t you have any better desire? I mean this suit could really use a few touch-ups, like this bell for instance! What is it supposed to represent? Your desire to be a home-kitten? A common house cat? How pathetic”, Blanc grinned, then flicked the bell at its mentioning, the tinkering sound echoing in the endless dark void both of them seemed to be standing in. Adrien could see two canine teeth gleaming just a little past Blanc’s bottom lip when he grinned, and it really emphasized his feral appearance.

“Why are you here?”, Adrien begged the question.

“I’ve always been here. Ever since you first put on that ring, I’ve been here. Watching, lurking, waiting. Hoping for the right...Opportunity”, Blanc smirked.

“What kind of opportunity?”, Adrien asked.

“Boy are you DENSE! No wonder you can’t figure out your Lady’s identity! Okay, let me explain this so even you can understand. I’m your evil half. Like the twin brother nobody knew you had but the bad one, except we share the same body. We are connected because of your ring, all Chat Noirs share connections with their predecessors through the ring, as do other miraculous holders through their respective jewels. Catch my drift?”, Blanc explained.
“That doesn’t really answer the question!”, Adrien argued.

“Fine. In much simpler terms, if you slip up and lose yourself to Hawkmoth’s dark magic”, Blanc rolled his eyes along with his shoulders, and pointed his baton at Adrien rather threatening, then made another sinister grin with a chuckle to match. “Then I can take over and you become me!”.

“No…!”, Adrien shook his head, utterly horrified at the news. He’d always had nightmares of him becoming what Blanc was and destroying everything around him, but that’s all he ever thought they were; nightmares. Nothing more. And yet Blanc himself, the very first Chat Noir who’s spirit haunted the ring it seems, was telling him otherwise.

“Yes! I have but one simple request, one little desire, and only you can give it to me”, Blanc winked.

“What? The ability to destroy everything I love and care about?! The ability to turn Paris to ruin?! To hurt Ladybug?!”, Adrien began to raise his voice, in both anger and terror.

“Oh no kitten, something much simpler than that”, Blanc said slyly, circling Adrien once again and then coming up behind him to whisper in his ear. “Freedom”.

It chilled Adrien to his core and he froze.

“You of all people would know about that, right Adrien? After all, you HAVE spent the last few years of your life locked up inside, with no rights to freedom whatsoever. House Agreste in your own home. Oh look! I made a pun!”, Blanc ended with a cackle. “You of all people would know how it feels to have your freedom revoked. Taken from you, without justice. It just isn’t fair, now is it?”, he continued.

“What would you know about fairness and justice?”, Adrien grit his teeth.

“Have you forgotten already? Can’t expect much less or anything more from an oblivious idiot I suppose. I was the first Chat, remember? I began this quest of fighting for justice and seeing fairness to all. That is, until m’lady crushed my heart and humiliated me! But I can’t complain. Holding this kind of power but ten fold is probably the best thing to ever happen, thanks to a certain butterfly miraculous user”, Blanc said.

“Well you can forget about your freedom! I’m not giving in to you! I am Chat NOIR! I will NEVER be a Chat Blanc! This is just a bad dream, and pretty soon I’ll wake up and you’ll be gone!”, Adrien growled, standing back up to his feet and keeping his ring held close to his chest. He turned away from Blanc to leave, unsure of which way to go in the endless dark void, but anywhere was better than with Blanc.

But Adrien wasn’t expecting for a steel cage to drop down on him, entrapping him where he stood. It was one of his worst fears and Blanc knew it.

“Tsk tsk tsk. No need to get into a hissy fit with me, kitten. But I’d watch your tongue! I can easily trap you within your own mind! Now we wouldn’t want that, would we?”, Blanc scoffed, strut ting up to the bars.

“You can’t do this!”, Adrien screamed at him.

“Oh, I can. But, I won’t. After all, I’m not the kind of cat to take away someone else’s freedom like that”, Blanc snorted, snapping his fingers, and the cage was gone before Adrien could blink. “The stray life is better for you anyway, not the life of some house cat”, he added, flicking the bell again as a reminder.
Adrien fell to his knees and heaved, feeling a tightness in his chest and like he couldn’t breathe. Was this what a panic attack felt like?

Blanc knelt down onto one knee in front of Adrien and leaned forward, taking Adrien by the chin with his claws and lifting it up so that Adrien was looking at him again. He smirked.

“Just remember, I’m here. Hiding in the shadows, watching everything. One mistake, one slip-up where your emotions go unchecked, and it’s game over for you kitten”, he snickered, then stood up and began walking away, tail swaying gracefully behind him. Adrien could barely gasp.

“Now I really must be going. It’s been a nice chat with you! Oh, another pun! I’m getting good at these, no?” Blanc said, stopping to turn and look at Adrien one last time with his signature sinister grin. “And one more thing. Your parting gift”, he added, bringing his right hand up and in it formed a ball of black mass. It looked like Cataclysm to Adrien, only it felt a lot more powerful and dark.

“Say hi to Plagg for me!” Blanc barely graced an invisible wall with his claws and the Cataclysm began to spread before he disappeared into the shadows. The dreamscape was beginning to break apart.

Adrien got up to run. He turned heel and began sprinting away from the creeping Cataclysm, but he just wasn’t quick enough. The ground beneath him gave away and he suddenly felt himself freefalling, with nothing to grab onto or save himself with, into the darkness of his own nightmare.

“And remember, kitten. I’ll always be here”, Blanc’s voice seemed to come from everywhere at this point.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!”.

“Ah!”, Adrien bolted upright from his pillow in another cold sweat, wide eyes and breathing heavily from what he just experienced. He looked around his room, eyes being met by the morning sun that’d barely rose over the horizon, an orb of light peaking out from the edge of the sky. He looked at his clock and saw 7:34 AM, which meant he didn’t have too much free time before he was to be at his 8AM photoshoot as his father had demanded.

Adrien could feel his whole body trembling still, with Blanc’s evil cackle resonating in his head.

“What is with these stupid dreams?!”, he questioned in frustration, rubbing his eyes to clear the sleepiness from them. Then he looked down at his hands, staring at them, as if they were covered in blood like in so many of his prior nightmares. Then he shifted his gaze to his ring, slowly turning his hand to look at it, the stiffness from the dull ache in his wrist still present.

“Always there?”, he said to himself aloud. And he had to wonder, after all this time of having his miraculous, why now was Blanc telling him these things? Maybe it was all in his head, just his imagination running wild after being yelled at by Ladybug the other day. Yeah, that had to be it!

It couldn’t be real. It was just a dream. There’s no way it could be-.

“You met him, didn’t you...?”, he heard Plagg say as his kwami appeared seemingly from nowhere. “You met Chat Blanc, didn’t you?”.

This only confirmed his chosen’s worsts fears. It was real.

Adrien looked at his kwami fear lingering in his eyes. He realized this had happened before, he could see it in the way Plagg was looking at him with that rare bout of concern. He then looked away with embarrassment, guilt, and shame.
“Aw kid…”, Plagg sighed in dismay. “I was hoping he would never come to you. I thought maybe for once he’d leave one of my Chat Noirs alone!”, he shook his head, tail and ears drooping when he floated closer to Adrien.

“He wants to be free, Plagg…He got to me through my fear of being locked up. He gave me a reason to sympathize with him…”, Adrien sighed.

“He can never be let free! He and a previous Hawkmoth are the reasons Felix had to take his own life!”, Plagg hissed.

Adrien’s eyes widened again and he looked at his kwami with surprise. And seeing the fear in Plagg’s green eyes gave him new determination to never let himself become Chat Blanc. He reached out and pat Plagg on the head.

“Don’t worry little buddy. I won’t let it happen”, he smiled reassuringly.

“Good!”, Plagg spat, crossing his tiny arms and turning his back to his chosen, pretending like he didn’t just enjoy the head pats.

Adrien chuckled and then swung his legs over to get out of bed. “C’mon, I need to get ready for this photoshoot father wants me to do”.

But truth be told, you can never escape an inevitable future.
Sound of Silence

Chapter Summary

Tensions are still high after the accidental reveal and Marinette finds herself trapped in a dark corner of her mind, trying to fight whatever demon she has encountered within, and is losing.

Adrien is left confused and to ponder what happened, while he tries to protect Paris alone, and is reminded of a memory with tears that still drip sore.

He did not get to meet up with Ladybug that night, and neither her with him. Instead, both found themselves utterly lost. Lost in the sound of silence.

Chapter Notes

Ooooooookay! It's been a while I know! I have no excuses this time, I just got really lazy with this chapter. Oops. Hopefully it isn't too boring or anything? I've been working on this one over the months since the last update. But hey, there might be another update soon! I've still got the "middle chapters" that I'd written a while ago and have been working the fic up to, but I'll probably go over them again and maybe edit them a little to match the others so everything still flows, and post them soon as they're ready! If I don't deliver anything within the next month or so, well then you have permission to beat me with a stick XD butnotinthefaceplease. Anyway, I'll make this rambling note short and let you get to reading! Carry on and as always, I appreciate any comment, kudos, or bookmark made to this fic! Have fun!

“Ah c’mon-a. Let me-a see a smile-a! Like you-a just saw a kitten sneeze-a!”

The photographer was dancing and circling around Adrien with the camera in his button-happy photographing spree, the click of the camera’s shutter becoming an annoying and repetitive buzz in Adrien’s head. It was too early for this.

“Alright-a! Different pose-a!” the photographer announced with exuberance.

Adrien shifted poses as he was told, sighing to himself at how bored of this he was. He would much rather be getting pulverized and his tail handed to him by an Akuma any day of the week over this, if it were a choice. He wondered how much longer he’d have to tolerate this, both for today and for the remainder of his life.

The photographer noticed the boy’s displeased expression and lowered the camera to let it hang around his neck, while clapping his hands twice in a swift, dismissive motion. “Alright-a! Five minute break!” he said, intent on using this time to look through his work so far and pick out what photos were best and what ones weren’t.

Adrien let out a bigger sigh in relief, taking the opportunity to stand up and stretch his limbs, then
yawned from tiredness. It didn’t help that he was bored out of his mind, further increasing the
drowsy lack of energy he was feeling from having to get up early on a Saturday. Maybe Nino was
up already? At least it’d be someone to talk to on his break, seeing as he couldn’t do much of
anything else or go very far. He pulled out his phone and opened a text conversation with Nino.

“Hey man, you up?”, Adrien shot the first text.

Of course, there was no immediate response. Adrien awaited to see if Nino’s icon would pop up at
the bottom to show he’d read the message and was making a reply, thumb hovering over the back
button in anticipation. But the icon didn’t budge. Nino must have slept in, as was usual on a Saturday
for the young DJ. Adrien huffed in disappointment and slid his phone back into his pocket.

His mind wandered to the previous day. The image of Ladybug’s upset face lingered in his head, the
tears rolling down her cheeks like a snowball down a mountainside, eyes angry but saddened at the
same time. He still hadn’t figured out what he’d done wrong, besides taking the blow for her and- he
kept forgetting he’d actually died. An uncontrollable shiver ran through him at the thought of never
being brought back, had the magic of her miraculous not been able to. And then there was the fact
that she knew his real name and didn’t seem happy about it. He wasn’t expecting her to be happy if
he’d ever gotten the chance to tell her himself, but with the way she reacted told him she knew him
personally in their other lives and that he was close to her, and it didn’t make her happy to know that
he had put himself in harm’s way- many times before, not just yesterday -to save her. But the
question that drilled at the inside of his skull was, why?

Why did it make her so upset?

Who even was she? How did she know him? It’s not like he knew many girls besides the ones in his
class, and of that he really only knew three of them. Any others were outside his age group and not
close friends of his at all.

Or maybe, was it possible that Ladybug knew him but he didn’t know her, in their civilian lives? He
supposed it could be, since he was well known by many in Paris as Adrien Agreste thanks to his
celebrity status.

No, he had to dismiss that idea. If that had been the case, it’d most likely mean Ladybug was one of
his many adoring fans, which he knew were crazy and a ridiculous bunch. And he was sure any fan
would be the opposite of upset if Adrien Agreste himself had literally died to save them as the one
and only Chat Noir. She wasn’t like that even with knowing his name. He knew her better than that.

Or, so he thought he knew her.

If he knew so much about Ladybug, how was it that he couldn’t figure her out on his own, like she
seemed to have done with him?

Out of anyone, even himself, he thought Alya would be the first one to figure out both of their
identities with how much she chases them around the city and tries to get a scoop for the Ladyblog.
There were a lot of times where he’d thought of giving her hints and tidbits, as Chat Noir, that he
knew about Ladybug just to help her research along, in hopes of finding out who Ladybug was
through her. But he knew if he’d ever done that and Ladybug found out he had a part in it, she’d
subject him to all of her wrath and she’d be worse than he was in his nightmares.

The circumstances of how his identity became known to her didn’t matter now, he could worry
about that later. What he had to do first, was find her and make things right again, apologize for
whatever it is he needed to apologize for and talk with her about things. Paris needed them, as a
team, not as two individuals going it their own way. Tonight would be a good time to do patrol and
maybe then he could find-

“Alright-a! Break over!”.

-hers. Okay, first he had to get through the day with his chores, if he could manage to survive with how much was on his mind, and then he can do patrol so he can find her.

Adrien sighed as he got back into routine and slipped into his model poses for the camera, faking the smiles he was told to give by the photographer. He only hoped his eyes wouldn’t betray those smiles. Then again, there was this beautiful tool called Photoshop that could fix that.

Morning could be better for a certain raven-haired girl, who hadn’t even moved an inch out of bed since waking up. She groaned at the fact that it was morning, a new day, and didn’t feel like doing anything else but sleep.

“You feeling alright, Marinette?”, Tikki’s little voice asked her.

Marinette opened her eyes and blinked away the blurriness in them so that the big red dot in her vision became focused until she could see Tikki clearly. “I don’t feel like getting up”, she mumbled.

“You don’t really look so good. Are you sick?”, Tikki asked with concern, flitting up to her chosen’s forehead to kiss it and measure her temperature, as she’d seen Sabine as well as many of her previous Ladybugs do when someone was ill. Marinette felt a little warm to her, but nothing too alarming.

“I don’t know, I just don’t feel energetic today”, Marinette yawned and sat up in bed, stretching her arms above her head and scratching at an itch on her neck. Tikki moved to float in front of Marinette, continuing to give her a look of deep concern. “What is it Tikki?”.

“You kept screaming in your sleep last night”, Tikki said softly.

Marinette froze and gave her kwami a wide eyed look, suddenly not looking so tired anymore. “W-what do you mean?”, she asked in a short stutter.

“You kept saying Chat Noir’s name, and Adrien’s, as if something bad was happening to them both and you were frightened by it. I did my best to calm you down but it only seemed to help so much before it started up again. I was afraid you’d awaken your parents”, Tikki explained.

Then Marinette remembered the disastrous dream she’d found herself stuck in last night, seeing Chat Noir get hurt over and over again. Only, he was maskless, and it wasn’t his face that she was seeing but Adrien’s instead. She remembered alternating between the two names thinking it’d make a world of difference and stop him from getting hurt, but nothing ever changed. Now that she knew who he was, the two boys were so merged together even in her dreams that it was hard to tell a difference between them.

“Chat Noir! Adrien! CHAT NOIR! ADRIEN!”, it all swirled back into her memory.

“I…Didn’t keep you awake, did I?”, Marinette asked as she hugged her knees to her chest and looked away from Tikki with embarrassed shame.

“Don’t blame yourself Marinette, it wasn’t any different than you dreamily saying Adrien’s name in your sleep, you were just…Louder, and much more afraid this time. I’m more worried about you than I am about myself. I am a godly being who’s been around since the beginning of time, the beginning of creation. I’m pretty sure if sleep was important to me then I wouldn’t have been able to live this far. You are my chosen, you may be an owner of my miraculous but I’m here to look after you as well. Until I know you’re okay, my concern is endless”, Tikki said, smiling sweetly and
chuckling at the girl.

“Have you always had to guide other Ladybugs like this or am I your neediest one?”, Marinette asked with a lighthearted chuckle of her own as she glanced up at Tikki past the bangs of her hair.

“You aren’t needy, Marinette. You’re fully competent of anything you put your mind to and I believe in you one-hundred percent of the way! But you’re young, younger than any other of my past chosens have ever been, so of course you need the most guidance because you’ve still a lot to learn! Don’t worry, things will get better”, Tikki buzzed as she bounced around in the air.

Marinette groaned again and flopped back down on her bed. “I still don’t feel like getting up today. I just…don’t think I can stand to face Adrien yet, even if there isn’t a chance I could see him today. I know he won’t know it’s me under the mask, or so I hope he doesn’t…but that doesn’t stop me from feeling guilty”, she said, curling up into the fetal position as tight as she could.

“You sure you aren’t sick?”, the little kwami asked, concern and worry returning to her voice and features.

“I don’t know, Tikki. I feel…Kind of sluggish, and tired, and like I just don’t have the energy to move. My mind is hazy and unclear, and all I want to do is sleep right now. Or hibernate, if it’s possible to do”, Mari explained, hugging her shoulders.

“Yesterday might have been a little too much to process and your mind hasn’t fully recovered, maybe all you need is rest before trying to think it all over?”, Tikki suggested.

“Maybe. I just hope nobody needs me for anything today, because the last thing I need is for someone like Alya to get suspicious of how jumpy I am from yesterday”, Marinette agreed.

“You mean, jumpier than usual?”, Tikki giggled.

“I’m not that jumpy all the time!”, Marinette retorted with a small laugh and a smile.

Just then, there was a knock on the bedroom door from below, and it caused Marinette to jump with a squawk in surprise, feeling scared out of her skin. Tikki giggled more at the irony of things.

“Hide Tikki!”, her chosen commanded, and Tikki did as she was told, taking hidden refuge underneath some of Marinette’s pillows. “Come in!”, Mari then yelled for the person on the other side of the door as she invited them in, sitting up on her bed but otherwise not moving from where she was.

“It’s just me, dear”, Sabine said when the hatch door was open and she popped up through it. She climbed up the rest of the stairs into her daughter’s room and closed the door behind her. “How’re you feeling today? Any better than last night?”, she asked as she proceeded to climb the stairs up to Marinette’s loft.

“No mama, I don’t really think so. I slept through the night but I still feel tired and like I have no energy. Maybe it wasn’t a very good sleep”, Marinette shook her head.

Sabine moved closer and placed a kiss on Marinette’s forehead, and then the back of her hand, trying to detect a fever. “You feel a little warm, but not too high. Did you have any plans with friends today?”, she said.

“Not really. I don’t think I feel like doing anything either…”, Marinette shook her head.

“Well then you stay in bed and get some more rest, and I’ll come back to check on you later today”,
Sabine patted Marinette on the knee and smiled at her.

“What about you and papa down in the bakery? Aren’t I supposed to help you two on Saturdays?”, Marinette asked a bit worriedly. She’d never let her parents down before, save for a few mishaps or mistakes, like forgetting to give Nadja Chamack her cake, and she wasn’t going to start now. She knew they loved her and always would regardless of what she did, but she didn’t want to bail on them all because she was feeling tired. After all, there’d been plenty of times where Paris needed Ladybug and she got out there however tired she was, there should be no reason to let this stop her from helping her parents today.

“Don’t worry dear, we can handle it for today. You just make sure yourself gets taken care of first, because your health is more important than the bakery”, Sabine said.

“Okay mama”, Marinette sighed, finding herself even too tired to argue, not that she ever did when her mother knew what was best. She flopped backwards on her bed again and curled up for sleep, nestling her head and face into her pillows.

Sabine pulled the blanket up and over her daughter and lightly tucked her in, then kissed her on the forehead again. “I’ll be back to check on you after the afternoon rush hour downstairs”, she said.

“Alright mama, love you. Tell papa I love him too”, Marinette yawned.

“I will dear”, Sabine nodded with a smile, and quietly left the room to go back downstairs and join her husband.

“Coast clear, Tikki”, Marinette whisper-yelled, alerting the kwami that it was safe to come out of hiding, which Tikki did.

“Your mother’s right, you need to rest for today. Just know that if an akuma appears-“, Tikki began.

“I’ll have to transform and stop it. I know”, Marinette finished.

“A superhero’s work is never done!”, Tikki laughed.

“Tell me about it”, Marinette groaned and flopped her face back into her pillows.

And as if on cue, her phone buzzed from a text message. She reached for it to see who it was from, finding it to be none other than Alya. She opened the message to read it.

“Hey girl! Guess who’s in the park for an early morning photoshoot?”

Marinette didn’t even have to put much thought to guess the who that Alya was talking about. Her stomach lurched at the name on the edge of her mind.

“Adrien?” she texted back.

“Ding! We have a winner! He’s in the park right next door to your place! You gonna come down and say hello? ;))”, came Alya’s text.

“Sorry Alya, but I’m feeling sick today. :/ probably best I don’t”, Marinette sent back after giving some thought to the idea. Normally she would have been squealing with joy and rushing downstairs in record time to join her best friend and ogle at her crush, but the secret she knew about him changed everything.

“Oh really? :o I was just on my way to Nino’s, but I can come hang out with you instead! Can’t let
my best friend spend the day sick in her room alone!” was Alya’s reply.

“No, it’s fine. You go spend it with Nino, I’ll be okay. Besides, I don’t want my best friend catching whatever it is I have :p”, Marinette shot back.

“Okay then, if you say so. But just make sure you’re feeling better for school on Monday, okay Sicky? ;D”, Alya replied.


“Ttyl! If you change your mind or need anything, just text me and I’ll be over there faster than Ladybug :)”, Alya replied once again, and that was the last message of the conversation. Marinette tossed her phone to the side tiredly.

“What did Alya want?”, Tikki asked curiously.

“She was just telling me that you know who is at the park next door for a photoshoot and asked if I wanted to say hi. I just told her I was sick as an excuse not to, and she offered to come visit with me instead of going to Nino’s, but I told her no with the reasoning that I don’t want her catching my sickness. So she’s going to be on standby in case I change my mind or need anything”, Marinette explained.

“You’re lucky both your friends and your family care a lot about you! It’s good to know that you have their support!”, Tikki smiled.

“I suppose I am”, Marinette smiled softly up at Tikki, and then nestled in for sleep with a yawn.

“Get some rest, Mari. You might feel better when you wake up”, Tikki said, brushing some of Marinette’s bangs out of her face and kissing her on the cheek before burrowing into the blankets to rest as well.

Alya shook her head as she put her phone away, and then looked up towards the top of the Dupain-Cheng’s apartment where Marinette’s bedroom was. “Girl better get well soon”, she muttered to herself, then continued on her way.

She waved to Adrien as she called his name, “Hey Adrien!”, just to be sure she got his attention and he knew she was there, not just because he looked ridiculously bored with his photoshoot and she figured a friendly hello would brighten his day.

Adrien turned his head to look her way out of habit with wide eyes of surprise, then smiled as he gave a small wave back. He gestured to the photographer with a hand to pause work, and looked back at the man with the camera rather pleadingly for permission to go talk to his friend. He knew he wasn’t supposed to interrupt work like this, it displeased the all disproving Gabriel things weren’t done adequately to his standards and expectations, such as an incomplete photoshoot. But anything was better than this right now.

The photographer looked questioningly at his muse with a raised eyebrow, and then over at Alya, before making the connection. He sighed and pinched at the bridge of his nose.

“Alright-a, but just be quick-a! I’m-a getting payed-a by ze photos, not-a by ze hour!”, said the photographer, waving off the boy and motioning him to go talk with his friend. “I need a drink-a”, he then mumbled and went to help himself to the water in his water bottle.

Adrien smiled thankfully and sprinted over to Alya. “Hey!”, he greeted her.
“Hey yourself! Another boring photoshoot again, huh?”, Alya grinned and crossed her arms.

“Yeah, you can say that again…”, Adrien frowned a little as he looked back at the photographer, and his bodyguard standing off to the side with eyes trained on him like a hawk. He smiled nervously.

“How’s the wrist?”, Alya asked him. He turned back to her at her question, and then looked down at his wrist, flexing his hand a little to test the soreness.

“It’s getting better. It’s not as bad as it was before, but I still probably shouldn’t use it fully yet just to be safe”, he said. Perhaps while during the times he was transformed since after the injury occurred, it was healing faster than he thought, which was a good thing. He wondered if Plagg might have something to do with that, even though the kwami had claimed earlier to be a poor healer unlike the ladybug counterpart. He looked back up at Alya and asked, “so, where are you heading off to?”.

“That’s good then. And I’m on my way to Nino’s. We were supposed to go see a movie, but he couldn’t decide on what to see that was playing because he’s so indecisive it’s unreal, so we’re having the movie date at his place instead”, Alya explained.

“Sounds like fun! Wish I had the time to go do something like that, but it looks like I’m pretty busy right now”, Adrien sighed.

“Well I might be back around here later to swing by Marinette’s and check up on her, make sure she’s okay and all. Maybe if you’re still here by then, you can join in and say hi”, Alya offered.

“Why, what’s wrong with Marinette? Did something happen?”, he asked, suddenly looking concerned, rather a bit wildly with his eyes widened, as he tilted his head.

“She said she was feeling sick today so she was going to stay in and take it easy to rest up. She didn’t tell me what exactly was wrong, just that she wasn’t feeling good. I’m sure seeing her friends will make her feel a little better though!”, Alya told him.

“Oh, that’s not good, I hope she feels better soon! I mean, I could try asking my father if he’d let me go with you to see her, but knowing him the answer would be no. He might not be too willing to let me near anybody that’s sick. You know, model stuff and all…”, Adrien said, then rubbed at the back of his neck in an embarrassed manner at having to remind Alya of his occupation and strict parent.

“Well my offer still stands, poster boy! Just let Nino know what the verdict is and he’ll pass on the message to me. If you can’t make it, then you can’t make it. You know Mari would understand”, she grinned again and put her hands on her hips sassily.

“Yeah, I know she would. She always does. She’s a great friend”, he nodded with a smile.

“Alright-a! Back to work-a! Chop chop!”’, the photographer yelled from across the park at Adrien, who jumped and slightly blanched when he remembered there was work still to be done.

“Okay, I’ll catch you later then! I’ve got to get back to the shoot. Say hi to Nino for me! And Marinette too!”, he said, backing up from her back towards the waiting photographer, before turning and darting the rest of the way.

“Don’t worry, I will!”, Alya called to him with another wave of her hand, then she shook her head with her brows furrowed upward at how he reacted to the photographer and ran off, similar to how Marinette acted sometimes. “Him and Mari are definitely made for each other”, she said aloud to herself before looking back at the building of the bakery, up at Marinette’s bedroom window, and then continuing on to Nino’s.
Hours passed. The morning turned into high noon, and later on, afternoon. Marinette had barely moved in her sleep. Tikki watched over her chosen in silence, hoping the girl wouldn’t get any worse. This was the most the little red kwami had ever seen Mari sleep, and it worried her. Though what concerned Tikki most was the possibility of an akuma appearing, for Hawkmoth knew no bounds and was relentless at times. Marinette had explained earlier that she felt void of energy and the willpower to get out of bed, so would she be up for saving the day if she was needed?

Of course, Tikki had much more faith in her chosen than that, and she believed Marinette would always step up to the plate when she had to, when no one else would. But since meeting her, Tikki had never seen her sick like this. Would it change things? How drastically? And what did it have to do with knowing Adrien was Chat Noir?

A couple knocks on the door told Tikki she needed to hide, so she quickly zipped away to hide beneath Marinette’s pillows. She heard footsteps as someone walked up into her chosen’s room and ascended to the loft, then soon Sabine’s voice.

“Marinette?”, Sabine spoke softly when she leaned over her daughter’s sleeping form slightly. Upon receiving no answer, she reached down and rested a hand on Marinette’s shoulder, giving her a small shake. “Marinette dear”.

“M-mama?”, Mari said wearily as she awoke with drowsiness, eyelids still heavy when she looked up at Sabine. “What time is it?...How long have I been asleep?”, she yawned and stretched.

“It’s almost four o’clock, dear. You’ve been asleep most of the day. How are you feeling?”, Sabine answered, sitting down on the edge of Marinette’s bed.

Marinette slowly sat up and rubbed her face, mind still trying to process Sabine’s words. After a minute of trying to wake up all the way, she finally answered Sabine’s question.

“Honestly? Not that much better…”, she shook her head with dismay.

Sabine frowned and reached out to her daughter to feel her forehead with the bad of her hand. Marinette felt warm still but it wasn’t anything too concerning, and was probably likely due to Marinette having been under her blanket this whole time.

“Are you hungry at all?”, Sabine asked.

Marinette laid back down while hugging her arms to herself, curling up like before on her side with her back turned to her mother. “No, not really”, she said.

“You should try and eat something dear, even if it’s something small. You should always keep your strength up when you’re not well, so you can feel better sooner!”, Sabine said.

“No thanks mama, I don’t feel like eating anything right now. Maybe later at dinner…”, Marinette told her.

“Okay dear, if that’s what you want. Your papa and I are baking fresh croissants down in the bakery, I’ll set aside a couple for you”, Sabine nodded.

“Okay mama”, came Marinette’s simple reply.

With that, Sabine stood up and left Marinette in peace, though she still had a frown that was slowly turning into worried concern for her daughter’s health and sudden change in behavior. Marinette was just fine yesterday, though acted a little strange, but nothing else out of the ordinary. Now she was like a completely different person. Sabine just wasn’t used to seeing her daughter so gloomy like this.
She left Mari’s room silently and went back down to the bakery to join Tom.

Tikki flitted out from her hiding spot, looking at Marinette with sad eyes. “Are you okay, Marinette?”, she asked.

“I’m not sure anymore, Tikki. I feel like I hardly slept at all, and still like I just don’t have the energy to move or do anything…I’ve never felt like this before, and it’s beginning to scare me”, Marinette explained, trying to bite back the tears that were pricking her eyes at the corners.

“Perhaps yesterday was a lot more exhausting for you than we both thought?”, Tikki suggested, though was unsure of that suggestion herself.

“I don’t know, maybe? Could it have something to do with the miraculous? Did I somehow use too much magic and it took a bigger toll than usual? I mean, I was angry after what the akuma did to Chat…Adrien…And you always say not to let my emotions get the better of me and control my actions like that. I know I can be impulsive when I do. Maybe I was feeling a little too much all at once and it channeled into my powers…”, Marinette said, moving to sit up once again and hug her knees to her chest.

“Marinette, you have every right to feel the ways that you do, and you had every right to feel how you did yesterday. It’s only when you let negative emotions cloud your judgment that you misuse your powers. Like the incident with the Bubbler, when you got jealous of Chloé and used your lucky charm at the wrong time for the completely wrong reason. Yesterday was different, it didn’t affect your powers nor was it for the wrong reason. The miraculous feeds off of my energy, not yours. Besides, you used your lucky charm before Chat Noir saved you, so it can’t be the miraculous’s doing”, Tikki explained.

“I was afraid of that answer”, Marinette sighed, hiding back under her blanket.

“Whatever this is, you will get through it! I have seen you do some amazing things in just the little time I’ve been with you since you were chosen to be Ladybug! And Marinette, you’re stronger than you think! Compared to what you’ve faced so far, this is nothing”, Tikki fluttered over Marinette’s hidden form.

“I know Tikki. Getting through it is not what I’m most worried about. It’s right now and the way I feel that has me worried, because I’ve never felt it before. I’ll get over it at some point I’m sure, the question is when”, Marinette’s muffled voice came through the blanket.

“I understand. Sometimes new things are stressful and hard to overcome, you transforming for the first time and taking on your first of what would be many akuma is a great example of such a thing. But you will, be it sooner or later”, Tikki said.

“That’s also not the only thing troubling my mind”, Mari mumbled.

“Oh? And what else is there?”, Tikki asked curiously.

Marinette then removed the blanket from her face which held a look of solemn as she said, “I’ll have to face Adrien at some point, too”.

Downstairs, Sabine had returned to the bakery where her husband was hard at work as he sang and hummed passionately about his work. It made her smile momentarily at his enthusiasm, and she was reminded where Marinette got hers. But then her smile slipped back into a frown as she joined him at his side.

“Tom, I’m worried about our Marinette”, she said, to start off the conversation.
“Oh? Is she alright?”, Tom stopped his singing and humming and asked, looking over and down at his wife.

“I’m really not sure. She’s not running a fever or showing signs of being ill, but she doesn’t want to eat or get out of bed. She hasn’t gotten up to move around all day, either”, Sabine explained.

“Ah, maybe it’s just stress and exhaustion from school. Sometimes I think they expect a little too much from their students and overwhelm them with too much homework. Who wouldn’t be tired from that?”, Tom said in an attempt to lighten Sabine’s mood and concern for their daughter, but it didn’t seem to help.

“No Tom, it’s something else. I think she might be depressed”, Sabine shook her head.

“Depressed?” Tom echoed, tilting his head a little, stopping in the middle of prepping some dough to listen more attentively, eyebrows raised.

“Yes, depressed. It’s been a while since I’ve learned about it but from what I can remember, symptoms are low or complete loss of energy, little to no appetite, loss of interest in things that would normally be exciting or interesting, a change in sleep patterns, and sadness among other things. She’s exhibiting almost all of those symptoms”, Sabine explained more.

“Oh…That’s not good”, Tom looked a little shocked now, and rather at a loss for what to do.

“Should we take her to the doctor?”, he asked.

“The doctor will only prescribe her anti-depressants which don’t always help, and she may not even be willing to take them. You know how stubborn she is, because she gets it from me”, Sabine shook her head, kneading a glob of dough as she spoke.

“She gets it from both of us”, Tom corrected with a chuckle, breaking out a rolling pin and using it for his own dough.

“I think we should just be as supportive as ever and keep her enlightened by using encouragement and being understanding. She is a strong girl, she’ll find her way again so long as we are right there beside her each step of the way. She has one more day before school again, hopefully she’ll be back to her usual self then”, Sabine smiled.

“Agreed! We’ve seen her face hard challenges before even without our help! And we make a great team, we’ve got this!”, Tom grinned.

“Exactly what I was thinking, partner!”, Sabine said.

The two shared a fist bump much like Paris’s beloved heroes did. The bell above the bakery door rang to signal that they had a new customer, and so they set off back to work until it would be time to close.

It was shortly thereafter that Alya showed up and greeted Tom and Sabine at the counter, asking about Marinette and if visitation hours were a thing. Tom seemed iffy at first so looked at Sabine, who thought that maybe a friend would be good for Marinette in helping her feel back to her chipper self. Alya got the green light to go upstairs and the blogger wasted no time in climbing the flights up to the apartment and to Mari’s room.

“Hey girl! Can I come in?”, Alya asked once she reached the hatch door that lead into her best friend’s room.

She heard a faint, “yeah, come in”, from the other side and so took her leave, climbing up the rest of
the way and shutting the door behind her. She stood up and looked around, almost expecting to find Marinette sitting at her desk or on her chaise, with a blanket draped over her shoulders and a few snot rags lying around, like anyone else would when they were sick. But to her surprise, her friend was in neither one of those places, so looked up at the loft. Fixing her glasses by pushing them back up on her face anime style, Alya climbed up to the loft and found Marinette still huddled under her blankets on her bed.

“Hi”, Alya said, crossing her arms and looking down at Mari with one eyebrow arched and a smile on her face.

“Hi…”, came Marinette’s tired reply, while she unraveled from her cocoon and sat up, rubbing an eye.

“Girl, you look terrible! Like something a cat dragged in! No offense to Chat Noir, of course. How’re you feeling?”, Alya chuckled at first, but then let her concern show.

Marinette flinched a little at the pun and the mentioning of Chat’s name as the image of his and Adrien’s faces flashed in her mind, causing her to wince, but luckily it seemed Alya didn’t notice. “Do you want the honest answer, or the soft answer?”, she asked.

“What’s the difference?”, Alya asked with another chuckle.

“The soft answer is I look and feel fine because I don’t feel like I need to blow my brains out through my nose every five minutes. The honest answer is I actually feel like I haven’t slept for days and then got all my energy steamrolled out of me by an akuma. That’s the difference”, Marinette explained.

“Oh honey, you’re that miserable?”, Alya said sympathetically, and then brought Marinette into a bear hug to show for it.

Marinette didn’t hesitate to return the hug either. The embrace felt welcoming and like something she needed right now. And her best friend had a good heart with gold intentions, even if some of her actions in doing so were questionable, such as chasing the akuma half across Paris in hopes of getting a scoop for the Ladyblog and keeping fans in the loop. If Marinette could tell Alya the truth about who Ladybug was, she’d no later scold her for doing something so dangerously reckless all for an interview with her superheroine idol. Something that trivial was never worth that kind of risk to her life. But for reasons that are an even greater danger to the both of them and their families or friends, it was best Alya remained none the wiser.

“Hang on a sec! I brought something for the both of us to share!”, Alya said suddenly, pulling away and bolting down the stairs to the bedroom floor where she’d left a backpack of things she had with her when she’d first arrived. She pulled out a box, and scurried back up the stairs to rejoin Marinette on her bed.

“So I know your parents own a bakery and all and you’re probably biased to the sweets they make but I grabbed some chocolates on my way over I thought you’d might like. They’re one of my favorite kinds!”, she said excitedly, opening the box to show Marinette said chocolates, which were covered in bits of hazelnuts and some drizzled over with white chocolate. They did look rather tasty, if she did say so herself.

“Alya-“, Marinette began to speak until her friend cut her off.

“Nuh uh! Don’t try protesting this, girl! I have the right to spoil my best friend when she’s not feeling good and not even you can change my mind! Just accept it and let it happen!”, she said.
“I was just going to tell you you’re the greatest friend I’ve ever had for doing this and trying to
comfort me but fine, I guess I won’t”, Marinette laughed a little.

“Aww, but you just did. Love you too, girl!”, Alya smiled, then handed Marinette a chocolate which
she accepted. “I also tried inviting Adrien over because I thought seeing him might cheer you up
even more! But he told me he might not be able to, and he wasn’t wrong. So he said to say hi for him
and that he wishes you all the best in getting well!”, she added.

Marinette flinched again, not really wanting to think about him for once, after what had happened
recently. By knowing his identity, she was basically an open book for Hawkmoth if he ever actually
akumatized her and then Adrien would be in grave danger, because of her. And he’d probably hate
her forever for it! Well, maybe not forever since he is Chat Noir, and wasn’t the type to hate
someone for long, let alone hate at all. Hate was such a strong word and- wait, didn’t she already go
over these thoughts?

Alya seemed to notice the flinch this time and got curious. “Hey, what’s wrong?”, she asked.

“O-oh! Nothing! I uh, just can’t imagine the thought of Adrien seeing me in such a sickly state! And
especially not when all his pictures are hanging up in my room! Plus, he’s a model, I don’t think
models take sick days and I’m sure his father wouldn’t be too happy if he caught something from me
so, better he stay away!”, Marinette stuttered, nearly inhaling her chocolate down the wrong pipe.

“If you say so. He was genuinely worried for you though, I don’t think he would have cared what
you looked like sick, or be too worried about getting sick himself. If anything being sick might be a
godsend to him, no more photoshoots or ridiculous model stuff until he recovers, y’know?”, Alya
grinned.

Yeah, and no Chat Noir until then either.

“He was…Worried?…”, Marinette mumbled with surprise as she looked down at her lap. Sure he
may have been Chat Noir and it was in his right to worry about the civilians he really cared about,
Ladybug included, but she thought he’d have much more pressing things to worry about since
yesterday, like how Ladybug suddenly knows who he is. Perhaps it came with the territory of
keeping it a secret and pretending to worry about something else a superhero may not. But then why
would Alya say he was genuine about it, if it was all for pretend? Adrien wouldn’t lie about caring,
and neither would Chat.

“Why are you so surprised?”, Alya chuckled with a raised brow and a sideways glance.

Marinette shook her head real fast and gave a grin of embarrassment. “Oh, I just didn’t think he’d
have time to worry about a sick me, hehe! Not with his schedule and everything”, she waved off.

“Which you would know by heart, no surprise there”, Alya smirked.

“‘Would’ know? I DO know and you know it! That boy’s schedule is etched into my brain for life!”,
Marinette said.

Alya laughed. “So then what you are? His admirer or his secretary?”, she asked.

Marinette’s face at that was priceless enough to send Alya into a cacophony of laughter over the
other girl’s reaction.

“I’m kidding, girl! But seriously, given your extensive knowledge about what that boy is doing every
minute of every day, you might as well be his manager!”, she said, bringing Marinette closer by
draping an arm over the other girl’s shoulders and pulling towards herself.
“At least I would be courteous enough to clear his schedule every now and then so he can have some free time to actually do what he wants”, Marinette scoffed with an eye roll.

“But then again…What difference would it make if he’s saving the world, right beside me?”, she thought to herself.

“You mean so he has time to make out with you”, Alya corrected her with a smirk.

“ALYA!!?”, Marinette yelled, and whopped a pillow right into Alya’s face without second thought, knocking the other girl backwards down onto the bed. Alya only laughed hysterically.

“For feeling sick you’re sure as spunky as ever!”, Alya said at the end of her laughing, sitting back up after she caught her breath back.

Marinette was silent again, for the first time since Alya had arrived, having brought her knees up and hugging them to her chest. It was quite apparent to Alya that there was definitely a shift in mood.

“Hey, I was only joking…”, she said, putting an arm around Mari’s shoulders again, this time looking concerned like before. “Tell me what’s really going on. Did you and Adrien fight or something?”.

“Not with him, but I did sort of have a fight with someone I care about…”, Marinette said softly.

“Who?”, Alya asked.

“You don’t know him”, Marinette said quickly, then added, “He’s…just an old friend I’ve known for a while”.

“’He’? Is he like, some sort of passed crush or something?”, Alya continued to ask.

To answer or not to answer. That was the real question.

“…Not really, no. Or at least, I didn’t feel that way towards him much. But I think…He felt that way towards me. We got into this argument and…I think I broke his heart. All because I knew something about him I don’t think I was supposed to know. I feel bad, and honestly want to tell him I’m sorry and make things right again, but I fear knowing what I know could get him into some serious trouble. I don’t think I can face him now…”, Marinette explained. She was out of ideas, alibis, ways to lie or stretch the truth. As long as she didn’t mention Adrien or Chat Noir’s name, and kept Alya guessing, then maybe she could still keep things a secret.

“Is that why you’ve been feeling miserable today?”, Alya asked.

“I think so, yeah…And I’m not sure why I would, not like this anyway”, Mari nodded.

“Hang on, you said you felt like you had no energy?”, Alya said with a thoughtful look.

“Yeah?”, Marinette confirmed.

“And your parents said something about you sleeping through the day and won’t eat anything”, Alya added.

“I guess? What are you-?”, Marinette looked confused.

“Lack of energy, fatigue, loss of appetite, not any actual physically sick symptoms, and by the sounds of it a feeling of hopelessness- here it is!”, Alya said as she typed all those things into Google on her phone, and then showed Mari the screen. “I don’t think you’re sick, just depressed!”, Alya
said, triumphant at figuring it out.

The screen of the auburn brunette’s phone read “Depression” at the top, with symptoms and ways to treat it listed below.

“Depression?”, Marinette tilted her head.

“It’s very common in many people, teens included! Basically you’re just really sad. It’s not anything dangerous, but it can be if it’s left untreated. It’s one of the leading causes of suicide”, Alya said, bringing her phone back to look at it herself and scrolling the page to read more.

“Does it ever go away on its own?”, Marinette asked.

“Maybe in some cases, but I think it’s rare”, Alya pushed her glasses back up her nose as she glanced at Mari, and then continued, “otherwise it’s only helped through meditation and sometimes therapy, depending on the severity of it and how it’s effecting your life. In your case, I think the only way you’re going to overcome yours is to confront the source, meaning talk to the guy you fought with and make up with him, or else it’s just going to get worse from here”, she explained.

“I can’t imagine how much worse than it is already”, Marinette should her head, resting her chin on her knees that she still hugged to her chest.

“Trust me girl, it can get worse than this, and you don’t want it to. This could leave you vulnerable to Hawkmoth!”, Alya said.

“…I know”, Marinette said simply.

The two talked more between them about things until it grew late in the evening and Alya had to go home, leaving Marinette alone. Alya bid her adieus to her best friend, and then Mari’s parents on her way out as they were closing up shop, and went on her way. Luckily, Marinette wasn’t entirely alone. She did, after all, have Tikki.

“Did talking with Alya help?”, the sweet little voice of said kwami asked as she flew out from where she had been hiding the whole time.

“A little. I think”, Marinette said, shrugging her shoulders.

“A little is better than not at all”, Tikki also shrugged.

“I suppose…”, Marinette mumbled. There was more silence between them until she spoke up again a moment later. “Do I have to go out on patrol tonight?...It’s going to be bad enough facing Adrien on Monday, I’m not sure I can face Chat Noir this soon”.

“You don’t have to, if you don’t really want to. But do remember that, as Ladybug, you still have responsibilities and must protect the city from Hawkmoth. You can’t let yourself fail if you hope to defeat him one day”, Tikki said.

“I know Tikki. I haven’t forgotten. I don’t want to fail either”, Marinette said.

“Good. I believe in you! You’ll get through this”, Tikki smiled, flitting up to Marinette’s face and hugging her cheek.

“I hope so Tikki. Adrien and I both, I really hope so”.

And meanwhile in the night, as winds of chill blew over the city, the black cat himself was out on the
prowl. He was patrolling upon normal routine but also, at the same time, looking for something. Rather, someone. She didn’t have to speak to him tonight, he just wanted to see her, and reassure himself that she was okay after what happened. No sign of red and black spots, to his dismay.

Chat Noir stopped perched on a ledge of the famed Notre Dame structure among the statues of gargoyles, unbothered by their fierce appearance as guardians of the cathedral. Standing, he looked at his baton and debated for a moment if he should try calling her, wondering if she’d even answer. The angel on his shoulder won out against the demon and he pressed dial. It rang, and rang, and rang still. Until he got no answer, as honestly expected, and was taken to Ladybug’s voicemail.

“Ladybug, where are you? Look, whatever happened, I’m sorry. Please don’t make me patrol alone, Paris is counting on us to look after its people, and I can’t patrol all of it by myself in one night! You can hate and ignore me all you want if that makes you happy, but don’t abandon your duties like this! Please, I……I just need to know if you’re okay. Please. That’s all I ask. Are you okay? Tell me! If you’re not okay, then neither am I. I can’t do any of this without you, I’m not mad at you I SWEAR, just…”, he begun to leave his message, but the bad butterflies in his stomach weakened his knees and he collapses to them, stifling a sniffling sob which he was sure was recorded into his message. “…Just call me. Please. Tell me if you’re okay. I’m sorry! I love you so much, you know that…I’ll be waiting, okay? I’ll wait for you until you’re ready to talk…If you ever want to again. Yours always, Chat Noir”, and he ended it there before he got too emotional, swallowing his tears away and biting back his sadness, so that he may continue with the patrol. He leaped from the ledge of Notre Dame and began running across rooftops, letting the wind dry his eyes.

It’s hard not to cry over losing someone when you don’t know what you did to make them leave. Chat would know this from past experience. When his mother left so suddenly, he fought so hard not to cry about it, even when he was alone where no one could see. Gabriel made sure that he knew being emotional wasn’t allowed. So much was suppressed within him because of that over the last couple years since, and nowadays he wasn’t so sure he could continue to hold things in. That was the only thing he was thankful about crying in his sleep. In a way, it was a release of those suppressed emotions, and that made things sometimes easier in waking life to handle. But it’s the part about being left without answers and a way to fix things, that got to him the most. What did he do to Ladybug to make her mad at him, besides the obvious that he knew of? What did he do to make her leave?

…What did he do to make his mother leave him and his father? What did he do to make her disappear, seemingly into thin air? Was it even something he did? Didn’t she love him enough?

Wasn’t he enough?

He skid to an abrupt stop on a rooftop to wipe his eyes away with the thoughts, getting angry with himself for allowing such things to get to him, right now of all times.

“You idiot…!”, he said to himself out of nowhere, partly wondering if half of that could have been from Plagg speaking through him.

He looked out at the lit up city from where he stood as the tears flowed again, and with them, the memory he only wished he could forget…

*There was no mistaking it. Adrien had woken that morning to hearing someone crying from a wounded heart, echoing through the house from the foyer. Things seemed colder than usual, he rolled out of bed with a shiver, curiosity piqued. He tiptoed down the stairs, tracking the cries as far as his father’s office where the door had, to his surprise, been left open. Sure, the sound of sobbing seemed rather foreign to his ears but he could tell, it was no one else but Gabriel.*
“…Dad?”, he said, after a moment of hesitancy and watching through the open door, right as he began approaching the man whose back was turned to him.

Though at the informal greeting, Gabriel quickly turned on the ball of his foot to face Adrien, glasses amiss from his face and eyes a clear sign that the weeping had been going on for much longer than Adrien knew or realized.

Adrien stiffened with wide eyes. “S-sorry, father!”, he corrected himself quickly, “are-…Are you okay?”, he then asked.

Gabriel turned away again from his son to compose himself and straighten up into something more presentable. “I’m fine, Adrien. What do you need?”, came his ever cold response.

“N-nothing! I was just…Where’s mom?”, Adrien jumped back at the chill in his father’s voice, completely unexpecting of it, but then looked around when he realized someone was missing.

“Your mother…”, Gabriel’s voice shook as he tried to keep strong. He turned back to Adrien once more, “has disappeared”, he said, allowing for one singular tear to trail its way down his face, but his gaze still held firm.

And it all suddenly hit Adrien, feeling like he’d just been struck by lightning, as his stomach dropped. His eyes widened as they too began to water when he realized the reality of the situation just by the sight of his father.

His mind then wanted to know as his heart begged to ask, “…Where did she go? Is she coming back?”.

But Gabriel did not answer, which did not give him ease. All his father did was huff and walk over to a wall, back to his son and hands folded behind him, and stared at seemingly nothing. There was nothing there. It became silent between him and Adrien, heavy and deafening.

It was then that the rift of distance between father and son had opened.

Adrien waited for a moment longer in hopes of hearing his father speak again, but no words were said, there was only the thick silence in the air.

That very same day, Adrien and his father had dressed in black to mourn, which Adrien didn’t know why since his mother had only disappeared, not died as far as he knew. Gabriel had the portrait of them hung on the wall of the foyer stairs, as well as the mural of Mrs. Agreste painted and put in his office on the very wall he had stared at.

The tears didn’t stop coming for the next several days that followed.

Chat’s gaze had wandered up to the sky whilst he looked back at the memory that hurt to remember. It was the saddest day of his life. After that day, the warmth of sun had disappeared and the Manor fell into a dark coldness of dull colors, smiles and laughter of a family no longer within its walls. What was left were one shell of a man and two broken hearts.

He didn’t want to lose Ladybug the same way; wake up one day and find that she’s gone, never to be seen or heard from again.

“What am I doing?…”, he asked himself, wiping his eyes with the cuff of his wrist. “I have a patrol to do”. He let himself continue, keeping a vigilant eye on the city for anything suspicious…And for a figure in red and black spots.
He knew there was a lot more ground to cover given he was alone tonight. It was going to be long and grueling, having to check on a lot more by himself, when normally he and Ladybug split up the city in halves so that each had their own part of it to look after. Sometimes the routine was to rendezvous at the Eiffel Tower, pick a half, and patrol before meeting up again to sit and talk if there was time and say goodnight. Other times, when things seemed peaceful, they’d patrol together. And even when they would split from one another, he never truly felt alone, because he knew she was out with him and that he would see her again before the night was over. This time, things were much quieter than usual, and he felt far more alone than ever on a patrol. He wished more than anything to have her by his side, smiling and laughing, teasing him with a game of tag and always claiming not to be it while he raced to catch her. Of course, there were those few occasions where he was on patrol by himself when she had something going on in her civilian life. But the difference was, at those times, he knew why he was solo. This time, he didn’t know. He was lost.

Chat vaulted from building to building, eventually coming to a stop and perching on the rails of a rather familiar balcony. He scanned his eyes over what he could see from there, finding nothing to be out of the ordinary. A moment longer and he was looking over his shoulder at the hatch door, needing nothing but a friend to talk to. But he had to turn away, he didn’t have time to sit and converse with Marinette if he was to patrol as much of the city as one person like him possibly could.

He shook off the thought and lept from the railing to the neighboring rooftop and disappeared into the night.

“Do you think I should patrol tonight, Tikki?”, Marinette asked her kwami.

“It might help you clear your head? You’ve been in here all day, maybe fresh air will be good for you?”, Tikki suggested with a shrug.

“I don’t know…What if he is out tonight too?”, Marinette shook her head, hugging herself as if she were cold.

“Oh Marinette. I know I’ve probably said this before already today, but you can’t avoid him forever”, Tikki frowned sadly at her chosen.

“I know I can’t, and part of me doesn’t want to…He’s been nothing but kind to me this whole time, both as Chat Noir and as Adrien, even when I wasn’t all too kind to him on the first day we met. And here I am hiding like a coward, very much unlike Ladybug…”, Marinette said.

“You are not a coward, Marinette”, Tikki told her, patting her on the head and fixing a lose strand of hair that was straying from the others.

“Still I just have this funny feeling. Like…Like I need to transform or something. Almost like there’s something waiting for me…”, Marinette said with a shiver, and then forced herself to get up and peak outside through her balcony door, checking for something and half expecting to be met with a pair of green eyes behind a black mask. But there was nothing there. She didn’t know she had just missed her partner.

“Maybe I should go out…Whether he’s out or not, it’s my responsibility to make sure everything is safe and peaceful, no unannounced akumas or petty crime taking place, and maybe you’re right Tikki. Fresh air might do me some good”, Marinette finally said.

“That’s the spirit! Just say the words when you’re ready!”, Tikki smiled at her.

Marinette smiled back. “Spots on”, and in a flash she stood as Ladybug. She took a deep breath in and let it out in a sigh before working up the nerve to climb out onto her balcony.
What if he was nearby waiting for her? What if he saw her? What if she crashed into him on her way out or he suddenly decided to show up right in front of her? What if-

Before she knew it she was standing outside, city lights glaring bright against the dark night sky, and still no Chat Noir in sight. Maybe she would get lucky and find that he isn’t out tonight.

She readied to throw her yo-yo at the nearest corner of a building to swing away and begin patrol, but the beep of a notification came through and it stopped her from moving any further. She flipped her yo-yo open and found the voicemail Chat had left her from an unreturned call. Suddenly she felt queasy again.

She out it to her ear to listen.

“Ladybug, where are you? Look, whatever happened, I’m sorry. Please don’t make me patrol alone, Paris is counting on us to look after its people, and I can’t patrol all of it by myself in one night! You can hate and ignore me all you want if that makes you happy, but don’t abandon your duties like this! Please, I…..I just need to know if you’re okay. Please. That’s all I ask. Are you okay? Tell me! If you’re not okay, then neither am I. I can’t do any of this without you, I’m not mad at you I SWEAR, just…”

She heard him sob, and put a hand to her mouth to keep her own from escaping.

“…Just call me. Please. Tell me if you’re okay. I’m sorry! I love you so much, you know that…I’ll be waiting, okay? I’ll wait for you until you’re ready to talk…If you ever want to again. Yours always, Chat Noir”.

She sank to her knees. She’d really hurt him more than she realized, she could hear it plain as day in his voice. She began to shake, and cried to herself. There would be no patrolling tonight.

Chat Noir found himself drawn back to the Eiffel Tower, standing once again at the top and looking over Paris as far as he could see. And still no Ladybug. He sighed, sitting on the edge of the platform and letting his feet to dangle. He brought his hands up and ran them through his messy bedhead mane, suddenly feeling overwhelmed by everything. Ladybug going M.I.A on him, having to patrol more than just his half of the city alone, not knowing what to do. He gripped his head and choked on the air around him in another sob he couldn’t cease. And all he could do was blame himself, for everything.

He did not get to meet up with Ladybug that night, and neither her with him. Instead, both found themselves utterly lost.

Lost in the sound of silence.

End Notes

Thanks for reading! Hope to see you back for next chapter and the rest to come! However much attention this gets may determine if and when it gets updated, so keep in mind that the more people there is that like it, the more likely I am to try and update. Typically I will post a chapter as soon as it's done, and that will be on my own terms. Asking about when it will be updated stresses me out and is a trigger for my anxiety so, I would prefer you not ask when the next chapter(s) will be. Life is binding and sometimes I can't get a break, so updates may
be sporadic.

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