## Spellbound

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### Summary

Going out on Midsummer had been a very bad idea, Adrien was able to admit that much. He couldn’t regret running into a girl named Marinette though, who has helped him through the time where Faerie tried to call him with sweet songs. He really wanted to get to know her better, but there was a slight problem: he was a *Cat Sidhe* and if she found out about it, she could as well be proclaimed dead on the spot. But the loneliness he had seen in her eyes had been too familiar for him to just leave her alone. Keeping her ignorant of the presence of the fair folk, while he himself was one of them, proved to be a lot harder than he had expected it to be though.

### Notes
Thanks a lot for clicking on this in the first place! I'm honoured, really! ;w; This is my very first fanfiction ever and I hope you'll like it! :D After not finding enough ML fanfictions with Celtic Mythology in them, I just decided to write my own one. Since my main story (and hopefully to-be-novel) is all about Celtic Mythology too, I just decided to use the concepts I scrapped, for convenience's sake, in this piece of work. It's interesting to play with the "what if"s and alternatives and so far I really like what I came up with. c:
Please keep in mind that English is my second language, so if things sound off, that's probably the reason why. I let the chapters be beta-read by my native English friends though, so I hope they caught most of my embarrassing little errors. :'D

Otherwise, this AU is playing as close to canon as I can get it, just with the Mythology bit added. Due to that I, of course, have to change a few things. I also wanted to start it a year before Marinette and Adrien get their respective Miraculous because I think pre-Miraculous Marinette is a concept that is only very rarely explored in fanfiction writing. Took the "what if" one step further there when I let her meet Adrien one year before she met him in canon. What can I say? As adorable as these two are as a couple, I just live for that Adrinette friendship. So, prepare for a lot of friendship fluff!

The First Book of Faeries

See the end of the work for more notes.
A Midsummer Night

Chapter Notes

I have the first 7 chapters written so far and yet need to send them to my beta-reader. I hope to be able to update weekly on Thursdays, but I cannot promise anything!

PS: Today is Midsummer, so even though I haven't finished writing the fanfiction yet, I felt that it was appropriate to upload the first chapter today! :D

There are some words in this chapter that might need explaining, so let's get that out of the way first:

Tír na nÓg = The faerie world of eternal youth and spring. Also referred to as simply Faerie.
Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh = Celtic celebrations throughout the year. Will be mentioned in more detail later in the story, but the specifics are not important for this chapter yet.
Cat Sidhe (pronounced [shee]) = A large black faerie cat with a white tuff at its front. It's the size of a medium dog.
of the Sidhe (pronounced [shee]) = of the mounds. Sidhe are faerie mounds under which faeries live. The word is used both when referring to these mounds but also when referring to the fae folk.
widdershins = counter-clockwise (it's Scottish, so I don't know if everyone knows it. Just thought I'd add it as well)

He knew he shouldn’t be out. The obedient son in him bristled at the sheer thought of so blatantly going against his father’s wishes. However, in the end, it had been the cat in him that had won the inner conflict, for it was the cat that yearned for freedom the most. That’s why Adrien had shifted and jumped out the window before his brother had been able to get a hold of him. Even though he had been anything but deaf to Félix’s demands of ‘getting his furry ass back inside right that instant’, and the excessive cursing that followed when he hadn’t done so, it failed to deter him, yet he still felt guilty. He knew that Félix was just worried about him and that with good reason.

It had been exactly half a year since their mother had disappeared without a trace on Midwinter. To go out on a night like this, when the pull of Faerie was at its strongest, was dangerous to those who could feel it. How easy would it be to just give in to the songs of times long passed and follow the voices that called him? How easy would it be to slip into Faerie, only to return eventually and find out that several hundred years had passed and all his loved ones were dead? Very easy. So easy, in fact, that his mother, who he had always considered an expert on all things fey, hadn’t been able to resist them after all.

Midsummer and Midwinter were no times for settled fae like them to wander around outside. It was a time to keep St. John’s wort and rowan sprigs, collected on Beltane, close and suffer through the unpleasant effects it had on them. Humans liked to use those herbs to keep fairies at bay, but Emilie Agreste had discovered that they were just as effective to keep fairies inside a house and prevent them from leaving. Since at home they were safe. The St. John’s wort, worn in their hair,
would divert the magic of Faerie and not tempt them to follow it.

Yet, that had been when his mother had still been around and made sure to always have those specific herbs and trinkets at hand when the days in which Faerie’s pull was most persistent came around. Midsummer, Midwinter, Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane and Lughnasadh; those were all difficult times. Even with the herbs helping them, the pull of Tír na nÓg was strong and hard to resist. Emilie Agreste had been confident of nothing bad happening with the St. John’s wort flowers in her hair and the only short trip to a shop. She had been wrong. With her gone, Adrien and Félix had been left to fend for themselves at Imbolc, Beltane and eventually also on Midsummer.

Félix had always been the stronger-willed one of the two of them. He had managed to get them the needed herbs but that hadn’t been enough. Not when their father had forbidden them from shifting since their mother’s disappearance and kept them strictly away from the outside world as best as he could. Therefore, it had only been a question of time until one of the twins would snap and break the no-shifting rule. That it had been Adrien was not much of a surprise, but that it had been on Midsummer of all nights was an absolute disaster.

The pull was strong and the songs of olden times threw him into a daze. They were comforting like a lullaby and beckoned him closer. Not that there would be a certain place where one could cross into Tír na nÓg, the Faerie realm. It just happened when the anchor to the human realm was broken. Adrien desperately tried to concentrate. To find his anchor and return to the mansion as soon as possible. His hackles rose at the mere idea of going back. It had been far too long since he had wandered over the Parisian rooftops at night like this. The warm breeze that blew through his fur further soothed him, making him want to just follow the beautiful music and the voices he heard, even though he couldn’t understand the words of either.

Don’t give in! He told himself harshly and made a sharp turn, running counter-clockwise to get rid of the daze. That his cat side argued with his common sense was really not making things easier for him as he was torn about where to go. The figures he saw walking through the streets and sometimes even through the air, did not help him to feel rooted either. They were not real, or at least, they were not real at this moment. A long time ago they had been real and they had walked those very grounds. Long before the name ‘Paris’ had even been invented and before the city had been built. Back then, it had just been roads and small villages scattered around a land with another name and form. What he saw were just pictures of the past.

Not real. They are not real. Ignore them. Run widdershins. Listen to what is real. Find an anchor!

Nearby in space and slightly sideways in time, something like a human figure, just much taller and much more beautiful, strode by, laughing at a joke Adrien wished he didn’t understand. Also, the smell—the smell!—was killing him. A smell like fresh-ploughed earth, just stronger and more alive, a smell of living magic full of eerie delight. A smell that was so distinctively not Paris that it confused his senses and made him lose any sense of direction.

Adrien wanted to panic. Panic would mean stress and stress would mean that he could snap out of the daze for good. It would mean that the soothing songs and the sound of horns from a hunt that had once taken place in a forest that was long gone couldn’t get to him anymore, if only for just a short moment. He couldn’t though. The pull was strong, way stronger than he had ever witnessed it being.

Don’t slip! You can’t leave Félix alone! He practically yelled at himself inside his head. However, even the thought of his brother could not root him in the here and now for long. He needed
something else. A feeling, a scent, a sound, anything! Just something that wasn’t Faerie. As of now, he was feeling, hearing, seeing and sensing things that shouldn’t wind their way into this reality. Things that belonged somewhere else and which he wanted to stay ignorant of like the humans were.

Green eyes frantically scanned the surroundings of Paris’ rooftops. Where was he? For some reason, he couldn’t bring himself to care much about his location. He could have been just a street away from the mansion without being able to recognize anything. Did Faerie already have that strong of a grip on him? Had it really come to the point that he couldn’t recognize his home anymore? He had spent so much time as a child on those very rooftops that he basically knew Paris better from up on them than from down on the streets.

When he took another step, he slipped. Not into Faerie but quite literally. Too deep in his musings of where and how and when, he had not noticed that the wall he was walking on had come to an end, making him fall. He braced himself for the impact of a fall from several storeys, knowing that he would be fine. After all, he was no regular cat: He was a Cat Sidhe. A faerie cat—oh, how much he despised the word! He could take a fall, even though it would still hurt.

It therefore surprised him when the fall ended shortly after it began and he tumbled on the tiles of what seemed to be a balcony. At least the scare the fall had given him was enough to snap him out of the daze at least a little. The heavenly scent of roses did the rest. Like all fairies, he was quite fond of the flowers. Just as rosemary and gorse drew fairies away, roses and bluebells drew them in. However, while roses were nice, would they be strong enough of an anchor? Could they chase away the smell of ancient magic that was drenching the city on this dreaded night? He could already feel the daze returning and the songs getting louder now that the shock was wearing off.

In the end, it was a voice that saved him from following the tempting calls again. A voice that managed to root him quite thoroughly.

“Hey kitty, are you alright?” It was sweet and female, soothing him in a way the songs of Faerie didn’t. For this was reality, not something illusory. Adrien would have jumped had he not still been in the slight daze of Faerie’s call. When he turned to its speaker, he was met with the most beautiful blue eyes he had ever seen. Could humans even have such beautiful eyes? Apparently, since she was definitely not of the Sidhe.

She held her hand out to him, probably for him to sniff like one would do when meeting a cat. He was so perplexed that his cat instincts took over and he did just that. The scent of vanilla, cinnamon and something sweet and floral greeted him. It was a wonderful scent that was much more tempting than the smell of magic.

That was when he realised that he had found an anchor. Thankful and endlessly relieved he nuzzled her still inviting palm and purred. On other days he would have run. Being close to humans only led to disaster and he didn’t want to bring bad luck on this poor innocent girl but tonight was different. Tonight, he was just a lost cat that couldn’t find his way home and he was more than grateful to this human girl for saving him, even if she did not know that.

Why was she outside on her balcony at night in the first place? It probably was close to midnight already and she seemed about his age. Thirteen-year-old girls should be in bed at this hour. He placed his front paws on the side of the lounger she sat on and meowed, curious as to what she was doing.

All curiosity vanished, however, when her fingers suddenly stroked through his fur and Adrien all but melted into the touch. It had been so long since he had last been petted by someone in this form—the last time had been when his mother had still been around. He only noticed that he had
jumped onto her lap when she giggled.

“You’re a cuddler then, huh?”

He was, even though he probably would never openly admit it. In that sense he was quite glad that the cat in him had decided to take over and succumb to the sensation of her pets. Otherwise he would have died of shame. She didn’t seem to mind but that was probably because she didn’t expect him to be able to understand her—she didn’t know that he knew of social boundaries and manners after all, that he was someone she could have crossed on the street once or twice. She would no doubt throw him off her balcony if she found out and then he’d be back to running from the songs.

The thought of that made him shudder and think about what his mother must have been through before she disappeared. The confusion and the dwindling will to be was something he didn’t want to go through ever again if he could prevent it. Therefore, social norms, morals and fae laws be damned, he would stay with this girl until Midsummer would pass. If she would let him stay that was.

He didn’t notice that she continued doing whatever she was doing before he fell on her balcony, though that was maybe due to the fact that she continued to pet him with her other hand. His purrs tuned out the scrape of a pencil on paper, though he noticed her occasional yawns. It was peaceful, to say the least. He knew he would only stay as long as Midsummer would last—that he would return home at sunrise in two days and never see her again—but something within him didn’t like the thought of leaving her.
Félix had tried everything he could think of to get Adrien to come back when he had suddenly jumped out of the window. No coaxing and no threat had worked though and soon after, Adrien had vanished from sight. He knew being asleep would have been wise. Sleeping was safe, after all. He wouldn’t fall into Faerie while sleeping, especially not with the St. John’s wort in his hair and pockets. However, Félix could not stop worrying about his brother. For Adrien to make it back safe and sound was unlikely. Well, actually it was likely, but it was improbable that it would be the next morning when Midsummer was over. Adrien would return someday, probably, but when that time came around, Félix would be old or even dead. He had tried to make his peace with the logical conclusion that he would never see his brother again, but still stayed up all night waiting for a miracle to happen and him to return.

The sun had just risen, but that didn’t mean much. Sure, Midsummer was easier to handle at daytime, but that was only because there were more distractions around with which one could be rooted to the earthly realm. Traffic noise, the chatter of people, all those things were loose anchors. Things that were not missing, but significantly less present at night. A night Adrien had gone out at.

Félix pulled his hair when his thoughts returned to his brother. It wasn’t like he did not understand why Adrien did it. He, too, had grown skittish over the months, yearning to shift and wander around outside. It was a freeing thing to do. Their father though, human as he was, didn’t understand this longing. His understanding of the situation was that as long as they kept up their human guises, nothing bad would happen and things would be safe. Félix especially had tried
many times to correct him, but his explanations fell on deaf ears. Gabriel Agreste would not be swayed, especially not when his wife—their mother—was mentioned.

A knocking stopped Félix in his pacing and whoever stood in front of the door didn’t bother to wait for a ‘come in’ before entering the huge room the twins shared. Unsurprisingly, it was Nathalie. Their father visited their room so rarely that it was basically a miracle when it happened. That day, however, was not one for miracles—at least not to him—so Félix hadn’t expected anyone else than his father’s assistant to begin with.

“Where is your brother?” she asked after taking a look through the room and noticing Adrien’s obvious absence. Félix frowned darkly.

“If you want him for an early morning photoshoot then don’t bother. None was scheduled for today, nor for tomorrow,” he said, not letting on to the fact that his brother was gone. As long as there was just a slight chance of Adrien returning safe and sound, Félix would not utter a word of his disappearance.

“Now there is,” Nathalie continued. “It is a substitute for the one from two days ago that had to be cancelled because it was cloudy.” While she had sounded like her usual objective self at first, it became apparent that she gradually grew uneasy under the glare Félix directed at her. Apart from their father she was the only human who knew what Félix and Adrien were. This was not due to them or their father, but because she had been a good friend of their mother who, at one point, hadn’t felt it necessary to keep what she was secret from her best friend anymore. That Nathalie’s loyalty had shifted from his now gone mother to his cold and distant father greatly displeased Félix while Adrien, ever the optimist, had voiced that it was nice that there was someone who could be there for him. Félix hadn’t bothered to point out that they could be as well, but that their father did not want that. He wanted humans close, not Sidhe. That was obvious, at least to Félix.

“Nathalie, it is Midsummer,” Félix said, knowing that the woman was very well familiar with what that meant.

“Your father is aware—” she said, but he cut her off.

“I don’t think he is. If he would be aware of just how bad Midsummer is to us, he wouldn’t even have considered to schedule a photoshoot. He should know better after what happened to mother last Midwinter.” It was a low blow and he immediately regretted saying it when he saw Nathalie’s eyes widen and then look down. He was angry at his father, not her. She wasn’t at fault for his irrational decisions, she just passed them on. And she was probably as devastated about their mother’s disappearance as they were, so tearing up barely healed wounds wasn’t fair.

“I’m sorry. But just tell him that it won’t happen,” he therefore added in a more placating tone.

Nathalie sighed. “He won’t be happy about this.”

“He won’t be happy about this.”

“Thats his problem.” Félix honestly couldn’t care less at this point if his father was happy or not. Adrien was gone and not only had his father not noticed it, but he hadn’t even bothered to so much as check on them, even though it was Midsummer. He even had the audacity to schedule an outdoor photoshoot for this dangerous and much dreaded time. Obviously, he didn’t care about their wellbeing at all, so there was no point in caring about his wellbeing in return.

When Nathalie closed the door behind her, Félix resumed his previously interrupted pacing. He wanted to believe that Adrien was alright. That he had found an anchor and was trying to make his way back home. The logical part of him argued that it was too late already and that he should comfort himself with the knowledge that he was probably with their mother now.
Deep in his frantic thoughts as he was, Félix didn’t notice the lashing black tail behind him or the twitching cat ears on top of his head. It was a thing that happened sometimes when he was not paying attention, mostly while being worked up about something. It wasn’t like his human form was not real, but some parts of it were an illusion. While his cat form was his true form as a Cat Sidhe, his more humanoid one was also one true form. He was half human after all. But half human also meant only half of the human looks, so a few of his cat features still were very evident. He usually hid them with a glamour, but especially his tail and ears were easy to slip through it when he subconsciously thought about using them.

Cat eyes—another feature—narrowed when the door was opened again and none other than Gabriel Agreste stepped through. Félix barely kept himself from growling when he saw his father as he raised a sceptical eyebrow at his son and said in a cold and very disinterested voice: “I thought I made myself clear that I don’t want any of you to shift. And take those ridiculous flowers out of your hair.”

That was yet another thing about the man: Ever since his wife disappeared, he had deemed the herbs and flowers she had sworn on, to be useless. When Félix and Adrien had first asked him about getting some St. John’s wort for Imbolc, he had scoffed and said that it was sheer superstition and that they wouldn’t do anything at all. They had tried to argue, but Gabriel Agreste never admitted to being wrong. Or at least they had never witnessed him to do such a thing.

Félix acted as if he wouldn’t have heard the latter, but obediently let his glamour snap back over his ears and tail. He kept his eyes cat-like though, just to show some small sort of defiance.

“It’s Midsummer, father,” Félix said in an equally emotionless tone.

“Which is why it is important for you to be supervised for the entire day.”

“No, it is important for us to stay inside the house, keep the St. John’s wort on us at all times and hope for the days to pass quickly,” Felix said coldly and glared at his father. “And if you would really care about our safety, then you would have sent Nathalie here much earlier. Because Midsummer doesn’t start at sunrise nor even at midnight, but at sunset. The first night of Midsummer is already over and you didn’t even bother to check if we were alright,” he snarled and this time couldn’t hold back a hiss.

“Well, you clearly are fine, so I don’t see why that would have been necessary.”

“Fine!? This is anything but fine! Or do you see Adrien anywhere!?” Félix half hissed, half yelled, now eventually having had enough of his father’s ignorance. Only a moment later did he realise what he had said and internally cursed himself for letting it slip. He actually hadn’t wanted to draw attention to Adrien’s rule-breaking, so now he had to find a way to word it like it wasn’t his brother’s fault. Which wouldn’t be hard since it technically wasn’t his fault at all.

Silence stretched out while the echo of Félix’s shout subsided. He glared daggers at his father while Gabriel just raised both eyebrows in surprise.

“He went out?” he eventually asked but didn’t sound concerned at all.

“No, the Sluagh Sidhe took him,” Félix said, since it wasn’t necessarily a lie. Even now he could hear the distant cries of the spirits, as they beckoned him outside, away from the security of his home. They were after his soul, but they weren’t going to have it. Adrien had been too tempted by the songs to resist the outside and with that had thrown himself head-first into danger. Under normal circumstances, he never would have left, at least not without returning at most an hour later.
“This is not funny, son,” Gabriel said, apparently thinking that Félix was being sarcastic.

“No, it really isn’t. If you could hear them you would understand!”

“I don’t hear them though. For all I know, you are pretending that there are some Sidhe”—he spat the word as if the mere mention of a being like that would be a personal insult “—going around that are out to steal children, just so Adrien has an excuse for disobeying my orders.”

Now that just took the cake.

“Mother told you about the dangers of Midsummer and the fey songs from Tír na nÓg! You know damn well that they are real and that there are actually Sidhe going around that are stealing children!” Félix yelled. It wasn’t often that he lost his composure, but there were just some things he couldn’t take with calm indifference like his father seemingly could. Especially not when his brother was most likely gone forever.

“Your mother has always been delusional—”

“Don’t you dare blame mother for this! It’s your fault that Adrien is gone! Just because you didn’t allow us to shift he snapped and could be tempted outside!”

“My fault?” his father scoffed. “You can’t seriously think that wandering around as a cat is preferable to being human. I won’t tolerate such uncivilised behaviour from my own sons.”

“We are not human,” Félix snarled and underlined the point by letting his glamour fall on purpose. His cat ears and tail were immediately back, but so were fangs and sharp claws. Things that were always there, but not open for the world to see. It was easy to confuse them as humans when no one could see what lay underneath the glamour, but Félix felt that his father needed a reminder of just that. Gabriel Agreste did not react at all though, as if his son was just throwing a temper tantrum.

“Call Nathalie when Adrien returns,” he just said and then turned around to leave the room.

Félix was itching to give his father a slash with his claws, but he held himself back with deep and slow breaths. No reason to feed the fire after all. He significantly calmed after his father left the room, though the eerie distant songs returned, just as the question that had circled through Félix’s mind for hours already.

Would Adrien return?
A Rainy Day

Chapter Notes

And we get back to Adrien and Marinette! With 3,662 words this chapter is still not *that* long, but at least longer than the previous two were. I really like writing long chapters but I also think it’s important to not cram in unimportant details just for the sake of making it longer. Therefore I'm always trying for an ideal length for these chapters so that I keep all the important parts and leave out all the unimportant things! :D

Also made some text dividers for this story! Do you like them? ^w^ By the way, I don't always want to repeat myself with word explanations, so that we don't end up with endlessly long vocabulary parts in the notes here, but since this is just the third chapter I'm gonna also repeat the words mentioned in the notes of chapter 1 and 2, just in case you forgot their meaning :3

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*Cat Sidhe (pronounced [shee]) = A large black faerie cat with a white tuft of fur on its chest.*

*Sidhe (pronounced [shee]) = fae folk*

*Ghillie Dhu = A solitary faerie who inhabits certain birch thickets. His clothing is made of leaves and moss.*

*St. John’s wort = A flowering plant that provides strong protection from fay magic.*

Adrien was used to waking up to either the sound of his alarm clock or Nathalie—and occasionally also Félix—calling his name. Being startled awake was something new to him. He had just been curled up in a warm, soft, comfortable space, minding his own business, when he had suddenly been assaulted with a shift of said space. The blanket that fell on top of him muffled his surprised yowl, making the instigator of this very uncomfortable wakeup-call none the wiser to his presence. By the time he had wiggled his way out of the cosy, soft and also heavy mass, the bed was already empty.

He decided to silently stretch and let his feline curiosity get the better of him before being lured back to the still warm covers and falling asleep again. If his memory served him right—Midsummer was still messing with his head after all—then he had followed the girl inside without her noticing. He then had just fallen asleep on the spot and that was where he was now. It seemed like she still hadn’t noticed that he was in her room, previously having been too tired to pay enough attention to the whereabouts of the black cat and now too busy with whatever had catapulted her out of bed.

Adrien looked over the railing down to the room below. Said girl was out of sight, but he could definitely still hear her while she seemed to furiously scribble something down on paper. She eventually let out a satisfied noise and then left her place under the bed to walk over to her dresser. She pulled out a few clothes and regarded them with a critical eye before eventually deciding on a combination.

Taking that as his cue to retreat, Adrien disappeared from the bed’s railing and curled back up in the covers. He really hoped she didn’t mind him using her bed for a nap. Félix was probably going stir-crazy at this point, but it wasn’t something Adrien could do anything about. He could not just
shift back and steal her phone to tell his brother that he was alright and safe. Especially not since that would connect the girl with him. Who knows who else would be listening after all? Better not to further inconvenience her.

Besides, this was nice. Not having anywhere to go and not feeling like a prisoner in one’s own home. If he called Félix, Nathalie would know and no doubt find a way to fetch him inconspicuously. He did not want to go though. This place was comfortable and it felt safe. As safe as one could feel in an unprotected house on Midsummer as a Cat Sidhe, but at least a hundred times more comfortable. He did feel horrible about leaving Félix home alone to worry, but he hoped his brother would forgive him once he got back and explained everything.

The creak of a hatch made him perk his ears, but the only sound that followed it was the girl’s hurried footsteps as she went down a set of stairs. Content but also sad that she wouldn’t be in her room for some time, Adrien took full comfort in the softness that was her bed. While he could still hear the sweet songs that tried to lure him outside, he convinced himself that he was safe in this place. He would not wander outside again and he would eventually return home.

The next time Adrien was awoken, it was in a much more soothing and gentle way, though still a very unwelcome one. Distant echoes of woodwind pipes, their hollow melody so hard to resist, so unlike sweet birdsong, reached his ears through a still closed window. The rain that heavily fell against it—a sound that was usually soothing to him—seemed to amplify it by a hundred. The tiny flutes, carved with obsidian knives from the bones of toads and played by silver-haired pipers with colourless eyes, were about to drive him crazy and worse; drive him outside.

He clasped his paws over his ears and let out a sorrowful mew, trying to break the spell he was falling under and tune out the music that was luring him away from this peaceful place. It was like being trapped in a nightmare that he wasn’t able to escape. Not until he felt the warm touch of a hand stroking his fur. Adrien relaxed into the sensation and welcomed it as the dreaded songs faded slowly and reality came back into focus.

“I didn’t even notice that you snuck inside with me last night,” a beautiful and clearly real voice said. A voice he recognized as the girl that had saved him. The girl that continued to save him without knowing it. His only answer to her comment was a purr as he arched into her hand.

“But I can’t really throw you out in the rain now, can I?” she sighed and got up. At the loss of contact Adrien opened his eyes and raised his head, watching her climb down the staircase to her room. He was on his feet in a second. Since staying in her bed proved to be dangerous as well, no matter how snug and comfortable it was, he needed to stay close to her if he truly wanted to anchor himself in reality.

As she sat down at what he now saw was her desk, he was already down the stairs and trotted up to her on noiseless paws. A silent ‘meow’ alerted her to his presence and she turned in her swivel chair to look at him with curiosity.

His own gaze was equally curious as he now, for the first time, really looked at her. Her eyes still shone in a bluebell hue, just as he had seen the night before. A colour that was also found in the shine of her black hair, which was tied up in a bun. Single strands of hair that had fallen out of it blew in the wind of a desk fan. Her clothes were casual and suited for this warm, when also rainy, summer day. She had also taken off her shoes in the comfort of her home, sitting on her desk barefoot.
“You can stay and keep me company if you want, but I won’t be much fun,” the girl said. He didn’t mind in the slightest, since this was the first open invitation she had given him.

In the time it took him to wonder if she’d mind if he’d jump on her lap, the songs from unreality picked up again, making him shudder. Another sorrowful mew escaped him as he looked at the girl, unsure of what to do. It was not like she would ever find out about what or who he really was and therefore wouldn’t come into a situation where she’d be creeped out or embarrassed by it. Though Adrien would. He knew very damn well what he was and that it was anything but normal to jump onto strangers’ laps. But desperate times called for desperate measures, so his behaviour could be excused…right?

With a small leap, he was on the girl’s lap again, just like the night before. As happened previously, she giggled at it, finding it more cute than concerning. Adrien did not like to trick her like this, but if he wanted to stay safe he did not have much of a choice. This girl, as impossible as it may seem, anchored him in the real world in a way St John’s wort, thoughts of his brother or the smell of roses couldn’t. He wouldn’t question it and would just take what he got.

Music started to play as she clicked on a playlist on her computer and Adrien could feel himself soaking in the peacefulness of it all. Rainy, cosy summer afternoons were a thing of his past and distant childhood. Before his mother had disappeared and even before he had started to model. It was something he hadn’t known he missed until now.

The silent music, the comfortable darkness of the room, only lit by the desk lamp, and the scrape of a pencil drew him into such a peaceful state that he started to purr again. He couldn’t even remember when he had last purred that much. Just why couldn’t his home be so warm? Why couldn’t he have such a small room with a balcony, a loft bed and just the few things he treasured and needed? A quiet space where he could spend the free time he almost didn’t have. The cat in him had always hated how big Félix’s and his room was, but he hadn’t really known why until he had seen how it could have been instead. Now he longed after such a place.

“No, that doesn’t work,” the girl suddenly muttered under her breath and erased a part she had just drawn.

Adrien raised his head curiously, but she didn’t look at him, still concentrated on her sketch while absentmindedly sticking her tongue out of the corner of her mouth.

The not-quite-cat sat up to see what she was drawing and almost gasped. It was a summer dress and the design looked beautiful! Through his father and through modelling he knew a thing or two about clothes after all. If she designed that completely herself then…wow. She really had some talent, especially at her age. Sure, there were a few things that looked off here and there, but it was still impressive. In fact, he knew a few models who would probably love to wear it.

“I was up late last night trying to finish this, but it’s still not right. I hope I can sew it together before summer is over,” she said with a sigh and laid her pencil down to instead critically look at her drawing. Her view shifted to a few rough sketches that lay scattered across her desk.

“I tried to get some inspiration from the Fête de la Musique earlier, but none of the designs really clicked with me. At least not for a summer dress.”

Adrien craned his neck to look at the sketches. There were seven of them and all were fantastic. Two of them would make fantastic pieces for a fall line and another would be perfect for a chilly summer evening. He saw what she meant with none of them being quite suited for a summer dress though.
At least now he knew why she had stormed out of her room in a hurry earlier and returned when it started to rain. The Fête de la Musique, which unfortunately always was on Midsummer, was very varied and a great place for musicians to show their skill. When he’d been younger, his father had also gone there to get inspiration for designs. Adrien had always yearned to go as well, since all the music and dancing sounded very tempting. As a faerie, he was very predisposed to such things. Really a shame that it was on a day where going outside and losing himself in a song or dance was incredibly dangerous.

When she noticed him staring she gave him a scratch behind the ears.

“I hope it stops raining soon so you can go back home.”

Adrien flattened his ears. He still really didn’t want to go home.

As if the universe had heard him, a lightning flash suddenly lit up the room, soon followed by a thunderclap that made his ears hurt.

Oh no. Oh no oh no oh no!

A thunderstorm to occur during Midsummer was about one of the worst things that could happen. As if the Solstice wouldn’t give them enough energy already! Those of them that moved freely between the worlds, uncaring of how much time passed, were very awake and alert right now, on the lookout for mischief. Not even iron would be able to keep humans safe if they were on the prowl.

Subconsciously Adrien pressed himself closer to her, as if he could protect her somehow with his comparatively small feline body. She misunderstood the gesture.

“You’re probably hungry though…”

Only when she said it did he realise how hungry he really was. He hadn’t eaten anything since dinner and that hadn’t really been much to begin with. Midsummer had made him too nervous to eat much of what the chef had brought him. It was something he very much regretted now. Not that food actually mattered when her life might be in danger…but he also wasn’t one to deny a treat. With him there she was probably as safe as she could get anyway.

“Let’s see what cats can actually eat,” she suddenly said and typed something on her keyboard. Adrien watched with interest as she pulled up website after website, reading through food choices for cats. He had to admit that he had never consulted such websites himself so he also read with interest. Apparently, cats couldn’t taste sweet flavours – the poor things. He was lucky to not have that problem. In contrary even, he had quite the sweet tooth actually, which made the smell of sugary goods from downstairs even more tempting.

“Hmm, cooked meat seems like the safest and easiest thing from all that,” she mused after a while and then rolled back with her desk chair. Adrien jumped off her lap when she got up and meowed at her curiously.

“Wait here for a moment, I’ll be right back,” she said and disappeared downstairs through the hatch. The Cat Sidhe trotted up to it to look downstairs. From what he could see there was a living area, probably the living room. He didn’t dare to go down further, even though he could only hear the girl and no one else moving around the floor. Just a minute or so later she appeared at the foot of the stairs again with a plate in one hand and a bowl in the other. On the plate were slices of pork sausage and even a little bit of cheese. He wiggled excitedly, happy that she had found something edible.
“Here you go, kitty.” As soon as the plate and bowl—which contained water—were placed on the ground, Adrien all but pounced on the food – of course not before silently thanking the animal who has died for its sacrifice like his mother had taught him to.

“Wow, guess you really were hungry after all,” she giggled and closed the hatch behind her. “I hope this doesn’t come back to bite me though. After all, people say that when you feed a stray it’ll keep coming back,” she said as she walked back to her desk and sat down to continue her sketching. Adrien briefly considered if he should be offended by the term “stray” but then just shrugged it off. It wasn’t like he belonged to anyone, so technically it was true.

“I can’t keep a cat here because of the bakery.” She sighed.

A bakery? That explains why it smells so good here!

“Though I wouldn’t mind you visiting me again. It’s nice having company from time to time.”

He could hear at the sound of her voice and by how quietly she said it that there was more to the statement than she was letting on to. Maybe she wouldn’t have ever said it in front of a regular person in the first place. Adrien immediately felt bad since it felt like spying, but he also couldn’t help but agree with her. He didn’t like to be alone either.

While he yearned to tell her of his own loneliness and hardships, he realised that he couldn’t. The only reply he gave was yet another meow, followed by a quiet sigh. It probably was better that way anyway. Humans shouldn’t know about the fae. It was too dangerous for them to know since especially the Unseelie didn’t take kindly to having their existence known of. They preferred to live in the unknown and were determined to keep it that way.

Whenever they encountered a human who knew…well, the ways of punishment varied, but it all resulted in the human not being to tell anyone about their knowledge anymore, in one way or another. Usually a very unkind way.

Death was a kind punishment, being driven to insanity was common, curses were likely too and being taken as a bride was rare but possible. From all those, the latter seemed like the favourable fate, but it was anything but. In Adrien’s opinion, it was the worst outcome of them all. His mother had preferred to not go into detail, but she had told Félix and him stories about human women being kidnapped by fae men. They would then be held like animals and only serve to please their capturer. Basically, they were slaves. Tortured slaves.

As the young Sidhe looked over to the noirette, an unpleasant shiver ran down his spine. Under no circumstances would he wish such a fate upon anyone, much less a person who has treated him so kindly. He couldn’t be selfish and risk her safety like this. Making her think he was a cat and feeling guilty about it was definitely the lesser evil. Would she one day be unlucky and find out after all…then he would explain and hope she would understand. Although it surely wouldn’t come to that. That, he would make sure of. He had kept this secret from every human he had ever encountered in his life so far. She wouldn’t be any different.

It turned out that the girl was very talkative while she was sketching and later on designing. At one point, another voice—her mother—had called up, making Adrien bolt up to the loft bed just in time for a Chinese woman to open the hatch and tell Marinette that dinner would be ready in an hour. Once he had been sure that her mother was gone and wouldn’t come up again, he had descended from his hiding place and rubbed against the noirette’s legs with a purr while she draped fabrics
over a mannequin.

So, her name was *Marinette*. Adrien preened at that knowledge, aware that a simple name didn’t mean as much to a human as it meant to him. *Sidhe* were very protective of what was theirs and especially of their names. A name, after all, held great power. If one knew a *Sidhe*’s name, it could easily be misused to summon them at will or even enslave them. His mother had been beyond **furious** when his father had so nonchalantly dropped his real name when he started modelling instead of thinking of a pseudonym. Only his middle name remained a secret to the public and he was determined for it to stay so.

While he, due to this incident, had started to treasure his own first name a little less, he still held an appreciation for names in general and Marinette’s name was especially pretty. It was unique and easily rolled off the tongue in an elegant way. It sounded like grace and poise, even though said name’s owner proved to be quite clumsy, stumbling over thin air at least three times while hopping around the mannequin. One time she even stumbled over him, making him let out a startled hiss, which in turn earned him a profuse apology. Usually he wouldn’t have let such an assault—on purpose or not—slide, but she was so genuinely sorry and had even given him more food, so that staying mad at her was impossible. She could just be glad that he was half human because a real faerie wouldn’t have so easily forgiven her.

When she had eventually left her room to eat the aforementioned dinner, Adrien had hopped on her chaise longue to take a nap. An uncomfortable nap that wasn’t really one because without her presence, his senses were going crazy again, especially since it was drawing closer to sunset. At one point he could have even sworn to have seen a faint flicker of a Ghillie Dhu, clothing made of leaves and moss, ghostly jumping *through* the floor and perching on a birch tree that flickered in and out of Adrien’s vision. He’d see it clearly if he let himself fall further, but instead he directed his attention elsewhere.

**Salvation** came in the form of his bluebell-eyed angel that ascended the stairs to her room. As soon as Marinette closed the hatch and sat down beside him to pet his fur, the Ghillie Dhu and the songs faded back into unreality. Adrien still didn’t know how she did it, but he was thankful for her gift nonetheless. And not just the gift to anchor him in the earthly realm, but also her magic hands. Hands that could draw beautiful clothes. Hands that could make those visions a reality. Hands that comically went all over the place when she was animatedly telling a story. Hands that made him go to heaven with their gentle caress and drew a purr out of him.

He could get used to this. He could get used to Marinette and to just being a cat. To not be *Adrien Agreste*, the famous young model and son of Gabriel Agreste. That, however, was not possible. No matter how nice the thought might be, he couldn’t just leave Félix alone. Marinette was the nicest person he had ever met, but he still dearly missed his brother. He was also worried. What if his twin had eventually followed him outside and gotten lost? No, Félix wasn’t that irrational. He would stay home and panic, probably drive Nathalie and their father crazy while doing so and bury himself in St. John’s wort out of paranoia. He would be fine.

…Right?
Chapter Summary

Adrien comes back home and faces the consequences of his actions.

Chapter Notes

This chapter really is one I'm not entirely sure about. My beta readers assured me that it's fine, but I still think there's something off about it, but can't see what exactly that is. It's probably the chapter I tinkered with the most and I hope you enjoy! ;w;

While the second night of Midsummer had not been as unbearable as the first, it still took quite a toll on Félix. It was probably also due to the fact that the day of Midsummer had been an absolute disaster in itself. He had tried to pay attention to Nathalie when she held a lecture about some historic figures, but his thoughts had either wandered to Adrien and how or more especially where he was, or he had been distracted by the songs that drifted into his consciousness.

The mansion was big and quiet enough to not pose much of a barrier, as another house probably would have. Too much empty space without personality to create a distraction from the ghostly figures. Having apparitions of the past wander through the dining hall during his classes was a very good reason, in his opinion, to interrupt Nathalie and ask for a break. At least it was his father’s assistant and not his Chinese tutor, so his reasoning of “apparitions of the past wandering the halls” at least didn’t sound like he had lost his mind. Well, it probably still sounded like it, but at least Nathalie knew that there was truth behind his words.

In a rare act of kindness, she had ended the lesson early and told the chef to bring Félix his lunch. The young fae, though, couldn’t sit still in the dining hall for another minute. As soon as Nathalie had left the room he had jumped up from his chair and run to his father’s office. He knew that Gabriel would be there at this moment, but he couldn’t bring himself to care. There had been only one thought on his mind: Tune. It. Out.

Luckily, his mother had found a very effective way to tune out Faerie in this house, though a slightly unconventional one. While she might have gotten away with it, Félix doubted that he would.

Still running from his sprint across the mansion, he had burst into his father’s office without a second thought. Gabriel Agreste hadn’t even had time to ask his son what the unruly interference was about before Félix had already typed in the code for the security system and activated it. As the metal—iron!—panels had slammed down in front of all possible entrances and exits to the building, the voices immediately had vanished and the young Sidhe could breathe a sigh of relief.

Only for a short moment though, because another voice had immediately arisen and it had not been happy.

“Félix! What exactly is it that you’re doing?” his father had demanded coldly and gotten up from
his chair to walk over, no doubt to lift the security lockdown again.

“Still saving myself from falling into Faerie!” Félix had snarled, more than fed up with his father’s ignorance towards the topic. Then again, who ever seriously listened to a thirteen-year-old?

“Again, with this ridiculous—”

“If you want to get rid of Adrien and me, then you can just tell us so! Do you want us to end up like Mom?!”

Gabriel had pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. “Félix—”

“We have never gotten through Midsummer or Midwinter without Mom. I don’t even know how she did most of the things to shield us from Faerie. Adrien is already gone and I don’t know if he’ll even come back! Please just let us keep the iron shutters down. If not around the whole mansion then just around Adrien’s and my room!”

“Enough with this nonsense,” his father had said and had pushed him aside to get to the control panel. With a simple code, the lockdown had ended, making Félix shiver immediately when the eerie feeling of unreality returned. “Get a hold of yourself and go back to your room. I don’t want any more interruptions out of childish reasons.”

That was how Félix had come to make himself a small sanctuary by emptying the lower part of a bookshelf, stacking the books in front of the hollow wooden space and throwing as much St John’s wort as he had inside it. A heated pillow, a blanket and a book about advanced Chinese had joined it soon. He then had shifted for the first time in half a year and climbed into the dark corner.

It hadn’t worked as well as the iron shutters, but the St. John’s wort as well as the small enclosed space did their job too. The difficult reading distracted him from Faerie while the warmth of the pillow and blanket comforted him, rooting him into reality together with the scent of the books he was surrounded by.

He had spent the entire day like that, only interrupted by Nathalie who had looked uncharacteristically worried after the chef had told her that he couldn’t find Félix. The warmed-up food was then placed in front of him without a comment about his shifted state. She had left shortly afterwards.

Then came the second night of Midsummer. It was easier but not easy to handle. He tried to sleep multiple times, though with being as exhausted as he was, the “falling asleep” part was not the problem. Rather the circumstance of him waking up multiple times to sounds that shouldn’t exist in the earthly realm prevented him from finding rest. When the songs and voices finally became duller in the early morning hours, Félix managed to fall and stay asleep. He had even told Nathalie the evening before that he did not want to be woken up until it was at least eight in the morning. After all, he really needed the rest. His priority was to get through Midsummer. As much as it pained him, he would have to mourn the loss of his brother later.

If Félix thought that the world was done with disrupting his sleep, then he was sorely mistaken. He was still curled up in his corner in the bookshelf when a loud thud from the bathroom made him blink his eyes open. He swiped at his phone with a paw, which told him that it was 06:13 AM. The noise—which had sounded like a bird that had flown against one of the bathroom windows—did not repeat itself, so Félix had half a mind to ignore it and go back to sleep. He would have done that, if it hadn't been for another noise getting his attention. This time, his full attention.

“Smelt it, smelt it, smelt it!” A very familiar voice cursed, when also muffled through the closed
window and door. Félix was up in an instant, dashing to the lower level. He reached the bathroom door at the same moment as he heard the sound of a window inside opening.

“–ringing iron bells and–” the voice continued to curse in a hiss but stopped when the bathroom door suddenly swung open with a bang. Félix, who had shifted back to open said door, had never been so glad to see his brother. Adrien didn’t even have time to give a startled yelp when he suddenly got wrapped in a tight hug.

“Don’t you dare scare me like that again,” Félix said while clutching the black cat tightly to his chest.

“I missed you too, Fé…but could you please crush me a little less?” Adrien said, the last part a little breathlessly. Félix immediately loosened his death grip, making the feline breathe a sigh of relief.

“Usually I’d ask what in the netherworld you were thinking going out on Midsummer night, but I already know the answer, so I won’t ask.”

Adrien shuddered at the reminder. “It was horrible, Félix!” he wailed. “I lost all sense of orientation and couldn’t find the way home, even though I was only one block away – the one with the park. I almost slipped into Faerie that first night. Almost!”

“Almost?”

“I…uh,” Adrien stammered, suddenly growing insecure and writhing out of Félix’s arms in order to pace up and down the length of the bathroom. “I kind of fell on a girl’s balcony and she was so nice, so I snuck into her room and spent Midsummer there. I know how dangerous it is and I know that I shouldn’t get that close to humans, but she had no idea that I was a Sidhe and…and she was my anchor. She only needed to so much as speak and I’d be less tempted to go outside and lose myself. It was really strange but also amazing. And she is so talented, she–”

“Stop,” Félix held up a hand, making his brother stop in his pacing. “Let me get this straight: You snuck into a human girl’s room and spent a whole day there? Have you lost your mind!?”

“What would you have done in my situation?!” Adrien shot back desperately. “I didn’t know how to get home and Midsummer was at its worst, so I couldn’t stay outside either! And she was my anchor, Félix! Nothing helped, but then there she suddenly was and Faerie seemed unable to get to me. She’s very special.”

Félix let out a deep sigh and ran a hand over his face in exasperation. “Adrien, humans always are anchors because they are the most sentient beings of the earthly realm. She’s not special, she’s just a random girl.”

Adrien seemed ready to argue about the girl being nothing special, but he paused with flicking ears, turning his head to the still open bathroom door. Only a second later – his hearing was not as good in his human guise – Félix also heard it. Hurried steps that came down the hallway and drew closer to their room. The click clack sound of heels gave the approaching person away as none other than Nathalie.

“Quick, shift!” Félix hissed at his brother while jumping up to close the window. “They know you were gone, but with Midsummer over you have no excuse to walk around in this form anymore.”

“You ratted me out?!” Adrien exclaimed in disbelief and looked mostly human – he didn’t wear his glamour, making all the feline features visible to anyone who was looking – when Félix turned
around to him again. He pulled at his hair while panicking further with his tail lashing furiously from side to side behind him, hitting Félix in the shins with every second whip. He winced, not at the lashes but at his brother’s words.

“If it counts for anything, it wasn’t on purpose. Father was just…unbearable. He acted as if everything was fine, and then it just slipped.”

Adrien just made a suffering whimper at the same moment as the sound of a door opening could be heard from the main room.

“Félix, are you alright? I saw an alert that a window in the bathroom was opened from the outside,” Nathalie said as she strode into the room, tablet in hand like always.

“I-it was just me, Nathalie,” Adrien said weakly as Félix and he exited the bathroom.

Both of the woman’s eyebrows shot up at the sight of him. “Adrien?” Her voice made it clear that she hadn’t expected him to come back at all, but there was also immense relief to be heard. She quickly reverted back to her default blank expression. “I will inform your father immediately.”

“Wait, Nathalie, could you–” Adrien tried, but the woman had already closed the door behind her. “–at least let me explain it.” The blond lamely finished. He then turned to his brother. “Father will be mad, right?”

Félix sighed. “Positively. Better pray to Danu and hope for the best. I’ll try to back you up, but after what he said yesterday it won’t be much good,” he said with a shrug and sat down on his bed. Adrien let himself fall beside him and buried his face in a pillow.

“It’s not really my fault, you know?”

“I know.”

“It just isn’t fair!” He lifted his head from the pillow again and looked at Félix. “Mom told him everything about Midsummer and other days in which the pull of Faerie is the strongest. She even told him why and how to prevent crossing to Faerie on accident. Why didn’t he help us be safe from it? Why?”

Félix had more than one reply to that, but he feared that his brother would feel even worse about the whole ordeal if he started to believe that their father simply did not care about them. Because that was what it was. Maybe more but not less. The Cat Sidhe could not sympathise with how his father could feel this way, but he felt like the reason for the neglect was much deeper than he originally suspected. Not caring about Adrien’s whereabouts at all proved that.

“I don’t know,” he therefore replied half-truthfully and scratched Adrien behind the ears, knowing it would calm him down. A comfortable silence settled upon them, only broken by a quiet purr from his brother.

Félix took the moment to reflect upon the last twenty-four hours in which Adrien had been missing. It had not ever been a question to him how much he loved his twin or how close the two of them were, but to be separated from him with the fear of never seeing him again had still hit him harder than he had ever expected it would. It had simply been unbearable. Having Adrien back now and trying to calm him down with pets, something that was so normal for them yet so sacred, felt like a miracle. No matter how mad he was about the circumstance of Adrien seeking shelter in a human girl’s room for Midsummer, he was still thankful for the stranger to have been an anchor to him and therefore saving him from Faerie. He really didn’t know what he would have done if he
had lost his brother too.

“Do you think we could each have a smaller room?” Adrien asked after a few minutes, successfully breaking the silence and drawing Félix out of his thoughts. “There are enough unused guest rooms in the mansion. We could each take one and make them our own comfortable places.” His purr picked up when he thought about it.

“What gave you that idea?” Félix asked, quite liking the suggestion. While the little corner in the bookshelf had been anything but ideal, he did have to admit that a smaller space had definitely been more comfortable than their way too big room.

“Marinette—that’s the girl’s name—has a room like that. A small attic with windows all around and a lot of little things that are hers. It felt warm and welcome there, while this just feels…off, you know?”

He did, in fact, know. But he was also aware that Adrien’s dream of two smaller, separate rooms would probably stay a fantasy. After all, why would their father go through the struggle of renovating two rooms while they already had a – in his eyes – perfect one to share. The thought was still nice.

He was acutely aware of how wrong all of it was. But then again, when had anything ever been right in this house after his mother’s disappearance? It was wrong how the archway to the mansion was rebuilt, now made out of iron, denying both of the Agreste sons – and every other fae for that matter – entrance or departure unless it was specifically opened for them. It was wrong how they were forbidden to shift into their cat forms, diminishing any speck of hope they might have had about acceptance of their otherness and making said otherness blatantly obvious to the point that they would feel ashamed about it on some days. It was wrong that they were kept away from the world, not only from humans but also the few other Sidhe they knew. All those things blanched, however, in regards to the latest inequity bestowed upon them by Gabriel Agreste.

It had started with Nathalie returning to the boys’ room and telling Adrien that his father wanted to speak to him. When Félix had moved to follow, things had started to derail, because Nathalie had held up her hand and told him to wait in the room.

He would have listened to that order, had it not been for the fact that he had just gotten Adrien back after being painfully separated from him. The picture of him jumping out the window on Midsummer night and the fear of him not returning would forever be etched into his memory and feed his nightmares for several years to come. Disobedience or not, he would not let himself be separated from Adrien that soon again. Nathalie couldn’t do much about it anyway.

When they arrived at the office, it came with no surprise that their father was not pleased. Insubordination from both of his sons at once? Félix should have known that this could only end in a disaster. He should have seen it coming and swallowed his fear of losing Adrien again as it was rather irrational to think he would not be coming back from a trip to their father’s office. Then again, it was not that irrational. In any case, things could not be changed and Félix had in fact been stubborn and irrational.

He now immensely regretted to have acted as he did, the bland and not quite like home smelling bed making the fallout of the whole thing even clearer. Cursing whatever god had found it
righteous to make faeries sensitive to iron didn’t help his situation either, for he would still be
trapped in a room with an iron lock. In a cruel twist of fate, Adrien’s wish of them each getting a
guest room to make their own had come true. Or at least for Félix it had. Meanwhile, Adrien was
locked in their room in a much more miserable state than Félix. His brother didn’t deserve this,
especially not after what he has recently been through.

Adrien was sensitive, way more so than Félix and especially more than their father. It was
something he had gotten from their mother and so far, it had not been much of a problem, with her
always there as a parenting figure to back him up. With her gone though, he was at an obvious
disadvantage. People like Gabriel could practically smell weakness and so Adrien had been
subjected to one soul-crushing punishment after the next. Like Félix though, he has also deemed
this incident the last nail in the coffin.

That was how, when his father had talked about ridiculous excuses and fairy tales, referring to
Adrien’s explanation of Midsummer – he was smart enough to leave out the part where he hid in a
girl’s bedroom – Adrien had shifted and tried to explain to his father why it was important for them
to run around as cats every so often. It was a valiant effort and Adrien’s arguments were solid, but
that did not matter much when faced with the unmovable mountain that was their father’s opinion
on that topic.

Knowing of things and believing in things were two separate concepts, but sometimes they
intertwined. Their father, however, had such a selective mind, only believing in the things that
worked in his favour. He might not believe in St John’s wort lessening the pull of Faerie magic and
otherwise keeping fey things at bay, but he did very much believe that his sons were not able to
touch iron and that the sound of bells drove them crazy. When it came to disciplining them, as he
called it, he was very open to believing in those things with all the pros and none of the cons.

Thus, Adrien had been forced into a bell collar, which was supposed to drive the point home that if
he wanted to walk around as a cat, then he could stay one with all the discomfort it involved – in
the expectation it would dissuade him from shifting again in the future. Félix had of course
immediately jumped to his brother’s rescue, trying to take the collar off. Before he could do so,
however, their bodyguard had stepped in, seizing him by the shoulders while Nathalie carried the
obviously distressed but oddly still Adrien out of the office. His father had then ordered for Félix to
take over Adrien’s photoshoots for the next three days and to stay in one of the guest rooms –
equipped with an iron door knob of course – so he wouldn’t be able to get out and take his
brother’s collar off.

A few of his things had meanwhile been brought to him, among them his phone, so he had
immediately made a call to Adrien. Their father might be able to prevent them from being in the
same room, but he couldn’t prevent them from talking to each other. At least not so far.

“I can barely move without those damn bells around my neck making a sound,” Adrien winced
miserably, making Félix feel even worse about the whole thing. He was beyond furious at their
father, but he was still oddly helpless against him.

“Try to muffle the sound with pillows or a blanket, that might work.” Félix just wanted to climb out
of the window and around the house to sneak into their room and rip the smelted thing off Adrien’s
neck. His father had really gone too far this time. At least the bells were not made of iron, but he
guessed that was because their father didn’t actually intend to physically hurt Adrien. Not really, at
least. Of course, he had not taken into consideration what horrors the noise of the bells could do to
a Cat Sidhe’s sensitive ears, so that they almost wished it had just been iron.

Shuffling, the tinkling of bells, a low hiss, as well as curses were heard from the other end as his
brother followed his suggestion. “It might help a little,” Adrien eventually said after a while.

“Good. Just try to hold out for a few days. Father will make me do your photoshoots. Officially it's so we are not behind schedule but I think it’s rather to keep me busy so I can’t find time to sneak into our room and take your collar off.”

Adrien sighed. “ Probably. Don’t worry about me though. I’m fine…just very annoyed and my ears will probably start to hurt after a while. Might become a little earitating.”

He could basically hear his brother’s grin. “That’s not funny, Adrien.”

“It’s a little. You have to admit it was a quite bell-placed pun.”

“You’re just as bad as Mum,” Félix said in a fond voice that was rare for him.

“Thank you dearly for the compliment.” The twins fell into a comfortable silence after that, knowing the other was just a few walls away.

“I have about an hour until I have to go to your photoshoot, by the way,” Félix said after a few minutes while lying on his back on the bed and looking at the clock on the wall.

“Do you even know how to model?” Adrien teased.

“Please. If you, dumbass, can do it then it can’t be that hard.”

“You just need to know how to strike a pose and not be stiff. So, good luck. You’re gonna need it.” This time the snicker on the other end was obvious.

“I’m sure I’ll manage just fine,” Félix said with an eye roll.

“I’ll pray to Danu again. Maybe this time my prayer will actually be heard. After all, last time I prayed for things to turn out fine, I ended up with a bell-collar.”

“Don’t you use sarcasm on me now. You always had bad luck and you know it. Comes with being a black cat.”

“Says the other black cat. Also, rude.”

“I’m not the one looking the part right now though.”

“Looks don’t turn bad luck around. Take it from the actual model.”

“Whatever you say.”

“Félix?”

“Hmm?”

“What do you think a girl likes as a gift?”
Almost a week had passed, but the black cat had not returned to Marinette’s balcony nor her room. She had initially expected it to come back for more food, but when that had not happened, the thought of the stray feline had slowly faded from her mind. Instead, she had preoccupied herself with way more important things, like finishing her summer dress or to avoid running into Chloé and accidentally offending the blonde with her mere existence.

Because the end of the school year drew near and only a week was left until the summer holidays would finally come around, there was not much homework or other things to do. All class tests had been written and graded, so the teachers didn’t find it necessary to torment them much further, apart from it being next to impossible to get the students to concentrate on what was taught in class to begin with. Marinette used the extra free time the lack of homework brought her to work relentlessly on her most recent creation. She had no one to impress but herself and maybe her parents, but it still would make her happy to walk around in this year’s summer dress.

It had become a tradition for her to make herself a new summer dress every year just when school was about to end and when summer break was about to start. It went back three years ago from when she had made her very first dress. It was far from perfect and her mother had helped her a lot, but it was still her own creation and she had never been prouder of anything before in her life. She had worn this self-made dress of hers as often as she could for the entire summer and from then on started to make even more clothes, mainly for herself. This year was her fourth year in a row, which would make the dress currently occupying her mannequin in a half-made state also the fourth summer dress.

When she got home from school that Friday she had immediately run up to her room to continue her work, only to find that she could not really get into it. Not even various songs could inspire her properly. It eventually got to the point where she withdrew from the mannequin with a sigh and looked out the window. It was a cloudless, sunny summer day and appropriately hot for the end of June. Maybe she would find inspiration in a change of scenery. It had worked for numerous art
blocks already after all.

Her mind immediately went to the park by her house and its shady spots under the trees, but then she reasoned that it would probably be packed and therefore not very relaxing. When it came to inspiration though, then there was one place in Paris that had so far never failed her. Her not so secret garden of inspiration and at the same time one of the most popular tourist attractions. With a grin she packed her sketchbook and pencil case in a bag, grabbed a sun hat and went back downstairs.

“I’m out sketching!” she loudly announced as she went downstairs and passed her mother who was just sorting groceries into the fridge.

“Have fun, sweetie. But be back before dinner!” Sabine called after her.

“I will! Promise!” Marinette said before closing the door behind herself and walking down the stairs.

While the summer heat had still been pleasant in May or at the beginning of June, it had quickly developed into something that had most locals stay inside their shutter-cooled homes, especially around noon. It made it even easier to pick out the tourists from the people on the streets, which was a game Marinette quite enjoyed silently playing to pass time. The woman there with her child who was animatedly talking to a man—her husband maybe?—in what was probably Dutch? Definitely a tourist. The man rushing around with the stressed gaze people only wore when they were in a hurry? A local.

She continued to pick people out of crowds like this, silently categorizing them until she eventually arrived at the Palais de Chaillot. The view of the Eiffel tower was spectacular as always, drawing in crowds of tourists that eagerly took pictures of the famous construction. Marinette meanwhile sat down on a spot on the stairs where she knew she wouldn’t be in the way of most people. When she had started coming there three years ago, it had taken a few bad experiences of being bumped into—consequently ruining whatever she was drawing—or even run over—prompting her to fall down the stairs one time—to find the perfect spot.

After only a few minutes of watching her surroundings and the crowds—mostly tourists, who were amusingly predictable—inspiration struck and she started sketching. Another summer dress, some tops, a pair of shorts and various other creations were brought into existence by her pencil that afternoon. When she was in the middle of sketching a hat, she got the eerie feeling of being watched. It was not really an unusual thing to be seen at a popular place like this but being seen and being watched were two different sides of a coin. While she could ignore the former, the latter sent an unpleasant chill down her spine. It was something she had always been sensitive to, ever since she was little. Her mother assured her that it ran in the family, which was fairly little comfort.

Marinette knew that whenever someone was singled out and watched at a crowded public place, the watcher was most likely a criminal. Maybe a pocket thief who thought to be able to sneak up on her while she was concentrating on her drawings. A good plan in theory, but other than her pencils, sketchbook and an Imagine-R card, she didn’t have anything of worth on her.

Therefore, she turned around to catch a glimpse of whoever was plotting to rob her and was surprised when bright green, innocent-looking eyes stared back. It was a blond boy around her age who immediately looked away when she made eye-contact. He seemed nervous for some reason and stood next to a group of arguing adults who were carrying equipment for what looked to be a photoshoot. Again, nothing really unusual in the heart of Paris. Marinette’s view moved back to the blond and caught him staring, again. This time he held eye-contact and gave her a timid smile. Something pulled at the back of her mind, telling her she knew this boy from somewhere, but she
couldn’t quite place where from.

Occupied with the question of when they could have met before – was he going to her school? No, she would have remembered someone with such remarkable looks – she didn’t notice his approach. Only a shy “hi” drew her out of her ponderings and made her look up. He looked even better from up close and the designer fangirl in her immediately noticed that all his clothes were from the Gabriel brand.

*Wait, a photoshoot and a good-looking blond guy in designer clothes?*

Was this a photoshoot for Gabriel? Was the blond guy a model? Only then did it click in her mind. A blond Gabriel model her age? No wonder she had had the feeling of having seen him before! That was Adrien Agreste, the son of her favourite designer Gabriel Agreste, who she had discovered shortly after starting to design her own clothes a few years back. How could she have not made the connection immediately?! She followed fashion magazines almost religiously after all and Adrien was in most of them.

“Hi,” she echoed with what she hoped was a pleasant smile and not an “oh my god, the son of my favourite fashion designer is talking to me, just don’t be weird!”-smile.

“What‒” he started but was immediately interrupted by a man with a thick Italian accent jerking him back.

“Shoo, little girl! Didn’t you hear me? Clear the area!” The man, who was probably a photographer judging by the camera hanging around his neck, said in an exasperated, impatient tone. It took Marinette a moment to understand the meaning of his words, but that was a moment too long since the photographer suddenly roughly pulled her up by the elbow.

“Hey!” she protested and bent down to pick up her drawing utensils. When she looked up again, the photographer was already going back to where everyone else was, dragging the young model with him. Adrien turned around to throw her an apologetic smile, before being ushered around the corner into a changing tent. Marinette sighed. So much for making a good first impression.

She picked up her bag and went down the stairs to the gardens. Shouts of “Where is Anaïs!?” or “Félix, help your brother!” followed her and slowly faded the further she got away from the scene. This wasn’t the first time she had retreated from her favourite place due to a sudden photoshoot, but never had anyone ever been so rude when asking her to leave. For a split second she had entertained the thought of maybe staying up there where she wouldn’t be in the way and watch the photoshoot as it went on but seeing how short-tempered the photographer seemed to be, he would surely not allow it. Not provoking any trouble was the safe way to go.

The Jardins du Trocadéro were packed with people since it was *that* time in the afternoon where everyone just seemed to migrate to the gardens. Especially on a hot day, on which people sought shelter in the shade of the trees. Many tourists wandered the paths, enjoying the famously romantic setting of a Parisian park that was only slightly lost to Marinette due to being used to it. With the masses around, it took her a while to find a free bench in the shade to continue her sketching, so that it already neared five in the afternoon when she finally did. Only about an hour until she had to leave, but she wanted to make the most of her small inspiration-trip.

All around her, people went about their day, either enjoying an own spot to sit or just passing through, admiring the beauty of the gardens. The sound of them talking, laughing or even arguing all mixed together into a comfortable background noise that lulled her into a state of peace. The hour went by quicker than she thought, so that it already was half past six by the time she checked her phone again.
Merde! I’ll be late!

Marinette quickly packed her stuff and rushed off to the nearest Metro station. Or at least, that’s what she had been planning to do, hadn’t she run straight into someone. The person luckily didn’t topple over from the impact, which would have made the situation even more embarrassing than it already was. Instead she was caught by two strong arms and righted again.

“I’m sorry,” she quickly said with an embarrassed blush that immediately paled when she saw just who she had almost tackled to the ground in her haste to get home.

“That should actually be my line. Or, at least sorry that my photographer was so rude earlier.”

In front of her stood Adrien Agreste. This was an absolute disaster! Just what did she do wrong to the world to deserve making a fool of herself in front of the same guy—who also was not just any guy—twice on the same day!?

“Err, yeah. Is he always like that?” Marinette asked at a loss on what else to say. Meanwhile she wished that the ground would just swallow her already.

“Yeah, when he’s in his diva mode,” he said with a roll of his eyes but then threw her a smile that made her heart beat faster. “I’m Adrien by the way.” He offered her his hand to shake and after a split second of hesitation she took it.

“Marinette,” she said with a genuine smile. Alright, a normal conversation, she could do this! She just needed to turn the situation around and act as if she hadn’t run into him in the first place. What was he doing in the Jardins du Trocadéro anyway? He didn’t just come out to the gardens to search for her and apologize, did he?

He scratched the back of his neck nervously. “Actually, I did.”

Wait, she had said that last part out loud!? Forget the ground swallowing her. Just let her jump into an active volcano right this instant! ...Okay, that might be a little too dramatic, even for her.

“Oh?” she replied unintelligently.

“And to tell you that I really like your designs. I saw you drawing earlier and it looked really good. Though, I didn’t get the chance to tell you because Vincent suddenly showed up. Sorry again about that.”

“Thank you!” Marinette said and positively beamed. The Adrien Agreste had just said that her designs looked really good! She had changed her mind and would jump into a volcano another day because this day was getting too good to suffer a sudden and dramatic death. “And you don’t have to apologize for it. It wasn’t your fault after all.”

“It was still rude and he probably won’t apologize for it, so I thought I should instead. And being able to compliment your designs is another plus.” He grinned and it looked like sunshine felt: sweet, warm and soft. It was the kind of smile one could not just easily fake and that was only captured on photo by coincidence when it happened. Most importantly, it was a smile that made Marinette’s legs go weak. Boys never smiled at her like that, Chloé made sure of that. If there even was the slightest sign that someone was showing interest in her, the blonde class bully found it to be her responsibility to spread nasty rumours or just generally embarrass Marinette by tripping her—which, with her clumsiness, was not a hard thing to accomplish.

“Speaking of your designs,” he continued, bringing Marinette back to reality when he took something out from behind his back—she hadn’t even noticed he was hiding something there.
When he presented what he held in his left hand though, she could only raise a very sceptical eyebrow. Because there, offered to her, was a very dead brown chestnut leaf. She looked back and forth between it and Adrien, trying to find some sort of reference or waiting for the punch line of a joke, but she found neither.

“No matter what you say, I’m still sorry for what happened earlier, so let me make it up to you with something to match the beauty of your creations.” The joke—because that was clearly what it was supposed to be—was lost on her. She was about to give him the benefit of a doubt with his hopeful smile when she heard the sound of taunting laughter nearby.

Marinette looked past Adrien to see another blond standing nearby. He was not the one who laughed. Rather, he looked at them with pity in his eyes and then facepalmed. The laughter was close by but she couldn’t quite see anyone it belonged to. Whoever it was, they must be hiding somewhere and watching the scene. Coupled with the look of pity from the other boy, it suddenly clicked, making the situation become crystal-clear to her. She turned back to Adrien and gave him an unimpressed, angry glare.

“Alright, I fell for it. Congrats. Very funny, really,” she said coldly, which made Adrien’s smile fall, being replaced by a hurt look that she would have bought if it wasn’t for the still ongoing laughter coming from who knows where. Seeing her reaction, it even picked up, solidifying her suspicion.

“Your dedication is admirable, since apparently you came all the way out here just to insult me and my work.” She walked around Adrien and down the path past the other blond as she said that. The metro would be there in about five minutes anyway, so she’d have to hurry to catch it, otherwise she’d have to wait for the next one.

“Marinette, wait! That wasn’t—” Adrien said, but Marinette had had enough of whatever this game was. She was used to it from Chloé. Someone was being nice to her, seeming genuine, only to turn out to be bribed by the devil in blonde to pull a prank on her, which Chloé and Sabrina would then loudly laugh about. It was a weekly occurrence at this point, so that Marinette had become naturally distrustful to these kinds of situations. What had she expected to begin with? Adrien was a rich and famous model. She had never gotten along with the rich and famous, so why would he be an exception?

“Spare me of your excuses, will you? In case you haven’t noticed, I have a metro to catch,” Marinette said in an icy tone and threw Adrien a glare that could have killed a small rodent.

“But—”

“Goodbye Adrien Agreste. It was not a pleasure,” she said with a mock bow and the same glare. The addressed model just stood there frozen, still with his stupid leaf in hand and looking utterly confused, like he couldn’t comprehend what had just happened.

On her way home, she didn’t feel like people-watching to pass time. Instead, her head was filled with the emotional rollercoaster that had been the most recent encounter. Going from flustered and embarrassed to getting her hopes up, just for said hopes to get utterly crushed had been quite the ride. Especially his stupid hurt look haunted her, as if he had genuinely not intended to compare her art with an ugly, dead leaf. Granted, she had been insulted much worse, but that had always been Chloé. This time it had been someone who had looked harmless and actually friendly.
She would have been delighted to go away from the encounter with a happy smile, content to have had a conversation with Adrien Agreste. Not that she would have gloated about it, she was not Chloé after all, but she still would have counted it as a personal victory and a highlight of her day. Having him compliment her drawings had been like a dream come true. Too bad he hadn’t meant any of it.

Chapter End Notes

I have been to Paris once, but that was over 10 years ago and I was a stupid 12-year-old with no sense of culture, so I don't really remember that much. Most of the descriptions of places I do is based on either the show or what I can look at on google maps street view. As are the names of the things I include. If any of you know better and want to correct me, then please feel free to do so! I'd really like to write this story as accurate to the actual Parisian layout as possible!

Also, wondering about the laughter Marinette heard? You'll find out what that was in the next chapter! ;D
Adrien wanted to *strangle* the pixies that were currently on the flight from an enraged *Cat Sidhe* while laughing merrily. Félix was not much help, just leaning against a nearby tree and shaking his head. The phrase “I told you so” was so heavily conveyed through his posture that he didn’t even need to say anything for Adrien to get it. The only *helpful* thing his brother did was to remind him that they were in a public place and that he therefore shouldn’t chase beings that were invisible to most.

Adrien only listened after three minutes of hissing curses and utterly failing to catch even one of the naked child-like creatures with pointed ears.

“Bite iron,” he snarled at their retreating forms, which drew more merry laughter out of them before they disappeared in the distance. Running clawed hands through his hair in frustration, Adrien eventually turned around to look at Félix, expecting the “I told you so” to finally fall from his lips, but it didn’t.

“It’s better like this,” he said instead, confusing Adrien even further.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“She heard the pixies laugh, which means she has a closer connection to the fae than a normal
person should have. You were just about to give her an enchanted gift that would have brought her even closer and you know once she can see—"

"—she cannot forget, I know." Adrien sighed. It was his fault after all. She was closer to fey magic because he spent so much time with her on Midsummer of all nights, when a fae’s magic was at its strongest. Usually it wouldn’t have been much of a bother. After all, the models he worked with or Félix’s and his tutors didn’t ever give off the impression that they could as much as sense anything weird. Marinette had though. She had noticed him staring at her earlier and she had heard the pixies laugh. Especially the latter was something she should not be able to perceive. Being in both Félix’s and his presence certainly had not helped the case, but that really couldn’t just be it.

"It will get less with time, bringing her back to her normal, dulled human senses. As long as she stays away from faeries that is.” At the latter, Félix gave Adrien a very pointed look.

"I wasn’t planning on seeing her!” Adrien argued, a little too quickly to be believable. The deadpan look Félix gave him was all it took for him to give in. "Okay, I was. But would it really be such a bad thing?"

"I can write you a whole book with the reasons why, yes, it would be. In fact, books have been written of all the things that can go wrong. You should read them one of these days.”

“But… I could protect her from the others. No faerie would dare to steal from another. Especially not from a Cat Sidhe.”

"She’s a person, not a possession, Adrien.”

"They don’t know that, nor do they care.” Silence befell them when Félix became thoughtful, both of them knowing the truth that lay behind the words. Adrien took the silence as a reason to pace, running his hands through his hair again which was hopelessly dishevelled at this point.

"We shouldn’t have this conversation here,” Félix eventually said. The pixies might have fled, but there was no telling if there wasn’t a Loireag hiding in the nearby pond or Apsaras in the trees. "Besides, the Gorilla is probably looking for us already.”

At last, Adrien saw reason. He threw one last suspicious look around before shoving his hands into the pockets of his jeans. His right hand felt the leaf that was in there, knowing what it really was. After all, he hadn’t wanted to insult Marinette. He had honestly meant it when he said he wanted to give her something as beautiful as her designs, but he had momentarily forgotten that she couldn’t know that his present was actually not a dead leaf. In reality it was a pretty silver necklace with a simple star charm that would have taken its real form once she returned home with the seemingly worthless present. In hindsight, that might have been a horrible idea to begin with when he wanted to keep her away from the fae. A dead leaf turning into a necklace would be quite the giveaway to the existence of magic after all, let alone to his secret. Damn his impulsiveness! He couldn’t say that he preferred the alternative of her hating him though.

"She hates me, Félix!” he lamented, again reminded of the cruel reality of it.

"I don’t blame her. After all, you acted like an idiot back there.”

"Gee, thanks,” Adrien said sarcastically and shoved his brother’s shoulder.
Not one of the fair folk was good. If they found a human, they made them their plaything until eventually losing interest and killing their unfortunate victim.

They liked things that were shiny and new, discarding things that were old and used…or leaving them behind cursed.

They were drawn to the innocent because the unpredictable ways in which they thought amused them. They were drawn to the guilty to give them back what they deserved. They were drawn to those that were in between two worlds like they were; teenagers for example, halfway to adulthood but still not severed from childhood.

They loved their little games and delighted in the humans’ naivety and misfortune.

Adrien knew all that, though there were certainly ones out there who knew it better than him. He had simply heard the stories, but those had been told to him often enough to be forever ingrained into his memory. Hundreds of stories told thousands of times. Whether his mother had meant for him to take them as a warning, an example or to let him know what not to do was not clear. For, as much as it pained him to admit, she had been one of them too.

Faeries—a word they didn’t like to be called by—acted out of instinct, usually being nothing but very dangerous children from their mindset. Aos Sidhe were the same. The only difference there was between other faeries and the Aos Sidhe was that the latter often had more human-like features. It went so far that an Aos Sidhe could be confused as a human if one didn’t know any better. They were also stronger than other fae, which made them royalty among the folk.

That didn’t mean that they didn’t have a childish way to their actions though. They, like all fair folk, easily got swayed by emotions that were much stronger than that of any human.

Where a human would have a simple disliking, a fair one would loathe. Where a human would like, a fair one would love with all their heart. Where a human was just protective, a fair one would be outright possessive and those that would harm what was theirs needed to fear for their dear life.

Being half Cat Sidhe—they belonged to the family of the many kinds of Aos Sidhe—half human did not mean that Adrien and Félix felt less as any of those two halves. Instead they jumped back and forth between feeling less and feeling too much. Especially the latter was a problem when they wanted—no, needed—to act human.

It started with the simple annoyance of Marinette not accepting his gift. In light of the entire situation, it should not have been relevant, should even be completely understood as a rational action, but the Cat Sidhe in Adrien couldn’t help but be irritated about it.

How dare she not accept what I have generously offered her!

Irritation that had grown into rage, which had dwindled as soon as Félix had reminded him of why she had not accepted the gift.

Then came the absolute devastation over the fact that Marinette—sweet, kind Marinette—hated him. At Tuesday it had gotten to the point where Félix explained to Nathalie that the photoshoot had to be cancelled because Adrien refused to shift back to human form and was in the process of tearing up their room in his quest to find a vent for his hopeless sadness. Nathalie, not wanting to
get into trouble herself, simply told their father that Adrien was sick. Which wasn’t quite far from the truth.

By the point where Adrien eventually reached the stage of acceptance, he found yet a new thing to drive himself mad about.

*What if the Court gets her?*

The fear of the fair folk going after Marinette didn’t let him sleep at night and drove his make-up artist into desperation when she tried to conceal the bags under his eyes at the next photoshoot. He couldn’t think of anything else and kept drawing scenarios in his head of how they would torture the poor innocent girl and he would blame himself forever to have just let it happen.

A week had passed since the incident at the Trocadéro. A week which had almost driven Adrien insane by taking him through a rollercoaster of ups and downs emotion-wise and he could without a doubt in his mind say that he had had *enough* of worrying. He just hoped a week was a sufficient amount of time to dispel the last bits of what had sharpened her senses to perceive the fey.

This was still a bad idea. This was a very bad idea. A horrible idea, in fact. Félix had been right after all; the more time he’d spend with Marinette, the closer she’d get to *seeing*. Hearing the fae was bad enough, even though that was hopefully gone at this point. If she’d also start to see them, there’d be no stopping them from tormenting her.

As he sat on the railing of her balcony and listened to the silent music that drifted up through the open sky light, he started to feel torn. She didn’t like *Adrien*, that much had been established, but as far as he knew, she still liked the black cat that had snuck into her room. While it felt better to be in his cat form while seeing her, it still felt wrong. Like he was spying on her. At least this way he wouldn’t accidentally insult her.

Adrien was a lot more faerie in this form than he was human though, which came with its own set of obstacles. Apart from the fact that he would be unable to talk to her—out of safety reasons—he would also reek of magic to those that could perceive it. Unfortunately, *those* were other fair folk and the last thing he wanted to do was to draw them near Marinette. He surely could protect her though, right? A *Cat Sidhe* was a mighty ally to have, for most lesser faeries avoided him, scared that his bad luck would curse them.

The soothing song that drifted up from Marinette’s room stood in a stark contrast to his emotional situation. He was still swaying between approaching her and leaving her alone when he started paying more attention to the piece that was playing. He couldn’t say that he recognised it, but the soft tunes as well as the singer’s soothing voice spoke to him.

After hesitating for only another short moment, he jumped down from the banister and padded closer to the skylight. It was no secret that he had a weak spot for music. Like every fair one, he loved hearing songs and dancing to them; they filled him with life and brought him joy, no matter what the song was about. It therefore came as no surprise that, when he stayed with her during Midsummer, he started to get a liking for Marinette beyond just wanting to reward her kindness, simply because he had found out that they shared the same taste in music.

Adrien only noticed that he had dropped down on her bed when he heard a startled squeak. He jumped at how close it was and looked wide-eyed at Marinette who was now sitting up on her bed, staring at him. Last time she had listened to music she had sat at her desk, sketching, so he had assumed she would also do so this time. He hadn’t considered that she could also be curled up in her bed.
Immediate embarrassment washed over him. Now that he didn’t have Midsummer as an excuse, just dropping down on her bed and seeing her in her pyjamas seemed quite intimate and certainly like an invasion of privacy. He wouldn’t appreciate such a sudden visit much himself if their roles were reversed, so he seriously considered a hasty retreat.

Marinette recovered from her shock much faster than he did, breathing a sigh of relief when recognizing him.

“I was wondering when you’d come back, kitty,” she said with a smile. It felt good to see her smile again, even though he knew that Adrien’s problems weren’t yet solved with it. Sometimes it was confusing to have more than one identity. He only gave a fleeting thought to the idea of retreating, before her charm and the peaceful music won him over.

Slowly and tentatively he approached her, testing if he was welcome despite the smile she was giving him. The music made him brave, so that he eventually curled up on the blanket next to Marinette. After a few moments, her fingers uncertainly sleeked through his fur and he relaxed into the sensation with a content purr. It had only been two weeks but he’d lie when he said he hadn’t missed this.

Her sweet smell of vanilla, cinnamon and what he now recognized as a mixture of roses and strawberry was unlike anything he knew from home where the smells were artificial and monotone like its people – except Félix, but he also had his moments. Marinette, in comparison, smelled real and alive and just welcome. And that’s what her comfortable bed and the melodious music that slowly lulled him to sleep were too: Welcome.

At home he could try to recreate all of it, listen to his favourite songs and curl up in bed next to Félix to cuddle with him while he read a book. While it also would be pretty comfortable it wouldn’t be quite the same as what Marinette could give him. Everything in her little attic room just felt right and so did she with her gentle nature. It was warmth and love. Two things that had been missing from his home ever since Midwinter when his mother disappeared. No wonder he had been tempted to return to the noirette.

“Today was quite the mess,” she sighed after a while, waking Adrien up from the slumber he had accidentally but unregrettably fallen into.

“Chloé apparently thought it was necessary to make up for the two months ahead in which she can’t torment me. Good thing I wasn’t sketching, or she’d have definitely torn up my sketchbook. Lost quite a few good designs that way already.”

Wait, Chloé? As in Chloé Bourgeois? As in his childhood friend Chloé? As much as Adrien hated to admit it, he could see the halfling princess being a bully, given the way she liked to complain about everyone around her lately and disregard anyone that wasn’t of her status. Félix was adamant to not speak to her after what she had done to Sabrina and Adrien had grown wary of her antics too.

“It was just various insults and the beginnings of another round of nasty rumours this time, not that those will spread a lot during summer. And I got tripped a couple of times, but I don’t think that counts. After all, I also trip without Chloé’s input,” Marinette chuckled bitterly. Adrien, in that moment, vowed to have words with a certain blonde the next time he got the opportunity. Vague words of course, since he couldn’t let Chloé know that he knew Marinette.

“Then I tried to get a hold of Nino and it got weird. Apparently, he got a new phone and a new number and forgot telling me, so I had to hunt him down to ask him what he was doing during summer break.” Marinette sighed and absentmindedly scratched the black cat behind the ears while she told the story, which was slightly distracting but very welcome.
“I have his number now, but that doesn’t bring me much since it turns out he’s visiting family the whole summer and only gets back a week before school starts again.”

Marinette let out another sigh and fell back on her pillow, staring at the ceiling. “We used to be close friends once, you know? Then we got into separate classes in collège and everything just… changed. We kept hanging out like we always used to at first, but then those times became fewer with more time in between. Nowadays we’re almost like strangers. It’s weird.”

He nudged her hand with his head in silent comfort since she looked like she needed it. While he hadn’t gotten to this point with Chloé yet, he also felt like they were drifting apart. Just like Marinette and this Nino had.

“It’s not like I don’t get along with the others in my class but I’m not quite on a friendship basis with any of them, so it would be weird to ask them to hang out.” She let out a humourless chuckle. “Now guess who’s gonna spend the entire two months of summer break alone. At least I have some projects to keep me occupied and I can help out my parents in the bakery.”

While she said it with a smile, he noticed that she didn’t feel any real joy while saying it. Her eyes didn’t have the glimmer they used to have when she was talking about something she was genuinely happy about. There was a sadness in these blue orbs that pulled at Adrien’s heartstrings, because if anyone knew the pain of loneliness, it was him.

Actually, he had just wanted to make sure she was okay and he was selfish enough to admit that he was yearning for her pets. It should have been just an innocent visit as his cat-self that maybe would have repeated itself once a fortnight or so, enough to keep him happy but not enough to put her into any danger... hopefully. But with this new knowledge he couldn’t just bring himself to abandon her.

Chapter End Notes

Looks like the kitty has a plan! >:3c

I have to admit that this is the first chapter that was not beta-read (my beta readers are all busy lately) so I hope there are not too many mistakes! I tried to catch as many as I could spot ;w;
With her latest creation finished and the weather being a gloomy grey with the promise of rain, Marinette didn’t feel like being up in her room. Her restlessness had drawn her down into the bakery where she had immediately taken over the cash register, giving her mother a well-deserved break.

Business was slow that day, so Marinette occupied herself with cleaning the counter and wiping the floor. A few of their regulars came in, giving her the orders she already knew by heart and asking how she was. The small talk was nice but lasted not long enough to really offer entertainment.

After a few hours she had cleaned everything in the bakery, rearranged the display cases to look as best as they could, and even counted the macarons for no other reason than giving herself something to do. Out of options, she took the notepad she and her parents used to write down orders and started doodling a simple outfit.

Immersed as she was in her thoughts of which colours might look best for the shirt, she did not notice the familiar sound of the front door opening and the ding of the bell that announced a new customer. She did notice, however, a shadow falling over her and a smooth, melodious voice when someone started speaking to her.

“Taking a break with style, I see.”

Marinette jumped, making notebook and pen drop down on the counter as she looked into the familiar green eyes of an unfortunately familiar blond model. Her startled expression quickly made way to an unamused scowl.

“Normal strangers aren’t that persistent in annoying me. Especially not models. Just admit that Chloé paid you to play another prank on me and leave the bakery.”

Adrien rubbed the back of his neck and gave her a nervous smile.
“Actually, I haven’t talked to Chloé in a while. I didn’t even know you knew her.”

“She’s the mayor’s daughter and goes to the school that is right around the corner of this bakery. Hard not to know her,” Marinette deadpanned and folded her arms. “If you’re not buying something, leave.”

His look of horror was almost comical but was quickly replaced by a thoughtful expression.

“It really would be rude to walk into such a fine establishment and not buy anything,” he mused and let his eyes wander over the selection of sugary goods. “What do you recommend?” he asked and suddenly had a charming smile on his face. His rapidly changing moods would eventually give her whiplash.

“That you pick something, pay for it and then leave,” Marinette replied with still folded arms, not willing to play whatever game he was trying to rope her into. His smile turned into a hurt frown and he managed to look like a kicked puppy.

She had planned to not give in to anything he said or did in case it was a trick, but there was something in his gaze that urged her to forgive him. It was not in the usual kind of sense when she’d see reason in a situation where she was in the wrong and was too stubborn to admit it, but in a sense of it just seeming like the right thing to do with no reason as to why given. It was downright irrational.

The sudden appearance of her mother not only snapped Marinette out of whatever trance she had been in but also managed to startle both teens.

“Now now, sweetie, don’t be rude to the customers,” Sabine said, making Marinette have a hard time to find her voice for a moment. Of course, her mother was right and she shouldn’t scare away customers by being rude, but this guy was just…unnerving. She couldn’t get a clear read on him at all. At least with Chloé, her intentions were always clear as day. Adrien Agreste, though, remained a mystery. And then there was this weird urge to forgive him and just do whatever he asked. Creepy.

“So, what can I get you, dear?” Sabine said in her usual motherly tone, oblivious of her daughter’s goose bumps and regarded Adrien curiously.

“I…uh…,” he stammered, looking around the display cases frantically.

Not so smooth now that my mother is here, huh? Serves you right, Marinette thought with a little bit of malicious joy.

“C-could you maybe recommend something? I…well, I’ve never been to a bakery before.”

Sabine gazed at him with a look of shock and kind reassurance while Marinette just looked at him like he was an idiot. Of all the excuses he could have thought of, that was probably the most ridiculous one. Her mother seemed to wholeheartedly believe him though and quickly rattled off her personal favourites, especially including those Marinette had either helped create or favoured.

Not wanting to stand this mild humiliation anymore, Marinette eventually retreated—not fled!—upstairs, leaving her mother and Adrien behind in the bakery. If she would have turned around, she would have seen the sad and almost longing look the model threw her way as she left.
It was on that day, that she got his first message. It was simple enough and was given to her by her mother as they set up the dinner table. A little piece of paper, the kind they wrote orders on, still with the faint lines from her doodle shining through, was all it really was. All it really should be. But it was the words on said paper that confused her. She had expected maybe another try to apologize or maybe even a mocking joke. Instead, it said the following:

Leaves tend to turn to gold, you know? And isn’t gold a beautiful thing? But golden leaves are short-lived and rare in summer, so what if one, once gold and now dead and brown, turned back to its former glory? Imagine something plain and even ugly to some, become beautiful once again.

~Adrien

What kind of message was that even supposed to be? If he was trying to explain himself for the dead leaf from the other day, then this was quite the poetic approach and she wasn’t sure if she was buying it. After all, this could just be a ploy to lure her into a false sense of security to get her with yet another prank. She couldn’t be sure, so she stayed suspicious.

As soon as she got back to her room though, the little piece of paper landed on her pin board.

When she went down to eat breakfast the next day, her father handed her a note. At first, she thought it might be a shopping list or an address and that she should run errands—which wasn’t uncommon—but she was wrong.

“A boy came by early this morning when we had barely opened. Gave me all kinds of compliments for a chocolate croissant he bought yesterday and asked for you. I told him you were still asleep so he left you a note,” Tom said with a chuckle.

Marinette took it and quickly read it over, confused as to why Adrien—because who else could it be—would come to the bakery at six in the morning.

This bakery and your family’s kindness are a blessing. I can see where you got it from. Have a nice day!

~Adrien

It sounded friendly, but not awfully chummy. He was aware that he was still walking on thin ice but she could not ignore the suspicion she still strongly harboured about the whole situation. Her father did not seem to have such worries and instead had interpreted—because of course he had read it—the message as the flirt that it really was not.

“An admirer?” he asked in a tone that would have been embarrassing if anyone outside of her family would be present. Marinette just huffed.

“Hardly.”

She then went about her day—after adding the latest note to her pin board, she needed to collect evidence after all—starting on a new project for which she tried to use the fabric scraps she had left. In her determination to keep herself busy so as not to have to go down into the bakery, she ended up finishing her work at the end of the day.
Marinette had expected this to be the end of it. Adrien had come to the bakery, tried to apologize, failed and complimented her via a small note. What more business could the model have in her parents’ bakery?

It turned out that she underestimated him, for when she came downstairs the next morning, there was a folded note lying on the otherwise empty kitchen counter which had “To Marinette” written on it. She immediately recognized the handwriting and proceeded to stare at the unassuming piece of paper for about half a minute before picking it up and reading what he had to tell her this time.

*Do you ever sit outside in the sunshine while a warm wind is blowing and think about how nice it feels? It’s such a simple thing, but it always makes me happy. You know what is best? It doesn’t matter whether you’re rich or poor or whether it’s a person or an animal, you still feel the same gentle warmth. Isn’t that nice?*

~Adrien

While the last note could still be counted as a form of teasing compliment, if one was stubborn enough to interpret it that way, this note was anything but. It was unrelated to her but yet connected in a simple, generally understood way. Just why would he leave such a note for her? It sounded a little like a letter she might get from an Animal Crossing character. A thought that made her chuckle.

The days continued like that. Marinette would wake up to find a new note from Adrien waiting for her and then she would continue with her daily activities. For some reason she still did not know, he was visiting the bakery every morning at ungodly hours just to leave her these messages—and to buy various pastries for himself, as her mother told her. He did not visit in the afternoons at all, which Marinette knew from the few times she had gone downstairs to work for a few hours.

With not much else to do than to continue this frankly monotonous way to spend her days, Adrien’s notes ended up becoming a highlight.

*It must be nice to have a balcony. I like to watch the city from high up places too. It’s kind of freeing and I like to see how everything looks from another perspective. Do you like it too?*

~Adrien

Every morning she woke up, curious and even a little excited to see what he wrote her this time. The messages did not change in their general tone and simply told her a few things he liked while he inquired if she liked those things too.

*Isn’t it sad that we can’t really see the stars here in Paris? I went out to the Camargue once for a photoshoot and we stayed overnight. It was beautiful. Sometimes I lie awake at night, listening to music, and imagine what it would look like if I could see the milky way here.*

~Adrien

On the fifth day, she had to admit that it was oddly endearing.

*Why is it so hard for some people to be nice? My brother says I’m too trusting and soft-hearted but I can’t help it. If hatred feeds hatred, then I like to believe kindness*
On the sixth day she had forgiven him for what happened at the Jardin du Trocadéro, now sure that it had simply been a misunderstanding. If he was a liar, then he was a very good one, but Marinette knew when to back down with her stubbornness. His notes were sweet and left her wanting to give him the benefit of a doubt. After all, he had not done anything truly malicious to her yet and he did go through the trouble of coming to the bakery every morning without fail.

Isn’t it wonderful how many different kinds of songs there are? The wind whispers songs, there is birdsong and then there are the songs not made from nature that are all so different but still appealing. How can I like things that are so very different? Like listening to Jagged Stone one minute and the next I switch to Owl City? Do you think that it is some sort of organized chaos? You as an artist probably know all about that, don’t you?

~Adrien

When a week had passed, Marinette was sitting behind the counter again while her parents enjoyed a break. It was then, as she was sketching things in the sketchbook she had brought downstairs with her, when the bell announced a new customer. She looked up to see a blond boy about her age. Just what was it with good-looking blondes walking into her life lately?

“Good afternoon, what can I get for you?” she asked him while he looked through the display cases with a bored expression. She had the weirdest feeling that she knew him but couldn’t place where from. The feeling just got stronger when he looked at her with teal eyes.

“I’ll have a slice of that coffee cake, please,” he said while pointing at the cake in question.

“Will you be eating here or is this to go?”

“I’ll eat it here, thank you.”

Marinette just nodded and prepared the piece of cake on a plate.

“Can I also please get coffee with it?” he asked while sitting down on the table in the corner and pulling out a book from his bag.

“Sure, how would you like it?” she said as she walked around the counter and placed the cake on the table in front of him. He explained to her how he wanted his coffee in an uninterested tone and she rushed to the back where they kept a coffee machine. While she brewed the hot beverage, she watched him in a way that she hoped was inconspicuous. He just sat there, reading his book and looking like he didn’t care about the world around him. Just where could she have met him before?

The question taunted her, as if his identity should be obvious, but there was something that was blocking her from making a connection.

He nodded his thanks when Marinette set down the cup of coffee in front of him and was about to go back to her place behind the counter. She would have done so, had there been another customer, but with just him there, she couldn’t hold her curiosity back any longer.

“Excuse me, but do I know you from somewhere?” she asked, which made him close his book and look up.
“I believe you do. We have not been formally introduced at our last encounter, which might also have been better so. It was a painful ordeal to watch,” he said, which did not help Marinette much in placing where exactly she knew him from. She could think of several things she had done that had been painful to watch, both literally and metaphorically. Hopefully it was the latter, because otherwise it meant that she might have run him over at some point. Either way, she cringed.

“Sorry about that then,” she said, even though she didn’t know exactly what she was apologizing for. The boy just waved her off.

“It was more second-hand embarrassment than anything else. My brother really is more socially inept than most people believe him to be.”

His…brother? He must have noticed her confusion, because he was quick to clarify.

“He honestly thought a leaf would be an adequate gift for a girl. It’s terribly obvious that he doesn’t get out much.”

At last the penny dropped.

“You’re Adrien’s brother.” Marinette stated and could have hit herself for how clear it should have been. They didn’t look as alike as one would expect of twins and their mannerisms might be as different as day and night, but even back at the gardens Marinette had identified them as brothers at first glance. Just why hadn’t she seen it earlier?

“Unfortunately, yes,” he said and took a sip of his coffee.

“What are you doing here?” she could not help but ask. First Adrien was leaving her odd notes and now his brother showed up. That could not be unrelated.

“Enjoying a slice of cake and a cup of coffee while I’m on a break. Adrien spoke highly of this place, so I thought I could check it out.”

The connection was not nearly as mysterious as Marinette had hoped it to be. She sat down on the other chair on the table and fixed Adrien’s brother with a smile.

“He talks about my parents’ bakery?”

The blond rolled his eyes.

“Just ever since he first ordered something here,” he said and took a fork full of his coffee cake piece. His previously bored expression suddenly lit up in surprised appreciation. A moment of silence passed in which he seemed to think about his words.

“He might have had a point about the food being exceptional,” he eventually admitted, making Marinette beam—especially since it had been her who had baked the coffee cake.

“Thank you. I’m glad you like it. What’s your name by the way? I don’t think you’ve told me.”

He lay his fork down on the plate and managed to somehow look regal while doing so.

“As I said previously, we have not been formally introduced yet. You can call me Félix and you must be Marinette.”

“Oh, you remembered,” Marinette said surprised, to which Félix snorted.

“Kind of hard to forget when Adrien can’t stop talking about you. That coffee was really overdue.”
To underline his point, he took a sip of said coffee, leaving Marinette to sit dumbfounded on the chair in front of him. Adrien could not stop talking about her? That was unexpected. She had thought that he had simply found a liking in the bakery after his first visit and then just left messages on a whim, writing down whatever came to mind for him at that moment. That he actually was thinking and even talking about her outside of that situation seemed surreal. It must be the guilt about the misunderstanding since she was pretty sure that she could not have left that big of an impression.

“Frankly, it’s hilarious,” Félix suddenly said with a barely-there smile—the first smile Marinette had seen on his face at all. She blinked at him.

“What is?”

“You. I have never met anyone who could hold a grudge against Adrien or tell him off the way you did.” He chuckled, cutting off another piece of his cake and eating it. Marinette, meanwhile, visibly cringed when she was reminded of it.

“Yeah, I probably shouldn’t have been so harsh,” she admitted and suddenly developed an immense interest for the table’s surface.

“Don’t beat yourself up about it. You make mistakes, you learn from them, you do better next time.”

“I doubt there’ll be a next time,” Marinette said with a sigh. Félix commented that with a raised eyebrow, silently prompting her to elaborate.

“I mean, when we first met, he didn’t know that I was just a bakers’ daughter who drew in her free time due to a lack of other things to do. He’s just so persistent because he wants me to accept his apology and make a clean cut and—”

“Marinette,” Félix cut in and Marinette felt herself transfixed with his teal eyes which made an uncanny shiver run down her spine. “It is quite bold of you to assume such things after only exchanging a few sentences with my brother. Maybe you should leave his intentions up to him instead of jumping to assumptions, which, might I add, quite stray from the truth.”

In the time he took another sip from his coffee, Marinette tried to recollect herself. He was right, after all. Hadn’t ‘jumping to conclusions’ brought that whole mess upon her in the first place?

“What should I do now then? He’s your brother, so you know him better than I do.” Félix looked at her as if she had just declared the earth was flat. “What to do?” he asked, incredulity strong in his voice. With a sigh, he covered half his face with a hand and mumbled something about ‘oblivious idiots’.

“The next step should be obvious and I will not insult the intelligence I am sure you possess by telling you every little thing.” Before Marinette could decide if that had been a compliment or an insult, Félix had put a twenty-euro note on the table and stood up.

“You can keep the change,” he said and turned to leave before Marinette could protest. At the door he stopped and turned around to her again.

“And for the record: Adrien is just socially awkward, not some stuck-up rich kid. It is for my own wellbeing too when I say that you should give him a chance. Listening to his endless rambles of how you apparently hate him and how he can make it up to you, robs me of more sleep than I’d like to admit.”
“Wait!” Marinette called when he was about to go out the door. Félix stopped and turned around to her again with a raised eyebrow.

“If I’d write a message for Adrien in return, would you then please give it to him?”

A very faint smile appeared on his face. “I think that can be arranged.”

Do you like cats? I purrsonally love them! Especially the black ones! :3

~Adrien
Third Impressions

Chapter Summary

Our enthusiastic, sheltered kitten is back and he takes a small tour through Paris with his new favourite human! :3

Chapter Notes

This chapter. **THIS CHAPTER!**
I swear to god, I did not intend to let you all wait so long for it, but I struggled with it for the longest time. Over two months to be exact and I'm so glad to finally have it finished and beta-read so I can continue with my uploads. I really don't know if I will keep to a schedule from this point forth because university starts again for me soon, but I will try to update as often as I can. If that will be once a week or once a month remains to be seen. The next chapter is finished already and I'm writing on chapter 10 right now, so I hope to be able to keep to a weekly schedule for the moment.

Also, to kind of make up for the long wait you had to endure, this chapter is about twice as long as the regular chapter is with over 8k words! This was not on purpose, it just happened to be this way. And by the looks of it, that trend will continue for the following chapters as well! C:

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**Unseelie Court** = The faerie court for the wicked, the unlucky and those that despise humans.

**Selkie** = Seals that can transform into humans to come onto land. They do this by removing their skins which they leave behind rocks. When their skin is stolen, they automatically belong to the one who has stolen it.

**glamour** = A sort of magic disguise.

**Kelpie** = A shapeshifting water horse that lures unsuspecting wanderers close with its beauty. If it is touched, one will stick to its skin and it will proceed to drag its victim underwater and drown them.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

The building that housed the bakery at the Place de Vosges was humble and lacked the somewhat hoary charm the older, more dignified houses of Paris had. There were no beautiful art carvings nor sculptures in its stonework, and neither did it have elegant window frames to indicate that the occupants were in no way in a dire need of money. It was these edifices that spoke of wealth and history that drew in faeries these days and made them want to stay. After all, the rich promised offerings and the generous space guaranteed work for those that preferred to stay invisible. These buildings however, were also a place for the wicked and mischievous of their folk to play their games, for the lack of kindness and fairness often went hand in hand with those monied and therefore deserving of punishment.
Adrien had never thought much about blessings and curses, nor about inflicting them on those who deserved them. Neither had he paid the prosperous households of Paris much mind, unless he had to attend a party for his father’s business. If that was not the case, then it usually was some event held by the Bourgeois family, to which he had always been invited as a member of the Unseelie court. Having lived the life of the rich and famous for as long as he could remember, the thought of seeing yet more of its luxuries utterly exhausted him.

Much to the appallment of people like Chloé, he had always been more interested in the regular population of Paris. Simple, but good families who lived their lives without having to constantly be at someone’s beck and call. It was a life that spoke of hard work and well-deserved riches instead of having deceitfully gained them. It was a fair life; one which he had never been allowed to live. Instead, he had always observed it from afar up on the rooftops, looking through windows into the family lives in the apartments.

It was exactly such a life that the house of the Dupain-Chengs spoke of. Their bakery was a humble business and the small part he had seen of their home was also nothing to boast with. This, however, did not mean that it was worth less than the homes of the rich. The monetary value might be less on a piece of paper, but the love that could be felt in every corner and crevice of this place made it much more valuable in Adrien’s eyes than his own mansion home, the Bourgeois hotel or any other ridiculously expensive building in Paris could ever be.

He was therefore understandably nervous when he stood in front of the bakery he had grown so fond of in the last week; just out of the view from the store front windows, watching the steady come and go of the customers. Adrien gulped and readjusted his sunglasses, hoping they and his purposefully unkempt hair would be enough to keep people from immediately recognizing him. The last thing he needed was any unwanted attention, which had been part of the reason why he had always visited very early in the morning and not in the afternoon.

Yet there he was, in front of the bakery, in the afternoon, on a Saturday. The plan that had seemed like a good idea the previous evening started to sound as stupid as Félix has dubbed it. To be exact, he had said that the plan was “positively senseless and guaranteed to end in some sort of disaster.”

“Did you forget what happened two weeks ago?” Felix had said the previous evening with a thoroughly unimpressed stare. Adrien, on the other hand, had just waved it off and reread what was written on the small piece of note paper in terribly cute handwriting.

Thanks for the small messages. They were sweet and odd in a good way. Your brother visited today and made me realise that I might have been too harsh on our first meeting. But seriously, a leaf??

If you really want to make it up to me though, then we can hang sometime. Only if you want to of course.

~Marinette

PS: Black cats are cute, but the pun was unnecessary.

“Adrien!” The shout had jolted him out of his thoughts and made him turn back to Félix who had been impatiently tapping his foot.

“I know what happened, but that was cat-me! If my human form would be a problem then the entire Gabriel staff would be affected by now. It'll be fine!”
“Well, whatever happens will be on you. I’ll play along with that reckless plan of yours this time, but don’t expect me to do it again.”

“You’re making it sound as if posing as me would be difficult. We’re twins and we’re faeries, so this should be a piece of cake. Speaking of, I might just bring back a slice of coffee cake for you if this works out. Don’t think I didn’t hear you muttering something about it being delicious earlier,” Adrien had retorted with a wide, toothy grin. Félix’s only response had been a frown.

The plan was simple: Félix would pretend to be Adrien for the day and work off his unfairly full schedule while Adrien would sneak away and make the most of the free time Félix had scheduled. Félix’s warning was not one to be taken lightly though and it now ghosted through Adrien’s head like a terrifying mantra.

_As soon as she can see, she can never forget._

He would just have to prevent her from getting there. Keeping her away from four-leaved clover and convincing her to wear something made from iron—even something as small as a ring would do—would probably do the trick. Not yet though. This was their first meeting after previously disastrous encounters, so he needed to play it safe, not be weird and just try to convince her that he was in fact a nice person. That was easier said than done though for someone like him who had a head filled with songs and dreams and who possessed one of the worst impulse controls a person could possibly have.

“With how often you come to visit, one would think that you’d know where the door is by now.”

Adrien jumped and could barely withhold a startled hiss as he whirled around to whoever had snuck up behind him. The familiar scent reached his nose before he had even turned around and he was therefore only mildly surprised to see Marinette standing behind him, her arms folded in front of her chest and an amused smile stretching her lips.

“I…uh…how did you know it was me?” Adrien said after a few unsuccessful tries to start a sentence.

“A blond that wears designer clothing and loiters around in front of my family’s bakery? Kind of narrows down the possible suspects.”

Adrien pouted, disappointed that his cover had so easily been blown. He really should invest in some off the rack or knock-off clothing next time he tried to be inconspicuous and probably give his father a heart attack in the process—if he was ever caught that was. That it had been Marinette and not some random stranger that had recognized him was a small relief at least.

“Why did you sneak up on me?” The question was out before he even processed that he had spoken it out aloud and immediately cringed. He hadn’t even said ‘hello’ to her yet, as was the polite thing to do. His mother would not have been happy with him. To his relief Marinette did not seem to be bothered by it and just shrugged.

“I had to do a delivery and saw you from way down the street when I came back. Speaking of, my parents are busy with a big order and I have to deliver another small one. So, see you,” she said and stepped around him to get back into the bakery.

Adrien had not consciously wanted to grab her arm as she walked past, but the small panic upon
her impending leave made it an almost instinctive move. He wanted to keep her close, though just
grabbing her was probably not the wisest choice. His arm flinched back from her almost
immediately as if he’d been stung and moved to the back of his neck while he threw Marinette a
sheepish smile.

“Sorry, uh…I just…uh.” *Very articulate, Agreste.* Marinette just raised an eyebrow at his antics
and he could feel that she was growing impatient.

“Can I maybe come with you? Deliver the order I mean! Just if that’s okay with you of course…”
he rambled, eventually becoming silent and shuffled in discomfort. This was awkward. Things had
been so easy when he had been a cat and they had just peacefully hung out together. Why did
everything have to be so much more complicated as a human?

“It’s in Montparnasse, so it’ll take at least an hour. Are you sure you have time for that?”

“Sure! Félix is helping me today, so I get to have his free time. Pros of having a twin,” Adrien said
with a mischievous grin.

“So, you switched schedules?” Marinette asked as she opened the bakery door and stepped in,
eagerly followed by Adrien.

“You could say that. It’s more like switching names for a day, really.”

“Wait, he’s pretending to be you?”

“Yep.”

“And no one will notice?”

At that, Adrien cackled. “You’d be surprised what a little change of hair style and some acting can
do. This is by far not the first time we’ve done this and gotten away with it.”

“If you’ll get away with it or not will probably show once you get home, won’t it?” Marinette
asked as she turned around to him. “Now, wait here for a second, I’ll be right back,” she said,
leaving him standing in the middle of the bakery’s front room. Sabine was standing at the counter,
taking care of customers and didn’t appear to have seen him yet. Marinette returned from the back
with a box in her hands just moments later and gave her mother a kiss on the cheek as she left.

“Be careful, sweetie,” Sabine called after her and then immediately turned her attention back to the
customers.

“Always, *Maman*!” Marinette replied as she walked out the door, closely followed by Adrien.

“Alright, lead the way!” he said giddily, hopefully diverting from the fact that he wouldn’t be able
to find the way himself. His mental map of Paris was quite detailed, but that was from a much
higher ground than the one they were walking on and from his current perspective, he barely
recognized anything. It was quite embarrassing, but he was willing to learn. Starting with the way
to the Montparnasse quarters.

It was odd, in a way, to walk the streets as himself and not as a cat. In this form, the subtle magic in
the air was a constant whisper, telling him he did not belong in daylight and not among people. He
was used to ignoring it when he was outside most of the time for whatever activities his schedule
dictated or recently also for the short trips to the bakery in the early mornings.

This situation, on the other hand was different. Instead of feeling more like a guest or a spectator,
he now was an active participant. Adrien was not made for tasks like delivering pastries or talking with human girls about random things he hoped to be normal. The universe told him to take the easy way, enchant the girl so she would like what he said without him having to worry about it. It was advice he actively refused to take since this would have been the faerie way to do things. He was no faerie though. Not right now, not to Marinette. She saw him as a human, when also a strange one and he would do anything to ensure that it would stay that way.

“So, the notes. What was that all about?” Marinette suddenly asked, startling Adrien out of his thoughts. He tilted his head. Had his intention not been obvious? Or was he misjudging human customs again? He had seen teenagers passing notes with half-cryptic, half-poetic messages on them countless times in movies and had just assumed it to be a normal thing. Apparently, it was not.

“I just tried to apologize for the misunderstanding and show you that I’m not…uh…”

“A jerk?” Marinette supplied helpfully, a quite stronger word than he would have chosen.

“Yeah,” Adrien said awkwardly and scratched the back of his neck. This was not going as well as he had hoped it would.

“For the record, I’m not mad at you anymore. If you want the ultimate chance to prove yourself though, then this is it.”

“No pressure then,” Adrien murmured.

“You’re weird,” Marinette said with a small laugh as they exited the Metro at Montparnasse. At first, they had not been talking much, both feeling quite awkward with the situation while Adrien also silently begged the universe to shut up. The awkward silence had ended at the Metro station with Adrien’s excitement, which, as he had quickly learned, was out of the ordinary. People in Paris were used to taking the Metro, yet Adrien, who was used to being driven everywhere, had never even seen one of the underground trains.

Marinette’s mood had shifted to obvious amusement at his childlike antics, like his enthusiastic exclamation of ‘The doors all open at the same time! That looks so cool!’ or ‘There are seats in here!’ once they had boarded the train. Only a few minutes later, when he had caught the confused looks from the other passengers, had he realised that he was probably acting very much out of the ordinary. He had flushed in embarrassment and immediately apologized to Marinette, who had just snorted and said that this was probably the most enthusiastic she had ever seen anyone being about taking the Metro.

His excitement, while being noticeably more contained after that realisation, did not die down completely. At each stop he had something to point out—the weird names of some of them, the design choices, silly-looking advertisements and also people that looked hilarious to his eyes—that sometimes even managed to make Marinette laugh. This led to both of them being in high spirits as they eventually had to get off half an hour later.

“I’d rather call it ‘sheltered’ or ‘isolated’, but sure, let’s go with ‘weird’. It doesn’t seem to be too much of a bad thing after all,” Adrien said and threw her a playful grin.

“So, you really don’t get out much, huh?”
“Other than on photoshoots and other things my schedule dictates you mean? Barely. Which is why I like sneaking out when I get the opportunity. The key is to not get caught.”

“Well, as a quite known model of one of the biggest fashion brands of Paris, I can imagine that the ‘not getting caught’-thing often becomes a problem. Don’t you get recognized?”

Adrien thought for a bit before replying, since he couldn’t very well tell her that the chances of a black cat being recognized as Adrien Agreste were quite slim.

“Sometimes. You’d be surprised how few people on the streets actually care about fashion brands and their models. Sure, there are certain circles who would immediately recognize me, but you don’t usually meet those randomly on the street.”

“And if you do happen to meet them, your plans of escape are foiled,” Marinette remarked.

“Not if you have the right disguise,” Adrien said with a grin and tapped his sunglasses.

“Yet I immediately recognized you. If you want to do this more often, you’re gonna need to do better. At least wear something that’s not designer and maybe also a hat, or even a wig.” Marinette then fixed him with a calculating look. “And colours that don’t stand out much. Maybe something brown, especially in autumn,” she muttered thoughtfully and quickly seemed lost in planning the perfect escape outfit for him. Adrien could just grin blissfully at that. This was the Marinette he had grown so fond of all those weeks ago, when she had quietly sat at her desk, fully immersed in designing, barely registering anything around her.

The latter part held true even now when she suddenly tripped on a loose tile and started fighting for balance. Adrien shifted the bakery box with the order they had to deliver into one hand and caught one of Marinette’s flailing arms before she could fall.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Bruised pride, but I’m fine otherwise,” she said with a sigh.

Adrien gave a small laugh at that. “Did planning my future escape outfit really distract you that much?”

“A little maybe,” she admitted with a blush she tried to hide by turning her head away and started walking again, this time in a faster pace.

“Can you tell me about it?”

“What?”

“The outfit you were planning. I’m curious.” If he would have looked in a mirror he would have probably seen another one of his wide grins on his face, the kind that his father despised and always told Adrien to get rid of. ‘What a ridiculous thing to ask of a cat,’ his mother had always said fondly. He quickly stopped thinking about it. Memories of his mother always made him sad and with that irritable, which was something he really did not need at this moment.

Marinette pondered his request for a bit. “Well, for the summer I would say a very simple t-shirt, maybe black, grey or a not very saturated green. Couple that with jeans or shorts in blue or another neutral colour. Basically, something that blends in, doesn’t look like a disguise and lets people’s view slide over you.

“For colder weather, a hoodie might be best. Those are always very comfortable too, so it’s
basically a win-win. Winter will be the easiest because you can just hide your face beneath a scarf and wear a hat.”

She looked him up and down as if to mentally check if her imagined outfits would work and then nodded.

“Looks like we have to go shopping then,” Adrien mused.

“Wait, we?”

“Of course! Or did you think I’d get far without your style advice?”

“You’re the model, so you tell me. *Would* you be able to pick your own outfit or not?” The teasing lilt in her voice excited him probably more than was appropriate. Though friendly teasing meant that she liked him and that meant that he was making progress! One way or another at least.

“Depends on who you’re asking. *I* think that I *am* capable of picking my own outfits, thank you very much. My father thinks the opposite and my brother doesn’t care. Meanwhile, *you* think that I am a disaster when it comes to picking something inconspicuous, so clearly, I am in a desperate need of help,” Adrien said with an exasperated sigh.

In truth, he was absolutely *horrible* when it came to picking something fashionable. His father had always fussed with his self-chosen outfits, saying that he had no sense of colour- or style-combination. In his defence, he had not tried to combine a masterpiece each time he got dressed. Instead, he simply chose what was comfortable and what he liked best. Picking things on a whim was his method of throwing together an outfit, which probably was partly due to his faerie heritage.

Consequences did not matter to faeries after all, since they lived for the moment and only did how they pleased. Adrien was very glad that this trait so far only seemed to heavily manifest in him when it came to making clothing choices and not, say, human interaction. At least he hoped that this was the case. It was quite hard to tell sometimes with his lack of knowledge about social clues and the like.

Marinette snorted.

“A model that doesn’t know how to properly dress himself. What has the world come to?!” she said in an overdramatic and mocking fashion.

“Clearly we’re all doomed,” Adrien replied, keeping up the act. Marinette laughed.

“Alright then. Let’s prevent the end of the world by getting you a perfect outfit or two.”

Adrien was about to throw back a witty remark, maybe even a pun—she had not much liked the pun in his last note, but they seemed to be on a friendlier base now, so surely it would not hurt trying—but an eerie feeling and a sharp whisper of magic caught his attention instead. It was a difficult task to not freeze on the spot, grab Marinette’s hand and bolt into the opposite direction, but he accomplished to continue walking. Something must have shown his shift of mood though, because the grin on Marinette’s face died and she looked at him in concern.

“Are you okay?” she asked, to which the answer would be a clear and capitalised ‘NO’. Adrien was *not* okay because there, just ten metres in front of them, looking at a shop window in disappointment, was a faerie. A selkie to be exact. A selkie who had her skin stolen and was enslaved to the Bourgeois family, to be very precise. Sabrina.

If she would see Adrien with a human, she would tell Chloé and if Chloé knew that he had been
seeing a human outside of the basic necessities such as modelling, then Marinette was not going to live for very long. He prayed to whatever kind gods would hear him to have mercy on his poor soul and let things turn out alright when he discreetly grabbed Marinette’s arm for a second time that day and pulled her into the next alley.

She was about to say something but Adrien put a finger on his lips, motioning her to be quiet.

“I just saw someone I know and she’s a blabbermouth. If she tells anyone that she saw me here, I’m done for,” he hastily explained as quietly as he could. It basically wasn’t a lie. He just conveniently kept silent about the fact that Marinette would be even more done for if that happened.

The Court did not know forgiveness. The mere thought of what would happen to members that went against its beliefs and rules could fuel his nightmares for weeks. What would happen to humans that were wrapped up in such crimes was too horrible to imagine.

Marinette’s eyes lit up in understanding and she nodded. A few tense seconds went by until they eventually saw the redhead walk by the alley without noticing either of them. At least it seemed that way. The air was quite thick with magic around these parts—why actually?—and Adrien’s own magic was luckily subtle, especially since he was in his less magical human form at the moment, so Sabrina hopefully did not notice the slight change in the air, busy as she was. They waited a little longer to be sure she was gone until they stepped out of the alley again.

Adrien breathed a sigh of relief he had not known he was holding, while Marinette just looked into the direction Sabrina had disappeared into. Then she shrugged and continued walking. Though just when the secret Cat Sidhe was about to pick up their earlier conversation again, Marinette stopped.

For a second time that day, Adrien froze.

Oh, so that’s why the air is so thick with magic…

His noirette companion had stopped in front of nothing less than what looked like an antique shop with various curious trinkets hanging in and beyond the shop’s front windows. It did not surprise him that the colourful glass orbs and wind chimes with small metallic birds would catch Marinette’s attention, since such things were very easily inspiring. No, it surprised him that she noticed the entire shop at all.

It had been a while since he had been there himself, the last time had been with his mother when he was probably around nine years old, but even from that short visit he remembered that this shop was something that was not meant for human eyes. It had a glamour on it that would let people ignore its existence, similar to how many faeries stayed invisible. He could see the shop and so could other faeries, but Marinette should not be able to see it.

Oh no, this is my fault! Félix was right!

Marinette did not seem to notice Adrien’s inner panic attack and instead read the cursive writing of the wooden sign above the shop front.

“Mélusine’s. Hmm, they must be new. I don’t come to Montparnasse often, but I’m sure I would remember seeing a shop like that,” she mused, inevitably making Adrien panic even more. What could he say to dissuade her from ever seeing it? If she would memorise the name and the shop’s location, she could probably find it on her own and that was an extremely bad idea.

He almost had a heart attack when Marinette tried to open the door, finding it locked.
“Closed on Saturdays,” she read on the sign at the door and tilted her head. “Weird day to close up shop. Saturdays would probably be the most lucrative after all.”

“Maybe it’s personal reasons, you never know,” Adrien said before she would also notice the sign that said “Open from dusk till dawn.” He mentally patted himself on the back to sound somewhat normal and not like he was internally panicking up a storm. Instead of grabbing Marinette and forcefully dragging her very far away from Melusine’s, he just gently took her hand and pulled her away from the shop that was not new at all.

“When is the delivery due by the way? I don’t want to be the cause for us being late after all,” he said, very desperately trying to change the subject. To his relief, Marinette immediately jumped on the topic, looking at her watch.

“We still have about fifteen minutes. Let’s hope it’s easy to find.”

Thus, concluded Adrien’s panic attack of the day and the beginning of their frantic search to find the address. It turned out to be one of those houses that had a shop at the ground floor and therefore a back-alley entrance, which made it, contrary to what Marinette had wished, ridiculously hard to find. With only minutes to spare, they delivered the order to a thankful old lady—a normal human and not a faerie like Adrien had feared; he was done with faerie surprise-encounters for the day.

The way back to the bakery went more smoothly. Adrien successfully distracted Marinette with the question of what she thought of his brother, so that she did not notice the faerie shop a second time. Her answer to his question, though, surprised him somewhat. Not ever had anyone described his brother as “comfortable to be around.”

“Is that an artist thing? Because I don’t get it,” Adrien said after that particular response. His mother had always told him how faeries were drawn to artists, since they were different from other people. He had never really understood why until he met Marinette. In contrast to other people, she was almost a complete mystery to him and therefore unpredictable. It was unnerving and exciting at the same time.

“I don’t know,” Marinette said thoughtfully. “He had his book, his coffee and his cake and seemed to be content while I was just there, sketching. Usually people expect a conversation or just attention and it’s pretty relieving when you encounter someone who doesn’t expect that. Takes away the tension.” She shrugged.

“You might be one of the first people to get along with him then. Most don’t quite know what to do with Félix because he either doesn’t participate at all or just makes brutally honest remarks. A lot of people find him rude or unapproachable but he’s actually very nice.”

Marinette smiled at him. “It’s nice that you’re defending your brother like that,” she said. “I’ve just met him once so far, so I can’t really judge, but I also think that he is not a bad person. We sometimes get customers who are quite rude about their expectations, so I know a foul apple when I see one. Félix was quite civil in comparison to that.”

“Hopefully you’ll get to know him better soon because he told me that we would only help me out this once, so he will probably use his free afternoons to pay your parents’ bakery a few visits. He was very fond of the coffee cake by the way.”

Marinette giggled. “He told me that too. Do you want the recipe? Because he only has two more weeks to enjoy it before we close down.”

Adrien threw her an alarmed look. Close down?!
“B-b-but…why close down?” Adrien asked in silent shock, but Marinette stayed calm and just waved off his concerns with a hand.

“Just for August. It’s the law that bakeries in Paris have to close down for one month and we always pick August for that. We’ll be open again in September, don’t worry,” she said, which considerably calmed Adrien down again. For a moment he had feared that they were going out of business and had to move away.

“What are you doing in August then?”

“Usually Papa uses that time to experiment with possible new recipes. Some are good, some are not, but it’s all in good fun. Maman and I are always the ones who have to taste-test these experiments and it’s like eating Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans, but with pastries: you never know if what you get is gonna taste good or bad. When I’m not doing that, I will probably design and sew some outfits and binge some shows I wanted to watch for a while.”

“That sounds a lot more fun than my schedule for August,” Adrien said with a jealous sigh. “Any chance I could taste-test one of those pastries too?” He had been close to also asking if he could join her in binge-watching whatever shows she wanted to watch and maybe even help her with her outfits, but both seemed a little too forward for the moment.

“Sure, but don’t say I didn’t warn you,” Marinette grinned. Adrien, who had expected a rejection, made a double-take.

“Wait, really?” he asked excitedly. “I can come by even when you’re closed?”

Marinette smiled but averted her eyes while absentmindedly twirling a strand of hair, that had come loose from her bun. “Only if you want to, of course.”

“Of course, I want to!” Adrien immediately said and had to hold himself back so he wouldn’t start skipping giddily.

“You’ll need a better disguise until then though, so when do you have time?” Marinette said and her shyness slowly melted away in favour of a mischievous smile. Adrien returned the expression. Who would have thought that plotting his escapes would be this much fun?

“We’re back,” Marinette said the moment they walked through the door into the bakery.

“We?” Sabine asked before turning around and smiling as she saw Adrien.

“Adrien, it’s good to see you again!” she said and stepped around the counter. In the time it had taken to deliver the order, the afternoon rush in the bakery had slowed down, so that it was currently free of customers.

When Sabine hugged Marinette, Adrien was getting a little jealous at the display of motherly affection. He still tried very hard to maintain a pleasant façade. It therefore came as quite a surprise when his cheek suddenly received an affectionate pat from the Chinese woman.

“It’s very gentlemanly of you to help Marinette with deliveries,” she said with a smile that was just a little too innocent.

“Maman!” Marinette exclaimed and started to blush profusely. “It’s not…it wasn’t…he was
Adrien wanted to save Marinette from her embarrassed stammering, but he also was at a loss of what to say.

“Why don’t you stay for dinner, dear?” Sabine asked him, obviously unperturbed by her daughter’s mortification. Finally, he could find words again.

“I’d love to, but my brother and I have evening classes at six and since I technically shouldn’t be here in the first place, they will definitely notice that I’m missing and I can’t risk that.” It really was a shame that he could not stay for dinner, but maybe, hopefully, the offer would be given to him again another time. Preferably at a time where he could actually make it.

“Oh, that’s too bad,” Sabine said, obviously disappointed but luckily not offended. “At least stay a little. Marinette has been holed up in her room for the past week and a little company could do her some good.”

“Maman, I am still here!”

“I…uh…I wouldn’t want to perturb,” Adrien said and he could feel his tail twitching nervously under his glamour as he picked up on Marinette’s discomfort. While he did not disagree with her mother and really wanted to stay at this peaceful place for as long as possible, he did not want Marinette to feel forced to hang out with him.

“Nonsense, dear,” Sabine said with a wave of her hand and gently pushed both teens in the direction of the stairs. “Just go upstairs. I’m sure you’ll find something fun to do.”

Marinette, whose face was still as red as the roses on her balcony, needed a moment to find words while she looked back and forth between her retreating mother and the staircase.

“I’m sorry about my mother, she’s a little…uh…”

“Persistent? I noticed,” Adrien said with a chuckle.

“Listen, you really don’t have to keep hanging out with me if you don’t want to,” Marinette said awkwardly, fiddling with the hem of her shirt while looking at her shoes.

“But I want to!” Adrien said and immediately bit his lip. Curse his impulsive faerie habits! Maybe he could still save this. “I hope this doesn’t sound weird or anything, but you’re a lot of fun to be around.”

“Oh,” Marinette said surprised and Adrien almost breathed a sigh of relief when he picked up on her happiness. Not all was lost yet after all! “Maybe we could play some video games?”

Adrien had a hard time to not give a happy wiggle which would have no doubt looked ridiculous in his human form. Video games were one of the topics they had not yet touched upon and so he had not been aware that Marinette liked them. It was yet another thing they had in common, which made him positively giddy.

“Sure!” he therefore said with a huge grin and let her lead him upstairs. He also noted that this would be the first time he would see her apartment from a human perspective. It also was the first time he would actually see her living room, without counting the small glimpse he had gotten of it as a cat. Therefore, when he entered it, he had to restrain himself from his nature of curiously snooping around. As kids, Félix and him had often done that when they were visiting someone and their father had not been pleased, repeatedly telling them how poor their manners were. The last
thing Adrien wanted was for Marinette to think he had no manners, but even that did not stop him from turning around in a circle once they entered and taking everything in.

“It’s so pretty,” he said in awe, again baffled by the fact that a human living space could actually be comfortable and not solely consist of cold marble and white walls. Well, the walls were still white, but it was a warm and welcoming white that mixed with the pinks and the dark wooden floor while the white walls in his house were just cold and lifeless. Here, his instincts told him to jump on the sofa and curl up between the cushions for a cat nap. He smothered the purr that was trying to make its way to his throat at the thought.

“Thanks, but it’s really nothing special,” Marinette said with a small blush. Adrien whipped around to her in disbelief. How could she not see how wonderful and perfect her home was?!

“It’s your home, that’s special enough.”

“I mean, you’re probably used to fancier houses.” She looked down as if ashamed and Adrien had to suppress the reflex to gape at her.

“Yeah, horrible right?” he said instead, which got her attention. “It’s always huge rooms, marble floors, white walls and…just cold. When you’re used to it, it gets suffocating. This though—” he motioned to the living space of the Dupain-Chengs—“is warm and comfortable. It’s…normal, you know? I’m not in houses like this often, so this is my version of luxury. The grass is always greener on the other side and all that.” His hand wandered to the back of his neck when he realised that he had been rambling. That was impolite, wasn’t it? Hopefully it had not seemed too weird to her. The look she was giving him, one of confusion, did not quite help to calm him in that regard either.

“I guess I never thought of it like that,” she then said and threw him a smile. “In that case, enjoy the luxury.”

He breathed a quiet sigh of relief as she turned to the kitchen.

“Would you like something to drink?” she asked, already taking out two glasses from the cupboard.

“Water please,” Adrien said, not willing to tempt fate by accidentally asking for something that would get him into serious trouble—like how milk would count as an offering which would not be complete without bread and cheese and he did not know how offended his faerie side would be if neither of the other two things would be offered without prompting. Dispersing those thoughts, he accepted the glass of water with a small thanks.

“Since you can’t stay till dinner, do you want to grab something from downstairs? The bakery is going to close in two hours so I’m sure there are some things we can already proclaim as leftovers. We donate most of them since we can’t eat pastries every day, you know, but snatching a few won’t hurt.”

“Is that really okay? I mean, I can pay for them too.”

That seemed to have been the wrong thing to say because Marinette threw him a disapproving frown.

“I’m not gonna let you pay for food. You’re my guest after all.”

“O-okay,” Adrien said, not daring to argue with her about it. It was confusing to have two different sets of morals and manners. On the one hand, the manners his father taught him said to insist on paying since it was the right thing to do. His faerie side however was delighted at the prospect of
free food and did not want to argue further. Deciding to give Marinette the lead on this one was probably wise since he wanted to get in her good graces anyway.

“I maybe should have suggested to grab leftover food when we were still downstairs,” Marinette said with a nervous giggle as she pulled a plate out of a cupboard. “I’ll just quickly go and look what we have and take one from everything, okay?”

Adrien was about to argue, saying that he would not mind accompanying her downstairs, but then quickly changed his mind as he realised what kind of opportunity this gave him.

“I don’t mind waiting, go ahead,” he therefore said with a smile.

“I’ll try to be quick,” she said as she rushed out the door and down the stairs.

“Take your time,” Adrien said with a grin, knowing she wouldn’t hear him anymore anyway. Instead, he used this precious time to walk to one of the walls and press his hand to it.

He had wanted to give Marinette and her family a blessing ever since she had helped him on Midsummer and the good deeds had just kept coming since then. It was really overdue at this point. The blessing would have to be a subtle one, so that other fae would not immediately notice it. He had only once blessed a house, that of an old lady who had put a bowl of a milk and a loaf of bread on her balcony as an obvious offering on Samhain.

From back then, he remembered that a blessing came easiest to a *Cat Sidhe* when all requirements were met and when the day was right. The first was not a problem since this family had practically showered him with nothing but kindness, generosity and a various number of offerings so far. It was neither Samhain nor Beltane though. It even was full moon and daylight, which worked to Adrien’s disadvantage since an Unseelie faerie like him drew power from a new moon and the night. Bad conditions like that would no doubt give him some magical repercussions, but he chose to ignore that minor discomfort.

Adrien closed his eyes and took a deep breath, drawing in the magic in the air around him that humans could not feel. It filled him with warmth that shifted and flickered as if it were alive, not unlike a candle’s flame would feel without it burning him. Then he breathed out, wishing good luck on this house and its inhabitants. Good luck was vague enough to be written off as coincidence. Nothing Marinette or her parents would question like some other faerie blessings, where they would, for example, find a new piece of gold every day. No, good luck was nice and subtle and Adrien would gladly deal with the little backlash of bad luck he’d have to bear in return. If tripping a few times or spilling a drink was the price to pay for this kind family getting what they deserved, then he did not mind.

He quickly stepped away from the wall and did his best to look to all the world like he had been standing on this spot the whole time when he heard someone—no doubt Marinette—rushing up the stairs.

“I managed to snatch a chocolate croissant for you. *Papa* said you order it every time,” Marinette said while walking up the last flight of stairs and then appeared in the doorway with a plate full of various baked goods in her hands.

“Awesome!” Adrien said while his eyes zeroed in on the croissant. He followed Marinette to the sofa where she put down the plate on the coffee table.

“So, games!” she said and rummaged around the TV. “We just have a few multiplayer ones, so take your pick.” One by one she laid out the cases of the games she had on the coffee table and Adrien
noticed that he had all of them too. He grinned when he saw “Mario Kart” join the selection. The first and only time he had played multiplayer on it was with Félix who had not stopped complaining about how the game was illogical, which ended in the declaration that it would just stress him out and that he therefore would not play it anymore.

“Can we play this one?” Adrien therefore immediately asked and pointed at the racing game in question. “I also promise to go easy on you.”

For some reason, Marinette’s whole stance shifted at that and her grin turned mischievous. Something told Adrien that he had just made a mistake.

“How nice of you,” she said while her eyes shined with a glint not unlike that of a kelpie’s stare when one was about to fall for its trap. Then again, this was just a friendly game of Mario Kart and not a water beast that tried to lure him into touching its skin to then drag him to a watery grave. What could go wrong?

Just thirty minutes later, Adrien found out that a lot of things could go wrong. It was nothing that would lead to either of their deaths, but it included some high-grade trickery for sure. After all, what else could be the reason for his continued losses? He looked at the screen in disbelief as it declared Marinette the winner of a race again and him as second…again. He had tried all the tricks he had learned in single player mode but none of them worked with her. As it turned out, playing against another player and not a computer-generated one was a whole lot harder than he thought it could be.

He pouted as Marinette made a little victory dance. It had been cute the first time, but after being defeated four times in a row, he just sullenly took another pastry from the plate—his chocolate croissant long eaten—and tried his best not to show his displeasure. It was rare that he did not get what he wanted and right now, he really wanted to win.

“Rematch!” he therefore demanded once Marinette had sat down again. He would have to be careful not to accidentally influence her gameplay with some magic, because that surely counted as cheating, right?

“How about we make a team race this time with both of us on the same team?” she suggested and he reluctantly agreed.

While he technically won when they played as a team, he still always came second to Marinette, only managing to cross the finish line before her once, but that was just because she had been hit by a blue shell.

When it was time for him to go home, rain had started to fall outside and Adrien could feel the fur under his glamour standing on end. While he had felt a certain tension in the air the whole day already, it was especially unlucky that it decided to come down now when he had to go outside. Then again, this was probably the bad luck he got for the blessing he gave. As he watched the thick raindrops hit the windows and run down in tiny streams, he started to almost regret his decision. Just almost.

Adrien profusely thanked Marinette for the wonderful time, the pastries, even the glass of water—the latter made her laugh—and then set out to depart.
“Wait,” she called and he looked back up the stairs to her, hand on the doorknob. “Just wait a minute, I’ll be right back!” With that she rushed back up the stairs, leaving Adrien at the door wondering just what she could be up to. When she returned half a minute later a little out of breath, she held out a pink umbrella to him.

“It’s not the best but it is **something**. Be careful, one of the metal joints is broken, so it does not unfold very well on that side anymore. I really should get a new umbrella at some point but I always forget and now this is the only one I got, otherwise I would have given you a better one!”

“Thank you,” he said and threw her a smile that threatened to break his face. “I’ll give it back to you on Wednesday.”

“It’s okay, you can keep it if you want. N-not that you have to or anything, since it’s broken and all and I’m not using you to get rid of broken things, that’s not it at all! I just thought that if you like it and don’t have an umbrella you can keep it. Which is ridiculous because of course you have an umbrella because you’re rich and…”

Adrien could just stare at her with wide eyes, not being able to comprehend that **Marinette** had given him a **gift**! Sure, she had gifted him food before, but this was different. This was something she really did not have to do but still did; giving him her only umbrella just so that he would stay dry, no matter how broken it was.

He ended her endless rambling by giving her a hug. She squeaked at the unexpected gesture, but hesitantly returned it anyway. She blushed slightly when they broke the hug, to which he had to hold back a chuckle.

“I might have my own umbrellas at home, but certainly no half-broken pink ones. I think I’m gonna keep it,” Adrien said with a grin. The next time he would need an umbrella, he would certainly be using Marinette’s pink one, if just to spite his father a little. Félix would no doubt find it hilarious.

“O-okay then, if you insist,” she said shyly.

“You offered it as a gift first. No returns!” he laughed and opened the door.

“Again, thanks for today. I really had a lot of fun.” *And minor heart attacks*, Adrien added internally.

“I had a lot of fun too,” Marinette said with a smile that lit up her eyes. He had done this. He had made her smile like that without charming her at all. The reason for it was a simple afternoon of him being himself and her being herself. No fake smiles, no carefully chosen words, no charades—except the glamour of course, but that was alright. Had he really done it? Had he managed that someone liked him for him? The thought alone made him want to break out in a happy song, but he learned the hard way that this looked horribly weird in public.

“See you on Wednesday then. I’ll count the days!” Adrien said after opening the umbrella—it really **was** half broken—and throwing her another smile and a wave.

“Y-yeah, see you then. I’ll have a game plan ready,” Marinette said, apparently gaining some of her courage back. It was sad how it seemed to come and go and not stay.

“Wouldn’t expect anything less,” he said and with a last wave, stepped out into the rain. It was not until he reached the corner of the street that he heard her front door close. He smiled to himself as the raindrops fell on the umbrella, the wetness just minorly touching him. Unseelie meant **unhappy, unfortunate or even unholy**, but maybe the universe did not completely despise him after
I could not resist an umbrella scene! ;w;
I first contemplated if I should even keep it in, but my beta-reader Queenie was yelling at me about how cute it was, so it stayed. You can thank her for it! XD
Ever since their first encounter, Marinette had known that there was something weird about Adrien. The kind of weird that felt similar to Chloé’s unprovoked cruelty, just that Adrien was not cruel in the slightest. Yet, the similarity and even familiarity, as she later found out, had made her distrustful of him at first. It had taken a bit of thought, but she had eventually written the feeling off as ridiculous. After all, both Chloé and Adrien came from rich families and mingled in the same circles. Of course, there would be a certain vibe about them, as Nino would call it. She still held on to that belief, even though some deep part of her whispered advice to still distrust the rich boy.

Adrien was not normal at all, she could say that with absolute certainty. Their interactions had been awkward at first, but his reactions of wonder at the most common of things had made Marinette lower her defences significantly. She eventually understood that he was just a sheltered rich boy in need of a friend, and if he chose her as that friend, then who was she to argue?

Her gut feeling, that was usually quite reliable, had gone through ups and downs during the whole day. One moment it told her to stay away from him, like when he had suddenly pulled her into an alley and told her to be quiet. Then her gut apparently changed its mind and told her to get closer to him, engage in conversation and make him happy. It was a confusing contradiction.

Then there was the part of her that guiltily admitted that Adrien was indeed very attractive and that was an understatement. Marinette had never seen a boy whose eyes were the same soft green as Adrien’s or who had hair that was so blond it looked like polished gold. There was almost something otherworldly to his beauty and one really would have to be blind to deny it.
Yes, Adrien Agreste, teenage model and face of the Gabriel fashion brand, was undeniably extremely attractive. That was a fact. She would lie if she would say that his looks had not influenced her to forgive him faster, after all she was but a simple teenage girl. To preserve some humility, she could also gladly admit that it had mostly been his actions rather than his looks that had convinced her.

Still, hanging out one-on-one with someone like Adrien for several hours on end would probably leave anyone a confused but happy mess. She really needed to sort these emotions out with someone that would not gush about how cute Adrien and her looked together. That clearly ruled out her parents and left her with Nino as her best bet.

She sighed when she thought about her best friend—could she still call him that? Drifting apart from Nino was something she never thought would happen and yet it had happened. At this point, she had not heard from him in over a week, ever since he had flown to Morocco on vacation. It was something that previously never had happened. He would have at least texted her when he arrived and then complained about his family’s antics to her every day with either a call or via text. This was always how it had been, until it had not been like it anymore.

With another sigh, Marinette laid the phone down on the kitchen counter and started to take out pots, pans and ingredients. While her parents closed up shop downstairs, Marinette was supposed to start cooking dinner, which also gave her precious time alone to sort out the mess she suddenly found herself in. She kept throwing glances at her phone, especially when she was left with nothing else to do while waiting for the water to boil.

Unsureness of whether to call Nino or not grew in her the more time passed. It was only close to six in the evening and there was just a one-hour time difference anyway. Maybe he was doing something fun with his family though and she did not want to interrupt him with her boring lamenting.

Against her better judgement she still picked up her phone and scrolled to his contact, torn between what was the right thing to do and eventually deciding not to be a bother to him. She saw her Nonna’s contact below Nino’s and decided to call her instead. Then again, she was probably on her motorcycle at that moment. She rarely sat still at one place even for a woman her age. Trying did not hurt though.

She went to click on her Nonna’s number, but apparently her finger had slipped because suddenly the picture of a whole other person appeared on the display and her phone was dialling Nino’s number. After a few seconds of panic, she eventually held the device to her ear and waited nervously.

“Hey Marinette! How’s it going?” Nino’s cheerful voice greeted her after only two rings and she felt herself relaxing. Hearing his voice in the same carefree manner she was used to felt like they had never drifted apart in the first place.

“Cloudy, rainy and cool. And you?” she asked, surprised how easy it was to talk to him when not seeing his face. Maybe calling him had been the right decision after all.

“Hot as hell. I’m just very glad they have air conditioning here, otherwise I’d be fried and could be fed to the sharks at the aquarium,” he laughed.

“I guess they’d prefer raw meat or more specifically fish. In a fried state you are neither,” she joked back with a grin. “How is Casablanca otherwise?” She really wished she could be there with him and just explore the city, lie on the beach and sketch whatever ideas she would get from the new surroundings.
“Eh, same old same old. The ‘wow new’ feeling kinda wears off after you’ve been there a couple of times, you know? Could also live without the family drama. Little B got into a fight with some cousin of ours yesterday and it was a huge mess.”

“Unprovoked though?” Marinette asked with a grin, knowing fully well that Nino’s little brother was almost a saint for a kid his age when it came to controlling his temper, probably due to Nino’s calm influence.

“He swears that Tazim threw the fish first and that’s probably true, but my aunt went all ‘my perfect son wouldn’t do this’ and it escalated from there. I just tried to stay out of it for the most part.”

“Sounds quite dramatic. I’d switch with you since it’s been kinda boring for me and I could use some excitement.” Even though she was technically already getting it in the form of a certain blond trying to give her emotional whiplash with his randomness.

“Yeah, a little bit of Marinette-temper is exactly what we need right now,” Nino said sarcastically and then chuckled. “You’d be throwing around tables before they even knew what was happening.”

“I would not throw around tables!” she protested adamantly while checking on the water, which was still not boiling.

“But you could and no one except Ma and Pa would expect it. A small, unassuming Asian girl wreaking havoc? It would definitely shock the fam into silence.”

“Did you just call me short, Lahiffe?”

“It’s the truth and you know it. Though it also works to your advantage quite often. Remember that one time in the park when some guy thought you to be an easy target and tried to steal your purse? You just threw him over your shoulder!” Marinette snorted at the memory. “Him running away in fear was kind of hilarious,” she admitted. “But I wouldn’t have been able to do that if it wasn’t for the fact that I helped carry in supply deliveries ever since I could lift a flour sack. That and because Maman thought it was necessary to teach me martial arts. Not complaining though.”

Finally, the water was boiling. Marinette added the noodles while cradling the phone between her ear and shoulder.

“By the way, Nino, can I ask for your advice on something?”

“Advice, huh? Well, I don’t have my crystal ball with me right now but I’m also plenty wise without it, so shoot.”

Marinette grinned at the reminder of Nino’s fortune-telling phase from two years ago. It had been a short spectacle, only lasting a few weeks, but it had led to both of them declaring the glass ball from Nino’s grand-aunt to be defective. Entertaining stories could be told from that whole ordeal and they kept bringing them up on various occasions.

“What would you do if you thought someone insulted you but it was actually a social misunderstanding. At least I’m ninety-three percent sure it was.”

“Ninety-three percent?” Nino snorted.
“Shut up, it’s an estimated number! Anyway, if said person would then show up a week later and not only say that he’s friends with Chloé but also say that he’s never been to a bakery before—”

“He’s never been a to a bakery before?!”

“Nino,” Marinette said warningly while working on the sauce.

“Sorry. Continue, please.”

“As I was saying, he said all that and then left a weirdly poetic note in which he apologized for the incident from a week ago. He then continued to leave messages when coming by in the very early mornings. Then, one week later, his twin shows up and says that his brother doesn’t stop talking about me. So, I end up feeling guilty and invite him to hang out. I could not know that he would show up the very next day and accompany me through half of Paris on a delivery and being a huge dork all the way. Like, imagine the reaction of a child when it’s on the Metro for the first time and then imagine a boy our age reacting like that. It was kind of hilarious to be honest. Then we ended up playing video games until he had to go home and it was nice, but…it’s still kind of odd.”

Nino was silent for a few seconds before responding. “Well, I don’t know what advice you’re looking for here, but it does sound like quite the mess. What was the misunderstanding though?”

“He complimented my designs, saying he wanted to, and I quote, ‘make it up to me with something to match the beauty of my creations’ and proceeded to gift me a dead leaf.”

Howling laughter sounded from the other side of the phone so that Marinette had to free it from pinning it to her ear and holding it at a distance instead.

“Oh man, that’s rich!”

“Gee, thanks for making me go deaf on my right ear. Anyway, according to his brother he’s socially-awkward.”

“Dude, I know socially-awkward, but this is next level! And sorry about your ear.”

“Apology not accepted, you’re now punished to be on speaker phone,” Marinette said while placing the device back on the countertop and tending to the dinner on the stove.

“But seriously, ‘Nette, do you like him?” Nino asked, his voice taking on a more sober tone. Marinette bit her lip in thought.

“I think so? I don’t know. He’s just relatable in this basic kind of way, you know?”

“Define basic.”

Could she tell him about the exact content of the notes? After all, those had been meant for her eyes only and just passing on what they said felt like betrayal. She decided to put it vaguely.

“Thinking about the little things in life, I guess? What you call your ‘philosophical moments’ where you think about the universe and life and such.”

“Interesting. Quite deep stuff to tell someone when first meeting them. It definitely adds to the ‘socially awkward on astronomical levels’ theory.”

“That’s what the notes were about. When talking he’s a little more…enthusiastic?” Marinette said, asking herself if that word fit. “In any case, he’s not the quiet and broody type. That would be his
It’s kind of scary how they can be twins but yet be such opposites.”

“Well, I haven’t met either of the dudes, so I can’t say anything for certain. But when his brother is the broody type, have you considered that the notes have been from him instead?”

“No, they’re not. Adrien always spontaneously writes them when he comes by each morning to buy pastries. At least according to my parents.”

“Well, then he might be a deep thinker but it’s awkward to say it out loud rather than to write it down, you know?”

“Probably. Especially since we practically don’t know each other.”

“And, how is this going to continue now?”

“Well, we made plans to go shopping next week because he wants an escape outfit and I have a better fashion sense than he does.”

“Escape outfit? Dude, does he come from an abusive family or something?” Nino asked, now with worry. That was when Marinette noticed that she hadn’t told him yet just who she was talking about.

“No, nothing like that! Or at least I hope not? He’s rich, well, his family is, and his days are scheduled so he has no time for himself at all, unless he climbs out of a window. This is still mildly concerning though.”

“Dude,” Nino just said and Marinette could almost see him shake his head in disbelief. “Poor guy, that must be tough.”

“Yeah, but it gets even better…or worse, depending on how you look at it.”

“Go on.”

“You know Gabriel Agreste? This one fashion designer I am a fan of?”

“You’ve talked about him before I guess? Can’t really put a face to the name though.”

“Well, the guy I have been hanging out with and his twin brother are Adrien and Félix Agreste. The sons of my favourite fashion designer. I just spent the whole afternoon hanging out with a model who thought that designer clothes and sunglasses would make for a good disguise!”

“Dude,” Nino said again, this time speechless. “How did you even get yourself into that situation?”

“I…err…kinda almost ran Adrien over,” Marinette admitted and was glad to have the phone on speaker because Nino started laughing very loudly again. She used the time it took him to calm down to tend to the food.

“So, let me get this straight,” Nino said when he stopped laughing. “You almost run the model son of your favourite fashion designer over, he says something super cheesy and probably accidentally insults you. Then he starts coming to the bakery and leaves you poetic notes and one day his brother shows up and tells you that the other dude is always talking about you. Then you invite him to hang out, he is being a huge dork, you criticize his fashion sense and then you end up playing video games. Then you make plans to go shopping together.

“Marinette, have you ever considered writing a book about this? Because I swear, things like that
only happen to you.”

Marinette groaned. “I know! My life is a soap opera!”

Nino, who seemed to have a ball with all the information, was undeterred though. “What I get from that is that this dude is very strictly sheltered, so you help him to escape, right?”

“Yeah, sort of.”

“Just show him how a normal teenager lives then. You know, this typical ‘esteemed guy meets normal person and they teach them how to let loose and have fun’ movie trope, just in real life.”

Marinette snorted. “Yeah, because Marinette Dupain-Cheng is known to be the most entertaining person ever!” she deadpanned.

“Hey, don’t be so hard on yourself. You can be fun!”

“Nino, at the moment I just sit around at home, sew outfits, play video games and binge shows. Sometimes I work downstairs in the bakery and do deliveries but that was it.”

“Marinette,” Nino said seriously and the girl in question paused tending to the sauce for a moment at his tone. “You are literally the most creative and inventive person I know. This boy is sheltered, which means he probably missed out on a lot of stuff normal kids do. So just do normal things with him. Let him experience the wonders of microwave popcorn, bake chocolate chip cookies with him, make a picnic on your balcony out of it, I don’t know! Normal stuff. And if you’re unsure if he’ll like something, then just ask him first if he wants to do what you planned.”

“You make it sound so easy,” Marinette grumbled, but still mentally noted his ideas down.

“Because it is. You’re just overthinking everything again. Go with the basics, get a feeling of what he likes and ease into this friendship if that’s what you’re going for.”

She sighed. “Nino, do you really think this is a good idea? I mean, yeah, Adrien seemed friendly, but he is also, like, way out of my league, being the son of my favourite fashion designer and all. Also, he is friends with Chloé for Pete’s sake!”

“If this would be a prank by Chloé you would have called his bluff already and he came to you not to her, so that says something.”

“Which is also not much. To voluntarily go near Chloé one really would have to have a death wish or something.”

“Or be on her good side, which he apparently is.”

“Also, girl talk here for a second, he is very…attractive,” Marinette blushed as she said it out loud, the statement seeming out of place with the kind of awkward yet playful relationship Adrien and she had so far. There had been nothing romantic about them ever, so it felt weird to objectify him like that.

“I’m just scared that this is kind of subconsciously messing with my perception of the whole thing, you know?”

“Hmm,” Nino said and the line was quiet for a few moments while he thought. “If you really can’t tell whether your hormones are messing up your judgement, then try to convince him to make a video call so I can see for myself what we have to deal with here.”
Marinette was very relieved with that idea. Nino had an excellent intuition when it came to judging other people and if he approved of Adrien, then she could be pretty much assured that her deceptive hormones were, in fact, not messing with her perception.

“I’ll ask him next time I see him.” And just like that, their main conversation point came to an end and Marinette was left with the uncomfortable reminder that Nino and she were actually not as close as they had once been, even though this talk had seemed like nothing had ever happened.

Yet here she was, talking about starting a friendship with some new guy she met—a famous model no less—while Nino was still there, giving her advice. She suddenly felt the urgent need to address this so that he would not feel like he was being replaced. She ended the speaker phone mode and held the device to her ear again.

“Nino, listen. I know we’ve not talked much over the last year and it’s become kind of awkward, but I really don’t want us to drift apart like that,” she said, growing quieter to the end as she grew more insecure. On the other end, Nino sighed.

“Yeah, it sucks, doesn’t it? We’ve literally been friends since Kindergarten and for us to drift apart like this is just stupid. You know that you’re my best friend ‘Nette and I really don’t want to lose you just because I’m being an idiot.”

Marinette smiled weakly. “We’re both being idiots. I know that a lot of people drift apart when they’re our age, but let’s not be like that anymore, okay? Our friendship is better than this. I’m sure that if we put some more effort into it we can also overcome these awkward teenage years somehow.”

“Exactly,” Nino agreed with a chuckle. “Let’s hang out when I come back from Morocco, okay? Like, the whole sleepover-experience. We could even try out the Ouija board again and see if my grand-aunt has some wise tips about how to properly work her tarot cards, so we don’t foretell people’s deaths again.”

Marinette laughed at the reminder. “Sounds good. And just so you know: you will be part of the cake tasting then. No excuses!”

Nino whined. “Marinette! You know I’ll come back in the last week of August, right?”

“I know,” she said mischievously.

“You are an evil person.”

She cackled, knowing fully well that her father usually got extremely experimental with his recipes in the last week before reopening and the results were therefore usually not as delicious as one would expect from the creations of a master-baker.

“Won’t object to that. After all, I promised Adrien some free samples as well.”

“The poor guy won’t know what hit him,” Nino said with a pitiful laugh.

“I warned him, but he was adamant about wanting to try everything. It was like promising a little kid free candy.”

“Well, then he’ll learn soon enough to listen to your warnings.”

“Apparently that’s a lesson no one ever learns, because I remember vividly to have warned you every single time to not eat too many onion bread rolls but guess who never listened and will never
listen to that?"

“I relent!” Nino admitted with a chuckle. A comfortable silence befell them as Marinette poured the noodles into a bowl.

“I’m glad you called me, ‘Nette. We haven’t talked for a while and I really missed it to be honest,” Nino said eventually.

“Me too,” Marinette replied with a smile that Nino could not see but hear.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter is not yet finished and the new semester starts tomorrow, so I have absolutely no idea how much time I am going to have. While I will certainly try to finish it until next week, I really can't promise anything. I have about half of it written at this point, so that's at least something! C:
One thing I can tell you already though: It's going to be a Félix chapter! ;D
Coffee Break

Chapter Summary

Félix goes to the bakery to investigate >:3

Chapter Notes

It has been a while since we last had a Félix chapter, so this was fun to write! Also special thanks to tog84 and bluetreeleaves for helping me with this chapter! You guys are lifesavers!

_Dullahan_ = Headless rider that claims the souls of dying people

_pain perdre_ = French name for "French Toast" and it literally translates to "lost bread"

(just so that you know where the pun comes from)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Adrien was undeniably an idiot. Going on a delivery with Marinette in broad daylight—well, better daylight than moonlight—where he could easily be seen together with her was reckless enough. But to go to _Montparnasse_ of all places was a kind of idiocy Félix had not thought his brother to be capable of. In his quest to get closer to the human girl, he had accompanied her to the one place in Paris where he was almost guaranteed to encounter another one of his kind. With the small corner of Bretagne culture in France’s capital came no few of the fair folk, who felt more at home among the Celtic surroundings.

Forgetting that was a feat all on its own, but then going to no other place than onto the front porch of _Mélusine_’s was unforgivable. Granted, it had been Félix himself who had gone there regularly in the past half year to get rowan berries, St. John’s wort and other herbs and trinkets for the critical days, but Adrien knew about it nonetheless. He knew where the shop was and the least he could have done was to change the side of the street so Marinette would not notice it due to his presence. What he had done instead was to notice it and then drag her away from it after she had seen it.

Félix knew the humans and so he knew that they were too curious for their own good. Even if Marinette would not seek it out directly, it was just a question of time before she would find herself in Montparnasse again and remember the strange antique shop. The damage had been done. Whatever Félix or Adrien could say to discourage her to go, would just fuel her curiosity.

“Mélusine is nice. Maybe nothing bad will happen,” Adrien mumbled desperately from his perch on the highest bookshelf where he was wallowing in endless regret.

“She is a faerie,” Félix replied and took another sip of the coffee he desperately needed. The day had been long and absolutely dreadful. No wonder Adrien had begged for a break.

“We are faeries!” Adrien stubbornly hissed and Félix heard the unmistakable sound of claws on wood.
“We are the young and naïve exception.”

“But she’s a halfling too. Like us!”

“Be that as it may,” Félix said as he turned around to look at Adrien who just defiantly stared back. “When it is not Mélusine, then it will be another fair one, halfling or otherwise. Her shop is a safe place from this world of iron and lies and many use it as a sanctuary. Can you imagine what would happen if they found a human there? Needless to say, that the things Mélusine sells would even make the most oblivious person suspicious.”

Adrien was quiet after that, except for the occasional scratching sound when he ran his claws against the wood in frustration.

“I screwed up!” he lamented eventually and jumped down from the shelf in favour of pacing up and down the second level of their bedroom with his tail lashing wildly.

“At last, something we can agree on,” Félix said with a roll of his eyes, but did not miss the glare Adrien threw him.

“We can’t just leave her helpless like this! They’ll curse her or kidnap her or…or…” Adrien did not dare to speak his thoughts out loud but he also did not have to. Both of them knew of the ugly consequences.

Félix eventually let out a sigh and leaned back against the bookshelf. He would have much preferred to sit on the couch or even lie down on his bed, but his brother needed attention and he was willing to give it to him. For the moment at least. So, there he sat, with his almost empty Starbucks cup—he had worked hard for that coffee and obtaining it had included no small amount of trickery—and listened to his brother’s panicked rambles. It was high time for an intervention.

“Calm down. She does not know anything yet and she will be fine as long as she does not find the shop again.” The probability of this utopian outcome actually happening was low, but by Danu, Adrien was going to tear the room apart again if he did not stop worrying. Some positivity was hopefully going to prevent that.

“Félix, I know that it would be safer if neither of us would see her again, but…she is the only human friend I have,” Adrien eventually admitted and stopped in front of Félix, looking up at him with hopeful eyes. It was quite selfish of his brother to put the girl in danger just because he liked her. Then again, faeries were selfish creatures and if Marinette could make Adrien happy, then Félix would tolerate her

“You really like her that much?”

“Yes! She is super nice and——”

“Don’t start with that again. Please.” Félix rubbed his temples, already feeling a headache coming, though that was more from the bright lights at the photoshoot than from the current conversation. He doubted he could listen to one of Adrien’s ‘Marinette is so nice!’ speeches again without the throbbing getting worse.

“At least she is not connected to any fey magic anymore,” Félix sighed in relief. He really did not need a repeat of Midsummer.

Adrien, to his surprise, ducked down in shame at his words.

“Actually…I…uh…kind of placed a blessing on their house today?”
Félix almost knocked his head on the bookshelf as he jumped up.

“You did what!? Are you crazy!?”

Adrien very wisely dashed to the other side of the second level and jumped on the banister.

“I’m sorry! It’s a subtle blessing, I swear! It’s good luck, they’ll be fine! No one is going to notice!”

“Why Adrien? Just why!?” The headache made itself known with a throbbing at the back of Félix’s head and he ran his hand down his face in exasperation. He knew his brother had meant well, but it would not hurt him to think a couple of steps ahead for once.

“They were kind to me! They gave me food, shelter and even an umbrella! It’s unfair to not give anything back.”

Félix just stared at his brother for a minute. A staring contest he eventually lost as he closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

“Fine,” he said through gritted teeth. “I’ll go to the bakery tomorrow and look if your blessing did any damage.” He fixed the black cat with a neutral glare again and Adrien had the decency to look guilty.

“You’re too impatient. If you want this to work out and not get her killed in the process, you have to stop doing fey things. I know it’s annoying and weird, but be human. Ignore your instincts and just do not use any more magic. That means no blessings, curses, enchantments, charms or otherwise. It would have been better to wait until Samhain with the blessing so it wouldn’t have backfired on you.”

“I don’t care about it backfiring on me. I can take some bad luck,” Adrien said stubbornly.

“Maybe you care about it backfiring on Marinette then? Because everyone you’re close to will be caught up in that bad luck of yours.”

“Oh…”

“Look, I’m not mad at you and nothing happened yet, but it could also be better. All I’m asking of you is to be more careful and to think things through before you do them. And no more magic.”

This was a mistake, Félix knew that deep down despite what conclusion Adrien and he had come to the previous evening. Yet he felt like he owed it to the girl for keeping his brother safe on Midsummer. A favour for a favour. Fair as fair. Even though she knew of neither favour.

It was still wrong.

Adrien and he were part of the Unseelie Court after all. They were born into it, though not properly raised to act the part. *Cat Sidhe* were unlucky creatures that belonged in the darkness of the night, hidden away from the world. Bells—church bells and small ones alike—hurt their ears and they could not see perfectly well in daylight. Even if they tore themselves free from the Court and became solitary fae—which would not bring any benefits anyway—they would always be *misfortunate*. They could act as *Seelie* as they wanted, but as *Cat Sidhe* they would never belong in the Seelie Court.
Walking down the street at noon in summer made Félix realise once again how out of place he felt among people in the Paris daylight. Things were all the same here. People acted predictable and were shocked when something outside of the norm happened. This was why Félix did not like to talk to most folks. He was outside of the norm and his blatant questioning of their normal served only as an occasional amusement.

Confusion was not as satisfactory a reaction as shock or even anger was, but he simply lacked the interest to dig deep enough to find random people’s true weak points and address them. To hit a nerve was always interesting because the reaction was often a surprise. Just like opening a present. The unpredictability of those kinds of reactions was the only comfort he had among this monotone world.

When he met Marinette, Félix’s worldview had needed some adjusting. She had pleasantly surprised him during the short conversation they had had two days before and he started to understand why his kind felt drawn to artists. She was thinking outside the box and even more than that. Instead of being drawn in by Adrien’s initial kind attempt at friendship and his natural charm, she had practically spat everything right back at him and proceeded to hate him. It had no doubt been the highlight of Félix’s summer to see his brother’s sunshine attitude fail for the first time ever. That she had eventually forgiven him and was giving this dangerous friendship a try also spoke for her.

Félix was not dreading the visit to the bakery like he had expected he would, no, he was actually looking forward to it. How would this girl surprise him this time and what conversation would they hold? The mystery of it intrigued him.

However, there was still the problem of the blessing and the bad luck it had given Adrien. He really did not want harm to come to Marinette, but there was still this tiny part in him that blamed her for his brother’s literally unfortunate situation. On the other hand, it was nice to see Adrien genuinely happy for the first time in what felt like forever. Their cold house stifled them both, but Félix had watched as his brother wilted away like a flower that did not get enough sunlight. He needed to interact with people his age even if they were human. It was healthy.

“Welcome, what can I get for you…Félix?” Marinette said as he entered the bakery, only looking up as she had already finished her default greeting. She threw him a smile that wasn’t the strained, forcefully polite one he was used to receiving. It was odd, in a way, to have someone take a liking to him despite his tries to stay distant.

“Good afternoon, Marinette,” he said with a nod.

“It’s barely one.”

“Still after noon,” Félix shrugged and started to study the cake display.

“Adrien told me you would come back for the coffee cake so I saved a piece for you just in case. Only if you want it of course,” Marinette said, which made his attention snap back to the girl.

“That is very considerate of you. Thanks.” Félix accepted the plate on which lay a generously big slice of the same cake he had also gotten two days prior.

“Latte Macchiato like last time as well?” Marinette asked, already making her way to the coffee machine and Félix had to admit that he was impressed that she remembered his order.
“Yes, that would be perfect.”

As he sat down on the only table and set down his plate, another customer entered the bakery. He did not pay the newcomer much mind—he just flinched slightly at the unpleasant sound of the bell—and instead took out the book he had brought with him.

Poetry was one of the few things in his life that Félix could truly appreciate. The fact alone that only people with an open mind could truly understand the meaning behind most of the poems was appealing. It felt natural to him, just like songs, trickery and riddles did. A little piece of his faerie side that stretched into his human life. Not rarely had it served as a comfort in difficult situations and calmed him down.

A cup of coffee being set down in front of him and Marinette’s voice drew him out of a poem about a moonlit meadow.

“Not everyone gets summer vacation, so prepare to witness the rush hour.”

“I will keep it in mind,” Félix replied with a nod and noticed that the customer from before was gone now, leaving the bakery empty except for Marinette, him and who he presumed was her father in the back.

“I mean, it probably will be pretty noisy in here and if you want to have a quiet place to read we can also go upstairs. You don’t have to of course, but it’s an option.” Félix raised an eyebrow at her shy rambles. Those were new.

“While I appreciate the offer, don’t you think it is unwise to let strangers into your home without supervision?”

“Oh, I would be upstairs too. I’m only filling in for Maman while she makes lunch.”

The offer was tempting but also unnerving. He did not visit human homes very often and while he knew the etiquette by heart, he still was afraid of accidentally offending Marinette in some way. Adrien would never forgive him if that happened.

“I would hate to inconvenience you with my presence,” Félix said. By the way Marinette snorted and tried to smother a laugh, he probably had either said something ridiculous for human standards or had sounded too formal.

“You’re not a bother, don’t worry. I was just going to work on some designs anyway. If you want we can also save the cake for later and you can eat lunch with me. Only if you want to, you really don’t have to!”

Her reassurances if he was alright with her propositions was a very welcome change to being ordered around. For the first time in a while, a decision was up to him. No wonder Adrien had felt compelled to give her a blessing.

_The blessing!_ Félix had almost forgotten about it. Though first, he had to not completely ruin this conversation. Afterwards he would investigate if his brother had accidentally doomed the Dupain-Chengs.

“That is a very generous offer.”

“It’s really nothing,” Marinette replied and shuffled nervously on the spot.

“Think about it,” she added when the door opened again and she rushed back behind the counter to
take the new customer’s order.

Félix did think about it. Accepting food or beverages from humans always held the risk of being poisoned. Not on purpose of course, but there were certain herbs that were harmless to humans but problematic to him. He would not die from it, but it would make him very ill for a few days. Was the risk worth it?

Well, on the other hand he could just ask if certain things were in the food and just say that he was allergic to them. It was a half-lie but it would work. Then he could still decide if he wanted to eat it or not. It also would make Adrien jealous, which would be amusing to see.

Speaking of his brother, Félix knew he should investigate the blessing before he forgot why he was there in the first place or was interrupted again. So, he let the noise of the conversation Marinette held with the customer drift into the background and focused on the magic in the air instead.

Adrien had not been kidding when he had said it was subtle, since Félix had not been able to pick up anything at all so far. Only when he closed his eyes and concentrated did he sense the familiar hum of Adrien’s magic in the walls of the building. He was certain no one other than him would even remotely notice it.

It certainly was not because Adrien was particularly skilled—he wasn’t—but rather because he had no practice in blessings whatsoever and did not know how to cast one properly. The blessing was weak, which meant that its effects would also be minimal. Not even an attentive fae would notice the difference in the baker family’s luck. Félix only noticed it at all because Adrien’s magic was as familiar to him as his own shadow. The effects of the blessing were basically non-existent though.

Well, it’s the thought that counts.

The good news of that was that Adrien’s bad luck would also be extremely minimal, which meant he would not be a danger to Marinette.

“Lunch is ready,” a voice suddenly called from the back and Félix, who had been in a slight trance, opened his eyes again. He saw an Asian woman—undoubtedly Marinette’s mother—descend the stairs just as Marinette handed back change to a customer.

“Thanks, Maman,” Marinette said and gave her mother a kiss on the cheek. Then she turned back to him.

“Félix?” she asked, suddenly seeming unsure of herself. It probably was impolite to refuse her kind offer anyway.

“Oh, so you are Adrien’s brother!” Marinette’s mother suddenly exclaimed in delight before Félix could even say a word. “He has told us a lot about you.”

Félix sighed. “I feared that he has.”

“Oh, it’s all good things, dear,” she said with a smile that was probably meant to be reassuring and approached him. “My name is Sabine, by the way. Feel free to use it.”

The irony of the wording was not lost on Félix and he had to bite back an amused smirk. Another fair one would have probably used such an opportunity for an enchantment, but Félix had no use for tricks like that at the moment.
No magic near this family unless you want to doom them.

Sabine held out a hand for him to shake and he took it, appreciating the formal gesture. From what Adrien had told him of the woman he had half-feared a hug.

"Félix Agreste," he replied. "Marinette invited me to eat lunch with her and I hope that it is not a bother."

"Of course it isn’t! Go on up, there should be enough for all of us," Sabine said with a smile—another honest one. This would take some getting used to.

Marinette, who had indecisively settled to wait for him at the base of the stairs, gave him an awkward grin.

"Maman is a great cook, so I’m sure you’ll like whatever she made."

Félix hummed as he joined her at the stairs, coffee and plate with the slice of cake in both hands. Marinette offered to carry it for him, but he declined with a shake of his head.

"I feel like I need to point out that I’m allergic so some herbs and Adrien is too."

"Oh, I’m sorry about that." Why would she be sorry about that?

"Which herbs are you allergic to?"

"St. John’s wort, rosemary, mints and we also don’t do too well with oatmeal and things that are overly salty."

"Is the salt thing really an allergy or just a preference?" Marinette asked with an arched eyebrow.

"The latter, though I thought it would be helpful for you to know," Félix admitted. Salt would not do him any harm, but he still preferred sweet to salty food.

The rest of the way upstairs was spent in silence.

"Well, Maman made spring rolls, so there should be several flavours. We can try to pick something for you that is not too salty," Marinette said as she approached the oven where said spring rolls were kept to keep them warm. She motioned Félix to sit down at the kitchen table while she retrieved them.

Félix set down his coffee cup and slice of cake but did not yet sit down. Instead, he decided to take a look around. The living room was just as Adrien described it, while also smaller than Félix had imagined it to be. Then again, it was a commendable size for a home this close to the Eiffel tower. That could not be cheap.

"You have a nice home," Félix eventually said with an appreciative nod. Marinette, who had deeply contemplated the spring rolls as if her life would depend on which one she would pick, turned around and smiled.

"Thank you. Adrien said something similar yesterday."

"I hope he…err…behaved. We don’t visit other people’s homes often."

"He was a perfect guest, even though I beat him at Mario Kart several times in a row," Marinette said with a grin and turned back to the spring rolls. She then picked two of them with a fork and put them on a plate.
“Here, those should not be too salty for you and it’s just vegetables inside. Is that alright or are you allergic to carrots too?”

“It sounds perfect, thank you,” Félix said and accepted the plate and a napkin.

“You’re supposed to eat them with a piece of lettuce and add some mint, but we’re out of lettuce and you’re allergic to mint, so I hope it’s alright like this? I can also give you chopsticks or a fork if that’s better?”

It had been quite a long time since anyone but Adrien had been this considerate about him, especially concerning small stuff like his preferred way to eat a spring roll.

“A napkin is fine.”

They both proceeded to eat their spring rolls in silence. What Marinette had said about her mother’s cooking skills more than held true. Maybe his personal chef could learn a thing or two from Sabine.

When Félix finally got to drink his coffee and eat his cake, he started to hear quite the noise from downstairs. Probably the rush hour Marinette had mentioned before. Now he was very glad to have agreed to eat lunch with her instead of staying downstairs.

“Is it okay if I leave you down here for a moment?” Marinette had finished washing both of their plates and now stood at the base of the staircase which Félix presumed led up to her room. “I just need to get my sketchbook and pencils from upstairs.”

Félix just nodded and she immediately sped up the stairs, tripping on one of the steps and then hurriedly continued like nothing had happened.

Well, so much for the blessing bringing good luck.

Adrien definitely would have to practise with blessings if he wanted to try anything of this sort again and actually let it make a difference. Not that he should. Félix still thought that it would be best to leave Marinette completely alone magic-wise so that the folk wouldn’t notice her.

“You can also sit down on the sofa if you like. It’s more comfortable than the chairs,” Marinette said when she came back down the stairs, a sketch book and a box—which he presumed was full of pencils—held under her arm.

Félix did as suggested, sitting down at the side of the couch closest to the door. Not that he planned on fleeing, but he was simply more comfortable with having as many options open to him as possible.

Marinette sat down with a polite distance to him, spreading the contents of the box on the sofa to her right. He was slightly impressed with the sheer variety of coloured pencils she owned. It must be around two hundred or even more, neatly sorted into several colour palettes. One of them consisted of several shades of yellow while five of the pencils looked absolutely identical to each other. How she was able to keep them apart was a mystery to him.

Back in the day, a few years back, Félix had enjoyed watching his father design. Seeing creations being brought to life was fascinating to him and he could not decide whether he took more enjoyment in watching the craft or seeing the finished product.
It was not like this anymore. His father’s spark had slowly dimmed and after his mother’s
disappearance it had all but vanished. His designs nowadays had little to do with the artistic genius
he had once been and instead seemed lifeless. Echoes of what they could have been. Works of
wasted opportunities and sterile practicality.

Marinette’s designs, on the other hand, were fresh and alive. She was young, creative and
inventive, giving her creations an innocence he had rarely seen in the fashion world. Mostly
because it was prone to mistakes. He could see flaws in her works, indications that she was not a
designer yet but still learning. They would be fatal were she to try to make a name for herself with
her current designs, but she wasn’t. She designed not to become famous and successful, but just for
herself. For the joy of creating something new she could call her own.

Félix was so immersed with watching Marinette draw that he almost forgot to read his book.

Poems of autumn leaves and sunshine eventually drew him back to his own small sanctuary
though. Away from a mortal realm where things needed to make sense to be understood. In the
words of poems, birds could talk, foxes could dance and life was looked at from another angle.
Things that humans often did not understand were written down clear as day here and small
everyday mysteries were solved in an elegant play of words.

“Félix?” Marinette’s timid voice drew him out of this world again. How much time had passed? He
honestly could not tell.

“Yes?” he said and looked up from his book. Judging by the three finished and coloured design
concepts that lay on the coffee table, at least an hour or maybe two must have gone by since he had
started reading.

“I don’t mean to throw you out, really I don’t, but when do you need to be home?”

That was an excellent question. He knew that he had free time scheduled starting at noon, but he
had neglected to check for how long this free time was permitted. Adrien had fencing classes at that
time and piano practice after that if he remembered correctly. Depending on what time it currently
was, the latter might actually be over soon and the both of them would have classes with Nathalie
afterwards. While Félix did not particularly care about those classes, he also did not want to leave
Adrien alone like that, so he should get home timely.

He looked at his watch to find out that it was already half past four in the afternoon. How had that
happened? Without noticing, he had sat in the Dupain-Chengs’ living room for almost four hours.
It also meant that classes had started half an hour ago and he was indeed late.

Smelt it!

“Half an hour ago,” Félix admitted with a slight cringe. He quickly stood up from the sofa and
threw Marinette and apologetic smile.

“I don’t mean to be rude, but I really have to go home now. Leaving Adrien alone with Nathalie
spells disaster and I’d rather not have to deal with the fallout of it.” Said fallout would be a bored
out of his mind Adrien that would in search for entertainment wreck their entire room. Again. Félix
really did not envy the household staff that would have to tidy up the mess afterwards and he would
rather prevent them from touching most of his stuff again.

“It’s okay. Go and save him, I guess,” Marinette said with a small smile.

“It’s rather my sanity that needs to be saved, but I will tell him that you worried about his
“I won’t tolerate your unpermitted absences anymore, so you are to join Adrien for this week’s photoshoots.”

“Unpermitted absences?” Félix just calmly replied with an arched eyebrow. “I had free time scheduled and I used it as I saw fit.” Nevermind that he overshot it by over half an hour just yesterday.

“This free time of yours is not to be used to leave the mansion, let alone doing so as a cat.”

“Well, it was not me who decided that an archway made out of iron would be a good idea, so you basically left me no other choice.” He knew provoking his father like this was not a good idea even at the best of times, but he simply lacked the capacity to care at that moment.

The previous afternoon he had spent with Marinette had been one of the most relaxing ones he had had for a while and it had very much been worth it. He had also been able to reassure Adrien that no faerie would notice the blessing and that Marinette and her family were therefore safe for the time being.

“Enough of this nonsense,” Gabriel said and the look he threw Félix would have severely frightened most people and made them bend to this man’s will. Félix was not one of his father’s employees or Adrien though. As soon as he had realised what he believed to be the cruel truth behind his father’s actions on Midsummer, he had vowed to not take part in this game of manipulation anymore. He was a Sidhe after all. He should bow to no human.

“You have half an hour to get ready for the photoshoot.”

Félix then did something Gabriel had obviously not anticipated, judging by the surprised and at the same time disapproving look he threw his son: Félix started laughing.

There was no humour in his laugh and his eyes twinkled not with amusement but with malice. It was the laugh of a faerie before they played a cruel prank on a person.

When Félix looked up at his father again, there was something dangerous in his expression which made Gabriel hesitate.

“You hoped to keep us inside and the rest of the folk outside with these iron gates? What, do you hope that by locking us in here, Adrien and I will become human? Is it human to be locked inside a house?” Félix’s voice had taken on a mocking tone and the danger he emitted almost seemed graspable.

It held a certain thrill to talk back to his father in a non-human way. To remind him of who and what exactly he was dealing with. Perhaps Félix would regret this, but sometimes he was a creature of the present and consequences did not bother him then. Just because he could think ahead did not mean that he always did.

“Félix, stop this ridiculous temper tantrum of yours and go to your room to get ready,” his father
said. While his voice or expression did not let on to any difference to before, Félix noticed the small signs that he was getting through to him. The twitch of his eye, the clenched jaw, the tension of his body. Gabriel Agreste could deny things connected to the fair folk as much as he wanted, but he still knew of the dangers they brought.

Félix’s fey grin fell into a threatening frown. “Consider this a warning. You know what you are dealing with here.”

And just like that, the Cat Sidhe walked out of his father’s office and back to Adrien’s and his room. He did not even stop after he entered it.

“And, what did father say?” Adrien asked from where he was sitting at the desk, trying and mostly failing to thread dried rowan berries into a necklace. He was so concentrated to get the needle through a berry without breaking it that he did not even turn around to his brother.

“Unagreeable things,” Félix said with a huff. The black ears atop his blond head flattened when he heard steps approach that were not Nathalie’s.

“And that is my cue to leave.”

“Wait, where are you going?” Adrien asked, but Félix had already shifted and jumped out of the window.

Regret was a nasty feeling. Félix did not regret trying to intimidate his father, but rather leaving Adrien behind to deal with the aftermath. He should have taken his brother with him but his instincts had screamed at him to flee. He did not want to deal with his father any more than he necessarily had to and the ridiculousness that would have probably followed his threat promised complications. Doing something incredibly stupid like cursing his father counted among these things and it was not a very farfetched thought either.

Félix had gone to the first place that had come to mind as an escape: Mélusine’s. Being surrounded by faerie things was exactly what he needed at this moment. When he stood in front of the closed shop though, he remembered a little too late that she was always closed at daytime unless one made a bargain with her to open up during daylight hours once.

Wandering through the streets of Paris was not an appealing option either. Daylight and a mass of people both being the opposite of Félix’s idea of relaxation.

There really was just one single place he could go to at this point.

So, it came that he found himself opening the familiar bakery’s door and suppressing to cringe when the bell above it jingled.

“Welcome dear! What can I get for you?” Sabine said in a tone that indicated that she was very happy to see him. He still was not used to it. People just weren’t happy to be in his company. It didn’t happen! He usually was shunned and with how utterly boring and rude most people were, that was honestly a good thing.

Even though he had witnessed Sabine’s cheerful and welcoming attitude the previous day already, he was still surprised to see it again. After all, she could have just played the cheerful mother previously to keep up a façade in front of her daughter. With that obviously not being the case after all, Félix felt an inexplicable and therefore irrational trust towards the woman. Inherently honest
and kind people did this to him, though they were as rare as they come.

Therefore, his next words were so unlike him that he had a hard time believing they came out of his mouth.

“Good morning, Madame Cheng. This might be an odd request, but can I hide here for the day?”

A few moments of silence passed in which Sabine’s smile fell and for a second Félix thought she was going to deny him. The worried look on her face told another story though.

“Of course, you can!” she said as if the idea of denying him was absolutely ridiculous. Had he accidentally charmed her? He hoped not.

She motioned for him to follow her behind the counter into the back of the bakery where her husband—or at least he assumed it was her husband—was currently frosting a cake.

“Tom?” Sabine called and Félix guessed that this was the huge man’s name.

“Yes?” Tom said and turned around. He raised his eyebrows in surprise when he saw Félix, but not in an unfriendly way. He walked over to the two of them and extended his huge hand to the boy.

“Hello young man, I’m Tom. What brings you here?” he said with a friendly smile and a pleasant, warm voice. It was so very different to the icy, clipped voice of his own father.

“I’m Félix Agreste,” he introduced himself in the same way as he had introduced himself to Sabine the previous day. The answer to Tom’s question though was hard to put into words.

“I…do not have anywhere else to go for the day.” It was an answer that still lacked sufficient information, but the last thing he wanted to do was to tell those people about his home situation. May they be as kind and friendly as they were, but they were still basically strangers and his personal life was not their business.

To his endless relief, they seemed to understand him even without prodding for more details.

“Well, you are welcome to stay here,” Tom said. “You can help me in the bakery if you like.”

Félix guessed that helping in a bakery was a tempting offer to most kids his age, but for him it really wasn’t. He might like the sweet goods, but the craft itself was beyond him. He could not even tell one end of a whisk from the other if he tried, making him more than just useless. Faeries did not cook or bake; creating things was not in their nature.

“I would probably rather hinder you than help, but thank you for the offer,” Félix therefore politely declined.

“How about you join Marinette upstairs? I’m sure she’ll be happy to see you,” Sabine offered kindly, which sounded much more appealing.

Marinette was, in fact, not very thrilled to see him. When he opened the door to the apartment he found her sitting on the sofa with her sketch book lying unused on the coffee table in front of her while an episode of Doctor Who—Adrien had begged Félix to watch it with him a while ago—played on TV.

“Good morning,” Félix said, but had not expected Marinette to jump and whirl around to him as if
he was a *Dullahan* that had come to declare her imminent death.

“What are you doing here?” she asked, clearly shocked by his sudden entrance. Well, to be fair, if someone he barely knew would just walk into his house and greet him while he was enjoying some peace and quiet, he would not be very pleased either.

“I don’t know where else to go,” he answered truthfully, similar to the answer he had given her parents. Just like them, Marinette seemed to understand immediately.

“Oh. I’m sorry about that,” she said awkwardly and pulled the blanket closer around herself as if to hide from him.

“Your parents sent me up here,” Félix added to somehow fill the awkward silence that had befallen them with just the sounds of the TV in the background.

“Of course they did,” Marinette muttered quietly to herself and then took the remote to pause the episode.

“I…uh…I am not really dressed for guests right now, so give me a minute,” she said and stood up with the blanket clutched around herself.

“If you’re more comfortable in your pyjamas, I really don’t mind,” Félix quickly said before she could disappear up the stairs. The last thing he wanted to do was to make her feel uncomfortable in her own home.

“My brother is a model, so I’m used to all sorts of clothes,” he added as Marinette hesitated at the foot of the stairs. Eventually she shook her head.

“Still! I’ll be right back!” she said and hurried upstairs as fast as the blanket allowed without her tripping.

Félix decided that staying put would be the best option to not make Marinette panic even more. He heard shuffling from upstairs and quiet curses as she tripped in her hurry.

When she eventually descended the staircase again, she wore a pair of baggy grey sweatpants and a t-shirt with the Slytherin emblem on it. Félix could not help but comment on the latter.

“Well, that’s a relief. I don’t think I could have put up with another Hufflepuff.”

An amused smile appeared on Marinette’s face and he was glad for it. *Good. Make her feel comfortable again without charming her in any way.*

“You like Harry Potter?” she asked as she ventured into the kitchen.

“You could say I do. The worldbuilding is impressive,” Félix said with a shrug. He usually avoided fantasy fiction, because the inaccuracy concerning all things magic frustrated him. His mother had found excessive interest in this specific book series though and the memories he therefore connected to it made it an exception. It served as a nostalgic reminder of her from the days of his early childhood.

He remembered fondly how their mother, Adrien, and he had camped at the entrance of the mansion with pillows and blankets to wait for the delivery of the newest Harry Potter novel. Once it had arrived, she would let the two of them look at the cover art first and then let them take guesses about what was going to happen in the story based on what was depicted. Afterwards she
would sit in her favourite chair in the living room and read it while both of them curled up on her lap. She had also read them chapters of the first book—the only one of the series they owned that was in French—as bedtime stories.

It was a memory too sacred to share with anyone else, since most would not understand it anyway or even call him silly. No, he preferred to keep memories of fond times untainted by keeping them to himself.

“We could marathon the movies if you like?” Marinette suggested while rummaging through the cupboards and the fridge.

“No, thank you. I personally prefer the books. I don’t want to keep you from your Doctor Who marathon either.”

At that, Marinette turned around to him with slight surprise. “You know the show?”

Félix rolled his eyes. “Try to have Adrien as a brother and not know nearly every popular TV show in existence.” His glance then wandered to the ingredients Marinette had gathered. “What are you making there anyway?”

“French Toast,” she declared. “You look like you haven’t had breakfast yet and this does not include salt or herbs, but some sugar.” She threw him a grin at the last one.

Well, Félix was not one to pass up free food…again.

“I suppose I can’t say ‘no’ to that then,” he said and a small smile tugged at his lips. “Though you really don’t have to.”

“I was planning to make myself something after this episode anyway. It’s really no problem.”

Félix then sat down on a chair at the kitchen table and watched with interest as Marinette mixed the ingredients, heated the pan and took one toast after another out of the toaster to pile them on a plate. After she had drenched three pieces in the mixture of eggs and milk—which did not look appetizing at all—and put them into the heated pan she turned around to him.

“Have you never made French Toast before?” she asked, obviously amused.

“No, and I also never saw anyone make it before. Now that I think about it, I think it has been a few years since I last had some.”

He almost had to laugh at the scandalized look Marinette was throwing him.

“Maybe the toast got lost in the kitchen somewhere,” he added which made Marinette snort. He just hoped she would not tell Adrien of it. If his brother found out that he had punned, he would never let Félix live it down.

“So, you never made French Toast, ever?” Félix was not sure whether she asked for clarification or just because she didn’t know how to otherwise keep the conversation going. Maybe even both.

“I have never made anything edible, period.”

It was hard to hold back a snort of laughter when Marinette turned to look at him as if he had grown a second head and, in the end, he did not manage to fully hold back his amused grin either.

“Alright, come here then,” she said and pointed at the spot next to her with the spatula. Félix
blinked.

What?

“I’ll teach you how to make French Toast.”

What!?

“That is a horrible idea,” he said instead but walked over to her anyways.

“It’s not hard. All you have to do is flip the toast until it’s ready.”

Félix had grown up with stories of Unseelie faeries becoming literally undone by practicing craft. Then again, those had been stories Adrien and him had been told by their mother to keep them out of the kitchen and away from their father’s drawing supplies. By now he knew that due to his human heritage he had nothing to fear. He would not die from flipping a toast!

“…” Félix still hoped that staring at the toast in the pan would suffice for now.

Turns out it didn’t. Marinette quickly handed him a second spatula and then proceeded to instruct him how to flip a toast with it. The result was more than just pitiful. Félix stopped counting how often he had flipped a toast over the pan’s border and in the end, he was sure that they had probably taken twice as long as it would have taken Marinette on her own to make the French Toast. He could not deny that it had been fun though.

Sitting on the sofa and watching Doctor Who while eating French Toast he had helped making was strangely satisfying as well. He felt as if he had earned this.

The day continued in a similar fashion. Marinette and Félix commented on the show while watching it and from time to time, Marinette would pick up her sketchbook to note ideas down or even make a few rough sketches. It was a different kind of peaceful than the previous afternoon, which they had spent in silence, but it was peaceful regardless.

They were watching an especially tense scene when Tom came upstairs in the early afternoon to make himself a sandwich. He made both of them jump with his entrance, which he, on the other hand, found absolutely hilarious. When Marinette suggested helping out in the bakery for her father, he brushed the idea aside, telling her to stay with Félix—though not before mentioning that the help wouldn’t be welcomed.

With the promise of free baked goods added into the mix, Felix took advantage of the latter offer and left in the early evening with two chocolate croissants and a piece of strawberry cake in tow. All of it for Adrien of course. Carrying the heavy paper bag while being a cat and manoeuvring it through one of the bathroom windows was harder than he had thought though and he hoped that the cake had not suffered too much.

Adrien, who was righteously mad at Félix, was luckily very easy to placate with the bag from the bakery. It was also good to hear that their father had not given Adrien any punishment for Félix’s bad behaviour. He was actually surprised since he had half-expected to find Adrien in a bell-collar again.

Early the next day, Félix left for the bakery before his father could catch him—and he also came
“Félix, with all due respect: You are crazy.” Marinette delivered that line in a deadpan tone but she looked like she was about to fall over in shock.

“It’s just so father doesn’t track Adrien’s credit card,” Félix said with a shrug as he still held the bundle of notes out for Marinette to take.

“B-but, this is a fortune! I can’t take that!”

It was? Huh, interesting.

“It’s just three thousand euros.”

“Just!?” she screeched in disbelief. Well, apparently it was a lot in her eyes. He would have to remember that.

“I know he’s a model, but we will be looking for inconspicuous outfits here, not a made-to-measure suit! The stuff we’ll buy will be relatively cheap.” She gave the stack of notes a significant look.

“Well, probably just cheap in your understanding of monetary value.” She huffed before begrudgingly taking it. Félix could not hold back the small victorious grin at that.

“Just so we’re clear: I will give Adrien the money and he can do with it whatever he wants. It’s his after all. I still don’t get why you’re giving it to me in the first place.”

“Because Adrien will probably be so excited he will forget it altogether,” Félix shrugged. “Just remind him that you have cash and he shouldn’t use his credit card, then you’ll be fine.”

Holding the money, Marinette shook her head in disbelief, mumbling something about rich kids.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter is not written yet and I have some uni work ahead of me, so that could still take a while. I hope to finish it soon though! ;W;

Oh my god, I almost forgot to mention it: my friend and beta-reader Queenie (the one with the model contest I told you of in the last update) drew fanart for this story and I'm still squeeing over it. Go check it out, it's so cute! <333
http://fav.me/dcoyzsp
http://fav.me/dcqv0n
“What will you do today?” Adrien asked as he donned the outfit Félix had helped him pick. Marinette had given his brother a list the previous day with suggestions on what Adrien could wear and it was a life saver. Which did not mean that he wasn’t still jealous of Félix for spending so much time with Marinette while he was stuck at photoshoots and classes all by his lonesome.

“Most likely reading a book,” Félix replied with a shrug.

“Here?”

“Of course not. There are several quiet public places in Paris after all.”

“And yet you keep returning to the bakery,” Adrien had a teasing grin while he did his best to make his hair look ruffled but still presentable.

“The company there is…interesting.”

“Coming from you, that’s a compliment.”

“Credit where it is due. They are also good bakers.”

“I like how this is more of an afterthought for you while the first thought was Marinette. Admit it, you’re warming up to her,” Adrien said with an excited voice. He wouldn’t lie, having seen his brother show a partial dislike towards the girl at first had hurt a bit. He was glad that they were on the same page again.

“I will admit that she is not dull like most human company tends to be.”

“Just remember that I found her first!”
At that, Félix gave him a flat look which made Adrien pause in his tries to make himself look as inconspicuous as possible.

“What?”

“Do you have any idea how awful that sounded in human terms? You really have to work on your phrasing.”

“Wait, it did? Smelt it!” Adrien’s curse was in earnest. Messing up human and faerie ways of speaking was a bad habit of his and he hated when it happened. He was used to smiling for the camera and could make polite small talk, but human friendships were new to him. That included casual, friendly conversations.

What he did know, however, was the faerie game of ‘mine and yours’. A way to perceive the world as the things that belonged to you and those that didn’t. Not more and not less. As far as the Court was concerned, humans were up for takes in that game.

“How would you say it then?” Adrien asked, a little miffed.

“I would not say it at all. Marinette is not a possession to be owned. Whether you like it or not, you will have to share her with others.”

“Tell that to the Court,” Adrien muttered darkly.

Despite Félix’s assurances that Marinette was safe, he was still worried about her. All it would take was an unlucky coincidence for a fair one to notice her and take her as theirs. Acting human did not bring anything when the person you did it for would be stolen away by your own kind eventually. He needed to lay some sort of claim on her, if only for his own peace of mind.

Adrien’s ear flicked when he heard a sound from the hall outside. Nathalie was approaching.

“Ringing iron bells,” Félix cursed and quickly locked the doors. Meanwhile Adrien was scrambling to collect his things.

“I thought my schedule is cleared for the day,” he lamented while trying to find his other shoe.

“Probably some last-minute thing father deemed necessary,” Félix said and hissed when there was a knock. He gave the door a murderous glare.

“Adrien, there is—” Nathalie started but then halted as she noticed that she could not enter the room.

“Please open up, your father wishes to see you.”

“He wishes for a lot of things. Tell him he should be careful with what he wishes from a Sidhe!” Félix called back with his tail angrily lashing behind him.

Adrien still did not know what their father had said to him on Monday, but whatever it was, it had Félix angrier with him than usual. At the slightest mention of him, Félix would hiss or do something else that illustrated his clear displeasure. He was also not being subtle about hammering down the point that neither of them was human and Adrien was not sure if he was bothered or glad about that.

Without even waiting for a reply, Félix opened a window and shifted.
“Hurry up before father gets the grand idea to use the security system,” he hissed while perching on the open window frame in his cat form.

“Father will not be happy about this,” Adrien winced when he shifted and jumped outside, knowing the way around security cameras and over the mansion wall by heart.

“Father is never happy about anything, so what does it matter?” Félix shot back.

“You are not the one who ended up wearing a bell-collar for three days!” Adrien hissed.

Félix winced at that. “You’re right, I’m sorry. I promise to curse him if he tries something like that again.”

“Why not just do what he says and not have to think about repercussions?”

“Because we are of the Sidhe. Obeying humans is beneath us.”

“You’re starting to sound like Chloé,” Adrien muttered and missed Félix’s frown.

“What do you think? Do I look inconspicuous enough?” Adrien asked as he stood in the Dupain-Chengs’ living room and watched Marinette descend the stairs from her room with a bag at her side. She gave his outfit a critical look.

“Well, you’re still wearing designer clothes, but they look ordinary enough to not attract attention.”

“Sorry, I only own designer clothes,” he said with a sheepish smile which made Marinette roll her eyes to the heavens and shake her head.

“Well, this is what we’re going to change today. Félix gave me three thousand euros yesterday so that you don’t have to use your credit card.” Another eye roll at that.

“Is that going to be enough?” Adrien asked, growing a little worried. Wrong thing to say.

“Just what is it with you two and money?!” Marinette exclaimed in exasperation and gave him a deadpan look. “I have never owned that much money in my entire life and I still manage to dress myself, don’t I?”

“Oh…I’m sorry. I did not mean to offend you.” He winced. This was going to be a minefield.

“I’m not offended, just baffled,” Marinette assured him with a smile before she bent down to put on her flats.

“And just so we’re clear: all of that is your money, so you spend it on whatever you like. I will just give you fashion advice and nothing more.”

“That works for me.”

“Alright, then let’s go,” Marinette said with a grin that seemed to hold a flicker of nervousness. Why was she nervous? Was there something about the prospect of shopping that scared her? Adrien sure hoped not. He would feel horrible if he would drag her into something she did not like. The whole shopping trip had been his idea after all.
While on their way through the city to Marinette’s favoured shopping centre, Adrien tried his very best to look like a normal person. He was very aware how exactly he was unlike one after all. The catlike gait, his a little too smooth movements, were usually not a worry of his. They were actually very desired in the fashion world, so he fit in perfectly. Out on the street, though, such people were rare and stood out.

He was tempted to use an extra strong glamour on himself so people’s eyes would wander over him without really seeing him. If he did that though, Marinette might be influenced by his magic too and then wouldn’t be able to find him again if they happened to split up. Furthermore, he had promised Félix to not use magic of any kind anymore while he was around Marinette. The task was more difficult to accomplish than he had thought it would be. Being inconspicuous was hard.

“Did you make those clothes yourself?” Adrien asked when he could not take the silence anymore.

“No, they’re store-bought. Just minimally altered, but that’s not really noteworthy,” Marinette said and fiddled with the hem of her shirt. A nervous habit as Adrien had found out.

“Why? Your designs are amazing!”

“Thank you, but they’re not quite good enough to be worn in public.”

“Let’s agree to disagree there. I think you should wear them whenever you want. Trust me, I’m a model.”

“Yeah, a model who needs my help to find an inconspicuous outfit because he can’t put one together himself.” Her teasing voice made Adrien all giddy again. Bantering with Marinette was a rare joy.

“Touché. So, what are we buying first?” he asked excitedly and struggled to hold back a happy wiggle.

“Whatever we find first. Preferably something that cannot be mistaken for designer clothing but still looks good.”

“I’ll trust your taste on that one.”

“I know.”

“Do you think we will find something with cats on it?” Adrien asked with sparkly eyes.

Marinette threw him an amused smile.

“Maybe. You really like cats, don’t you?”

“They’re the best!”

“I think my favourite animals are probably hamsters,” Marinette said thoughtfully and missed the look of absolute betrayal on Adrien’s face.

“Traitor,” he muttered.
The moment they entered the shopping centre, Adrien felt like he had stepped into a different world. While the streets outside were hot and humid on this sunny summer day, the building was a lot cooler, no doubt due to air conditioning. He breathed a sigh of relief as the colder air washed over him—a reminder that hot and sunny did not agree very well with his Unseelie nature. After all, his domain was the night.

Looking around at the colourful variety of shops and the mixture of different songs that drifted out of each of them, he could not feel further from Faerie if he tried. A shopping centre was probably one of the least fey places in existence after all and he would enjoy the human experience of wandering through it to the fullest!

What then caught his undivided attention though were the escalators. He had seen escalators before of course and even had had the pleasure to ride them, but those experiences were few and years ago.

“Can we go up?” He therefore immediately asked and excitedly pointed at the moving stairs. Judging by Marinette’s raised eyebrow but amused smile, he was being weird about normal things again. An embarrassed blush spread on his face and he stopped giddily jumping up and down.

“I mean…err…lead the way,” he said, a sheepish smile stretching on his face. So much for acting normal and blending in.

“There are some good shops on the first floor we can go to if you want,” Marinette said, not commenting on Adrien’s weird behaviour at all.

*By Danu, please tell me I didn’t accidentally charm her!*

“Sounds great.” Why did his voice suddenly sound squeaky?

*Calm down, Adrien. It’s just Marinette and it’s just a shopping centre. Nothing to be nervous about. Just act like a normal person.*

Stepping on the escalator was definitely harder than it should have been. Shamefully, Adrien had to admit that while he possessed the grace of a cat, he was not very acquainted with moving surfaces. Keeping his balance wasn’t an issue but figuring out where to best put his feet proved to be a problem. Should he just climb an escalator like he would climb a normal set of stairs or should he stay on the spot and wait until he arrived at the top? He saw people do both, which did not help him decide on what was best.

Every time he encountered one of the moving contraptions, his body seemed to forget how to work. Which brought him to his current predicament.

Not being able to decide whether standing still or walking was the best option, he was caught in a bizarre middle thing of both, with each of his feet being three steps apart, which resulted in an awkward split. Meanwhile he held on to the rails on either side for dear life.

“Adrien, are you okay?” Marinette asked from in front of him but by the way her shoulders shook and how her lips tried hard not to stretch into a grin, he knew that she had trouble containing her laughter. He did not need to know much about humans to know that his current position was not how one correctly rode an escalator.

“I’m fine, just…riding an escalator.”
His pride was in shambles even before Marinette snorted and started to laugh about his dilemma as quietly as she could.

When they eventually arrived at the top and he looked back, he saw several people watching him with amused expressions on their faces. Great. He was not even at the mall for three minutes and he already managed to get unwanted attention. It was ironic how his non-human antics and not his looks had been what garnered it.

“Can we go into one of the shops so I can hide in a changing room for the next hour?” Adrien asked pitifully while covering his blushing face with his hands.

“Now don’t be a crybaby. It wasn’t that bad,” Marinette said with a chuckle. “I once had a shopping bag rip open while I was on the escalator. That was a mess.”

Adrien moved his hands aside to look at the noirette who just gave him a shrug as if to say ‘it happens.’

“But hiding is still a good idea, since the last thing you need is people staring at you,” she added and proceeded to gently grab one of his arms and drag him into a nearby clothing store.

Adrien was a little disappointed when she let go as soon as he starting following her by himself, but he still counted the small gesture as an improvement. Or was it normal to grab someone’s arm and drag them around? Marinette sure had not seemed to like it when he had done that to her previously. Granted, he had dragged her into a shady alley and not into a clothing shop so maybe that was rather it. Regardless of its meaning in a human sense, to him it still meant that they were growing closer.

While coming to that particular realisation and still getting over the embarrassment from the escalator incident, Adrien somehow failed to realise he had entered a shop until Marinette and him had already walked through half of it.

He had never been in a normal clothing shop before, only ever in designer ones, mostly from his father’s brand. The difference could not have been clearer.

While the designer shops practically screamed ‘high society’ and ‘propriety’, this shop was more colourful, more chaotic but still in some sort of order so people could find their way around. There were also a lot more people here than there usually were in designer shops, creating a background noise with their conversations that added to the pop music that blared out of several speakers.

Adrien loved it!

“You mostly wear plain or printed shirts?” Marinette asked while strategically scanning the male wear options this shop presented.

“Uh, I’d say plain. I never get to choose my clothes for myself.” Which made this entire trip even more exciting. Adrien would finally get to choose clothing he wanted to wear! For when his father was not looking of course.

“Then we should probably go with more colourful designs. The further it is from your usual look the better.”

With that simple objective at hand, the two of them started browsing through the shop, halting at every piece of clothing that seemed to fit what they were searching for. Marinette would then very
critically consider it, before either hanging it back on the rack or adding it to the hangers she held in one hand. After not more than twenty minutes, they had already managed to gather quite a wide selection of things for Adrien to try on.

Lots of the pieces fit very well, while others were too tight or too baggy. As a model, he knew at least *that* much. Deciding on what he would keep or not was something he left up to Marinette since she was the fashion expert after all. Yammering over the loss of some of the pieces he would have liked to have kept did not help either—Marinette always found a way to convince him of the impracticality of them.

In the end, they managed to find a decent pair of jeans and three shirts which they both agreed on. Only when Adrien paid for the clothes did he notice something.

“Hey Marinette?” He asked after the cashier had handed him his bag and he had thanked the woman with a friendly smile and a nod.

“Hmm?” The noirette said absentmindedly while studying a grey cardigan.

“Don’t you want to pick out clothes for yourself too? I mean, I know this shopping trip is mainly about getting outfits for me, but that doesn’t mean you can’t buy anything for yourself.”

“It’s alright. I don’t have much money right now anyway since I just spent it on fabrics,” Marinette replied and let the sleeve she had observed drop. Adrien frowned.

“I can buy the clothes for you, you know? Money is not really a problem for me after all.” Marinette shuffled uncomfortably at that proposition.

“No, that…wouldn’t feel right.”

“Then how about you just try on the things you like and get inspired by seeing yourself in the clothes?” He asked with a grin as they exited the shop and went into the next one right next to it.

“My mother told me that she and father used to do that when they were younger. She would just try on all sorts of things without buying them, because it was fun and father would design something inspired by it when he liked the form or colour of some of the pieces.”

“Hmm, that *does* sound fun actually.” Marinette tapped her chin in thought and let her view drift to the left to a rack with various blouses.

“But we’ll first find another pair of jeans for you and at least one plain shirt, just to mix things up. Maybe we could combine it with a jacket,” she mused and drifted off, her eyes set on her goal, which currently was a bunch of folded pairs of jeans in various colours and variations. It was quite enchanting to watch her while she was in her element, sorting through piles of clothes and finding what looked best. Most of the time it almost seemed like magic to him, to be so at ease with a task he struggled with.

When Marinette was about to shoo him into a changing room again, he caught her eyes lingering on a blue shirt that fell in waves form the hanger it was on. He stopped and eyed it curiously.

“Do you want to try it on?”

Marinette hesitated, apparently torn between shoving him into the changing room and taking a closer look at the blue shirt.

“I don’t know. It doesn’t look like it would suit me very well.”
Adrien did not need to be a *Cat Sidhe* to know that she was lying. She *wanted* to try it on but for some reason she did not dare to.

“Tell you what, we’ll *both* try it on!” Adrien said and snatched the shirt in his size from the rack before Marinette could protest.

“Let’s see who looks better in it,” he added with a wink and then disappeared into the changing room, quickly drawing the curtain shut.

A few seconds of silence passed and then he heard an overdramatic sigh.

“You’re ridiculous,” she said fondly and then he heard the curtain of the cubicle next to his being drawn shut.

*Oh, if only you knew just how true that is.*

Adrien grinned to himself. This was fun. Trying on things just to prove a point to Marinette instead of ending up buying them amused him. It was a harmless form of being out of the ordinary but still —hopefully— within bounds of the acceptable. Being himself among humans. Such occasions certainly were rare.

He quietly snickered to himself after he had donned the shirt that had definitely not been designed with a male body in mind. His reflection looked ridiculous.

“Are you changed?” Adrien asked, eager to see how the shirt would look on Marinette.

“In a sec!” was the answer he received. Only a few moments later he heard the curtain from the neighbouring cubicle be drawn back, which also made him emerge from his one.

His first thought was that she looked absolutely *stunning.* Of course he already knew that, but this outfit really worked especially well for her. Marinette usually wore simple T-Shirts or other nice-looking, but not really *extraordinary* things. Like as if she tried very hard to not stand out at all, but rather preferred blending in the background. This shirt, though, practically screamed ‘Look at me! I’m beautiful!’

Only a moment after he stepped out, Marinette started laughing hysterically.

*Oh, right. I’m wearing the shirt too.*

“Oh, I’ll admit that this looks better on me. The cut doesn’t quite work for you.”

Adrien put his hand on his heart, pretending to be hurt.

“How cruel! I thought we were friends, Marinette,” Adrien said with an exasperated pout. She rolled her eyes in return, a grin still playing on her lips.

“I’m here for style advice, remember?”

“A very purrty style advisor. You should consider buying that shirt after all.” The faint blush on her cheeks was not lost to him and even though she was clearly flustered, she seemed happy. At times like these he was happy to be able to pick up on other people’s emotions so easily.

“It’s too expensive,” Marinette lamely replied but turned to look at herself in the mirror of her cubicle. “Even though it looks better than I thought it would. The way it falls at the front really works surprisingly well for me.”
“If you don’t want to buy it, then I’ll just have to buy both of them,” Adrien replied with a mischievous grin, which made Marinette whirl around to him again.

“You wouldn’t.”

“Hmm, wouldn’t I?” he asked in a teasing tone as he disappeared into the changing room again to try on the actual pieces of clothing they were in the shop for.

“Oh my god, you would,” Marinette groaned. “Seriously Adrien, you don’t have to buy this, let alone both of them. What would you even do with yours?”

“Wear it?”

Marinette’s tone shifted to incredulity. “And that helps you look inconspicuous, how?”

“Who said I would wear it when I want to be inconspicuous?” Oh, the pranks he could pull on his father with that!

“It’s your money, so you buy it if you want, but that will just mean that you’ll own two girl shirts you cannot wear.”

“Well, you could borrow it unconditionally. That way it stays mine and you can wear it without feeling bad about it.”

A moment of silence followed in which he heard Marinette take a breath as if she was about to say something, but didn’t.

“Still,” she eventually said in a pouting tone, apparently finding no good counter-argument.

“View it as compensation for that time I tried to gift you a leaf.”

“I really don’t need compensation for that, Adrien.”

“Marinette,” he whined, “Why won’t you let me make you a gift?” He was joking but at the same time he also felt a little hurt that she would not accept anything he wanted to gift her. Blame it on his faerie nature, but it was of utmost importance to him that she would keep something he had given her.

“Because we’re here for you, not for me and I don’t need a gift.”

“Nuh-uh,” Adrien said as he emerged from behind the curtain again, this time wearing a black shirt that had the text ‘You don’t speak French? Baguette out of my life’ written across the front.

“We are here for fun.” He held up the blue shirt with an impish grin. “And it would be a shame if I wouldn’t bring Félix a little souvenir.”

“Now, let’s don’t be mean,” Marinette said in a chiding tone. She took the blue shirt from him and hung it back where it belonged. For a moment Adrien thought he might have taken it too far with the mischief, but then she started skimming through the shirts.

“With Félix’s gloomy attitude, the blue would just look sad on him,” she said with a grin and then pulled out a grey variation of the same shirt. “A warm grey would fit him much better.”

Adrien’s grin grew as she shook her head and snickered.

“Félix will hate us.”
As the afternoon stretched on and the two young teens bought more outfits—well, Adrien bought them while Marinette helped pick them—they started to grow hungry. Adrien’s idea to go eat at the Italian Restaurant in the shopping centre was turned down by Marinette in favour of getting crêpes, especially when he admitted that he hadn’t had one for ages.

Shopping bags in both of his hands, he studied the selection of fillings intently and eventually decided on what was advertised as a ‘Giotto Crêpe.’ It turned out to be a delicious mixture of caramel and nuts. Marinette got a strawberry chocolate one.

They sat down on one of the benches in a more secluded area and were watching the people that went along their daily business. Most were on fun shopping trips like the two of them, while others seemed to have specific goals in mind. Adrien watched families with small children with particular fondness, finding joy in seeing someone else living the childhood he had been deprived of.

“Sorry if this sounds weird, but is this your first time at a mall?” Marinette asked after she returned from throwing away the napkins their crêpes had come in.

“Not really, but it has been a while since I’ve last been at one. That was with Chloé and she mainly let me carry her things so I couldn’t really look around for stuff I liked. You could say that this is the first time I’ve been shopping for myself.”

“How are you enjoying shopping for yourself then?” Marinette asked with a grin, clearly focusing on the positive, though Adrien had clearly seen her make a face when he had mentioned Chloé.

“It’s amazing! I can just buy whatever I want and eat whatever I want.” Adrien enthusiastically took one of the bags and rummaged through it. “And now that I have normal clothes, I can visit you without much problem!”

For some strange reason, Marinette seemed surprised at that.

“You…want to visit me?”

Oh, maybe he was not welcome after all. He could feel his ears drooping under his glamour and concentrated very hard to not let them accidentally slip through—that would be hard to explain.

“You said I could come even when you’re closed,” Adrien said and tried not to let his disappointment show. In reality he probably looked like a kicked puppy…or kitten.

“Yes, of course you can,” Marinette hurried to say and started waving her hands around, “I mean, you’re welcome any time! I just didn’t expect you to want to hang out with me more, is all.”

Adrien blinked. “Why wouldn’t I want that?”

“Because I’m…uh…just me? I’m not really anyone special.”

Marinette was clearly delusional.

“You’re special to me,” Adrien said without hesitation and blushed as he realised how much heavier the words sounded when he actually said them out loud.

“I mean, you are the first…normal friend I have ever made. Someone I don’t have to act overly
formal around and where I actually have a say in how we’re spending our time together. It’s always a lot of fun with you, like going shopping today or playing Mario Kart the other day!”

Marinette blushed but had a small smile playing on her lips.

“T-thank you?”

“You’re welcome!” Adrien said with a wide grin and fished the cat pun shirt he had found in one of the shops out of the bag. It was the only item of clothing he had purchased without Marinette’s approval and he didn’t regret it at all.

“It’s purrfect, Marinette!” he has said and pouted at her until she had given in and reminded him that it was his money after all.

“I might lend this to Félix. It’s practically his default mood,” Adrien snickered as he read the text on the shirt again: you’ve CAT to be KITTEN me right MEOW.

“You seem to lend out your clothes a lot,” Marinette remarked.

“No, just to Félix usually. We share the same wardrobe though, so that doesn’t really count.” Suddenly his eyes lit up with an idea.

“Hey, Marinette?” Adrien started bouncing in place excitedly and she eyed him warily, probably already catching on that he was up to something. This was by far not the first time that day where he had proposed a crazy idea after all.

“What did you think of now?” she asked in a deadpan tone, though the smile never left her face.

“Father always throws away the clothes that don’t fit us anymore, so next time he plans to do that, I can just give them all to you instead! You can experiment with them and also study them since they are designer clothes. What do you think?”

Adrien loved how Marinette’s eyes lit up at the offer and it seemed like several ideas already raced through her head.

“That would be amazing!” she gushed. “I could get my hand on real quality fabric and make myself an outfit with it and—” she stopped abruptly and grinned at him sheepishly.

“That probably sounded weird. Using your old clothes to make myself an outfit.”

“This is exactly why I’m giving them to you. Whatever you end up doing will probably look much better than the original anyway.”

Marinette chuckled. “I doubt that, but thanks for the boost of confidence.” She thoughtfully looked around.

“I think we have enough clothes for you for now, do you want to go somewhere else before we head home?”

“We could just walk around and then go in any shop that looks interesting,” Adrien already picked up his bags. There were a couple of shops he had seen in passing but they had not gone into them since they had concentrated on clothes shops so far.

This is how the two of them ended up in between rows of cheap things no one really needed but
were tempting to buy anyway. There were very fake looking plastic flowers, low-quality notebooks of all sizes, picture frames, a lot of decorative articles and all kinds of other stuff.

Adrien eyed a huge pile of boxes with motifs on them and asked himself how he could excuse buying unusually large numbers of the bigger ones for himself and Félix. After all, boxes were the best! Before he could decide on which ones to get and how to actually get them home, Marinette called his name from further down the aisle.

He passed a shelf with all sorts of candles and had to suppress the reflex to wrinkle his nose. Some of them had very weird scents and his sensitive sense of smell picked up nuances that were probably not intended for human noses in this intensity. He hurried a little more after that and eventually stopped in front of a corner full of crafting materials, such as plastic beads, fake feathers and even those funny looking eyes with rolling pupils.

“We could make lucky charms out of those!” Marinette said as she skimmed through the various coloured beads.

“Lucky Charms?” The only things that came to mind at that were iron horseshoes or those smelted clovers. Both of those probably found their origin with faeries, while one was to ward them off and the other was to uncover their glamour. Neither was advisable to use. Hearing Marinette happily talk about making her own lucky charm therefore understandably made him nervous.

“Yes, I always used to make those when I was a kid when I wasn’t making necklaces or bracelets. It’s just a band with beads that you keep in your pocket and as long as you have it, you’ll have good luck. The trick is to believe in it.”

Oh, so it isn’t real. That was reassuring.

When Marinette suddenly produced such a lucky charm from her pocket, Adrien was surprised by how simple it looked. Just a red string with seven differently shaped and coloured beads on it. Seven was a magic number, though if it really was lucky was another question.

Seven grains of wheat on a four-leaved clover to see the fae. Seven points to a star to have a powerful magic glyph. Seven years to rescue your loved ones from Faerie.

Those were only a few things that came to mind but neither of them ended particularly well. Then again, if Marinette wanted to use seven plastic beads and a string and call it a lucky charm, then what was the harm?

I’m overthinking this again.

“This is very cute,” Adrien said eventually, dispersing all thoughts of faeries and bad luck.

“I won most games ever since I started carrying it around with me.”

“Wait, so that’s why I couldn’t beat you at Mario Kart?!” He needed one of those lucky charms, even if he had to buy all beads in the shop for it!

Marinette smirked—smirked!—at him.

“Well, if you make yourself your own one you might have a small chance. No promises though.”

Oh, it was on!

“Which beads do I need?”
“The ones you like best,” Marinette said and put the lucky charm back into her pocket.

“But there are so many I like!”

“Try to narrow it down to seven. You’re probably only gonna use them for the lucky charm anyway and then they’ll be left to collect dust.”

“Can’t I make several?” Was that a custom? You could only make one lucky charm and then you could never make one again?

“Sure, but what would you need several for?”

His response was immediate. “To gift them to people of course! Everyone can use a little bit of luck after all.”

This was perfect! He could enchant them with real good luck on Samhain and then just give them out without having to fear that anyone would notice it. He could even give one to his father! Maybe then he would finally understand that faerie magic could be useful.

Marinette and him then spent the next ten minutes discussing various different beads and eventually managed to reduce Adrien’s prior selection of twenty-three to just eleven kinds. Three of them were cat-themed and he was especially fond of the black, green and white beads. He would definitely make a lucky charm for Félix out of those!

Halfway through selecting the beads Marinette had gone and fetched a shopping basket so Adrien had an easier time carrying his selection of cheap goods around. He could tell by her facepalming after a couple of minutes that she regretted that decision.

By the time they had reached the end of the aisle Adrien had added various different folders and spiral notebooks with cat motifs to the basket as well as several other cat themed things he would probably never use. They looked funny though, so why not?

He stopped dead in his tracks when he saw the corner full of party supplies, mostly for birthdays. Candles that spelled out ‘happy birthday’, a lot of streamers, balloons as well as paper plates and napkins covered in colourful designs. People bought these things to have a good time. To eat cake from the plates and to blow streamers into each other’s faces. Party hats, that could only be bought in packs of ten each, meant that guests would be present and celebrate whatever party was going to occur together with the one hosting it.

Adrien did not want to complain, but Félix’s and his birthday experiences were basically non-existent so far. Sure, their parents had always celebrated with them, but it was not the same as what he saw on TV. They had always gotten plenty of presents and a huge cake—the best money could buy—but other than that, there had been no real celebration. Their father had always left early, especially in recent years, since their birthday always occurred in or around fashion week when he was most busy. With their mother now gone, this year’s birthday would be an even lonelier one…

“You could just wear one of these when you don’t want to get recognized in the future,” Marinette suddenly said with a snort, pulling him out of his thoughts about birthday parties. She was holding up a pink, glittery mask with black feathers on the side and Adrien was immediately reminded of one photoshoot where he had had to wear such a mask. It had been interesting, to say the least.

“Good idea! That’s even better than the sunglasses!” He eagerly took a black mask with pink feathers, the perfect counterpart to the one Marinette was holding, and held it to his face.

“How do I look?” Adrien asked with a grin.
“You know I was joking, right?” Marinette replied flatly and put her mask back. “If you wear that, you will draw even more attention.”

“Yes, but will anyone recognize me? I don’t think so!”

Two itchy masquerade masks landed in the shopping basket, one black, one pink.

“And if you wear one, people won’t recognize you either.”

His grin was met with another flat expression.

“Really?”

“Yes, really!” Adrien giggled before swiftly moving on to the next aisle.

Yet another picture of a cat drew him in but when he stood in front of it, he just frowned. Cat toys. Cheap and very unnecessary cat toys. They were all colourful and weird. Give him a string and a box and he’d be happy, as would probably be any other cat. Those things looked like they would fall apart after just minutes of playing with them. What a waste.

“Do you have a cat?” Marinette asked, but he shook his head.

“No, father doesn’t allow pets, especially not cats. Some cat always manages to sneak in though.” Or two cats, to be more precise.

“Oh, so you get visited by a stray too?”

“Too?” Adrien asked. Was a cat sneaking into her house on a regular basis? He had not smelled any cat earlier.

“Yeah, a cute black one who sometimes drops in. Maybe he would like those.”

Adrien was glad that Marinette was currently busy inspecting a grey-furred atrocity that these cat toy manufacturers probably called a ‘mouse’, because there was no way to explain the blush that was undoubtedly spreading on his face.

He was the cat and she had called him cute!

“I don’t think any cat would like those,” he eventually said when he was sure that his blush had died down. “It looks like they would break easily.”

“True. And this cheap stuff could be toxic too.”

Oh, most definitely. It smelled very weird and unappetizing.

“They might be horrible cat toys, but they are still good for pranking people who are afraid of mice.”

“You really like playing pranks, don’t you?” Marinette asked as Adrien stuffed the most horrible looking toy mice he could find into his shopping basket.

“It’s fun, so why not? The reactions are usually hilarious!” It was at least one way to satisfy the part of him that was a mischievous trickster.

Three cat mugs, a cat-shaped picture frame and a pair of fluffy cat slippers later, the two of them were on their way to the checkout. Marinette had shaken her head in disbelief when she had taken a
look at all his frankly ridiculous purchases and called him a crazy cat person. Yet another more fitting endearment than she probably realised. Adrien just found his newest acquisitions hilariously ironic.

They were on their way out when Adrien noticed something he had not seen when they first entered the shop: a display stand with umbrellas.

“Did you get a new umbrella yet?” he asked while looking through the different colours and patterns that were available.

“Not yet,” she admitted and started looking through the stand too. “I probably should buy myself a new one.”

A wide grin spread on Adrien’s face when he suddenly found the most perfect umbrella he had ever seen.

“No, you won’t,” he said as he grabbed all three of the available umbrellas of this kind and ran back to the cash register that was still empty. The bored-looking cashier just wordlessly took the money Adrien was practically throwing at him and muttered ‘have a nice day’ as he handed back the change.

Adrien put two of the umbrellas into one of his shopping bags and handed the third one to Marinette.

“Here you go. It was kind of my fault that you don’t have your old one anymore after all.”

“You really didn’t—” Marinette started to protest but then noticed the design on the preview picture.

“Really Adrien?”

“Isn’t it meowvelous? Now you, Félix and I have the same umbrella!” Said umbrella was black and had cat ears as well as cat eyes. Something in his face must have changed her mind because Marinette suddenly smiled.

“Thank you, that’s very sweet of you.”

He beamed. It was the first gift of his she had accepted since the shirt from earlier still only counted as a loan. No enchantments, no tricks, just a simple—but awesomely cat-themed—umbrella given to her in a simple way. Why couldn’t all things be so easy?

When they eventually left the shopping centre and began their walk back to the bakery—Marinette had managed to convince him to not wear the masquerade mask after all—Adrien felt a little exhausted but still happy and accomplished. He wore the cat pun shirt he had bought earlier, having changed into it shortly before they left, and carried three of his overall six shopping bags. Marinette had insisted to carry half of them, no matter how often he said he could handle it. He was still glad for it though since the plastic straps had started to painfully dig into his hands.

The first thing they did when they entered the living room was to let themselves fall on the sofa and not get up for a few minutes.

“That was exhausting but so much fun,” Adrien eventually said with a blissful grin and Marinette
turned her head to look at him with the same expression.

“It really was. I don’t even know when I have last been on a shopping trip like this. Must have been with Nino over a year or so ago.”

Ah, this Nino person. Adrien had wondered when she would bring him up. Despite a nasty little bit of jealousy, he was still curious if Marinette managed to repair the friendship with her old friend.

“Nino?” Adrien asked, since he technically should not know about him.

“Oh, uhm…Nino is a friend of mine. We’ve been friends for ages but he’s been…busy lately.” A slight lie, but he would let it slip. It probably wasn’t something she wanted to talk to him about.

“Oh, that reminds me!” she suddenly said and sat up. Adrien watched with curiosity as she took her phone out of her bag.

“I promised to give him a call when you were around since he wanted to get to know you. Would that be okay?” She nervously bit her lip at the question and Adrien considered. It was risky to have a lot of people know that Adrien Agreste frequented the Dupain-Cheng bakery and hung out with Marinette, but since this Nino person already knew, there was probably no further harm to be done.

“Sure,” he therefore said and still stayed wary. Marinette and her parents were the only humans he talked to regularly outside of his family and he still was anything but smooth most of the time. He hoped that he could act human enough for a little phone call.

“Don’t worry, Nino is very nice and laid back. He’s in Morocco right now but I’m sure you two can meet when he comes back next month,” Marinette explained while the phone was audibly dialling. Adrien had to admit that the prospect of yet another human friend sounded great. Maybe that way he also wouldn’t have to share Marinette with Nino but could just hang out with the both of them at the same time. It was perfect!

“Hey ‘Nette! How’s it going?” a voice suddenly said. By the way Marinette held the phone Adrien could tell that it was a video call, so he shuffled closer to see better.

“Good. We just came back from an interesting shopping trip.”

“We?” Nino asked and Marinette held the phone so camera picked up Adrien as well. He gave the tanned boy a shy wave. It was weird to first meet someone on a video call.

“Oooooh, that shopping trip. Hi dude! You must be the new model friend Marinette told me about! I’m Nino, nice to meet you.”

Nino had a friendly smile as well as a calm voice and overall seemed like an alright person. Then again, he had expected nothing less from one of Marinette’s friends. She didn’t seem like the type to hang around shady people.

“I’m Adrien,” he said with another little wave. “Also: New model friend? Does she have several?”

The small frown Marinette sent his way was amusing. Nino, on the other hand, started laughing.

“You tell me! I certainly would not know of any more. Has she hidden more pretty blondes from me?”

“Félix sometimes models when he wants to do me a favour but I don’t think that counts. He’s my brother by the way!”
“Did he have to model today too?” Marinette suddenly asked and seemed a little concerned.

“No, I had the day off today, but we both ran away before Nathalie could tell us otherwise. He’s probably in some library to read a book.”

“Yeah, sounds like him.”

“Wait, you had to run away from home on your day off? Why?” Nino asked, seemingly not getting the full picture yet.

“Father often crams in last-minute things, especially when Félix and I have nothing scheduled. Photoshoots, fittings, interviews, classes and other stuff like that.”

“Dude, that’s cruel.”

“It is a little,” Adrien admitted with a wince. Despite him disliking his father’s most recent ways, he still was his father and Adrien didn’t like to talk bad about his family.

“Anyway, do you want to see what we got?” He pulled one of the shopping bags into his lap and started rummaging around in it.

“Sure!” Nino replied and seemed to be equally curious as Adrien was excited.

“Fair warning Nino: Most of the stuff we got are clothes.”

“When I managed to listen to your hour-long rants about cross-stitches, I will survive this too.”

“Rude!”

Adrien snickered at the exchange that seemed not unlike the ones he had with his brother.

He proceeded to show Nino each article of clothing one by one while Marinette seemed to hold herself back from commenting on each piece. By the time he got to the two girl shirts he had bought, she did not seem to be able to hold her commentary back anymore.

“And these ones have a story behind them,” Marinette said with an eye roll while Adrien just mischievously grinned.

“Consider me curious,” Nino said as the sceptically looked at the shirts in question.

“Well, Marinette looked at this shirt,” Adrien said and held up the blue one, “and I asked if she wanted to try it on.”

“And then he guilt-tripped me into it by trying one of those on himself.”

Nino started laughing. “Dude, I hope you took a picture.”

“We didn’t, but I can put this on now and show you if you want!” Adrien said with a grin and held up the grey one while subtly placing the blue one on Marinette’s lap.

“Wait, you bought that for yourself?” Nino exclaimed in amused disbelief and kept on laughing. It was nice to see that Marinette and him were not the only ones who found it hilarious.

“Well, it would be cruel to not get my brother something from the shopping trip.”

“Be careful that you’re not starting a prank war. My little brother and I had one going on for
months until he finally gave up.”

“Oh, our prank war started on the day we were born, so don’t worry about that.” Adrien had a hard time to keep his grin to a normal level of amused and mischievous when thinking about the endlessly many pranks Félix and he had pulled on each other.

When you were a trickster and prankster by nature but had no one to pull the pranks on unless you fancied going to bed early without dessert, you had to pick the only other one available for pranks. Tricking each other had a certain thrill to it too, since the simple pranks were easy to predict and therefore less likely to work. Surprise pranks like buying a girl’s shirt for his brother were usually the best since they were nearly unpredictable. Setting traps was harder most of the time, especially since Félix could smell a trap from miles away.

“Wait, Félix is playing pranks on you?” Marinette asked and Adrien couldn’t hold back a snicker at her incredulous expression. It really must be hard to see the calm and collected Félix as a prankster, but Adrien knew better. It was a side his brother only showed very rarely to strangers and he had a subtlety about it that made it seem almost effortless, blending perfectly well into his character. Adrien himself was a bit more straight-forward about it.

“Yeah, all the time. I give it a few more weeks or months and he’ll start playing pranks on you too. Don’t prank him back without me though, or he’ll take it personally,” he said with a wink.

*Never trick a trickster when you are not one yourself.*

“Wow, petty much?” Nino said.

“Yeah, I’m the only exception because I’m his brother.”

“Still, when you’re playing a prank on someone you have to expect being pranked back by them. This is the general rule of pranks,” Nino explained and sounded like he was relying the truths of the universe to them.

*A rule that the fair folk doesn’t play by.*

It was not like Adrien feared that Félix could harm Marinette—no, he would never do that. It was rather that he was afraid of the two of them being on bad terms again. Or more specifically Félix getting a dislike for Marinette after he just managed to sort of befriend her. Such a step back would not fare well for anyone involved.

“Speaking of pranking Félix, we also stopped at this awesome shop that had all sorts of cat-themed things. I got *those* to put in my brother’s bed or on his favourite chair.” Adrien pulled out a handful of these horrible looking toy mice he had bought. Most looked like chunks of dust that had taken on a life of their own and also had exploded at some point.

“Aren’t those cat toys?” Nino asked. Adrien huffed.

“No cat that has any class would ever play with those. They are much better suited for pranks!”

“So, you went into a shop and bought like twenty toy mice. What did the cashier say?” Nino seemed amused by that.

“That’s by far not the only thing he got,” Marinette said with a sigh. “Show him, Adrien.”

The blond couldn’t hold back his enthusiasm as he presented each cat-themed item to Nino like it was a sacred treasure. He then ended his presentation with the masks and the many different beads.
Last but not least he took out one of the cat umbrellas, tore off the packaging and then opened it up. He had to admit that he was very pleased with it and even Marinette let out a small giggle when she saw the product in action.

“He got one of those for me too,” she added while Adrien closed the umbrella again.

“Great, so next time it rains you two can pretend that Marinette is the twin instead of your brother.”

“Félix gets an umbrella too, so we could pretend to be triplets!” Adrien said happily. At least someone got the appeal of that plan.

“I doubt that would work, but we can try. Would Félix even voluntarily use that umbrella?” Marinette asked.

“Oh, I’m sure he’ll find it hissterical.”

“Stop it with the puns already,” she said but the amused smile told another story.

*She likes my puns!*

“Looks like you have a great summer ahead of you,” Nino said and while he looked friendly, there was something observant about him that Adrien could not place. Like he was testing him. If he was, then the *Cat Sidhe* did not appreciate it.

“Only if I keep ditching photoshoots to go to Marinette’s instead. Which I will probably do. Father has other models he can use that are probably better than a 13-year-old, so it hopefully won’t be that bad for the company.”

“It really sucks that your dad doesn’t even give you real free time in summer. How do these things go when there’s school?”

“Oh, I don’t go to school. Félix and I are home-schooled.”

“Really? That sounds cool though. You can just hang out at home the whole day and do your homework whenever.”

Adrien frowned. “It’s actually very boring and lonely. We don’t see other people our age often because we’re mostly just locked inside the house.”

“Oh. Sorry, dude. I guess I never really thought about it that way.”

“It’s okay. That’s why it’s so great to sneak out and see Marinette! It’s much nicer here than it is at home.”

“Marinette’s place is heaven! Pastries whenever you want them and awesome parents. You really hit the jackpot there,” Nino agreed and Marinette snorted.

“You’re exaggerating,” she argued.

“Nope, not at all.”

“Ah, now I get it. You both just come here for the pastries,” Marinette said.

“Yeah, pretty much.”

“No, that’s not it!”
Adrien looked at Nino, appalled.

“How can you say that? Marinette is so much better than the pastries!?”

“Dude, I was joking,” Nino snorted. Marinette, who had been apparently anything but oblivious to Nino’s joking reply to her own sarcastic statement, now turned as red as Adrien did when he looked at her.

*Let the Nuckelavee take me already…*

“Anyway, my aunt is calling. Some mandatory family trip I have to go on.” Nino made a face at that. “I’ll text you later ‘Nette. See you Adrien, and keep sneaking out of your horror house please!”

“Will do!” Adrien said with a grin.

“Don’t feed yourself to the sharks.”

Then only the contact picture was left.

“Why would he feed himself to the sharks?”

Marinette giggled. “It’s an inside joke. The last time we talked he said something about it being so hot down there he would be nothing but fried meat before long and could then be fed to sharks.”

“That’s possible?! Why would humans even go to such dangerous places?

“No, it isn’t. The worst Nino has to suffer through is a family trip.

“Speaking of fried meat though, I’m starving. *Maman* is gonna start dinner soon, do you think you can stay that long this time?”

Adrien *could* stay for dinner this time around and it was fantastic! Sabine could cook as well, if not even better, as she could bake and the resulting dish was delicious.

While they had waited for dinner to be ready, Marinette and he had played some video games where she had beat him mercilessly. Even Tom had joined later on, which had led Adrien to win two matches and lose another two.

They also went through the pictures Marinette and Adrien had taken of the outfits Marinette had tried on and planned to design outfits of her own. As well as an unflattering video of Adrien Marinette had sneakily taken when he had tried to step on an escalator for the second time that day. It had gone significantly better than the first time, which meant he had tripped and fallen onto the escalator. He had then struggled for half the way to get back up again. All the while Marinette had tried to hide her giggles, though they were very audible on said video.

As the family plus Adrien sat together at the small kitchen table and talked about their day, he never felt left out. All of them were always mindful to include him in their conversation by prompting him to tell his version of a story from the shopping trip, or asking for his opinion on the things they talked about. The whole thing gave Adrien a pleasantly warm feeling that he had not felt from his own family for a long time.

Even when his mother had still been around, dinners had never been like this. The table in the
dining hall was too big and the distance between its occupants too wide to hold chummy conversations like this one. Family activities had always been more of an exception in their household, making the trips they did—to the zoo or a museum—precious and few.

For the Dupain-Chengs, such things seemed to be the rule though. There was no distance between them. No other responsibilities that kept them apart for most of the time. No one to order someone else to do something.

If spending the summer with Marinette meant he could be part of this warm family, if even just for a little bit, then he would gladly run away from every single photoshoot his father ordered him to do. Because this was how a family should be. He had desperately missed it.

Chapter End Notes

I'll have you all know that I tested the escalator thing in real life just to see how many steps one can physically keep their feet apart. If me going through the entire ML merchandise of that shop and then demanding where the Plagg plushies were (they had none) didn't make the employees think that I was absolutely insane, then my exit of performing a split on the escalator probably did. I suffer for my art and my obsessions. You're welcome.

The next chapter is already finished and beta-read! I just have to go through it before I upload it, but I'll wait a few days with that so that I hopefully will have chapter 13 finished at this point so I don't have to stress so much. We'll see.
And here we have the second critical day of this fanfiction: Lughnasadh. Luckily it's not quite as bad as Midsummer was!

I can also finally introduce Mélusine to you all! Not gonna lie, I like her a lot, but I admit to being biased. :D I based her off of the legendary figure Mélusine (or Melusina, as she is also called) since I found her backstory fascinating. I immediately had so many headcanons and I just had to use her! I recommend reading the myths about her, they are very interesting! :D Also, she is a half-faerie and had a bullshitty (in her opinion) human father. Sounds familiar? ;D

Also, remember that little bit about the shop being closed on Saturdays back in chapter 8? That was a reference to her myth too! sorry, I'm just very excited about hiding references to it everywhere ;A;

Thanks a lot to everyone who beta-read this chapter and helped me with all those silly errors! You know who you are! <3

The crescent moon hung low in the sky, the light of the sunset still lingering around it. The temperatures had fallen and Félix breathed in the cool fresh air. At least it was as cool and as fresh as the air at the end of July in Paris could be. It was still an improvement from the stale air inside his home; no matter how good the air conditioning was, it was never the same as being outside.

Standing on the roof of his house and letting the wind play with his fur gave him a sense of rightness. This was where he belonged. The night was his domain and the noble Cat Sidhe form his birthright. It made him feel far away from the earthly worries he had to endure and the ridiculousness of it all. In this form he was free.

“Félix, I know I shouldn’t be that person, but you really should come down from there. You could slip!”

With a sigh Félix turned to his brother’s worried voice. Adrien was half-hanging out of a window and looked up at him.

“Everything is fine.” The dismissive statement did nothing to sway Adrien.

“Just as everything was fine with me when I jumped outside on Midsummer? Come on, Félix, you’re being very hypocritical right now. Lughnasadh is starting tomorrow night and you’re just waltzing around without a care in the world!”

“Lughnasadh is not Midsummer.” While the statement itself was true, he still felt the distinct pull that was tugging a little more strongly at his awareness than it usually did. Whispers that he could otherwise easily ignore had become annoyingly persistent. He knew that Adrien felt it too, which meant lying would not help at all.

“Have you packed yet?” Félix asked as he began to climb down the roof and jumped back through
the window into their room.

“Yes, but you’re sure this is okay? I mean, it’s a big day and I really would hate to disturb Mélusine when she is celebrating.”

“Do not worry about that. She rarely has company these days so she will be delighted to have us over.”

He jumped on his favourite chair and curled up on the grey shirt Adrien had presented to him as a gift from his shopping trip with Marinette. Apparently the two of them had wanted to play some sort of prank on him, but the joke was on them since the soft material of the garment made for a perfect pad to take a cat-nap on.

“I’m just saying. We managed on our own just fine so far.”

Now that was a blatant lie if ever he had heard one.

“Adrien, without the herbs from her shop we would not have made it past Imbolc and you know it. Either way, Mélusine was the one to extend the invitation when I was there last night to bargain for St. John’s wort. It would be incredibly rude to deny it, especially since we need all the help we can get.”

“It just feels…wrong to leave father and Nathalie defenceless like that.”

“Oh, by Danu, Adrien! They will be fine.” Félix grumbled and gave an irritated swish of his tail. His father really was currently last on his list of priorities.

“But, what if—”

“You seem awfully hellbent on staying here for some reason,” Félix interrupted, staring at his brother intently. The flinch at his comment was barely noticeable, but it was there.

“Not really, just…” Adrien started but trailed off, looking out the window into the twilight sky. Paris shone beyond with the Eiffel Tower as its most prominent structure that had just lit up a few minutes ago. Apart from the famous tourist attraction, there was also something else—something much less famous—in the direction Adrien was looking. Félix narrowed his eyes.

“Don’t tell me you planned to sneak into Marinette’s room during Lughnasadh.”

A twitch of Adrien’s ears was the giveaway this time.

“You were! You absolute moron!” Félix hissed and jumped up on the back of the chair to be on eye level with his brother.

“Yes, Lughnasadh is not Midsummer, as you have so eloquently stated earlier, but being around her as a Cat Sidhe is risky even on normal days. Let us not risk it by being around her on the critical days. That would just end up in an absolute disaster now that staying away from her for two weeks on end is not an option anymore.”

Adrien flattened his ears and sighed.

“You’re right, Fé. It was a stupid idea anyway.”

“Glad that we agree.”

“But, is she going to be alright?”
“Most certainly. You gave her the necklace, right?”

Adrien nodded. He had worked on making a necklace out of rowan berries over the last few weeks with the intent to give it to Marinette so that she would be safe. He had told her something about a silly superstition of his and practically begged her to wear it just so he could have peace of mind.

Félix found this incredibly risky since Marinette would probably look up on the internet what kind of superstition required rowan berries but they could always claim to be Wicca or something similar. It was as close to the truth as they could get anyway.

“Rowan berries will protect her from being kidnapped or mind-controlled, so even if she encounters a fair one, she will be safe,” Félix reminded his brother. Adrien, in turn, just sighed again.

“I guess I’m just worried.”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

On the day before Lughnasadh, Adrien and Félix both stayed as long as they could afford at Marinette’s place. They had brought their duffel bags beforehand already and explained that they would spend the night at the place of a friend of their mother, since she had invited them over. The truth sounded much less mysterious than the experience would probably be.

What proved to be more difficult was the Dupain-Chengs’ insistence to drive them to that family friend of theirs and drop them off there. Only after several fake assurances that they would be driven by their own driver—lying was a necessary evil in this case—did the overly concerned parents back down. It had both been reassuring and annoying though, which was a weird combination.

In the evening, the twins said their hasty goodbyes to Marinette and her parents before rushing off. They wanted to get to Mélusine’s before dusk since they did not necessarily want to encounter any of her customers. Not that they had anything in particular against the fair folk, it was just that faeries always brought complications and complications were the last thing they needed at this moment.

They had not even tried to argue with their father about cancelling photoshoots and classes for the day and staying away from the mansion. Instead, they had sneaked out of the house early in the morning with their duffel bags and left Nathalie a note that told her of their absence. Their father could rage all he wanted, but would still not find them until they willingly returned. Let him relearn that faeries were not to be crossed so easily, even when they were his own children.

After what had happened on Midsummer, Félix was not willing to take any more chances. He realised they would not make it for very long on their own, only relying on a few simple herbs. Mélusine’s was their best bet. As dangerous as the shop was for mortals, the worst a faerie could fear was a bad bargain there. In truth, entering it was like coming home.

Félix could understand why the folk regarded the legendary halfling’s place as a sanctuary with its many fey things strewn about everywhere—adder stones, dried elecampane and clover, septagrams carved into various kinds of wood, flint and much more. Yet there was an order to the chaos, a system neither faerie nor human understood, for it was unique to Mélusine herself.

Whenever something was needed, she would be there to grant the item or to deny it as she pleased.
There was no way of finding anything specific without her help. Everything yet nothing was available, two extremes of a whole, two sides of the same coin. Such was the faerie way.

Strike a good bargain with the blonde shop owner and she would give you what you want, but only if she benefited from what she was getting in return.

To get the St. John’s wort and the dried rowan berries, Félix had had to sing her a song which he had afterwards forgotten the words of. She loved to hear children sing, especially those she had watched grow up, and she collected their songs like some other people would collect stamps. It had been a comparably easy bargain, since others had to give her much more precious things like names, favours or even their own children. Mélusine was a hard bargainer and proud of it, which made Félix dread what she would ask for when Adrien and he were older.

For the moment though, they were orphaned children in her eyes and therefore in desperate need of her care.

“Come in, kittens, come in,” she said excitedly as the twins entered her shop. Mélusine herself was looking brilliantly beautiful as always with her tall figure, her wavy, long blonde hair and her striking blue eyes. It was easy to see why so many legends had been written about her in which knights had begged on their knees for her hand in marriage. Though those knights probably would have hesitated a little if they would have noticed her slit-shaped pupils. Then again, some were foolish enough to take faeries as their brides in full knowledge of what they were. His own father was such a fool.

“We really appreciate that you’re letting us stay over, Mélusine,” Félix said politely, knowing better than to thank her for it and was smothered in a tight hug shortly afterwards.

“Oh, it’s my absolute pleasure to celebrate Lughnasadh with you two. And Adrien, I haven’t seen you in ages! Look at how much you’ve grown!” Now it was his brother’s turn to get his breath hugged out of him, though he did not seem to mind since he returned the hug in kind.

“I already heard what happened before Félix told me,” she said with an exasperated sigh after gently breaking the hug and venturing behind the counter to a hallway beyond. The twins followed her.

“Your father is an insufferable man, caging you like livestock and then daring to neglect you on Midsummer of all days. Daft human.”

“Wait, who did you hear that from?” Adrien asked and Félix noted that his voice sounded a little panicked. Not without reason. If this information made the rounds, then there was a chance that someone has caught wind of the twins’ closeness to a certain human girl as well.

“The Court talks, kitten. Not voluntary, often, they are deceptive like that and I am a mere cursed halfling and therefore not high in their graces. Bargains are helpful for getting information though and some of the folk do talk a lot without any prompting.”

“Did they say anything else?” Adrien pressed on and Félix elbowed his brother for the impulsive question. Mélusine threw them a mischievous grin over her shoulder which made Adrien realise his mistake.

“Is there anything else to know?”

And there it was. They could lie and say that there was not and with other faeries that might have worked, but Mélusine was half human too. She knew the art of lies and how to weave them.
Halflings did not lie often, but in contrast to faeries they could, which meant that they also knew when they were lied to. A false story would not satisfy their host.

“Do you have to tend to the shop tonight?” Félix therefore asked, deflecting the question. Mélusine would not forget it, but they would have time to think of a satisfactory answer until she asked it again.

“I would rather not. I have a nice little home in Brittany where I would like to partake in the whole spectacle. It has been a few years since I have last seen the cutting of the first corn or tasted the meals they make of it. But we can go visit some holy wells tomorrow and feast plenty. Who knows, maybe we’ll also be able to play matchmaker for a few mortals.” She giggled like a little girl at the idea.

“So, you do or you do not have to work?” Félix asked and with that also cut off the excited string of questions Adrien had been about to ask.

“Well, it’s my shop and I can technically open and close it whenever I want, but a nasty Sidhe cursed it when I had it closed once on Beltane. The Court took care of it and the curse was lifted, but it was a hassle and I’d rather not risk angering a fae on one of the important celebrations again. I will only be open until moonset though. They seemed to be happy with that.” Her grin told Félix that there was something off about it.

“And when is moonset?” he asked, feeling a smirk growing on his face.

“Shortly after eleven at night.” She grinned too. Dusk was at nine, which meant only two hours of work for her instead of eight. Whoever had asked her to be open on the eve of Lughnasadh had been tricked by the trickster. Not many faeries dared to do such a bold thing and even less got away with it. Mélusine was aware of the gamble she had taken, and instead of being afraid, she delighted in the risk.

“I will be in bed before midnight for once and can spend the whole entire day with you two kittens. Until then, you can decide whether you take this door,” she pointed to a plain white door that went well with the interior decor of the building and no doubt led up to her apartment above the shop, “or one of the other doors. The walls only work at daytime, so don’t even try it.” Now she pointed to a hallway to their left which was lined with doors of different styles and sizes. The end of the hallway, however, was painted with a path in a forest that looked real enough that one could easily imagine just going through what was undoubtedly a wall and take a stroll in nature.

“The last time we did that, we ended up lost in the North of Germany because Adrien had the great idea to run through what looked like a garden path painted on the wall of your living room,” Félix remarked while Adrien just mumbled something about having been six and not knowing the portal opened in the mornings.

Mélusine laughed. “Oh my, I almost forgot about that! It was adorable finding you both wandering around in Brekling and asking where Paris was. Your mother and I had a blast.”

“We’ll stay where we are on the globe for now, thanks,” Adrien said somewhat sheepishly and did not even take as much as a glance at the corridor again.

“Are you sure? I have this lovely cottage in Sweden in the middle of the forest. It’s nicely quiet there. Something that really can’t be said about Paris.”

For a moment Adrien seemed to consider it, but Félix opened the door to the apartment and pushed his brother up the staircase that lay beyond it.
“And let me guess: that portal opens once a month?”

“And a week,” Mélusine corrected. “Have you ever stayed in the middle of nowhere for a month? It gets lonely and my customers would be absolutely livid if I’d close the shop for that long.”

“Fair enough, but still no deal,” Félix said with a shrug and walked up the stairs, followed shortly by Mélusine.

“If this is about your father and these ridiculous things he forces you to do, then I think you could use a week away from him.”

They could both use a break like that, but they couldn’t take one because there still was a promise for them to keep. A promise to themselves that did not bind them like a bargain or a favour would. What motivated them not to break it were the consequences that could follow.

Being at Mélusine’s place for a day was as much of a break as they were going to get at this point and they were thankful for it. Being with her meant that they could also make sure that Marinette did not find her shop and if she did, they could be there to prevent the worst.

Apart from that very practical reason it was also a relief to be in the company of someone who not only knew most of the secrets they kept from the world, but also would not use that information against them. Yet.

Mélusine, as much as she often argued it, was not like the other faeries. As a halfling—a child of a faerie and a human just like Adrien and Félix—she knew how humans thought and felt. She could see cruelty where faeries saw fun and she fought to prevent harm coming to any child in her care.

She had had a lot of them in her long life. Children, that was. Most were not her own, but human children; orphans or even those that had been traded for a changeling and needed a caring mother to raise them. It was one of the reasons why Mélusine had homes all over the place, which she conveniently connected to her shop through portals that seemed to follow their own laws when left alone.

Her love for children was the only reason why Félix had been able to make such simple bargains with her and why Adrien and he were at her place in the first place. He knew that once they were not children anymore, she would lose interest and treat them like she would any other faerie. Or at least he suspected as much.

Truth be told, Félix did not know nearly as much about the shop owner as he’d like. What he did know was from the times he had visited her shop as a child, and from the stories told to him by his mother in anecdotes, when she had felt like it. That and the few bargains he had struck with her recently.

It was easy to venture through a conversation with a faerie, while also dangerous. They could not lie but spoke with a silver tongue. You could only guess what they were up to most of the time, but you should always be sure to exercise caution. Infidelity was nothing rare with them and they loved playing their little games of pretend with faeries and mortals alike. It was safer to never trust a faerie, and as long as you were careful enough to not strike a bargain with any of them, or tell them your name, you were safe.

Halflings were a whole different can of worms though. They could lie. They could trick you into a false sense of security by convincing you they were just human enough to understand you, but then stab you in the back. They were a much bigger gamble to take because, while it was more likely that they were being honest with their actions, you could never know if you were walking right
into a trap.

The safe bet obviously was to stay away from faerie folk in general, but if you were one of the folk, that was sadly not an option. With Mélusine, Félix just needed to stay suspicious because he knew that Adrien would be too trusting.

“I’ve made you some food. I hope you’ll appreciate the theme,” Mélusine said with a twinkle in her eyes as they entered her apartment.

It was not particularly big, just as average as most Paris apartments were with white walls and floor-length windows that let in the last light of the day. As in any faerie home, everything was remarkably clean and tidy.

What made it vastly different from their own home, except for the smaller space was the decorations. Wooden bookshelves lined every wall in the room, with books overflowing each shelf into piles on the floor. Only one corner was exceptionally empty to make room for a painting of a porch with sea-view. It was no doubt another portal and by the looks of it also a relatively new one. Mélusine had probably run out of space in her other living room downstairs.

The dining table stood next to the kitchenette in the middle of the room and the ceiling above it looked like someone had tried to let a tree grow out of it—which might even be what had happened. From the artfully wound branches hung glass orbs with lit candles inside, which were obviously real. The answer to how they managed to burn without oxygen and also not melt the glass orbs was simple: magic.

The table itself was richly set with all kinds of food on silver plates. All of the food was something they were familiar with—bread, oatcakes, cheese, butter, sausages and milk—which almost seemed odd in such a fey house. Then again, real faerie food was hard to acquire. If anyone could do it though, it probably was Mélusine.

“A Lughnasadh feast?” Adrien asked excitedly as he recognized the theme Mélusine had talked about.

“That’s right! And a faerie feast too, just for us three,” Mélusine said with an excited grin and hugged both twins to her sides from behind in glee. Félix, who was not used to physical affection from anyone but his brother, tensed at the contact but soon relaxed. Somehow it was different when it was not a human but a faerie. It felt right.

“Are you gonna eat with us?” Adrien asked as he turned around in her half hug, his tail curling in hopeful anticipation.

Félix could not even remember when their father had last sat with them at the dining table to eat something, dinner or otherwise. When their mother had still been around they had always eaten together, no exception. To have that tradition broken had also broken something in Adrien, who had always loved company and loathed being alone. Félix had never forgiven his father for his neglect.

“Of course, kitten!” Mélusine almost looked offended at the question. “And you know what?” she said and hugged Adrien closer to her side with the arm she had around him. “Tomorrow we will all cook dinner together. I’ll teach you how to make the best pumpkin soup you ever ate. How does that sound?”

Adrien looked at her in awe and then broke into a giddy smile. “Yes! We will finally learn how to cook!”
Mélusine let both of them go and chuckled. “Don’t get your hopes up yet. Cooking doesn’t come easy to halflings. Just as with lying, we can learn it though.” She winked at the twins before motioning to the table.

“Well then, let us eat before the sun goes down and some goblin gets the idea to curse my shop again.”

Félix had to admit that it was by far the best meal they had had in over half a year. When their mother had still been around, the cooks had the strict instructions to only make certain kinds of food for them, which had always been amazing. After she had gone missing, their father had insisted on a more human menu for all household members, which didn’t always agree with the twins. Most of the food was too salty for their taste and they rarely got anything sweet to eat at all. No wonder they had gotten more miserable as the months had gone by.

When they finished their meal, Mélusine surprised them with a honey cake and chocolate pudding.

“I have to admit that I didn’t bake the cake myself. Cooking, I can handle, but baking is a whole other thing. Never stopped me from trying to make a few batches of Christmas cookies, even though it always ended up an inedible disaster.” She laughed.

“And the pudding?” Adrien eagerly asked while eyeing the chocolate dessert. It made Mélusine laugh again.

“Oh kitten, I was there when they invented pudding. I have gotten quite good at making it myself in the last few centuries. Here, try it yourself.” She set the glass bowl with pudding down in front of Adrien and gave him a smaller bowl to put the pudding into.

After just one spoonful, his brother seemed convinced.

“That tastes amazing!” He exclaimed and eagerly shoved another spoon full of chocolate pudding into his mouth. Félix took some of it too, but just a polite portion instead of the mountain of pudding Adrien had shovelled into his bowl.

“I know,” Mélusine said with a giggle. “But don’t forget to eat the cake. I got it from a fantastic bakery at Place des Vosges.”

Adrien suddenly started to cough violently while Félix did a much better job at acting inconspicuous. Luckily, Mélusine was too worried about his brother’s wellbeing to see it as a reaction to what she had said. Or at least Félix very much hoped so.

“Are you alright, kitten?” she asked and gently patted his back. Adrien just nodded, not daring to say anything which was probably wise.

A cuckoo clock—a common substitute for a clock with bells—went off from where it hung on the wall next to a bookshelf. It was nine o’clock.

Mélusine sighed.

“And that means work for me. You’ll be safe up here as long as you don’t open the windows since the spells I set in place seal fae magic from the outside. Be good until I’m back,” she said and ruffled both of their hair before hurrying back down the stairs.

Adrien, who had recovered from his coughing fit, sent Félix a wary look. He in turn just put a finger on his lips, motioning his brother to be quiet. Even when Mélusine was downstairs, they could not be sure that she would not hear them. No talks about Marinette. They would talk about it
once they were home again. That Mélusine had bought a cake from the Dupain-Cheng bakery was only minorly concerning anyway and therefore did not warrant an immediate discussion.

The twins finished eating their dessert and afterwards went to explore Mélusine’s apartment. Adrien seemed especially careful to not accidentally trigger a portal or some other kind of spell by touching the wrong things. Félix had fewer reservations and eagerly went through the titles of the many books their host had stored in her living room. There were even more books down in her shop and in her various other houses. If she would try, she could probably fill an entire library with them.

In the bookcases of her living room, the collection was a wild mixture of romance novels, murder mysteries and spell books. Félix studied the spell books’ covers, not daring to look into them without permission. Such tomes were dicey after all and he did not fancy getting cursed by accident and then having to endure Adrien’s endless teasing about it.

“I’m bored,” Adrien declared after an hour. He had explored everything there was to the living room—without daring to open any doors or to touch any painted walls in case they were portals—and had then decided that the black leather couch was safe enough to lay down on.

“She will be back in about an hour,” Félix replied from where he sat at the kitchen table and went through one of the murder mystery novels to pass the time. He would have sat down on the couch, but Adrien was taking up most of the space—probably on purpose. Jerk.

Adrien’s response was groaning into a pillow in frustration. Silence reigned for a few minutes, only interrupted by the silent tap tap of Adrien’s tail as it hit the back of the couch in its agitated lashing. Said tapping sound started to grow louder with each passing second and after a few minutes Félix was convinced that Adrien was doing it on purpose. He endured it for two more minutes and then silently stood up to walk over to his brother.

While still holding his book in one hand, he shoved Adrien’s moping form aside and sat down on the small space he had freed. Only moments later Adrien was already sprawled on Félix’s lap like the annoying cat that he was, only to then be blatantly ignored.

“Fé,” he whined and tried to swat the book out of his brother’s hands. Felix, in turn, just held it higher. Face-down as Adrien was, his reach was not the widest after all.

“I’m still bored!”

Félix did not feel like dignifying that with an answer.

“Fé!”

The detective in the book had just found another clue and started connecting the dots to the possible suspects. Would it be the jealous ex-girlfriend after all? Félix was almost entirely sure it was.

“Pay attention to me!”

It would certainly not make for a very original conclusion to the story, but it would be amusing to see the murderer squirm when she would eventually be cornered. Those were always the best parts of murder mysteries after all.

Only when Adrien turned around and successfully swatted the book out of his hands did Félix
properly acknowledge his brother with a glare. Adrien just threw him an innocent grin. Asshole.

“Really Adrien?”

“You were being rude.”

“That’s subjective and therefore debatable.” Félix leaned forward to pick the book up from the floor, not caring that he was squishing his brother in the process.

“Why are you even reading stories about death?” Adrien asked as soon as Félix had settled back down with the book and started flipping through the pages to find the part he had last been reading before being interrupted.

“The investigation and the conviction are the most interesting parts, not the death itself.”

“It’s still sad and you are still boring,” Adrien grumbled.

Only then did Félix notice the tension in his brother’s body. It was barely there and he was doing a good job of externally masking it, but this was still more than just simple boredom. He seemed anxious about something and it was not hard to guess about what.

He opted for holding the book with one hand and letting the other one rest in Adrien’s hair, petting him behind the ears. It took a little until it drew a purr out of him, which was another indication that he was anything but relaxed.

The worry about Lughnasadh being a repeat of Midsummer and about Marinette being safe had weighed down heavily on his brother in the last few days. He was a master at putting on a happy face when he was feeling down, but he could never fool Félix for very long with it.

After just fifteen more minutes, Adrien had fallen asleep.

Golden corn fields stretched as far as one could see and the sun was shining in a cloudless sky. It was the perfect day for a celebration that was meant to worship Lugh, the Celtic god of the sun, light and harvests.

Celebrating the light as a Cat Sidhe was almost ironic, but Félix was willing to humour Mélusine when she had excitedly shoved them through one of her many doors that morning. They were currently in Ireland if he was not mistaken and their faerie host seemed to have a goal in mind.

Adrien eagerly trotted along and enjoyed the change of scenery. Breathing fresh air for a change really was a relief. No exhaust emissions or the smell of alcohol and garbage mixed itself in the air into an unpleasant cocktail. Only the smells of soil, rapeseed and wheat were present, though they were more of an afterthought. The absence of any pollution was what was most noticeable.

“Can you tell us where we are going?”

Félix looked at Adrien and Mélusine, hoping his brother’s question would receive an answer for he was equally curious.

“To an old friend of mine. He owns a farm in this area.”

She let out a happy giggle and started twirling like a little girl. “Going through the fields sure brings back memories. I’ve lived here not so long ago, you know?”
“What is your understanding of ‘not so long ago’?” Félix asked since he doubted that a halfling that was almost a millennium old would have an even remotely similar sense of time as Adrien and him.

“About sixty or so years,” Mélusine replied undeterred. “There was a changeling bargain in the area and I happened to have a house close by from a century ago. Renovations were a pain, but the boy I took care of grew to love it. Adorable little one. He sadly died two years ago. Had a heart attack in the piggery and got eaten by the pigs. Such is the farm life.” She sounded more like she was talking about an unfortunate inconvenience rather than a tragedy. Adrien had gone pale though.

“The pigs ate him?” He asked with a weak voice.

“Yep, boots and all. They eat anything, you know? The family didn’t find even a scrap of him afterwards.”

“Is that family the one we’re going to now?” Félix asked, already dreading more gory details about the former farmer’s demise.

Mélusine started laughing. “Oh no, kitten, they hate my guts! Blamed me for the whole mess and said that if I had blessed him with good luck it wouldn’t have happened, which is ridiculous. Do I look like an Asparas or a Cat Sidhe to you?”

“Can’t say you do,” Félix said to humour her since Adrien seemed to have been shocked into silence.

“I mean, I can do blessings, but the conditions are very bothersome. You two are ironically lucky that blessings come so easy to you.”

“There are drawbacks,” Adrien remarked quietly, almost inaudible.

Finally, Mélusine seemed to pick up on the sullen mood.

“Oh, don’t be sad, kitten. He has lived a good life with his wife and kids and that is what is worth being remembered. Weirdly enough, humans always just focus on how things ended, rather than how they began, so they fail to see the bigger picture.

“Look at the fields for example.” She gestured to said fields. “All of this was a forest once upon a time and somewhere around here was a village. Only vague ruins of it are left now and certainly nothing of the forest can be seen anymore. The people forgot what was once here. The most they look back on is how many years in a row they have planted grain, so that they know that in the third year they have to switch to rapeseed and to nothing in the fourth to relieve the ground soil. They continue with it until things change again and they forget about this circle too.

“My advice about humans is to make the time you have with them worth it, so you don’t have to regret anything in the end. We fair folk tend to think about the whole picture, so we have to make it a pleasing one.”

The words hit closer to home than Mélusine probably intended them to and therefore did not help much to lift the mood.

One certainly couldn’t say that Mélusine wasn’t one to learn from her mistakes. She spent the rest
of the trip pointing out various things like an old thorn tree and how it was a holy site; or
overgrown stones with faded symbols that were once used as objects of worship—all in the hope
that it would distract the boys, mainly Adrien, from what she had said before.

When they came across a wishing well, Félix was certain that his brother wished for something
along the lines of a long and healthy life for everyone he cared about. Félix just wished for good
luck. They certainly could use some.

Not even the litter of kittens that was presented to them by Mélusine’s friend—he turned out to be a
descendant of one of the many children she had raised in her life—could completely chase away
the gloom. That the world whispered easier solutions and tempting offers to them did not help
either. At least the enchanted St. John’s wort was helping a lot to keep those voices at bay.

When they arrived back at the house that held the portal—a garden gate with the swirly depiction
of a tree—Adrien seemed to at least have calmed down enough to give what looked like an honest
smile to the suggestion of cooking pumpkin soup for dinner.

Stepping through the gate was just as surreal as the first time. It felt like walking through a normal
door, but at the same time, the world shifted all around them in a matter of seconds until they
stepped out in the hallway full of doors back at Mélusine’s shop in Paris. Félix knew that a human
would probably get disoriented to the point of insanity when going through one of those fairy-path-
like gateways.

Cooking dinner was as chaotic as could be expected with two Cat Sidhe present that were both
beyond talentless when it come to the art of cooking. Mélusine possessed the patience of a saint
though, slowly walking them through the steps and even cleaning up the mess they made in the
process. The resulting soup was passable at best.

The dark thoughts from earlier seemed to return when the twins made themselves comfortable in
the bed of the guest room again that night. Adrien was snuggling a little closer to Félix than he
usually would and it also took him a while to actually fall asleep. Félix could already see the chaos
of the following day unfold as he imagined a distressed Adrien trailing behind Nathalie and his
father. What worried him even more was if he could behave in front of Marinette. Perhaps a visit to
the bakery would have to wait.

Chapter End Notes

Remember when I had a schedule way back when I started uploading chapters in June
and July? Well, I have done a very shitty job of actually keeping to that schedule,
haven’t I? :'D

This will change now! I am very determined to get the Christmas chapters out in time,
so I will now upload TWICE A WEEK! The schedule so far is Tuesdays and Sundays.
If I can manage it I will also upload on Thursdays on top of that shortly before
Christmas.
Oh, and yes, it is very hard to write 10 chapters in about a month of time, but I’m
trying! ;w;
Marinette had initially thought that Adrien and Félix—or at least one of them, most likely Adrien—would show up the next day to tell her about their stay at the place of this family friend of theirs. When neither of them did, she berated herself for thinking so highly of herself in the first place. Who was she to them after all? A pastry supplier at the least and a new friend at best. It was stupid to think they would even consider to tell her about an intimate thing such as a family visit.

When both of them showed up the next day though, she realised that the doubts she had put herself through had been thoroughly unnecessary. Something had happened. She was not sure what that something was and she also was not going to ask, but there was definitely something wrong.

Adrien, usually the incarnation of sunshine itself, looked like someone had put a dimmer to his soul and turned it all the way down. He was still smiling, but it was a hollow smile that did not reach his eyes.

Félix looked more like himself, but he was obviously worried about his brother’s state if the constant concerned glances were any indication.

Marinette was not the only one to notice it either. Her parents immediately started fussing over the two boys. Before she could even blink, the twins and she were ushered to the kitchen and her mother started making omelettes for all of them.

“How was the stay over at your friend’s house?” Her father asked as he sat down at the kitchen table with them.

“It was a unique experience,” Félix cryptically replied after a contemplative pause.

“She taught us how to make pumpkin soup!” Adrien piped up and even though he seemed excited, the sparkle in his eyes died down way too quickly.
“Maybe we could make it together sometime,” Marinette said as a try to keep the conversation on a more joyful topic. When Adrien’s eyes caught hers though, a weird expression crossed his face for just a second. Regret? Sadness? Whatever it was, it wasn’t anything positive.

“Well, we aren’t very good at it yet,” he sheepishly admitted with a fake smile that seemed to cover up whatever snippet of emotion Marinette had previously seen.

“Which is a clear understatement. If it hadn't been for our friend’s help, the soup would have been inedible,” Félix added.

The conversation carried on in a similar tone, first continuing with the topic of food and then drifting off to various other things. The twins’ mood had slightly improved by the time Marinette’s mother set down a fluffy omelette in front of each of them.

After a while, rain started to fall outside and Adrien flinched at the rumble of distant thunder. Marinette’s parents had gone downstairs, probably to discuss something in private. They had left the three teenagers in the living room, where they had settled down on the sofa to watch TV. The show they watched was nothing particularly interesting, but just one of those afternoon shows that were made to keep people only mildly entertained.

When Adrien flinched a second time, Marinette came to a decision.

“Have you guys ever built a blanket fort before?”

“A what?” Félix asked with his default sceptically raised eyebrow.

“No, we haven’t. What’s a blanket fort?” Adrien asked at the same time and blinked curiously.

With a grin, Marinette stood up and opened a cupboard where they stored extra blankets.

“Help me carry those upstairs and I’ll show you.”

The twins seemed confused, but curious enough to follow her instructions. Only when they set down the blankets as a pile on the floor did she remember that neither Adrien nor Félix had ever seen her room before. She immediately blushed in embarrassment when she noticed them eye the pink walls and childish decorations.

“You have an amazing room!” Adrien suddenly exclaimed, drawing her out of her shame. He wore the same awed expression he had given her living room when he had first seen it, just even more intense than back then.

“It does look comfortable,” was the only comment Félix gave it, coupled with an approving nod.

Marinette blinked at both of them. They liked it? She gave a shy nod of thanks in return.

“So, uhm, blanket fort,” she said to change the topic and both boys immediately stopped their curious inspection of her room to look at her attentively.

“The first thing we need to do is free this space.” She pointed at the space below her bed. Luckily, she had just tidied up the previous day, so that the only thing she had to do was to shove her desk chair to the other side of the room.

“And making it more comfortable,” she added as she pulled her round rug into the space in front of
“What can we do?” Adrien asked as he awkwardly tried to stand by the hatch to stay out of her way.

“Help me with the fun part,” Marinette replied with a grin as she produced a box full of pegs from a corner of her room.

“The chaise needs to go in front of the rug.” She folded up its parasol and put it away. “Can you help me push?”

Adrien practically jumped at the opportunity to help while Félix seemed much more hesitant.

“What will this result in?” He asked as he watched Adrien and her push the piece of furniture across the room.

“A dark cave made out of blankets and pillows.”

For some reason, this seemed to catch his undivided attention and he started helping without further questions from then onward. Adrien also seemed even more enthusiastic than before, which was probably a good sign.

After fetching a bunch of folding chairs from the guest room downstairs and even acquiring some more blankets from the sofa, the three of them got to work. Most blankets could be secured by stuffing one end between the bedframe and the mattress of Marinette’s loft bed, while others had to additionally be secured with books. They were then fixed with pegs to the backs of the folding chairs.

When Marinette descended the stairs from her loft bed—very careful not to disturb the blanket that hung over it—she was happy with what they had done so far.

“Alright, these chairs need to be a little further apart, so we actually have an entrance.” She cautiously did so under the curious stares of the twins.

“Is it finished?” Adrien asked hopefully, but Marinette shook her head.

“Just a few more details.” She then climbed inside the unfinished contraption, armed with another blanket that was then carefully placed in front of the window to block out any light, and secured at the staircase.

After they had blocked any other holes where light might be able to get in, Marinette told the two to wait outside, before throwing a bunch of pillows and thick fluffy blankets inside the fort and disappearing in it.

“Why can’t we come in?” Adrien whined only three seconds later and Marinette had to stifle a giggle.

“Because it’s a surprise. It’ll only take a minute,” she replied as she arranged the many pillows and blankets for maximum comfort.

“One minute is over,” Félix said when she was almost finished and she was amused to note that he sounded a little impatient.

“Aaaand done,” Marinette declared as she emerged from the now finally finished blanket fort again. “Be careful not to knock any of the chairs over when you go in.”
Adrien practically dove inside and let out a delighted gasp afterwards. “Félix, you have to see this!”

“I would, if your behind wasn’t blocking the entrance,” the other twin deadpanned.

Marinette hid a grin behind her hand. Watching the two of them interact was incredibly amusing, especially on Félix’s part.

“We could make some microwave popcorn and watch a movie in there if you want.”

The sound of sudden shuffling could be heard and a second later Adrien peeked his head out of the entrance.

“Microwave popcorn?”

Marinette blinked. “Please tell me you know what microwave popcorn is.”

By the sheepish look he threw her, he apparently did not know. She could not say that she was surprised, honestly.

This was how the three of them ended up in the kitchen, watching the bag of popcorn turn in the microwave. At the very first pop, Adrien gasped and started wiggling in place when more pops followed. Félix seemed to try very hard to keep a neutral face, but could not quite cover his expression of curious interest. Marinette meanwhile felt like she was dealing with visitors from the past that saw modern inventions for the very first time. It was bizarre.

One bowl of buttery-sweet microwave popcorn later, the three of them climbed back into the blanket fort and Marinette started her computer. She also turned on her desk lamp in the corner that illuminated the cozy cave in a warm light.

The rest of the afternoon was spent entirely in the blanket fort with the three of them watching a movie. They only left it once to get more popcorn—Adrien and Félix both insisted to tag along to help her carry it even though she saw through that lie quite easily when both of them intently watched the next bag while it turned in the microwave.

When the movie was finished and Adrien had begged her to watch anime—she should have guessed that he liked those—her parents surprised them with a plate full of cookies and some more experimental cake—something with caramel and chocolate this time. The squeal of absolute glee Adrien let out at the sight of the baked goods was something she would not forget very soon. Neither would she forget him thanking her parents like they were angels sent from heaven. Félix’s gratitude towards the treats was meanwhile expressed with a polite ‘thank you.’

At one point in between episodes, Adrien noticed her pin board and just threw her a knowing grin. After her initial confusion, she eventually remembered that all the notes he had left her were on said pinboard. Only halfway through the next episode did her embarrassed blush die down.

The twins stayed until after dark and only left hesitantly. Especially Adrien had to pretty much be pried away from the blanket fort by an also quite reluctant Félix.

When Marinette took down the blanket fort afterwards so she could go to bed, she noticed a post it note on her desk.

Thank you for today. I’m so glad we are friends! :3

~Adrien
She was still smiling when she climbed under her covers that night.

To absolutely no one’s surprise, the twins showed up the next day too.

Adrien was devastated to see the blanket fort gone and it took Félix, Marinette and a time span of about ten minutes to assure him that it could easily be rebuilt and that this was indeed not the end of the world. Marinette’s suggestion to have a picnic on her balcony was the argument that eventually won Adrien over and made him stop mourning over the pile of blankets.

The weather was nice, perfect for sitting on the balcony. Apparently, it was also perfect for uninvited guests, drawn in by the cookie crumbs. After all, the black cat was not the only visitor she had met on her balcony so far.

Tempted by the food she had brought up with her, a pigeon had once sat down on the table in front of her while she had been drawing. It had snatched a croissant and then had proceeded to take it apart on her balcony. Since she had not tried to stop it, the pigeon had returned shortly afterwards. After the fourth time, she had given it the name Jacques and from then on had given him a cookie each time he visited.

The good thing about Jacques’ visit that day was that she could introduce him to Adrien and Félix. The bad thing was that Adrien turned out to be very allergic. Marinette tried to shoo the insistent bird away, but to no avail.

In the end, Félix took Adrien home after assuring her and her parents that he would be fine once he had taken his medication.

Adrien returned the next day without Félix and seemed to be in very high spirits. The question as to why that was, was easily answered with the bag full of beads and string Adrien had brought with him.

“I want it to be a surprise for Fé, so I said he should spend the day somewhere else today,” he explained as they ascended the stairs to Marinette’s room.

“I thought it would be fun to make lucky charms together. I’m not very good at it myself. But… uh…you know that already.”

She did. The necklace he had given her before he had visited this family friend of his, was anything but fashionable. He luckily had made it long enough so that she could wear it under her shirt. His choice of using dried berries instead of beads was…interesting, to say the least. His reasoning had been some superstition that those berries would prevent bad things from happening, or something like that. It had been such a sweet and thoughtful gift and he had looked so hopeful and pleading when he had given it to her that she did not have the heart to just put it in a box or hang it up in her room somewhere. Besides, Adrien had asked no less than five times already in the last three days if she was wearing it.

“It’s probably much easier with beads than with berries, so don’t worry about it,” Marinette assured him.

When they were done setting everything up—including Marinette’s own collection of beads, as well as some examples of lucky charms, necklaces and bracelets she had made in the past—Adrien
was vibrating in his chair with excitement. It was quite cute how he got so excited about such simple things.

This was no comparison to his expression when he eventually finished his first lucky charm though. Marinette half-expected him to jump out of his chair and happily bounce around the room right then and there. He did no such thing though. Instead, he started another lucky charm right away and another afterwards. Only two hours later he had finished six lucky charms in total.

“Who are you making those for?”

Adrien paused his work to show her every single one of his finished charms. He was so proud.

“This one is for Félix,” he said as he held up a charm that consisted of grey, black and teal beads with a crescent moon-shaped bead in the middle. The one for his father was made out of black, white and red beads with a bead shaped like a cat face in the centre. It was not what she personally would have chosen for the famous designer, but she supposed that Adrien knew his father better than she did.

The next one—black, white and blue beads with an oriental-looking bead with an eye painted on it—was for someone called Nathalie. He had talked about her before and from what Marinette had gathered she was something like a nanny. When asked, Adrien explained that Nathalie was his father’s assistant and has been his mother’s best friend.

Marinette was surprised when Adrien said the white, blue and sea-green one with the seal-shaped bead was made for Sabrina. Of course he would know Sabrina. After all, he knew Chloé. When she asked why he would give her a lucky charm, his excited smile morphed into a bittersweet one. He looked guilty.

“I’ve known her since I was a little kid. We were very good friends, but I ended up…saying too much. It is my fault that she is following Chloé around now. Anyway, she can use all the luck she can get these days, so this might be a good gift for her.”

There seemed to be much more to the story, but Marinette wasn’t going to pry. After all, it seemed to be hard for him to talk about it.

The next lucky charm was for the friend of their family Félix and he had stayed with the previous week. Marinette frowned. Whatever had happened on that visit had upset Adrien, even though he seemed to be mostly over it by now.

His last finished lucky charm was presented to her with such pride, yet sadness that she almost teared up.

It was for his mother.

His mother that he told her had gone missing less than a year ago. She had known that of course—it had been on the news and had even been mentioned in fashion magazines that talked about Gabriel Agreste. To hear it from Adrien himself and seeing how much the loss affected him almost broke her heart though.

He gently brushed his thumb over the middle piece of the lucky charm—a green cat eye. Not a bead in the shape of a cat’s eye, but a real cat eye gem that he must have bought just to make this lucky charm.

The hug surprised them both—Marinette because she had not realised that she was going in for a hug at all, it was just an automatic response; Adrien because he had been looking intently at the
lucky charm in his hand. When both of them had gotten over the initial shock, Adrien relaxed in her arms and hugged her back. He did not cry, did not even give the slightest indication of it, but she could tell that he wanted to. By the way he gripped her shirt and hid his head in her neck it was obvious that he was in desperate need for comfort.

They sat there and hugged each other for what probably were several minutes but which felt like hours. Marinette soothingly stroked his back while Adrien just held very still and remained silent. When they eventually separated, he threw her a thankful smile and immediately went back to work on his seventh lucky charm.

It took at least ten minutes until Marinette built up the courage to ask who that charm was for. He then threw her the softest smile she had ever seen on his face.

“It’s for you.”

“He liked it!” Adrien said in place of a greeting as he burst into Marinette’s room the next morning and she gave a startled squeak. Her parents had probably let him in and apparently, they saw no harm in letting Adrien into her room while she was sitting at her desk in her pyjamas. She had been sketching a design before she had been interrupted and now went on the search for her pencil, which she had thrown halfway across the room.

“Who liked what?” She asked while she fished out the pencil from underneath her chaise longue and tried very hard to not be embarrassed about her current attire.

“Fé liked the lucky charm I made him! He also really liked that name bracelet you made for him. He told me to tell you ‘thanks’ in his place by the way.” Adrien beamed and could not stand still.

“That’s great,” Marinette replied and sat back down to resume her sketching while Adrien continued with his excited ramblings about everyone’s reactions to their lucky charms.

“What is this?” He asked after a while and she turned around to see what he was referring to. He was holding her jar with coloured water and oil that she had made a few years ago with Nino. Her water had been coloured pink while his had been blue. They later had laughed about how stereotypical their favourite colours were.

“A jar with coloured water and oil in it,” she replied.

“What does it do?” He asked as he carefully regarded it.

“It is sort of a homemade lava lamp. You’ll see what I mean when you shake it.” Adrien did just that and then let out a gasp of delight.

“It’s pretty!”

“It was prettier when it was new,” she said with a frown as she regarded the now muddled colours in the jar.

“Tell you what, we will make a new one and you can keep it, but only when you go downstairs for a bit so I can get dressed.” It was kind of embarrassing to explicitly point out the latter, especially when Adrien’s view then drifted to her pyjamas.

“But the little pandas are so cute,” he commented with a tilted head, which made Marinette cross
her arms in front of her chest and throw him an unamused look.

“Adrien.” Her warning tone seemed to get her point across and he dashed down the stairs, but not without throwing her a grin and a wink. Like every teenage girl would do, she then threw herself into analytics of what the hell that had meant while she was getting dressed.

Without really noticing it, they fell into a rhythm. Adrien and Félix would stand on her doorstep in the late mornings or early afternoons—or more specifically in her living room since her parents always let them in before she had the chance to. They would then eat together and afterwards spend the day however they liked. Before the twins would go home, they would get to taste the experimental confectionary creation of the day. If they liked it—which more often than not was the case—they were given more of it in a box to take home.

Each of these days had at least one highlight that made it stand out. Be it a unique activity or a unique incident.

Like the one time they went to the nearby park—Adrien and Félix both in disguise of course—to eat the croissants her father had baked them. A squirrel had then decided to steal Adrien’s chocolate croissant in a moment when he was not paying enough attention. Marinette still didn’t know what had become of the squirrel.

She just remembered Adrien taking off after it as if it had just stolen his most precious possession and Félix telling her to just wait for him to return. When Adrien had returned without his croissant and with the squirrel nowhere in sight, he just wore a mysterious grin and said that he had dealt with it.

Another time, Adrien had become fascinated with the concept of homemade popsicles. Marinette spent half an hour to get the cherry juice out of his white shirt.

The day Adrien convinced her to wear one of the ridiculous, cheap masquerade masks they had bought on their shopping trip, was the day they visited a bookshop. Félix followed them at a distance which he explained as ‘necessary to avoid association’. It was probably not the worst idea since they did get a lot of strange looks. The good thing of wearing said disguise was that it also hid Marinette’s embarrassed blush. Adrien, meanwhile, seemed to thoroughly enjoy the confusion he was causing among the other pedestrians.

When they arrived at the narrow bookshop on the south bank of the Seine, Adrien’s full attention was immediately on the shop’s cat. Both he and Marinette petted the brown striped feline until it was nothing more than a purring furball.

As they ventured further into the shop in the search for Félix, who had disappeared during their cuddle session with the cat, they noticed that Shakespeare and Company was anything but a regular bookshop. Books were crammed into every possible space and after just a few rooms and up one set of stairs, Marinette had absolutely lost any sense of orientation. The hordes of tourists were not helping either. All the while, the cat followed them. Or better said, it followed Adrien, weaving around his legs as he walked but not causing him to trip even once.

When they were about to enter another room, Adrien suddenly stopped, which made her accidentally walk into his back. His explanation was a mischievous grin and a finger on his lips,
telling her to be quiet.

Then he started sneaking into the next room and was impossibly noiseless while doing so. His posture indicated that he was about to jump on something, which rather turned out to be a _someone_ because one second later there was a small crash and exclamation of “Really, Adrien!?”

Marinette rounded the corner to see Félix on the floor, Adrien victoriously lying on top of him and the cat rubbing against Félix’s face in an obvious sign of affection. She could not help but burst out laughing at the sight.

“Sure, _laugh_ at my misery.” The disdain in his voice just made the whole situation even more hilarious.

Similar _attacks_ on Félix happened throughout the day, with the shop cat constantly changing sides on a whim. It was funny how she stuck to the twins as if they were her favourite people in the world.

Whenever Félix sat down on one of the comfy chairs or sofas to read a book, either Adrien or Marinette would come out of nowhere and scare him. It was particularly easy to do so when he was immersed in a book, especially for Marinette who was not nearly as silent as Adrien was in her sneaky approaches. Still, just about a third of those attacks actually worked and after a while Félix seemed to get annoyed with the both of them.

This was when they decided to go on the quest to find the exit of the bookshop. And a quest it was, because the many similar rooms and never-ending rows of books did not help much to get a sense of direction. It took them more than half an hour to find the entrance again, but them stopping more than once to pet the very insistently present cat also contributed to that.

From time to time they caught other visitors throwing them strange looks and just a few moments later they would remember that they were wearing ridiculous-looking masquerade masks. They usually came to the conclusion at the same time every time it happened and one look at each other was enough to burst out laughing.

If anyone would have told her two months ago that she would sneak around in a labyrinth-like bookshop with Adrien Agreste, while both of them wore glittery masks and were being followed by a cat, she would have highly recommended to them to find a good psychiatrist. It was funny how fast things could change sometimes.

With falling into this pattern of constant visits and adventures, the days on which they did _not_ come to see her became even more lonely than they otherwise would have been. Marinette found herself growing restless, sketching the entire day and working on yet another new design project to pass the time. She went downstairs more than once and asked her parents if anyone had come by. No one had. It was plainly obvious what she was really asking though.

She ended up joining in her father’s baking experiments and made an experiment of her own, involving a recipe she had seen on Pinterest and some pointers from her parents on how to _fix_ said recipe. The resulting marzipan-strawberry cake tasted at least acceptable. She had only baked a small one to not waste too many ingredients and she put the rest of it into the fridge. If the twins would come back the next day, they could try some of it too.
In the following few days a new system was established. Said system involved two new phones Adrien and Félix had gotten themselves with the help of their mysterious family friend. They had not been able to give Marinette their number so far because their phones’ activities were regularly watched by Nathalie and their father—controlling much?

With said new, independent phones, they finally had a way to keep in contact with her without personally showing up and without letting anyone know about her existence. It was strange how she ended up being the one people were not allowed to know about, since barely anyone knew about her anyway. It gave the whole thing a certain thrill, making her almost feel like a secret spy.

Adrien having her number of course also meant that Marinette ended up suffering through an onslaught of cat memes once he departed that day.

When rain started to fall and did not want to stop for several days, the three of them spent the majority of their time in Marinette’s room, watching silly videos or anime on the internet. Félix would sometimes join them but more often than not, he would withdraw to the living room to read a book or even converse with her parents.

Marinette quickly found out that Adrien’s taste concerning anime and cartoons was all over the place and he practically liked everything. What was a little strange was his sense of humour though. He would laugh at scenes that were meant to be suspenseful or even horrifying and he sometimes even was confused or bored when obvious jokes were made. She supposed it was due to his sheltered life style or he just had a peculiar sense of humour by nature.

When the twins one day brought their Nintendo 3DSes with them, as well as all of their games, they ended up playing Animal Crossing New Leaf together for the entirety of the afternoon.

It was all fun and games at first, with Adrien gushing over Kiki that lived in Marinette’s village. Of course he would be the one to gush over the only black cat villager. After he was done going through what probably was every possible dialogue option with Kiki, he started wandering around town and continuing his prank war with Félix in a virtual form by burying traps everywhere. Unfortunately, Marinette fell into said traps about just as often as Félix did.

After about an hour of this nonsense, Félix and she eventually teamed up to get Adrien back for it. While he was in another villager’s home, the both of them buried as many traps as they could find in a circle around the house’s entrance, which left Adrien no choice but to fall into at least one the traps.

He was pouting for the next ten minutes and called Félix an unfair trickster and Marinette a traitor.

When the weather started getting better again, it got better quick. The temperature rose to record heights for August, which let Marinette get creative in her way to cool down.

Said creativeness translated to a merciless water gun battle that involved water bombs as well, outside in the park. They were mindful not to disturb other parkgoers with their fun, but a few kids were seemingly inspired by their antics, so they joined forces with them. Needless to say, it turned into a full-on water war shortly after.

Marinette surprised the twins with her good aim—years of precise sewing work did have its perks when it came to pinpointing details, or in this case, targets. Félix and Adrien, meanwhile, were
pretty evenly matched, with the only difference being Félix’s displeased quiet hisses whenever he was hit. Adrien found that hilarious for some reason, which motivated him even more to hit his brother.

When they returned to Marinette’s house shortly afterwards, they were fully soaked, which gave Marinette the idea to lie down on her balcony to dry. It had only taken five minutes and both boys had been fast asleep. Only the smell of pastries had managed to wake them up half an hour later.

It was a few days after that when they went to the zoo, together with Marinette’s parents. Her mother enthusiastically took about as many pictures of them as she did of the animals. Even though Marinette could not see Adrien’s eyes through the sunglasses, she would have bet money on them sparkling the entire time. He was very excited, even for his standards.

What was undoubtedly the highlight of the day was when they went to the big felines. The previously dozing snow leopard raised its head and then trotted over to the glass, putting its paws on it and looking at them. Adrien immediately mimicked the big feline and put his hands where its paws were on the other side of the glass with a huge grin. The leopard then started rubbing its head on the glass, as if it wanted to cuddle Adrien, which was adorable. Marinette filmed all of it of course.

It would have been a cute coincidence, if it would not have been for this very same thing repeating with all the other felines as well. It didn’t matter if it was Félix or Adrien who was closest to the glass, the big cats would stroll over and show as much as affection as possible through the barrier.

Marinette thought back to the bookshop where the cat had followed both of them and came to the conclusion that the twins both were some sort of cat magnet. It was bizarre but in a weird sense also quite cool actually.

She still would not want them to meet the lions or any other big felines without any barrier between them and also told Adrien as much when he proposed asking to one of the caretakers if they were allowed into the cages. Besides, it was probably illegal to let someone who was not part of the staff, and who was a famous model no less, into a cage with semi-wild predators.

In an earlier conversation it had come up that Marinette did not know how to skateboard. Not just that, but that she was an absolute disaster when it came to keeping her balance. Well, she was not famous for her clumsiness for nothing. Adrien, though, was either not really grasping the extent of her clumsiness or he was reckless since he seemed convinced that she could master the art of skateboarding without any pre-established coordination skills.

Marinette had expected to fall. A lot. And she did, so that much was going as predicted. What she had not expected was for Adrien to catch her before she hit the ground. Every. Single. Time.

She had no idea how he did it. One moment he was ten metres away from her, giving her instructions and in the next he was diving to catch her before she hit the concrete. It was so baffling that she at once point asked him if he knew how to teleport. He just gave her a mysterious grin as a reply.

That evening, when she had just gotten out of the shower, she found her phone on the floor. She at
first had no clue how it had gotten there until there was a crash and her pencil holder fell from the
desk as well, spilling pencils all over her floor. In place of said pencil holder now stood a very
smug looking black cat that looked over the edge of the desk to regard his work.

“Kitty!” she said, which made the feline jump and then snap its head in her direction. He gave a
happy meow when he saw her and jumped down from the desk to weave around her pyjama-clad
legs with a purr.

“I haven’t seen you in a month,” she said and bent down to pet the black cat. The purr just got
louder.

Suddenly there was a weird noise that was not the cat’s purr. Marinette needed a moment to place it
and then practically jumped to get her vibrating phone up from the ground. She breathed out a sigh
of relief to see that the screen was still intact. She accepted the call without even looking who it
was.

“Hello?”

The cat jumped up at her legs and gave a pitiful meow, obviously discontent to be ignored. To
appease him she sat down on the chaise longue and let him jump up on her lap to pet him.

“Marinette, this is an emergency!” Adrien’s voice came from the other end.

“What happened?” She was immediately worried. Had something bad happened? Had they been
found out and were not able to come anymore? Then again, Adrien had said emergency, but he had
sounded happily excited. It was probably best to just hear him out before jumping to more
conclusions. Even the cat headbutted her, which she took as a sign to calm down.

“Father and Nathalie are going on a business trip to Milan for the weekend and they will leave on
Thursday!”

She did not immediately get why this was supposed to be great news.

“And?”

“That means we can come with you on your vacation!”

Ah, yes. The vacation. Marinette had told them that her parents and she were going to visit a friend
of her Nonna who lived by the sea and would spend three days there. It was a small trip, but it was
vacation nonetheless. Adrien had first treated it like the end of the world—“Three whole days
without you Marinette! This is a catastrophe!”—but then quickly had changed to ‘plan mode’ by
searching for the best way to escape from his home for three entire days and come with them
instead. To be honest, neither of them had thought that a joint vacation would have been possible.

“You do know that we still have to ask my parents, right?”

“Yeah, but I bet they’ll be thrilled!”

“I don’t know. I mean, it would be great to have you two come along, but you can’t just invite
yourselves to a family vacation out of nowhere like that.”

“Yeah Adrien, stop being rude,” came Félix’s voice from the background. Apparently, Adrien had
her on speaker phone.

The cat gave the phone a swat with its paw, seeming displeased by its distracting presence.
“Don’t, kitty,” Marinette said and shifted the phone to her other ear while resuming to pet the cat with her other hand.

“What did you say?” Félix asked.

“Oh, I just have a stray cat visiting who demands my full attention right now.”

She could have sworn to have heard Félix mumble something along the lines of “of course he does” but was then quickly interrupted by Adrien’s voice again.

“Can you ask your parents pretty please?” At the tone, the image of his puppy eyes appeared in her head.

“You can ask them yourselves tomorrow.”

“See, that’s the thing. I have a photoshoot tomorrow and Félix has to come with me. We can’t miss out on too many of them or father will notice how often we’re absent. I don’t know if it would be too late to ask on Tuesday since you’re already going there on Thursday.”

Marinette sighed. “Alright, I’ll ask, but don’t get your hopes up.”

Turns out that her parents were thrilled, just as Adrien had predicted they would be. Marinette had to admit that taking people outside of her family with them on a family vacation was weird. Not unwelcome, just…unusual. Sure, they had done a lot of trips with the Lahiffes, but never a joint vacation. Wouldn’t it be too early for something like this? It felt like everything happened way too fast. After all, she barely knew the twins for two months at this point and now they would already partake in a sacred family tradition. She just hoped everything would go well.

Before said vacation would commence, however, there were still a few days to kill. On one of those days, Adrien and Félix managed to actually convince Nathalie to free their schedule completely. It was one of the very first days on which they visited Marinette on which they had not snuck out of the house. They decided to celebrate it by going outside, in disguises of course—how they had managed to officially leave the house without anyone noticing those outfits was a mystery to her.

That day, their goal was a mini golf course. It always baffled her how much the two of them had never actually done and playing mini golf was one of those things.

After explaining the rules to them, they quickly found a lot of fun in the game. Marinette, who had played many times before, was the best out of the three of them. Adrien just tried to hit the ball as hard as possible and regularly hit it out of bounds that way. He had a few lucky hits, but mostly he played like one would expect a beginner to play like.

Félix was a completely different story though. His method was precision and when said precision failed him, he started to get unusually worked up about it, blaming the unevenness of the course and the cheap balls. At one point he had even declared his club to be defective and had demanded Marinette to hand over hers so they would be more evenly matched. Needless to say, it made no difference.

Marinette, to no one’s surprise, ended up winning the round and Félix, to his great displeasure, lost it. He was furious and demanded a rematch, which Adrien only too gladly seconded.
There was not much difference to the next round, except that Adrien got less lucky hits. Marinette won again, but Félix was on the second place this time. He seemed content enough with that. Adrien, for his part, did not mind losing and found it more fun to draw cat doodles on the sheets of paper on which they marked down the scores.

As Marinette’s personal tradition went for mini golf, they went to eat ice cream afterwards. Adrien, thrilled by the options on the menu, ordered the biggest and most expensive sundae that was advertised with ‘who manages to eat all of it pays half the price’. He was more intrigued by the challenge than the prospect of paying less money.

To Marinette’s surprise, Adrien actually did manage to eat the entire giant sundae all by himself and he even had room in his stomach left for dinner afterwards. At least now she was for certain that whatever model diet he was on was thoroughly unnecessary. One simply was not a black hole for food without ever having eaten such amounts of food in one go before. How he managed to retain his model figure was a mystery to her.

Then again, it was probably genetic, since Félix developed a similar appetite when her father set down two batches of lasagne that evening. He had made two just to be sure they all had enough, but what he had not counted on was for Adrien and Félix to eat one whole and then still be hungry. Marinette just hoped they were not starved at home.

Thursday eventually dawned. Adrien and Marinette excitedly texted back and forth, informing each other on their state of packing. She had to repeatedly tell Adrien to pack less because his already giant suitcase was overflowing. One would think he would be gone for a month instead of for a weekend.

At least Félix seemed a little more reasonable with his luggage, which was a relief because she did not know how they would manage to get all of those suitcases into their car otherwise.

When the twins eventually stood in front of the bakery, both with a small suitcase each—apparently Félix had managed to convince Adrien to reconsider his packing methods—Marinette greeted both of them with a hug.

“It’s so great that you can come along!” she said excitedly while her parents appeared from behind the car to take the twins’ suitcases.

“We haven’t been on vacation for years!” Adrien admitted equally enthusiastic and trotted after her parents to help them.

“Really?” Her mother asked and Marinette could already tell this would be one of the most extravagant vacations ever.

The car ride itself was already an adventure all on its own since neither Adrien nor Félix seemed to have ever been on any sort of vacation or road trip by car before. Or at least not in the usual ‘we’re going on vacation’ setting that Marinette was used to.

They didn’t know about the games where one would look for funny-looking signs or count cars of a specific colour. When Marinette suggested the latter to them, they immediately jumped on the idea. Adrien won multiple times since there apparently were much more red cars than blue or green cars around.
Also the snacks that her mother handed them from the passenger seat were met with great enthusiasm.

After a while Marinette felt the sleep she had been deprived of that morning catch up with her so she decided to finally make use of the pillow she brought and take a nap. She was a little embarrassed when she woke up half an hour later and realised that she had opted for Adrien’s shoulder rather than the pillow in her sleep. Her apologies were just met with amused grins though, so she let it drop.

When they finally arrived in the late afternoon, all of them stretched their stiff limbs, while Adrien and Félix both managed to make it look graceful.

_Goddamn models…_

Her Nonna’s friend did not seem very thrilled to have two more guests, but Adrien quickly won her over by gushing about how good the food was.

After dinner, they were all pretty much ready to go to bed, but Adrien and Félix surprised her once again by having unnaturally much energy left. Adrien then produced a deck of Uno cards which he had hidden somewhere in his suitcase. This resulted in two very competitive hours of the three of them playing Uno. Félix won most of the games.

When Adrien got bored after losing three times in a row, he decided it would be fun to try and build a tower out of the cards. They managed to stack up two layers before it fell.

Even though Adrien had said that he had gone to the beach before and Marinette presumed that that was also the way for Félix, one would have never guessed it by the way the twins were worshipping the ocean. Once it was in sight, there was no stopping for them. They threw their beach bags at Marinette’s feet before excitedly dashing into the water. Hearing Félix squeal, very appalled, at the coldness of said water was one of the funniest things she had ever seen him do and she would keep it in mind for future reference.

Adrien, on the other hand, had probably been a sea creature in another life by the way he seemed determined to spend all day in the water. He was coaxed out of it by Marinette who had started building a sand castle out of lack for inspiration and Adrien watched the progress with great curiosity. It was no masterpiece, but it might just help her get out of her art block.

Of course she should have expected that Adrien would copy her, quickly starting to build a sand castle of his own. Félix, who had opted for a book as a way to spend his time, soon joined them, not wanting to be outdone by his brother. It all turned into a competition of who could build the best sand castle and if Marinette was anything, it was competitive.

They let her parents be the judges which resulted in Félix being declared the winner—_those traitors_!

Afterwards they decided to take a stroll at the beach. Not too far, but just to see what else it offered. Adrien and Marinette were collecting shells while Félix just walked beside them with a slow pace and his usual silence. He only came to life when Adrien suddenly let out a squeal of delight and held up a stone with a hole in it.

_Coming to life_ in that case meant to freak out as if Adrien had just picked up a poisonous jellyfish. He took the stone out of Adrien’s hand faster than Marinette could look and then hissed something
to his brother in a language she did not understand. Huh, she would have to ask them how many languages they did actually speak.

The next day was not spent at the beach but at a theme park that was nearby. Adrien and Félix, who both had never been to any kind of theme park before were very excited. As it turned out, they were neither scared of heights, nor of fast rollercoasters nor of haunted houses. They actually found the latter absolutely hilarious. Marinette had the urge to apologize to the poor workers once they left said haunted house, but didn’t bring up the courage to do so. Only the mirror labyrinth managed to teach the twins some humility, since neither of the two managed to tell what was a mirror or a glass wall and what was not. Constant curses were heard, especially from Félix who suddenly didn’t find any fun in the whole thing anymore.

Overall, they had an amazing time at the theme park, even managing to make the waits for the attractions entertaining by having Félix point out several people who were acting ridiculous and commenting on how rude it was for some to cut in line. Adrien would then try to start a friendly talk with them and tell them that they could not just do that, to which he often got snarky replies or even excuses of ‘it’s okay though’ which Adrien often fell for.

When they returned home that evening, they were all pretty tired from walking around all day, which made them decide to lie down on the lawn chairs on the terrace and just nap for a while.

When Marinette woke up again, it was already dark. The temperature had not fallen much though, so it was still comfortable outside. She looked to the side and saw Adrien intently looking up at the night sky. She followed his view and gasped.

Living in Paris, she often forgot how beautiful the night sky looked in other parts of the world. She could only ever see a few stars, rarely enough to make out a full constellation. Here though, with very little light pollution, the sky stretched out in front of her in its starry beauty. She could even faintly see the milky way, which was something she had never seen before.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Adrien said and Marinette just smiled.

“Yeah.”

“I wish we could see the stars like this back in Paris. It’s sad that it’s called the city of lights but the most beautiful lights are never seen there.”

“I have never seen so many stars before.”

At that, Adrien turned his head to her. “I thought you have been here before.”

“I have,” she confirmed, “but I guess I have never really looked at the night sky before. It’s not something I think about very often to be honest.”

“You should think about it more. It’s very fascinating,” Félix threw in from the other side of the terrace. He had, to her surprise, left his lawn chair and was now lying on the ground on a blanket with…a book. How he could make out any of the words in this darkness was a mystery to her.

“Did you know that there is a black hole in the centre of the milky way and we’re circling around it?” Adrien threw in enthusiastically and pointed up at the sky. “The part of the milky way you see there is from the side. It’s actually a huge swirl.”

“I didn’t know the black hole thing,” Marinette admitted sheepishly. She had never paid much
attention to space phenomena before. The most she knew were the names of the planets of the solar system.

“Do you know any constellations? I could show you some,” Adrien offered and by the way he said it, he seemed to have waited for an opportunity like this for a long time already. It would be downright cruel to deny him.

“I only know the great dipper,” Marinette said which lead to the two of them laying down on the blanket with Félix. The three of them stayed up half the night while Adrien pointed out different constellations.

She had seen him excited for new things before, seen him smile when he found something he liked or laugh at something he found funny. None of that was in any way comparable to the sheer joy he radiated as he explained the different constellations and their origins to her. From time to time he would even point out single stars or star clusters and tell her what they really were and how they were discovered.

It was then that she noticed that apart from minor things like video games or anime, she had never seen him be truly passionate about something. So far it had always just been titbits of random knowledge he had thrown in here and there, but it had never been anything he could have or would have talked about for hours on end.

She didn’t know when it happened, but she had stopped seeing him as Adrien Agreste, the famous model and started regarding him as Adrien, who was her friend. Seeing him being so ardent made him seem slightly more real, for a lack of a better word. Like he was not just an easily excited and friendly presence in her life, but also a person of his own with a life outside of seeing her. Of course she had known that he existed outside of his frequent visits to her house, but since he had never talked much about his home life, it had just always lacked something personal.

It was weird how the reality of that only registered with her then and there, when they were laying on a blanket at her Nonna’s friend’s beach house and looking at the stars. Not just that, but she felt truly comfortable. A different kind of comfortable than she felt with Nino, but it held the same safety and trust that came with friendships.

“Adrien?”

“Hmm?” He was sprawled out on her chaise longue, looking through some casual mandarin phrases her mother had written down for him. She had been ecstatic to have someone she could speak her native tongue with and was determined to teach the twins some of the more regular sentences instead of the formal speech they had learned so far.

Meanwhile, Marinette was sitting in front of a large pile of clothes that he had just casually handed to her in a sack that morning. It was the promised collection of his and Félix’s clothes that would have otherwise landed in the trash. Looking through it was highly inspiring, but since they were still clothes Adrien and Félix had both worn, it also seemed a little more personal than it should be.

“I really like this dress shirt and I think I could change the cut to make it fit me. Would that be weird? I mean, I would only wear it at home anyway…”

“Why would that be weird? It’ll probably look better on you than it ever looked on me anyway,” Adrien replied with a grin.
“I’ll doubt that Monsieur Model.”

“Why doubt, when believing in things makes the world so much more colourful?”

“Is that a reference to something?”

“No, just a thought.” The smile he threw her was not his usual grin. It was smaller, but not less warm. On the contrary even. His smile was secretive, as if he had just entrusted her with a great secret. A fond smile that spoke volumes. Until he turned away and focused on the notes again.

Only then did Marinette realise that she had only been familiar with Adrien’s philosophical way to word things from his notes. This was the first time she had ever heard him say something like that.

If what Nino had theorized held true, then that meant that, at least to a certain degree, Adrien trusted her enough to let her see such a personal side of him. It also meant that they were becoming better friends.

Hadn’t she dreaded a boring summer on the first day of summer break? She had never been happier to admit that she had been very wrong.

Chapter End Notes

In case any of you were confused as to how Adrien could be in Marinette's room as a cat and be on the phone at the same time, let me remind you that according to him, Félix and he often pretend to be each other without it ever being noticed. Imitating Adrien's voice should therefore not come very hard to Félix. And no, he did not approve of Adrien sneaking out as a cat to see Marinette, but Adrien just does what he wants. Seriously, he does. This whole scene was not planned but it snuck in there somehow. Guess he was very desperate for some cuddle time with Marinette. x3

I'm coming along great with all the chapters so far. I was able to merge 4 into 2, so I have not as many chapters to write as I previously thought, which is amazing! I think I won't have trouble to stick to the Tuesday and Sunday schedule for this month, though I won't promise anything for next month! Take this as a christmas present from me. ;D
Why Faeries Should Not Bake

Chapter Summary

The return of Nino!

Chapter Notes

Not gonna lie, this chapter is kind of a mess. I might be rushing too much and the quality suffers from it, which is shitty, I know. :'c
A huge thanks to Draxynnic for saving my ass and beta-reading this last minute. It would have been so much worse without you! ;A;

When the summer was about to come to an end, it also meant the return of Nino. Adrien had been curious about this friend of Marinette’s ever since he had first heard of him. Seeing him in person was definitely different than seeing him on a phone screen or in pictures. The part that stuck out to him the most was that Nino was particularly close to Marinette. Of course he had already known that, but in some way, it still irked him.

Nino’s return had been sudden and the first he had heard of it was when Marinette had sent him a text the previous day that Nino was back and they were hanging out. He had seethed over this message. His initial plan to befriend Marinette’s childhood friend seemed not as important as it once was as the cat in him yearned to show Nino just who Marinette belonged to.

The thing was just: She didn’t belong to him.

Félix never tired of reminding him of that simple fact over and over again. Especially when he had been about to text Marinette back, asking why she hadn’t mentioned that her friend would soon be returning.

His brother had also felt the need to plainly point out that the date of Nino’s arrival had, in fact, been mentioned before but that Adrien had just not been attentive enough to listen and remember it.

The fact that he had missed something so obvious annoyed him. What annoyed him even more though was seeing Nino and Marinette interact. There was a trust and companionship about them that he did not have with her. It was not unlike his relationship to Félix, but they were siblings, that was something different.

“Hey dudes, nice to finally meet you in person!” Nino said cheerfully as Adrien entered the living room of the Dupain-Chengs that morning. He was very early on purpose since he had wanted to be there before Nino would have a chance to show up. What he had not counted on was that Nino had spent the night at Marinette’s place.

Something that he correctly recognised as jealousy boiled inside him. Marinette had never asked him to stay over and have a sleepover!
“Nice to meet you too,” Adrien replied with a smile that was actually a snarl in disguise. He took Nino’s offered hand though his grip was a little stronger than was polite.

“Likewise,” Félix replied much more civilly though he did not shake Nino’s hand as Adrien had done. What he did instead was to give his brother a subtle glance that said ‘quit it, you idiot.’ It was probably for the best since at this point there would not be much left until Adrien would start growling.

“Why are you so early?” Marinette groaned from where she sat slumped over the kitchen table, head on the surface. Adrien’s concern spiked at the sight.

“Are you alright?” He asked, rushing over to her.

“No. You’re all disgusting morning people,” she grumbled and frowned at him.

“Yeah, don’t drag her out of bed before eight,” Nino supplied, which made Adrien throw a scowl his way. It was probably as much displeasure as he could show before it would border on impolite. The boy just laughed in return and held up his hands in surrender.

“I didn’t do anything, dude. Marinette set an alarm because of something involving the sunrise and had trouble falling back asleep afterwards.”

“You let me stay up until two, you traitor,” Marinette complained weakly, but there was a small lift of the corner of her mouth. She was just teasing. It was more frustrating than he would have thought possible that the teasing was not directed at him. Félix seemed to pick up on it and just threw him an unimpressed glare.

“Anyway,” Marinette continued and dragged herself into an upright position, “Maman and Papa are out of the house today, so we have the kitchen to ourselves. How about we bake something?”

“Oh man, yes please! Tom’s combination of gummy bears, chocolate and marzipan yesterday was definitely not the kind of baked goods I’ve missed for over a month!” Nino made a disgusted face, which made Adrien tilt his head. That sounded good actually.

“Do you have some of that left?” He asked Marinette who just cringed.

“Yes, but you do not want to try it, trust me.”

“Why did you keep it when it apparently tastes revolting?” Félix, who had comfortably settled down on the sofa, asked with the kind of tone that Adrien knew he used when he already knew the answer to a question he had asked.

“Because apparently it’s not officially horrible until you two have tried it as well.”

“Based on both of your reactions to the sheer mention of it, I will pass on any samples.”

“I’ll try it!” Adrien immediately declared which drew an eyeroll out of Marinette as well as a mutter of ‘of course he would.’

“Don’t blame me when you won’t like it,” she said and got up. “Are you coming too, Félix?”

“To see my brother suffer from eating an atrocious pastry? Do you even have to ask?”

And so, they went downstairs into the bakery’s kitchen, where another fridge stood. It was for preparing dough or something like that. Adrien had to admit that the tour of the kitchen already lay
a few weeks past and he did not remember every single detail.

“Last chance to back down,” Marinette said as she handed him a slice of what looked like a chocolate cake with molten gummy bears in it. What she had failed to mention earlier was that there were also nuts on the top, as well as cherries in the middle. He was not allergic to either and neither were those things were poisonous for his kind, but the combination seemed…not particularly tasty.

“No, I’ll suffer with you,” Adrien said as she handed him a pastry fork and he placed a generously big chunk of cake on it. Five seconds later he was filled with regret.

“Oh, by D- god, this is awful!” He gagged and was very thankful for Marinette’s foresight as she immediately handed him a glass of water.

“They told you so,” Félix rather unhelpfully remarked with an amused grin. It earned him a glare. *Smartass.*

“Alright, now how about we bake something that actually tastes good?” Nino asked and for once, Adrien had to agree with him. What he could really use was something like the strawberry-marzipan cake Marinette had once baked. She was probably as good as her parents when it came to baking.

“Just who does ‘we’ include in that?” Félix asked, seeming ready to bolt for the door.

“All four of us, no excuses,” Marinette said and just from the look in her eyes one would have never known that she had been slumped over a table from fatigue just five minutes ago. *That* look meant trouble.

Both Adrien and Félix had actively avoided the kitchen for the entire summer, excluding the tour they had gotten that one time. Excuses, some better than others, had always prevented any involvement, but it seemed like their luck had officially run out.

It was not out of a dislike for the craft, but simply their absolute inability to perform it. If an inexperienced human could make a *mess* of a kitchen—Marinette had told them many stories from when she was a kid and had caused all sorts of messes—then two *Cat Sidhe* would most likely get the kitchen completely *destroyed.*

Even Mélusine, who was about a hundred times older than they were, was unable to bake. If she couldn’t do it after centuries of trying and trying again, then there was no way in Tír na nÓg that Adrien and Félix would grasp it in the span of a day.

“I feel the need to remind you about what happened with the French Toast and will therefore repeat my statement from back then: This is a horrible idea.”

Félix was at least able to put it politely. All Adrien could think was ‘oh shit’ on constant repeat.

“Now don’t be dramatic, it’ll be fine,” Marinette said with a worrying lack of concern. “This is an easy recipe.”

“French Toast is even easier and I was able to mess *that* up. I would suggest to reconsider who you want involved in this…undertaking.”

“You’re never going to learn if you don’t try.”
“We’re not going to learn even if we do try,” Adrien heard himself mutter, but only Nino, who was standing right next to him, seemed to pick that up.

“Dude, you’ll be fine. Don’t stress yourself out about it.”

Oh, it was not his wellbeing that Adrien was worried about. It was rather Marinette’s opinion of him after he would make an absolute mess of their baking project and the entire kitchen. He regarded the ingredients that sat in front of him, innocent-looking and yet untouched. He felt sorry for all of them for their inevitable ruin.

“Do not expect this to turn out to be a masterpiece is all I’m saying,” Félix sniffed, seemingly resigning himself to his fate. Adrien cringed. That was putting it mildly.

“We don’t. But it’ll still taste good, I promise,” Marinette said confidently.

Adrien decided to not comment on that and concentrate on the recipe instead. He could at least try. Basically, it did look easy. Just a list of ingredients that had to be measured and put together in the right way. If it would have been anything else, a potion for example or even a soup, didn’t matter, then Adrien might have had a more optimistic view of the outcome. Baking though, was the exception, especially for the Unseelie.

He did not exactly know why it was like this, he just knew that it simply was how things were. Just as one did not think about why water was wet or why the sky was blue, Adrien did not think about why he could not bake. There were answers to these questions, but usually they did not matter much. The way of life was that Adrien and Félix would not ever successfully bake anything. End of story.

Even if they tried—and they really did try their very best—the universe disapproved. Bad coincidences, also known as a Cat Sidhe’s infamous bad luck, prevented them from doing a successful job. Small things that were enough to disrupt the work: A box of pepper that would have otherwise stayed in its place, fell over into the batter, ruining it; the carton of milk fell over; Félix flinched when the wind shut a door with a loud bang and let go of a whole batch of eggs; and more such unfortunate coincidences.

They did call them coincidences, because really, what else could they say? Marinette assured them that it was fine and, worse even, started blaming herself and her clumsiness for the whole mess later on.

Adrien felt immensely guilty. Not only were Félix and he unintentionally ruining the kitchen, but Marinette also felt bad for it.

After another half hour of unsuccessful tries to mix the batter, Adrien declared that he had to go to the bathroom. He then started pacing back and forth in the living room once he was upstairs in the hopes that it would calm him down.

His fault. It was all his fault.

He had seen this disaster from a mile away but had he tried to prevent it? No, he hadn’t! At least Félix had made an active effort to get out of the situation.

What could Adrien have done though? Just stand in the corner and refuse to do anything when asked? No, there was no possible way he could have reasonably explained that. It would have led to questions. Questions he would have not been able to answer.
In the end, it was probably best the way it was with him retreating halfway through, like a coward. He just hoped that Félix would find an equally believable excuse to escape the situation since they certainly should not make things worse for Marinette.

When Adrien heard someone coming up the stairs, he first thought it to be Félix. Only a few seconds later, he realised that those steps could not possibly be his brother’s though. They were too sloppy and loud for be even remotely close to Félix’s silent and graceful strides. They were too heavy to be Marinette’s either, which left only one option.

Adrien hastily adjusted his glamour that had slipped in his miniature emotional breakdown and had revealed his ears and tail. And not a second too late because at the very moment he looked completely human again, Nino appeared in the doorway of the living room.

*That was way too close for comfort!*

Adrien asked himself how he probably looked like to the boy: dishevelled hair from when he had run his hands through it in frustration and nervous energy practically radiating from him.

He could feel his tail moving slowly back and forth under his glamour, invisible to human eyes, as he tried to decipher the situation. Should he feel cornered or was this a welcome opportunity to finally fix the horrible mistakes he had made so far? If Félix was here, he would probably tell him that he had acted like a clingy, jealous cat, which was not a flattering first impression. Adrien was annoyed that he couldn’t deny such an accusation, whether it came from an imaginary Félix or not.

“Hey man, you alright?” Nino asked and looked genuinely concerned. Well, that at least answered Adrien’s question about how he looked like to him right now: pitiful.

“Yeah, just…stalling.”

*Why, in Danu’s name, did lying have to be an issue now!?* Adrien was not an excellent liar, but he could lie well enough for someone who did not have it in his nature to tell untruths. He had heard that honesty was a good foundation for friendship, but the last thing he needed now were more questions he could not answer!

“You really don’t like baking, huh?”

*Phew, that’s an easy one.*

“It’s not like I don’t like it, but I’m horrible at it! You saw what happened down there and Marinette is blaming herself for it and…and…”

It’s my fault.

He couldn’t really say the latter out loud though.

“Yeah, ‘Nette has the habit to blame herself whenever things go wrong.” Nino sighed.

“I don’t want her to feel bad for something that is not her fault at all.”

“Tell her that.”

“What?”

“Tell her exactly that. I’m sure she’ll appreciate it,” Nino said with a shrug. Adrien gave a small grin in return. Could it really be that easy?

He threw the stairs an anxious glance. If he would go downstairs now, there would be no way that
he could escape being roped into baking again.

“You don’t have to do it now. It’s enough when you tell her later. Just not too much later.”

Nino’s sudden reassurance surprised him. Adrien had acted nothing but ignorant toward him so far, so why was Nino suddenly making an effort to help him?

“I’m sorry.” The words were out before Adrien had even properly thought about them and he bit his lip as soon as he had spoken. Unfortunately, one of his fangs caught on his lip as well and immediately pierced it.

_Ouch._

“What for?” Nino asked but his eyes sparked with something vaguely familiar. Only a few seconds passed until Adrien realised what it was. The look was similar to one Félix would wear when he knew the answer to a question. It was different on Nino, but the core principle stayed the same. That meant he _had_ noticed Adrien’s weird behaviour after all.

_Smelt it._

“For being so…err….rude earlier. I just- I don’t know. It’s stupid.” He would _not_ admit that he was jealous. Only Félix needed to know that.

“Nah dude, I get it,” Nino said and ventured further into the living room until eventually sitting down on the sofa. He patted the spot beside him, clearly an invitation for Adrien to sit down. The blond hesitated only a moment before doing so.

“You do?” He asked, seriously doubting that Nino was familiar with a faerie’s possessive nature.

“Let’s just call it a good guess until I’m sure,” Nino went on with a smile. “You’re friends with Marinette and from what she told me, you spent all summer together. Then suddenly I show up and you feel like you need to take a backseat. Am I right so far?”

Adrien frowned at how accurate that was and nodded.

“It’s a third wheel situation and I’ve been there before. Back in third grade, Marinette became friends with Kim and that naturally led her to spend less time with me. It was not the end of the world, but I had to get used to the thought that I could not hang out with her _all_ the time anymore. It needed some adjusting on all parts, but it worked. But man, was I jealous back then. I’m not really proud of it, but I guess it’s a normal reaction.”

Adrien blinked. That might not exactly be what he was going through but it was probably as similar as it could get. Nino had not been exaggerating when he had said he understood him.

“That…does sound very familiar,” Adrien admitted with a slight wince.

“Don’t worry about it. We’ve all been there.”

A comfortable silence befell them and it was Adrien who eventually broke it.

“She told me a lot about you, you know?”

Nino snorted. “I’m not surprised. We go way back after all.”

A smile tugged at Adrien’s lips as he thought about his own childhood friends. The smile faded as soon as it appeared though. He could not call them childhood friends anymore, could he? Chloé
was potentially dangerous now that Marinette was in the picture and after what happened to Sabrina…

“It’s great that you could be friends for so long,” Adrien heard himself say. “I don’t really have anyone like that. I mean, I had, but…that’s different.”

“Yeah, ‘Nette said that you’re friends with Chloé?”

Nino knew Chloé too? Great. Just when he thought things couldn’t get more complicated.

“I don’t know if you can call that a friendship.” Especially after spending so much time with Marinette, Adrien was almost completely sure that the kind of friendship he has had with Chloé, was not…real. Well, it might be a friendship in faerie terms, but he did not like the Court’s ways of constant retaliations for mischiefs. It was sweet words and backstabbing all around, keeping him on his toes and making him wary of every word he said. He had once accidentally insulted an Aos Sí. It had earned him an annoying curse that made him sneeze whenever he was close to feathers, which luckily could be explained away as an allergy.

Chloé was no exception to such tricks. She manipulated those around her to get what she wanted. Adrien would lie when he said that he was not doing something similar when he did not get his way, but Chloé had made it a way of life. He had only realised how sad this way of life was after Sabrina ended up on the short end of it.

My fault.

He shook his head to rid it of the unpleasant thoughts.

“I don’t think Chloé can do friendship, even if she was held at gunpoint. She’s good at slavery though,” Nino rolled his eyes. Adrien winced again. This was frighteningly close to the truth and it managed to make him feel even more guilty.

“Marinette said you like music?” Adrien asked in a desperate attempt to change the topic. To his endless relief, Nino jumped on it.

“Yeah dude, it’s kinda my thing. Just like fashion is Mari’s thing.”

“So, do you write songs?”

Music was at least a familiar terrain. Adrien knew music. Scratch that, he lived music. Songs and dances were part of his very essence and even though the piano lessons were a mandatory annoyance, he still enjoyed playing whatever he wanted in his free time. That, or listening to songs and dancing to them. Quite often he would drag Félix into it too just for the fun of it.

“Nah, I’m garbage at composing, but I do remixes. I also started to practice DJing. My cousin gave me his equipment for Christmas last year. It’s old but still pretty neat. Do you wanna see?” At the last question, Nino pulled out his phone and opened his gallery before Adrien managed to give an eager nod. He opened a video that showed him behind a mixing table, producing music that was obviously still a work in progress. The camera suddenly shifted, to show the small grinning boy who was filming the whole thing jumping up and down in excitement. Nino snorted at that.

“That’s my little brother. He’s my biggest fan.”

“You have a brother?” Adrien said in awe. He had never met someone else his age who had siblings. Chloé and Sabrina were both only-children and Marinette was too.
“Yeah, that little stinker and a lot of cousins.”

Cousins. Adrien himself did not have aunts or uncles and therefore also no cousins. He only had his parents and his brother. Well, only his father and his brother now. Though, to be honest…

“I…only have Félix,” he admitted with a cringe.

“Dude, this is no competition!”

“I know, it’s just…you all have these big families and a bunch of friends and then there’s me, who doesn’t have any of that. I mean, I already knew I was different, but I think I’m just now realising by how much…”

The thoughts had snuck up on him without warning and he said the words out loud without really meaning to. He did not want to complain about his life. Yes, he was different, but that was a given. He was half a faerie, for Danu’s sake!

“Adrien.” He could feel his ears perk under the glamour. This was the first time Nino had addressed him by his name.

“I can’t say I know much about your home situation, but I know that at the very least you have Marinette as a friend. I’ll speak from experience when I say that once you have her as a friend, you won’t get rid of her so easily anymore. She’s there to stay. And you have me too now.”

Adrien gasped.

“Really?”

Had he actually managed to befriend Nino? Just like that?

“Sure! We can hang out too and have some bro time, you know?”

“You…really want to be my friend? Why?” He could not help the doubt. On the one hand there were all his crazy fans who wanted to be friends with him because of his social status. On the other hand, he could have accidentally charmed Nino to like him. As much as Adrien wanted to prevent it, things like that just happened sometimes when he was too emotional and did not pay attention. An easy way to figure out if either of those were the case was to ask for reasons behind the sudden bursts of affection.

“Well, Monsieur I-climb-out-of-windows-in-a-cat-jumpsuit—”

“Marinette told you about that?!” That had been on a day close to Lughnasadh when he had struggled with his glamour and wanted to make sure that no one would notice if he accidentally messed up. Marinette had very much questioned it, but had then just taken it in stride. He had not told her explicitly not to tell anyone, but he had still hoped she would have kept it to herself.

Nino snorted. “Obviously. Point is, I think you’re a cool dude. You also earned Nette’s seal of approval even though she started with hating your guts. Not everyone can manage that.”

Adrien gave a small smile, thinking about how far Marinette and him had come ever since that meeting at the Jardins du Trocadéro. Had it really been three months since then already? Wow. It both felt like it happened yesterday and years ago.

“Nino?”
“Yeah?”

“Do you like anime?”

“Who do you think got Marinette into it?” Nino laughed and Adrien grinned.

“Then listen to this. Félix doesn’t appreciate it.”

Adrien then proceeded to show Nino a video of him playing various anime soundtracks on his grand piano. He had shown it to Marinette too, who had been absolutely in awe. Nino was too, but he seemed much more interested in the practical side of things than Marinette had been.

“Dude, do you have magic hands or something? How can you even reach those keys at the same time?!”

Finally. He finally had someone who appreciated his effort for creating the perfect music.

The two of them proceeded to show each other various videos of either themselves performing music or searching some up on the internet of others doing so. Adrien meanwhile got the nagging feeling that he had forgotten something. It took only half an hour until he finally remembered what that something was.

“Oh shit!” He suddenly exclaimed halfway through a video and jumped up. “We left Marinette alone in the kitchen with Félix!”

“Is that…bad?” Nino asked and stood up as well.

“Let’s hope not.”

Nothing could have prepared Adrien for the surreality of the situation that awaited him downstairs.

Félix, who was adamantly not lifting a finger to help Marinette, stood in the corner of the kitchen with his arms crossed. Meanwhile, Marinette was working with the finished dough, rolling it out while several baking trays with still unbaked cookies sat beside her.

“—because obviously neither of us could fly,” Félix said with an eye roll just when Adrien and Nino entered the kitchen. “But since the pants Adrien wore were a size too big, the jumping caused them to—”

“Félix, don’t tell her that!” Adrien quickly interrupted, his face blushing crimson. Apparently, his brother and Marinette had not fought, like he previously had suspected, but had rather settled for telling each other stories. Or to be more precise, Félix had opted to tell embarrassing stories about Adrien, when the latest one was anything to go by.

“—slide down,” Félix finished as if he had not heard his brother. By the quick mischievous grin he sent him, he had very clearly heard though.

Just wait until we’re home Félix. You’ll pay for that.
Marinette laughed and Adrien had the sudden urge to run upstairs again and hide.

“Please tell me that is the only embarrassing story he told you,” Adrien whimpered pathetically.

“Well, I did not tell her about the flower incident if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Félix!”

“What flower incident?” Marinette asked with a snicker.

“Marinette,” he pleaded, “Please let me keep some dignity.”

“You lost all dignity when you bought a shop empty of all its cat-themed wares.”

Adrien pouted.

“Nino, we’re going back upstairs.”

Chapter End Notes

Just so you know, the flower incident Adrien is so embarrassed about involved catnip! :D

Next chapter is coming out on Sunday. I kinda wanna promise that, but to be honest, I have a very stressful week ahead of me and I don't know how much time I'll have for writing. We'll see.
The transition from summer to autumn was a gradual one as always, with the leaves slowly turning into various shades of yellow, orange and red and with the shops one by one offering more products accommodating the colder season. For Marinette, though, it was as if a traffic light had changed from red to green. One day she was glowering over her sketches—even going as far as waking up early to see the sunrise to get even a speck of inspiration—and the next she was a fountain of ideas. That day of productivity was, of course, September 1st, the generally understood beginning of autumn for artists. Well, at least to all the artists she knew personally, which were fairly few.

Unfortunately, it was also the last day of the summer holidays, with rentrée being the very next day. Fall break wouldn’t be for another month and a half and judging from her experiences of the past years, the teachers would surely cram the time before that full with tests, which would leave her with precious little time to work on her designs. Therefore, with the autumn vibe hitting right before time would be taken from her, she gave it all she had, designing no less than seven outfits before eventually having to call it quits.

It was late afternoon, almost evening, when there was a knock on the door. Marinette had been in the middle of an experiment involving three mugs of hot chocolate and various spices when an
unannounced, yet not fully unexpected guest entered the apartment.

“Good afternoon,” Félix mumbled, a plate with a slice of his favourite coffee cake in one hand while he closed the door behind him with the other.

“Hello Félix. Too busy downstairs?” Marinette asked with a knowing smile.

While she considered herself to be good friends with Adrien at this point, she did not seem to be quite there yet with Félix. His presence was a frequent one, but he mostly seemed like an observer rather than a partaker. It was like he was Adrien’s protector of sorts, looking out for him at all times. His silence-loving ways were a stark contrast to his twin’s boundless energy and enthusiasm, which made for a good balance.

The wish for some peace and quiet was what had surely driven Félix upstairs, no doubt after her parents had heavily suggested it to him.

“You could say that. But it was to be expected, since this is the first day you’re opening after a month of being closed.”

“And yet you have not been deprived of cake while we were closed. Quite lucky, aren’t you?”

Félix sat down at the kitchen counter and shrugged.

“I suppose,” he just said and pulled out a book from his bag. Marinette used the opportunity to return to the hot chocolate on the counter behind her, adding cinnamon to one mug, salt to another and then both into the third.

“What are you making there?” Félix asked.

“Hot chocolate. I want to try how it tastes with different things added. Do you want to try one? I was about to drink all three on my own, but it might be more fun to taste-test them together,” Marinette replied and immediately placed the hot chocolate with the salt in front of Félix. He, in return, eyed it sceptically.

“It goes well with the coffee cake, don’t worry,” she added, in case that had been his primary concern. One never quite knew with Félix.

“What did you put in this one?” he asked, still quite sceptical of the beverage in front of him.

“Just a little bit of salt.” She had to snort at his bewildered expression. “I know it sounds weird, but it makes it sweeter, trust me.”

He spent another few seconds looking back and forth between her and the mug, before grimacing and reluctantly taking a sip. His eyebrows rose in surprise.

“You know,” he said after setting the mug down again, “for a moment I thought you were trying to poison me, but this is actually quite good.”

Marinette grinned. “Good! That means I took the right amount after all. I wasn’t quite sure if I made it too salty or not.”

Félix threw her a betrayed look but she cut short any argument by taking a sip of her own mug, the one with cinnamon. She pursed her lips in thought.

“Hmm, it’s good, but it’s missing something.” Walking around the kitchen she looked at the spices
in the pantry and then shook her head. Something spicy was tempting for this experiment, but she felt like trying something sweet. Opening a drawer, she pulled out a small bag of vanilla sugar, tore it open and poured a little into the mug with the cinnamon. After stirring it a little she took another sip and her face lit up.

“Much better!” She said with a happy sigh and giving the mug an approving nod.

“What about the third mug?” Félix asked and Marinette noticed that he had emptied almost half of his mug while she had not been looking.

“Cinnamon and salt. Want to try it?” she asked and held the cat-themed mug—a surprise-present from Adrien—out to him. He took it without hesitation this time. Félix took a sip, pondered, then took another before placing the mug down next to his other one on the counter.

“The cinnamon is very strong, but it’s good. I’m not a big fan though,” he said and then turned back to his coffee cake.

“Fair enough. Do you want to finish the hot chocolate or should I make you a coffee?”

“Is both an option?”

“Sure, but don’t expect a Pumpkin Spice Latte. I can improvise much better with pastries than with beverages.”

When she turned around, she caught a rare smile on Félix’s face, even though it was only a small one.

“So, August is for experimental pastries and September is for experimental beverages?”

“Kind of? I’m just in an autumn mood and hot beverages are perfect for the aesthetic.”

“Hot beverages are always perfect,” Félix stubbornly countered.

“Let’s agree to disagree there,” Marinette chuckled while readying the coffee machine. A comfortable silence befell them as they both finished their mugs of hot chocolate with the sound of the coffee machine in the background.

“So, are you looking forward to autumn?” Marinette asked eventually after putting her mug into the dishwasher.

“Well, on the one hand it’s a pretty way for the year to end. On the other hand, everything around us is dying.”

“Now, that’s a morbid way to look at it. Also, there’s still December until the year ends.”

“With our calendar it is, but in the Celtic calendar, the 31st of October is the last day of the year. They celebrate Samhain on the 1st of November as their New Year then. The Celts found it appropriate that the year should end with everything dead, so that the new year would mark the rebirth of the world.”

“That sounds quite familiar actually,” Marinette said thoughtfully, wondering where she could have heard it before.

“Father once based a fall collection on it since mother was quite fond of Celtic things. That was four or five years ago I think. Maybe you heard it there when you were following fashion trends
back then already."

“Yeah, could be. I’ll definitely have to look it up later.”

Another comfortable silence befell them. In contrary to when Félix had first shown up in the bakery back in July, their silences did not hold any kind of tension anymore. He was just the quiet type and even if he judged her, he never did it with mean intent, which put Marinette at ease. To be around someone she could just be quiet with was a nice change.

When she was around her parents or Nino, there always seemed to be something to talk about and when she was with Adrien, he always desperately fidgeted after something to say, as if any sort of silence would offend her. She adored all of them of course, but it was also a little exhausting.

“Autumn is always addressed as comfortable and cosy, but I’ve never really witnessed it like that. The mansion is not the cosiest place in the world and there is only so much a cup of coffee and a good book can do,” Félix said while looking out the window.

Marinette raised her eyebrows. When it came to the twins she had learned by now that things she grew up with, that she considered as natural, were foreign concepts to them. So far, she had always done her best to give them a glimpse into that world of hers and when it came to autumn-cosiness she did not intend to draw a line either.

“You know you can come by whenever you like, right? I’m sure my parents will appreciate having someone to fuss over while I’m at school and you can just sit here in the living room and read a book. Of course I’d have to ask my parents first, but I’m sure they won’t mind. That is, if you prefer my home to yours. I don’t mean to imply that your home is not nice, it’s just–”

“Marinette,” Félix interrupted her and made a stop gesture with one hand. His face was yet again graced with a small smile. “I’d love to come by,” he said, making Marinette breathe a sigh of relief before her face brightened with a grin.

“Great! And you can bring Adrien too when he’s free. I’ll be at school for most of the day, but I always go home for lunch, so we can eat lunch together if you’re here.”

“As tempting as that sounds, we really should ask your parents before making further plans. They will both be busy in the bakery after all and leaving a stranger alone in their apartment is not a very wise idea.”

“You’re not a stranger,” Marinette threw in, a little bewildered.

“Still, it would be much more reasonable for me to come by when someone else is also here to watch me.”

“Okay, fine, then you can come when I have lunch break and afterwards you can ask my parents if it’s okay for you to stay. How does that sound?”

“Most acceptable,” Félix said and devoured the last bite of his piece of cake.

“What!”

Félix dropped his fork at the outburst and looked at Marinette as if she had lost her mind. It was Wednesday, one day after school had started and the noirette had looked forward to a relaxing
lunch break with Félix after having to put up with Chloé all morning—they were in the same class again.

The previous day, Félix had tried to politely leave just as Marinette had to go back to school, but Sabine had insisted on him staying, which ended with him still sitting on the couch in her living room when she had come back from school that afternoon. By the look Sabine had thrown Félix over lunch, Marinette suspected that she would repeat whatever she had done the previous day to make him stay and feel welcome. She would have chuckled about it, were it not for the latest revelation Félix had so casually dropped as if it did not require any further consideration.

“You mean to tell me,” Marinette started and Félix raised an eyebrow at the threatening undertone of her voice, “that Adrien’s and your birthday is in two weeks and I am just now hearing about it?!”

The blond picked his fork back up and continued eating lunch with a calmness that was beyond Marinette’s understanding.

“As I said, it is just our birthday. We never had anyone except our parents to celebrate it with, so it was always sort of a family thing. Well, there is Chloé, but she always forgets it, so we always got presents about a week or so later. I just never considered it particularly important,” Félix said and stuffed another bite into his mouth. Marinette just stared at him in disbelief and one look at her mother told her that Sabine was already planning how the birthday cake was going to look like.

“Okay, that is your opinion. What about Adrien?” Marinette asked, remembering how excited the other twin could get at the most common of things. If they really never had a birthday party before, then receiving one would probably make Adrien the happiest person in the world. It was of utmost importance to Marinette to see Adrien, and also Félix by extension, happy, so it was natural that she would prepare something for them, even if it would only be something small so their father would not notice.

“He will be over the moon if someone except me will even remember his birthday,” Félix muttered.

“Surely your father will remember it,” Sabine said, appalled by the thought that a parent would forget their own children’s birthday. Félix cringed slightly at that.

“I wouldn’t count on it. He’s very busy lately because fashion week is coming up and he even forgot Mid—” Félix coughed and then took another bite of the Chinese dish on his plate. He didn’t let Marinette or Sabine know what it was he had been about to say.

“So, you’re not having a birthday party?”

“Not as far as I’m aware.”

Marinette thought for a bit, while her mother asked Félix something in Chinese to which his reply was a shrug.

“Alright, don’t worry about your birthday. I’ll handle it,” Marinette eventually said to which Félix gave the faintest of smiles.

When Marinette got home on Friday, it was just her parents and her. Adrien and Félix both had a fitting and a photoshoot afterwards from which both of them had texted her throughout the day. Félix was especially annoyed to have been forced into the whole thing, but had told her he did it so
that Adrien wouldn’t have to suffer through it alone.

“Hello dear, how was school?” Sabine said as she prepared an order for a customer.

*Urgh, school.*

Chloé had been especially cruel to her that day and spilled juice on Marinette’s shirt. By the time she had been able to go home to change it at lunch, the damage had already been irreversible. It was a good thing that she did not wear her own designs to school, or otherwise she might have started crying.

“I survived,” Marinette muttered as she made her way to the stairs.

“Marinette, could you help with a delivery? It’s a last-minute thing and neither of us can leave right now,” her mother called after her just as she had reached the hallway.

Walking around might actually help her to get her mind off what had happened. It also wasn’t like she could just say no when her parents so desperately needed help.

“Sure. I’m just going to bring my bag upstairs real quick.”

One trip to her room and back later, she stood in the bakery’s kitchen and looked at the cake box that stood on one of the tables.

“It’s a birthday cake,” her father explained just as Marinette curiously opened the lid to see what it looked like. The many pink sugar roses, rainbows and a unicorn made out of icing told her all she needed to know about the recipient of the cake. She closed the lid again.

“This is the address.” Her father gave her a note with the address scribbled on it.

“I’m probably going around the city for a bit afterwards, but I’ll be home for dinner,” Marinette said as she pocketed the note and carefully lifted the cake from the table.

“Be careful, sweetie,” her mother called after her.

“Always!”

*A birthday cake, huh?* Marinette thought as she walked to the Metro station. It reminded her that there was yet another birthday coming up in a little more than two weeks and that she still didn’t have presents for either of the twins.

It was proving harder than she had thought to find gifts for two boys that already had everything anyone could wish for. Well, except for a reasonable schedule but she could not give them that. Since they could just easily buy whatever they wanted, it seemed easiest for her to just do something herself.

Clothes were out of the question though. They both were models after all and her designs were not nearly good enough for them to wear. Heck, she did not even dare to wear them herself. She had briefly thought about scarves, but what would they do with them? They probably had a closet full of scarves alone. Any articles of clothing were therefore a clear ‘no.’

What else would they like? Adrien really loved outer space and Félix liked…coffee? Neither of those were really things she could work with without spending money.

She threw ideas back and forth in her head while she sat in the Metro and was still doing so while
she walked to the address on the note.

Only when she had trouble to find the front door did she notice how familiar the area was. It was the same address Adrien and she had searched for when they had made a delivery together. It had already been two months since then. Wow.

This had the indisputable advantage that she found the address faster than she otherwise would have. The old lady who had ordered the cake gushed about the pretty design and thanked Marinette profusely. She even gave her one of those bonbons old ladies always seemed to have on them.

On her way back to the Metro station, Marinette thought back on when she had been in this area with Adrien. They had mostly talked when they had been on their way back to the bakery, but on the way to the old lady’s house, there had been something.

She knew she remembered it. At least him dragging her into an alley and motioning for her to be quiet was something that had been burned into her memory. It was the only shady thing she had ever witnessed Adrien doing—climbing out of windows did not count—and in her darker moments of doubt, she had used this one incident as evidence that he should not be trusted after all. That all lay two months back though and, in the meantime, she had gotten to know Adrien well enough to know that he had just looked out for her, no matter how his actions looked from an outside perspective.

What had happened afterwards though? They had not directly found the address. She knew that. There had been something else. Something he had convinced her to walk away from. Just what had it been? Why couldn’t she remember?

She was so deep in thought that she did not pay attention to where she was going and therefore promptly ran into someone.

“I’m sorry,” she immediately cried out and looked up at the woman in front of her in shame.

“It’s fine, child,” the tall blonde said in return and threw Marinette a friendly smile. She had been in the process of unlocking the door of a shop and was just putting away the keys.

Marinette blinked. This shop…it seemed oddly familiar.

Wait a second.

The shop! It had been a shop Adrien and she had halted in front of but it had been closed.

The sound of a wooden wind chime drew Marinette out of her epiphany and she watched as the woman disappeared into the very shop she and Adrien had stopped in front of two months ago. She quickly put a hand in the door to prevent it from falling shut.

“Excuse me, but are you open?” she asked, which made the woman pause and turn around to her.

“I am not, but if you want to take a look around, you are welcome to do so. I just have to get those upstairs real quick.” She held up two bags with groceries that Marinette was only now noticing.

“I can help you with that if you want,” she suddenly offered out of nowhere. Strange. She usually wasn’t this forward. Then again, helping her with her groceries was the least she could do after she had been allowed to roam the shop even though it was closed at the moment.

“That would be lovely,” the woman replied with twinkling eyes and handed Marinette one of her bags. It was filled with mushrooms, nuts and unusual fruit, from which Marinette only recognized
figs and dates.

They went to the back of the shop and up a set of stairs into the apartment above.

“Just put the bag on the counter, I’ll put everything away later,” she said while she sorted vegetables, cheese and meats into the fridge.

Marinette just awkwardly stood there.

What had compelled her to help a stranger with her groceries and follow her into her apartment? That just screamed stranger danger. She was usually smarter than this…

“So, you wanted to have a look around the shop?” The woman was suddenly in front of Marinette, startling her. When had she moved?

Stop being so distracted!

“Only when it’s not a bother. You probably want to rather enjoy your free time.”

“Oh, but I do enjoy it. Having guests over is part of that.” She ushered Marinette back down the stairs and into the shop.

“You know, it’s mostly only customers that come by and all of them just want business. Do not count on any of them for a friendly chat over some tea. It’s rather rare that I get to just sit down and talk a little.”

“Oh, uhm, I guess I can do that.”

“Fabulous! I’ll make us some tea and you have a look around. Do you like rose tea?”

“Yeah, rose tea is fine,” Marinette replied but the shopkeeper had already disappeared in the back, apparently making the tea.

When she started looking around, she couldn’t help but gasp. She had remembered the wind chimes from the front window and the many books and trinkets she had seen while rushing past earlier, but now that she could take in everything in detail, she was simply in awe.

It seemed to be…Wiccan? In any case, the shop had all sorts of mystic-looking things available. There was a bunch of rose quartz in one corner, a bundle of herbs Marinette did not recognize in some box without a sign and sticks of all varieties neatly arranged in a basket.

What really caught her attention though were the glass orbs that hung from a giant branch on the ceiling. There must be at least a hundred and each of them was unique in its colouring and design. Some were painted with swirls in different colours or even whole pictures, while others were clear but filled with herbs and sticks. Marinette watched in awe as the light caught in the glass orbs and reflected in all colours of the rainbow on the walls, floor and ceiling.

“Witch glasses.” The voice startled Marinette out of her observation, especially with how near it was. The woman had managed to sneak up on her again.

“They are pretty, aren’t they?”

Marinette could only nod.

“Most use them as a protection against evil spirits. Back in the early days they were called watch bottles because of that but they were not nearly as pretty as these ones are. They were also hung in
churches for a while, but not anymore and might have been the origin of Christmas ornaments. You can hang these in your home all year round though.”

“They protect against evil spirits?” Marinette asked without believing a word of it.

“Yes, they do. Well, at least against anything that is not human and wants to cause harm to any occupant of the room the witch glass hangs in. I recommend to hang one into every room, just to be safe.”

“How…practical.” Marinette shuffled awkwardly, having problems with keeping a straight face.

“Which one do you like best?”

“Oh…uhm…I’m sorry, but I don’t have any money on me right now.”

Marinette fully expected to be thrown out of the shop upon this admission. The woman, though, just laughed.

“Oh, that is completely alright, child. Money is overrated anyway if you ask me. I prefer trades, just like in old times.”

“I don’t have anything to trade either.”

“How about this then: You stay for a cup of tea and a nice little chat and for that I will give you one of the witch glasses.”

“That’s too generous!”

“It really is not. Trust me, I know the values of my wares well.”

Against her better judgement, Marinette heard herself say “alright” and sat down with the woman at a small table in the corner.

“So, I’m curious. What made you want to come into this shop?”

Marinette thought about that for a bit. Why had she wanted to enter it in the first place? Sure, there had been the initial curiosity of what was inside, especially after Adrien had dragged her away from it so quickly last time she’d seen it, but that was not all.

“I…am looking for inspiration for a birthday present. Well, two presents actually. I don’t want to buy anything, but I also don’t know what to make by myself.”

“Oh, so you’re an artist?”

“Not really. I mean, I design in my free time but I’m not very good yet.”

“Tsk tsk tsk, child. Everyone who creates art is an artist. It doesn’t matter how good they are. That is usually a question of taste and experience anyway.”

“I guess. But I’m still not good enough to design anything for them. They’re…used to high class things.”

The shop owner did not immediately reply but took a sip of her tea instead.

“You do plan on doing something hand-crafted that they don’t own yet, hmm?”
“Yes, that’s the plan. I just don’t know what I could make. I mean, they already have everything.”

“No one has everything. There definitely are things they lack and this is exactly what you can give them. Just ponder over it for a bit, it’s often simpler than you think.

“You said they are used to high class things, so I’m going to presume they are well-off and have everything money can buy. Well, whatever you make for them will definitely be something they won’t already have since it will be an original design.”

Marinette frowned. While that was true, it still did not solve her dilemma. She took the cup of tea in front of her and took a sip—tasty. When she placed it down again, she noticed the layer of knitted wool around it. She lifted the tea cup again to inspect it closer. The knitting pattern was a familiar one since she had used it once to make Christmas sweaters. It was all secured snugly around the cup with a big button.

“The cup cozies were something I got out of a trade. Pretty cute, aren’t they?” The woman asked.

“This would be a good gift.” Marinette did not know if Félix needed a cup cozy, but it would definitely be something he could use and that he probably did not have already. It was perfect!

“Well, I’m afraid I can’t give these to you.”

“Oh, that’s not what I meant!” Marinette quickly threw in. “I could make those myself. I just meant a cup cozy as a gift idea in general. I have a friend who likes to drink coffee, or hot beverages in general, so he could probably use one of these.”

“Ah, I see. In that case I can recommend you a nice little place that sells the best wool for very fair prices. It’s just two streets down from here, a shop called ‘well wishes.’ You cannot miss it.”

“I’ll definitely keep it in mind.”

“It’s worth it, trust me. Autumn is around the corner now and there’s nothing more comfortable than sitting in front of a window and watching the rain fall while working on your latest knitting project.”

“Oh, definitely! It’s either knitting, drawing or reading a good book when I don’t have homework to do.”

“Yes, reading is definitely a hobby of mine as well. I must admit that I’m more of a literati than an artist though.”

She laughed and pointed to the bookcases they sat in front of.

“Now tell me about these friends of yours who you need to get presents for. Perhaps we can brainstorm some ideas.”

Marinette bit her lip. She couldn’t tell this stranger that she knew Adrien and Félix Agreste personally. Then again, she didn’t have to. There were many people who were well-off and it would probably not raise too many eyebrows that she was friends with two of them. As long as she did not mention their names or that they were models, absolutely no one would guess that she was associated with the Agreste family.

“Well, uh, one of them is very quiet and he loves to read books and drink coffee. The other is very enthusiastic and easily excited about all sorts of things. He loves sweets, cats, outer space, watching anime and…a lot of things actually.”
It was ridiculous that out of the two of them it was Adrien’s present that caused her trouble. She pulled her lucky charm out of her pocket under the table and looked at it for a bit in hopes that it would give her some sort of inspiration.

Adrien had made this charm for her. In all his excitement of sharing good luck with everyone, he had forgotten to make a charm for himself. This is why, when he had gifted this charm to her, she had given him hers. He always carried it around with him now and pulled it out on any given occasion, gushing about it. She kept hers more secret and often chuckled at the ironic leaf-shaped bead in the middle.

“Hmm, when he likes sweets then a cake could work. Are you good at baking?” The woman’s voice brought her out of her thoughts again and she quickly let the lucky charm disappear back into her pocket.

“Yes, my parents own a bakery. I was actually on my way back from a delivery.”

“Really now? That’s wonderful! Which bakery is it? I really would love to come by sometime.”

“It’s the ‘Tom & Sabine Boulangerie Patisserie’ near Place des Vosges.”

“I know that place! You make the best pastries in all of Paris!”

“Thank you!” Marinette beamed with pride. She always loved it when people complimented her parents’ work.

“Oh, this is a very lucky coincidence,” the woman said and clapped into her hands like an excited little girl. For some reason, it did not look as weird as it should have.

“I have an idea! What if I order something twice a week and you deliver it to me? We can then enjoy the pastries together and you can even bring your knitting supplies and get to work on this cup cozy of yours. I could give you some pointers and who knows, maybe you’ll even get an idea for this other present until then. What do you say?”

It did sound tempting.

“That sounds great, but I have school all week and I don’t know how free I’ll be on the weekends.”

It would be unforgivable if she’d neglect her school work just to go halfway across Paris and drink tea with a stranger while knitting birthday presents for the twins.

“Then we’ll do it like this: I’ll order something every day and if you can’t deliver it, you can just give it to those friends of yours or your classmates instead. Deal?”

“But then you’d have to pay even for the pastries that don’t get delivered to you.”

“Why don’t you let me worry about that?” The woman replied with an amused grin and took another sip of her tea.

“Oh dear, I just remembered that I have not even introduced myself yet, have I? How rude of me,” she purred and then eagerly shook Marinette’s hand.

“You can call me Mel.” She sent a broad grin.

“Marinette,” she replied without a beat and returned a polite smile.

Mel’s grin creped wider.
“That is a very pretty name, my child.”

Chapter End Notes

I forgot how much fun it is to write cliffhangers. I'm a comic artist who is known for her cliffhangers, so why the hell did I not transfer this to this fanfiction yet? Probably because it was mainly fluff so far :p

I promise more cliffhangers in the future as far as I can arrange them! :D
A Birthday Surprise

Chapter Summary

It's finally Adrien's and Félix's birthday!

Chapter Notes

This took MUCH LONGER than I would have liked!
I hope all of you had a great Christmas and will transition smoothly into the new year tomorrow! ;D
This is definitely the last chapter of this year, but since it's a party it's still quite fitting.
My original plan was to already be at the New Year's chapter right now, but life did not let me. :'c We will get there eventually!
Happy New Year everyone!

“They look so uncomfortable!” Adrien snorted at the photos in Marinette’s English textbook. “I don’t think any of them are models. That smile is creepy and he isn’t even looking at the camera!”

“Adrien, stop browsing my textbook to nitpick on photos while I still have to do homework with it.”

Adrien looked up from the photo story he had regarded critically and tilted his head at a clearly not amused Marinette. The two of them were sitting at her desk with Nino and Félix also present elsewhere in the room.

“But the task is so simple! You just have to translate the sentences and fill in the blanks!”

“I still need the page the task is on for that.”

Well…that was true.

“It’s taking you so long though.”

“Maybe it wouldn’t take me as long if you would stop flipping to other pages while I work on it.”

“Adrien, if you’re not going to help her then leave her alone. In contrast to us she actually gets in trouble for not doing her homework,” Félix interjected.

“We’re getting in trouble too!” Adrien argued while flipping back to the correct page in the textbook.

“Deprivation of dessert is not noteworthy as a punishment.”

“It is too!”
“You’re getting no dessert for not doing your homework, seriously?” Nino snickered. He was laying on the floor of Marinette’s room to do his homework, because Adrien had stubbornly claimed the second chair to sit next to Marinette and help her. Félix, who had been at the Dupain-Chengs’ house the entire morning already, had opted for the chaise longue instead.

“Yes, life is hard for us.” Adrien sighed dramatically and slumped back in the chair. From the corner of his eye, he could see Marinette rolling her eyes and shaking her head in what he recognized as amusement.

Nino, who did not seem to be as serious about finishing his homework as fast as possible as Marinette was, gave a low chuckle at that.

“Dudes, you’re fourteen! You should be able to decide for yourselves if you have dessert or not.”

“We’re thirteen,” Félix replied without looking up from the book he was reading.

“Almost fourteen!” Adrien threw in immediately. Both Marinette and Nino were fourteen already and it was a little embarrassing to be younger, even by a few months.

“Just three more days,” Nino waved off. “You’re already fourteen in my eyes if that makes you feel better.”

Adrien beamed.

“They’re not officially fourteen before Sunday.”

“Marinette,” he whined.

“I stand by my word. Now be quiet! I really want to finish this, so you or Nino can help me with my physics homework afterwards.”

Adrien managed to be quiet for about three minutes, but since he was the only one in the room with nothing to do, he quickly grew bored. He started playing with one of Marinette’s pencils, letting it roll from one of his hands to the other and then trying to balance it on his nose. He then took another pencil and put it on his nose too. That continued until he was balancing a total of five pencils. The whole construction fell apart when he tried to add a sixth. Marinette sighed.

“What were you even trying to do?”

“Sorry, I’m just bored,” Adrien admitted sheepishly. He had never been good at sitting still when he had nothing to do. With modelling he had instructions to follow, to keep him occupied, but in situations like his current predicament he easily grew skittish. His cat side told him to just lay down somewhere comfortable and to take a nap, but he did not dare to. It would be a disaster if his glamour would slip while he was inattentive.

“You can go and water the flowers on my balcony if you want to. Please don’t drown the roses again though.”

“That was one time!”

“Which was one time too much.” She would never let that go apparently.

“I solemnly swear that I will not drown any of your plants,” Adrien said with a small grin.

A distraction was a distraction, so he got up, filled the watering can at the tap and climbed up the
loft and beyond to the balcony. This was not the first time he did this by far, which was probably
why Marinette allowed it at all. Her flowers were sacred to her and being allowed to handle them
meant a certain amount of trust. He had gained said trust only after weeks upon weeks of watching
her water her precious plants and being explicitly taught how to do it after eventually asking if he
could try it too.

What Marinette did not know was why he had a particular liking to some of her plants. If things
went as smoothly as they did so far, then she would never find it out.

Adrien gave the roses a sniff and sighed blissfully. For plants that grew in the polluted air of Paris,
they still managed to smell as sweet as roses should. Adrien was especially fond of them since they
grounded him. Samhain might be more than a month away, but the pull of Faerie was a constant
companion even outside of one of the critical days. It just was that much worse on them. To feel
more real was the best feeling in the world to him, even though Marinette’s and also Nino’s
company contributed to that much more than any plants ever could.

His eyes then fell on the pink primroses Marinette had introduced to him as a new addition to her
balcony garden. She had bought them in spring and was very proud that they had survived
throughout the summer heat. Adrien was glad about it too. Letting primroses under your care die
was an offence to the fair folk. Seeing how some took every possible opportunity to bring
misfortune to humans, such a small thing could have devastating consequences. He always kept an
eye on the flowers just in case.

Adrien was about to head back down into the room, but the silence indicated that Marinette and
Nino were still busy with their respective homework. Changing his mind, he let himself fall on the
lounge chair and enjoyed the sunny weather instead.

His fae side protested about him being too close to Marinette’s rosemary plant, but he could just
grin. It was a gift he had given her himself for seemingly no particular reason. There was a reason
of course: The plant allowed him to worry a little less about his friend. After all, rosemary
prevented the fair folk from stealing away humans in their sleep. It was one of the few faerie-
repelling plants Adrien could be around without much worry, as long as he did not eat it. Stealing
Marinette away at night while she was sleeping was the last thing he planned to do after all. The
thought alone seemed downright creepy.

As he lay on the lounge chair and watched the clouds slowly move in the sky, he thought about the
previous few weeks in which things had changed. School had started again, so it was natural for
their days to change and for them to see each other less often. Adrien had known that it would
happen…but it still had happened too soon.

If he counted Midsummer, then he knew Marinette for almost three months already. That did not
seem like a long time but it felt like an eternity. He could barely remember how his life had been
like without her being just a phone call or a quick trip down the block away. It felt like a miracle to
have met her, which was ironic since Cat Sidhe like him should be unlucky.

Still, things were different now. He could not call her while she was in school and even if he texted
her, she could only reply every so often. Adrien had also started to text Nino, which worked better
since he sat in the back row of the class…which apparently made a difference somehow? He still
was not in the same class as Marinette, so he could not tell him how she was doing.

Lunch breaks were a ray of hope on school days because it meant that Marinette and Nino were out
of school and he could meet them at her house. At the times he could not do that, he usually called
or texted them from whichever photoshoot, fitting or even class he was stuck at for that moment. It
was not as much as before but it was something.
But then there were the times where Marinette should be free but wasn’t. When she had homework like at this moment or when she was on a necessary delivery. He understood how both of these things were important, but his selfish side still wanted to have her all to himself. He wanted to go outside and have adventures like they had done in summer, but that was barely possible anymore.

Félix kept telling him to stop worrying about it and get used to this new situation. He was right of course, but that did not mean that Adrien liked that things changed. After all, change was usually some sort of catastrophe for him.

Sabrina getting enslaved, his mother disappearing, his father growing downright hostile towards faeries and to Félix and him by extension. No, change certainly wasn’t a good thing for Adrien, so it was no wonder he was nervous about this one. The one good change that had happened in the last few years had been to meet Marinette. He couldn’t lose her too…

Adrien scowled at the physics task in front of him. Helping Marinette with her homework the previous day had been easy and even fun to do, but his physics tutor delivered the lesson in such monotony and with so much special attention to fine details in writing laboratory reports that everything was just plain boring to him. And physics was his favourite subject, so this said something!

Félix looked equally bored, though Adrien doubted that the physics tutor noticed it at all. He was only there to be paid and whatever work the twins did not manage to do would be on them and not him. It was an unfair system but one Adrien could not change anything about.

His father and Nathalie had left the house for the day, preparing things for the upcoming fashion week. To make sure that Adrien and Félix would not leave the house, their entire day had been packed to the brim with classes. The temptation to fake going to the bathroom and escaping instead was huge, but Adrien knew the punishment for such an action well. He did not want to ever wear that smelted bell collar again if he could help it. So, sitting through all of their classes and studying it was.

Marinette’s text that they couldn’t meet up the next day since she was doing something with Nino which she did not want to tell him about, did not help either. If anything, it made his mood even worse. Félix was smart enough not to say anything about it.

When Adrien let himself fall in bed that evening, he was ready for death. He texted with Marinette until she had to go to bed, which was at least a small comfort.

The next day did not go much better. They did not have as many classes, but they were still told to stay in the house. Adrien felt like a prisoner. He caught himself pacing the room more than once which Félix always commented with an impatient sigh. And even though they did not have school, Marinette and Nino texted very rarely, which they explained by saying they were working in the bakery.

Well, at least that explained why Félix and he had not been invited to join them. The last time they had tried to help with baking was more than enough to prove that their presence was more a hindrance than a help.

With the knowledge that the next day would be their first birthday without their mother, Adrien
eventually lay down in bed and fell asleep.

He was awoken by a strange feeling. It felt like a fae had entered the house but that was impossible, unless…

*Mother!*

Adrien jumped out of bed and accidentally dragged Félix out of it with him. His brother hissed at him in turn but he did not care. In his pyjamas he ran through the halls towards the entrance where he felt the feeling from. He stopped when he heard two voices arguing in the front hall. Neither of them was his mother though.

*Why did I get my hopes up in the first place? I know she won’t come back…*

He was about to go back to his room, dejected, but his curiosity eventually got the better of him. After all, he recognized both voices.

“You’re not welcome here!” He heard his father bark and Adrien cringed. It was unwise to be rude to the fair folk.

“Neither are the kittens apparently, which is precisely why I am here.”

Adrien peeked around the corner to see what he had already suspected. Mélusine stood in the middle of the foyer and looked up to his father who stood at the top of the stairs, unmoving like a statue with a frown on his face. She seemed way more relaxed than was appropriate for the occasion.

“And what makes you think I will allow someone like you to see them?”

“Emilie,” Mélusine simply said. At the sharp intake of breath, Adrien could see that she had hit a nerve. Félix came up silently behind him to watch the spectacle too. He seemed oddly amused by it.

“What about my wife?”

“She told me that if anything happened to the twins, then I should take care of them if she was unable to.”

“No harm has come to them. They are safe in this house.”

Adrien and Félix both shrunk back as Mélusine’s relaxed expression changed to something horrifying. They had never seen her angry before and now they knew that they would never want to get on her bad side. Ever.

“This is a cruel joke, even for a human. Bells and iron? Let alone forbidding them to shift and *letting Adrien out on Midsummer!*”

“I do not see how that counts as—”

“Don’t you *dare* deny it! Then again, you seem to be even more harebrained than you have every right to be, making me lose my temper like this. Invoking the ire of an old fae such as myself will
It was then that Mélusine straightened her posture and changed her furious snarl to a pleasant smile. Both twins jumped when she turned her attention to them.

“Good morning kittens!” She then proceeded to rush up the stairs with a speed and elegance that no human would ever master but that still fell short of that of a true fae. The next thing the twins knew, they were enveloped in a tight hug.

“Happy birthday you two!”

Adrien couldn’t help but grin. “You remembered!”

“Are you implying that I would forget something important like this?” She sounded offended, but still wore a grin.

“What was that about taking us away?” Félix meanwhile asked, which made Mélusine end the hug and roll her eyes.

“I’m not taking you away, don’t worry. Even though your father seems to think that I will. I sadly have to go soon since there’s someone in Prague I need to meet. But I still made time to see you.”

“It’s so nice that you thought of us!” Adrien hugged her again.

“Of course, kitten.”

An unamused snort from Félix drew Adrien out of his bliss again. He followed the direction his brother was looking in and saw that the top of the stairs was empty. His father had disappeared in the short time Mélusine had rushed up the stairs and hugged them.

*He has not even wished us a happy birthday…*

“Now come along, I don’t want your grump of a father to see what I give you so he can’t take it away,” Mélusine said and without further ado took each twin by the hand and pulled them back to their room.

How did she know which one was theirs? As far as Adrien knew, she had never been in their house. To see her in it was actually rather strange. The cold marble floors and white walls did not fit to her at all. He had only ever seen her surrounded by faerie trinkets or outside in nature. Her being out in daylight Paris and in their house of all places seemed as odd as the sun shining at midnight.

“You brought us gifts?” Félix asked as they closed the door behind them. He seemed excited about the prospect. Not without reason, since the gifts they had gotten so far had only ever been human gifts. While they had liked them—new video games and books—they still had only ever satisfied one half of them.

“Of course! Now, your mother did not want that you dabble in magic too much on your own, but you’re fourteen now and that’s old enough in my opinion. Besides, how are you going to fend for yourselves without practice?”

Adrien grew more excited too. Would they finally learn real magic? Sure, they had stolen some of their mother’s books after she disappeared but the spells in them were mostly quite advanced and therefore too dangerous to try. Others were just guides for herbs or other things that helped with magic or that hurt fae.
Mélusine then ceremoniously handed them a tome that...did not really deserve the name. It looked more like a regular book and it was new too. Adrien tilted his head in confusion.

“I wrote it myself! In it are some spells that will probably help you and some lessons of when not to use magic. Most spell books are made for fae, but there’s barely anything for halflings. I’ve lived long enough to have learned some tricks though, so this will come in handy.” She gave it to Félix with a wink, who immediately started flipping through the handwritten pages. Adrien looked at it over his shoulder, seeing headings like “Enchantments”, “How to not charm a human” or “How to stay safe on the important days” and sometimes even hand-drawn pictures of herbs or trinkets.

“That’s amazing,” Félix said in awe and visibly restrained himself from saying ‘thank you’. Thanking a fair one for a gift was bad manners after all.

“And that’s not all,” Mélusine said as she took a small box out of her pocket. She set it on the floor and then mumbled something in Irish. Adrien only picked up ‘grow’ and ‘real’—he really needed to practice his Irish again. It obviously was a spell because the box started growing until it was half as big as the twins. It was not wrapped, but Adrien did not mind. Instead he started jumping up and down excitedly.

“Oh my god!” He exclaimed after confirming that it really was what he thought it was.

“I thought your father wouldn’t allow you to get one, so I got you one instead.”

Even Félix wore a grin as he regarded the box which contained what was probably the greatest cat adventure playground of all time.

“It gets installed partly on the ceiling,” Mélusine said and looked up. “Which might be a little hard here, but we’ll surely be able to think of something. I can stay a little and help you set it up.”

“Yes, please! I always wanted something like this!” Adrien said and was sure that he would have cried tears of joy if he could—Cat Sidhe were not able to cry though.

They spent the following two hours wrestling with the instructions and how to set it up. Mélusine’s experience with building all sorts of stuff saved them from almost destroying it altogether. In the end it was set up in the corner on their second level at the windows, so that they could lounge on it and look outside. Of all of the parts, the ceiling paths were unsurprisingly the hardest to install, but they eventually managed it. Was it cheating to use some magic?

When Mélusine had to leave, Adrien almost begged her to take him with her. It was only nine in the morning and the day was far from over. Sure, Félix and he could enjoy the new construction in their room and the amazing box it had come in, but that would only keep them entertained for so long. Only the thought that they could escape later to go to Marinette’s kept him from following Mélusine outside.

After she left, the suffocating silence of the mansion returned and Adrien could not help letting out a sigh. For the hundred thousandth time since Midsummer, did he ask himself why his house couldn’t feel warm and homely.

“Do you think mother would have gifted us something like this too?”

“Maybe,” Félix just replied with a shrug. One look at him was enough to tell that he wanted to get away too.

They then wordlessly returned to their room. While Félix climbed their new cat playground,
Adrien settled down in the box—he fit in perfectly! He started texting Marinette, who, to his surprise, was awake already and texted him back an excited ‘HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!!’ with a lot of party and cake emojis. A smile tugged at his lips. Mélusine was not the only one to remember their birthday.

The box toppled over and Adrien scrambled out of it and in the direction of their walk-in closet one minute later.

“Fé!” Adrien yelled excitedly, startling his brother in the process and almost making him fall off the top level of the cat playground.

“Marinette invited us over!”

“Finally. I was asking myself when she’d say something,” his brother just said. Though he did not seem surprised, he could clearly see that he was happy about the invitation anyway.

“You knew!?” Adrien peeked out of their walk-in closet to look at his brother in disbelief.

“I highly suspected. We’re not all as oblivious as you are.”

“I’m not oblivious.”

That drew a snicker out of Félix. *Rude!*

After Félix fixed the apparent fashion nightmare that Adrien had deemed suitable as his ‘birthday outfit’ and getting dressed himself, the two of them snuck out of their bathroom window and climbed over the mansion wall. They knew better than to even *try* to go through the front door, much less be *permitted* to do so.

“She remembered our birthday!” Adrien said for what must be the hundredth time by the way Félix rolled his eyes at it.

“Are you really surprised?” His brother asked as they walked around the corner into Rue Gotlib.

“No, but it’s amazing anyways! Mélusine came to give us presents and now Marinette remembered and even invited us over! This is the best birthday ever!”

“Don’t you dare jinx it!”

“Hey dudes!” They heard from behind them and Adrien whirled around to grin at Nino. “Happy birthday!” He said as he caught up to them and wrapped both twins in a friendly hug. Adrien noticed how his brother only mildly protested this time around.

“Thank you, Nino!” It felt good to finally be able to thank someone without breaking etiquette.

“What are you doing here?”

“Nette called me and said I should come over. The more the merrier, right?” Nino said with a grin.

“Right!” Adrien enthusiastically agreed and suddenly had to concentrate very hard to keep his glamour in place.
“Did she plan this?” He asked, hoping Félix was wrong and he was not as oblivious as his brother claimed after all. Nino snorted.

“Obviously.”

Oh. He *was* absolutely oblivious after all.

“Let’s go! She’s probably walking a hole into the floor while waiting.” Nino then continued and proceeded to push both twins into the direction of the bakery.

When the three of them arrived there, they saw a sign at the door that declared it to be closed for the entire day. Therefore, they went around the building and over to the actual door that led to the apartment above.

They had barely rung the doorbell as the door already flew open, revealing a very excited-looking Marinette.

“Happy Birthday you two!” She squealed as she jumped forward to hug both Adrien and Félix, showing much less restraint than Nino had and squeezing them tightly—she was much stronger than she looked!

Adrien recovered from Marinette’s surprise attack as she pulled him and Félix up the stairs, smiling all the way.

“What did you do?” Félix asked meanwhile out of caution. He was not fond of surprises, but since he apparently had known about it for a while, it could not come as much of a surprise to him anyway.

“You’ll see,” Marinette just replied with a mysterious grin. This made Adrien even more excited. Did she prepare a birthday party?! If so, it would be his first one!

As they climbed the final set of stairs, Adrien started wiggling excitedly. He knew he shouldn’t get too hyped about what was or wasn’t behind the door. How often had he gotten his hopes up before, only to let them be crushed? He didn’t want to experience this on his birthday. Then again, he couldn’t believe that Marinette had it in her to be cruel enough to set him up for a joke. That kind of thing just *didn’t happen* with her.

His thoughts were interrupted when the door opened and he was wished a happy birthday for the fourth time that day—that must be a record! This time it was Tom and Sabine, who seemed equally as enthusiastic about the whole thing as Marinette was. It was clear where she got it from.

When Adrien managed to look past her parents, he couldn’t help but gasp. The whole living room had been decorated with streamers and balloons. Even a garland that spelt out ‘*joyeux anniversaire*’ hung from the ceiling directly above the kitchen where two cakes with yet unlit candles on them stood.

Adrien squealed and excitedly jumped up and down. He didn’t care that he looked like a little kid at that moment since this was clearly a birthday party. A birthday party thrown for Félix and him. Their *very first* real birthday party! He looked at his brother to catch his reaction, which was different but not the least bit less happy. Félix held a hand to his mouth to hide his grin but his eyes said it all.

“Thank you!” Adrien said and proceeded to hug Tom and Sabine, who both hugged him back as if he was their own child.
“It was Marinette’s idea,” Sabine said, which made Adrien break the hug and whirl around to his certainly best friend again. Of course it was her idea! Brilliant, sweet, caring Marinette. Who else could it have been?!

She squeaked as Adrien picked her up in a hug and whirled her around in a circle while laughing. It was freeing.

“Thank you!” He repeated, this time to Marinette. She let out a laugh too.

“It’s nothing.”

“No, it’s everything!” Adrien said as he set her down again. “Seriously, thank you Marinette.”

“You’re welcome,” she said and gave him one of those genuine smiles of hers. The kind that photographers always strived to catch but only did with a stroke of luck.

Marinette then herded all of them to the kitchen table where three extra chairs had been placed. It was a little cramped, with Marinette, Adrien and Félix sitting on the window-side, Sabine and Nino sitting on the kitchen-side and Tom sitting at the head of the table. It still was a hundred times more comfortable than their own huge dining table at home. Being so close to people was nice.

Things just kept getting better as Adrien recognized the cake in front of him as one of his favourite cakes from the experimental phase in August. A monster of a cake, made out of marzipan, chocolate and fluffy vanilla-hazelnut goodness! While it was impossible to pick one favourite cake, this one was clearly among his top three.

Félix, too, had gotten an experimental cake he had been fond of. In his case that was a buttercream, chocolate coffee cake. Both cakes looked almost too good to be eaten with the detailed flowers and artful writing on the tops that said ‘Happy 14th Birthday Adrien’ and ‘Happy 14th Birthday Félix’ respectively. Adrien identified said handwriting to be Marinette’s.

After Tom and Sabine lit the candles, everyone started to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ which made Adrien beam and Félix blush, flustered. Their mother had always sung them a ‘Happy Birthday’ song, but it being sung by more than just one person added something ceremonial to the whole thing. Adrien loved it!

When it came to blowing out the candles afterwards, both twins did so simultaneously. As for the wish, only one thing really came to mind.

Please don’t take Marinette away from me too.

Everyone took a slice of the birthday cake they liked best while of course Adrien and Félix both got the first slices of their respective cakes. Meanwhile, Sabine hopped around the table and took pictures with her phone which Marinette promised to send to them later.

When everyone started to eat, Adrien pretty much melted as he took the first bite. The cake was even better than he remembered it being.

“This is so good,” he said in between bites.

“I’m glad to hear it,” Tom said with a grin. “Do you think I could offer them as a monthly special
Definitely!

The conversation continued like that, talking about the cakes at first and then branching off to all sorts of topics. At one point, Adrien asked Sabine to show him the photos she had taken. He found out, much to his amusement and Marinette’s mortification, that Sabine had started taking photos even before Félix and he had arrived, which meant she had caught Marinette while she was pacing in the living room and then mid-run down the stairs. Marinette meekly commented that she got a text from Nino at that point telling her they were almost there and that she got a little too excited. Sabine had even managed to take a picture of when he had picked Marinette up and spun her around. He absolutely needed a copy of that one!

At one point they had moved from the kitchen table to the more spacious and much more comfortable sofa. Adrien was in the middle of a debate with Tom about which Mecha Strike II character was the best one to play as when he picked up on a weird mixture of nervousness and anticipation.

He glanced behind himself to see what that was about only to see Marinette looking at him with her hands behind her back and a small smile. His natural curiosity screamed at him to look what she was hiding, but he restrained himself from doing so. A questioning look to Nino showed him in much the same position, which made Adrien fully turn around, his previous conversation forgotten. Félix seemed equally curious even though he was not nearly as obvious about it.

Nino flashed both of them both a smile. “Happy birthday again dudes!” He said and produced two wrapped gifts from behind his back. Marinette did the same but still held that nervous, yet warm, smile.

Adrien couldn’t help himself, he hugged both of his friends again.

“Thank you!”

He would probably never get tired of saying that or of having occasions to say it.

He couldn’t say it to his father since lately there had really been nothing he could thank him for and the times he thanked Nathalie or the chef for simple things like giving him his schedule or bringing him his food did not really count. They were pleasantries and not much more. The fair folk was out of the question anyway when it came to verbally expressing gratitude.

“You really didn’t have to,” Félix said, polite as always.

“Hey, it’s your birthday. Of course you’re getting presents,” Marinette said with a laugh. “Open Nino’s ones first.”

All four presents were wrapped in the same kind of wrapping paper—a pink-grey-silver striped one—only varying in sizes. Nino gave him the smaller one of the two presents he held and the other one to Félix. Adrien was confused by the size of his present at first since it was about the size of his thumb. What could Nino gift him that was this tiny?

The answer was a USB stick, which still did not help Adrien much.

“It’s a song mix from a few more unknown bands you’ll probably like,” Nino explained, which gave the, at first sight, unimpressive gift a whole new meaning. A grin quickly grew on Adrien’s face.
“I can’t wait to listen to it! Thank you so much!”

“More horrendous K-Pop. Wonderful,” Félix deadpanned with an accusing look to Marinette—she had been the one to introduce Adrien to K-Pop. She in turn just threw Félix a mischievous grin and shrugged before silently ushering him to open his gift from Nino as well. Said gift turned out to be a mug with the text ‘There’s always time for coffee’ on it. Adrien snickered.

“That’s you in one sentence, Fé.”

“Hilarious.” Félix rolled his eyes but there was a smile tugging at his lips. “Thank you, Nino,” he said appreciatively.

“You’re welcome, dudes. Now open Nette’s gifts!”

Adrien guessed that Nino knew what Marinette’s gifts were but he still seemed to be as excited as Adrien himself was.

As Marinette both handed them their gifts with a shy smile, Adrien’s first impression was ‘soft.’ A piece of clothing maybe? Knowing Marinette, that was very possible. If so, it seemed to be something small. A hat or a scarf maybe? Fitting for the coming winter.

Adrien was fully unprepared for what he saw when he carefully ripped the wrapping paper open and extracted from it a small crocheted black cat, about the size of a real-life kitten. He carefully inspected it from every angle, everything on it clearly hand-made with an attention to detail that was astonishing. The small cat was entirely black save for a white spot on its chest and its very green eyes.

He knew what or, to put it better, who had probably been the inspiration for that design—himself—but he could not help but see someone else in it. The small cat looked like his mother.

Behind him, Adrien only barely heard Félix thank Marinette for something having to do with his mug and a good colour choice, but he wasn’t listening. Instead he lightly petted the cat’s head, still staring at it in wonder. The green wool that had been used for the eyes was the perfect colour too, making it only too easy for Adrien to picture it as his mother. Had it really already been nine months since he had last seen her? It felt like it had only been a few weeks at most while at the same time it also felt like years. Close but far away. Yes, that described it pretty fittingly.

“Adrien, are you alright?” Marinette’s voice snapped him out of his thoughts and he looked at her for a moment without saying anything. He simply didn’t have words for what he wanted to say. After struggling for another few seconds, he eventually hugged her tightly. He didn’t know what crying was like, but he sure felt like tears would have been appropriate at this moment.

“This is the best gift I ever got,” he said softly, so quiet that only Marinette could hear him. She hugged him back then, silently, apparently also at a loss for words. Adrien held the hug for longer than was probably appropriate, but screw manners, he just wanted her to know how happy she had made him. Happy and also a little sad. It was bittersweet.

The crocheted cat did not leave Adrien’s side for the rest of the day. He even almost hissed at Félix when he had wanted to take a closer look at it. Not that his brother would have been offended, but it would have probably looked weird to the other people present. Luckily, Félix had understood the murderous glare directed at him correctly.

Adrien thought about the fate of his past plushies, which had all been destroyed when he had played with them. At one point, his father had stopped buying any for Félix and him. If it was
because they were accidentally destroying them or because he thought they were too old for them was unknown. In any case, Adrien swore that the crocheted cat plush that looked so much like his mother would not meet such a fate. He would forever treasure and protect it!

The rest of the day was spent playing games with everyone—both video games and regular party games. Tom and Sabine busied themselves tidying up the kitchen and preparing the cake for the twins to take home with them—Adrien had never been gladder that Félix and he had a mini fridge in their room—while the four teenagers played Wii Party. It had them both rolling on the sofa from laughter and shouting in despair or outrage at different parts. Félix, surprisingly, ended up winning. He claimed to have had a strategy.

Afterwards they decided to play a round of twister. Nino was not bad, but he was still the worst from the four of them at it. Then again, he was up against two Cat Sidhe, who were naturally flexible, and Marinette, who had surprisingly good balance for someone who regularly tripped over air. This time, Adrien won. In the end it had pretty much just been a battle between Félix and him which had drawn comments from Nino like “How are your spines not broken?!” or “Are models made out of rubber or something?!”. It was hilarious.

They then chose to end the day with a game of charades which Tom and Sabine also participated in. Hilarity ensued, especially when Félix, awkward as he was, had to mime ‘headbanging’ and ‘whirlpool’ among other things. It was also amusing to watch Nino trying to make everyone understand that him running through the room and throwing some of the wrapping paper was supposed to be a catapult. Marinette meanwhile had a very easy time miming whatever word she got, usually making it easy to guess with how expressive she was. The undeniable winner of the game though was Tom, who turned out to not only be a formidable video gamer but also a master at charades. The others had no chance.

When it was time to go home the twins only did so reluctantly. Adrien hugged everyone again and saw Félix, who usually only voluntarily hugged his brother and nobody else, share brief hugs with Tom and Sabine. Neither of them really knew what to say, but they felt like everyone still understood what they were trying to express.

“See you around dudes!” Nino said as he walked down the street away from the bakery. He and Marinette had accompanied them downstairs to the front door.

Adrien hesitated. He did not want to leave, but he knew he had to. He spontaneously shoved his cake in Félix’s arms whose balance luckily was still formidable, which did not mean that there were no complaints.

Adrien then turned around and hugged a very surprised Marinette.

“Thank you,” he said with as much emphasis as he could. “This is the happiest I’ve ever been on my birthday.”
A scream that was definitely not human echoed through the Agreste mansion as claws dug for
purchase on the wall and his teeth ached with the strong desire to tear something apart. To say that
Adrien was angry would be an understatement.

Félix yelled at him, probably telling him to calm down, but Adrien did not listen. The rushing
blood in his ears and his rage had erased all traces of noise around him. And he was not just angry,
he was also desperate. Desperate and past the paralysing shock that had first gripped him.

Only when strong arms wrapped around him from behind and forcefully tore him off the wall did
he start to hear noise again.

“Calm down,” Félix hissed just as Adrien realised that there was an urgent knocking at the door.
He could not be calmed down by mere words at this point though.

“Then fix it!” He roared, making his brother flatten his ears at the sheer volume of it. It was an
unreasonable thing to ask; fixing what could not be fixed, but Adrien demanded it nonetheless. He
did not believe that the world was as cruel as it was, forcing this situation on him and making his
nightmares become true.

Nathalie said something from outside the door that Adrien did not catch, his frantic thoughts too
loud to concentrate on the subtle noises of his surroundings. What he did hear though was Félix’s
angry snarl towards the door.

“Go away Nathalie! This does not concern you!”
Adrien wiggled himself free of his brother’s grip and glared at him.

“Fix. It.”

“We can’t,” Félix replied, but Adrien did not care for the remorse in his face.

“You can fix it, Fé! You can fix everything!” A desperate tone snuck itself into his voice and a shiver overtook his body as he felt the anger dissipating, letting the hopelessness slowly win over.

“I can’t undo what has been done.”

“It can’t stay this way! We can’t just give up!”

Adrien felt his knees wobble as they threatened to give out under him. Felix quickly caught him before he fell and wrapped his arms around his limp brother. With careful steps, he dragged Adrien's shivering body to the bed.

“We can’t let that happen,” Adrien whimpered, his voice quiet. “This isn’t right. This isn’t how it was supposed to go.”

He was pretty much thrown on the bed by Félix and immediately scrambled to find Emilie—he fittingly had named the crocheted cat after their mother. He hugged the small black plushie tightly to his chest and curled up around it. It did not give him any comfort, but it at least gave him something to hold on to as the world was falling apart around him.

“Can we build a blanket fort again?”

Marinette rolled her eyes as she gathered up different snacks and pastries from the kitchen.

“You’ve been here for five seconds, Adrien. Calm down.”

He smiled sheepishly and his hand went to the back of his neck. Right, patience was a thing.

“Sorry, I’m just excited. I’ve never had a sleepover before!”

“I figured. I’m still surprised you agreed though.”

“We get the opportunity to mock horrible fashion choices with you. That is a good way to vent after all the photoshoots and fittings we were forced into,” Félix remarked as he finished taking off his shoes and orderly put them down near the door.

“Well, if you put it that way it really is the perfect way to spend a sleepover,” Marinette said with an amused grin. Little did she know that Adrien was not interested much in watching the live footage of this year’s fashion week. He was much more excited about being able to hang out with her again without homework getting in the way.

My first sleepover.

The thought made him giddy again. Movies and TV shows had always painted it out to be a fun, harmonic thing, usually between girls where they told each other secrets and ate snacks while watching movies. He did not get why that should only apply to girls though and Marinette had thoroughly assured him that Nino and she had had several sleepovers and it had always been a lot of fun.
‘It’s the same we usually do just in our PJs and with sleeping involved,’ she had said.

Granted, Adrien had first been extremely worried about the sleeping part because he was afraid their glamours would fail. An evening spent reading the spell book Mélusine had gifted them had thankfully solved that problem. The key was to wear a gemstone where the glamour spell was stored instead of having to consciously concentrate on keeping it in place.

With that issue out of the way, Adrien would have no problem enjoying the sleepover.

Would Nathalie freak out when she wouldn’t find the two of them in their beds that night? Probably. Would their father punish them for running away again? Undoubtedly! But it would still be worth it!

As the three of them went up to Marinette’s room, Félix carrying the duffel bag, Adrien couldn’t be happier.

“I’ve been working on something earlier, so it’s still a little messy,” Marinette apologized. “I was planning to tidy up before you got here, but I lost track of time.”

“It’s okay, we can help!” Adrien immediately offered.

“Thanks, but you really—”

“It’ll get done faster that way. So how can we help?” Félix interrupted her, already used to her habit of wanting to do everything on her own. She sighed.

“Alright. Can you pick up the fabric scraps and put them into the box over there? I’ll handle the desk.” Said desk was basically buried under sewing supplies. It was not a fair division of work, but then again, Adrien doubted that he could sort her different colours of threads the way she wanted to. That was a thing with her: she had her own order. Even if other people just saw chaos, she saw a system and it worked for her.

The three of them got to work and only a short time later did the twins finish their task.

“Where does the box go?” Adrien asked while Marinette was sorting different needles into their rightful place.

“Next to the trapdoor by the other boxes.”

When Adrien put it down, he noticed a new addition to her collection of boxes. A medium sized wooden one that had decorative yet simple carvings on its sides.

Growing curious, he crouched to see the details of it. Only when he saw a triskelion did he pause. Why would Marinette have a box with a triskelion on it? Well, it was a commonly used Celtic symbol and these days might even be seen wrongfully used in jewellery and art. But carved into a wooden box? That did not seem like Marinette’s style.

He looked back over his shoulder but saw that Marinette was still assorting her sewing supplies in a hurry while Félix threw him a questioning look.

The box did not smell like Marinette. At least not entirely. It might have been in her room for a week at most, but the smell of herbs and old wood was still strong. Something at the back of his mind recognized the scent as familiar, which in conjunction with the triskelion was not a soothing thought.
“Where did you get that box, Marinette?” He eventually asked. Something in his tone made her turn around with a frown as Adrien pointed at the wooden object. He did not dare touch it.

“Oh, that,” she said and her face immediately lighted up as she came over to him. “I got it as a gift.”

Adrien could feel his invisible tail lashing nervously under the glamour as Marinette picked up the box and opened it. Inside was a collection of ornaments...no, those were not regular glass ornaments.

Witch balls! His mind provided and he immediately felt like he had swallowed a rock.

“From who?” Félix asked while Adrien was still frozen.

Please don’t say ‘Mel’, please don’t say ‘Mel’, please don’t say—

“A shop in Montparnasse,” she chirped, oblivious to how Adrien froze at the mention of it. “Do you remember Adrien? We walked past it when we made this delivery back in July? You know, the one where we established that you have terrible fashion sense?”

She was joking and at any other time he would have laughed and joked back, but he could not find anything funny in this conversation.

“Y-y-you went t-t-to Mel’s place?!”

Now Marinette showed appropriate concern. Had he ever stuttered in front of her? Yeah. Had it ever been with a hoarse voice and in panic? No.

“Adrien, is everything alright?”

No, it isn’t.

“What did she ask for in exchange for those orbs?” Félix asked, much more articulate than Adrien who at this moment tried very hard to keep it together.

“Well, funny story—” No, not funny. “she said all I had to do was keep her company now and then and it was pretty nice honestly. We drank tea and knitted and she even gave me advice for my designs! She said those ornaments are called witch glasses and that they protect from evil. Not that I believe in those things, but they still look pretty so I thought about hanging them up in my room, I just didn’t have the time yet. Do you want to help me?”

During her story, Adrien sat on the floor, his legs too weak to hold him up. When she was about to go away, he caught her hand.

“Marinette...d-d-did you give her y-y-your n-name?” It was a risky question but he just had to know.

Marinette looked at him with a puzzled expression for a moment. “Yes? I mean, she already knew the name of my parents’ bakery and therefore where I lived, so it’s not like it did much harm, right?”

Adrien had stopped listening after ‘yes’. Her hand slipped out of his grip and he had paled significantly.

No.
Not her.

No, no, no, no, no, NO!

A cold feeling gripped him and he could feel his limbs getting numb. Marinette had given her name to a fair one and on top of things made a deal with them.

Needless to say, there had not been a sleepover afterwards. Adrien, as shocked as he had been, had been dragged home by Félix with the excuse that he might have caught a bug that was going around. It was a lie, but one that did not lead to many questions. How his brother had gotten him home in the first place was a mystery. He only remembered seeing the mansion wall and shifting to more easily climb it. Then he had broken down in their room.

Clutching Emilie to his chest, who still faintly smelled like Marinette, he desperately searched for a way to salvage the situation. His mind, however, only came up with all kinds of horror scenarios.

Marinette, dancing in a palace made of gold, silver and diamonds, her feet bleeding and her eyes misty from an enchantment that kept an empty smile on her face.

Marinette, forced to drink faerie wine and eat faerie food, transforming her into a being that was neither human nor faerie.

Marinette, going through life with a face empty of emotion, never speaking and not eating; her soul stolen away.

Marinette, in a beautiful dress, walking down a path of flowers—

A yank at his tail made the horrible images stop and Adrien let out a painful hiss.

“This is a mess we can’t fix, but that doesn’t mean that things will get worse.”

“What do you mean?” Adrien demanded, still not completely drawn out of his panic.

“I mean that Mélusine won’t necessarily sell Marinette to the Court. She holds something against us with that, but the Court doesn’t care…yet. We’ll just need to find out what she wants in return.”

Getting a clear answer out of Mélusine? That would certainly be easier said than done…

Chapter End Notes

my chapter plan is completely screwed up at the moment because originally this was going to be a 10k chapter including a lot more, but then I decided to split it in not just two, but three parts. So this was a little shorter than my usual chapters (thank god) and the next one will be around that length too. Chapter 19 will be much longer though and I'm still trying to figure out the exact plot of it. As soon as it gets into detailed fairy lore I have to consult my sources and that takes time! :’D
The next chapter will definitely come out this month, but I'm not sure about the chapter after that. We'll see! ¯\_(ツ)_/¯
Marinette petted the cat that was loudly purring on her lap while she created mood boards on Pinterest to get inspiration for winter designs. She didn’t know when exactly it had started but the black cat had developed a habit of visiting her quite frequently. He would drop in almost daily through her open skylight and demand her attention. Attention which she could not always give him, so he usually sabotaged whatever she was doing at that moment by winding around her legs or laying down on her lap. The latter was especially hindering when she was working with her laptop already in her lap, resulting with the feline lying down on top of it.

She had often played with the idea of giving the stray a proper name, but after calling him ‘kitty’ for so long, it had kind of stuck.

On this day, she had just returned from a stressful school day—Chloé had been a pest again—and just looked for some relaxation and time for herself. Hot chocolate, pyjamas and browsing Pinterest it was! And apparently a cat was also part of the equation. He seemed quite calm that day, not making a nuisance of himself by stopping her from whatever she was doing for a change.

The quiet atmosphere was interrupted by her vibrating phone. She sighed and then picked it up.

“Is the world ending?” She asked as a greeting while she kept scrolling through a wall of different colour palettes.

“What?” The bewildered answer was a little amusing.

“You never call,” Marinette clarified.

“So far there has not been an occasion for it,” Félix said.
“Then this seems to be an occasion. What’s up?”

“I just wanted to ask if you’ve heard from Adrien in the last two hours.”

Marinette stopped her scrolling to check her phone for messages. The last thing Adrien had sent her was something about being bored at a fitting, but that had been four hours ago.

“No, I haven’t. I can go downstairs and check if he’s in the bakery.” Though that would be unusual. Even when he was held up by her parents, he usually immediately went up to greet her.

The cat gave a loud meow in protest as Marinette stood up from the chair.

“Do you have a cat with you?” Félix asked and for some reason he sounded like he was facepalming.

“Yeah, a stray that sometimes visits me.”

“If that stray happens to be black with a white spot on the chest and green eyes, then please throw him out right this instant. I’ve had a lot of encounters with him and he has caused me nothing but trouble so far.”

Marinette raised her eyebrows so high they disappeared beneath her fringe.

“I didn’t know you made a habit of petting strays.”

“I don’t. Just throw the cat out please. And don’t bother looking for Adrien. If he’d be in the bakery, you would definitely know about it by now.”

The weather was shifting cooler now that the autumn months had hit. Marinette was ready: a handmade baggy grey sweater with pockets, it was long enough to look elegant. The outfit was completed with a pair of dark grey jeans and a loose viscose shirt with a pretty coral-pinkish pattern she had found on sale at the end of summer.

Said shirt was the only thing she wore that she hadn’t made herself and she was quite proud of the entire ensemble to be honest. What made it even more special was that she was outside with said outfit on. She had never dared to walk around in her own creations outside of the safe confines of her home. It would have been too easy for Chloé to ruin one of them either physically, or by saying something nasty. Out of fear to encounter the class bully out on the street, she hadn’t dared to wear anything self-made while going shopping or on deliveries either.

This day, however, was different. After all, the chances that Chloé would show up in Bois de Vincennes was quite low. A literal forest was probably the last place Marinette would ever encounter the blonde at, so she felt safe.

And not that she was comparing her outfit, but it was still clearly outshined by the incarnation of sunshine that skipped ahead of her. Adrien had donned a cat pun shirt, jeans and a loose black jacket. She had not made his outfit herself, but she had picked it, which was almost just as good. Besides, Adrien had the ability to make everything look good, especially when he was sporting a grin that could best be described as ‘innocent joy.’

The afternoon sunlight and the flying golden leaves created a wonderful backlighting and even though she didn’t know much about photography, she knew that some photographers would kill for
this setting and the model. She couldn’t help but take a few pictures with her phone while Adrien sported one of the happiest smiles she’d ever seen at the colourful trees around them.

“He needed this,” Félix said from beside her, his hands buried in his pockets and his default neutral expression in place. If this would have been the first time Marinette had heard Félix speak, she would have said that he was absolutely uninterested. By now, she knew better though. There was an attentive and content shimmer in his eyes that revealed his true emotions better than any expression could. He was happy too.

“Yeah, I noticed that he has been down lately and the weather was nice today, so I thought he’d like to go for a walk. The trees won’t stay as pretty as they are now for much longer after all.”

“Good call, as always.”

Marinette nodded and they spent some minutes in silence watching Adrien excitedly dart around and catch falling leaves, though his method of swatting at them did not seem very effective. He was never this lively and playful in public usually, afraid that he would catch the attention of paparazzi or just random people who would recognize him and take sneaky photos to upload on social media. It just made Marinette that much more sure that coming to this particular park—if one could call it that with how huge it was—had been a good idea.

In the previous three weeks things had taken a downhill path. To be exact, it had been on the day where they were supposed to have a sleepover and Adrien had suddenly started acting weirdly. Questions about it had been evaded by both twins, so Marinette had been left to piece the puzzle pieces together herself.

First off, she believed them when they said that Adrien had been sick. The weeks leading up to fashion week had been one fitting or photoshoot after the other for both of them, so no wonder it had taken a toll. Adrien had seemed totally normal and cheerful beforehand though, so Marinette had focused her attention close to what had caused his mood to change: the box.

At first, she had not been able to even remotely guess what it could have been that had set him off so badly, but then she had remembered something Félix had told her once when he had come over and taste-tested hot chocolates with her. Their mother had liked Celtic things.

Adrien rarely talked about his mother and when he did, it was always with a sadness Marinette did not know what to do about. Maybe the box had reminded him of her and he was more sensitive to the topic than Félix was. That might have been it, which would mean that she should hide the box in their storage closet and avoid other things that could trigger another breakdown.

Now that she was alone with the stoic brother on the forest path, Adrien still running around out of earshot, Marinette decided it was the perfect opportunity to ask Felix: “It wasn’t just a bad cold, was it?”

“Calling it a family drama would be a little far-fetched, but it is something similar. I’d love to say that he’s just being paranoid, but…” Félix trailed off, seemingly at a loss for words. How unusual.

“It’s serious then.”

“Yes.”

The problem being family drama fit Marinette's theory about their mother. She had no idea what the two of them would have to be paranoid about though.

Before she could ask further though, a fan of leaves was shoved into her face.
“Mar, look!” Adrien was suddenly back at her side. “Aren’t they pretty?”

The nicknames had started recently, around the time of his and Félix’s birthday. She had never noticed before then how rarely Adrien had ever used her real name to begin with. She honestly found the nicknames to be quite endearing and she hoped it meant that they were becoming even better friends. Now she just needed to find a good one for him in return.

Marinette snorted. “Are you going to wax poetic about them now?”

Adrien blushed. “Stop reminding me of my shame!” He said dramatically and held the leaves to his forehead as if he was a lady in a clichéd old movie that was about to faint.

“Nope, your shame is here to stay.”

He pouted and it looked unfairly adorable. Marinette couldn’t help but smile warmly. She took the leaves from him and studied them. The vibrant colours and the patterns on the different kinds of leaves were indeed very pretty and also very inspiring.

“You’re right, the leaves are pretty,” she said.

Adrien positively beamed as she carefully placed them in her sketch book and put it back into her bag. He then unexpectedly took her hand and gently pulled her forwards.

“I’ll show you where I found them.”

Marinette had become very familiar with Adrien’s excited grin over the last few months as well as with his tendency to touch people whenever he got the opportunity to. Suddenly grabbing her hand therefore was nothing out of the ordinary, but she could not help but feel like there was something off about it. Sure, everything looked the same as usual, but there was also a weird feeling of urgency accompanying it.

As he led her down the forest path he kept talking about the different trees and claimed to have climbed most of them. When Marinette saw a wide-leafed tree with plenty of horse chestnuts lying on the ground around it, she started collecting them in her bag.

“What are you doing? I don’t think you can eat those,” Adrien said, receiving only a perplexed stare and a few seconds of silence in return.

“Let me guess: you have never crafted anything with horse chestnuts before.”

“No? Is that bad?”

Marinette rolled her eyes and let out an overdramatic sigh.

“Guess this is another thing you have been unfairly deprived of. Come on, help me collect some and then we can craft something with them when we get home.”

The afternoon continued in this manner, collecting horse chestnuts, acorns and when it came to Félix even the occasional twig. Adrien let out a loud, excited gasp when he found a yellow flower growing near the path, only to shriek in alarm a few seconds later when he found out that its entire stem was black from an aphid infestation.

“Don’t worry, we’ll find a clean one,” he had said, as if getting this specific flower was crucial for
their survival.

“And if you don’t?” Marinette asked. The flowers did not look very special after all and it seemed very likely that all flowers of that kind in the area would be infested. Adrien seemed torn, looking back and forth between the flower and her.

“I’ll brush off the aphids then,” he eventually said with an unpleasant shudder.

“Why do you need the flower that badly?” Marinette asked, as she picked a poppy from the side of the path. It was free of any aphids as far as she could tell. The silence that followed made her look up from the red flower to catch Adrien staring at her in what she could only describe as panic. The expression was gone as soon as their gazes met and he shook his head.

“It’s important,” he just mumbled but dropped the topic afterwards.

Félix, meanwhile, snickered—a sound Marinette could not recall to have ever heard from him. He unexpectedly took the poppy flower out of her hand and threw it into the lake.

“I recommend to keep your hands off those if you want to have safe dreams.”

Things started to get weird from then on, starting with both twins being fiercely against sitting under a willow tree by the lake. When she asked why, they couldn’t properly answer her, just giving lame excuses like ‘someone could slip and fall into the lake.’

Marinette eventually conceded. With how strongly both of them reacted they surely had their reasons, even if neither wanted to tell her about it. That let her imagination run wild though. Had one of them at one point fallen into a lake? Did they have bad experiences of some sort with a lake? Might it even be something about their mother?

The thoughts were still swirling through her head when they got back home hours later and half-heartedly made some figures out of the horse chestnuts.

One week went by and instead of using the free time Toussaint granted her to catch up on some sewing, Marinette spent almost every day with the twins or just with Adrien. Not that she was complaining, but the weird feeling that something was wrong manifested itself in the back of her thoughts. Suddenly Adrien’s smile seemed strained, his laugh lacking its usual joy and his excitement cutting back.

She couldn’t help but ask herself if it was her fault. Was she being boring after all? Had she perhaps even misjudged them and they were not quite her friends? But then she reminded herself of all the nice things they have experienced together and especially, most recently, their birthday party. They both had been so happy. It just wasn’t like them to cut off something they enjoyed.

That was when her dark thoughts drew the next possible solution: They wanted to keep her away from something. Perhaps they were just wary that the press would eventually catch them together with her and then cause her trouble. Yes, being overly worried about something like that was very
like them. Marinette just hoped that this was all there was to it and that it wasn’t anything worse.

“Hmm, you might be right with that,” Mel said and set her teacup back down. Marinette, guilty she hadn’t visited in two weeks, decided to use the afternoon to stop at the old shop in Montparnasse—the twins were forced to go to a photoshoot during that time. A little piece of advice from the older woman couldn’t hurt.

“So, I’m not just seeing things,” Marinette sighed in relief and slumped back into the antique chair. Mel’s lips curled in an almost imperceptible smile.

“Maybe seeing things is the whole problem here, sweetheart. Whatever they are doing, they do not want you to know about it. It might be best if you stop looking and just let them be mysterious. Everyone needs secrets.”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter is already written and currently being beta-ed. It's 12k words long, so you'll be in for a treat! ;D
There is a tiny reference/foreshadowing to the next chapter included in this one. Can you spot it? >:3c
If there was anything that could help stabilize Adrien’s fragile mental state, then an invitation to the Samhain revel was not it. In fact, it just made things worse.

“We can’t go!” He howled as the two of them were alone in their room, his voice so loud that Félix flattened his ears at the volume. The invitation to the Samhain revel had only contributed to Adrien’s erratic mood swings. Granted, it had come from a small green-tinged pixie that had stepped out of a rock in their garden just a few hours ago at dawn.

“Let’s think about it,” Félix said as he went over the swirly handwriting again.
Their mother had always gone to the revel on Samhain and left the two of them with Chloé and Sabrina where they would be safe. This meant that they only had a vague idea of what the revel actually was about, but they knew one thing for certain: they had never been invited. So far, they had assumed that it was because they were halflings, but apparently there had been an entirely different reason all along.

“Are you crazy?! What if you let something slip?! They would descend on Marinette like vultures!”

…His brother was not wrong about that. The Courts took any chance they got to mess with humans and Marinette was a tempting target: young, innocent, female...

Félix quickly shook his head. It was enough that Adrien had vivid nightmares about the what if, he didn’t need to start with that too.

“We can’t just decline the invitation either.”

“Why not?!” Adrien hissed. He had shifted and was sitting on the highest level of the cat playground, together with his treasured plushie. Félix rolled his eyes.

“You’ve been among humans a lot lately, but don’t tell me that made you forget simple fae manners.”

Adrien grumbled something unintelligible and glared down at his brother.

“Don’t give thanks for gifts, but also never turn down a gift,” Félix said after it was clear that Adrien was not keen on giving an answer any time soon. “An invitation works in the same way.”

“And never accept one either because it’s most certainly a trap,” he immediately hissed back, his voice venomous. “The whole gift thing is a lose-lose situation for the recipient and a win-win for the giver. No, I didn’t forget that little detail!”

Adrien was right of course, but that didn’t help them one bit. It meant that at least one of them needed to accept the invitation and show up. Seeing how Adrien had a hard time controlling his temper at the moment, it would have to be Félix. He was not thrilled.

“I’m not surprised you showed up, though I expected it to be sooner. Did it really take you this long to figure out?”

A smile played across Mélusine’s lips as she stirred honey into her cup of tea. Félix was not fazed and just crossed his arms. He was very glad that Adrien had not come along, since he would have undoubtedly freaked out at this first sentence already.

“You upset my brother,” was all Félix said as he sat down across from the old halfling at her kitchen table. She just smiled as if he had said something funny.

“Yes, he is quite emotional, isn’t he? That’s what made it easy to figure out your little secret. And when I can figure it out, then the Courts can too.”

Félix glared at Mélusine. “Is that a threat?”

“No, kitten. It is advice and a hint that I did you a small kindness.”
“I do not believe in kindness from the fair folk.”

“How about kindness from a fellow halfling then? Bargains already cause me enough trouble. I certainly don’t look for more on top of it.”

“Then what do you gain from it?”

A small smile crossed her lips.

“You know about my past, I assume?”

“Depends on which part you want me to focus on. If you mean the part of having a shitty human father and hope to make me sympathize, then don’t bother.”

“You don’t need to sympathize, but I certainly do. Look what killing him got me,” she said with an exasperated sigh as she adjusted her serpentine lower half and wiggled the tip of her grey-scaled snake tail in the air for emphasis.

Usually Mélusine did not let anyone into her shop or house on Saturday nights due to this form. It was a widely-known shame of hers and she did not appreciate it when fair folk visited her just to mock her fate.

Félix had taken a huge gamble when he had knocked on her door that evening and was quite surprised to be let in without any more questions asked.

“I’m not planning to get myself cursed if that’s what you’re implying. I would appreciate it if we could return to the original topic though,” he said and continued.

“Yes, I do know about your past beyond what your legends tell. You adopted children because you could not bear the sight of your own and raised them.”

“Smart kitten. Now, my gain in all this is quite simple: company. I have not raised a child for almost a decade and I miss it. The legal process of adoption these days is quite bothersome and you cannot just take orphans from the streets anymore like you could back in the day.”

“I thought you raised changeling exchanges?”

“No, those are rare. They usually keep the stolen children to themselves, because that is their gain from all of it. I am merely one of those desperate women now who wait for her spot on some list. It is a very bothersome process.”

That was news to Félix and it sounded much less mysterious than the image he had built of her in his mind.

“You can’t steal someone away from their family like that. People will notice,” he argued, getting back to the topic of Marinette while being careful not to say her name. Just in case.

“I don’t have to. Being visited once in a while and drinking a cup of tea is all I ask for. To take on a child completely would require time I don’t have. I would be forced to close down the shop and I don’t really feel like doing that at the moment. This arrangement is beneficial to all sides.

“Besides, if the fair folk assumes she belongs to me, then they will not try to do any mischief with her. They will also be less suspicious when you two are seen around her. I know you think you’re being subtle, but by Danu, I already had to convince three of my customers that the girl belonged to me to explain your connections to her.”
Félix froze.

“Did you really think that two naïve kittens could outsmart a Court full of old fair folk? She would have been dead two months ago if I had not intervened. I was glad when she eventually showed up in my shop. Such a sweet girl.”

“I’m still not convinced that you don’t have an ulterior motive.”

“You can believe whatever you want, kitten. I can assure you though that I do not intend to cause Marinette any harm, nor do I want to cause you two any trouble.”

Mélusine lightly tapped her spoon at the rim of the tea cup before laying it aside and taking a dainty sip.

“No,” she said after setting the tea cup back down, “I assume you have received an invitation as well and that Samhain is the actual reason for your spontaneous visit.”

Félix gulped. Thoughts of the Samhain revel had not left him ever since receiving the invitation at dawn, which was why he had not wanted to wait any longer to see Mélusine about it. There was literally no one else he could ask.

“Yes,” he eventually said with a strangled-sounding voice. He cleared his throat and then asked the question he already knew the answer to: “We can’t refuse it, can we?”

“You know you can’t,” Mélusine simply replied. “It is even a stretch if only one of you attends, better not push your luck.”

Félix let out an unamused snort. “What luck?”

“Don’t underestimate your magic, especially not on Samhain when blessings and curses come easiest to you. In any case, I am glad you have come to me now, so we have some time to practise.”

“Practise?”

“Shielding your mind from the Folk, dear. It’s not an easy task for a halfling and you will have to tap into your fae side to make it work, but I’m sure you can do it. You won’t be able to perfect it before Samhain, but it will have to be enough.”

A shudder ran down his spine at the proposition. He had read about that spell in the book Mélusine had written for them and, despite it being quite advanced, it also required ridding himself of human sentiments. He was rooted, but the fair folk wasn’t. It made his thoughts easy to read, like catching a fish in shallow water. Unrooting himself would mean to give up his humanity…at least for a little while. The thought of becoming like the fair folk to protect himself from them left a sour taste in his mouth. Then again, this was how faerie magic worked: everything had a price.

“Wait, you said that Marinette will be safe as long as the folk thinks she belongs to you. Why would my thoughts be dangerous?”

Mélusine sighed deeply.

“Kitten, that only concerns the local Courts because they know and respect me for my work. The revel on Samhain consists of Courts from all around the world. They might have heard about me, but that doesn’t mean that they will respect me enough to keep their gnarly fingers away from my children.”
Something in her tone showed that she was speaking from painful experience.

“The rights of a halfling are pitiful in the grand scheme of things, so you will always have to be careful when you’re among other Courts or even your own.”

Félix was quiet for a bit.

“Alright, when do we start?”

Unrooting himself at first felt like someone had pulled out a carpet from underneath Félix’s feet and he was stumbling, desperate to find balance. It was almost like Midsummer without St. John’s wort, just that the pull at this time of year was subtler and slipping was therefore avoidable. After being rooted for so long with an almost normal human life, unrooting himself felt welcome but wrong at the same time.

It was by far not the first time Félix existed in the in-between since such a thing was unavoidable when growing up as part faerie. He actually felt comfortable in this state. Weightless and uncaring. Not belonging to either world inspired recklessness though. What were the consequences after all?

Still, it was not human at all, which also made it feel wrong at times. A state with no consequences was an invitation to ignore basic morals.

“Félix,” Adrien said, his voice hesitant and his tail lashing nervously. “It might be better if you stay here for today…or at least to go somewhere else.”

That statement instantly brought Félix back to the here and now, putting an end to his balancing act between the two realms. He blinked, not quite able to process what Adrien had said.

“E-excuse me?”

Adrien bit his lip and looked away, his tail lashing faster and a quiet purr rumbling in his throat as he grew more anxious.

Adrien frowned and flattened his ears.

“I-I get that you have to practice, but this is freaking me out. What if you slip up near Marinette? She would immediately notice that something is off.”

“I won’t slip up,” Félix said, not knowing if it was the truth or if he just said it because it was the right thing to say to get what he wanted.

“You almost did when we went on that walk in the forest last week! Don’t think I didn’t hear you! ‘I recommend to keep your hands off those if you want to have safe dreams,’ you said after throwing her poppy flower into the lake!”

Had he really said that? He only remembered to have taken the flower from her to prevent her from accidentally invoking faeries into her dreams. Something Adrien obviously had not looked like he was about to do.

“It was for her protection. You know that,” Félix said adamantly.

Adrien frowned and flattened his ears.
“I’m sorry Fé, but I don’t want Marinette to be in danger.”

“Oh, and you are not putting her in danger?”

Félix knew it was wrong the moment the words left his mouth. He had no right to snap at Adrien, especially not with a fragile topic like that. The reaction was instantaneous.

Adrien’s tense posture slumped, his tail now limb on the ground and his eyes blown wide with hurt and disbelief.

Félix winced. He had not meant it. Unrooting and rooting himself while trying to shield his mind had exhausted him, especially since he had practised it with the same determination with which he practised a piece on the piano until perfection. It was still no excuse. It would never be an excuse.

Before Félix could apologize, Adrien opened the window, shifted and jumped outside into the grey Parisian afternoon.

“And you really can’t stay?” Marinette asked over the phone, something Félix could only hear due to his good ears. Adrien was calling Marinette on the other side of the room, as if trying to keep her as far away from him as possible. Félix would lie if he’d say that this didn’t hurt.

His brother and him had always been together and trusted each other with everything, but now it seemed like this trust was slowly breaking as Adrien grew wary of him.

He hated it. He hated it so much. It wasn’t like they never fought or said things they regretted, but this had been going on for a week now with no sign of improvement.

If things would go his way, then he would just not go to the revel in the first place and forget about the whole balancing between two realms thing. He would do anything to get Adrien’s trust back.

“No, sorry. There’s something important I need to take care of, but I can come back tomorrow morning.”

“Don’t come too early please. I’ll probably stay up late tonight playing a horror game.”

“But when I come early, I can get more of these Halloween specialties you promised and make you a hot chocolate.”

Félix heard Marinette snort on the other end. “I’m sure Papa will save some for you and give you all the scraps, no matter when you’ll turn up.”

“I’ll count on it,” Adrien said with a grin. A grin which he only directed at Marinette these days. Félix did his best to swallow his jealousy. It wasn’t fair to either of them.

“Alright, see you later then,” Marinette said.

“See you later, and don’t forget that I’ll come bearing gifts!!”

Adrien hung up and Félix watched him wearing a blissfully happy expression for a few moments longer before it inevitably dropped and he let himself fall backwards on the bed with a heavy sigh.

It was the 31st of October. Samhain would begin at sunset, which meant they had only five and a half hours for the last preparations.
In Adrien’s case that meant going to Marinette’s place with a bouquet of St. John’s wort and a bunch of dried apples. Other charms like a fairy triad—twigs from an oak, an ash and a thorn tree tied together with white, red and black threads—and an array of different herbs had already been given to Marinette previously as dubious gifts. Adrien would have to convince her that he had a strong supervision about Samhain so that she would also keep all those things in place. This was not only about her safety after all since Adrien was absolutely not risking her to be alone on Samhain. He would find a way into her room as a cat and keep her safe while also being protected himself by the wards and by Marinette.

At least this way Félix did not need to worry about his brother while he went to the revel.

“Adrien,” he started, but Adrien quickly shut him up with a frown from across the room.

“Don’t,” he said. “I know what I’m doing and I’m being careful. You better worry about what you are going to do tonight.”

He was still mad.

“It’s not like I chose to go to the revel!” Félix hissed, sick of feeling blamed for all the chaos while he actually tried to prevent worse things from happening. He did this for them and for Marinette! Why couldn’t Adrien understand this?

“Fé, you’re losing yourself if you keep doing this. There has to be another way somehow.”

They both knew that there wasn’t. Easy ways did not exist with faerie magic. It sometimes looked easy and simple, but that was only because it could hide its nastiness pretty well. A bad price for something good. Repercussions and suffering for every good intention.

“I don’t want to have to look at you and ask myself if I’m looking at my brother or…” Adrien didn’t finish his sentence and decided to look away instead. Not that he needed to finish it for Félix to understand what he meant: a true Unseelie.

He knew that it should feel like a dagger to the heart that Adrien almost trusted him as little as he trusted all the fair folk he was protecting Marinette from. Oddly enough, though, it didn’t.

Being a true Unseelie did not sound like such a bad thing anymore. He was smart, after all. He would be witty and resourceful among everyone else, fitting in perfectly and not draw anyone’s attention. It was the perfect disguise. This way he would be able to hear their plans, learn what their tricks were and then he could tell Adrien so that they could protect themselves better.

It was good.

It was risky.

Adrien shouldn’t despise him for it. He gladly gave up some of his humanity if it meant to keep his brother safe. And Marinette too by extension.

Félix was not ready. Walking through a dark forest and holding Mélusine’s hand like a lost child he flinched at every sound. Leaves blew in the wind, twigs snapped, and shadows scurried through the age-old trees. If Félix concentrated, he could see the amused and hungry red-yellow eyes of pookas, shape-shifting creatures who were tasked with dirting each and every berry they could find.
A trail of floating blue lights—will-o’-the-wisps—led deeper into the forest but Mélusine unerringly walked the opposite direction.

“They’re trying to lead us astray,” she had explained when Félix had wanted to follow them earlier, making them momentarily disappear. Of course he had known about the myth that will-o’-the-wisps fooled wanderers to deviate them from their path and let them get lost, but something still drew him to them.

“The souls of the dead favour neither side. They want to confuse the fair folk as much as they want to confuse humans. They are afraid of soul eaters though, which is why they disappeared when you tried to follow them,” Mélusine remarked with a chuckle, as if it had not sounded sinister at all. Cat Sidhe were soul eaters, even though Félix had never tried to eat a soul before. At least that explained why he felt drawn to the spirits of the dead.

Creepy.

Félix did not know the name of the forest they walked through or even where it was. Mélusine had offered to accompany him to the revel which had naturally meant that they took one of her portals to get there. He had not asked where exactly it led, neither did he care. All he wanted was to survive this night and then return home.

Or did he?

Part of him wanted to thoroughly enjoy Samhain and partake in the festivities. He would not have to hide for once and there would be no one to tell him what to do and what not to do.

Why shouldn’t he let himself enjoy it?

If he was forced to be there, he might as well delight in the benefits it offered.

“Remember your manners, kitten. Being among the folk is no reason to be reckless. In fact, it is the best reason to not be reckless. Show a single weakness and they will latch onto it.”

“I know that,” Félix growled.

Who does she think she is!? My mother?

A slap to the back of his head drew a hiss out of him.

“Get a grip. Tonight, the temptations are stronger so you’ll have to concentrate to resist them.”

“You’re making it sound easy.”

“I have done this several hundred times already, kitten. For you it is the first time near and soon in a sídhe on Samhain so it’s natural that you’re having trouble. Just concentrate and whatever you do: don’t relax and don’t give in.”

The forest thinned out eventually, giving way to a meadow with a hill at its centre. To humans it would probably look empty when also odd with the lanterns that lit it. Félix, however, could see the many faeries that roamed it, laughing and chatting while going in and out of the hill. Some just arrived through the air on horses of straw that turned back to single straw stalks when they landed.

Even though he grew up with the weirdness of faerie magic, he had to admit that this was the oddest thing he had ever experienced. And the night had barely even begun. He gulped and carefully kept his tail from nervously lashing.
Félix would be a graceful and silent cat, just like his mother had taught him to be.

“Going into a sídhe is not like going through one of my portals. Humans stumble into the fairy mounds by getting lost, but we are taking the direct path,” Mélusine said and pointed to a rock where a group of laughing pixies just disappeared into.

“But what about the people going through the hill?” Félix asked, since that seemed like the more obvious entrance. The older halfling chuckled.

“These are apparitions and souls. They roam the lands tonight but they are not present like we are.”

He could have kicked himself. Usually he was good at telling what was real from what was unreal, but the magic in the air confused his senses. How embarrassing. It was like confusing a pig for a deer.

“Time in the sídhe flows as it likes,” Mélusine explained. “You could spend years in there and only a night would have passed in this world, or the other way around, so you can never be sure how long the night will really last. Just call my name when you’re ready to go home and I’ll find you and sort things out.”

They stopped in front of a stone with ancient engravings.

“After this you are on your own. Be a smart kitten,” Mélusine said with a motherly smile and scratched him behind the ears, probably to calm him down. It did not help to ease the nervous knot in his stomach. He took a few deep breaths and then nodded to Mélusine. He was not ready, but he probably would never be ready for it anyway. Now was as good a time as ever to jump into the cold water.

The two of them stepped forward which made the stone open up—there was no other way to describe it.

One moment they were still stood on the meadow with the hill and the next they walked on a path of white flowers that wilted when they stepped on them. The sky above them was not the familiar midnight blue anymore, but it looked like they were in the middle of the milky way, alit with millions of bright stars and colourful stardust.

The trees on either side of the path were so tall that Félix could not see their tops, but they still did not cover the sky. Amidst the trunks was occasional movement—deer, foxes, birds and other forest animals—but whenever Félix turned to look, said animal was already a rotting pile of bones on the ground. Grass was growing and turning yellow around the corpses, swallowing them.

There was one smaller tree that grew leaves, fruit and threw them off so fast that everything surrounding its branches was a blur while it shot up into the sky in height.

How many years passed in one second? Five? Ten? One hundred? He could not tell.

Just as he thought he was going to lose his mind, the strangely fascinating horror ended and he found himself confronted with an array of noise in a brightly lit place.

“What was that?” he whispered breathlessly.

“A faerie path, kitten. It’s a shortcut between worlds since a sídhe is its own realm. It is not Tír na
Mélusine soothingly stroked his hair. “Calm down Félix, you have to concentrate now. Audrey wants to talk to you, so better seek her out. She doesn’t like running after people.”

A shudder ran down his spine.

She really could have mentioned that earlier!

Audrey Bourgeois was the chief of the Unseelie court in Paris—their mother’s and therefore also Adrien’s and Félix’s Court. Whatever she would want from him was guaranteed to be unpleasant.

“Where can I find her?” he asked, to which Mélusine just shrugged.

“You can only find anyone here when you know their name and unfortunately, her real name is not something she willingly shares. I sadly have business to attend to now and it would end badly for you if you were to be dragged into it. Good luck, kitten.”

Félix frowned as Mélusine gave him a last reassuring pet between the ears and then just left him.

He needed a moment to collect himself and then looked around.

The room he stood in was a mixture of the most prestigious palace he could ever imagine and a forest. Plants and shimmering precious metals and stones were equally used in shaping the architecture of this infinite room. And even though it was infinite, it seemed to have corners and doors leading to other rooms. A human would no doubt go crazy when trying to perceive this concept and even Félix had a little bit of trouble with accepting it.

Music was playing from everywhere and nowhere at once and even though they were different pieces each, they still harmonised with each other. Faerie music. It was alluring and made him want to join the dance floor instantly. Félix restrained himself.

Don’t give in.

The rest of the noise was created by thousands of conversations, held by a wild array of fair folk. He could not quite decide whether it was soothing or disturbing to see other fair ones with animalistic or just simply inhuman features.

Practically everyone had fangs which they only too gladly flashed at each other in smiles and snarls alike, both looking so alike that it was hard to see which one was which. Knowing the fair folk: probably both.

Ears twitched, tails curled elegantly, wings flapped and extra limbs gesticulated wildly when stories were told or complaints were voiced. Félix saw claws, horns, antlers, fins, feathers, scales, beings that seemed to be made of stone and even some that looked like they were carved out of wood. He saw folk that barely reached his knee and some that were easily three times his size.

There was a lot of blonde hair and a lot of elaborate dresses, sewn with materials that were unthinkable to humans and looked like glittering water in the morning sun or dune grass in the sea wind. Said creatures—beauty and grace come to life—laughed and it was the loveliest sound he had ever heard. That was until a tinkling of bells made him flatten his ears and he almost hissed at the group of fae that had dared to wear those golden objects of horror.

“I see they are at it again this year,” a voice next to Félix grumbled and he almost jumped when he caught the scent of dog and saw the giant black canine next to him.
“They?” Félix asked and fell back to his default tone of indifference.

“The Seelie Court of the Upper Rhine. They had bad relations with the Unseelie Court of the Black Forest for a while so they wore bells as protection. The conflict has been solved for years but they’re still paranoid,” the Cú Sidhe growled, his long tail curling behind him like black mist.

Now what was Félix supposed to say to that?

“They are inconveniencing a lot of guests that way, aren’t they?”

Well, it was better than saying nothing.

The black dog snorted. “As if they would care. They’re probably doing it out of exactly that reason.”

“Do not talk bad about other guests, Grim,” a female voice suddenly said.

Félix had not heard the faerie woman approach and that unsettled him. If the fair folk continued to appear around his vicinity out of thin air then he would continuously be caught off-guard. This was bad. For the first time in his life did his advanced senses feel useless. A frightening thought.

The female speaker was a tall and blonde fair one. Pointed ears, breath-taking beauty and red eyes were the only things that distinguished her from a human in appearance, which did not help him determining what race she was. The golden circlet around her head spoke volumes though: a faerie chief. Félix bowed politely as a greeting and she gave him a fanged smile in return.

“How adorable, a little halfling!” She squealed ecstatically and pushed the Cú Sidhe aside. Félix was not sure if he should feel flattered or insulted.

“Dance with me!” She said in the blunt but tempting fey tone one could not say ‘no’ to.

“It would be my honour. Though I can only spare one short dance since I need to find someone,” Félix said, as politely as he could. One wrong word and he would be trapped dancing with her forever. Even if he would say ‘just one song’ it would take the entire night at least, since each song flowed into the next, making it impossible to determine where one ended and another began.

“Let us find them first so we can dance for longer afterwards,” the blonde said excitedly and took his hand, dragging him through the crowd. “Who are we looking for?”

“The chief of the Unseelie Court of Paris,” Félix heard himself say. Usually he would have hissed and politely asked her to let go of him, but for some reason it felt right that she was holding his hand. Why should he be uncomfortable anyway? After all, she helped him find who he was looking for.

…Who was he looking for again? Whoever it was, they could never be as beautiful and elegant and kind as the blonde that held his hand and mumbled words he could not understand with her sweet-sounding voice.

Suddenly the two of them found themselves in another part of the sídhe. When had that happened? How much time had passed? Guests were sparser here, the infinite-looking room dimmer and the music more silent.

They walked for a little bit, the Cú Sidhe from earlier following them silently. His presence really
started to bother Félix. Why couldn’t he be alone with the beautiful blonde? Why did this overgrown dog think that he had any kind of claim on her? How pretentious of him!

Félix got his bearings back when they stopped and he recognized Audrey Bourgeois, standing at most ten metres in front of them. Her golden circlet gleamed in the light of some glowing crystals while she talked to a group of fair folk with antlers.

“Here we are,” the red-eyed blonde said in a sing-song voice and let go of his hand. “I’ll stay around so that you won’t run away afterwards,” she giggled and gave him a playful poke on the nose. He was glad that she would stay. At least someone was friendly to him at this revel since he predicted the conversation with Audrey to be anything but friendly.

He fought down the unpleasant shudder that begged to run down his spine and make the hairs on his tail stand on end while he walked over to Audrey and the antlered fae.

Luckily their conversation drew to a close just as he arrived and Audrey turned around to him, piercing him with her blue eyes. He hurried to bow. Disrespecting Audrey was a bad idea on all levels of the spectrum.

“Oh, Emilie’s kitten,” she did not sound pleased. In fact, she sounded like she had just gotten a very repulsive gift. “Where is your brother?”

Just tell her the whole truth, that will make things easier, a traitorous little voice in the back of his mind whispered, but he silenced it. Mélusine’s warning of temptations came to mind again. This would be a difficult conversation. He could lie, but Audrey was exceptionally good at sniffing lies out. Careful wording it was then.

“He could not come. Our chef used rosemary in a recipe and my brother swallowed it before he noticed something was wrong.” It was not exactly a lie. Their chef had really once used rosemary and Adrien, hungry from a long photoshoot, had dug in without chewing much. He had to stay in bed for a week afterwards. Granted, that had been in May, but Audrey did not need to know that.

She huffed. “Ridiculous. I hope the chef was fired.” She made it sound like a challenge.

“We don’t have the authority to fire household staff and father does not care,” Félix replied with a shrug. Making his father look bad in front of the chief of Paris’ Unseelie Court was not the wisest thing to do, but his priorities currently lay elsewhere.

“Mélusine said you wanted to talk to me?”

Audrey rolled her eyes. “An unpleasant necessity, yes,” she sniffed and Félix knew immediately where Chloé got her attitude from.

“Since Emilie very rudely left without eradicating any deals she has made with my Court, we cannot touch anyone that lives in or works at your house, even if we know their names. She clarified that you and your brother are responsible for those deals in her absence, so I need your permission to dissolve all of them. That is all.”

Félix arched an eyebrow while trying very hard not to hiss at the Aos Sidhe. What she was asking for would take away every bit of a safety net their family had left. Sure, he did not particularly like his father, and Nathalie often was annoying too, but that did not mean that he wished for them to be tortured by the fair folk.

“The deals stay,” Félix said with the strongest voice he could muster. Audrey, who had obviously expected no resistance arched her eyebrow.
“I beg your pardon?”

“Whatever deals, bargains and other arrangements my mother has made are to stay until she returns and says otherwise. I don’t see why I should mess with them after she has gone through the trouble of setting them up.”

“These humans know too much. It would be much easier to just dispose of them before they do something that endangers my Court.” Her voice had taken on a dangerously hissing quality at this point.

So that was the problem. Audrey was not greedy in wanting access to even more humans in a city with a population of over two million. No, she was afraid of those who knew how to fend the fair folk off. That made sense.

“Then that will be my responsibility,” Félix said, hoping to end the conversation with that.

“You are just a halfling child,” she sneered. “What do you know about the responsibility over a Court?”

“But are those humans not his property?” The lovely voice of the other blonde faerie chief piped up from behind them. Félix turned around to see an amused grin on her face.

“Taking away the toys from a child. Shame on you,” she pouted while petting the Cú Sidhe beside her. Félix had to swallow his growl at the sight.

“The boy denied your request multiple times, so I suggest to leave it at that.” She came over and gently pulled Félix away from Audrey. “Now if you do not have any more business with him, I will have to take him away. He owes me a dance and I do not intend to wait for it any longer.”

Before Audrey could protest, Félix found himself in a loud room with music and full of dancing pairs.

Oh dear, this will most certainly have consequences. One did not just up and leave during a conversation with Audrey Bourgeois. Not that it was very important right now, since he was in the presence of the most amazing faerie he had ever met.

“That went well, didn’t it?” The faerie chief asked him with a giggle. Félix wanted to argue, but then realised that it would be rude so he kept quiet and just gave her a smile.

The room they were in assaulted his sensitive ears with too much noise so that he started to feel like he had been thrown into a beehive. Everything around him was buzzing with noise produced by sharp and damning tongues but he was kept in place by the red-eyed fair one’s presence, enticing like the smell of honey.

Wait, he really smelled honey.

That’s when he noticed that they were stood next to a table full of the finest food Félix had ever seen.

“So, you are Emilie’s son,” the faerie chief said as she poured a golden liquid into two glasses and offered one of them to him. This was the thing that smelled like honey.

Faerie food is dangerous, the back of his mind whispered automatically, but Félix did not care. He took a sip of the beverage and was sure to have never tasted something that good before, nor would he ever taste anything better.
“Faerie wine. Nectar. The words should ring alarm bells in his head, but he found himself not caring. It was absolutely delicious after all. Why should he be wary?

“I should have seen it earlier. You have her tail and her grace,” the fair one continued and let a hand glide through his blond hair.

“I do hope that is a compliment,” he said with a grin to evade a thank you. To his great delight, it made the fair one laugh.

“Oh, you precious little thing,” she said and petted him behind one ear, making him purr.

Run away!

Why should he run away?

“Your dear mother almost was part of my Court once, you know? Then she went to Paris.” The fair one sighed, apparently saddened by the retelling of the story.

“French fair folk.” She huffed dismissively. “Always so obsessed with making the poor rich and then living at the core of power. A waste of time if you ask me.”

Something in Félix bristled at that, but before he could even think about speaking in defence of his mother, the thought vanished and he found himself nodding. Agreeing with her was much easier than arguing with her after all! He did not want to argue with her. It would displease her. And he should never ever displease her.

She took the drink from his hand and set it and hers down on a tray carried by a servant.

“Shall we dance now?” It was not a question, as she took his hands and dragged him amidst the dancing pairs, who immediately freed some space for the two of them.

Dancing itself was easy. Félix had had dancing classes for as long as he could remember, so falling into a rhythm and letting his feet carry him without having to think about the steps was not the problem. What irked him was that the blonde fair one was that much better of a dancer. He could as well have the movement skills of a newborn fawn in comparison to her. It was embarrassing but he still did not want to stop. After all, it was a privilege to dance with her and she did not seem to mind his inferiority.

“You’re a cute little cat, you know that? With good manners too!” He preened at the praise.

“And you are beautiful,” he heard his mouth reply automatically. A compliment that was very true but it still made him blush. She laughed.

“Cat Sidhe have become so rare and I still don’t have one in my Court. Would you like to join it? All you’d have to do would be to give me a kiss and tell me your name. Very simple, you see? I would not take away what’s yours from you like Audrey does.”

That was a fantastic offer! He would be able to live under the Court of a kind faerie chief who he would not have to be afraid of. And for what price? A kiss and his name. Those were just two things and he could immediately give them to her!

Just as he was leaning in though, he felt the faerie chief’s hand be forcefully ripped out of his and another one took his place.

“We’re switching partners, alright?” A giggly voice said.
No! Not alright!

Before he could express his disagreement though, he was already gone from the dance floor and back at the table with the tasty food and drinks. Away from the beautiful faerie chief and the offer of a lifetime!

He growled at the one who had dragged him away, but his reward was the contents of a glass of spring water thrown at his face.

“There, that should do it,” she said with a pleased smile as Félix shook his head to get rid of the wetness. “You can be glad that you’re not human or I would have to shove a hand full of salt into your mouth now.” He glared at her.

His expression immediately softened into a confused stare though as something seemed to wash off of him. The colours around him dimmed and the urge to go back to the dance floor and find the blonde beauty with the red eyes disappeared.

Félix just stared at the girl in front of him who had two black insectoid arms crossed over her chest while a normal looking pair of arms was busy straightening her red dress and putting down the now empty glass. She also had fragile-looking insect wings on her back and antennae on her head making her look like most humans imagined faeries to look like, just that she was his size and not tiny.

“Creirwy is a collector,” she said, unperturbed by his staring. “Her entire Court consists of fae she has either tricked to join it or who she has indebted so they were forced to work for her. She wants rarities and you are one. Most here know to be wary of her so I take it that this is your first time at a revel.” Her blue eyes regarded him expectantly.

“Uh…yes,” Félix replied and internally winced at how pathetic he sounded.

“Thought so,” she said with a shake of her head that made her black hair shift just enough to reveal rounded ear tips.

What?

Human but not human?

“I suggest to never go near Creirwy again. She is beautiful even for a fair one, but that’s just how it is with Leanan Sidhe.” The girl shrugged.

A Leanan Sidhe. Félix could have kicked himself. He had not even lasted ten minutes before falling for the charm of a Leanan Sidhe, also called a faerie lover or faerie mistress. They were something like vampires among the fair folk.

“You can go ahead and say ‘thank you’. I won’t be offended,” the girl said with a grin that showed fangs.

“Thank you,” Félix mumbled. He really owed one to her now. Damn it. He hated having debts.

“I take it that this is not your first Samhain revel then? What did you do, get kidnapped and be stupid enough to eat faerie food?”

Félix clapped a hand over his mouth the moment the words left it. Unrooting himself apparently got rid of his filter. While the girl was a little annoying with her bubbly voice and apparently unbreakable good mood, she did not deserve to be insulted like that.
“I’m sor—”

“Don’t bother.” She interrupted him with a wave of her hand and looked at the dancing pairs. No, not the dancing pairs. Her eyes—very focused and serious which stood in stark contrast to her giddy expression—followed the servants that busily walked around, collecting empty glasses or adding even more food to the already overloaded tables. Servants he had not paid any mind to earlier but now he had to force down a wince of pity.

Félix had never seen enthralled humans before and he pretty quickly realised that there was a clear difference between hearing about it and actually witnessing it. They were thin, as if not getting enough food and their eyes were empty, staring into space instead of focusing on what was around them, blissful smiles on their faces—no doubt dreaming about something wonderful while their bodies were trapped in this nightmare. They did what they were asked to do, without questioning those orders.

“You’re naïve, Cat Sidhe,” the girl said with a humourless grin. “You think you know every horrible thing the Court has to offer but in reality, you have barely scratched the surface.”

She took his hand and pulled him away from the tables and away from the dancers.

“Let me show you something,” she said and suddenly their surroundings changed, becoming even more like a forest. Moonlight shone down on a clearing whose ground was covered in a carpet of moss and bluebells. At first it seemed to be peaceful, until a horrible human scream pierced the night, followed by pearly laughs.

The girl led him onto the clearing, not letting go of his hand.

“Where are we?” He demanded.

“Another part of the _sidhe_. This is where the fair folk comes to have fun.”

Even though her expression didn’t let on to it, he could clearly feel that she was uncomfortable. The feeling was mutual. He did not know what had caused this unfortunate human to scream that way, but the girl dragged him forwards relentlessly.

A deer that wore torn clothes jumped in front of them, its eyes wide with fear. It was followed by a pack of barking dogs—the kind that looked bred for hunts with white fur and red ears—and a horde of fair folk. They laughed whenever a dog managed to bite it and then let it get away again. Félix felt the blood drain from his face. The scream from before…

“Humans are not meant to shapeshift. It’s unbearably painful for them to be changed into an animal form rapidly. The folk see it as a party game to transform a human into a deer or hare and let them be chased by their dogs. They continue that until the transformed human is torn to shreds or forgets that they ever were human to begin with, becoming nothing but a mindless beast,” the girl explained and gave a twitch of her wings which Félix only now realised were covered in a ladybug-like shell. Had she gone through transformations like that too and spoke from experience? He was too scared to ask.

They passed by a tree that carried golden apples. The fruit had a heavenly scent that tempted him to pick one up from the ground and eat it. The ladybug girl slapped his hand.

“Don’t eat them. I did not bring you here so you could join in the fun. *Watch* instead. And tell me what you see.”

He blinked at her for a few moments, surprised at her boldness but then decided to humour her.
“I see a tree with golden apples on a meadow with bluebells and…”

His voice left him.

There, on the other side of a giant root of said tree, crouched a creature that devoured the fruits like its life depended on it. It looked grotesque, like someone had tried to cross a human with an insect, a goat and a bear. He looked away and spotted a group of fair ones nearby, watching the creature with amused grins on their faces while holding a crying girl.

“Denise!” She sobbed and tried to tear herself away to get to the creature.

“Change my sister back!” She then demanded of the faeries, who laughed in return.

“This is getting boring,” a fair one with goat legs said. “Let’s give her fruit and see what it does to her!”

The rest of the group laughed in agreement and each grabbed a soft, mouldy apple. Even from a distance, Félix could see that they were dripping with sour juice and swarming with worms. They forced said fruit into the girl’s mouth and laughed as she tried to fight it.

Félix looked away, but the ladybug girl forcefully grabbed his face and turned it back to the group.

“Keep watching, now comes the interesting part.”

Therefore, he had no choice but to watch as the girl eventually succumbed to the magic of the fruits and eagerly ate every horrible scrap of it. When she was done, she looked at the faeries and started begging for more. They just laughed and said she had to do something for them first. She eagerly agreed, without knowing what she agreed to.

The ladybug girl let go of his face and Félix did not waste a second to avert his gaze, as the fair ones had just told the girl to strip off her clothes and get on all fours.

“So, you see, those are humans who got kidnapped and were stupid enough to eat faerie fruit,” the ladybug girl said and threw him a slight glare. Félix didn’t reply, didn’t even wince. He was too horrified by what he had seen to give much of a reaction. How had he ever found it appropriate to joke about something like that?

The noises of the group of fair ones, as they continued to abuse the human girl in the most horrible of ways, followed Félix and the ladybug girl as they walked away.

Félix was about to be sick.

“There is much more to see here. Who knows, you might find joy in some of those games they play with humans. Over there at the river they throw humans in and wait for the Nixies to drown them, making bets on how long each one lasts. We could join the betting. What do you say?” The ladybug girl continued in an almost mocking tone.

“No, thank you,” Félix choked.

Finally, his sadistic companion noticed the state he was in and took pity on him.

“Come on, let’s get you out of here,” she said in a much softer voice.

Suddenly the horrible noises of tortured humans from all around him stopped. Félix opened his eyes again and saw that they were in some sort of garden. When he looked up, he could see a castle
of a size so big that no building in the world would be able to match it. It was made of gold, silver, diamonds and the occasional giant tree woven into the structure. The sight was surreal.

It was ironic, really, to have a garden surround something that was basically a garden itself. He just would not question it.

The ladybug girl led him to some rocks and giant crystals, so he could sit down. It took a few deep breaths, closing his eyes and counting from thirty backwards and a repetition of all of it for Félix to calm down again.

“I am truly sorry about what I said to you earlier. I did not mean it. I had no idea that…”

He did not finish the sentence, not yet ready to put what he had just seen into words.

“Your reaction was surprising. You’re not the first halfling I’ve met and most are more fascinated with the fey ways. It’s rare to see a fair one actively refuse these games. I must admit that you’re the first one I’ve met that has this strong of a negative reaction to it.”

Félix shrugged. If this had proved anything, then that he knew fairly little about what other fair ones deemed appropriate or fun.

“Most get taken tonight. Those for which seven years have passed will get disposed of since the faeries deem them too old and ugly. A lot will die before the night is over or will be sent back to the earthly realm to pine away and others will come.” The girl said and her voice, for the first time, took on a serious tone.

“What about you then?” Félix asked. She smelled neither like a human nor a fair one but like something in between. Not like a halfling that was both, but like someone that was neither.

“Well, the thing with me is that I would not have survived this long if I would just tell any curious kitty cat my life story,” she said with a cheeky grin and a small giggle.

“I did not ask for your life story. I am just curious about what you are. I hope that is not an insensitive thing to ask for.”

The ladybug girl smiled. “It’s a little insensitive, but it’s not like it’s a big secret,” she said. “And since you are in dire need of education when it comes to the fair folk, it might even be beneficial for you to know.

“So, sometimes, when humans get taken, they are not kidnapped. Instead, they go willingly in exchange for a deal they made with the fair folk. They get their name taken and are then bound to be the Courts’ servants and live in sídhes and Tír na nÓg. Humans cannot live among faeries, so as the decades go by, they change to fit their new environment.”

She studied the claws of her insectoid black pair of arms for a moment before continuing.

“The fair folk has little use for them as actual servants, so they use them as an exchange for when they kidnap humans. With the changed bodies, they are better at coping with transformations and even learn to use magic themselves.”

She looked at him with a grin. “You seem like a smart guy. Can you put the pieces together yourself?”

It took Félix a moment, but then the answer suddenly seemed crystal-clear.
“You’re a changeling.”

Her wings buzzed happily. “Yep!” She said with a fanged grin. “You’re lucky, you know?”

Félix snorted at the irony. “I have not been aware of that. Please enlighten me as to why exactly that would be the case.”

“It’s almost impossible to find someone here that sees a human side of things, but you found me.”

“You rather found me, not the other way around.”

The changeling waved a hand dismissively. “Details!”

“Well, I am not naïve enough to trust someone just because of a commonality.”

“Clever cat,” she said, which led them to spend a few moments in blissful silence. A silence Félix used to contemplate what he had just learned and everything he had done since entering the sídhe.

He had been arrogant enough to believe that if he just unrooted himself and held a few conversations, that he would be able to blend in naturally. He had even believed himself to be some sort of spy, finding out what the fair folk would do next, to do what? Prevent it? The changeling was right; he was naïve!

He had even let his morals drift far enough from what they previously were that he had momentarily forgotten the value of mortal life and the horrors of faerie games. Was this what Adrien had seen? Had this been why he had lashed out at him and told him to stay away? Félix felt like such an idiot. He should have listened to his brother.

“So,” she eventually said and looked at him curiously. “Cat Sidhe are shapeshifters. How come you did not attend in your cat form? That way no one could have asked you to dance and it would have been easier to avoid conversations.”

Félix hummed thoughtfully. She had a point. “I suppose I just did not think that far ahead.”

“Can you show me then? I’m curious how you look like as a kitty!” She said and bounced excitedly on the rock next to him. There was only one answer to give to that.

“Absolutely not!”

“Why not? You really don’t have to be embarrassed in front of me, you know? After all, I’m the one with the four arms and the ladybug wings!”

As if to underline her point, she unfolded said wings and wiggled the claws of her additional appendages.

“I am not embarrassed. It is simply not safe to be that vulnerable around people who can potentially cause me harm.”

“It’s Samhain though. If I would just look at you the wrong way you could curse me without even lifting a paw. And I know a changeling’s word doesn’t count much, but I promise not to harm you, alright?”

Félix stared at her with narrowed eyes, unconvinced.

“I mean, I could just bring you back to the ballroom and then see how you cope with being asked to dance again,” she said with a teasing grin.
He narrowed his eyes further.

“Fine. But I will not hesitate to curse you if you do something shady,” Félix growled and stood up.

“Where are you going?”

“I am not going to shift in front of you!” He hissed and felt his cheeks warming. How was simply talking about it embarrassing already?! Truth be told, shifting in front of other people was like changing clothes in front of them. It was just awkward. His brother was the exception.

Thus, he ducked behind a nearby bush so he could shift in peace.

*Just what am I doing? I can’t trust her!*

Then again, he couldn’t really risk to be sent to the ballroom of horrors again, or worse: to that place where the fair folk played their torturous games with humans! Humouring her for the moment probably was his best bet, even though he would have to stay extremely alert.

His cat form gave him immediate relief, making the world look clearer to his eyes and letting his senses work better. He was less human like this, which in his situation was an advantage.

“Are you happy now?” He asked grumpily as he jumped back on the rock he had previously sat on.

“Oh, by Danu, you are so fluffy!” She squealed and Félix swatted a clawed paw at her with a hiss when she tried to pet him.

“No touching!” He snarled.

“Come on, don’t be a grumpy cat!”

He growled at her, his tail angrily lashing behind him. “This is an invasion of privacy.”

“You are no fun,” she said, a pout on her face.

“Yes, I get told that quite frequently.”

Suddenly he heard a noise nearby. It was not the snap of a twig, a rustling of leaves or even something obvious like footsteps. No, the noise was much subtler: A startled intake of breath.

His eyes narrowed as they made contact with terrified grey ones that belonged to a girl. She stood frozen between some trees a few metres away, as she had apparently been in the process of sneaking past. That she looked at him with an expression of fear bothered him immensely for some reason.

Her hair was blonde, but it was not the golden blonde that was common for the fair folk. Hers was rather a dirty dark blonde, almost brown, a hair colour no fair one had. Even though said hair hid her ears it was obvious enough that she was human; Félix didn’t need to see her rounded ear tips to know that.

“So, you finally noticed her too. She’s been sneaking around here for a few minutes already. I hoped you’d pick up on that once you shifted and you didn’t disappoint, kitty.”

Félix hissed when she patted his head and then quickly withdrew her arm with a giggle. How embarrassing. He really should have paid more attention to his surroundings.

The changeling suddenly jumped up. “Please don’t run away!”
A look in the direction of the trees told him that the human girl was trying to flee. At least she did not seem to be enthralled. Had she somehow escaped the folk or had they just forgotten about her? In any case, she was incredibly lucky to have only run into him and the changeling and not some other fair one.

With a sigh, Félix jumped back down from the rock and decided to follow them. He was aware that this whole situation practically screamed 'trouble', but sitting around alone in his cat form in an unfamiliar place did not seem very safe either.

“Shh, calm down,” the changeling tried to soothe the girl who had become frozen with fear again the moment she had been grabbed by a clawed, black arm and a normal one. “I’m not going to hurt you, I promise!”

“Please let me go, I just want to be gone from here,” the blonde girl whispered hoarsely.

The changeling hummed. “An understandable wish. What is your name?”

Félix narrowed his eyes suspiciously. No fair one asked that question with good intentions in mind.

“M-Meghan.”

Apparently that human girl was an idiot.

“What are you planning to do with her?” He asked, not trusting the situation. The changeling turned around to him with an arched eyebrow.

“You really don’t know anything, do you? Humans can only leave a sídhe when they still know their name. If she would be a changeling candidate who had her name taken, I would not be able to do anything for her.”

Félix blinked as that information sunk in. Did that mean that she really could not remember her own name at all? No wonder she had been so pissed at him for his offhand comment earlier. She was a prisoner just as much as the enthralled humans with the empty smiles were. She still had her wits, but that did not mean that her fate was any better than theirs.

“How are you lucid?” Félix then asked Meghan in return.

The girl shivered. “T-they d-did horrible things t-to me. I can’t…not anymore. They—”

“Hey, it’s okay,” the changeling soothed her. “You managed to flee from them when you had an opportunity and that is very brave of you. There is a way to get out of here, but you will have to hurry since you will have to make it before sunrise.”

She then turned to Félix who flattened his ears since this was starting to sound like mission impossible.

“You will help, won’t you?”

“I’d prefer not to,” he admitted. He would not just risk his life for some random girl he did not know.

“What if she was a human you cared for?”

“But she is not. No offense.”

“Cat Sidhe,” the changeling said and her voice took on a threatening tone. “You surely remember
that you owe me a favour for when I saved you from that Leanan Sidhe?”

Félix cursed. This was exactly why he hated having debts with the fair folk.

“I invoke this favour now, which is helping this girl get through the forest.”

“You have got to be kidding me,” he growled.

How do I get myself into these situations?!

A faerie debt could not just be ignored when it was invoked, which meant that Félix had no other choice but to follow the changeling and Meghan into the forest. He only then noticed that Meghan seemed to be in an exceptionally bad shape; thin and weak from whatever she had been put through. Dread settled in his stomach as a what if scenario came to mind again and he hastily forced himself to think of something else.

Don’t think of Marinette while you’re in a sídhe!

After only a few minutes, Félix would have had no choice but to follow them anyway, or he would have gotten terribly lost. The changeling seemed to know the way though and led them through the forest full of curious sights.

For the most part he ignored the weird trees, the glowing stones and flowers and the occasional pair of eyes that watched them from the shadows. Especially the latter set his nerves on edge. Who had seen them? Would they even care? He was a cat now, so would they even recognize him?

Questions he had no answers to, so he got rid of them. All he was left with were simple thoughts like ‘jump over that dead tree’ or ‘don’t walk through the thorns’ which was at least occupying. All the while the question of where they were heading and if that exit would lead him out of the sídhe as well circled in the back of his mind. Would Mélusine even be able to find him when he was outside of the sídhe?

“I am still far?” Meghan eventually asked breathlessly as she stumbled over tree roots which she could not see in the dark.

It was the right question, asked at the wrong time because a voice that was definitely not the changeling answered.

“Who is visiting my bog in this fine night?”

The question was purred by a twisted voice that made Félix’s fur stand on end and alarm bells go off inside his head. Splashing water was heard as he watched something huge and black emerge from a nearby pond and then wade closer to them on muddy ground.

The changeling swore and grabbed Meghan’s arm to drag her forwards. The girl screamed but then started running too, Félix following close behind them.

“We’re too close to the other realm!” He heard the changeling say, not minding to keep the volume of her voice low anymore.

“What does that mean?” Meghan asked, panic coating her voice as she glanced to the sides in panic as will-o’-the-wisps appeared one by one.

“It means that we are almost out of the sídhe but still close enough to it to encounter fair folk.”
A keening wail suddenly erupted behind them. It was the most horrible sound Félix has ever heard.

“It also means that this is as far as I can take you,” the changeling said with a cringe and stopped. The sudden halt threw Meghan out of balance so that she almost fell down.

“At this point I’m sure we’ll see each other again someday.”

Félix did not like this situation at all and he would really rather do anything else. He still nodded and then took off with a ‘follow me!’.

Unfortunately, it took him half a minute to remember that humans could not see in the dark.

To his great horror, he saw Meghan running towards the only thing she could see: the will-o'-the-wisps.

“Not that way!” Félix yelled, but Meghan had been gripped by blind panic at this point.

As he ran after Meghan, he felt how the flames of the will-o'-the-wisps around him went out one by one. It was a weird thing to feel the fear of the dead in his bones, but he ignored it in favour of catching up to Meghan.

“Go back!” He yelled.

She did not react.

“Meghan, go back!”

The blonde still did not react.

Her feet made splashing noises on the ground that grew muddier by the second as she blindly followed the will-o'-the-wisps. Panic settled in his stomach like a dead weight that made it hard to take a step.

“Turn around! Don’t follow the wisps!” He yelled again, to no avail because the horrible wailing rose again.

His heart beat faster, the fur on his neck stood on end. He had to save Meghan, but right now it seemed wiser to just turn around and seek shelter. His instincts practically screamed at him to go back to the changeling, far away from the keening wail.

Félix turned around.

Also not a good idea.

For behind him the forest was cast in shadow, so that almost nothing was visible anymore. The air seemed to be full of tension, like with a thunderstorm shortly before it began.

He felt sick and dizzy, everything at once, while the temperate around him dropped to the freezing point in a matter of seconds.

Like hypnotised, Félix started into the shifting darkness. He was not certain why this wall of blackness made him panic so much, but he was certain of one thing: He absolutely could not let it catch up to him.
At last he snapped out of his frozen state and ran into the opposite direction, after Meghan. His claws dug into the soil with each step and his tail lashed wildly behind him.

Faeries were dangerous and the world seemed determined to explicitly remind him of that.

He had not been aware what real, genuine fear was like, not even when Adrien had gone missing on Midsummer.

Now he knew.

It was a chill that crept through him, making him feel like his blood had been replaced with ice-cold water. It was hearing his thundering heart in his ears and practically nothing else. It was the dreadful anticipation of being caught any second.

The shadow took away his orientation, swallowing all scents and noises of the forest. All that was left was the keening wail and the smell of decay, both of which would guide him to his demise.

“Oh, there you are,” a voice said nearby and Félix could feel the blood drain from his face. It sounded like the changeling but in a contorted way that made his fur stand on end.

It wasn’t her.

Trickery! Illusion! His instincts yelled.

“Oh, thank goodness!” Meghan said, seemingly not noticing the changes.

“Come this way! I found a horse that can carry you out of the forest quickly.”

Bog. Wailing. Horse.

The pieces fell into place in his mind.

Shapeshifter! Kelpie!

Félix heard how Meghan followed the voice and he waded through the cold mud to follow. Everything smelled like decay and death, which made it hard for him to pinpoint where exactly she was.

As he finally saw something white emerge from behind a tree, a horrible fear gripped him. All his instincts told him to flee while simultaneously spitting out choppy pieces of information.

Unseelie! Ambush predator! Dangerous!

He still could do nothing but stare at the pearly white horse with kelp in its dripping mane as it stepped closer to where Meghan stood.

Doesn’t want you! Greedy! Flee!

“Oh, aren’t you beautiful?” He heard Meghan say, absolutely enchanted by the equine’s beauty.

“Don’t touch it!” Félix yelled and tried to leap forward though his paws had a hard time lifting out of the mud. The blonde turned around to him, hesitating. Unfortunately, that also got the kelpie’s attention.

She eventually shook her head.
“You’re one of them, I don’t trust you,” she said and the horse gave him a much too wide smile behind Meghan’s back, as if the skin at the side of its head had split. A grin that morphed back into the expression of a witless horse as soon as the human girl turned towards it again.

*Tricked! Bad! Save her!*

Even though he knew that he had already lost, the kelpie’s aura having whispered false truths to the girl, he lurched forward. If he could just get there in time, he might be able to tear her away. He might be able to save her.

The mud sucked at his paws with every step, reducing his progress to a nightmarish crawl. Each squelch felt like a clock ticking away inside his head, counting down the seconds until...

...Until Meghan reached out to pet the horse, obviously not expecting her hand to get stuck fast to its hide.

She tugged at it to no avail and her panicked gaze met Félix’s.

Too late.

He could not save her now.

Unable to run away fast enough he had no choice but to witness the horrid spectacle in front of him as the white coat of the horse melted away and became black. Its jaws, opening wider than possible for a horse, were lined with rows of sharp teeth.

Its chuckle was even worse a noise than the wailing from earlier had been.

“Thank you for not listening to the kitten. You will be a splendid meal, little meatling.”

The creature met Félix’s gaze again with silver eyes full of mockery and mischievous joy.

“You can have her liver and her soul when I’m done.”

“No, no no no no! Please let me go!” Meghan tried to beg helplessly, tears running down her pale face, but the fair folk did not know mercy.

Without hesitation, the black horse jumped into the deep water of the bog, dragging Meghan with it.

The panicked look of horror and desperation she threw him was the last thing he saw of her before she was pulled below the surface and the water turned red.

The silence that followed was eerie and horrible. Now that the kelpie was gone, having taken its magic with it, he could catch Meghan’s scent again. Like further mockery of his failed attempt to save her, the stench of her fear soaked the area, making him choke.

“You didn’t save me,” a voice said in his head and it scared him to death.

Meghan’s voice.

Against his better judgement he looked up and saw a small blue light dance above the water’s surface.

A will-o’-the-wisp.
The soul of a dead person.

One that did not run away from him.

“I am dead because of you.”

Oh no, he thought as a no longer dormant instinct inside him made his teeth ache with the need to
taste death. It almost overwhelmed the guilt that threatened to fill his entire being.

My fault. It’s all my fault.

The fear he had smelled and the desperation, they were emotions he now felt himself. Yet, there
was something alien about them, like they were not his.

They were hers. He felt what Meghan’s soul felt and he wanted it to stop.

“It hurts. It hurts so much.”

It hurts.

She suddenly drifted up to his face, making him turn away, but she darted back into his vision. Not
letting him escape the sight and smell of her.

“I wanted to see my little sister again. What will she do without me?”

Stop talking, Félix thought as she made him feel her sorrow.

For the first time in his life he felt his eyes tear up. They were not his tears, but hers. A Cat Sidhe
could not cry.

“I did not want to die.”

Stop. Talking.

Félix’s resolve was slipping slowly but steadily. He could feel how appalled his instincts were for
making him feel human emotions while he was still unrooted.

Make her pay! Devour her! They screamed and became harder to ignore by the second.

He did not want to feel her emotions, did not want to hear her thoughts. He did not want to hear her
blame him. A righteous blame.

No, don’t! Félix told himself desperately.

He had never thought much about being a soul eater, thinking that he would never come to a
situation where he would eat a soul in the first place. He had been naive enough to think that he
could just resist it as easily as he could resist hissing at people.

How foolish of him.

The urge to eat her soul was as tempting as the songs of Tír na nÓg were on Midsummer. He had
to resist even when it made his jaws ache with how hard he pressed them together.

There was no telling what would happen if he would eat a soul after all. What would happen to
him? What would happen to her?
He tried to turn away and run, but the will-o' the-wisp followed his movements again, this time only inches away from his face. She would not let him escape this hell.

“End it, Cat Sidhe.”

No.

If he would do this, would he be able to call himself a human anymore? Not that he had ever confidently been able to call himself one, but he had sometimes just forgotten what he really was, if only for a few minutes or even hours. Would he lose this when he went this far?

“End my suffering. I know you can.”

No, I can’t.

It would be going too far, wouldn’t it? Oh god, what would Adrien think? What would he say?

“If you devour my soul, this pain will stop.”

I can’t...

He would just have to live with the knowledge of having doomed a single soul to eternal suffering. Even though he could have done something.

“Do me this last favour.”

He did not want to hear her anymore and she did not want to let him go. She would probably torment him forever with her pain.

I shouldn’t.

“It is your fault that I have to suffer.”

He wanted her to be silent more than anything else. She was asking for it, so he would do her a favour, right? He would release her from all the pain and desperation she felt. Pain and desperation he did not want to feel anymore.

No one needs to know, right?

He wanted it to end so badly. He wanted to feel his own emotions again and be able to run away from this place of death.

Devour her! His instincts told him.

And so he did.

It took him what felt like hours until he realised that he could not find the changeling anywhere.

“Mélusine,” he eventually called in a pathetically weak voice, begging that she would be able to come out here into the forest and find him.
He was apparently still close enough to the *sídhe* for the name-summoning to work. The halfling immediately descended upon him.

“Oh kitten, what happened to you?” She picked him up and for once he did not protest. He was a shivering, dirty mess with no idea where to go.

“I want to go home,” he managed to whimper and then fell silent.

Chapter End Notes

...no regrets! >:3

PS: I hope you liked Bridgette because she shall return eventually! ;3

PSS: I kind of drew something ;w; http://fav.me/dcyof0v
Adrien poked at the last yellow leaves that were left on a cherry tree and watched them sail down to the ground. Usually it would have been a very satisfying thing to do, but his heart was not in it this time. It was merely a mindless activity he indulged in while thinking. A way to pass time that prevented him from sitting on a cold park bench.

He regarded the now barren tree with a frown and then leaned against its trunk. The overcast night sky, its clouds bright from the lights of the city below them, did not give him any answers. Neither did the whispers that added themselves to the usual city noise. Whispers from invisible creatures that he wanted to neither see nor hear.

Félix didn’t know he was out here. Or maybe he did and was just mindful enough not to follow him. Maybe he even went outside himself to go elsewhere in Paris. To be alone and do some thinking of his own. Contemplations about what to do or some reflecting of what has been done.

Nothing was right since Samhain. Actually, no. Nothing was right since they had gotten that smelted invitation to that cursed revel. Since Félix had decided that becoming more like them would be in any way helpful.

Adrien kicked a pebble and it landed in a puddle with a plop.

When Félix had returned home that day, it had already been evening and Adrien had been worried sick. It had taken all his willpower to not ditch Marinette and run to Mélusine’s to demand where his brother was. Félix had barely spoken when he returned. Instead he had stayed in his cat form and had cuddled up in Adrien’s lap while trembling like an aspen leaf.

Wrong.

Everything had been wrong.

Adrien had petted his brother the whole night, sang him songs their mother had always sang to them and eventually had just silently cuddled him.
It had been two weeks and Félix still had not spoken about what had happened on Samhain. Whenever the topic came up, he got a haunted look in his eyes and then swiftly changed the topic. Only the question whether it had something to do with Marinette had been answered with a ‘no’. That was a relief at least.

Marinette was completely safe, he had made sure of that. She had several protections in her room that would keep the fair folk at bay. Not many enough to draw unwanted attention, but still enough.

His best friend was safe, but what about his brother? He had visited Mélusine about it, but she also did not know details. All Adrien had gotten out of her was that she had found Félix in his cat form in a forest, coated in mud and scared witless. Obviously, the fair folk has been involved, so who knows what had happened?

“These cookies are amazing!” Adrien gushed and eagerly took a second one when the plate was offered to him.

“Glad to hear it,” Tom said with a grin. “It’s the first batch of the season.”

“Will there be more?” Adrien asked eagerly once he had swallowed, the heavenly sweet taste of almonds and currant jam still lingering in his mouth.

“Most definitely, they’re some of our top sellers during Christmas.”

A *ding* was heard from the oven and Tom ventured over to take out some freshly baked bread.

“I will make a batch of coffee flavoured cookies later, so you can take some home with you for Félix,” he said while expertly placing the bread on the side to cool down and putting in another waiting baking tray.

“I’m sure he’ll appreciate it,” Adrien said and tried his hardest to make the grin on his face seem genuine.

It had been two weeks since Samhain and Félix had barely spoken. He rather preferred to immerse himself in a book and be unresponsive for hours. Said books were noticeably non-fictional and non-fey but had everything to do with their current classes. Something was definitely wrong when his brother threw himself into studying.

“Take the plate upstairs so you have something to snack on,” Tom said and pointed at the plate with Christmas cookies that Adrien had set back down on the counter.

“Thank you,” he said and couldn’t help to have a shudder run down his spine. Adrien had thanked Félix for something this morning and his brother had looked at him as if he had lost his mind. Like a fae that had been offended for being thanked even for such a small thing like handing him the sugar at the breakfast table. It was eerie and the memory of it still ghosted in his mind.

The few weeks Félix had spent with ungrounding himself had changed him and Adrien hated it.

“Good afternoon, Mar!” He said cheerily as he entered the apartment. Marinette sat at the kitchen table with a scarf around her neck and a steaming mug in her hands. It smelled like mint and Adrien had to smother the urge to gag. Probably tea.

“Hi Adrien,” Marinette replied with a raspy voice. “Sorry, I caught a cold.”
He blinked. As weird as it was, he had never been around a sick person before. The fair folk didn’t get sick and for some reason both his father and Nathalie didn’t either, not even such a small thing as a cold.

“Why are you apologizing for it?” He asked hesitantly as he closed the door behind him. Was it a thing one did? Were illnesses something to apologize for? That seemed ridiculous.

“I don’t want to infect you,” she said and smiled at him apologetically.

Oh, that’s what it was then.

“Don’t worry, I’m immune.”

“Adrien, no one is immune to a cold.”

“We’ll see.”

He threw her a grin and then placed the plate of Christmas cookies he had already forgotten the name of, on the table in front of her.

“Tom said to bring those upstairs so we have something to snack on.”

Marinette grimaced. “Too bad I won’t be able to taste them.”

“That’s okay. I’ll just eat them for you,” he said. It earned him a playful shove.

“Don’t you dare.”

“And what if I do dare?”

“I might tell Papa to not give you any more fresh cookies this week?”

Adrien gasped in mocked outrage.

“You wouldn’t!”

“Wanna bet on that?”

Marinette’s challenging grin was infectious as they fell into their usual banter.

Spending the afternoon with Marinette, playing video games and just goofing around made him almost forget about his problems. Hell, it almost made him forget that he wasn’t actually human. Catching a break was nice, but of course reality didn’t let itself be silenced forever.

“So how is Félix doing?”

That innocent question brought him back to the ground zero he had just managed to escape from. It was a question he did not know how to answer.

“He’s…going through something right now.”

“Is it something bad?” Marinette asked and put down her sewing needle. She had just worked on mending one of Adrien’s favourite cat pun shirts which he had accidentally torn a small hole into with his claws. He had explained to her that it must have caught on something and ripped.

Another day, another lie. The more lies he told her, the worse he felt. Only the fact that it kept her
safe prevented him from accidentally telling the truth. It did not prevent him from feeling like he was the scum of the earth though.

“I don’t know. Fé went somewhere on Sa—…on Halloween and when he came back, he was very freaked out. He doesn’t talk about it and just buries himself in his books. I’m doing all I can but I think I just need to be patient. He’ll tell me eventually.”

“What if he doesn’t?” Marinette asked, worry clearly etched into her face. He couldn’t help but give her a weak smile. Seeing someone else but himself worry this much about Félix felt good. His brother was too alone…

“We’re twins. There is nothing we don’t know about each other, so he definitely will tell me. I just don’t know when that will be.”

While what he said was true, Adrien could not help but listen to a small voice at the back of his head that told him that things were different now. Yes, Félix had always told Adrien of his worries, but that had been before everything started to go so very wrong. Before he started becoming less human and more fae.

The world constantly changed, but Adrien had never thought his brother’s trust would too.

Midwinter was approaching and Adrien could taste it in the air, as it became more drenched with magic each passing day. It also meant that the anniversary of their mother’s disappearance inched closer—something he did not want to be reminded of.

Therefore, he jumped on every opportunity for distraction. One such opportunity was to go Christmas tree shopping with Marinette and Nino. It had taken surprisingly little convincing to get Félix to join them as well.

Perhaps he wanted to get out of the house for once too, or just wanted to see Marinette after one month of avoiding her. His excuses had started to get quite ridiculous, but at least the two were still texting. Adrien would hate to have whatever happened on Samhain get in the way of their friendship.

He had not needed to worry.

When Félix and he arrived at the bakery, his brother was enthusiastically welcomed by Marinette with a smothering hug which he returned in kind. He seemed to have missed her more than he had let on to.

“It’s so good to see you again!” Marinette said with a gleeful grin.

“Likewise,” Félix said and—no, Adrien was not hallucinating—smiled. His brother *smiled*. Not the small raise of the corners of his mouth, or a teasing grin, but a genuine, wide smile. With how off he had been in the past two months Adrien had almost forgotten what this smile looked like.

A small inner voice hissed at him to be jealous, that Marinette was *his*, but he pointedly ignored it. Listening to his fae side or cat side never helped after all and he should be allowed to feel glad to see his brother happy. Screw that traitor of an inner voice!
They left the bakery after Nino arrived, accompanied by Tom who joyfully whistled a Christmas tune. Adrien fell into a discussion with Nino about whether or not Christmas songs sounded better in their original versions or as remixes. Meanwhile he watched Félix out of the corner of his eye, noticing every slight grimace or flinch he did when he heard or smelled something unpleasant.

With it being the beginning of December, there were lots of things Félix and he—but especially Félix—were sensitive about. Be it the shrill cry of one of the small Santa figures some shops had in their display windows, or the real risk of being touched by holly at some point.

Especially the latter was something to be avoided, because touching one of the red berries felt like getting bit by a spider. It also took about an hour for the annoying pain to dissipate. Very unpleasant.

Adrien knew that black cats were not known to be lucky and especially Cat Sidhe were bad omens, but Félix seemed determined to take that to a new level. After barely three blocks, he had already bumped into something or someone with holly at least five times. Each of it unfortunate enough to not be a coincidence. Bad luck like their namesake, but where had it come from?

*What have you done?*

“Hello Albert,” Marinette suddenly said and Adrien looked up from his discussion whether dubstep was appropriate for Christmas songs or not, to see who she was greeting.

“Oh, if it isn’t my favourite customer! How are you doing, Marinette?”

Albert, as it turned out, was an elderly man that owned a flower shop a few blocks down from the bakery. The very same flower shop where Marinette had bought the majority of her balcony plants.

“Great! Today I’m here for the trees!” Marinette declared and there was a fiery expression in her eyes. Adrien knew that expression. She usually wore it right before she demolished him in a video game. He had no clue why said expression applied to Christmas tree shopping though. Was it perhaps more challenging than he thought?

Albert winked at her knowingly. “Just what I wanted to hear.

“Claire, keep an eye on the shop, will ya? I’ll be at the tree sale for a while!” He hollered into the shop where a middle-aged blonde woman gave him a nod and then continued to pick out flowers for a bouquet.

“The trees are over there,” Albert said and ushered the group of five a little bit down the street. There, the space in front of an empty store and parts of the empty store were used to display an array of conifers of all sizes and kinds.

As they walked, Albert draped an arm over Nino’s shoulders and pulled him into a side-hug.

“Nino! It’s been a while, my boy! How have you been?”

“Good,” Nino replied with a grin and a voice that implied familiarity.

“Buying a tree this year?”

“No, sir.”
“Ah, one day I’ll convince ya yet. You’ll see!” The old man laughed and then turned to Tom.

“A nougat cake if it’s one of the first five.”

“I bet it’ll be at least seven.”

“You’re on! And I’ll pay for that cake if it isn’t, so better start planning one already!” Albert laughed.

Adrien followed the conversation with fascination and a lot of confusion. They all seemed to know the man beyond just a passing acquaintanceship, yet none of them had ever mentioned him before.

“We go here every year to buy our tree,” Marinette explained as if she had read his thoughts.

“Albert and Papa always make bets how many trees I’ll look at before finding the one we end up buying. When Albert wins, Papa makes him a cake for free, and if Papa wins, we’ll get a discount on the tree.”

“An odd deal,” Félix said.

Marinette shrugged. “They’ve done it since I was little.”

Adrien jumped when a new voice suddenly joined their conversation

“I’ve never seen you two before. Are you friends of Marinette?” Albert asked.

“Uhm…yes,” he said, taken off-guard. The last thing they needed was a newspaper headline that read “Agreste twins spotted while Christmas tree shopping!” Their father would kill them. Or worse: get out the bell collar! A definite nope!

“Are you looking for a tree too?” Albert asked enthusiastically and draped an arm around Adrien’s shoulders just as he had done with Nino before. He smelled like cigars, wood and old people.

Adrien was very glad that he had been the victim and not Félix since his brother did not take kindly to strangers touching him without his consent.

“We…uhm…maybe? We’re just here to help Mar,” he said.

For some reason, that made Albert laugh.

“Oh, you don’t know yet, do you? No one is fit to help her when she’s at it with picking the perfect Christmas tree! She has an eye for detail unlike anyone I’ve ever met and the longer she considers a tree, the higher a price I can sell it for.”

Adrien blinked. No wonder Marinette was looking at the trees like a fun new challenge.

“Well, since father insists on a plastic tree this year, if he buys one at all, we might as well have a look around,” Félix said which made Adrien whirl around to him.

“What?! Since when don’t we get a Christmas tree? When was that decided?!”

“I asked Nathalie before we…departed.”

He meant before they had snuck out of their bathroom window.
“Don’t worry boys, I’ve got plenty of trees here to choose from. I might even make you a special offer for the tree Marinette will rate as second-best.”

Albert winked conspiratorially.

The idea of an own Christmas tree in their room didn’t sound so bad. They would be able to decorate it as they liked and it would let their room smell pleasantly like a pine forest. No way in hell would Adrien tolerate a chemically-smelling fake tree.

“I mean, we *do* have some cash with us,” he thought out loud. Nino snorted.

“And when you say *some* cash, you mean…”

He looked at Adrien expectedly.

“Not that much, just two hundred,” Félix answered. Nino choked.

“Dudes, you desperately need to learn the value of money."

“Wait, that’s a lot?” Adrien asked. One could barely buy a video game console with that money!

Albert barked out a laugh.

“Where did you find those two, Marinette?”

To Adrien’s relief the old man also withdrew his arm from him.

“In the park,” Marinette replied without hesitation and grinned.

“It even was plant-related,” she winked at Adrien which lead him to bury his face further in his scarf.

“Stop bringing that up, *please!*”

She held true to her word of never letting him live down his shame.

“Nope,” she said, popping the ‘p’ and stuck out her tongue at him.

He playfully swatted at her and she dodged with a giggle.

“Alright, oh great chooser of Christmas trees, tell me the secrets of finding the right one,” Adrien said as they walked through the rows of trees that stood on wooden blocks. The first few they came across were relatively small and they just got bigger in size the further they ventured. Marinette didn’t even spare the small ones a glance.

“Depends on what you’re looking for. Our tree goes into the corner next to the television, so it has to fit in there somehow. Papa and I don’t like tiny trees, so I’ll have to find one that is big, full but also not too wide.”

Adrien had no idea that there were these many criteria for choosing a Christmas tree.

“I mean, our room is pretty empty, so I guess Félix and I could buy any tree here,” he said and tried scratching the back of his neck but was stopped by his scarf.

“I vote against a tiny one as well. It would look pathetic,” Félix stated.
“How about one of these red ones then?” Adrien asked teasingly as he spotted a bunch of trees that had been spray-painted to be another colour but green. Félix glared at him.

“Seriously though, I can’t believe there are people buying those,” Nino said as he regarded the colourful trees.

“Different people have different tastes, let’s not judge them,” Marinette shrugged.

“You’re just saying that because you wanted a pink Christmas tree when you were six.”

Marinette swatted at Nino. “Don’t tell them that! I have a reputation to uphold!”

Félix snorted. “For some reason I have no problem believing that.”

“I am older and wiser now!” Marinette insisted and then turned her attention back to the very naturally green trees they stood in the midst of.

She suddenly pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes while looking at a specific one. It was the same expression she got when she looked at a design and tried to discern what was wrong with it.

Adrien, for his part, did not see anything wrong with the tree she was currently scrutinizing. It looked big enough and also did not seem to be too wide.

After at most half a minute though, Marinette looked away and shook her head.

“Not that one,” she said and moved on to the next tree.

“What was wrong with it?” Adrien asked.

“Too few branches in the middle. It makes it look barren.”

“Yes, I noticed that too,” Félix agreed.

And so, the hunt for the perfect Christmas tree continued. Adrien quickly found out why Albert had said that the trees Marinette singled out could get their price raised, since she only looked at the best of the best. All of them looked perfect to his eyes, but there was still always something wrong. One was not straight enough, another was too uneven, another had multiple tips and so on.

Meanwhile Albert trotted behind them like an excited puppy and put colourful bands on the trees Marinette took a look at.

What was probably most amusing and not at all surprising was Félix to join Marinette in her nitpicking. He pointed out crooked branches, compared the heights of trees and even had something to say about how the needles were grown.

In short: Marinette and Félix combined made Albert lose his bet by about twenty trees, but also made him very happy because he had more trees he could consider raising the price for.

It also meant that the tree that was at last rated as the second-best tree was exactly the one Adrien and Félix ended up buying. They politely refused any refunds and even gave Albert a tip.

There was only one thing they had not thought of in advance: how to get the tree home.

“Well, it doesn’t look that heavy,” Adrien said as he pondered the netted tree on the ground.

“I’m not sure a regular human teenager is able to carry one of those. We’re not supposed to draw
any attention to ourselves, remember?” Félix hissed so quietly that only Adrien could hear him.

“What, do you suggest that we drag it all the way home?”

“Everything okay?” Marinette asked as she stepped out of the tent the others had all disappeared into to drink some mulled wine and hot chocolate respectively. Adrien and Félix had stayed outside due to the holly and mistletoe that was strewn about on the table as decoration. The risk of accidentally touching either of those was just too high.

“We were just discussing how to get the tree home. Inconspicuously,” Félix said, adding the last word for emphasis.

“Oh, I can carry it if you want,” Marinette said.

“But…isn’t it too heavy for you?” Adrien asked. He did not want Marinette to hurt herself because of him.

“Hold my cocoa for a sec,” she said and shoved her mug into Félix’s gloved hands.

Adrien then watched as small, frail-looking Marinette lifted up a tree that was almost twice her size.

“Ok, I admit that it is heavy,” she wheezed and let it drop back to the ground. “But it should be alright if Nino and I carry it. I’m sure you two will be able to get it the rest of the way home afterwards.”

Adrien blanched. He had totally forgotten that they would have to march through their front door with a Christmas tree.

“Nathalie will be thrilled,” Félix deadpanned, apparently having had a similar thought.

Nathalie was not at all impressed when the twins returned home that evening with a netted Christmas tree. At one point, Adrien even saw her looking to the ceiling, seemingly praying for patience. He was a little sorry, but if it would be this or a plastic tree, then he would just have to deal with the guilt of causing his father’s assistant some trouble. Especially since she now had to go on a shopping trip to find a Christmas tree stand.

Chapter End Notes

The next three chapters are already written and edited, so I have good news: There will be regular uploads this month!
I will stick to a Sunday schedule for Spellbound and a Thursday schedule for Clockwork Harmony and that will last until I run out of pre-written chapters! :3
Midwinter

Chapter Summary

half a year since chapter one!

Chapter Notes

This is 20 words short of 3k and therefore one of my shorter chapters, but I still like it a lot because poor Félix is finally starting to make progress with his healing! :A; The poor kitten deserves good things!

Oh, and Chloé appears. :D First time writing her and I have to admit it is a little difficult. On the one hand, I don't want to fall prey to clichés and on the other hand, I still need to stay in character for her. It's a difficult balancing act.

And yes, it is intentional that Midwinter, which is on December 21st, is the 21st chapter of Spellbound. >:3c

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If karma was a thing, then it was out for one Adrien Agreste.

“And then she gave some pathetic excuses as to why it could not be delivered on the very same day. Ridiculous! Utterly ridiculous!”

Chloé’s demands of seeing him had become more frequent and more insistent in the previous two months so that they had started to sound like threats. It was not like Adrien hated to visit his childhood friend, but it was like seeing a person and not recognizing them. Just like Félix had been not like himself before Samhain. He was getting better, but something of this otherness still lingered on him like a smudge that didn’t want to go away. It was scary.

His mind still saw the Chloé that had played Seelie and Unseelie with him when they were kids. It was a Chloé that had shared her toys with him and brushed his fur. A Chloé that had even gotten along with Félix.

His eyes saw another Chloé now and he couldn’t help but feel like he had lost a friend.

“Humans can’t use portals or faerie paths as shortcuts to deliver things, so it usually takes a while,” Adrien tried to reason, hoping in vain that Chloé would recognize common sense when it was relayed to her carefully. She flinched as if she had been stung though and threw him a slight glare.

“Don’t use that word,” she hissed.

Adrien blinked. “That’s how it’s called though. I didn’t name it,” he defended himself. Not that it would bring much, since Chloé just huffed.

“Then humans should invent those shortcuts! Their incompetence knows no bounds as it seems.”
Adrien sighed as Chloé stormed off, probably to redo her makeup or brush her already perfectly untangled hair.

Sabrina, who sat on one of the armchairs and worked on what he guessed was Chloé’s homework, flinched as a door loudly slammed shut. Adrien just flattened his ears slightly.

This was exactly how he had imagined his visit to go. Instead of asking how he had been in the last few months, Chloé had fired complaint after complaint at him about all sorts of things. Never a complaint about him personally though. At least her common sense reached as far as knowing that insulting another fae was a horrible idea, even if you were the daughter of the Court chief.

Adrien hesitantly turned his gaze to Sabrina who immediately looked away and pretended to read something in the maths book she held.

“You can yell at me, you know?” Adrien said, his tail nervously lashing and his fingers fiddling with the hem of his shirt. His claws pierced it but he did not care. It was one of the designer shirts his father had given him to wear and therefore wasn’t something important.

“W-what?” Sabrina asked and looked at him like a deer in headlights. He gave her a guilty smile.

“I know you’re still mad. At least I would be if I were you.”

Sabrina bit her lip and looked in the direction Chloé had disappeared into.

“I’m not mad at you, Adrien. It’s been years now and we were kids back then. You didn’t know any better.”

“That doesn’t change things.”

“You were not the one that took my skin, so you’re not to blame. You even tried to get it back.”

Adrien didn’t know what to say. He did not deserve forgiveness for telling Chloé a secret he should not have told her. It was his fault that Sabrina’s skin had been stolen and she was now enslaved to Chloé. A small reminder of how cruel the Court could be, even when you were just a child.

He should have known better.

His mother had told him the stories of selkies getting their skins stolen by humans and then having to obey them and become their wives. Back then, his mind probably had not realized that this was not limited to forcing a selkie to be one’s wife and especially not limited to just humans. Real fae couldn’t steal from one another but halflings could.

Chloé was such a halfling and she had stolen Sabrina’s skin to prove something to her mother, so that she would finally be held in high regards.

Audrey had not much left for her half-mortal child though and most often acted like Chloé didn’t exist. Well, except for the times where a halfling came in useful.

Adrien regretted that Sabrina had been caught in this crossfire. Sabrina, who, even without the seal skin, still smelled like the sea.

“I will get it back…eventually,” Adrien said.

Making Sabrina lose her selkie skin was his biggest regret and he would do anything to fix his mistake. For her to lose her skin was like not being able to shift would be to him. Torturous.
“Don’t make promises you can’t keep.”

Before Adrien could argue and tell her he was being serious, Chloé re-entered the room with all the subtlety of a marching band and the natural grace of a fae one.

“Adrikins! You are going to spend Midwinter here, won’t you?”

Adrien could do nothing but stare at her in disbelief as she let herself fall down on the sofa next to him and began to file her nails.

“Chloé.”

His voice sounded strangled all of a sudden. He coughed and tried again.

“You know what happened last year on Midwinter.”

“What? That you didn’t come as well? Do you want to make it a tradition to leave me alone on one of the most horrible days of the year?!” She shrieked, her sharp teeth visible through her snarl. Adrien was neither impressed nor intimidated. His own fangs were much sharper and his irritation at her ignorance gave him some of the cool indifference Félix usually wore.

“Mother disappeared last Midwinter,” he hissed coldly and was happy to note that Chloé flinched.

“But it’s much safer here!” She said in a desperate try to still win his favour.

“No place but a sídhe is safe on Midwinter or Midsummer and even that is relative. You know that. We have iron shutters around the house and they help at least a little. Félix and I will be fine, but… we’d rather be alone.”

Chloé huffed and looked away. “Ridiculous,” she said and turned her nose up in the air. “If you don’t want to spend time with me, then you can leave.”

Adrien frowned.

“Chloé—”

“I said leave!” She hissed and threw him a venomous glare. This was not the Chloé he had become friends with all these years ago. What he was looking at was a self-righteous fae who was convinced that every favour of the world was hers to demand.

He stood up and walked over to the glass door that led to the balcony. With his hand resting on the handle and without turning around, he spoke again.

“Congratulations Chloé, you did it,” Adrien turned around to look at her but he shouldn’t have bothered because she gone back to studying her nails.

“You became a true Unseelie.”

“Flattery won’t get you anywhere, Adrikins,” she replied but at that point he had already stepped outside into the cold winter air and shifted. There was only one place for him to go now and the mansion was not it.
“We could enchant him so that he would leave the house during Midwinter and return when it’s over. At least then we won’t have to put up with his idiocy,” Félix said with a dangerous grin. It was the kind of dangerous only a mixture of madness and mischievousness could create. A faerie grin that showed too many teeth stretching wide on his brother’s face.

Adrien wanted to slap that grin off of him.

“Maybe we could try to talk to him first?” Adrien suggested. He’d prefer it if they would not enchant their father, especially since they were not that good with magic yet. One tiny mistake and they would accidentally drive him mad or worse. No, experimenting with magic was out of the question.

Félix huffed. “As if he would agree to any suggestion we give him.”

“It’s been a year today since mother disappeared. Maybe he just needed time to understand what happened?”

“Unlikely.”

“Doesn’t hurt to try,” Adrien said and slowly walked towards their door.

“What about Marinette?”

Adrien stopped mid-motion, his hand lingering above the door handle.

“What about her?” He asked slowly, but no matter how much he tried to keep any emotion out of his voice, the fur that stood on end and his lashing tail betrayed him.

“Don’t play dumb with me, Adrien. I know what you’re trying to do.”

With a few steps Félix had reached him and forcefully turned him around.

“You know she would help but you still want to keep me away from her!”

Adrien was taken-aback by his brother’s snarl. Yes, he was wary of Félix ever since Samhain, but at least the situation with Marinette seemed to be under control again.

“Félix, do you remember what you said when I returned on Midsummer?”

“Yes, you returned! Which means it is safe with her and—”

“What did you say?!” Adrien interrupted him and was surprised at himself as he raised his voice to do so. He never raised his voice.

“I told you to not scare me like that again,” Félix snarled and his expression seemed downright feral. Did the approaching Midwinter bring out the fae side that he had tried so hard to bury in the last two months? Was it bringing out something similar in Adrien too? He was scared to look into a mirror.

“You asked me if I had lost my mind!” Adrien said. “And that with good reason, because what happened after Midsummer? Marinette could suddenly hear the fair folk! And that was just me being close to her, without any magical artefacts, charms, wards and the like. What do you think would happen if both of us would spend the entirety of Midwinter close to her with all that stuff?!
“As soon as she can see…”

Adrien looked at Félix expectantly, waiting for him to finish the sentence.

“She cannot forget again,” his brother said and looked away. Adrien used that opportunity to hug him.

“I get that you’re scared. I’m scared too, but we cannot risk Marinette’s safety just because you don’t want to put up with father’s stubbornness. You got through Midsummer all by yourself last time and this time I promise to not go anywhere.”

He ended the hug and gave his brother a forcefully giddy smile.

“We could build a blanket fort and watch Christmas movies in it the entire night! How does that sound? And we could steal that giant chocolate Santa father got as a Christmas present from this one fabric supplier and see how much we can eat of it until we get sick,” he giggled. “See? We have distractions. It’ll be fine.”

Félix still did not look at him.

“You know how I went to see Chloé last week?” Adrien said to change the subject. A topic change that drew a snarl out of his brother. He took that as a ‘yes’.

“I almost didn’t recognize her. I know that she has been changing for a while but now she’s just so much different to how she was before that it’s…scary.”

Adrien forcefully turned Félix’s face so that he would look at him.

“I’m worried that the same thing will happen to you.”

Whatever snappy retort Félix had probably prepared died on his tongue at that. Instead he just opened his mouth as if he was about to say something and closed it again.

“Think about it, Fé: Since when am I the reasonable one of us two? Since when do I have to keep you from doing stupid stuff? Since when am I the one who thinks…less like a faerie?”

Adrien could see how the last word sent a shiver down his brother’s spine and made the fur on his tail stand on end. A reaction he would not have given back in summer. Sure, they did not like to be called faeries, but they did not mind it as much as the true fair folk did. As much as Chloé did.

“I know this is not just you, but also because Midwinter is approaching, but please, by Danu, get a grip!”

With these words Adrien stormed out of the room.

“Have I really become this bad?” Félix asked. His voice was strained, like he was about to start sobbing. It was the closest thing they could come to crying.

“It’s okay, you can still go back. You have me and you have Marinette, too. Everything will be
“fine,” Adrien said as the two of them were huddled together in their badly-constructed blanket fort and watched a Christmas movie marathon on Adrien’s laptop.

The St. John’s wort was itchy like always and the dried apples were an uncomfortable presence, but it was generally bearable. It wasn’t as nice as it had been on Midsummer or Samhain where Adrien had cuddled up to Marinette and she had petted him, but it was still nice in its own way.

Despite spending so much time with Marinette in the past half year—it was half a year on the day now that he knew her—Adrien still loved to spend time with his brother and just comfortably hang out with him. It was different than hanging out with a friend or any other family member. After all, Félix was not just his brother, he was his twin brother, his other half. It felt good to be there for each other.

“What if I can’t go back?” Félix asked and Adrien felt that his brother started shivering. He snuggled closer to him with a comforting purr.

“Fé, if there is one person in the world who could do it, then it’d be you. You’re smart and ridiculously stubborn. It’s just a matter of staying grounded for long enough and getting used to it.”

“But what if I really can’t go back? What if it’s like a scar that will never disappear?”

“Then we’ll deal with it and prevent it from getting worse,” Adrien said and momentarily snapped his head to the side, his ears twitching, as he heard the tail end of a wonderful song. He quickly shook his head.

*Ignore it. The songs are not important; Félix is!*

His brother gave him a humourless smile.

“You’re ridiculously rational lately.”

Adrien shrugged.

“One of us has to be.”

This earned him a playful shove.

“Shut up.”

Adrien snorted. “For real though, Fé. You were the one that tried to jump out the window this time and you only didn’t because I hit you atop the head with the St. John’s wort bouquet.”

“May I point out that you have become unnecessarily violent?” Félix said but his small grin betrayed the joke.

“You deserved it.”

As if his body was just reminded of the previous assault, Félix sneezed.

“It’s funny how our roles are reversed this time. I’m just glad I could stop you from getting outside. Midwinter must be bad with the cold wind and the frozen roofs on top of everything.”

“I don’t see any fun in it,” Félix said dryly.

“You’re right. It’s hell,” Adrien replied soberly. “But at least we’re in it together this time, right?”
As it should be,” Félix said and snuggled closer to Adrien, a quiet purr rumbling in his chest. They then watched thirty more minutes of ‘Home Alone’, laughing at all the accidents and traps, before Adrien started talking again.

“Do you think mother is happy where she is?”

It was the first time either of them had spoken about it that day. So far it had been like a silent pact to not talk about the anniversary of their mother’s disappearance, but Adrien just couldn’t pretend like nothing had to be talked about anymore.

“Maybe,” Félix said, his eyes not betraying any emotion.

“It doesn’t help wondering about it anyway,” he continued. “She won’t come back any time soon. And when she does, it will be like only a week or so has passed for her.”

“I miss her,” Adrien said.

Félix wrapped his arms around Adrien and buried his head in his neck.

“I miss her too,” he whispered, as if the world wasn’t allowed to hear. As if the world was not meant to see Félix show any weakness. It was only for Adrien to see and hear. He hugged his brother back.

“You’re fluffy like her, you know?”

Félix snorted. “Don’t call me fluffy just because you’re a shorthair.”

“There’s no one but me who dares to call you fluffy anyway, so where’s the harm?” Adrien grinned. He withdrew from the hug when Félix stayed quiet for too long.

“Fé?”

“You’re not…the only one. On Samhain a changeling called me fluffy. She was very rude about it,” his brother sniffed but Adrien clearly saw a faint blush on his cheeks.

Interesting.

It was also the first time Félix talked about Samhain out of his own volition.

“Aww, Fé, why didn’t you tell me you found a girlfriend?”

Teasing had to be allowed. This was a precious opportunity after all!

“She is hardly even an acquaintance. Especially after what she has gotten me into.”

Félix’s eyes suddenly took on the dullness they usually had when the topic of Samhain came up. Adrien shifted nervously.

“Do you want to talk about it?” It was worth a try. Tongues were looser on Midwinter and minds freer.

“…”

“Fé?”

He sighed heavily. “I might as well.”
And that was how Adrien learned about the horrors his brother had carried around with himself all on his own for the past two months. No wonder he had changed…

Chapter End Notes

...am I the only one who suddenly wants to draw the scene where Adrien stopped Félix from running outside by hitting him with a bouquet atop the head? :'D

Next chapter will be around 8k words long, so look forward to that! I couldn't make it shorter to save my life! ;A; (but it's Christmas fluff, so I guess there won't be much to complain about ;D)
Christmas

Chapter Summary

what the title says ;D

Chapter Notes

Remember back in December when I had delusions about finishing the Christmas chapter in time for Christmas? Yeah, those were odd times! :D
THREE MONTHS LATER you finally get to see it. Oh, and let me tell you, this chapter didn't want to behave at all! I had so many problems, starting with just keeping it below 10k (I managed to make it 8k in the end. Not ideal, but can't help it) and then about who gets which present. RoseGardenTwilight can vouch that I basically had a flow chart of the presents alone (or at least a very extravagant list). It was also thanks to her that I did not mention every single present and therefore saved myself 2k or so words! :D Only the important stuff! ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Marinette sat at her desk and knitted a scarf while half-watching a Christmas movie Adrien had recommended to her. He and Félix had pulled an all-nighter two days ago and practically watched every Christmas movie in existence. When she had asked why they’d done it, Adrien had just replied with a ‘why not?’ and left it at that. That, and a winking emoji.

But that had been this morning. Now it was the evening of the 23rd and, like every year, Marinette was giddy for Christmas. Just this scarf needed to be finished and signed, then she’d be done!

The wool for it was one she had found in a shop Mel had recommended to her. It—the wool, not the shop—went through several shades of green, which made the finished scarf look like a summer meadow. If it wouldn’t be a gift, she would have kept it for herself, but Félix needed a cheer up more than she needed a new scarf.

He had been off since his birthday and judging from Adrien’s fidgeting behaviour whenever the topic of his brother was brought up, he was worried about it too. He definitely knew more about it than Marinette did, but she remembered what Mel told her and tried not to meddle. No matter how much she liked to help, sometimes she just had to accept that there were some things that just were not her business.

The only way in which she could help without being too forward was through Christmas presents and so she gave it her all. The only real purchase she had made was the wool and a lot of photo paper. But since those were just materials, the gifts still counted as self-made. Only the Rubik’s cube she had customized to be like a sudoku puzzle made a slight exception. It was an old one of hers which she had never used and after seeing one with a sudoku pattern on the internet she had thought it to be funny to paint it. Said cube was already wrapped in Christmas paper with the name ‘Félix’ written on it.
She had also made a photo album with the best photos they had taken during summer and in the last few months. That was a gift for both twins equally.

For Adrien specifically, she had knitted a hat with cat ears, enjoying the running joke of the black cat theme and hoped he would like it.

A scarf and a hat were both pieces of clothing, but those would at least be excusable if they looked off. She had told herself that exact same sentence like a mantra while knitting them so that she would not chicken out last minute and make something else instead. She wanted to become a fashion designer for Pete’s sake, so she would have to start somewhere!

Additionally to that, she had of course knitted ugly Christmas sweaters for both of them. She only dared to do that because it was kind of the point that they looked unstylish. That way she at least would not have to live in shame when the twins looked like they were modelling potato sacks. Then again, they would probably still find a way to make even that look good.

As she put the finishing touches to the green scarf, she contemplated how to give them the presents. It was one of the things she had not thought about at all, because seeing them—especially Adrien—almost every day had become as natural as going to school was. She had not considered that she would not see them around Christmas time.

Marinette had not known how long four days could be until she had to spend them all on her own. But at least she had spent that time wisely with finishing the last gifts that had still needed some work.

After she stitched the last swirl of her signature in a bright green thread, she opened up the messenger app on her phone.

**Marinette:** can you come over tomorrow? I have presents! :D

Marinette wrote into the group chat she had with both twins. The reply was almost immediate.

**Adrien:** PRESENTS?! O:

**Félix:** He means “yes”.

Marinette giggled as she imagined Adrien freaking out and Félix just being his reserved self.

**Adrien:** WE HAVE PRESENTS FOR YOU TOO! <3

**Marinette:** you didn’t have to!

**Félix:** Don’t be ridiculous. You more than deserve it.

**Adrien:** What Fé said! Also you got us presents so why shouldn’t we get you some? ;A;

**Marinette:** ok I relent

**Adrien:** GOOD! :3

**Marinette:** when can you come over? maman and papa will be busy in the bakery until three and then maman will start preparing dinner and I’ll help. can you come before then?

**Adrien:** Sure! And I’m jealous! I want a Christmas dinner too! T_T

Marinette blinked. Did that mean that they didn’t get Christmas dinner? Surely, she must have
misunderstood him.

**Marinette:** you don't get a christmas dinner???

**Adrien:** no! T__T our personal chef is not here during the holidays!

**Félix:** Additionally, father is absent. An urgent business trip to Milan or something.

**Adrien:** It's not so bad! We're living off of canned ravioli right now ;w;

Marinette stared at her phone screen in disbelief for a full minute.

**Marinette:** WHAT THE HELL!!!??!! YOU TELL ME THOSE THINGS!!! SINCE WHEN HAS THIS BEEN GOING ON??!?!?

**Adrien:** …yesterday

**Félix:** Yesterday morning. There was a note on the dining table, which was quite considerate.

Marinette could almost *hear* Félix’s sarcasm.

**Marinette:** maman and papa are asleep already but I'll ask them first thing tomorrow morning if you can stay over for christmas

**Félix:** We would hate to intrude on your family celebration.

**Marinette:** YOU'RE NOT INTRUDING!

**Adrien:** But we're not part of the family

Marinette exited the messenger app and decided to call those two idiots instead.

“Don’t think for a second that my parents wouldn't adopt you both if they could, so don’t give me this ‘we’re not part of the family’ crap!” She said before Adrien could even utter a greeting. There was a short silence on the other end.

“But…isn’t Christmas a sacred family thing?” Adrien asked.

“Yeah, but family is not limited to blood relatives, you know? And your Christmas sounds like it’s going to be shitty, no offence.”

“None taken. It’s true after all,” Félix said from the background. Apparently, she was on speaker phone.

“But what if your parents say no? You have not asked them yet,” Adrien said.

Marinette rolled her eyes.

“Adrien, you have *met* my parents. When I tell Maman as much as that your Christmas dinner consists of canned ravioli, she will personally come to your house and drag you here. And that doesn’t even include the part where your father just went on a business trip during Christmas without telling you!”

“You do have a point,” Félix said after some contemplation.

“See? And I’m not leaving you alone on Christmas! I’ll ask my parents tomorrow morning, though
I doubt that they’ll have anything against it.

As predicted, her parents were as appalled as Marinette had been when she told them of Adrien’s and Félix’s situation. She did not even have to ask if they were allowed to stay over since her parents immediately insisted that the two of them should pack their duffel bags right away.

When Marinette returned from grocery shopping—they needed to accommodate for two additional people after all—Adrien and Félix were already sitting on the sofa in her living room. Both of them held a mug of hot chocolate and they occasionally took something from the plate with chocolates and cookies. Someone—her mother?—had even put on Christmas music in the background.

“Oh, you’re already here,” Marinette said happily surprised as she closed the door with her foot while still holding the shopping basket.

“Mari!”

Adrien jumped up from the sofa so fast that he almost spilled his hot chocolate. Only Félix’s quick reflexes prevented that mess from happening as he snatched the mug out of his brother’s hand.

“I heard that we’ll be six instead of four people, so I bought some more food to feed two poor, starved models,” Marinette said with a grin and gladly gave Adrien the shopping basket when he offered to help.

“Wait, six people? Who else is coming?” Félix asked, clearly uncomfortable.

“My grandma. She should arrive soon, so brace yourselves.”

“What’s your grandma like?” Adrien asked as the two of them went over to the kitchen area to sort the groceries.

“She is…pretty much the opposite of regular grandmas. Instead of sitting in a comfy chair and knitting all day she drives around on her motorcycle and visits all kinds of places. I think she was in Brazil last. We barely see her because she’s traveling all the time, but she always comes home for Christmas!”

“That’s so cool! I can’t wait to meet her! Where does this go?”

“In the fridge. I’m sure you’ll get along great,” Marinette said and then glanced over to Félix. “Just a heads up: She doesn’t think much of personal space.”

“Duly noted. I will keep my distance to compensate for that.”

Marinette smiled but internally debated whether or not she should say something to Félix. In the last few months he had become even more distant than he had already been and even his texts were lacking in any real interest. Her traitorous inner voice would tell her that he did not like her anymore, but Adrien’s story about something unknown happening on Halloween prevented her from drawing that conclusion.

Something most definitely has happened and it afflicted Félix even almost two months afterwards. She should just concentrate on making him feel welcome and comfortable. Him being left alone with Adrien on Christmas probably had not helped the situation.
“Don’t worry. I’ll make sure she won’t be too overbearing,” Marinette said. She saw Félix let out what she thought to be a sigh of relief.

Suddenly Adrien perked up and looked to the window. Marinette was first wondering what caught his attention but then she also heard the noise of a motorcycle drawing near and eventually stopping right in front of the house.

She hastily sorted the last of the groceries into the fridge and left the rest out on the kitchen counter.

“Speak of the devil,” she said with an excited grin. It has already been a year since she had last seen her Nonna. Getting letters and reading about her journeys just wasn’t the same as being able to listen to her overdramatic retellings of said adventures.

When Marinette was already at the door, she turned around again, motioning to the twins to follow her.

“Come on! I’ll introduce you!”

“If you don’t mind, I’d rather stay here,” Félix said.

Neither his body language nor voice betrayed anything than indifference, but Marinette still had the feeling that he was uncomfortable. In the half year in which she has known him, she learned that Félix took a while to warm up to people and rather preferred to have as few as possible surround him.

Step one of her plan to make Félix feel comfortable: Let him be.

She looked over to Adrien who just shrugged.

“Go on ahead. I’ll stay with Fé.”

Another thing she had learned in the past half year was that the twins never separated unless it was necessary.

Step two: Don’t separate Félix from Adrien.

As she rushed down the stairs to greet her grandma, she thought about how exactly she would be able to make Félix feel right at home while someone he considered a stranger was present. She just needed to find something they could connect over. Maybe her grandma’s stories would interest him! It was worth a shot.

“Marinetta, my little fairy!”

Marinette was immediately smothered in her grandmother’s hug.

“Oh, look at you! You’ve grown so much!” She said and pressed a huge smooch on her cheek.

“I’m so glad you came, Nonna!” Marinette said and hopped giddily in place.

“Have you told her yet?” She asked her parents.

“Not yet. Mama has just been here for a minute after all,” her father said with a laugh.

“Tell me what?”
Instead of a reply, Marinette just took her grandma's hand.

“Come on! I want to introduce you!”

“Introduce me to who? Since when are there guests on Christmas except me?”

Marinette giggled. “Since now! Their father left on a business trip and I couldn’t just leave them alone on Christmas.”

She gnawed at her lip when she thought about it again. Her grandma was traveling all around the world all year, but for Christmas she always made it a point to come back to Paris and spend the holidays with them. Why would Gabriel Agreste just abandon his own children like that?

“A business trip on Christmas?” Her grandmother seemed appalled. “Tsk, some people don’t know when to lay off work.”

Apparently…

“We’re back!” Marinette called when they entered the living room. Adrien leaned at the back of the sofa while Félix sat where she had last seen him.

“Hi?” Adrien said awkwardly and scratched the back of his neck. With all the modelling and public appearances, one really did not expect him to be shy, but Marinette knew that his social awkwardness went a long way. Félix’s too, but he could mask it better than his brother.

Adrien offered her grandmother his hand, his smile growing a little more confident.

“I’m Adrien.”

Her grandma, ever enthusiastic to meet new people, immediately took his hand and shook it.

“And I’m Gina Dupain. My, aren’t you adorable?” She said and patted him on the head. Marinette hoped she wouldn’t do the same with Félix. Said twin sighed quietly and stood up. Her grandma immediately whirled around to him with a smile and took his hand the second he offered it to shake it.

“Félix Agreste,” he said in the polite tone that he usually used to mask his emotions.

Her grandmother repeated her introduction, and—much to especially Félix’s horror—ruffled his hair. Marinette and Adrien cringed in synch and threw each other a slightly panicked glance. This was not off to a good start.

“And you two are related?” Her grandma went on and turned her attention back to Adrien. With that she missed the way Félix desperately tried to fix his hair.

“We’re twins,” Adrien supplied, still a little tense as he threw small, uncertain glances in either Marinette’s or Félix’s direction. Her grandma seemed surprised.

“Twins? But you’re so different!”

“We get that a lot,” Félix mumbled with an eye roll.

“Oh, that reminds me of when I was in India this year! There were these twins that—”

And so, her grandma started to tell one of her many stories. They all sat down on the sofa to listen to her, while Adrien and Marinette both acted as buffers between Gina and Félix. In the time it took
to tell the story, both twins visibly relaxed, which Marinette was glad for. She’d hate for there to be tensions between her grandma and them.

Her father briefly came upstairs to tell his mother that he had brought her luggage up into the guest room and that he would have to go back to tend to the bakery then.

As the story finished, Adrien seemed to have a lot of questions, but was abruptly cut off by a question being directed at him instead.

“So, how did you two meet my little fairy?”

Marinette, who sat right next to Adrien, felt him tense. Félix, on the other hand, looked like he had just been personally offended and inconspicuously balled his fists. Had it really been that bad of a question? Sure, Adrien had pretty much made a fool of himself when they had first met and she knew that Félix hated it when someone talked bad about his brother, but this reaction was a little intense.

A glance at Adrien told her that he had gone pale, as if he’d seen a ghost.

“Uhm…your what?” He asked and shifted towards Félix.

“Marinetta!” Gina exclaimed while pointing at Marinette. Her grandma apparently had not noticed how uncomfortable the twins suddenly were.

“Do you go to school together?”

“No, they’re homeschooled. We met in a park by coincidence,” Marinette said since neither Adrien nor Félix seemed to give a coherent answer any time soon.

“Oh, how romantic,” her grandma said with a sly grin.

“It isn’t like that!” Adrien immediately threw in while he blushed probably as furiously as Marinette herself did. At least her cheeks felt like they were on fire. Why did everyone have to draw that conclusion?!

To everyone’s surprise, Félix suddenly snorted.

“Yeah, romantic. If looks could kill then Adrien would have died back then.”

“It wasn’t that bad,” Marinette pouted. Had she really glared at Adrien? She couldn’t remember. Maybe she had.

“You did not have the privilege to watch the entire spectacle from the sidelines. And trust me, I am as determined as you to never let Adrien live it down.”

“I hate you both,” Adrien grumbled and gave Félix a slight shove. At least that seemed to have deterred them from their previous shock. Marinette just hoped that the good mood would stay.

Her grandmother insisted to help prepare the food while Marinette was sent upstairs together with Adrien and Félix so they could prepare for the two of them to stay the night. Since the guest room was taken, they would have to get creative. The spare mattress from downstairs was carried to the attic with only slight trouble. Marinette was about to start a search for the air mattress they had from that one time they had gone camping, when Félix claimed that Adrien and he could just share
“We’re used to sharing a bed, so it’s fine.”

“If you say so. But don’t complain later when it doesn’t work out after all.”

“It’ll be fine, don’t worry,” Adrien said again and sat down next to his brother on the chaise lounge.

“So, I am curious; how does your family in particular celebrate Christmas?” Félix asked.

“Hmm, we eat dinner together and then we just talk until we go to bed. Tomorrow morning, we’ll open the Christmas presents and then the rest of the day is usually spent doing fun stuff. When I get a video game for example, I usually play it with Papa almost the entire day.”

“That sounds so nice,” Adrien said with a sad grin. “I’m sorry that we don’t have a present for your grandma.”

“Hey, don’t worry about it. I’m sure it’s already gift enough for her to have two fresh minds to corrupt.”

“And you are sure we are not intruding?”

“Félix Agreste,” Marinette said and picked up a pillow. “Don’t you dare say that again or you’ll leave me no choice but to use this.”

Félix raised his eyebrows.

“A pillow?”

Adrien’s eyes started to sparkle with delight and he also snatched a pillow from the chaise.

“Are you suggesting what I think you are suggesting?” He asked Marinette. She grinned back at him.

“You bet!”

Félix didn’t even have time to dodge as Adrien’s pillow already made an impact with his face.

“Pillow fight!” He yelled and Marinette joined his enthusiasm with a giggle and a pillow to his face. He was quick to retaliate and in turn threw her on the mattress. Even Félix eventually joined in, making it more of a war than a simple fight. One that included tickles and the resulting kicks.

They eventually stopped and just let themselves fall backwards on the mattress, still giggling.

“Being assaulted by pillows is a strange way to make someone feel welcome,” Félix said with a grin on his face.

“Well, you seem stubborn enough to question it, so I have to forcefully hit it into your skull until you remember it.”

“So violent!” Adrien gasped in mock horror. “What happened to our sweet little Mari who made us flower crowns?”
“She’s dead. Killed in the war of pillows,” Marinette said and let her head roll to the side, her tongue rolling out with a “bleh” sound to indicate her demise.

“No! Stay with us Mari!” Adrien pleaded and jokingly shook her for emphasis.

“Kids? Dinner is almost ready!” Her father’s voice suddenly shouted from downstairs. Marinette’s state of death was instantly forgotten as she jumped up from the mattress.

“Oh shit, it’s that late already?!”

“What’s wrong?” Adrien asked.

“I still wanted to change and do my hair and maybe even wear a little makeup.”

Would she be able to do that in ten minutes? She had not even picked out her outfit with all that had been going on before!

It wasn’t like her family would mind if what she wore wasn’t one hundred percent fashionable, but she would mind. And it was always nice to have an excuse to dress up a little.

“Don’t worry, we’ll help. Adrien might be horrible when it comes to fashion—”

“Hey!” Said fashion disaster threw in.

“But I can give you advice if you’re indecisive.”

“Do we have to dress up too? We didn’t know what was appropriate so we just packed a lot of outfits,” Adrien said sheepishly.

“You don’t have to, but you can if you want?” Marinette said, slowly getting out of her panic and settling on determination instead.

“Ok, I’ll find an outfit to wear and then I’ll change in the bathroom downstairs while you can stay up here and change. Would that be okay?”

She tried very hard not to think about the process of them changing, which, of course, resulted in her not being able to think about anything else.

_Shut up, stupid teenage brain!_ 

Félix nodded. “And afterwards I can help you with your hair.”

That surprised her. She would have never guessed that Félix was any good as a hairstylist, but she would just accept that fact for now and move on before she’d be too late.

And so, the rush of picking the perfect Christmas outfit began. They all eventually decided on a dark blue dress for her that glittered if the light hit it just right, making it look like the midnight sky. Marinette had not made it herself, but it had been a present for her birthday last year. She was just glad that she had not grown too much since then.

When she had changed and came back up the stairs, she knocked on the trap door.

“What’s the matter?”

The last thing she wanted was to walk in on the two of them while they were still changing. The
thought alone made heat rush to her cheeks.

“Yep, the coast is clear!” Adrien replied and opened the trapdoor for her. As she climbed up the last steps, she caught his look of absolute awe.

“You look beautiful.”

The heat that had just dissipated shot back into her cheeks and Adrien didn’t seem much better off as he seemingly noticed what he had said just a moment after. At the same time Marinette realised that she was absolutely not ready to see Adrien in a suit. He looked so good that it should be illegal.

“I mean, that dress looks very pretty on you. It fits your eyes and your hair and—”

“It was a good choice,” Félix cut in, the corner of his mouth twitching up in obvious amusement. He also wore a suit and looked unfairly good in it.

*Models.* Marinette thought with a weird mixture of jealousy and fondness.

“Sit down and I’ll do your hair,” he said and motioned to the chair in front of her vanity. “Any wishes or suggestions?”

“I’ll just trust your expertise,” she said, unable to even start thinking about what hairstyle could possibly make her look good enough that her being in their presence wouldn’t make her feel incredibly inferior.

“What can I do?” Adrien eagerly asked and drew near.

“Go stand in the corner and look pretty,” Félix said without hesitation. Marinette saw Adrien pout in the mirror, but eventually do like his brother said, sitting down on the chaise lounge.

Meanwhile, Félix undid her bun and started brushing her long hair.

“While you look good with your hair down, I would suggest something else for this dress and also something that won’t get in the way at dinner. May I braid it?”

“S-sure,” Marinette said while she tried very hard not to freak out as Félix’s hands carefully combed through her hair, gathering strands and braiding them into a masterpiece.

“You’re very good at this,” she said as he was halfway through.

“I used to do that for mother a lot,” he said quietly. It was rare that either of the twins talked about their mother, especially since it had now been over a year since she has disappeared. Marinette didn’t know what to say and she couldn’t nod either since Félix had strictly instructed her to hold still.

“It’s been… a while,” he continued and she saw him give a sad smile in the mirror. “It’s actually quite nice to do it again.”

“Well, I volunteer as tribute for future hairstyling sessions then. This looks beautiful so far.”

Was the mirror screwing with the lighting or did Félix just *blush*?

“Thank you,” he said quietly and for some reason, that made Adrien grin like he had just gotten the best present in the world.
Before she knew it, Marinette already sat downstairs at the kitchen table. An additional table had been added to it so that everyone had enough room.

The conversation was light and cheerful and even though Félix did not say much, Marinette could see that he was enjoying himself. As did Adrien. He was practically glowing with happiness.

The two of them occasionally flinched when her grandma called her ‘my little fairy’ but apart from that, there were no further incidents.

Speaking of her grandma, Gina Dupain, as predicted, seemed ecstatic to have a fresh audience to tell her stories to. Thus, most of the talk after dinner was done by her as she retold the tale of when she had fought a kangaroo or how she had travelled across the Indonesian islands.

Even though Marinette knew the stories already, they were still exciting to hear. Though she was probably not nearly as excited as Adrien was. He was basically at the edge of his seat the entire time, soaking in her grandma’s stories as if he had never heard anything more exciting.

Eventually they all went to bed which brought Marinette to a tiny dilemma: She would sleep in the same room as Adrien and Félix.

Sure, the three of them had stayed at the same house back in summer when they went to the beach, but even then, they had stayed in separate rooms. And yes, she had many sleepovers with Nino before in the past, but Nino was…well…Nino! They had known each other since kindergarten and he was basically her brother. They had sleepovers way before it had become weird to have a boy and a girl sleep in the same room together.

With the Agreste twins she did not have that luxury. The three of them knew each other quite well, having spent the majority of the past half year together, but that still didn’t prevent it for being awkward. At least for her.

Adrien seemed over the moon with the entire situation and for Félix it was hard to tell if he thought anything in particular about the sleeping arrangements.

“This is our first sleepover!” Adrien said while excitedly bouncing on the mattress.

All of them had already changed into their pyjamas—Marinette’s own ones were Christmas themed—and were contemplating if they should go to bed already. Well, Adrien seemed as far away from sleep as one could get, so it would probably be a while.

“Congratulations,” Marinette said with a laugh that was only slightly awkward. Only Félix seemed to notice it as he raised an eyebrow in return.

“Do you want to do makeovers now?” She asked in an effort to not let an awkward silence follow.

“Yes!”

…She had been joking!

“A good idea. Especially since we missed the opportunity to see you with makeup because of the rush earlier.”
She had not expected Félix of all people to agree with Adrien in that moment.

“Wait, so you two want to wear rainbow eyeshadow and have your hair braided?” She purposefully made it sound as ridiculous as possible.

“Why not? It sounds fun!”

That had certainly never happened when Nino and her had a sleepover. Marinette had always thought of those things to be part of girl sleepovers only. Something no guy would ever be interested in.

Well, the stereotypes had been wrong!

“You two are such models,” she said with an eye roll.

“You say that as if it's a bad thing.”

Adrien seemed genuinely confused.

“Well, I was actually joking. If I would have suggested it to Nino, he would have voluntarily slept on the sofa downstairs to escape the wrath of my makeup kit.”

“What is wrong with makeup?” Adrien asked in all his naïve glory. Félix, who was equally sheltered but apparently more educated on the subject, decided to take pity on him.

“Adrien, boys don’t usually wear makeup.”

“Oh,” said model said and he blushed sheepishly.

“I mean, if you two really want to, we could try to do each other’s makeup? As weird as that sounds,” Marinette said eventually.

“I don’t think it sounds weird,” Adrien mumbled with a pout.

And that’s how the three of them spent the following three hours until midnight doing each other’s hair and makeup. Adrien proved again to be the least artistic of the trio, while Félix had only good things to say about Marinette’s makeup skills. No matter if the end results looked good or comically bad though, the three of them had surprisingly much fun.

“Eyeshadow actually looks good on you,” Marinette said after she had just finished doing Adrien’s makeup again. Félix, meanwhile, just snorted since she had purposefully made it look as girly as possible.

“With some hair extensions and the right outfit, you could be mistaken for a girl,” he said, apparently finding the thought hilarious. Adrien though, just got an excited gleam in his eyes. A gleam she had learned meant either trouble or a lot of fun. Sometimes both.

“Oh my gosh, we have to try that! Marinette, can you make me an outfit that makes me look like a girl? I want to see how many people we could fool!”

While the request was quite odd, Marinette still felt herself grinning. She loved a good prank as long as it didn’t hurt anyone.

“I could try, but it would take some time,” she said.

“Design it for summer then! That should give you lots of time and I'll pay you in advance!”
Oh, he was *serious* about it. Then again, Adrien Agreste was not known for speaking sarcasm.

“Uh, let’s come back to that another time,” she said, as she seriously needed consider if this was really a good idea. If Adrien was *caught* running around Paris looking like a girl then they would have to deal with some quite unpleasant and annoying tabloid headlines.

When the makeup was washed off again and hair was unbraided, they eventually settled into their respective beds. Funny enough, the makeover session had worked wonders to loosen Marinette’s nerves so things were not quite as awkward as before anymore.

And there was yet another thing.

“I know the presents should not be opened before tomorrow, but I’ll make an exception for those two here,” Marinette said and produced two wrapped gifts from her loft bed where she had hidden them earlier.

Adrien looked like Christmas had come early…which it actually had. Quite literally.

She handed each twin the respective present and both immediately tore apart the wrapping paper. Adrien let out a gasp as he unfolded the Christmas sweater.

His had ‘meowy catmas’ knitted into it, together with a black cat that wore a Santa hat.

Félix’s sweater on the other hand proclaimed in blue letters ‘frost-tea’ with a snowman drinking tea below it. That image had been quite tricky to knit and she had needed Mel’s professional assistance to accomplish it.

Marinette could not see Félix’s reaction to his sweater though, because she was suddenly tackled—luckily, she had been sitting on the mattress and landed on it—and hugged very tightly by Adrien.

“Thank you! It’s purrfect!”

“You’re welcome,” she said when she was able to breathe again.

She suddenly heard a rumbling sound. At first, she thought that her phone was vibrating on the desk, but then she realised that it was coming from Adrien.

*Is he*…purring?

“You’re starting to take cat theme quite seriously, KitKat,” she giggled.

Adrien practically *jumped* away from her, blushing furiously.

“This is very well made, thank you,” Félix chimed in before Adrien could say anything—probably profuse apologies judging by his expression.

“I’m glad you like it,” Marinette said, thankful for this change of topic. Loosened nerves or not, being literally *glomped* by Adrien was something she did not want to think about in too much detail. A quick glance to the mirror on her vanity told her that she was blushing only marginally less than Adrien did.

*Damn it.*
When the Christmas breakfast was eaten and everyone was in a jolly mood, the time to open the presents had finally come.

“Merry Christmas everyone!” Her father declared, which was followed by a series of hugs.

A bone-breaking hug from her father, a gentle hug and a kiss from her mother, a normal hug from her Nonna and an uncharacteristically tight hug from Félix. When Adrien enthusiastically hugged her last, the hug lingered a little longer than the others did.

“Thank you,” he whispered instead of a ‘Merry Christmas’. He said it with emphasis, just as he had done shortly before leaving on his and Félix’s birthday.

Marinette tightened her hug.

“Merry Christmas Adrien.”

“Now it’s time for the presents!” Her grandma suddenly proclaimed and handed each of her parents and her a wrapped gift.

“I don’t have presents for you two,” she said to Adrien and Félix, sounding incredibly apologetic. “But if you’ll be here again next year, I’ll definitely bring you some!”

Adrien grinned at her. “Thank you! That is very nice,” he said and Félix just gave a small thankful smile. A smile that quickly left his face as her grandma hugged him and Adrien even though Marinette had told her to stop doing that. Fortunately for Félix’s composure, the hug didn’t last long.

“Don’t worry Nonna, I have presents for them,” Marinette said as she worked on getting the ribbon off.

“Well, Christmas is about celebrating with your loved ones anyway, not about the presents. Though some nice gifts never hurt anyone, did they?” Her grandma said with a fond laugh and then directed her attention to Tom, who let out a laugh.

“Where is this one from?” He asked and Marinette did not even have to turn around to know that her father had gotten another teddy bear. It was a running joke ever since Gina had mixed up the presents for her father and her one year, so Marinette had gotten a rolling pin and her father had gotten a teddy bear. They all had found it so funny that they had just not switched the presents back, so Marinette had been the proud owner of a rolling pin she could barely lift when she was six years old.

“Toronto,” Gina said just as Marinette finally managed to get through the thorough wrapping of her own present. It was a small sculpture of what looked like a human with an elephant’s head.

“This is from India, my little fairy,” Gina immediately said excitedly. “It’s called a Ganesh. The locals said it brings good luck.”

“Thank you Nonna!” Marinette said and was very aware of a curious Adrien who regarded the Indian souvenir as well from over her shoulder.

“Now,” she said and put her Nonna’s present down on the coffee table, “I’m gonna guess you want your presents too?”

It was a rhetorical question since Adrien was practically vibrating from excitement already. She grinned.
“Yes please?” Adrien asked with the most pleading puppy eyes in existence. Marinette would probably never be able to resist them.

*Oh god, he’s too cute!*

“Alright, this is your pile. Check the names on the presents before opening them and start with the smaller ones,” she said and pointed to a pile of eight wrapped presents.

While Adrien pounced on them, Marinette handed her parents and grandma each a present. For her mother she had bought a DVD box of her favourite show and for her father she had made a lace rolling pin. The latter had been something she had seen on the internet once but wanted to rather make it herself than to just buy it. That had proved to be extremely difficult though. It had taken her over a month and in the end, she had been very glad that she had been able to finish it in time.

For her Nonna, she made a good luck charm, just as she had made some with Adrien back in summer.

All of them loved their presents, especially her father, who promised to try out the lace pin the very next day.

Marinette squeaked when she was suddenly hugged from behind so tightly that she was lifted off the ground.

“Thank you so much, it’s *pawsitively purrfect*!”

She fondly rolled her eyes.

“Really, you’re living up to the cat theme. Not much more and you’ll turn into a real cat,” she joked which made Adrien chuckle.

“*Purrhaps* I will. Who knows?” He said and let her go again. Only when she could turn around did she see that he wore the black hat with the cat ears. It fit him even better than she had thought and the cat ears made him look even cuter.

Stop it, stupid brain! He’s your friend. FRIEND! You’re not allowed to find him cute!

Marinette quickly looked away which made her gaze fall on Félix who was currently studying the sudoku Rubik’s cube she had made for him. From the twins’ birthday she already knew that Félix was not very expressive when receiving gifts, though that did not mean that he wasn’t thankful. Judging from his slightly interested gaze though, she deducted that he at least liked it to some extent.

“Open this one next,” she said and handed Félix the present that contained the green scarf. She nervously bit her lip as Félix opened the present, quite slowly in her opinion. He was careful to not tear the paper, even though there wasn’t anything special about it—it was red and had ‘Merry Christmas’ printed all over it in white letters.

Adrien meanwhile had sat down on the ground and was curiously leaning his head on Félix’s knees to have a better look. That ended up being a bad idea because as soon as Félix pulled the scarf out, Adrien got a slap on his hand as he had reached out to touch it. Marinette could have sworn to have heard a quiet hiss from Félix, but she must have imagined it. Félix Agreste just did not make uncivilized noises.

“It’s so pretty and soft,” he said and only after he flinched and blushed did she realise that he had not meant to say that out loud. She giggled.
“I’m glad you like it,” she said just as Félix swatted Adrien’s hand away a second time.

“You really made that for me,” Félix said quietly, apparently to himself while stroking his finger carefully over her signature.

“Can I open this one?” Adrien suddenly asked and pointed at the largest of the presents. It had both of their names written on it, so Marinette made room on the sofa next to Félix and patted it. Adrien plopped down between the two of them.

“Félix, look! It’s for both of us,” he said, his excitement almost graspable and wasted no time to tear the wrapping paper away, when also very carefully. He tilted his head when he looked at the cover that had a photo of the three of them, Nino, and her parents on it. They had taken it at the end of summer.

“Is this a photo album?“ Adrien asked and suddenly got very excited when Marinette nodded. He turned over the first page and grinned when he saw a leaf—not the leaf, but it was symbolic anyway—glued onto it. Next to it she had written down what the first of his notes had said.

_Leaves tend to turn to gold, you know? And isn’t gold a beautiful thing? But golden leaves are short-lived and rare in summer, so what if one, once gold and now dead and brown, turned back to its former glory? Imagine something plain and even ugly to some, become beautiful once again._

The rest of the album consisted of all the photos they had taken from that point onward. Small memorials like a ticket to the zoo were also included. Marinette had worked on that photo album since August and had originally wanted to give it to them for their birthday. It had only been halfway full then though, so she had kept working on it. Due to her parents enthusiastically taking pictures of everything, filling up the second half had not been such a hard thing. In the end she had even needed to sort through pictures and only pick the best of the best ones to have enough room. The photo album ended with two empty pages and the heading ‘Christmas’ above it.

Only when they got to these pages did the twins look up.

Now, she had fully expected Adrien to hug her again. What she had absolutely not expected was for Félix to pounce on her and give her said tight hug. To accomplish this, however, he had to basically jump over Adrien who had quickly gotten the photo album to safety.

Being intensively cuddled multiple times by two models each in a timeframe of less than twelve hours was..._something_. Nevermind that said models were two of her best friends, which made the whole situation frustratingly conflicting—especially in regards to Adrien.

In any case, Félix’s sudden _attack_ was surprising and unexpected. Like if Chloé suddenly started giving genuine compliments to people or threw around flowers. Shortly put: It was so beyond the things Marinette had expected to happen that she had not even entertained the thought in her wildest dreams.

And...was Félix purring too? What was it with these boys? Maybe it was a model thing. Or it was just one of the weird habits they had gotten through being home-schooled and therefore not spending much time around other people. Yeah, that must be it.

“Félix, are you okay?” Marinette asked and also Adrien was watching the two of them with slight concern on his face.

“Thank you so much. This is the best gift I have ever gotten,” he said.
Marinette sighed in relief. He was just very happy. She could deal with that...somehow. Well, truth be told, she would probably be able to deal with it better when Félix wouldn’t be draped over her. If Adrien would join this hug now too, she’d be a pancake.

Eventually Félix apparently decided that the pensum of affection he could give had exceeded its critical limit, so he withdrew from his quite dramatic hug with an embarrassed blush. That just gave Adrien an opportunity to hug her instead.

“This really is the best present ever,” he said and sounded so happy that Marinette was glad that she had worked so hard on the photo album for the past half year. Every single hour and papercut had been worth it!

“You’re welcome,” she said, even though it didn’t sound like a strong enough reply to such a deep expression of gratitude.

“This is basically nothing in comparison to your presents, but I got something for you too,” Adrien said as he ended the hug and looked at Marinette shyly. Only then did she notice the red round box with the golden bow he was holding out to her, his expression nervous.

That silly boy. He did not need to get her a gift at all and she was sure that whatever it was would be amazing. That he was still nervous about it was quite adorable.

“Don’t downplay your present before I even opened it,” Marinette said with a fond eye roll and a smile as she opened the red box. In it she found a foam lid that had something written on it that made her sit up straight in shock. She recognized the jewellery label as one of the most prestige and expensive ones she knew. It wasn’t like money was a problem for the twins, but she still couldn’t help but feel a little faint when she thought about what could be in the box.

Deciding to not make Adrien even more nervous than he already was, she eventually took the lid off which revealed a small jewellery bag. It also had the name of the label printed on it in clear black letters on white. It did not seem to be a ring—otherwise she might have screamed—but rather a necklace or bracelet of some sort.

When the opened the bag, the latter fell into the palm of her hand. It was a simple-looking silver chain with seven charms hanging from it. As she gave said charms a closer look, she realised that they must have been hand-picked.

“Do you like it?” Adrien asked meekly and gave her the hopeful puppy eyes again.

“I love it! It’s so pretty!” She hurried to say when she noticed that she had been quiet for too long. “But that must have cost a fortune!”

*Oops.*

She probably shouldn’t have said the last part, because Adrien’s happy grin immediately morphed into a guilty smile.

“I’m sorry, I...just wanted it to be something special.”

Oh god, now he was *apologizing* for being the sweetest person in the world. Taken, without any concept of monetary value, but that wasn’t his fault!

“No, don’t apologize!”

Marinette cringed.
"Way to ruin the moment."

“Why did you pick these charms exactly?” She asked instead. That seemed to get Adrien all excited again and she breathed an internal sigh of relief. Crisis averted.

“The leaf is because you just won’t let that go and it is how we met after all,” he said with an amused grin.

“Then the Eiffel Tower is because we both live in Paris and most of the great things we did also happened here, so it is kind of a summary of summer.

“The Moon with the Stars is from when we went to the sea and looked at the stars and also the evenings when we sat on your balcony.”

Adrien looked at the charm and gave a secretive smile. Maybe it also had another meaning to him than those two, but if it had, then he didn’t tell.

“The Chinese fan is because of your heritage and because it’s red. Since that’s a lucky colour in Chinese I thought you can also could it as a tiny good luck charm.”

When he moved on to the next charm, Marinette saw him blush just slightly.

“This here is a guardian angel. It’s…uhm…because you’re literally saving my life more often than you even realise by just being there for me. I just thought it was fitting.”

Now she was blushing too if her warm cheeks were any indication.

“The crown is because this is the closest charm I could find to being fashion-related. Can you believe it?” He gave a small laugh. “And if you want it can symbolize that you’ll be the queen of fashion one day. Who knows? I might model your designs in the future,” he said with a wink.

This boy was out to kill her, wasn’t he? How could someone so sweet exist?! At least the boost of self confidence his belief in her abilities gave her was nice.

“And what about the black cat?” Marinette asked, pointing at the seventh charm on the bracelet. She suspected it to be part of the black cat running joke, but Adrien just grinned mysteriously.

“That’s a secret,” he just said and then proceeded to put the bracelet around her wrist.

Looking at the charms and recalling all the photos they had just gone through in the photo album, Marinette thought about what had happened in the previous half year. It was a lot. Most of the things had been so odd that she would have declared everyone crazy who’d have told her about them a year ago. Never in her life would she have thought that she, ordinary Marinette Dupain-Cheng, would be lucky enough to meet two such amazing people and befriend them.

Judging by the charms and what they meant to Adrien, the feeling was mutual. She smiled.

Later she would be stunned by her own boldness and excuse it as a spur of the moment decision, but a simple ‘thank you’ seemed almost laughable in comparison to what this gift meant. Adrien was right, the monetary value of it didn’t matter. It was special, no matter its cost.

She gave him a light kiss on the cheek.

“Thank you, Adrien.”
Gonna say this now already so that there won't be confusion later: I am currently writing on chapter 25 and hope to get it finished by the time it's due to go up. When I manage that, I will immediately upload another "chapter" after that, which won't actually be a chapter but rather a synopsis. This is because after a lot of thinking I decided to keep Spellbound as one single story and not splitting it up into three. It'll result in a rather high word count because each arc is about as long as a whole book, but since it's still the same story, it belongs together. The thing is that the synopsis for arc 2 will also mark the beginning of a hiatus since uni will start again in April for me and I don't know how much time I will have to write. I want to have a few chapters written beforehand to hopefully continue with a schedule, so there could be a month or so without an update. Clockwork Harmony will continue to update though! :D
Félix’s Lament

Chapter Summary

The traumatized kitten’s view of things

Chapter Notes

Finally, I get to show you Félix’s perspective! Not gonna lie, I really enjoy writing from his point of view! ;w;
I’m gonna repeat what a lot of you guys said on the Samhain chapter: the poor kitten needs therapy ;n;

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Félix has thought a lot about shapeshifting in the previous two months. For him, it was something natural. One moment he would look human—at least for the most part—and in the next he would have the body of a cat. Either way, he would always stay Félix. That fact never changed. He was Félix as a human and he was also Félix as a cat.

How was it like to not shift? To be trapped in one form for an entire life and, even worse, to not feel like that form was fitting? Félix has lived half a year without shifting at all and that had been confusing and torturous enough. He had felt stuck in place.

What did the changeling feel about her body? She had not wanted to change it. It had been forced on her. On top of that, she would be different whenever a human was kidnapped and she had to take their place. How many lives had she lived? How many forms had she taken? And throughout all of that, she did not even know her name.

Yet despite the shocking lack of identity, she had still seemed sure of herself. Somewhere she must have found an anchor to define herself with. He did not know what this definition was, but he could not help but admire her for it.

He thought about her a lot and about the things she had showed him. Seeing all these horrors had helped him to understand. Simply hearing about them or reading about them, as it had turned out, was worlds apart from witnessing them. Being forced to watch the gruesomeness of them had shaken him to his core and he needed time to think.

A lot of time.

In that time, Félix saw Adrien grow more worried with each passing day. Even Marinette grew worried despite not knowing what was going on. Luckily both of them knew him well enough to leave him to his thoughts.

At first, Félix tried to forget what happened on Samhain. He pretended to not feel the small dancing flame inside him. Pretending like it did not whisper curses and blame to him. He also pretended to not hear it as the voice slowly grew quieter and eventually disappeared. It was hard to
pretend to feel like the diminishing of the flame had not given him more power, more magic, but he managed.

_Ignore it all._

When Félix saw Marinette again after over a month of being kept away from her, he could not help but feel endlessly relieved. She was warm, she was alive, she was _safe_. There was no way to describe how thankful he was to not see her in any danger. The nightmares had not been kind to him, putting her in place of the humans from all the horrible things he had witnessed in the _sídhé_.

She needed to stay safe. She needed protection.

What happened to him was of little consequence. He deserved some bad luck for what he had done after all.

It was fair this way.

Adrien at first didn’t ask, but from the looks he had thrown at his brother the next day, he knew something must have happened. The topic only vocally came up when they had decorated their newly acquired Christmas tree that evening.

“What did you do?” Adrien asked quite bluntly and for some reason it made Félix flinch.

“Bless her to avoid attention from the fae. What else?”

It was an action that made perfect sense in Félix’s head, yet Adrien reacted like the world was ending.

“YOU DID WHAT?! WHEN?!”

Félix felt guilty. Of course Adrien would be alarmed about anything that had to do with Marinette and magic, especially since their fight from before Samhain still wasn’t completely resolved. They have gotten over it for the most part since Félix stopped with unrooting himself on purpose, but a certain tenseness, especially regarding Marinette, was still there.

He should have asked first.

“Yesterday evening,” Félix just replied somberly while internally shrinking into himself. He just couldn’t stop doing the wrong things with the right intentions, could he?

“But she didn’t say anything about…” Adrien trailed off and narrowed his eyes.

“You know, I wondered why I smelled _cat_ on her when I have not visited her as one in days.”

Félix felt his cheeks warm at the accusation. For some reason he had thought it would be a good idea to visit Marinette as a cat, despite never having done so before.

Adrien’s silence after that statement made it even worse. There were some things the two of them knew without having to tell each other. Invisible lines and boundaries they never overstepped. Visiting Marinette as a cat was such a line because it was different than seeing her in their human forms. And it had been Adrien’s privilege to do so.
Until now.

It was not like Marinette belonged to either of them, but cats were possessive creatures and Adrien was her kitty. The growl that built in Adrien’s throat was therefore justified. He did not appreciate someone else trying to claim this place, even when it was his own brother.

“I just wanted to help,” Félix said and did the only thing he could: He fled. In his case that meant to walk over to his favourite chair and picking up the book he had previously discarded.

Adrien should win this fight because it was not worth fighting over. Félix did not want to claim anything or anyone after all. He just wanted everyone to be safe and sound. If he paid for that with his brother being angry at him then so be it.

He couldn’t risk to let the things he saw on Samhain happen to them. He just couldn’t.

Sometimes Félix wished he could cry.

The persistent bass and the sheer volume of the music were an imposition to Félix’s sensitive ears, but he endured both with a scowl. Just like with Samhain, the choice whether to attend or not was not left up to him. If it had been, he would have more than gladly spent New Year’s Eve at Marinette’s place with her parents and her eccentric grandma. While he has been highly suspicious of Gina at first, it had turned out that her worst flaw lay in constantly misusing the word ‘fairy’.

In comparison to what he imagined to be a peaceful affair at Marinette’s at this moment, Félix had landed in an auditory hell.

Chloé had insisted that Adrien and he showed up for her New Year’s Eve party and his brother—curse him—had agreed for both of them. It was beneficial to stay in the good graces of the Court, but this party was destroying Félix’s carefully constructed walls of composure.

When he suddenly felt his phone vibrate in his pocket he went to a secluded alcove to check it, more than glad for the momentary break it gave him.

**Marinette:** how is the party?

The corner of his mouth twitched in Félix’s version of an amused smile. Marinette must be psychic with how good her timing was.

**Félix:** Adrien is making a spectacle of himself at karaoke right now.

And not only Adrien did. Apart from Sabrina, Adrien and him, Chloé had also managed to find other fair folk their age—or at least they looked like teenagers—that mingled in the otherwise human crowd. The trace of magic in the air was obvious and seeing most of the crowd be mesmerized beyond belief was disconcerting to say the least. They stared in awe whenever one of the fae grabbed the mic and sang songs in a way so beautiful it would make the original singer weep with jealousy.

**Marinette:** can you film it? I want blackmail material 😊

Marinette would never stop to amuse him.
Félix: If only you would have said something thirty seconds ago!

Which was not true. Adrien was still standing up there on the small stage, singing a popular song Félix did not spontaneously know the name of. As much as he would love to gather embarrassing blackmail material on his brother and send it to Marinette, Adrien singing was not part of that. Not when he made the song sound better than what Félix recalled to have heard on the radio, causing most girls in the room to swoon.

To the folk, singing was as easy as breathing and just as natural. Especially Adrien was often cautious not to sing in front of humans, since it was almost impossible not to charm someone with it. A real shame, because he loved to sing. Félix saw how it pained his brother internally whenever a catchy song came on that Marinette started to hum to or even sing along with. He always wanted to join but couldn’t risk it.

And Félix would not take any risks tonight. Marinette would never see a video of Adrien singing if he could prevent it!

Marinette: aww 😔 maybe he’ll send me a video of you singing later 😊

Félix: That is highly unlikely, as I will not participate in this madness.

Marinette: you’re calling singing madness?

Félix: Yes. Very much so.

Only a glance to the crowd was enough to underline his statement.

Utter madness.

Taking a closer look was a mistake though. There was a difference between charmed and enthralled humans, but it was slim enough to cause unwelcome images to flash through Félix’s head. Memories of the Samhain revel.

Seeing a crowd, when also a relatively small one, being charmed by his brother of all people—even when Adrien didn’t do it on purpose—was too much for him.

Clutching his phone like a lifeline he left the ballroom that the party was hosted in. A garden would have been an optimal place to escape to, but that was probably the only luxury Le Grand Paris did not have. And so, Félix escaped to what was probably closest to it: the roof.

Fresh air welcomed him, as well as the giggles of a couple that had retreated here to have some privacy. He did not even have to look to sense that one of them was fae and the other charmed. The magic in the air told him that little secret.

Sensing magic and other fae without meaning to was something that had usually just happened at daytime. Preventing other magic from influencing him was something he had only been able to do when he had been on his half of the sky. But the universe was cruel to him even at night ever since Samhain.

Ever since eating the soul, his mind added.

The world supplied information to him without him even asking it to do so. Sometimes he just put a St. John’s wort flower in his hair to silence this ability. To have at least a few hours of peace and quiet and the illusion of being human.
Yeah, right. As if he could even pretend to be one anymore. He did not have the right to call himself human after what he had done. With eating a soul, he had crossed a line he had not been aware existed and there was no going back now.

The couple did not pay him any mind and he was glad for it. Félix walked past them and into a dark corner out of sight. A quick shift and some graceful climbing were all it took for him to get on the roof of the elevator.

Only when Félix sat on the topmost part of the hotel, did he let out a sigh. Not one of relief, but one just for the sake of it. He shifted again and pulled his phone back out of his pocket.

Marinette: I gotcha. singing in front of people is scary

are you having fun though?

Was he having fun? No. He told Marinette as much.

Marinette: do you want to talk about it?

you don't have to if you don't want to!

Félix couldn’t help the smile. There was no way he could tell her what was troubling him and there was also no way she could help, even if she knew. But she still wanted to help. A fair one would have asked for something in return. Nothing, especially not a favour, was ever for free. That was what made talking to Marinette a breath of fresh air, because she never expected anything but common decency in return.

Félix: Chloé is being a pain. To put a long story short: She likes Adrien but hates me. Adrien is being too nice for his own good, so he sticks to Chloé, while I am left to my own devices.

That was as close as he could get to the truth.

Marinette: merde

Félix snickered quietly. Marinette saved swearing to special occasions, which usually involved Chloé.

Félix: Could not have said that better myself.

Marinette: how exactly does Chloé treat Adrien?

Félix: If I would describe that, you’d just get unnecessarily angry. Neither you nor I can do anything about it, so we should just leave it to Adrien to escape her clutches.

In reality, Félix wanted to do nothing more than to storm back downstairs and tear Adrien away from the blonde monster. Maybe even tell her to bite iron a few times. But due to his frankly dangerous conversation with Chloé’s mother on Samhain, both Adrien and him walked on thin ice with the Court. And as he had promised himself to take no risks tonight, he would just have to trust in his brother to make the best of it. Even when it itched him to give Chloé a swipe with his claws or to bare his fangs at her. Anything to make her back off basically.

Marinette: do you have any resolutions for the new year?

Marinette’s sudden change of topic was very welcome, as it prevented him from actually acting on one of his violent desires. Instead, it made him think.
New year’s resolutions, huh?

Well, he would definitely have to get the hang of most of the spells from Mélusine’s book and fully earn his brother’s trust back. Finding a way to walk more safely among fae was also among those things.

**Félix:** Helping Adrien more. How about you?

In the end it boiled down to this. Most of Adrien’s wishes were also Félix’s wishes. The majority of them concerned Marinette’s safety and Félix honestly wanted nothing more than to guarantee it.

**Marinette:** wearing my own clothes in public

Félix was pleasantly surprised by her answer. So far, Marinette had been extremely hesitant to wear any of her own creations outside of the confines of her home. Wearing them to school was something she so far had not dared to do, especially because of Chloé and her destructive ways. It was a big step for Marinette and showed that her self-confidence had grown slightly. If that was due to Adrien’s and his influence or was just a natural progression wasn’t clear, but he liked to think it was the former. It would be nice if they ended up helping her as much as she had helped them.

**Félix:** I will hold you to that. Speaking of: Have you decided whether or not you will sew that girly outfit for Adrien? He is still very excited about the idea.

**Marinette:** really? I could design and sew something but I’m not sure if it would be good enough…

**Félix:** Do not downplay your abilities. Take it from someone who dabbles in modelling from time to time and sees haute couture fashion frequently: You’re outstandingly talented for your age. If anyone could design an outfit that would make Adrien look like a girl, then you could.

**Marinette:** thank you Félix! 😊

In the distance Félix saw a firework explode, the bang of it reaching his ears only a moment later. He rolled his eyes. Some people really could not wait the remaining fifty minutes until midnight, could they?

**Félix:** Nothing to thank me for. I am just thinking of the blackmail opportunities this project opens up for me.

Suddenly his phone vibrated, having received a text from someone else. Since this was the phone that Mélusine got for him back in summer, there was only one other person who could have texted him.

**Adrien:** where the hell are you?!

**Félix:** roof

He decided to leave it at that and enjoy the view of the Parisian skyline at night. At least as far as enjoyment went when unreality eerily danced all around him especially in a night like this. It was a never-ending curse to be able to perceive it ever since the moment he was born. It would do him some good to ignore its presence and find a distraction, just as he did on the solstices and the four Celtic celebrations.

The occasional firework exploded in the sky, basking the rooftops it exploded over in a colourful
light temporarily. It wasn’t a lot, but counting them and cataloguing their colours served as good enough of a distraction and gave him something to do while he waited. Red, pink, purple, gold, blue, gold again.

He just saw a green one explode close to the Eiffel tower when the magic around him gave him something he could best describe as a friendly nudge and an air of familiarity. Only moments after, a black cat climbed on his lap and curled up there.

“Too much?” Adrien asked, already guessing what was going on. Félix nodded, not taking his eyes away from the skyline.

“I’m sorry. The singing probably didn’t help, but Chloé begged me to, and it seemed like a good idea at the time and—”

“You don’t have to justify yourself for having fun, you know?” Félix said and absentmindedly scratched his brother behind the ears.

“I have to when you’re suffering from it,” Adrien argued vehemently. In that moment, Félix’s phone gave another ping, which caught his brother’s full attention.

“How is s—”

Félix cut him off by holding his mouth shut.

Not here, he thought and tried to rely said message through his eyes. Adrien seemed to get it, since he hissed, seemingly angry at himself.

They couldn’t let anything slip about Marinette while they were on Chloé’s party of all places. A party that included fae. At least one of the guests would have good enough ears to pick up on their conversation and then it would be game over.

To answer Adrien’s unspoken question though, Félix held the phone so that Adrien could read the conversation. He gave a happy wiggle and a purr when he read that Marinette agreed to sew the outfit for him.

“Blackmail, huh?” He then said with a grin that no cat should ever wear. “Well, joke’s on you, because I will look absolutely fabulous and not regret a thing!”

Adrien tried to strike a model pose, which ended up looking absolutely ridiculous in his cat form. Nevertheless, it did the trick and drew a smile out of Félix.

“What’s your new year’s resolution?” He asked as Adrien climbed out of his lap and shifted to sit beside him. He leaned back on his arms and looked in the cloudless night sky, thinking.

“Going to school would be nice,” Adrien eventually said with a wistful grin. “Meeting new people and making friends has been the best thing that has happened to us this year. I want more of that.”

Félix couldn’t help but agree.

Chapter End Notes

heads up: there'll be a time jump in the next chapter! ;D
A Whole Half Year

Chapter Summary

As the title says, a half year has passed :3

Chapter Notes

Please don't panic about the time jump! I just did it because nothing grand happened in that half year and the significant things that did happen are mentioned. This and next chapter are sort of filler chapters to wrap some things up and let the story flow better. Oh, and there's something important that happens in this chapter which I thought needed a chapter of its own since next chapter is out of Marinette's POV and I can only write this out of one of the twins' POV. ;W; No spoilers yet, you'll see what I mean! ;D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Your chambers are now lit, Princess,” Adrien said, which drew an amused snort out of Marinette.

“You’re having way too much fun with this,” she said.

“Look who’s talking!”

How hypocritical of her to say such a thing while she was working on a new dress for the princess doll that lived in the very house he was working on improving!

“It is fair to say that we are all quite invested in our own way,” Félix added from the chaise lounge where he was reading a book.

It was the end of May, which meant that it had been over three months now since Marinette had first babysat Manon and complained about it afterwards. Adrien, who had never really interacted with children before, had practically begged to help her the next time she had to babysit.

When the little angel had not been soothed by anything, Adrien had made the innocent suggestion to play with dolls. One thing had led to another and they had started to not only invent stories for the dolls but to also build them a house. Even Félix had been roped into it, being the person who took notes on the dolls’ adventures so previous events did not become forgotten.

Before any of them had even known it, they had grown quite attached to the whole game, so that they even continued to work on it when Manon wasn’t there. Half of the wall behind the chaise lounge was already will with decorated boxes that had fabric scraps as carpets and wallpapers and all kinds of small furniture. Some of it was crafted while the rest had been bought. It had gotten to the point where Adrien could not walk past miniature objects anymore without buying them for the dollhouse. This was how the princess doll had gotten into the possession of not only a glitter lava lamp, a fake potted plant and a ceiling fan, but also a brand-new lamp that actually worked.
The latter was something Adrien had found online and, under the pretence of practicing physics, ordered for himself. Nathalie had raised an eyebrow at the various wooden dollhouse lamps and copper cables for the circuits, but otherwise did not say a word.

A gust of wind made the windows rattle and rain splash against them more vigorously. It was yet another early summer storm, including thunder and lightning. Shortly put: the perfect weather to stay inside and work on the dollhouse.

“You’re quiet today, Princess. Did something happen?” Adrien asked as he set up cables for another lamp—a small chandelier for the party room. The nickname was also something that came from the game of dollhouse, since Marinette played the princess doll. Calling her ‘Princess’ had been an inside joke at first, but then it had stuck. Just as KitKat had apparently stuck for him.

Marinette sighed, but didn’t look up from the small dress on her lap. She absentmindedly tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and frowned when it ended sooner than she was used to. Adrien stopped working on the circuit to give her his full attention when he felt a wave of anger wash over her before it settled into resignation. His tail gave an irritated twitch under the glamour.

“I’m okay. It’s just…Chloé,” she said with an annoyed sigh.

Félix growled at the mention of the blonde, though it was quiet enough that Marinette did not hear. Adrien, too, had the wish to do something he would probably regret later.

A little more than a week ago, Chloé had officially taken it too far. Not that Adrien had ever supported her bullying of Marinette in the first place, but by cutting off a chunk of her hair she had crossed a line that made it hard for the Cat Sidhe to not storm into the hotel and return the favour with his claws and teeth instead of scissors.

Félix had voiced even more vicious plans than that. It had been an undertaking to hold him back from making any of them a reality. He had also scared Marinette quite a bit when he had declared in a murderous voice that he was going to kill that fake princess and make her choke on iron. It had been only seconds after Marinette had returned home that day with an obvious chunk of her hair missing and crying her eyes out. She had then told her parents and them what had happened. At least Félix had not been alone with his extreme reaction, because Tom had been equally furious—that had been quite the frightening sight.

Sabine had been the only one who had kept a level head and immediately made an appointment at a hairdresser. The haircut that resulted from this was a nice shoulder-length one. The hair that had previously gone to halfway across her back could not be replaced, but Marinette had stayed brave and taken her new style in stride.

Not without shedding a few more tears, but that was a secret only a certain stray black cat knew of.

“What did she say?” Félix asked, his voice dark as if he was ready to jump up any second and storm to the hotel to make Chloé pay for whatever she did.

“The usual. It was stupid,” Marinette said with a shrug.

“You’re making that sound as if anything she says is clever,” Félix said and rolled his eyes. “What was it this time?”

“Fé, stop being pushy,” Adrien said and then turned back to Marinette who had flinched. “You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to.”
She visibly relaxed at that suggestion.

“I just have to survive just one more month, then school is out for the summer.”

She raised her head to give both twins a grin. “Hey, now that I think about it, it’s almost been a year since we met. It’s crazy how much has changed since then, right?”

“You can say that again,” Félix said.

“Yeah, now we can just spend two weeks here without anyone suspecting that I’m a creep who gifts leaves to strangers,” Adrien said with a grin and a wink as he returned to installing the chandelier.

“You’re still the weirdo that tried to give me a leaf. You won’t live that down, KitKat.”

“I have come to accept that by now,” Adrien said with a dramatic sigh. “It’s our origin story after all.”

“What am I then? The coffee guy?” Félix asked and Adrien could hear that he had calmed down again.

“Yes,” Marinette said without hesitation, popping the ‘p’. “And I’m offering both you weirdos shelter.”

“And we’re eternally grateful for that, Princess.”

Adrien indicated a bow from where he sat on the floor, which earned him a nudge with Marinette’s foot and a giggle.

“Dork,” she said.

As it was customary at this point, Gabriel Agreste had left on a business trip, leaving both Adrien and Félix home alone. Since he was supposed to be gone for two whole weeks—or longer, one never knew with their father—the twins had decided to ask the Dupain-Chengs if they could stay at their place for that time. They had told Nathalie that they would stay at Mélusine’s. Since Nathalie didn’t want to be involved in more fair folk business than she had to and since she was overdue for some vacation time, they had come to a mutual understanding of just not telling Gabriel Agreste any of it once he returned. Just as long as the twins kept to their schedules and didn’t miss any more photoshoots, of course.

The Dupain-Chengs had not hesitated for a second when Adrien and Félix had asked if they were allowed to stay for two weeks. Since Marinette still had school, they had been put in the guest room this time. But even though it wasn’t like their sleepover at Christmas, they still sat together on the weekends for movie nights or had vicious Mario Kart tournaments. Nino often joined them, making things even better! He just didn’t find as much fun in the dollhouse as the other three of them did, so he usually left it at a ‘no, thank you’ when asked to join.

It was just like living in the bakery for real. They were treated more like part of the family than like guests at this point and Adrien loved it. He knew that Félix loved it too, even when he barely showed it.

“It’s nice not to be alone anymore,” Marinette suddenly said quietly. Félix hummed approvingly, not looking up from his book, but Adrien paused his work again to look at her. It seemed like an
eternity ago since he had visited her as a cat and she had spilled her heart out to him, talking about how she drifted apart with Nino and how much she suffered under Chloé’s bullying. She had seemed so small and hopeless back then, no one but her family to rely on. He often asked himself what would have become of her if he hadn’t returned to the bakery and befriended her.

“Likewise,” Adrien said just as quietly with a small wistful smile.

Before Adrien met Marinette, he and Félix had little to no experience with humans, especially not with those their age. Over the last eleven months though, the similarities but also the differences became very clear. Especially the latter.

Often, it was jarring how unalike humans and halflings really were. Adrien had noticed it at various occasions when Marinette and Nino had thrown him—and Félix too for that matter—weird looks as he reacted to something in a way that was apparently not normal. He often played the ‘sheltered kid’ card, but lately he got the feeling that Marinette was slowly starting to notice the difference between what really was a result of his sheltered life and what was not.

If he learned one thing with clarity though, then it was this: humans were fragile. One fall to hurt them, one horror movie to scare them witless, one fey concept to confuse them, one nice smile to make them trust you, one play of words to make them follow you into a trap. The list went on.

Adrien’s initial worries therefore increased tenfold the more he learned. Humans were not just susceptible to faerie mischief, they were beyond helpless towards it! They even threw their full real names around like flower petals on a wedding, no sense of caution at all! It was maddening.

There was yet something else Félix and he had learned about human behaviour, and that boiled down to their father’s treatment of them being even more unacceptable than they had previously thought. The shocked reactions from especially Tom and Sabine had shown that Gabriel Agreste treated them more like animals than children. He provided them with food and things to do, thinking it was alright to leave them to their own devices for a few weeks without saying anything in advance.

The comparison to animals had come from Nino, who had once muttered something about even his dog being treated better than the two of them, which Adrien and Félix had apparently not been supposed to hear. Félix, who had already lost his patience with their father, had jumped on that analogy immediately and put it into perspective, claiming that their father only saw them as cats in human form.

Adrien was therefore not surprised when he came home from a photoshoot and heard Félix yelling, seething with anger, already down in the entrance hall.

“Is father home?” He asked Nathalie timidly. She had accompanied them to all their photoshoots in the four weeks Gabriel Agreste had been gone and otherwise enjoyed the free time she had been granted. A free time that apparently was over now. She seemed as startled as Adrien himself was, which couldn’t mean anything good.

“I forgot to tell him,” she said to herself, a slight fear in her voice. Adrien did not know if she meant Félix or his father, but it didn’t matter. Letting either of them be in the same room as the other promised trouble. For how long had the shouting already been going on without Adrien or Nathalie being there?
“Ringing iron bells,” Adrien cursed as he ran up the stairs to his father’s office where the shouting came from. He stopped in the doorway and took in the surreal scene in front of him.

Félix stood in front of their father with a lashing tail, its fur standing on end, the ears angrily pinned down and his claws out. Adrien noticed especially the latter because one of those clawed hands was currently wrapped around their father’s throat who for the first time in a long while looked genuinely scared.

“Fé, stop it!” Adrien cried when he snapped out of his frozen state. His brother’s left ear twitched, but other than that he gave no indication to have heard him.

“See how you like it to be trapped,” Félix snarled and roughly let go of their father who stumbled back against his desk. When Félix brushed past Adrien, he just hissed a mysterious ‘I took care of the problem’ and then prowled on in the direction of their room.

Adrien was torn on whether to go to his father and check him for possible injuries—Félix’s claws were very sharp after all, and who knows what he had done before Adrien had arrived—or going after Félix to demand an explanation. Seeing how his brother was currently riled up, it would probably be better to leave him alone for a bit.

With hesitant steps, Adrien walked closer to his father. He wouldn’t deny that he was still angry at him for everything he had done—especially the bell collar—but he was still his father. Who knows? Maybe the scare Félix just gave him would knock some sense into him.

“Are you hurt?” Adrien asked, only to instantly wither under the glare his father threw him.

“Is that your sick idea of fun, Adrien?”

“I—what? No! Did Félix hurt you?” Adrien stammered. It was true that he found more fun in morbid things than humans did, but this was not some cartoon or a movie, or misfortune that happened to a stranger. This was his father and he was possibly hurt! If it had been anyone but Félix, he would have heavily considered some retribution for this act.

“That remains to be seen,” his father said, his voice frosty and his glare even colder. Adrien took a step back.

“Y-you’re neglecting us. Félix is very furious about it,” he tried, his voice too timid to have an impact on the statue that was his father who just raised an eyebrow and scoffed.

“You have the best education money can buy, a personal chef, you model for a famous fashion company and have everything you wish for. How is that neglect? Félix just does not appreciate the human ways as it seems.”

Adrien was baffled how his father could think of what just happened as nothing more than teenage rebellion.

“The fae part of our lives isn't the only thing you've been thoroughly neglecting,” he said, a familiar anger simmering in his stomach. It was not like the roaring flame that was Félix’s anger, but it was enough to let him face his father. How ridiculous that sounded. A parent should not be someone he needed to be afraid of, and yet…

“Pardon?”

“We never see you. We have to make appointments to talk to you and when we do, you never really listen to us anyway. We wait at dinner until our food gets cold for the slight chance that you
might show up. That is not how it should be. This… it was different when mother was still around!”

Adrien thought of all the times where he had been able to go to Tom for advice for something he did not dare to ask his own father. He also thought of the many times where they had sat together at dinner with the Dupain-Chengs, with not even the slightest doubt that everyone wouldn’t show up without saying so in advance.

“Is that all?” Gabriel asked, not moved at all except for a slight narrowing of his eyes when Emilie had been mentioned. “I am very busy with the company. It is natural that I have little time.”

“Other parents are busy too but they still take time out of their schedules for their children. Sabrina’s dad even has to work night shifts but they still find times where they can at least eat dinner together!”

Yes, taking another halfling with a human father as an example was a good idea. Maybe then he’ll understand!

“That’s enough,” his father said and his tone said that the ‘discussion’ was over. “I believe you have Chinese class right now.”

Adrien lingered for a moment, waiting for this father change his mind and maybe add something. He only got an impatiently raised eyebrow in return though. With a dejected look Adrien eventually turned around and walked out of the office and to his room.

It took two days of their father hiding in his office and Félix’s occasional satisfied grins until Adrien realised what had happened in the office before he arrived. The nail in the coffin had been when he had heard the sound of someone struggling to open the front door and came to investigate only to see that it was his father. Adrien had offered to help and opened the unlocked door for his father, only for him to turn around and walk back to his office.

“You cursed him, didn’t you?” Adrien asked that evening at dinner—another dinner their father had not bothered to show up to. Félix’s resulting grin was eerie and mischievous with no bit of regret at all.

“He deserved it,” his brother said.

“Fé, you can’t just curse father!”

“Well, I did. It’s nothing he won’t be able to survive. He just can’t leave the house for a little over a year.”

Adrien poked at the piece of chicken on his plate.

“You never cursed anyone before,” he said quietly.

“How do you know that?”

That startled him. “You did?”

Félix shrugged. “We get bad luck for blessings but good luck for curses. Do both and it negates each other. Cursing some random person on the street to get rid of some bad luck is not uncommon for a Cat Sidhe. That’s where we get our reputation from.”
“You can’t just curse people whenever you feel like it!”

Félix arched an eyebrow. “I could not exactly keep myself away from Marinette to not let the bad luck backfire on her, could I?”

Adrien opened his mouth to argue, but closed it again. His brother had a point.

“It still doesn’t mean that you can curse father,” Adrien said. “He will let that out on both of us.”

“I won’t let him,” Félix said matter-of-factly.

“You’re not exactly almighty, you know?” Félix looked like he wanted to argue, so Adrien hurried to add: “I mean in a legal sense—in human ways if you will. Outside of anything related to the Court. Or do you want to follow their ways all of a sudden? You can’t do things by half when it comes to magic after all. Either you commit, or you quit it before it becomes a habit.”

That got Félix’s attention. At least he looked properly abashed.

“I can try,” he mumbled.

Adrien sighed. Things were not like they have been around Samhain anymore—that was more half a year ago at this point. He could certainly trust Félix again, even though a few bad fae habits have stayed. Especially after Félix had explained what happened, things have become quite clear. Becoming less human were apparently the consequences a halfling had to endure when eating a soul. Félix could not help that and Adrien tried to be supportive, but sometimes he was just…well, he was still Félix and with that he was stubborn to a fault.

“Please just…tone it down a bit. We can go to Mélusine tomorrow and talk to her. She might know a better way to help keep Marinette safe so you don’t have to bless her all the time.”

Chapter End Notes

And don’t forget: next Sunday I’ll upload the last chapter of arc 1 of Spellbound and I’ll go on a small hiatus with the story afterwards to write three or so chapters ahead. I will drop a “chapter” with a synopsis on the following week so that people won’t get confused with the update. I will explain more about how long the hiatus will exactly be in that synopsis update. But first I’ll still give you around 8k words of Adrinette fluff! ;D
Pretty Pretty Girl

Chapter Summary

Adrien finally gets his wish granted of disguising himself as a girl

Chapter Notes

Before I say anything else: This chapter is meant to be just friends having fun and it is in no way meant as an offence to the transgender community! If there happen to be any amab people reading this who identify as female, then I want to tell you all that you're all amazing, beautiful girls and that I appreciate you! ❤️ (same goes vice versa of course!)

Alright, this is the last chapter of arc 1 and I did my very best to wrap up loose ends! 😊 I probably did not get everything, but I still have two arcs to write, so if any of you notice anything that is missing in this chapter, then please tell me! Obviously I opened other cans of worms here and those will be addressed thoroughly in arc 2, so don't you worry about that! 😊 Thank you so much Draxynnnic and Tempomental for beta-reading this! ❤️

PS: Bluetreeleaves is a treasure! Thank you so much for your awesome comments. You made me weep with joy! 😅; This chapter is dedicated to you, since it features the thing! 😊

PSS: 25 chapters for arc 1. That's like an entire book! 😅

Adrien's outfit

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Marinette tried her best to concentrate on what Mlle Bustier said about the text they had just read in class, but apart from noting down a few English words she had not known she had added nothing to the current page of her notebook. Well, that was not exactly true. She had drawn a few doodles into the corners while trying her hardest to ignore Chloé, who kept making dismissive comments about the text being ridiculous in general.

It was Friday on their second to last week before the end of school, so anything that was taught wouldn’t matter for their final grades anyway. Most students used this as an opportunity to just not pay attention in class at all. Marinette didn’t envy the teachers, but she also couldn’t work up the motivation to actually participate. Raising her hand to ask for the translation of a word she didn’t know would furthermore earn her attention from not only Mlle Bustier but also from Chloé. And it was Chloé’s attention Marinette feared, so she just did what she did best at school: be invisible.
The only one who trumped her in that ability was Juleka.

The vibration of her phone provided a welcome distraction. Careful not to be caught, she put it down on her knees as she checked it.

**KitKat:** I GOT THE HAIR EXTENSIONS!!!

It was a comment that sounded absolutely ridiculous out of context—though since it _was_ Adrien after all it very well still fell into his spectrum of _weird_. In any case it managed to draw a small smile on Marinette’s face and lifted her mood at least a little bit. The hair extensions had taken a long time to be delivered and since Adrien had not wanted to drop names to speed up the delivery, it had been five weeks of wait. But now that they had finally arrived there was nothing that held them back from finally pulling the prank that had been planned since Christmas.

**Coffee Boy:** Nathalie is judging him immensely. It is amusing to watch.

She was cautious not to look too suspicious as she replied, keeping a pen in her right hand and doodling something in her notebook while typing with her left hand under the table.

**Princess:** perfect! are you free tomorrow?

Dots immediately appeared as Adrien started typing and Marinette looked ahead to Mlle Bustier again.

**KitKat:** we have a photoshoot at 7 but we should be done with that by noon! 😊

**Coffee Boy:** We _would_ have classes afterwards, but we can afford to skip them.

**KitKat:** the photoshoot is at the park by your house by the way!!! :3

**Coffee Boy:** Translation: Please bring pastries when you go to the park to sketch.

Marinette had trouble to keep in a snort of amusement. She replied with a thumbs-up emoji and then ignored her phone for the remaining five minutes of class since Chloé, in her boredom, had started to look her way.

After the bell rang, Marinette had made it barely three steps out of the classroom when a haughty voice behind her spoke up.

“Marinette Dupain-Cheng,” she said, putting as much disgust as possible in the name. Marinette cringed.

*Almost made it this time!*

“And where do you think you’re going?” Chloé asked and when Marinette turned around she saw the cruel smirk on the blonde’s face.

“Home?” Her voice was quiet. Not quite fearful, but definitely intimidated. When it came to Chloé, it was best to let her go by like a storm and then pick up the pieces afterwards. The one time she had tried to talk back to the mayor’s daughter had been over a month ago and it had earned her a new haircut. She didn’t want to take that risk again.

“Better go to a dumpster first. Maybe you’ll find some clothes there that aren’t as hideous as whatever you’re wearing right now. A potato sack would make a good improvement.”
Chloé smirked, knowing that she had hit a sore spot. Marinette couldn’t deny that the comment hurt a little, but how much was Chloé’s opinion worth anyway when two models constantly told her how amazing her designs were?

“I know everything about fashion, in contrary to you,” she continued, putting emphasis on the latter word as if Marinette would be something repulsive. “My boyfriend is a model after all.” That statement was accompanied by a dramatic hair flip and a grin.

“Your boyfriend?” Marinette couldn’t help but ask and immediately regretted the question. The last thing she wanted was to prolongate this confrontation. Chloé threw her a patronizing grin.

“His name is Adrien Agreste and he is very famous. He always goes shopping with me since he has the second-best taste—no taste is better than mine after all—and he would certainly never hang around a lowlife like you.”

Marinette understood that Chloé aimed to make her feel bad about herself with her bragging, but in reality, she just suddenly had trouble to hold back her laughter.

Adrien’s advice for clothes shopping would mainly consist of buying as many cat pun shirts as he could find. And joke’s on Chloé, since he did actually ‘hang around a lowlife like Marinette’. Not that she would say any of those things or worse: debunk Chloé’s lie. Instead she said: “Oh, that’s nice. I didn’t know people existed that lived up to your high standards.”

Chloé didn’t let her win that easily though.

“Well, you certainly wouldn’t know. Tell me, how is it like having no friends?”

“I have friends,” Marinette mumbled, which drew a laugh out of the blonde.

“Oh really? Then where are they?”

Chloé looked at her with the expression of someone who was sure of her victory. After all, there was no one that would be coming to Marinette’s rescue. Nino was in another class, not knowing what was going on out in the hallway and Adrien and Félix would not be in school at all. Probably ever. As much as it hurt, there really was no one in her class that stood up for her. Everyone was too afraid of Chloé to risk their own standing for someone unimportant such as Marinette. She had to fight this battle alone. And fighting alone meant to just stare at Chloé and try to swallow her frustration, anger and sadness. It meant banishing these feelings to the back of her mind and to ignore them. Showing any of them would only encourage the bully further.

*Show no reaction, then she’ll lose interest.*

It was the *genius* advice she had gotten from one of her classmates once. The only advice she had ever gotten in that regard and it had never helped nor worked. But it was the only thing she had, so she held on to a small flicker of hope.

“While you’re searching for friends you should try to find a hairdresser too. This short hair looks ugly on you,” Chloé said and her smile turned impossibly more evil as she walked past Marinette and down the hall.

*Swallow it. Don’t show any emotion. Ignore it all.*
“She said what?!” Nino exclaimed in disbelief and clenched his fists. Marinette shrugged.

“It’s not like it’s anything new,” she said, while pushing the peas on her plate back and forth with her fork.

She had visited Nino initially to ask if he had time the next day and wanted to film the prank they were planning to pull, but then her latest confrontation with Chloé had still weighed on her mind, so she had broken down and told Nino what had happened.

“You should tell Mlle Bustier about it. Maybe she can do something,” Nino said.

“I did. But she keeps saying I should take the high road and wants me to see the good in Chloé.”

“The words ‘good’ and ‘Chloé’ should never be used in the same sentence.” Nino shook his head. “If Mlle Bustier can’t do anything about it, then how about Adrien? He knows Chloé, so maybe he can talk some sense into her.”

An ironic smile flitted across Marinette’s face. “It’s much more likely that Félix is already researching how to get away with murder on my behalf and Adrien is not far behind him on that point. Cutting my hair was one step too far.”

“Yeah, it was,” Nino said, his expression momentarily turning dark. “But you know, it doesn’t look bad. You really rock that haircut actually! I’m not saying that you should thank Chloé for it, but it looks nice anyway.”

“Thanks, Nino,” she said with a smile. Count on Nino to see the good in a bad situation. Speaking of: “Have I told you yet what Adrien did when he first saw me with my new haircut?”

“Nope, please do tell.”

“He showed me pictures of models with the same haircut and then said that I was even prettier than all of them combined.”

Nino snickered. “Yep, that sounds like him. Sometimes I wonder if he’s doing it on purpose or if he just doesn’t know how flirty he sounds when complimenting you.”

Marinette blinked. “He compliments everyone like that.”

“Nope, he doesn’t. Just you.”

Now that she thought about it, Nino was right. Well, sure, Félix was his brother so they interacted differently, but she couldn’t recall a single time where Adrien has said something even remotely flirty to Nino.

“Maybe it’s because I’m a girl,” she thought out loud. That was a possibility, right? He might have adapted something from all the anime he had watched and now just channelled an Ouran High School Host Club image or something.

“Or because he’s an oblivious idiot who doesn’t realise he has a crush on you.”

“What?!” Marinette screeched. Nope, that couldn’t be true! Not under any circumstances! They were friends after all. You just did not have a crush on friends!

“No, that’s not it,” she therefore said, her thoughts racing in panic.

“Alright, then be my guest and interpret what happened on your birthday,” Nino said with a teasing
If Marinette was blushing already, then the heat of her cheeks probably made them a colour similar to overripe tomatoes now.

“T—that was just a spur of the moment thing, nothing more!” She stammered.

To an outsider, it might have looked wrong when she had tackled Adrien to the ground and kissed him—*on the cheek!!!*—but he had gifted her an honest to god *Cintiq* tablet! And the newest model too! Those things cost as much as her parents made in an entire month! It had always been like a holy relic for her, something she had only seen once at a convention, but never thought she’d ever own.

“And he was grinning about it like a lovestruck idiot for the rest of the day,” Nino added.

“Or he was just happy that I liked his present,” Marinette pointed out, since that option was much more likely. Better not jump to conclusions.

“That definitely would explain the poetic notes you got after you first met him,” Nino continued like she hadn’t said anything. She wasn’t sure if he was still teasing her or if he was serious.

“He was just sheltered and awkward and tried to apologize,” Marinette said.

“And then he was jealous once I showed up.”

“No, he wasn’t.”

“Yes, he very much was. Caught him pacing in your living room that day when we made a baking disaster and had a talk with him about it.”

“You never told me that.”

Nino shrugged. “It never came up.”

“I still think you’re wrong,” Marinette said and hurried to eat what was left on her plate to have something else to do. Entertaining the possibility that Adrien really had a crush on her was a little too much on top of everything.

“And what if I’m not? I thought we already established that I’m the wise one of us two.”

“You *must* be wrong. Adrien and I are *friends*. Just friends.”

“Yeah, keep telling yourself that.”

“*Nino!*”

He held up his hands in surrender. “Hey, I’m just saying to keep an open mind. Sometimes you two really look like you’re a couple with how you act around each other, you know?”

“No, I don’t *know*, because it’s not true,” Marinette said adamantly and crossed her arms. Nino raised both his eyebrows in return, starting a staring match that she eventually lost.

“*Fine.* If you think that we’re acting *couple-ly* again then you’re allowed to poke me or throw something at me.”

That made Nino grin. “With pleasure!”
“You are a lifesaver,” Adrien sighed as he dropped down on the bench between Marinette and Nino. His comment was referring to the box on Nino’s lap which he instantly grabbed an éclair out of.

“What one of us?” Nino asked while saving an especially tasty-looking doughnut for himself. It had odd-looking icing, just as everything in the box was slightly lower quality than what was in the display cases of the bakery. But what the pastries lacked in looks, they more than enough made up in taste.

“That depends on who brought the pastries. He is only interested in those,” Félix said from Marinette’s left. He had sat down there quite a while ago already since only Adrien needed to model and Félix had just come along to not get even more classes shoved on his schedule. Officially he was moral support, but in reality, he just read a book and snuck the occasional macaron from the pastry box or commented on Marinette’s current designs.

“Not true! I just want to know who is more deserving of my undying love today!”

“That better be me, or I’ll ruin your makeup on purpose,” Marinette said and was hit almost instantly with a doughnut crumb.

“Oops, my bad,” Nino said with a grin when she turned to frown at him. Something told her that she would come to regret what she had said the day before. And she had not acted flirty just now! It had just been friendly teasing. They always did that!

“Are you done for today?” Félix asked, sneaking another macaron. Adrien just nodded since his mouth was stuffed with the éclair.

“Figured. Photoshoots rarely run late when it’s just you.”

“Seriously, it’s impossible to get a bad photo of you,” Marinette said and then looked at Félix. “And I mean both of you with that.”

“Freaking models,” Nino agreed with a roll of his eyes which earned him a friendly shove from Adrien and a blank stare from Félix.

“Excuse me for being more photogenic than you,” the latter said and closed his book.

“Dude, you don’t have to make this personal.”

“Just see it like this Nino,” Marinette said as she put away her sketchbook and stood up. “Now you have a new challenge: Take a bad photo of either of them.”

Adrien, having finally swallowed the pasty, snorted. “Good luck with that.”

“Challenge accepted!” Nino declared with a grin and gave Marinette a high five.

“I love this outfit so much!” Adrien squeed as he spun around excitedly to make the black-white, tasselled kimono shawl fly behind him. In addition to that, he wore low-cut grey-blue jeans, a white blouse, and a pair of beige sandals, the last of which he had bought himself. It was a perfectly casual outfit completed with a gold-white-black beaded long necklace Marinette had
With the hair extensions and the makeup, it was almost impossible to tell Adrien apart from a regular girl. The only thing that gave him away was his voice.

“Glad you like it,” Marinette said and couldn’t stop her cheeks from reddening. She was still not used to other people liking her designs to this extent.

“Not like it, love it!” Adrien corrected with a grin and got one of Marinette’s pillows thrown at him. She threw Nino an accusatory glare since the flirting thing was only supposed to involve her and not Adrien, but Nino just grinned innocently and pointed at Félix. Great. It seemed like Nino had told Félix of their pact and now he decided to join in to make sure that his brother would also get a hint apparently. The only one who was still oblivious to what was going on was poor Adrien, though the last thing Marinette wanted to do was to tell him why exactly he had just gotten a pillow thrown at him. It was ridiculous after all.

Adrien asked “What was that for?” at the same time as Marinette screeched “Don’t ruin my work! I don’t want to have to redo his makeup.”

Félix held his hands up with the indication to play nice for now. After they had returned from the park, he had changed into a shirt that he had no doubt stolen from Adrien. He had also ruined his previously perfectly arranged hair in favour for an unkempt style—she could count on one hand how often she had seen Félix with unkempt hair so far, so this was a rarity. His intent was obviously to blend into a crowd like Adrien would, though the visual similarity he had to his twin brother with this look was jarring.

Speaking of hair and looks and Félix: With his help she had finally found a hairstyle she could wear while her hair grew out again. Since it was too short to make a bun that didn’t fall apart after an hour, they had settled on pigtails for now. Adrien had even said that they looked cute, which had made her heart flutter…because it was a nice comment! Everyone liked to hear nice things after all. It didn’t mean anything!

After donning some sunglasses, Marinette was ready to hit the town and see if anyone would be able to see through Adrien’s disguise. She hoped not.

When the four of them descended the stairs from her room, they walked past Sabine who was cleaning up the dishes from lunch. Upon hearing them she turned around.

“Oh my,” she said and held a hand in front of her mouth to hide a smile. “Adrien, I barely recognize you!”

“You look amazing in that outfit,” Sabine said and threw her daughter a wink while Adrien curtsied.

“Thank you,” he said. “But all the praise goes to Mari! She made it after all. I’m just wearing it.”

Marinette felt warmth creep into her cheeks and immediately averted her gaze to mask it. That’s how she missed Adrien jump slightly when he was poked in the side by his brother. She did hear his confused “What?” though.

“So, what are we gonna do?” Nino asked when they were finally out on the street. No one had
thrown them weird glances yet, so the blending-in part was working well!

“Oh, I have an idea!” An unfamiliar female voice suddenly said and both Nino and Marinette whirled around to the unknown speaker. It was just Adrien though who threw them a confused look.

“What? I’m just trying to sound authentic.”

Marinette blinked. If she had not seen that those words had come out of his mouth, she wouldn’t have believed it was Adrien who had said them. His voice sounded dramatically different, which was quite scary actually.

“We’re good at mimicking voices,” Félix said with Adrien’s voice, which was incredibly disorienting with how similar to Adrien he currently looked.

“Dudes, stop it please. You’re both creeping me out.” Nino said with a shudder.

Creepy indeed.

Adrien’s excited smile dropped. “I’m sorry. I just thought it would be fun. I practiced all week,” he said, in his normal voice this time.

Marinette winced and suddenly felt like she had just kicked a puppy.

“It does sound amazing! It’s just a little disorienting since we’re not used to it, that’s all,” she reassured him. “Anyway, you said you had an idea?”

Adrien’s disheartened expression quickly changed back to excitement again.

“Right!” He said, his voice being higher pitched this time but still closer to his usual one than before. “I thought we could go through tourist shops and see who can find the most ridiculous merch.”

“That’s a great idea!” Nino said. “And whoever loses will have to wear all the ridiculous stuff we’ll buy!”

“Then we have to make Félix lose!” Adrien immediately snickered which earned him a glare from his brother and a giggle from Marinette.

“I think it’ll be funny no matter who loses or wins. Let’s do it!”

“And I can pretend to be a tourist and you guys can give me a tour of the city,” Adrien said and then became thoughtful. “Now that I think about it, it’s been a while since I’ve been on the Eiffel tower. How about it?”

“Dear god, we’ll get pestered by those people who sell miniature Eiffel towers,” Félix groaned.

“We’ll get pestered by them no matter which tourist attraction we go to,” Nino pointed out.

“Nah, you just have to dodge them,” Marinette said with a wave of her hand. “As long as we don’t act too much like tourists, they won’t pester us anyway.”

“Let’s see how many vendors will call me Mademoiselle,” Adrien snickered, obviously amused.

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep count to make sure your dignity is in shambles afterwards,” Félix assured him.
“My dignity will be fully intact, thank you very much.”

“I’ll just take every Mademoiselle as a personal compliment,” Marinette said. “It means that I managed to do a good job with the disguise.”

“That’s already guaranteed anyway,” Nino said. “Just give me a heads up when you start talking to people so I can film it.”

Adrien gave him a thumbs up. “Don’t expect too many surprised reactions though. I’m quite the good actor,” he said with a wink.

“Wait, if this is supposed to be a prank, then isn’t the whole point getting a reaction out of people?” Nino asked.

“Yes, but this is a disguise first and foremost and apparently Adrien gets a kick out of not being recognized,” Marinette said.

“You bet I am! This is hilarious!” His voice had gradually become higher so that he sounded like a girl again. It just wasn’t as much as a shock this time. And really, if Adrien was having fun, then who was Marinette to discourage him? Nino seemed to take it with humour at this point too and was mainly relieved that Félix continued to talk in his own voice instead of using Adrien’s. Seriously, *that* had been even creepier than Adrien’s voice change.

Just as predicted, the vendors that ran around tourist attractions and sold miniature Eiffel towers did try to get their attention. They didn’t even fear Félix’s glares, which certainly spoke for a lack of a survival instinct. Adrien’s efforts at pretending to speak neither French nor English made everything worse since it seemed to further encourage them. It was usually Marinette who stepped between the twins and the vendors with a firm ‘no, thank you’ that succeeded to chase them away.

At least on the Eiffel tower they were free from them.

“You were right, you know?” Marinette said as she and Adrien leaned against the railing and looked over Paris down below.

“That is very likely. About what specifically though?” He asked with a grin.

“That I like to watch what’s going on from high-up places. You said you liked it in one of the notes you gave me last year when I was still mad at you for that leaf thing, remember?”

Adrien’s grin shrunk into a fond smile. “Yeah, I remember. Maybe we should go up here again soon.”

“Yeah, maybe,” Marinette said. Caught up in the moment as she was, she didn’t notice Nino approaching from behind and poking her in the side—she would probably be blue around the ribcage soon if it continued like that.

“Should we go down again? We still have awful tourist merch to buy after all,” he said and didn’t seem to have any scruple about having just destroyed a moment.

*Wait, what?*

No, they *hadn’t* had a *moment*. A moment would mean for there to have been something between them that was romantic, in most interpretations of the term at least. And seeing anything romantic
in their relationship would mean that Nino was right and that his stupid plan was working.

*No, it was just a nice moment between two good friends. Calm down, Marinette! Adrien didn’t ask you on a date after all!*

No, but he had suggested that just the two of them would go up on the Eiffel tower again, which was, for a lot of people, the most unironically romantic place in the world.

*It still didn’t mean anything!*

The first time Adrien got addressed with *Mademoiselle* was when they were about to go to the elevators of the Eiffel tower and he was asked to take a picture. Nino filmed it and caught the ‘Thank you Mademoiselle’ on video, much to especially Félix’s glee who immediately asked to have all video footage sent to him at the end of the day. Adrien and Marinette just kept breaking into fits of laughter once they were in the elevator, which earned them weird looks from the other passengers. The looks made it all the more hilarious though.

The second time had been when someone who tried to sell single roses to passers-by had handed Adrien a rose with the words ‘For a beautiful Princess’. The poor woman had probably not predicted that the young girl she had just given the rose to would break out into howling laughter, with Marinette and Nino not far behind.

“I’m sorry…but…she’s the Princess,” Adrien managed to get out between laughs and somehow managed to keep his voice from slipping back to his natural one. He then pointed at Marinette who was too used to the inside joke at this point to feel embarrassed about it. The flower vendor was extremely confused though.

Adrien had ended up buying the yellow rose and given it to Marinette. He had also been quick to point out that yellow roses symbolized ‘friendship’ and that it therefore fit perfectly.

Marinette had no idea why she suddenly felt a pang of disappointment at that. Of course they were friends! …What else would they be?

“How does it look?” Nino asked after donning a particularly atrocious pink, sequined hat with the Eiffel Tower on it.

“Revolting,” Félix said after only a short glance. Marinette could only agree. Whoever designed this merchandise had no fashion sense whatsoever.

“Mari! Look what I found!” Adrien suddenly squeaked and produced a hairband with cat ears in the colours of the French flag.

“Really?” She asked flatly. There had to be an end to cat themed merchandise eventually, right? If there was, then they had clearly not reached that point yet, because Adrien just kept finding new stuff.

“Yes, really!”

He bounced excitedly in place.

“It’s not as atrocious as Nino’s new hat though,” she said, which made Adrien gasp, appalled.
“These are not atrocious! They are a work of art!”

“Work of art? The dye job is sloppy at best. I can make you better ones than that any day.”

“Is that an offer?” He asked with a smirk.

“Yeah, sure,” Marinette said with a shrug and immediately had the atrocious hat thrown at her.

“Really?” She asked, this time towards Nino and in an exasperated tone.

“Yep,” he just said and picked up the hat from the floor when the shop owner threw a glare his way.

“Will anyone explain to me why you two keep throwing stuff at Mari and me or poke us?” Adrien asked.

_Aha, so he did notice that it hadn’t been just him!_

“Nope, dude. Unless Nette wants to explain.”

“Forget it,” she said to Nino even before Adrien used the most damning weapon at all on her: puppy eyes.

“So, are you going to buy that?” She therefore asked and gave the hat in Nino’s hands a pointed stare.

_Just don’t look at Adrien._

“Depends. Do you think we’ll find something worse than that here?”

“Doubtful. Pink sequins are hard to top,” Félix said as he regarded a t-shirt that said “Je t’aime Paris” with such a deep frown as if it had personally offended him.

“Then I’ll buy it!” Nino said and fought his way through the tourists to get to the cash register.

_Princess,_” Adrien whined behind her—his girl voice still threw her off guard.

“You better not be buying those cat ears,” she said while pretending to look through a collection of snow globes. Adrien was undeterred though.

“Please tell me why we keep getting stuff thrown at us.”

“I’ll tell you later,” she said, avoiding the question altogether. Adrien didn’t seem happy about that answer but to her immense relief dropped the subject. Hopefully he wouldn’t ask again soon.

They left the souvenir shop shortly afterwards. Marinette had kept Adrien from buying the cat ears only by promising to craft him much better ones. When they walked down the street towards the next tourist trap, they came across a park where a fair was currently held. Adrien’s eyes grew wide and he stopped.

“Can we please, please go there?” He begged with sparkling eyes like a little kid.

They quickly decided that going on a fair was a lot more fun than hunting for bad merch in souvenir shops, so they abandoned their previous plan in favour of stuffing their faces with cotton
candy, going on rides and at last, discovering the claw game machines. Adrien was thrilled!

“Those things are corrupt as hell, dude,” Nino warned him.

“It’s a question of skill! Just tell me what you want and I’ll get it for you,” Adrien said confidently.

“He’s right, you know? You’ll just lose a lot of money in those things,” Marinette said.

“It’s not like I’m short on money,” he said with a grin and then stopped in front of a machine that had a variety of stuffed animals inside it.

“Watch and learn,” he said and threw a Euro into the machine. It came to life and Adrien expertly navigated the claw to where he wanted it. It grabbed a plushie, but it immediately slipped out of its grip again, which let the claw return to its starting point.

Adrien gaped at the machine in outrage.

“Told you,” Nino said.

“I’ll just try again!”

Adrien, as expected, was way too stubborn to admit defeat just yet. It took thirteen tries until Nino finally decided to put his foot down.

“How about we stop Adrien from wasting any more money and see what else is on this fair?” He suggested while simultaneously dragging a squirming Adrien away from the claw game.

“I agree. Though I doubt that anything will stop him from throwing more money away,” Félix said.

“Hello? I’m still here, guys! And I’m not throwing it away, I’m investing it!” Adrien argued as they walked out of the building and back to the main path of the fair.

“In low-quality plushies,” Félix countered.

“They were cute!”

“And bad quality.”

“Guys, stop the bickering,” Marinette said and shoved herself between the twins. “We all know that we can’t stop KitKat from anything he sets his mind to, so it’s not worth arguing about it. If he wants to waste your father’s money, then I say, let him.”

“Oh, he hasn’t told you yet? This is his money he is wasting since father cut off any financial support to us,” Félix said with an eye roll.

Marinette blinked. That indeed was news. She looked at Adrien who rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly.

“It’s not a big deal. I mean, modelling is quite lucrative.”

“Alright, in that case please don’t waste a lot of money anymore. I’d feel bad about it.”

“I promise to only spend it on things that are worth it,” he said with a grin. A grin that grew when he suddenly saw a booth that had a giant cat plushie as its grand prize. All one had to do was earn no less than one thousand points with popping balloons by throwing darts at them. Marinette knew instantly that in Adrien’s eyes, the grand prize was very much worth spending money on.
Félix seemed to realise something similar because she watched how his expression went from exasperated to resigned. Nino meanwhile took out his phone to film what would no doubt be another memorable moment of their day.

“Bonjour Mademoiselle, do you want to give it a try? Even for a few points you can win one of these,” the stallholder said and pointed at some baskets that had consolation prizes in them like a small squirt gun or one of these spirals that flip-flopped down stairs.

“Absolutely,” Adrien said with a confident grin. “How many do I have to hit to get that cat there?”

The stallholder chuckled at the boldness.

“That would be one hundred balloons and you’d have to pay fifty Euros for one hundred darts.”

“Deal!” Adrien said and pretty much slammed the bill down on the counter.

“How good is your aim?” Marinette asked him while the stallholder counted the one hundred darts.

“We have a dart board in our room and I’ve done fencing for practically my whole life, so I’d say my aim is pretty good,” Adrien said with a confident smirk.

“Your chances of every single throw being a hit are still quite low,” Félix remarked.

“Oh, friends of little faith, I’ll just need some luck, that’s all,” Adrien said with a grin and got out the lucky charm Marinette had gifted him last summer. When had he pocketed it earlier? For some reason, the comment earned him a disapproving scowl from Félix.

“Don’t worry, this is not cheating,” he added quietly to his brother, though not quiet enough that Marinette and Nino didn’t hear. How would one even cheat in a game of throwing darts at balloons?

“Here you go, Mademoiselle,” the stallholder said and presented Adrien with his pile of one hundred darts. Marinette couldn’t help but feel nervous. Adrien plus sharp objects that were thrown? That did sound like a disaster waiting to happen if she was being honest. Nino seemed to think the same thing because he took a cautious step back.

Then the first dart flew and hit a balloon, making it burst with a satisfying plop. Another followed and after that a third. After thirty popped balloons with not a single throw missing its target, the stallholder seemed to grow unsure. He had no doubt seen a chance to mercilessly scam someone, selling more and more darts to let them reach their goal, but Adrien defied his expectations. And not just his. Marinette stared in disbelief as the fiftieth balloon was popped with the fiftieth dart. Some other people had stopped to watch too, or to just wait for their turn since it was clear that one hundred balloons were a little more than half of the balloons that hung on the wall.

Ninety darts and the stallholder gaped in disbelief.

Ninety-one. Ninety-two.

“How is she doing that?” One of the people who had stopped to watch, asked.


Everyone seemed to hold their breath when Adrien threw his last dart and hit. He cheered and Marinette joined him in his happy jumping. When the stallholder handed the giant cat plush—or
was it a pillow?—over to Adrien with something that was more a grimace than a smile, Adrien gave Marinette an overjoyed grin.

“For you, Princess,” he said with a smile that melted her heart.

*Heart, stop melting! This is not the time!*

“You can’t just give that to me! It’s too much!”

“Of course I can,” he said. “Besides, I think my arms are tired from all the dart throwing so this plush will end on the dirty ground in one…two—”

Marinette took the giant cat plush away from him, which probably looked comical since it was almost as big as her.

“You’re impossible,” she said, which only deepened Adrien’s grin.

“Impossible or implausible?”

“Both. You’re definitely both.”

“It’s a shame I don’t have something to throw at you two right now,” Nino said while still holding up his phone, clearly filming them.

“*Nino! This definitely doesn’t count!*” Marinette argued and could already feel herself blush for the who-knows-how-manyth time that day.

“Oh, believe me, it *does* count. You can watch the footage of it later if you want."

Marinette was about to reply, but a sudden wetness on her hand distracted her from it. She looked up at the sky that had become quite cloudy in the last half an hour, dark clouds swallowing the last patches of blue sky that were left.

“Is it starting to rain?”

“Yes, it is,” Félix said with disdain. She could have sworn to have also heard him grumble “I’ve been waiting for that all day.”

Suddenly Adrien grabbed her hand.

“Come on, we’ll find shelter in the Ferris Wheel!” He said with a grin and started speed-walking through the crowd with her in tow.

“W-why the Ferris Wheel? It’s on the other side of the park!” Marinette said and threw a look back over her shoulder to see if Nino and Félix were following them as well. They were making a valiant effort to, but were eventually swallowed by the crowd. Alright, just Adrien, her, a giant plush cat and an impending thunderstorm then. Nothing to worry about!

“We can just go into one of these food tents and wait for the rain to stop,” she continued as they walked past said tents.

“I’ve never been on a Ferris Wheel before,” Adrien said with a shy smile. “And since we need shelter from the rain, I thought it’d just pop two balloons with one dart, so to speak.”

Marinette gave him an eye roll and a smile. It might not be the most practical solution, but she could see his train of thought.
The rain, that had been a few single drops thus far, suddenly picked up. They sprinted to the Ferris Wheel which, luckily for them, was not that popular in the afternoons. They were immediately seated.

“Ha! We made it!” Adrien said breathlessly as the Ferris Wheel started moving. He did not alter his voice to sound like a girl now that they were alone. It was almost a shock to hear his normal voice again after a whole afternoon of not hearing it.

“Don’t celebrate just yet, because in about five minutes we’ll be out of here again,” Marinette said as she watched the rain hit the glass of the gondola.

“But for now, we are.”

Adrien giggled. A giggle that quickly grew into laughter that Marinette couldn’t help but join.

“You’re crazy, you know?” She said. “You took off across the entire fair, dragging me and a giant cat plush behind you, just because it had to be the Ferris Wheel where we would find shelter from the rain.”

“But it was fun, wasn’t it?” Adrien countered, not the least bit regretful.

“Yeah, it was,” Marinette laughed and then leaned back with a content sigh. She set the cat plush she had been holding with an iron grip down next to her.

“So, first time on a Ferris Wheel. What’s your impression?” She asked.

“It’s nice!” Adrien said as the gondola slowly rose higher and higher. “I really like the view from up here, even with the rain. How about you? How often have you been on a Ferris Wheel?”

Marinette thought about that for a moment. “Not that often actually. Maybe around ten times overall? More or less.” She shrugged. “It’s nice though. And quiet.”

A comfortable silence befell them, the only sound being the rain, as they both just enjoyed sitting in the gondola for a bit and, in Marinette’s case, waiting for her heartbeat to calm down from all the running.

“We just abandoned Nino and Félix,” Marinette eventually pointed out while looking through the window next to her as if she could see the two.

“Fé will curse up a storm of his own if he didn’t find a dry place to wait the rain shower out in,” Adrien snickered.

“Right, I almost forgot that he’s not the biggest fan of rain.”

A grin grew on her face when she imagined Félix just wildly throwing around all kinds of curses while running through the downpour.

“So, uhm…can I ask you something?” Adrien asked, his voice suddenly insecure which made alarm bells go off in Marinette’s head. What was bothering him?

“Sure. Shoot!”

“Earlier you said that you would explain later what is going on with the poking and throwing stuff at us. …Is it later now? I mean, you know what’s going on and Nino and Félix obviously know it too…and…well, I was just wondering if it’s something bad because none of you want to tell me
what it is."

Oh my god. Anything but this question!

For a moment Marinette played with the idea of grabbing the cat plush again and pulling it in front of her face to hide the blush that was surely there now.

“W-well, you see, it’s not necessarily bad. It’s just a little awkward because Nino and Félix are jumping to conclusions.”

“What conclusions?” Adrien asked and blinked innocently.

Just tell him!

Marinette took a deep breath and pulled the cat plush closer for moral support.

“Yesterday, Nino said something about the two of us acting like a couple a lot and I told him he was imagining things. I actually wanted to prove him wrong so I said that he could throw something at me or poke me whenever I’d do something he considered as flirting. I thought nothing would happen because obviously I don’t flirt with you and vice versa! But…apparently Nino doesn’t see it that way.” She didn’t even want to know how deep her blush was at this point. She hugged the cat tighter. “And apparently Félix also liked the idea of proving to us that we act like a couple. But…uh…I don’t know. It’s just the kind of friendship we have since we’re both very affectionate people and…well…”

Marinette had no idea where she was going with this. All she had accomplished was to turn both of them into furiously blushing messes and to make everything awkward.

Way to go.

Why couldn’t they just laugh about how ridiculous the mere idea of them as a couple was? Why was it so embarrassing to talk about it?

“It’s silly, right?” Marinette said eventually to snap them both out of the awkward silence. She fiddled with the charms on her bracelet, a nervous habit she had adapted ever since she got it.

“Yeah, totally silly!” Adrien said and the higher pitch of his laugh was not due to impersonating a girl this time but rather had a hysterical note to it.

“Sorry for not telling you earlier, but I didn’t want to make it awkward,” Marinette said in an attempt to somehow salvage the rest of her dignity.

“No, it’s okay!” Adrien quickly said and then snorted. “It’s actually pretty funny when you think about it. If the situations are ever reversed, we will definitely return the favour for them.”

Marinette couldn’t help but grin. She loved Adrien’s mischievous side.

“Oh, you bet we will! I’ll bring stale bread as ammunition.”

Adrien then held his fist out with a grin and she bumped it, the awkwardness slowly disappearing.

“You know, I have never flirted with anyone before so I wouldn’t even know how to go about it.”

To Marinette’s immense surprise, this one sentence did not make the awkwardness return. Well, maybe just a little.
“And I never had anyone flirt with me before, so we’re basically equally oblivious,” she said with a grin. Finally! They had transcended into joking territory. At last, they could laugh about it!

“I mean, you sometimes sound like you’re trying to imitate Tamaki Suoh, but other than that I wouldn’t know of any flirting.”

Adrien laughed. “Well, I do have the French part, the piano playing and the blond hair down for that role at least.”

He leaned forward and Marinette’s traitorous heart skipped a beat when he got closer. All he did though was to pull the yellow rose from earlier out of her bag.

“And I gifted you a rose,” he added with a wink, handing it over to her again. She accepted it with an amused grin.

“Instead of dressing you like a girl I should have let you cosplay Tamaki today. You certainly have the act down. Especially the dramatics.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment, thank you very much.” He bowed overdramatically. “Speaking of dressing me like a girl though: I’d say the disguise was successful!” Adrien said with an excited grin.

“You got called Mademoiselle or referred to with female pronouns no less than thirty-three times today. Is your masculinity in shambles yet?”

Adrien snorted. “I’ve never cared much about portraying a masculine image anyway and this was way too much fun to dislike it even the least bit. I think the best part was that people just didn’t question it. It’s like I was invisible for once. You know, invisible in a good way!”

Marinette grinned, knowing exactly what he meant.

“Yes. Finally, no close calls or weird looks because we were wearing glittery masks that didn’t do much to divert attention.”

She rolled her eyes. Apart from the trip to the book store the previous summer, the masks had come out a few other times too. Marinette had of course made some changes to make them look a little less horrible, but they had drawn attention to themselves anyway.

“Today I could just be normal for once. Walking around Paris, being with friends, doing silly stuff without it ending up on the tabloids.”

Adrien grinned and took her left hand, the one that had the bracelet around it. He looked at the charms with a small smile and Marinette couldn’t look away as he stroked a finger over the small Eiffel tower and the crown. His gaze out of sparkling green eyes met hers. It always fascinated her how someone could have eyes that green. It was not the greyish or even swampy shade of green that most green eyes she had seen in her life had, but it was a warm green with golden accents that always reminded her of a spring meadow.

“And it’s all thanks to you, Princess,” Adrien said and shyly kissed the back of her hand.

Marinette let herself fall down on her chaise lounge and regarded the outfit Adrien had worn as it hung neatly over the back of her chair. The giant cat plush was beside her—she’d put it up on her
bed after she had properly cleaned it—and she leaned on it for support. *So much* had happened today. *Too much* had happened. Among the fun stuff had been a few revelations though that she could have very much continued to live without.

Number one: Adrien and she were both oblivious, since they didn’t notice they were flirting with each other. Nino had shown her the footage he had taken with a shit-eating grin and she had to admit that he was right. From an outsider’s perspective it was hard to deny that she and Adrien looked closer than normal friends usually were.

Number two: Her heart was a traitor and should be locked up in jail for its continuous acts of high treason. It didn’t matter how much she told herself that she and Adrien were just friends, something in her always rebelled against it. For the entire day this rebelling voice had gotten louder and louder until eventually it had almost completely taken her over.

She regarded the singular yellow rose that stood on her desk in a vase. Yellow for platonic love and therefore friendship—she had looked it up as soon as Adrien and Félix had gone home. It had been a sweet and, in the moment, even funny present, but now Marinette couldn’t help but frown as she looked at the flower and its godforsaken colour. The wrong colour.

She had absolutely no idea when it had happened, but at some point, over the last year she had developed a crush on Adrien. It had just been today that she had *accepted* that crush’s existence. Nino had seen it all along, but *she* had been oblivious.

And as it seemed, the talk with Adrien in the Ferris Wheel, where she had pretty much hammered down the point that the two of them were *just friends* was not helping her case at all. Especially not since he had not hesitated to agree.

Marinette let her head sink down into her awaiting palms and released curse words her parents would be ashamed to hear coming out of her mouth. And then she said them again. With adjectives.

Chapter End Notes

**Bonus:**
And meanwhile, wherever they were, Félix and Nino suddenly felt an irresistible urge to throw something at the Ferris Wheel and didn't know why.
(thanks [Draxynnic](https://www.tumbler.com/draxynnic) for that one! ;D)

Alright, with this, Spellbound will go on a short hiatus. I hope to be able to update again at the beginning of May though we’ll have to see how regularly that will be. Because of uni, I might have to change my upload schedule to "every second Sunday" or even another week day. The next three chapters are already written, but I'll have to do some planning to breach a time gap I was not considering very thoroughly when first planning the story.
Also, I deserpately need to continue writing on Clockwork Harmony. As some of you might have noticed, I didn't update this week. My initial plan was to finally finish chapter 6, but whenever I try to, my brain just goes blank. So, that's not fun. No idea when I'll be back on track with that one, but I promise to come back to it eventually after a small break to gather my thoughts! 😊
Also, do you remember what I said about posting a synopsis as a separate chapter? I changed my mind. It just messes up the chapter numbers AO3 assigns, so I'll just put it in the description of the next chapter. Small hint already: Origins and onward ;D

The Second Book of Faeries
Chapter Summary

Origins with a twist - part 1

Chapter Notes

Welcome back to...well, regular uploads, I suppose. :') At least that's the idea of having 9 chapters pre-written already! :3
As you can see, the upload schedule changed! Instead of Sundays, I am now uploading on Thursdays. Why? Just because! ९(๑ والا ९
I have chapters ready for until the end of June at the moment, so I hope that I'll be able to keep the schedule consistent this time!

Anyway, I have finally gotten to the Miraculous part of the story, which will mean that now I get to mess with the canon! >:D
I'm gonna say that now before people accuse me of things not going according to canon: I am writing an AU where Adrien has a twin brother, where he and Marinette are friends already and where faeries exist. Things are bound to be somewhat different, including some characters' reactions or some dynamics. Please keep in mind that I decided some things with future scenes and developments in mind, so please wait before you judge. :3
Otherwise I hope you enjoy fae lore because there's gonna be more of that soon! ^v^

Félix was not unfamiliar with challenges or precarious situations. Between living with a fae-hating father and having nothing to protect himself from being lured to another realm every other month but flowers and dried fruit, he’d grown quite accustomed to dealing with difficulties.

To be able to go to school, however, involved a lot more trickery and especially bargains than were usually involved. Including, and not limited to, Chloé’s help. While he was not thrilled to have made deals with a fae and the personification of a spoiled rich kid—a combination from the netherworld itself, no doubt—he had begrudgingly accepted that she had more connections than him. His father would never allow them to go to public school after all, especially not after Félix had cursed him, so he couldn’t just drop the name ‘Agreste’ in his favour. Fortunately, the principal of Collège Françoise Dupont was part of the Unseelie Court as well. Unfortunately for him, he wasn’t an Aos Sidhe, but a faerie owl called a Duphon—he really had not been subtle at all with his school’s name—which meant that he had to listen to the royal fae without complaint. This put him at Chloé’s mercy and also Adrien’s and Félix’s if they so chose.

The tricky part of the ordeal had not been the principal, but rather Chloé herself. She was delighted by the idea of having her Adrikins so close every day, but to let Félix enrol as well, she had needed some compensation for her troubles. While the blonde was not as experienced as the older fair folk, her intelligence was not to be underestimated. Félix had not wanted to settle on a favour in exchange for her help, since that could literally be anything. No, he had needed something more
concrete. Said concrete thing turned out to be his and Adrien’s appearance at her parties and their presence on Samhain.

Félix had even been relieved about the latter, since a pre-set arrangement like that excused both Adrien and him from going to the revel, should they be invited. And if Félix wanted to avoid one thing at all costs, then it was the revel.

Félix closed his eyes for a moment to will away the unwelcome memories trying to nudge at the back of his mind, focusing instead on the sound of his brother scrambling and flailing as he got ready for their first day of school. The air in their room was thick with joy, anxiety, excitement and window cleaner—the household staff had cleaned their room while they had been at basketball practice the previous day.

When Félix opened his eyes again, the scene in front of him had not changed much. Adrien was still running around like a headless chicken, gathering everything he thought he would need in a backpack that, judging by its size, was most likely designed to hold supplies for a one-month-long camping trip at the very least. He had to suppress an eye-roll and a sigh as he observed this pitiful sight and instead took a picture. One never knew if it might be useful in the future.

“Why not try this one instead?” Félix then asked and held up a considerably smaller and much more appropriate shoulder bag.

“But it won’t all fit in there!” Adrien argued while he was in the process of trying to fit a basketball into the bag. Félix looked at the ceiling in exasperation.

*Danu, grant me strength.*

“What I need to call Marinette so that someone with school experience can tell you that what you’re doing is ridiculous? Or will you finally listen to me?”

This made Adrien pause.

“You really think this is too much? We will spend hours at school!”

“Yes, *in class!*”

“But what about the breaks? I heard there are breaks! I want to have something to do then, so I have to be prepared.”

This time Félix couldn’t help the eye-roll. “You have been hanging around Marinette too much.”

“That’s not bad!”

“It is when you adopt her bad habits. Overorganisation *is* a thing, you know?”

Now it was Adrien’s turn to let out an annoyed sigh.

“Fine! How would *you* pack a school bag?”

Félix took the giant backpack out of Adrien’s hands and started unpacking.

*Knitting supplies — really, Adrien?*

That particular item earned a raised eyebrow.

*Where did he even get those?*
Said raised eyebrow turned into a deep frown when his hands closed around something smooth and solid, thumb tracing the edges of a hole in the stone’s centre.

“Please tell me you weren’t planning on using that,” he said as he held up the adder stone for Adrien to see. His brother squirmed uncomfortably.

“You know, I just thought it would be good to find out if there are more fae other than Chloé and Sabrina at the school. I’m not as good as telling them apart from humans as you are.”

If possible, Félix’s frown deepened as he threw the adder stone aside and instead pulled out a spiral notebook that he placed in the smaller white bag.

“You’re not supposed to. I can only do it because I ate a soul and I sincerely hope that you won’t ever follow my bad example. If there is anyone else around at the school then I’ll tell you.”

Félix knew that Adrien had meant well, but antagonizing other fae by seeing through their glamour with an obvious thing like an adder stone was not a good way to go about the situation.

He handed Adrien the shoulder bag which now also contained a tablet, a small pencil case, a calculator, a package of tissues and a water bottle.

“This does not look like much.”

“It is enough, trust me. Especially considering that we’ll have to outrun Nathalie and the Gorilla, so less weight is beneficial.”

Félix shouldered his own bag and then checked himself in the mirror one last time. He looked like a perfect model-student, maybe a little too formally clothed but acceptable. It was a look that stood in stark contrast to what he was about to do: Climbing out of a two-story window and over a garden wall to rebelliously run away from home.

“Alright, are you ready?” He asked and watched an anxious but mostly excited grin take over his brother’s face.

“Yes! Let’s do this!”

“Words cannot describe how much I want to hit my head against a wall.”

“I said I’m sorry!”

Félix fixed his brother with a deadpan look as the school building faded into the distance through the car window.

“We were at the entrance, Adrien! Just a little more determination on your part and we would be sitting in class right now.”

“I couldn’t help it! T-there was an old man and he couldn’t get up without his cane. I just had to help him.”

Adrien did not look up from his fidgeting hands while he guiltily admitted what had ultimately led to the failure of their escape. Sure, Félix could have gone to school on his own, but without Adrien there really was not much of a point to be there.
“You really fail as a fair one,” Félix said with an ironic grin and shook his head.

“Was that a compliment or an insult?” Adrien seemed offended.

“Depends. You’re supposed to be a selfish creature, yet you’ve grown annoyingly selfless in the past year.”

Adrien grinned. “A compliment then. Thank you very much.”

Nathalie was suspiciously quiet during the entire ride and made a point of looking at her tablet in concentration as if it was the most interesting thing in the world. Félix narrowed his eyes. He knew that she was acting on his father’s orders and that she did it to keep her job, but she was still walking on thin ice with him. Judging by how she flinched when she caught his gaze, she knew it too.

When the iron gates of the mansion closed behind them, Félix could not help but glare at them too.

“Ringing iron bells,” he growled. They had been so close.

Their lectures continued as they were marked on their schedules. Adrien answered Nathalie’s questions with boredom while Félix did not see why he should put effort into this torture. Glaring at the furniture in the cold room was a much better use of his time. Oh, and texting Marinette of course.

**Princess:** Chloé chased me away from my seat because she wanted to sit behind Adrien

I tried to sit next to Nino instead but no that’s Adrien’s seat >>

then Adrien didn’t show up

karma! >:D

**Coffee Boy:** We almost made it but he just had to help up an old man.

**Princess:** that’s good though! I helped an old man today too. he almost got run over by a car and I pulled him away just in time! at the price of macaroons…

**Coffee Boy:** WHAT THE HELL, MARINETTE!?

**Princess:** what?

**Coffee Boy:** Don’t just run into traffic!

**Princess:** I’m fine! I only had one macaroon left at the end though because I dropped the box again when I was in class T^T

**Coffee Boy:** just your luck

**Princess:** IKR?

I shared it with the new student though

her name is Alya and she loves superheroes!
she and KitKat will probably get along fantastically ;D

**Coffee Boy:** Great. Just what we needed: Another nerd for him to bond with.

**Princess:** let him be! O:

**KitKat:** DON'T GET RUN OVER BY CARS PRINCESS!!!

Félix glanced up to see that Nathalie had paused in her lecture to make them read a text. Something Adrien obviously did not do since he was currently busy typing up a storm on his phone.

**KitKat:** YES PLEASE INTRODUCE ME! THIS IS AMAZING! I'LL DEFINITELY COME TO SCHOOL TOMORROW!

**Coffee Boy:** Look what you did.

**Princess:** no regrets

“Félix,” Nathalie called and he looked up with a frown. “Can you summarize the text?”

“Not interested,” he replied soberly and then looked back at his phone. She sighed.

Félix saw her taking a breath as if she was about to say something, but she didn’t get the chance to as the doors opened at exactly that moment.

“What are you two doing, sneaking off to go to school?” Their father said in a voice cold as ice. Félix met his gaze with an equally icy glare.

“You told him?” Adrien asked, betrayed, while Nathalie averted her gaze.

“Father, why can’t we go to school like everyone else?”

Félix knew the moment that their father entered the room that this would be a lost cause, though Adrien did not seem to have gotten the memo yet.

“Because you are not like everybody else,” Gabriel replied and let the sentence hang in the room. Adrien flinched as if he had been slapped and Félix let out a threatening growl. He was fine with being called different, but to Adrien, who tried to be human with every fibre of his being, such a reminder was really hurtful.

“Good job. Does that mean you’re on your way to acceptance then?” Félix said sarcastically and could barely hold back from accompanying the statement with a slow clap. His father did not seem to find it funny though.

“You two will never go to school. Did I make myself clear?”

Adrien suddenly jumped up and stormed out of the room. Félix followed suit.

“You’re playing with fire,” he hissed as he passed his father but didn’t wait to see if it earned him a reaction.

Once in their room, Félix found Adrien face down on their bed.

“We’ll try again tomorrow,” he said as he sat down next to Adrien and scratched him behind the ears.
“What good would that do? Father will just send Nathalie again to stop us. How many times will we be able to sneak away before he makes it impossible? One day? Two days?” Adrien whined, continuing to wallow in self-pity.

Félix sighed as he stood up, deciding to let Adrien mope for now. He made his way up the spiral staircase to the second level and let himself fall down on a beanbag there. His phone had vibrated nearly non-stop for the previous few minutes so he was curious to find out what Marinette was texting him about.

**Princess:** and don’t worry KitKat I don’t plan to make it a habit

running in front of cars that is

holy shit

ONE OF MY CLASSMATES JUST TURNED INTO A STONE GOLEM! WHAT THE HELL!!!???

Félix blinked and then reread the words. It was like staring at a familiar scenery where a tree had been felled and needing a second to place what was off. And then, when the realisation finally hit him, it was like his world was crumbling. He could feel the blood drain from his face as the meaning sunk in.

No. By Danu, no! This is not supposed to happen!

He needed a moment to pull himself out of pre-maturely panicking before he could read on.

**Princess:** MY NEW FRIEND IS CRAZY

SHE IS CHASING AFTER IVAN BECAUSE SHE THINKS SUPERHEROS WILL SHOW UP

WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING?? THOSE THINGS DON’T HAPPEN!!!

She was absolutely right with that. Those things did not happen. At least, they didn’t happen to humans. Not on this scale.

**Coffee Boy:** Where are you right now?!

His hands trembled as he typed, not even noticing the noise from outside that startled Adrien to jump up from bed and turn on the TV. The minute it took Marinette to reply passed torturously slowly.

**Princess:** just got home

He breathed a sigh of relief. The bakery should be safe, especially with all the charms in Marinette’s room.

**Coffee Boy:** STAY THERE!

He barely registered the sound of the TV in the background as the news announced that a supervillain was attacking Paris.

This was magic. Magic that drew attention and therefore everything the Court reviled. Whichever maniac used it would probably be dead by the end of the day. Exposure on this level was dangerous after all. Humans were not supposed to know about the existence of magic. They should write it off as fiction.
This was bad. Very bad.

“What’s this doing here?” Adrien said while Félix was still in the middle of panicking. His panic was cut short when a surge of magic suddenly went through their room, making the fur on his tail and ears stand on end. He shifted out of caution and then looked down to an equally startled Adrien who was looking at a floating little being.

“Did you just let loose an imp in our room?!” Félix yelled and jumped down to the ground level to catch the flying black thing that started to dart around their room and took a bite out of random objects.

“I’m sorry! I had no idea the box was magic!” Adrien screeched, as he tried to catch the flying creature as well. It took a few minutes of getting in each other’s way but eventually Adrien managed to catch the small thing. Félix sat on his shoulder with a lashing tail and regarded the not-imp suspiciously.

“Huh,” the being said, looking at both of them. “Wasn’t expecting to be dealing with actual kittens. Interesting.”

Félix narrowed his eyes. He didn’t like this creature.
Chapter Summary

Origins with a twist - part 2

Chapter Notes

Okay then! Not gonna lie, I have been looking forward to this chapter for a while now and even though it's a lot of dialogue, I hope you'll like it! :3 You can thank Tempomental for the chapter name since he encouraged me to use it :D

“I’ll have you know that I take offense to being called an imp,” the small black cat stated and glared at Félix. He growled in return.

Adrien meanwhile had gotten over his shock for the most part and looked at the creature with curiosity.

“What are you then?” He asked, which drew the creature’s attention back to him.

“Not your business, Cat Sidhe. Who did you steal my ring from?”

Adrien blinked. He had not stolen anything!

“I just found it here!” He let go of the small being to sit up and frantically motion at the box on the table in the hope it would illustrate his honesty. There really was a ring in it, though it wasn’t black like Adrien had first glimpsed. It was actually a quite simple-looking silver band. He frowned.

“It’s not iron, is it?”

The creature threw him an offended look. “My ring is not made of something as ordinary as iron! It’s a magic material, but nothing for faeries to use.” He—at least Adrien assumed it was a ‘he’—crossed his tiny arms and threw both twins a sharp look. The message was clear: ‘Paws off the ring.’

“If not for the fair folk, then who else is it for that uses magic?” Félix inquired suspiciously from where he still sat on Adrien’s shoulder.

“Humans,” the creature said simply and Adrien felt his brother’s claws dig into his skin when he tensed.

“Magic is not meant for humans,” Adrien said. He thought about Marinette and how much he had tried to keep her away from magic in the past year.

The only instances he remembered magic to be used by humans from what his mother had taught him was on the rare occasions when a fae had been tricked by a human and was bound to them
with their name. But then the human would use the fae’s magic, which still would not be their own. Their own magic was their soul and if they found a way to use that, they would instantly die. But even when they used a fae’s magic, there would be grave repercussions. That’s just how magic worked.

No, humans couldn’t use magic. They were only victims of it.

“Is your ring cursed?” Félix asked with an angry hiss, though that only seemed to offend the creature more.

“Fé, be nice.” Adrien said and then addressed the small being with an apologetic smile. “I’m sorry about my brother. We’re very suspicious of the fair folk.”

“Smart kittens, but aren’t you Unseelie yourselves? I can smell it on you.”

Adrien looked away. “We don’t have much choice in that matter.”

The creature sighed. “Well, it’s practically my Court anyway, so who am I to judge?”

Adrien was going to inquire about that, but then the ground shook again. This immediately brought his attention back to the attack that was currently going on. A magic attack! He could worry about what the small cat creature was implying later.

“Do you know what’s going on out there? The Court wouldn’t risk this exposure.”

“This is why I’m here,” the creature said with an eye roll. “Or awake at any case. The one who got this ring is supposed to help stop it and since you’re not lying—yes, I can tell—the old man apparently lost his marbles and gave me to a halfling.”

“Which one of us?” Félix asked.

“Well, obviously not you. I don’t accept holders that eat human souls.”

Adrien could feel his brother tense again and plucked him off his shoulder to sit him down on his lap instead and pet him reassuringly. The last thing they needed now was for Félix to get angry and to accidentally offend this creature.

“How are you able to tell?” Adrien asked since even he, who knew Félix’s magic inside-out, had not noticed anything for months.

“I am the one who founded the Unseelie Court in the first place and who is responsible for Cat Sidhe. Your great goddess Danu? She’s my other half.”

Adrien was suddenly very glad that he had kept Félix from accidentally insulting the creature.

“You’re a god?!”

The tiny black cat smirked. “You may worship me now.”

Another small earthquake shook the ground, reminding Adrien at the crisis at hand.

“But, so I am supposed to use your ring and stop what’s going on out there?”

The tiny god sighed. “Basically.” Then he turned to fix him with a warning glare. “I don’t trust the fair folk and halflings are no exception, but this city might fall if the Black Cat Miraculous won’t be used soon. Unfortunately, I don’t have the time to find a new wielder.”
“I promise to help!” Adrien quickly said. His thoughts went to Marinette. Was she safe? By Danu, what if she wasn’t safe?! What if she was hurt in the attack?! He had to protect her!

“The Court will have my brother’s head if he walks out there and gets involved in this magic business!” Félix said with an angrily lashing tail. The tiny god just waved it off.

“The glamour of a god is superior to whatever glamour a fae can conjure. No one will notice a thing.” He narrowed his eyes to green slits then. “You will both have to swear on what is dearest to you that you won’t tell anyone, especially not the Court, about me. Do not misuse my name and you,” he pointed at Adrien, “may never misuse my Miraculous.”

A deal with a god seemed like a horrible idea, especially when the price was the thing dearest to them. But Marinette could be in danger and there was no time.

“Swear in return that you will not sell us out to the Court and not harm the ones close to us,” Félix said. Adrien breathed a sigh of relief. Thank god for his brother’s quick thinking or he would have agreed to the god’s terms without securing himself first.

“Yeah, yeah, I agree to that,” the god said dismissively.

“Alright, then I promise to agree to all your terms,” Adrien said.

“I promise too,” Félix said through gritted teeth, clearly uncomfortable with making a deal.

“Good. Name’s Plagg by the way. Since we’re in a bit of a situation right now, we’ll sort out the details later. I’ve never had a halfling as a holder before, so I don’t know what exactly will happen, but you should at the very least be able to use Cataclysm.”

“Cataclysm?” Adrien asked at the same time as Félix said.

“That doesn’t sound like something my brother should ever use.”

“It lets you destroy anything you touch,” Plagg supplied.

“I stand by my point,” Félix said, which made Adrien pluck him off his lap and put him down on the couch beside him.

“Fé, just shut up for a second.”

He stood up and took the box in his hand. “How does destroying something help?” He asked as he regarded the ring.

“The person who causes havoc is a normal human who got akumatised. An Akuma is corrupted magical power in form of a butterfly. Find the object the Akuma is hiding in and destroy that. The Ladybug can then capture and cleanse it.”

“The Ladybug?”

“She’s your partner and has the power of Creation. Danu’s power if you will.”

A human had Danu’s power?! Were these gods insane?!

“Alright,” Adrien said anyway “And I need the ring for it?”

“Yes, it lets you transform.”
“Transform? As in shapeshifting or do I get a costume?”

“The latter,” the god said, which prompted Félix to groan in frustration and hide his head under his paws. Adrien, meanwhile, saw the ring in a new light. Would he finally be able to live out his dreams of becoming like Sailor Moon?!

“The phrase is my name followed by ‘Claws Out’, but—”

“Plagg, Claws Out!” Adrien said without hesitation.

“I have not finished explaining!” The tiny god’s voice faded as he was sucked into the ring.

Magical terrorism aside, this was practically what he was born for! All the hours of watching anime paid off as he now posed dramatically while the magic flew over him. In only seconds it was over.

“I wish I could add this to blackmail material,” Félix said from where he sat on the couch but Adrien didn’t pay him any mind. He was much too busy to look at his superhero outfit!

“This is amazing!” He said in awe but then paused. His tail, his ears and even his claws and eyes—except for the green sclera, that was new—had not changed at all. He couldn’t go out like that! People would question it! Besides, Félix and he were the only Cat Sidhe in Paris, so the Court would immediately draw its conclusions.

“I can’t go out like that! People will notice that something is off!”

“Don’t worry, kid. They won’t notice a thing.” Plagg’s voice suddenly said in his head, making Adrien jump.

“Are you sure?”

“Don’t underestimate the glamour of a god. Now go!”

Adrien didn’t hesitate another second and threw open the window.

“Adrien!” Félix yelled and he paused. There was a strange sense of déjà vu as he looked back at his brother who had shifted back to his human form to run to the window. As if he wanted to keep Adrien from escaping. Just like on Midsummer over a year ago. He winced when he mentally took a step back and thought about what Félix must be thinking right now.

“Don’t worry Fé, I’ll come back,” he said with a smile.

“Just…be careful.”

“Will be!”

With another grin, Adrien jumped out the window and landed on the wall around the mansion. This was new. He was used to sneaking out of his room and running over the Parisian rooftops, but he has never done so in his human form. Taken, this was not exactly his human form, but it was close enough to make the experience new and exciting.

The rush of magic that was so much more powerful than his own drew a grin on his face. It felt like he was wearing lightning, just with all the energy and none of the heat or pain. Such overflowing power! No wonder Plagg had been hesitant to give his ring to a fae who could tell exactly how extraordinary it really was.
“It was very rude to not let me finish,” Plagg said in his head and Adrien cringed as he scaled a roof.

“Sorry, I was just excited.”

“I noticed. So, your name is Adrien?”

“Yep,” he replied with a sigh.

“Do you make a habit of just telling powerful gods your name?”

“It’s not much of a secret,” Adrien said with a shrug and jumped over the gap between two roofs. He was slowly getting closer to where the golem was rampaging. “I also know your name, so this is only fair. Besides, I’m a model, so most of Paris knows who I am.”

“Living dangerously, aren’t you, kid?”

“You have no idea,” he muttered.

“Anyway, about the Akuma.”

“Right, you said something about corrupted magic power and butterflies?”

“*Akumas are corrupted magic butterflies sent out by a wielder of the Butterfly Miraculous who uses its power for evil. It’s supposed to make champions, but when it’s used for evil, it corrupts the mind of the humans who are touched by it and makes them act out all their violent and frustrated tendencies.*”

Adrien shuddered. “Let’s not make one of those butterflies touch my brother then, or Chloé will have a very bad day.”

Plagg ignored his comment. “*The butterflies possess an object that is connected to the negative emotion the person is feeling at the moment of being akumatised, so you have to find that object and destroy it.*”

“Sounds easy enough. What’s the catch?”

“The catch?”

“Magic always has a catch.”

“Listen kid, I have never let a halfling use my Miraculous before so I really don’t know what will happen. The talking-in-your-head thing is new too.”

“Oh, so that’s not normal?”

“No. The Miraculous are made for humans and humans don’t have any magic in them beside their soul. When we transform, we put our magic into our holder, so they are not easily hurt by what they’re fighting. The basic attacks, like your Cataclysm, and the magic to transform are stored in the Miraculous itself so that the transformation will fall away after five minutes when you use it.”

“So, the Miraculous acts like an anchor for the magic? That makes sense. Can’t hold magic in a human when their body isn’t built for it. Unless you use it on them similar to shapeshifting, but that would be bad.”

“Exactly, which makes the five minutes after activating a power very taxing on us. The earlier our
holders detransform, the better we and they are off. If the transformation is held for too long too often after a power is used, it will have unintended side effects.

“With you it’s different because you have your own magic too. Some space I would usually occupy in your body is therefore already taken and that means I have some overflowing magic left. Not enough to be corporal, but enough to at least be conscious. That’s why I can communicate with you right now. It also means you’re more vulnerable and have to partially rely on your own strength.”

“So, when my power is—”

“DON’T SAY IT! It’ll activate it! Oh, and look at your back. I know fae are tough, but I don’t want to fall down a ten-story building with you.”

Adrien checked his back and found a silver baton.

“I have a weapon!” He squeed giddily.

“Before I forget: You can only use your power once, so use it wisely. And don’t use it on humans.

“Don’t worry, I don’t plan on killing anyone,” Adrien muttered while discovering that the baton could extend. It was not like the epee he used for fencing, but hitting someone with it with brute force would probably still hurt.

“How long can it extend?” Adrien asked while giving the baton a few practice swings.

“As long as you need it to be. Go ahead and try it out.”

When Adrien held the baton over a rooftop’s edge, he willed it to extend all the way down to the street below. Nice! He could pole-vault across Paris this way. He let it shrink again to pull it into a horizontal position and let it extend to the rooftop on the other side of the street. He grinned. This was just like the banister of their second level, just with added difficulty and thrill.

“So, about my power,” Adrien said and stepped on the baton, making a few cautious steps to test out how secure it was before starting to walk faster. “You said I can destroy anything I touch and that involves living things too. Fé was right: It sounds like something I better shouldn’t use unless I’m in a life or death situation.”

“If it isn’t absolutely necessary, then don’t use it. The five-minute timer counts for you too and I don’t know how my magic will affect yours if it’s in your body for too long.”

“Alright, then I’ll try to cope without destroying things for now and play it safe.”

He looked down on the street far below and grinned.

“I’m starting to get the hang of this.”

His ears twitched as they caught a sound that was getting closer. A scream, but from where? At almost the last second, he looked up, seeing a person in red falling out of the sky. It was much too late to dodge so he was unable to do anything when the other person crashed into him. He braced himself for impact, but a string wound around them and stopped their fall one metre above the ground.

Then it clicked. Red suit and falling out of the sky? This must be the ladybug person Plagg had talked about! The one that was supposed to be his partner!
Adrien was about to give a witty remark when the very familiar smell of vanilla, cinnamon, roses and strawberry reached his nose. Bluebell eyes looked at him apologetically and a sweet voice he would have recognized anywhere said “I’m sorry, I didn’t do it on purpose,” while her lips stretched into an awkward, apologetic grin.

He stared. There was little else he could do when the new information clicked in his brain. He could feel Plagg’s magic flicker with shock as knowledge he should not possess settled in.

*Marinette*?!
Chapter Summary

Origins with a twist - part 3

Chapter Notes

Finally we get to see Marinette with her Miraculous! Not gonna lie, I had a blast writing this chapter! I rewatched the origins episodes more times than I like to admit and took notes on the things that seemed off to me, like the elephant in the room: everyone just accepting magic that easily! There would have been a lot more screaming and downward spirals of doom mentally if that would have happened to me. So look forward for some of those typical Marinette freakouts.

PS: Keep in mind that Adrien is probably pterodactyl screeching in his head for the entirety of this chapter :’D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For once, Marinette was looking forward to her first day of school since Adrien and Félix would finally be attending as well. Not even the possibility that Chloé could be in her class this year could dampen her mood. When the twins had not shown up, she had been content enough with the fact that Nino was in her class this year and that she had also found a new friend.

Then, after going to the library, things had started to go wrong.

The last thing she had expected to happen that day was for a stone golem to run loose around Paris and a weird flying bugmouse to appear in her room, telling her she had to stop said rampaging magical thing.

Her day did not go as planned at all, but at least she had an objective now: save her crazy new friend from the golem and then maybe save Paris too if she could. She would just…ignore the magic part of the whole ordeal for now and focus on that not so simple task. Yeah, denial sounded like a good solution for the moment. Denial was easy. Everyone could do denial!

Tikki had said something about a partner and she just hoped that this other person would more capable than her. After all, she was just fifteen years old and had been granted magical powers. That was like in one of those anime she always watched with Adrien! She was not Hinamori Amu though, but Marinette Dupain-Cheng. Well, Marinette Dupain-Cheng clad in red magic spandex and armed with nothing but a yo-yo.

“What have I gotten myself into, Jacques?” She asked the pigeon as she stood on her balcony with the magic yo-yo in her hand. The bird let out a coo and then went back to pecking at the cookie crumbs on the floor.

Saving Paris? Adrien would probably be thrilled! But no, life had given Marinette Dupain-Cheng
lemons in the form of a pair of magical earrings and she would sure as hell make lemonade out of that!

After taking another deep breath, she swung the yo-yo and then let it go, watching it sail over the Parisian rooftops.

*Magic yo-yo indeed,* she thought as the string stretched without ever showing any sign of ending. When the yo-yo caught, she gave it an experimental tug and couldn’t help but scream when she was suddenly yanked off her feet and catapulted through the air.

*Oh god, I’m going to die!* She thought just when she spotted a black figure below her. To her growing horror, she was heading directly towards said figure. She didn’t even have time for some nice last thoughts before she crashed into him.

It didn’t hurt as much as Marinette had expected it to and the yo-yo—deceptive little thing—had saved them by tying them up and letting them hang upside down over the street. How humiliating.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t do it on purpose,” she quickly said, praying that this other person wouldn’t call a lawyer on her for accidental almost-murder. Only then did she notice his peculiar green cat eyes.

*Oh, that must be my partner. What a great first impression I managed to make…*

She missed the shocked stare he threw her as she tried to find a way to get out of this tangled mess. Her not so trusty yo-yo apparently had a life of its own, since it unwound itself just as the thought crossed her mind.

*Ah, so it listens to what I want. Sort of at least…*

The two of them landed on the street much more gracefully than Marinette had thought possible.

“You’re my partner?” The boy asked and now that they were not tied up anymore Marinette took a moment to properly look at him. His costume seemed to be made out of the same material as hers, just completely in black and with much more details. Though two things were off: his ears and tail. They seemed to be made of fur. If she hadn’t known any better, she’d have said that they were real, but it was probably just part of the costume. So, that was the holder of the Black Cat miraculous Tikki had told her about.

When she got past analysing his outfit, she noticed the anxious tremble in his voice and his stiff posture. He seemed shocked and scared.

Oh, so they were both newbies. Fantastic.

Which *genius* had come up with the idea to let two untrained teenagers save an entire city? If she ever found the person responsible, she’d have *words* with them!

“I guess so. What’s your name? I’m Ma—” She said as she tugged at her yo-yo that was still caught on the baton. It came loose and as her luck would have it, smacked her new partner on the head.

“Madly clumsy. I’m so clumsy.”

*Just my luck.*

“Don’t worry, the only spots I’m seeing so far are yours,” he joked and gave her a reassuring grin. “You can call me Chat Noir. You know, superheroes, secret identities and all.”
He winked at her but she could see that his posture was still tense. Maybe he was trying to be brave for her since one of them had to be.

At that moment there was a crashing sound from a few blocks away and Marinette watched on with horror as the Montparnasse tower crumbled in the distance. She felt her blood run cold. How many people were in this tower? Had they managed to evacuate in time?

She didn’t notice that her legs had given out under her until a set of black-clad arms caught her before she hit the ground.

“Don’t worry, Ma—my lady, we have the powers of ancient gods on our side. I’m sure we can fix this.”

She felt herself nod numbly. This was serious. The most serious thing she had ever been involved in. It was life-and-death-levels of serious! She shook her head. There would be time to think about the logistics of magic later, because right now she had to make sure that there would be a ‘later’!

Chat Noir seemed to think something along those lines too as his playful expression changed to one of determination.

“Let’s go and save Paris, my lady,” he said. “I can try to distract the villain if you need more time to figure out the ropes.”

He gave her yo-yo a pointed look. Not accusing, but rather assessing.

Marinette took a deep breath. There was no time to get used to anything, so she just had to work with what she had. Tikki had said that when she didn’t know what to do anymore, she should use Lucky Charm, so she’d save that for when she was facing Ivan.

“I’m okay,” she said and swung her yo-yo in a circle.

“Trust yourself,” she mumbled, repeating what Tikki had said earlier. Maybe if she said it out loud it would come true. Her yo-yo whizzed through the air, caught on something on a nearby roof and even though Marinette knew what to expect, she still screamed when she was suddenly pulled into the air.

She landed on the rooftop with shaking legs and Chat Noir close behind her.

“I’m okay, it’s just a little much,” she said in a high voice while trying her best not to panic.

“Don’t worry, I got your back,” he said with a genuine smile. “And I’ll be there to catch you if you fall again.”

She gave him a small grin.

“I wouldn’t exactly call what you did ‘catching’, but sure. And thank you.”

She watched from the top of the stadium how Chat Noir hit Ivan with his baton, which only made things worse, as her classmate’s monstrous form only grew because of it. How was she supposed to fight something that was almost as big as her bakery and had taken down the Montparnasse tower?!

Just because a magical ladybug had given her earrings and superpowers didn’t mean that she was a
superhero. No, at the end of the day she was still Marinette Dupain-Cheng, who could not even keep her seat because a bully had taken it from her. Alya had said that all that was needed for evil to triumph was for good people to do nothing, but this was not just some normal deed. This was staring her potential cause of death in the eye! She wanted to save Ivan, but she was not willing to die trying.

“I can’t. I’m not going to be able to do it,” she said and covered her eyes in desperation. When she looked again, she saw Ivan throw a goal at Chat Noir that missed, bounced on the ground and was heading directly towards Alya. Her blood ran cold.

Move, damn it! You have to do something!

She couldn’t.

Luckily, Chat Noir had the same idea and could. He threw his baton which extended and let the goal bounce off just in time to save Alya. Marinette couldn’t even breathe a sigh of relief as Chat Noir, now weaponless, was caught in Ivan’s stone fist.

“What are you waiting for?” Alya yelled and Marinette snapped her attention back to her.

For a miracle.

“The world is watching!”

That really did not help at all! She wasn’t exactly camera-shy, but right now she was responsible for all of Paris. Talk about pressure.

Think positive! An inner voice said.

Well, positive, might be a stretch, but she could think tactically at least. She had always been good at organisation and planning, be it an outfit, or a schedule for studying for tests. A fight against a supervillain had not been among those things yet, but hell, there was no one else right now! She had superpowers, she had her weapon and she still had an ace up her sleeve!

She squeezed the yo-yo in her hand, getting rid of the rest of her nervous jitters and ran to the edge of the stadium’s roof. Her yo-yo, as expected, did exactly what she wanted it to, catching Ivan’s legs as she skidded on the ground between them and eventually came to a halt.

“Animal cruelty? How shameful!” She said to make herself sound more confident than she actually was and pulled on the string. Her own strength surprised her as Ivan really toppled over and let go of Chat Noir. The poor guy fell into the other football goal and she didn’t lose a second to run over to him and check if he was okay.

“Sorry it took so long,” she said awkwardly.

“No worries, my lady. Let’s kick his rocky behind,” Chat Noir said but Marinette grabbed his tail to stop him, making him yelp.

“Wait! He gets bigger with every attack. We have to do something different,” she said thoughtfully while Chat held his tail protectively as if it had been violated. Wait, had he felt that?

Note to self: Don’t pull on his tail again.

“Hmm, does anything here need to be destroyed?”
“No?” Marinette said in confusion as she looked around.

“Okay, then my special power is no help. I can destroy anything I touch,” he said with a grin and a shrug. “How about you? What is your special power?”

“My kwami said that I can conjure an object that will help me win.”

“That sounds useful,” Chat Noir said while looking at Ivan who was in the process of getting up. “Think you can do that in less than five minutes?”

Marinette bit her lip. “I sure hope so. I don’t know what else would work.”

_Alright, here goes nothing._

“Lucky Charm!” She called and threw her yo-yo up just like Tikki had told her to. A suit fell down from the sky and into her hands. She looked at it like the universe was mocking her. Maybe the earrings were broken.

She looked at Ivan again. Tikki had said that the Akuma was hiding in an object, but he was entirely made out of stone.

“Where do you think the object is?” Chat Noir asked, apparently thinking the same thing.

“Well, there’s nothing on him so…wait, what about his fist? He hasn’t opened it for this entire battle. That’s it! It’s like with Matryoshka dolls. The object isn’t on him, it’s in his fist!”

“How are we supposed to get him to open his first then?” Chat Noir asked.

She looked at Ivan’s closed fist, then let her view sweep over Alya—who was filming the entire thing, _oh god_—then the tab next to her and lastly the hose that ended coincidentally exactly where Chat Noir and she were standing. Marinette grinned. “With this.” She held up the Lucky Charm and connected it to the hose.

“Don’t resist, trust me,” she said as she wrapped her yo-yo around Chat Noir’s legs and then started to whirl him around in a circle.

“Are you crazy?” He yelped as the yo-yo released him and he flew right towards Ivan who caught him in his free fist. Marinette took one breath to steady herself.

_Trust yourself._

She had to believe that this plan would work.

“Catch me if you can!” She yelled as she jumped in Ivan’s direction—it was _crazy_ how high she could jump! Under different circumstances she would have panicked about that fact alone. Well, she would probably do plenty of panicking later if she survived this.

Just as she predicted, Ivan let go of what had been in his fist to catch her and the Lucky Charm.

“Alya, the tap!” Marinette shouted and her new friend jumped into action. The Lucky Charm suit quickly filled with water, forcing Ivan’s fist open and releasing Marinette.

She had done it! Her plan had worked and she had survived! There was no time for celebrations yet though, as Chat Noir was still trapped and the akumatised object was still not cleansed.

With a forceful stomp she broke what seemed to be a stone, revealing a black-purple butterfly. She
watched as it harmlessly flew away, making Ivan turn back into himself.

“You were absolutely incredible, Pr—partner!” Chat Noir said and looked like he was about to hug her, but held himself back at the last second, instead scratching the back of his neck in embarrassment. “Sorry that I was not much of a help.”

“You were amazing too, Chat! I couldn’t have done it without you,” she said with a smile and tentatively stretched out her fist. He bumped it with his.

“Bien joué;” he said with a grin.

Marinette jumped when there was a loud beeping in her ear, no doubt the countdown.

“Does the lady need an escort home?” Chat Noir asked with a bow, but she just shook her head.

“No thanks. Our identities must remain secret.”

“Superheroing one oh one,” he said with a wink. “How about you quickly zip home on your own then? Don’t want to reveal your identity on your first day, do you?”

He was right. Now that the battle was over and the adrenaline started to leave her system, she started shivering. She needed to get home fast before she transformed back or worse: had a breakdown in public.

Her view swivelled to Ivan, who had not moved from the spot and looked disheartened. A gentle hand took the note out of her hand.

“Don’t worry, I’ll take care of this. The city is saved, so now it’s time for you to get to safety too.”

“Okay,” she said quietly and could feel the shiver in her voice. Slowly reality was catching up to her: magic, monsters, superpowers. All that new information was kept behind a dam that threatened to break any second.

She watched Chat Noir walk over to Ivan and turned to leave, only to come face to face with an overly excited Alya.

“Uncanny, amazing, spectacular!” She apparently was in full-on reporter mode. “Will you be protecting Paris from now on? How did you get your powers? Did you get stung by a radioactive ladybug?”

No, Alya, I’m not Spiderman. Can ladybugs even sting people? Marinette’s mind held fast on that irrelevant question as she turned around again. She could not deal with this right now. She was on a timer and she desperately needed to scream into a pillow!

“I’ve got a ton of questions, Miss...?”

Oh god, a name! She needed a superhero name like Chat Noir, but she had no time to think of anything overly clever. Therefore, she turned around, scratching together the last bit of confidence she had left while striking a typical hero pose.

“Ladybug. Call me Ladybug,” she said while screaming internally. And then she ran. She ran and zipped the hell out of there!

Now she was glad that her yo-yo listened to what she wanted it to do, because she didn’t have anything left for logistics in her brain. She had to concentrate everything on keeping it together.
while she flew above the streets of Paris—!!—in record speeds.

When she finally dropped down into her room, making the transformation and therefore red suit dissolve, she grabbed the giant cat pillow Adrien had gotten her two months ago and screamed.

This was all too much and way too crazy. Magic? It belonged in fiction! And so did superheroes and monsters and basically everything that had happened today! Nothing made sense anymore.

“Marinette?” A tiny voice asked and Marinette jumped. Oh, right. She had forgotten about that tiny detail.

“Please tell me you’re not some devil-creature from another universe that is going to steal my soul!” She screeched. When the fantasy genre had taught her one thing, then it was that overly cute, magically powerful beings should be met with wariness. And Tikki had tricked her already earlier by letting her say the transformation phrase without telling her it was a transformation phrase. Wariness was probably a good course of action.

Tikki blinked.

“No! Nothing like that! I’m here to help you!”

“Then explain how!” Even though she was probably too deep in her panic to accept rationality at that moment.

“I want to stop the person that misuses the Butterfly miraculous and you want to live in peace. Working together benefits us both! I’ll help you to cope with the knowledge of magic and how it works too.”

“But I’m just a normal teenager! I can’t possibly save Paris over and over again if more of those Akumas show up.”

“But you did it today! You can do it again, you just have to believe in yourself!”

Marinette sighed. This was too much at once.

“Just…let me scream into my pillow for at least another ten minutes please?”

“If that makes you feel better then go ahead,” the tiny goddess said and settled down on the shelf over her bed.

And so, the screaming continued.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I made a Puella Magi Madoka Magica reference. Sue me :V

Also yes, Chat didn't use Cataclysm. That was very much on purpose :3
Félix had followed the battle on TV. They were just starting to show some footage taken from a phone when Adrien came back barrelling through the window and faceplanting on the floor. Odd, he was usually more graceful than that. Did that suit mess with his balance?

“She threw me at a stone golem!” Adrien screeched after a mumbled ‘Claws In’, making Félix blink. There was no question as to who the ‘she’ was, as the news had already talked about a Ladybug hero. It took a second for the anger to register in his system.

“She did what?!” Félix exclaimed.

“S-she, she fell on top of me a-and, she was so confused and scared. And she was so amazing. AND SHE THREW ME AT A STONE GOLEM!”

Plagg snickered. “Looks like she broke the kitten.”

“Adrien, take a deep breath and then try again,” Félix said, as he had trouble making any sense of Adrien’s stammering. Well, except for the ‘she threw me at a stone golem’ part, that had been hard to miss. Adrien did as instructed: took a deep breath and then started screeching again. This time, though, Félix understood him loud and clear.

“Marinette threw me at a stone golem!”

Due to living with the fair folk’s craziness, there were few sentences Félix thought he would never hear. This was one of them.

“Marinette?” He asked. Surely his brother was confusing something.

“YES! S-she has magic a-and this should not happen. Plagg, why did that happen?!”

Things finally clicked in Félix’s head. The Ladybug Miraculous had somehow fallen into Marinette’s hands, which meant that she now wielded the power of the ancient goddess that had created the fair folk. Fate had a cruel sense of humour.

“I’m more concerned about the fact that you noticed it was her,” Plagg said thoughtfully. “Normally the glamour protects the wielders from recognizing each other, even if they know the other person outside of being transformed.”

“You said that you have no idea what will be different when a halfling is using your Miraculous. Could that be the reason?” Adrien said, his voice now carefully calm, which meant that he was close to an even bigger breakdown.

“Possibly. Sorry kid, I didn’t think this would happen.”

Then Plagg paused and narrowed his eyes. “You haven’t charmed her, have you?”
Adrien looked appalled. “Of course not! I would never hurt her and—”

“What about the lucky charm? You enchanted it with good luck, didn’t you?” Félix pointed out. He knew Adrien carried his lucky charm around everywhere and judging by how much Adrien meant to her, he could only assume that it would be the same for Marinette.

Plagg groaned and buried his face in his paws. “This is why I don’t deal with the fair folk,” he muttered in exasperation.

“I-is that the reason?” Adrien asked, shuffling anxiously on the spot.

“Yeah. When you charmed that thing, then it has traces of your magic. You subconsciously reached out and recognized it while it mingled with the magic of the suit. And since you connect that charm with this Marinette girl, you were able to recognize the rest as well. That wouldn’t work for anyone else because the Ladybug’s glamour is too strong, but your Miraculous is its equal in power, so you could breach that gap.”

“This is bad,” Félix said as he thought of all the consequences this entire situation could bring. “Now humans know that magic exists, which is practically an invitation for the Folk to play their mischief with everyone since it would just be written off as Akuma weirdness.”

Adrien visibly paled. “How are we supposed to keep Marinette safe now?! We would have to keep an eye on her 24/7!”

“Hey, calm down kitten! She now has the goddess that created the fae in the first place on her side. Tikki won’t let anything happen to her chosen, especially since we had trouble with the fair folk in the past already. Your girlfriend is as safe as she can get.”

Adrien made a noise that sounded like a dying whale. “G-girlfriend?! M-Marinette is n-not my g-

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Adrien made a noise that sounded like a dying whale. “G-girlfriend?!! M-Marinet -
“Well, I was going to try and find a human wielder, but seeing how you two already have a connection with the Ladybug’s chosen, keeping this arrangement might be for the best.”

A smart choice. Taking the ability to protect Marinette away from Adrien would be fatal for everyone involved. And that didn’t even touch on his jealousy if someone else would become her partner.

“Anyway, I’m starving! Do you have anything to eat?”

“You mean except our remote control and various other objects in this room?” Félix asked, though the god just grinned at him unapologetically.

“The price for being in my glorious presence and using my powers is Camembert. As much as you can get.”

“Camembert cheese? You mean on a sandwich?” Adrien asked.

“No, Camembert by itself is enough!”

“And that’s why you shouldn’t make deals with tiny gods, Adrien,” Félix deadpanned though he also was relieved. He had expected that the power of destruction would come at a higher price when he was used to fae deals, which usually involved things like firstborn children. Camembert cheese though? They could manage that.

Félix stretched, the morning breeze brushing through his fur and the air being pleasantly warm for September. He had figured that the only way to ensure that they would not get caught by Nathalie would be to sneak out earlier than she expected them to. Well, it might not be the only way, but at least it was the least complicated one.

“You two are such strange kittens,” Plagg said as he floated beside them. Up on the rooftops he apparently wasn’t worried about anyone seeing him. “If you’re gonna sneak out, then why would you go to school of all places? Just sitting in place all day and listening to some boring lectures doesn’t seem very fey to me. What about pranks and hijinks?”

Félix rolled his eyes. “If I wouldn’t know any better, I would say you’re disappointed.”

Plagg snorted. “On the contrary. I am pleasantly surprised. It’s been a very long time since I met halflings that were this connected to their human roots.”

“I hope that’s a good thing?” Adrien asked a little anxiously. He seemed very distracted ever since the news about the stone beings had come on the previous day. Ladybug, and that meant Marinette, had made a mistake. One couldn’t really expect her to be perfect on her first day out, especially since she was dealing with something as unpredictable as magic. He knew his friend, though, and therefore he was certain that she would beat herself up for it.

Adrien, in his usual manner, had started to blame himself. He had known about the capturing the Akuma part but he had forgotten it at the time, too awed by her skills and especially too focused on protecting and reassuring her to the best of his ability.

“Oh, yes, it’s very good. For a fae, that is,” Plagg said and gave them a very mischievous grin. “My holders are usually marked by their selflessness, so this is quite hilarious.”
“Right, because faeries are selfish creatures,” Adrien muttered. Even though Plagg had just complimented him in his own twisted way, his brother looked insulted.

They jumped over another gap between roofs and Félix took a moment to pause and look down. There was a stone creature in about every tenth street and they just got more numerous the closer one got to the Eiffel tower. It was no minor magic that was at work here, but in comparison to what he had seen in the sidhe back on Samhain…this was basically nothing. A curse to be made out of stone and a twisted mind? For the fair folk that was everyday business. Those were pranks.

**Fun and games.**

Félix shuddered at the unpleasant images this train of thought dug out.

So far the Butterfly Miraculous’s magic didn’t seem lethal, but they couldn’t rely on it to stay that way. Once they defeated these creatures—Félix had no doubt that they would—what would come next? How long would it be until something more dangerous showed up? How long would it take for his nightmares to actually come true?

He shook his head and caught up to Adrien. Dwelling on it was no use at the moment. He had to focus on one thing after another. School came first. The fight would find them sooner or later anyway, so he should use the calm before the storm to be productive.

“You know, it’s odd for my ring to be trapped in a pocket dimension. Since I never had a shapeshifter as a holder the situation has never come up. It’s an interesting new experience,” Plagg said.

“I’m just glad it worked. Carrying around things as a cat is not easy, especially not something as small as a ring,” Adrien said with a sigh. “When we were kittens and still learning how to shapeshift properly, we kept losing our clothes. Luckily, we got the hang of how pocket dimensions worked when we were eight, so that we could store our clothes and other things we had on us in there while we were shifted.”

“Which is still rather late for a fae. Most learn it when they’re one year old,” Félix added.

“Meh, you’re halflings, so your magic isn’t as strong. Eight years is still a good time frame in your case,” Plagg said.

Adrien suddenly stopped on the edge of a roof. In front of them was the school, but his view shifted to the other side of the street: the bakery.

“Don’t even think about it,” Félix said before Adrien could do something stupid.

“She’s probably blaming herself,” Adrien said, not taking his worried glance off the rooftop balcony.

“You care a lot about this human girl, don’t you?”

Plagg’s voice was neither teasing nor judging, which was odd since he had basically only done both of those two things so far. Adrien’s tail lashed back and forth nervously.

“I do,” he eventually replied shyly.

“That’s good. Since you’re gonna be partners you should be able to get along with her. You’re lucky that your girlfriend got the Miraculous.”
Adrien made a noise as if someone had stepped on his tail. “I already told you that she’s not my g-
girlfriend!” He argued and Félix was sure that his brother was blushing underneath the fur.

“Yet,” Félix coughed, which made Plagg snicker. Adrien hissed at him.

“Marinette and I are just friends,” he insisted. “Now come on! We’re gonna be late for class.”

With these words Adrien jumped to the next roof, leaving Félix and Plagg behind.

“Denial?” The tiny cat god asked, making Félix sigh.

“You have no idea how deep.”

Since they had heard Chloé’s voice from the courtyard and since Félix was pretty sure he had seen
their father’s car close to the school, they decided to not go through the front entrance. Instead,
they climbed through an open window in an empty classroom where they shifted back.

“We made it!” Adrien cheered quietly and was practically vibrating with excitement. Félix was not
sure if that was an improvement to the distracted moping from before.

“I still don’t get why you’re this thrilled about school,” Plagg grumbled as he hid in Adrien’s shirt.

“Let’s get out of this classroom before anyone asks what we’re doing in here,” Félix said and
purposefully stepped outside into the mostly empty hallway. Being early had the clear advantage
that they were not crowded by a group of avid fans of Adrien—or on rare occasion even fans of
Félix. This made their short trip to the principal’s office much easier than it otherwise would have
been.

After politely knocking, the two entered.

“Good morning, Monsieur. We’re here to pick up our timetables,” Félix stated while trying to look
as polite as possible. The man in front of them still looked as if he’d seen a ghost.

“You’re not really being subtle, are you?” Adrien asked curiously as he looked around. And he was
right. For a faerie owl to have pictures of owls everywhere in his office was absolutely not subtle at
all.

“I…erm,” Monsieur Damocles said, drops sweat starting to collect on his forehead. It was obvious
that the only Aos Sidhe he was used to talking to was Chloé.

“Adrien, stop being a hypocrite,” Félix therefore said to put the man at ease. “Half of your
wardrobe consists of cat-themed clothes.”

“You don’t have to tell him that,” Adrien hissed as an embarrassed blush overtook his face.

It took at least five more minutes of searching until both of them finally had their timetables. Said
five minutes were spent in a tense silence. Since none of them seemed to break it any time soon,
Félix chose to take pity on the poor Duphon principal.

“We are much more gracious when it comes to humans than Chloé is, so you won’t have to worry
about us causing any trouble.”

Monsieur Damocles looked like he had just been granted a boon, which was the only sign of gratitude they would get. The fair folk did not say ‘thank you’.

By the time they stepped back out of the principal’s office, the school had already filled with students. There were so many people their age everywhere.

He immediately noticed a group of students in the corner of the courtyard that seemed to be quite vocal. A dispute perhaps? A question that answered itself as he also recognized Chloé as part of the group. Of course, it was a dispute. What interested him far more were the traces of magic he picked up from said group. Instead of just two sets of magic from Chloé and Sabrina, he picked up four.

Félix didn’t have time to tell Adrien of this discovery, as his brother decided to be an idiot and draw attention to himself at the same moment that a girl with glasses stormed off.

“Hey Chloé,” his idiot brother said from up on the second level, which was the exact moment when Félix decided that bailing was a good option.

“You deal with her. I’m out of here,” he hissed in Adrien’s ear and then walked over to the room that he identified as their classroom. If Adrien wanted to deal with Chloé this early in the morning, then that was his problem. Félix would not risk a headache just yet.

The classroom was empty except for one person in the front row. Luckily, it was a familiar face, so Félix sat down on the empty seat next to him.

“Good morning, Nino,” he said as soon as the bespectacled boy had taken off his headphones.

“Morning, dude! I see you finally made it,” he offered Félix a fist bump that was hesitantly returned. There was no one there to watch it after all. “Chloé will give you hell for sitting in Adrien’s seat.”

“Ah, so this is the seat all the drama was about,” Félix said. Apart from it being in the front row, he did not see anything particularly special about it.

“I mean, the real drama yesterday was the monster attack. Poor Ivan, man.”

“Is there a seat that is not taken yet?” Félix asked to deviate from the topic. The last thing he wanted to talk about was magic.

“There’s one next to Nathaniel in the last row and one next to Ivan, though I assume you wouldn’t want to sit next to him.”

There was a free seat in the last row? Perfect. From there he could watch everyone in the class without drawing suspicion and especially keep an eye on Chloé.

“I’ll move to the last row before Adrien comes, then. The last thing I need is for Chloé to talk to me.”

Nino snorted. “I feel that, dude.”

“Adrien will most likely make a fool out of himself when he will try to *introduce* himself to
Marinette later. Pay close attention, since we will not let him live it down,” Félix said.

“Gotcha, dude! This will be painful to watch.”

When Félix heard other students approaching the classroom, he got up again. “This is my cue to retreat.”

“Later, dude,” Nino said and put his headphones back on. Meanwhile, Félix walked to the back of the class and sat down on the seat Nino had pointed out. He watched as the classroom slowly filled with students. The first to arrive was a red-haired boy that sat down next to him and shyly introduced himself as Nathaniel. Félix was pleased to note that he immediately started sketching comics and kept quiet, which meant he would not bother him. He very much preferred the quiet types.

Among the students of the class were the two other fae he had sensed earlier. Two girls: a very small one with pink hair and a very quiet girl with goth clothes and red eyes. Red eyes? Was she even wearing a glamour? It was a miracle she had not been found out yet.

When there were many excited squeals outside and he caught his brother’s name being called from various teenage girls, he knew that the drama was about to unfold. Félix learned back with a sigh.

“This is your seat, Adrikins. I saved it for you. Right in front of me,” Chloé said as if the seat would be a king’s throne.

“Thank you, Chloé,” Adrien said, putting emphasis on the words of gratitude. Félix had to hold back a snicker and he could see that the short, pink-haired girl also tried to hide a grin. Chloé, meanwhile, looked like she had trouble to cover up that she was internally fuming. His brother was surprisingly good at being passive-aggressive.

As expected, Chloé didn’t let that well-hidden insult go by without retribution. Félix watched with a darkening gaze as she spit out her gum and ordered Sabrina to stick it on the seat of the other front row. Adrien noticed too.

“Hey! What’s that all about?!"

Careful, Adrien. Control your anger.

“The brats that sat here yesterday need a little attitude adjustment. I’m just commanding a bit of respect, that’s all.”

“You think that’s really necessary?”

“You’ve got a lot to learn about school culture, Adrikins. Watch the master,” Chloé said as she sat back down while Adrien tried his best to get the gum off the seat. Félix’s ears twitched under the glamour as he heard a familiar voice from outside.

Marinette!

She was talking to another girl—probably that Alya person she had told them about—and discussing superheroes of all things.

By Danu, why can’t either of you two be subtle!?

Félix made a mental countdown to how long it would take for the two girls to arrive and he quickly realised that Adrien wouldn’t get the gum off in time. The most frustrating thing was to not be able
to do anything when an angry voice suddenly demanded: “Hey! What do you think you’re doing?”
Adrien could deal with hordes of fans asking for autographs. He could even deal with Chloé clinging to him, at least for a certain amount of time. What he could not deal with was Chloé bullying Marinette.

“You think that’s really necessary?” Adrien said, even though he would have gladly yelled something along the lines of “Bite iron” instead. A few threats to leave Marinette the hell alone would have also been nice, but he couldn’t do that. He needed to act like he knew neither Marinette, nor what exactly was going on.

“You’ve got a lot to learn about school culture, Adrikins. Watch the master.”

Oh, I will. But that master isn’t you, he thought as he tried to get the disgusting gum off the seat.

A quite cold voice from the doorway startled him.

“Hey! What do you think you’re doing?”

One fearful fraction of a second long, Adrien thought the angry voice was Marinette’s—this was her seat after all—which, after what had happened the previous day was more than terrifying. That girl had thrown him at an honest to god stone golem after all! One didn’t just do that!

When Adrien whirled around, it wasn’t Marinette though, but rather a not-very-friendly-looking brunette stomping his way. Marinette, meanwhile, stood in the doorway and looked indecisive about what to do. He only had a second to catch sight of her because his vision was suddenly blocked by a looming figure with hazel eyes, that glared at him through a pair of glasses.

“Uh…getting this gum off?”

He shouldn’t have worded it as a question, especially since Chloé started laughing with Sabrina following suit.

“Yeah, likely story, blondie,” the girl snarled.

“Alya, this might be a misunderstanding,” Marinette suddenly said as she approached and tried dragging the hostile girl away. Alya—wasn’t that the girl Marinette had wanted to introduce him to?—snorted dismissively, but apparently decided to drop the subject for the moment. She sat down on her side of the row and immediately pulled out her phone while Marinette took a tissue out of her bag to put it on the seat. She then handed him another one, so he could get rid of the stickiness on his fingers.

Adrien had to suppress a smile and instead followed her example of sitting down. Only seconds later, his phone vibrated. After wiping his hands clean, he pulled it out his pocket—class had not started yet so it should still be allowed, right?
Princess: sorry about Alya

KitKat: Why do I always make horrible first impressions?! ;A;

Coffee Boy: Because you are an idiot.

Princess: bad luck?

He supposed both was true. He resisted the urge to turn around to glare at Félix, or to give Marinette a small smile. Chloé was probably watching him like a hawk.

“Daddy’s boy, teen supermodel and Chloé’s buddy? Ha, forget it,” he heard Alya say dismissively. Apparently, she had looked him up online.

KitKat: Princess why do girls always hate me because of misunderstandings? T^T

Coffee Boy: She is quite rude, isn’t she?

Princess: don’t worry I can fix this!

and stop being overdramatic KitKat

DJ N: you’re a magnet for disaster

Coffee Boy: Agreed.

KitKat: gee, thanks you two -.-”

And thanks Princess! <3

“Why didn’t you just tell her it was Chloé’s idea?” Nino asked.

“Uhm…it’s complicated,” Adrien said with a grin he supposed was a little too wide to be believable, judging by Nino’s sceptical expression. He couldn’t help it though, since he couldn’t very well tell Nino that it was because of Court conflicts and Marinette’s general safety.

Only shortly afterwards, roll call began and as luck would have it, he was the first one on the list.

“Agreste Adrien,” Mlle Bustier said. Adrien looked around in panic. Marinette and Nino had never told him that this was a thing! What did he say?! Luckily, Nino came to his rescue.

“You say ‘present’,” he stage-whispered, making Adrien jump up.

“Present!” He said loudly, making the entire class, even the teacher, laugh. He sat back down with an embarrassed blush.

“Agreste Félix,” Mlle Bustier continued.

“Present.”

Of course, his brother would say it in a dignified way and not make a fool of himself.

“Bourgeois Chloé.”

“Present.”

Adrien suppressed the urge to growl with how smug she sounded. The irritation was quickly
forgotten when he felt the ground shake under what seemed to be heavy steps.

*Oh no.*

“Bruel Ivan?”

Adrien jumped out of his seat for the second time that day as the door suddenly flew out of its hinges and Stoneheart burst in, yelling “PRESENT!”

His first thought was to grab Marinette and get her out of the classroom. Tiny claws dug through the fabric of his shirt, reminding him that *Adrien* couldn’t do much in this situation. Right, if he would get Marinette out he would immediately have to ditch her to transform. To explain *that* would be hard without outing himself.

Adrien caught his brother’s gaze and an understanding passed between them. Félix would keep Marinette safe while he could go and transform. He therefore didn’t waste any more time or opportunity and sprinted out of the classroom, hiding in the empty locker room.

“My first day of school and I don’t even make it past roll call,” Adrien muttered as he checked that the locker room really was as empty as it looked.

“Sounds like a day off to me,” Plagg said.

“Oh no no no no. We have a princess to save. Plagg, Claws Out!”

He could already hear Chloé’s complaints when he exited through one of the windows.

“You have no idea who you’re dealing with! My daddy, the mayor, will bring in the police, the army and the entire cavalry!”

Doubtful, Chat Noir thought as he jumped to hit Stoneheart atop the head with his baton. This was perfect to vent his frustration!

“And don’t forget the superheroes!” He said at the same time as Plagg yelled in his head “Don’t hit him!” He landed on the ground to see Stoneheart grow in size.

“Oh, iron bells,” he cursed under his breath. How could he have forgotten about that?!

“My bad!” He called with an apologetic smile.

“Super-incompetent, you mean,” Chloé sneered. Chat Noir had to swallow the urge to hiss at her.

“Ha! You wanted the cavalry? Well, here it is!” Stoneheart bellowed, which was followed by stone beings of his likeness appearing from all sides. “Seize him!”

*Not today, Rocky.* Chat Noir thought as he dodged the big but relatively slow golems. He noticed too late that it was merely a distraction and that the real Stoneheart got away in the meantime.

“Smelt it,” he growled.

“*Stop wasting time, you idiot!*” Plagg called, making Chat Noir wince.

“I can’t just let them hurt civilians, so I have to keep them occupied and stall until Ladybug gets
here,” he snapped back as he blocked the punch of one of the stone beings with his baton. Fighting was like a dance for the Cat Sidhe, when also a new one. Dodging punches was easy enough, but he grew more worried by the minute. Where was Marinette? Had Félix not kept her safe until she could transform? Was she hurt?!

“What is she waiting for?” A familiar voice suddenly said, seemingly to herself and one of Chat Noir’s ears twitched to locate the speaker. It was Alya—was she insane?! A quick glance confirmed that she hid behind a dumpster. He had no time to let his gaze linger on her though as the fight progressed quickly. The Stonehearts had now taken to throwing cars and it required all of Chat Noir’s concentration to dodge those.

Alya’s scream brought his attention back to her and he had only enough time to throw his baton to save her from getting hit by a silver car. That short moment had been enough for one of the Stonehearts to close his fist around him though.

This is the second time this happens! Damn you Alya, we’ll have words once this is over!

With only his legs dangling in the air and his baton out of reach, Chat Noir defaulted to excessively swearing at the stone creature, though it did not seem to face him at all.

“Let me go, you son of a Kelpie!”

“Language, kitten!”

“Not the time, Plagg! How do I get out of here?!"

“You don’t. Not unless you want to kill an innocent person.”

“Holly and iron bells,” he hissed in irritation. Great. Just great! This was absolutely not how he had imagined his first day of school to go.

“Chat Noir, extend it!”

Princess!

Only a second later his head got hit with his baton, though he didn’t mind. Time to get free and help his lady! As soon as he fell to the ground, a yo-yo string wound around his left leg and pulled him out of the way.

Dangling upside down from a light pole had also not been on his list of things of how to spend the day. Considering that he spotted Ladybug sitting very smugly on op of said street lantern, he could not really complain though.

“Sorry I was late,” she said.

“My lady, have I ever told you, you turn my world upside down?” He joked with a wink.

“Oh, you’re quite the joker, aren’t you?” Ladybug teased back and he grinned. There was the sassy Marinette he was used to and not the downcast and shy one he had briefly seen in class earlier.

The roaring Stonehearts destroyed their small moment.

“But your comedic timing needs work. We gotta get out of here!”

Chat Noir was startled when she did not unwind the yo-yo from his leg before swinging away,
consequently dragging him with her. The string untangled mid-air, he adjusted his position with cat-like grace and turned to follow his partner. Rooftops! Finally, he was on the rooftops again! This was familiar territory.

“Hey, aren’t we gonna take care of them?” He asked with a look back. Those stone monsters could still hurt people after all.

“No,” Ladybug said resolutely. “If we want to save them all, then we go to the source.”

Chat Noir and her landed at the Trocadéro. The first place she had met civilian him over a year ago.

“That one,” Ladybug said, snapping Chat Noir out of his nostalgia as she pointed at the Stoneheart on the Eiffel tower. Said akumatised victim currently roared at a bunch of news helicopters Was he making some sort of King Kong impression? How ridiculous.

Speaking of ridiculous:

“I demand my daughter’s safe return!” Mayor Bourgeois said through a megaphone that made Chat Noir flatten his ears. He hated those things. They were way too loud for his already sensitive ears, but in his transformed state it just became that much worse!

Ladybug and he had almost made it to the police barricade when Stoneheart suddenly decided to throw Chloé. Seriously, what had her father expected when making demands towards a clearly hostile magical being? He had Audrey as a wife, so he really should have known better! Seeing Chloé in serious distress managed to brighten Chat Noir’s day though. There was the karma she deserved!

Ladybug suddenly dashed past him and managed to arrive just in time to catch Chloé. Well, it might be better that way actually. This way Chloé was neither exposed due to maintaining impossibly few injuries, but she now also owed Marinette a favour.

Chat Noir had to hold the malicious grin back. This was even more delicious karma than an accident!

“I know the fair folk has a twisted world view, kitten, but don’t let it get to your head,” Plagg said. “There are people here who know about the fae so you have to convince them that you at least behave human.”

The kwami was right. There were also news cameras everywhere. A small slip and he could be done for.

He was brought back to the present by a shout from behind him.

“We’re clear to attack!” Roger yelled, while standing atop of a police car. Chat Noir winced when he noticed his broken arm. Sabrina was probably quite distressed about it.

“No, wait! Don’t attack them! You know it’ll only make it worse!” Ladybug argued desperately.

“I’ve a new plan, unlike you. Move aside and let the pros do their thing. You’ve already failed once.”

He usually liked Roger, but in that moment, he would have gladly given him a swipe with his claws. It could wait, though, as his attention was fully on Ladybug. He could clearly see that it was Marinette behind the mask in that moment, as doubt started to gnaw at her. He hated it when she
doubted herself, especially when she was actually right!

“He’s right, you know? If I captured Stoneheart’s Akuma the first time around none of this would have happened! I knew I wasn’t the right one for this job.”

Had his Princess gone insane?! Almost everyone would have messed this up when dealing with magic for the very first time in their lives! How dare the public blame her for it! Chat Noir was tempted to growl at Roger, but quickly decided that comforting his friend was more important than expressing his anger.

“No,” he said in the softest voice he could muster as he put a hand on her shoulder. She looked up at him with those beautiful bluebell eyes of hers. “He’s wrong, because without you, she’d no longer be here.”

He motioned towards Chloé who was making a show of hugging her father. The small lie wouldn’t hurt. After all, it didn’t matter that Chloé would have been perfectly fine even without Ladybug’s help—that was a fact she didn’t have to and hopefully would never know. All that mattered was that she had dove in to save her while no one else had. That’s why she was the hero.

“And without us, they won’t make it. And we’ll prove that to them. Trust me on this, okay?”

Chat Noir smiled when she blinked at him.

“Okay,” Ladybug said and he could see in her eyes that her confidence had returned.

The moment was broken when the Stoneheart on the tower suddenly started roaring, followed by lots of coughing and spluttering. A swarm of something flying—butterflies?—appeared out of his mouth then, making the Akuma villain fall backwards, unconscious.

The swarm of butterflies then took a shape resembling a head and Chat could feel a dark magic that made the fur of his tail stand on end. He didn’t like this.

“People of Paris, listen carefully. I am Hawkmoth,” the swarm said.

“Hawkmoth?” Chat Noir and Ladybug repeated at the same time.

“Ladybug, Chat Noir, give me the ladybug earrings and the cat ring now! You’ve done enough damage to these innocent people.”

Chat Noir has never wanted to curse a person as badly as he did at that moment. His murderous glare turned to curious confusion when Ladybug suddenly started clapping slowly and confidently walked towards the kaleidoscope of butterflies.

“Nice try, Hawkmoth, but we know who the bad guy is. Let’s not reverse the roles here.”

Marinette has always had a way with words, so he silently cheered her on as she turned the tables with just a few sentences.

“Without you, none of these innocent victims would be transformed into villains. Hawkmoth, no matter how long it takes, we will find you. And you will hand us your miraculous!”

She then started running towards the tower while he still stood frozen. Chat Noir couldn’t take his eyes off her as she slingshotted herself up to the akumas and caught every single tainted butterfly with her yo-yo.
“Let me make this promise to you: No matter who wants to harm you, Ladybug and Chat Noir will do everything in our power to keep you safe!”

And with that, she opened her yo-yo and released hundreds of purified white butterflies into the air. Chat Noir stared in awe.

It was suddenly like the sweetest songs of Faerie played through his head, but instead of pulling him towards another realm, he gravitated towards her.

“Hey kitty, are you alright?” It was a sweet voice that soothed him in a way the songs of Faerie didn’t.

“I’m Adrien by the way.”

“Marinette,” she said with a genuine smile.

“You’re weird,” Marinette said with a small laugh as they exited the Metro at Montparnasse.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Adrien said and Marinette just smiled.

“Yeah.”

“I wish we could see the stars like this back in Paris.”

“It’s nothing.”

“No, it’s everything!” Adrien said as he set her down again. “Seriously, thank you Marinette.”

“Mar, look! Aren’t they pretty?” He said excitedly and shoved a fan full of colourful leaves in her face.

“Are you going to wax poetry about them now?”

“Are you suggesting what I think you are suggesting?” He asked Marinette. She grinned back at him.

“You bet!”

“Pillow fight!”
“And we’re eternally grateful for that, Princess.”

Marinette nudged him with her foot and giggled.

“Dork.”

“You’re impossible,” she said.

“Impossible or implausible?”

“Both. You’re definitely both.”

“You were amazing too, Chat! I couldn’t have done it without you,” she said with a smile and tentatively stretched out her fist. He bumped it with his.

He had known this girl for over a year now and in this time, he had learned what kind of person she was. She was smart, she was kind, she was honest and hated injustice. She was so creative that he was sometimes convinced that she had been blessed by a fair one and she was also, undeniably, the most beautiful girl he knew.

Looking up at her now as she stood tall on the Eiffel tower and declared that the two of them would protect Paris, he couldn’t help but see how much she had grown. If anyone deserved to stand up there, then it was her.

“I’m so proud of you,” he whispered, knowing she couldn’t hear it but having to say it anyway. Because it was the truth. He was so incredibly proud that his heart threatened to burst.

There was yet another truth he realised in that moment, but that, he kept to himself.

_I love you._
“Tikki, I can’t believe I did that,” Marinette said with shaking hands. Watching the news report that repeated the speech she had given at the Eiffel Tower and parts of the fight that followed—especially the Miraculous Cure—was like an out-of-body experience.

“You did great, Marinette!” Tikki assured her and hugged her cheek. “Your speech was truly inspiring.”

Marinette could feel her cheeks flush a bit at the praise.

“I still jumped off the Eiffel Tower though,” she pointed out and then paused. “OH MY GOD, TIKKI! I JUMPED OFF THE TOP OF THE EIFFEL TOWER!”

Her trusty cat pillow was back to be screamed into.

“Marinette, calm down! Everything is fine! Even if you wouldn’t have had a parachute, then your suit would have prevented most damage. You were perfectly safe the entire time. The only thing that can harm you is magic, but your Miraculous Cure can heal those injuries.”

Marinette only got half of that as she was still too busy burying her face into the pillow and mumbling in panic. She was glad that she wasn’t scared of heights. Though…she might be now.

Damn it.

“Tikki,” Marinette eventually said when she was done with this round of screaming. She hugged the cat pillow to her chest. “Chat Noir said that his power is to destroy everything he touches, but he hasn’t used it yet. Is it really that necessary? Don’t get me wrong, I’m very glad to have a partner and he’s awesome, but…isn’t destruction supposed to be something bad?”

Tikki sighed and sat down on the mattress in front of Marinette.
“For everything that exists there has to be a counterpart. Without destruction, creation would be meaningless and without creation, destruction wouldn’t exist. Both are natural parts of the universe and both can be good or bad, depending on the situation.”

“Okay?” Marinette said, still not understanding.

“Let me give you an example: If you encounter an Akuma victim whose object you cannot easily destroy with a stomp or a punch like this time, then Cataclysm will come in very handy. You might also need destruction to get free from being trapped somewhere. Your Cure will restore those things afterwards, so you won’t have to worry about it. This time, the power of destruction was not specifically needed. You did need Chat Noir though, powers or not.”

That made more sense. “Okay then. So, we should only use his power when we really need it?”

“You should both use your powers only when you really need them. There might even be battles where you won’t need a Lucky Charm at all.”

“Tikki, you said that creation and destruction are counterparts. So, if I got the Miraculous of Creation for my creativity, then what qualified Chat Noir for the power of destruction?” The question has nagged her for the entire day already. Her partner didn’t seem like a bad person and she had no idea what would give anyone the idea that he would be the perfect candidate to wield the powers of a god of destruction.

“Well,” Tikki said at length and looked away for a moment. “First off, you didn’t get your Miraculous because of your creativity. I work best with artists because of their affinity to creation. That, however, doesn’t mean that every creative person could wield my Miraculous as well as you do. It takes leadership abilities and a good heart to wield me. You qualified because of your courage and your willingness to act when no one else did.”

Marinette let that sink in for a moment. “Alright, then what are the qualifications for the ring?”

“Usually the holders of the Ladybug and the Black Cat Miraculous are judged by how compatible they are and how likely, or rather unlikely they are to abuse the power they got. You can probably imagine what some kinds of people would do with the power of destruction at their fingertips, so it’s important to find a kind soul that won’t misuse it.”

“That makes sense,” Marinette muttered. The thought alone of what people like Chloé could do with the power of destroying everything they touched made a shudder run down her spine. Something Tikki said jumped out at her, though.

“Wait, you said ‘usually’. Is it different this time?”

Tikki looked away again. She’s definitely keeping something from me, thought Marinette.

“Don’t worry, I was probably just confused about something when I felt his aura earlier. I’m sure he was chosen for his kindness, so you won’t have to worry.”

It didn’t really sound like Tikki was sure about that, but Marinette decided not to dwell on it for now.

When afternoon classes resumed for the day—seriously, Paris just got attacked by a super villain! Couldn’t school be cancelled over this?!—Alya was ready to pick her up. Marinette was quite
surprised to see her when she got downstairs into the bakery to say goodbye to her mother.

“Hey girl! Ready for school?”

“A-Alya? What are you doing here?” She might have expected Nino or even Adrien on her doorstep, but not her new friend.

“Making sure that I have the entire short walk to school to tell you everything that happened today!”

Marinette chuckled.

*Of course, she would.*

“Well then, let’s not waste any more time,” Marinette said before giving her mother a goodbye kiss on the cheek and then letting herself be pulled outside by Alya. She listened to her enthusiastic rambles about superheroes and about how she had been too late to be at the Eiffel Tower in time. Marinette was perplexed that after nearly getting crushed by a car, Alya had still not been discouraged from getting footage. No, she had even biked all the way over to the Eiffel Tower, even though that was also in vain.

“My next goal is an exclusive interview!” Alya declared with fire in her eyes, and Marinette couldn’t hold back a grin.

“Oh, how exciting!” She said as genuinely as she could. Maybe she *could* give Alya an exclusive interview one of these days. What were friends for, right? She would have to ask Tikki first, though.

“But even better!” Alya said as they walked up the stairs. “I’ll find out who is really under that mask!”

*Oh god, please don’t.*

“Yeah, good luck with that,” Marinette snorted.

“You don’t believe me? Just you wait and see, girl! It will be I, Alya Césaire, who will solve this mystery!”

Yep, Alya and Adrien would definitely get along great. They functioned on the same level of dramatics and were very passionate about their interests. Now, if only she could convince Alya that the gum thing had been a misunderstanding, then she could properly introduce the two. She’d have to think of something.

When the two of them entered the classroom, almost everyone else was already seated. The only ones still missing were Chloé, Sabrina, Adrien, and Félix. Marinette grinned as she spotted the empty second row. If she could save Paris, then standing up to Chloé should be child’s play now.

“Wait,” Marinette said as Alya was about to go over to their old seats, and pointed to the second row. Alya grinned.

With a finality, both girls sat down and had a victory fist bump. The joy didn’t last long though, as just moments later, Chloé and Sabrina entered the classroom.

“Uh, you’re in the *wrong* seat. Go on, get lost!” Chloé said and pointed to their old seats. Marinette might have bent under this command before, but now Chloé’s small temper tantrum seemed quite
harmless when she compared it to fighting supervillains.

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing,” Marinette said calmly.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Chloé asked in the voice she put on when someone said something that she deemed to be nonsense.

“It means that I’m not putting up with your crud anymore, Chloé, and neither is anyone else around here. So, take your attitude and go on, get lost!”

Throwing Chloé’s own words back at her and see her fume in anger was more satisfying than Marinette had thought it would be. The whole class laughing at Chloé’s expense was a little victory of its own, too. Marinette made a satisfied noise as she sat down again, immediately earning a nudge from Alya.

“Good job.”

The previous year should have prepared her for what came next, but Marinette suddenly felt herself thoroughly unprepared when the incarnation of sunshine entered the room, his face brightening when he saw her.

It’s just Adrien. Calm down!

Nino saluted Adrien in greeting as Félix noiselessly entered the room behind his brother. Marinette didn’t pay him much mind, though, as she returned Adrien’s wave of greeting. Then she noticed the twinkle in his eyes that she knew by now promised mischief. She frowned.

What is he planning now?

Her thoughts were interrupted when Félix unexpectedly spoke up. He had stopped in the centre aisle next to her desk and was looking at Alya.

“I see you’re glaring at my brother,” he said, which only prompted Alya to throw said glare his way as well. Félix gave the faintest twitch of the corner of his mouth.

“Keep up the good work.”

“Fé!” Adrien whined, but his brother had already gone up the rest of the stairs to his seat, leaving a slightly baffled Alya in his wake.

Marinette propped her head on her hands.

“The world is against you today, isn’t it?” She asked Adrien with a reassuring but also secretive smile. She knew Félix was just teasing him.

“Yes, woe is me!” Adrien said dramatically and slumped forward. “You’re the only one who is nice to me,” he lamented.

Marinette rolled her eyes fondly. Dramatic as ever. Her heart skipped a beat when he turned around and grinned again, but she tried to ignore it. Getting flustered by his antics wouldn’t help her at all. When his grin turned mischievous, she knew she was in trouble.

To absolutely not her surprise, but definitely her utter horror, Adrien suddenly stood up, put a hand on her desk and threw her a flirtatious grin. She did not even have time to become flustered about it
because he suddenly started *singing*.

“Hey, I just met you, and this is crazy. But here’s my number, so call me maybe.”

He then handed her a piece of paper with his number and honest-to-god *winked* at her.

Marinette was dead. Deceased. She had died and gone to heaven. *And* she was probably blushing furiously, if the heat she felt in her cheeks was any indication.

She should have known that Adrien wouldn’t just officially introduce himself to her like a normal human being. That he would do something like this should have actually been on the list of things she should have been expecting to happen on this day. Then again, said list had stopped working the second Stoneheart had burst into the classroom.

Thus, she suddenly found herself at a loss for words. That might be why she started laughing.

“Adrikins, what are you *doing*?!? Chloé suddenly shrieked and jumped up from her seat. At least her nemesis’ outburst managed to sober Marinette’s fit of laughter.

“Introducing myself to a fellow classmate,” Adrien said, unperturbed, his smile never wavering. Therefore, Marinette didn’t know what it was, but Chloé must have seen something that made her back off with…a *grin*?

Ah, she thought Adrien was tricking her! That explained it. Unfortunately, Alya thought the same.

“Are you crazy? He’s obviously trying to make you like him so he can backstab you later,” Alya hissed and threw a suspicious glare in Adrien’s direction as he sat back down on his seat and *winked* at Marinette again.

*Adrien, you’re not subtle with the winking!* She thought in exasperation. Any minute now someone would notice that there was something off.

Marinette hummed as she read the short text that was scribbled above the number.

*Adrien Agreste’s official phone number*

Marinette grinned. Now that he had a valid reason to know her, he could finally give her the number of his actual phone and not the secret one he had gotten to stay in contact with her and Nino.

“*Hello*? Earth to Marinette,” Alya said and waved a hand in front of Marinette’s face.

“W-what?” She stammered.

“I said: He’s a model, so he probably gives his number to every pretty girl.”

Marinette had to suppress the urge to roll her eyes as Alya narrowed hers suspiciously.

“I bet he’s being nice to you to get to me so I’ll get off his case. Well, it ain’t gonna work!”

Marinette heard Adrien sigh and saw Nino shake his head in exasperation. Her phone vibrated.
Coffee Boy: As amusing as this was, I don't think you did yourself any favours there. I nearly died of second-hand embarrassment.

KitKat: It was ART! Right Princess???

Princess: sure let’s call it art if that helps you sleep at night

KitKat: ;A;

DJ N: you overdid it a little dude

Princess: I think it was funny

when also slightly mortifying

KitKat: I'M SORRY! T__T

Princess: no apologies KitKat

KitKat: was that a pun?! ー

Princess: wouldn’t you like to know

KitKat: IT TOTALLY WAS!

DJ N: I swear to god if you two start quoting lyrics at each other now I’m gonna leave this chat

Coffee Boy: I second that.

KitKat: you guys are no fun >>

“Who are you texting?” Alya asked, and Marinette locked her phone before her inquiring friend could read the conversation.

“My…nerd friends,” Marinette replied with a grin as a plan slowly started to form in her head. “One of them hasn’t stopped bothering me about the latest issue of Majestia for days already, so with real life superheroes showing up, I’m afraid that he’ll never stop talking now.”

Just as expected, that got Alya’s attention.

“He’s a Majestia fan too?! You have to introduce us!”

“He’s invited to dinner on Friday. Do you wanna come too?”

Alya grinned brightly. “Yes please! That would be awesome!”

“Am I invited too?” Nino asked. He had apparently given up on texting and had instead listened in on their conversation.

“Yes please! That would be awesome!”

“Ame invited too?” Nino asked. He had apparently given up on texting and had instead listened in on their conversation.

“Sure, you are. Prepare for an ultimate defeat in Mario Kart though, especially when KitKat is present.”

She heard Adrien snicker quietly but luckily Alya didn’t seem to notice.

“KitKat?” She instead asked with raised eyebrows.

“It’s a nickname,” Nino waved off. “Dude is a crazy cat person.”
“Crazy cat person, huh? You know, my dad works at the zoo and he said that they’re gonna get a new panther in two months.”

“That’s amazing! We could all go together!” Marinette said to divert Alya’s attention further from Adrien, who looked like he was only seconds away from joining the conversation.

“You bet we will! Maybe dad can even give us a personal tour!”

The conversation went on until class started. Whenever the teacher would pause to write something on the board, Marinette would pull out her phone.

**Princess:** can you come earlier on friday? I don’t want Alya to glare at you two all throughout dinner

**KitKat:** Sure!

And I really want to go to the zoo again now! ;A; We’ll definitely go once they get the panther!

**Coffee Boy:** You do remember what happened last time we were at the zoo, right?

**Princess:** it was adorable! <3

you two are real cat magnets! ;D

**DJ N:** wait what happened?

**Princess:** all the cats wanted to cuddle them but the glass was in the way

I’ll send you pictures and a video later!

**KitKat:** I really wanted to pet the snow leopard! It was so fluffy! ;A;

**DJ N:** dude…

**Coffee Boy:** Yes, Nino, gaze upon the insanity I have to live with every second of every day.

**KitKat:** rude

Before Marinette even knew, class was over and she was on her way home. She said goodbye to Alya, who was getting picked up by her big sister, and then headed outside.

Rain.

Of course, it would rain on the one day she forgot to bring an umbrella! Then again, there had been more pressing matters on her mind earlier than whether or not she had an umbrella with her.

She sighed. Maybe it was just a short shower and she could wait it out.

“Hey,” a familiar voice suddenly said from behind her, making her heart skip a beat. She turned to Adrien and smiled.

“Cuddling a snow leopard, huh?” She asked and Adrien laughed.

“They are very fluffy big kittens, so of course I want to cuddle one!” He said with a grin as he opened his umbrella. It wasn’t the cat one, but rather a very serious-looking, huge black thing that probably belonged to his father.
“Forgot your umbrella?” He asked and held it out to her.

“Yeah, I had a lot on my mind today,” she said with a guilty smile and a shrug as she stepped under the umbrella next to him. It wasn’t the first time the two of them shared one, but it was the first time since she had realized she had a crush on him, which made the entire situation very confusing, exciting, and scary at the same time.

“I’ll accompany you to the bakery, no matter what Nathalie will say,” he said and the two of them started walking.

“So, how do you like school so far?” Marinette asked, knowing that he had waited for this day for a long time.

“It’s great! Well, I would like it better if someone wouldn’t glare at the back of my head for the entire class,” he said and scratched the back of his neck. Marinette rolled her eyes.

“Don’t worry about Alya. Once she really gets to know you, she’ll drop the hostility. She’s only like that because she thinks you want to play with my heart or something.”

Adrien snickered.

“Yeah, I thought so. Did I win your fancy yet, Princess?”

“Considering that you were serenading me with ‘Call Me Maybe’ earlier, I would say so, yes.”

He grinned. “Shall I continue then?”

Marinette only had time to let out a squeak when he suddenly took her hand and started to dance with her in the rain while singing.

“Before you came into my life, I missed you so bad, I missed you so bad, I missed you so so bad. Before you came into my life, I missed you so bad. And you should know that, I missed you so so bad.”

She laughed, freely and joyfully and secretly in love with this silly dork. Maybe, for a moment, she could pretend like he was in love with her too and that his joking flirting was actually genuine.

“It’s hard to look right at you baby, but here’s number, so call me maybe,” she sang on, which painted a brilliant smile on Adrien’s face.

“Hey, I just met you, and this is crazy. But here’s my number, so call me maybe,” the two of them sang together, laughing all the way and making silly dance moves. They were still laughing when they arrived at the bakery.

“It has been an honour escorting you home, Princess,” Adrien said with an awkward bow as he still held the umbrella over both of them.

“You rather danced me home,” she giggled, which made Adrien grin, mirth dancing in his green eyes.

“Any complaints?”

Marinette laughed. “Not at all.”

A car honked behind them, which made Adrien roll his eyes. Apparently, Nathalie had followed them down the street.
“And so, with great sadness, I need to depart now,” he said dramatically before his smile turned soft.

“See you tomorrow, Princess.”

Marinette’s heart stopped for a second when he kissed her on the cheek and then smiled at her shyly. She was still staring at the street when the car he had climbed into was long gone.

“Marinette?” Her mother said, amusement in her voice as she held the door of the bakery open. How long had she been standing there?! If Marinette had not blushed before, then she was probably blushing a fiery red now. Her mother had seen _everything_!

With a squeak, she rushed inside and didn’t stop until she was safely up in her room, on her bed and again screaming into the cat pillow.

Chapter End Notes

The question you're all probably asking yourselves now: Did Adrien charm Marinette or not?
All will be revealed soon! >:3c
Félix had *really* earned his coffee today. Being harangued by a tiny ancient god, sneaking out of the house at an ungodly hour, having to breathe the same air as Chloé Bourgeois and to top it all off: having to run away from a supervillain and watch the fight on TV while his brother and his best friend were directly involved—those were all things that in and of themselves justified a cup of coffee. Nathalie had not been thrilled about him texting he was getting a coffee and then coming home at an indefinite time, but that was her problem. This business was urgent.

Unfortunately, a coffee did not guarantee the day’s hardships ending, even though it really should have!

The rain fell heavily on his umbrella and it took a lot of self-control not to let out the occasional hiss as the first drops of freezing wetness struck him. A sip from the hot beverage may cure a little bit of the cold, but none of the headache. At least he was almost at his destination.

A wooden wind chime played a lovely melody when he pushed open the door to the familiar shop and placed his umbrella in the stand next to the entrance.

“Good evening, kitten. I expected you,” Mélusine said from not behind the counter but from where she sat at a small table with tea on it. Yes, she really had been expecting him.

“Good evening. It was not really hard to guess that I’d show up,” he said and sat down on the other chair. Mélusine hummed and took a sip of her tea. Apparently, she expected him to initiate the conversation.

“I’ve been at a revel on Samhain inside a sídhe, so I have no right to call what happened today ‘madness’, but considering that humans don’t know about magic, it very much is madness to them.”

Mélusine nodded. “Where is your brother?”

“Home…I hope. Today was our first day of school and all things considered, it might have been a little much for him.”

“Are you sure he is home and not at Marinette’s?” She asked with a grin. Félix frowned.
“Marinette has been through too much today to deal with an overly worried cat. I hope he has enough common sense left to know that.”

“True, true,” Mélusine said and sighed. “It certainly is a mess, isn’t it? Not that these kinds of things don’t happen from time to time, but in this day and age…it might have more consequences than it ever had before.”

“How did people deal with the knowledge of magic in the past?” Félix asked and looked at his yet-untouched tea cup.

“That always depended on the situation. Some went into straight-out denial while others slowly came to terms with it. Even now there are humans out there who learned about magic years ago and adjusted to live with it. Your father and Nathalie for example.”

Félix scoffed. “I wouldn’t quite call what they did ‘adjusting to live with it’.”

“Different people cope differently. As for this magic, it does not belong to the fae. It is much stronger—even god-like! I have seen it in the past a few times and the Court speaks of the wrath of the gods. Sometimes these beings undo curses, like now. Other times they might even hunt and kill fae. You never quite know.”

“Wait, they have shown up before?”

From what Plagg had said, it had sounded like the Court didn’t know about the Miraculous. Well, now they might, with Hawkmoth just announcing the existence of the magic jewellery to the world. But if the Court saw them as gods, then there might still be a chance to turn the tables in their favour. First and foremost, he had to keep Plagg’s existence and Adrien’s new identity a secret from Mélusine.

“Oh yes, they sure have. Jeanne d’Arc was such a goddess. Whenever they appear, they seem to take mortal forms, though. Being burned at the stake must have been such a horrible death.”

Félix was suddenly extremely grateful that those customs had changed over the centuries.

“Even if their appearance is temporary, people now have video proof that magic exists,” he pointed out. Mélusine nodded along.

“It is quite exciting to see how people will react to it. So far, they only have the concept of magic superheroes, which means that it might be a while until anyone suggests a connection to the fair folk. If they draw that conclusion at all. I can’t predict what the Court will do, but considering these new circumstances, they will use their chances.”

“Which means they will play their mischief with humans more often,” Félix concluded with a frown.

“Perhaps, perhaps not. We’ll just have to wait and see on that one. I’m pretty sure that they’ll become active if such an attack happens again. When there already is magic, then where’s the harm with adding some more of it to the mix?”

“A lot of harm.”

Mélusine shrugged. “This is just how most fair ones think. Don’t condemn me for pointing that out.”

Félix let out a sigh and leaned back in the chair. Even the ceiling of Mélusine’s shop was full with
trinkets that hung from branches or even the ceiling itself. Crystals, potions, witch glasses, wind chimes, amulets and things Félix could not identify, all gently turning and swaying in an invisible breeze.

“So, what you’re saying is that we have to keep an eye out for fae in addition to everything else when there are attacks? How bothersome.”

Mélusine just smiled and took a sip of her tea.

“Such is life, kitten. No one said it was easy.”

They spent the following minutes in relative silence. Only the occasional ping of a wind chime and the constant rain that hit the windows could be heard.

“Now,” Mélusine said as she finished her tea. “I think it is time for your lesson, kitten.”

She produced a small white mouse from seemingly out of nowhere and placed it on the table.

“Show me how good you are at lifting enthralments.”

When Félix got home in the evening, it was to an argument between Adrien and Plagg.

“I didn’t charm her!” His brother yelled right when Félix entered the room. He considered walking back out of the door, but with the alternative places to be in the house being quite dull, he didn’t have much choice but to get involved. After all, he already had a pretty good idea of what this all was about. “Marinette is wearing a rowan berry necklace beneath her shirt that protects her from charms.”

“Are you sure about that?” Plagg inquired and seemed…worried. Great, now he was worrying too.

“Yes, are you sure?” Félix threw in and Adrien whirled around, apparently only just having noticed his presence.

“I am sure! I checked beforehand and rowan berries have a very distinct smell, so there was no way I was wrong.”

Félix wasn’t sure who Adrien was trying to convince, though the desperate note of his voice spoke volumes: He wasn’t sure.

“Speaking of smell,” Plagg said and floated closer to Félix with narrowed eyes. “You reek of magic. What did you do?”

He decided to narrow his eyes back. “Practice. At least one of us should be decent at magic.”

“That entirely depends on what you want to use this magic for.”

Plagg suddenly sounded threatening. Was he doubting his intentions? Félix did it mainly to protect Marinette and Nino, to be able to do something in case something would happen to them. Well, of course Plagg couldn’t know that.

“It’s for emergencies,” Adrien piped up. “Fé is better at magic than me. We thought it would be best if at least one of us is able to dispel enthralments or lift curses, so that we won’t have to make deals with the fair folk for that sort of stuff.”
“Who’s teaching you then?” Plagg asked and he still didn’t look convinced.

“Mélusine. She’s an old friend of mother and a halfling like us,” Félix said.

“The snake lady? I heard of her and I don’t trust her. Everyone that has as many portals as her has something to hide.”

“She’s the only one we can ask about fae things,” Adrien said.


“We’ve only known you for barely two days,” Félix pointed out.

Plagg huffed. “Rude! I am the god of destruction and if you’re looking for someone to teach you to destroy things others created, then I’m your best bet. Quit going to that witch and ask me instead. I’m sure you can avoid a lot of trouble that way.”

“You’ll teach us?” Adrien asked excitedly while Félix still had his doubts. No magic being had ever offered him anything for free. Especially not education.

Plagg snickered. “I didn’t say that. But I might be convinced with some exquisite cheese.”

Ah, there it was.

“Consider it purchased,” Adrien said before Félix could get a word in edgewise.

“What was this about charming Marinette earlier?” Félix asked over Plagg’s cheers. His brother, as expected, became defensive.

“I didn’t charm her, okay?”

“Even if you didn’t, you very much made it look like it. Why?”

Adrien sighed. “Because of Chloé. If she thinks that I charmed Marinette, then that would excuse any kind of closeness we have.”

Félix paused. He hadn’t thought about that yet. Sure, his brother could be a convincing actor if he wanted to be, but he didn’t know about Marinette. Letting Chloé believe that Marinette was charmed would probably cover up any slip-ups in the future. It wasn’t the worst kind of plan in that regard, though there was still one thing his brother seemed to have overlooked.

“What about Tikki then?”

Adrien blanched and Plagg let out a dramatic sigh.

“Thank you for finally pointing out the obvious!” The kwami said to Félix. “She’ll think that you tried to charm her chosen.”

“It was a one-time thing! I won’t do it again.”

“Kid, the best thing you can do now is to let things settle. If you’re gonna be around this Marinette girl often, which I’m gonna assume you will be, then Tikki will see for herself that you’re not dangerous…hopefully.”

“Hopefully?!"
“Well, she does have prejudices and the fair folk is full of charmers and good actors. And since you won’t let your girl on to any fae stuff, there definitely will be some acting involved.”

“Then we have to fix this now! Whatever bad impression I made, I can just explain the situation to her! Then she won’t have to be suspicious of me!”

“Bad idea, kitten!” Plagg said and then let out a hiss when Adrien shifted to his cat form. “Hey, warn me next time you do that! I’m okay with my ring in a pocket dimension, but it still gives me the chills.”

Adrien ducked apologetically. “Sorry Plagg, but I have to hurry. It’s dinner time, so Marinette is probably out of her room right now. That means I can talk to Tikki and explain myself.”

“You can’t just break into your girlfriend’s house as a cat while Tikki is there. Do you have a death wish?”

Félix had to agree with Plagg and therefore held Adrien back by the scruff when he was about to dash to the open window.

“Not so fast. You can’t just go and have a talk with Danu like this. That’s a suicide mission under these circumstances and you know it.”

Adrien just hissed and tried to wiggle himself free of Félix’s hold.

“He’s right, kid. Better let it rest for at least a day. You’ll eventually get your chance to talk to Tikki about this and I’ll even help you, but being impulsive about it will get you sent to Faerie at this rate.”

He could feel a shudder going through Adrien when Tír na nÓg was mentioned. Eventually, his posture relaxed so that Félix could let him go.

“I still don’t like this. I didn’t do anything wrong,” Adrien lamented.

“Well,” Plagg said at length. “I get that you wanted to mislead the Court chief’s brat, but what was that about singing in the rain later?”

Félix raised an eyebrow, as this was the first time he had heard about this sort of thing. When he looked at Adrien, his brother seemed to shrink into himself.

“I…I got carried away there. I just felt like singing because I was so happy and…yeah.”

Plagg rolled his eyes. “First I get a halfling as a holder and now the kitten is also in love. I don’t get enough Camembert for this.”
Danu – The Goddess of Creation

Chapter Summary

Adrien meets Tikki

Chapter Notes

Tomorrow is the one-year anniversary of Spellbound! ONE YEAR! Can you believe it?! 😊 The time really flies by! ;W;
And tomorrow is also midsummer! >:3

“And it’s just completely crazy, you know? Last week everything was still normal and now we get attacked by magic supervillains!”

Adrien hummed as he let Marinette rant and instead wordlessly took the next flower pot she gave him. There had been a storm warning with strong wind gusts and Marinette did not want to take any risks. That meant that her plants had to somehow get from the balcony down to her room.

“And then there’s Alya who likes to go towards danger instead of running away from it!” She groaned. “And the stupid misunderstandings and crazy theories she keeps making up about you and Félix.”

Adrien placed the lavender plant down on the floor and climbed back up the ladder. It was just the two of them as Félix—after lots of convincing and bribing—was at a photoshoot in Adrien’s stead.

He had thought about what his brother and Plagg said the previous day and therefore had come to the conclusion that proving he didn’t want to cause any harm to Marinette would be the best approach. Even though he didn’t know where Tikki was at that moment, he could tell that she was somewhere in the room and that she was not pleased. Most likely because he had managed to breach the barrier she had conjured up to keep Marinette safe from the fair folk.

When he had first arrived at the bakery, it had been a little problematic to get in. It was like someone had taken the feeling of warmth and safety that usually surrounded him in this place and turned it on its head. He had suddenly been hit with the strong sense of not belonging. The constant whispers of the universe that told him that he was on the wrong side of the sky when he was out in daytime were easy to ignore by now. This feeling was like that, just amplified by a thousand at least.

But the weak spot of every barrier was an anchor. He was uncharacteristically lucky to have Marinette as such an anchor point. Even more so since he realised what he really felt for her. Hopefully Tikki could forgive him for just breaching her barrier with this trick.

“What are today’s theories?” Adrien asked. He was equal parts amused and displeased at Alya’s animosity. On the one hand, some of her conclusions were hilarious. On the other hand, however, she did her best to keep Marinette away from him and he didn’t much appreciate that.
“That Chloé paid you to be nice to me and therefore fool me into thinking that you like me.”

Yikes, that dug out some unpleasant memories.

“Now I get why you two are getting along so well: You both have the same theories,” Adrien said as he reluctantly accepted the flower pot with the rosemary plant in it. He both loved and hated that thing.

“That was over a year ago!” Marinette protested with a pout.

“Still one of the conclusions you jumped to and you weren’t shy of throwing it in my face back then,” he said with a grin. While it wasn’t the most pleasant memory, it was still quite nostalgic to think about it.

“I’m sorry about that, I just—”

“Hey, we’re past that at this point. No need to apologize. I was kinda weird back then after all, wasn’t I?”

Marinette snorted. “Past tense?”

Adrien set the rosemary plant down with a relieved sigh before climbing back up.

“I’d like to think that I have learned to be a normal teenager since then. Or are you implying that you weren’t a good enough teacher?”

Marinette laughed in return. “There’s no way to get the crazy out of you KitKat. Unless you want to try an exorcism with your anime collection as the sacrifice.”

“No, anything but that! I need those to live!”

“Remember what we said about Tamaki Suoh?”

Adrien jumped up on the balcony and took the planter with the roses. He held it out to Marinette.

“What’s your point?”

She fondly rolled her eyes. “Exactly that,” she said as she took the planter.

“Marinette?” Sabine’s voice suddenly came from downstairs.

“Yeah?”

“Can you help out in the bakery for a bit? We just got a large order of macaroons for tomorrow.”

“Say no more,” Marinette said as she sat down the planter at the edge of the skylight and jumped down on her bed before taking the planter again and carrying it down the stairs.

“Do you want to help too?” She asked Adrien even though she probably already knew his answer.

“Nah, I’d just ruin the order. Go help your parents and I’ll carry the rest of your plants inside,” he said which was rewarded with a smile.

“Thank you! Be sure to come downstairs when you’re done though.”

He grinned fondly. She’d never give up trying to get him involved in baking.
“Will do,” he said just as she set down the planter and disappeared through the hatch.

Finding excuses to not join activities like baking or anything that involved iron was getting harder and harder. It was a necessary evil to lie to her, which didn’t mean that he liked doing it.

Adrien climbed down the ladder with yet another plant and only then realised that he was alone in her room and that the pressuring presence hadn’t left yet. His tail nervously lashed back and forth under the glamour as he looked around the room but couldn’t see Tikki anywhere. Of course, he wouldn’t just randomly spot an ancient deity when they didn’t want to be seen.

He bit his lip and glanced to the hatch that led downstairs, tempted to take up Marinette’s offer of following her to the bakery’s kitchen. But no, he had promised to take care of the plants first and that’s what he was going to do.

With growing unease, he climbed back up the ladder to her bed. Only three plants were left and he went through the motions of picking them up and carrying them down into the room almost mechanically.

When he set down the last plant, he was more than ready to flee the room, only to discover that the previously open hatch had been closed and locked. Adrien paled.

“Plagg?” He asked, his voice taking on an almost hysterical note as he panicked.

“You’ll eventually get your chance to talk to Tikki about this and I’ll even help you, but being impulsive about it will get you sent to Faerie at this rate.”

Plagg’s words echoed through his mind and he couldn’t help but shiver. He didn’t want to go to Faerie! He couldn’t leave behind everything that was important to him here! He couldn’t leave Marinette! Had the room gotten colder or was it just his imagination?

“What?” His kwami eventually replied with a yawn. How had he been sleeping while there was a looming disaster?! Adrien opened his mouth to reply but the words died before he could even form them. What was he supposed to say?

_Tikki is here and Marinette is not. I’m scared._

He gulped and sat down on the ground as his legs threatened to give out. It wasn’t just the knowledge that Tikki was Danu which made her the royalty of royalty of royalty to the fair folk. It was that this same goddess now thought that he had tried to charm her chosen. He was dead. He was deader than dead!

“Breathe, kid,” Plagg said and only then did Adrien noticed that he had indeed not been breathing. He took gulps full of air but the sudden mixture of scents from all the different flowers and herbs confused his senses. Roses and lavender were calming him while rosemary made him feel uneasy. And those were only the ones that directly affected his fae side.

His instincts flared when the magic in the air suddenly thickened. It felt like it threatened to crush him at the slightest provocation. It was terrifying. His cat side told him to flee—the enemy was too mighty—but his human side argued with common sense. This was his opportunity to explain himself and it would probably not get less risky any time soon. Besides, when would he ever get the opportunity to talk with Tikki one on one again?

He forcefully swallowed the frightened butterflies in his stomach and shifted. Might as well lay all his cards on the table and not annoy her with glamours.
Apart from a silent displeased hiss, Plagg didn’t say anything. He seemed content to simply watch the situation unfold. Adrien just hoped he’d keep his word and intervene when things started to go south.

“Y-y-your d-divine highness?” Adrien squeaked out, his voice miserably meek. The pressure of the magic got stronger, making his head hurt with the beginnings of a migraine.

“T-T-Tikki? Please, I just want to talk,” he said even quieter than before. To say he was scared was a colossal understatement. He could never have predicted the reply his request received though.

“Who told you that name?” A beyond furious voice yelled in his head and he awkwardly held his paws over his flattened ears, even though that did nothing.

“P-Plagg did,” Adrien managed to choke out, hoping it was the right answer. She knew Plagg after all. It only seemed to make Tikki angrier though.

“So, a fae stole the ring after all,” the voice in his head hissed and he heard himself whimper. This was exactly what he had wanted to prevent from happening.

“I d-d-didn’t steal—”

“Lies!” Tikki yelled in his head, effectively cutting him off. He would like to say that he was surprised, but he honestly wasn’t. If Tikki had lost a chosen to the fair folk once, then no doubt something horrible had happened to them. Adrien tried to calm himself with the thought that the goddess just wanted to protect Marinette.

“I won’t believe anything that comes out of a halfling’s mouth. You can lie,” she continued, her tone seething.

“Stop torturing my chosen, Tikki. The kid just wants to talk to you,” Plagg finally intervened. Adrien didn’t dare to open his eyes or even breathe a sigh of relief yet.

“Your chosen?” Tikki exclaimed in disbelief. It was the first thing she had said out loud.

“Yeah, the kid might be faerie, but he got my ring the same way as your girl got your earrings.”

“But he’s a—”

“Halfling, I know. In comparison to quite a few others I’ve met in the past, he’s surprisingly human in his approach. Just give him a chance, will you?”

Adrien heard Tikki huff. “Fine. You get one chance to explain your sins, Cat Sidhe.”

He raised his head with a start at being addressed and blinked. All his life he had pictured Danu as a grand concept. She was a goddess even among the deities of the immortal fae and therefore it was only logical for her to be the most beautiful and pure being in the universe. A being that would awe everyone that took as much as a glimpse at her. The small ladybug that floated in front of him with a glare did not really live up to that image. There was no doubt that she really was Danu though. The magic power she had demonstrated so far was enormous.

“Sins?” Adrien squeaked, his tail nervously lashing. He had committed no sins!

“You tried charming my chosen,” Tikki declared, her tone threatening and her stare murderous.

“I didn’t want to charm her!” Adrien said in a surprisingly steady voice. “I knew she was wearing a
rowan berry necklace to deflect charms; I even checked beforehand! This is all just a misunderstanding…I tend to cause those.” The last part was mumbled and Adrien looked down, not daring to keep eye contact with Tikki.

“How about spying then? Plagg might have told you my name, but he couldn’t possibly have told you where to find me.”

Adrien gulped. “About that…” He said and threw Plagg a helpless look. His kwami shrugged. “I…I know Marinette is Ladybug. Plagg said it could have been her lucky charm—one I gave her, not the ones you create—that messed with the magic, but…I could see through the glamour. I know this isn’t supposed to happen and I really didn’t do it on purpose!”

If her glare was murderous before then now Adrien feared that it was about to reach Medusa-levels of deadly. He half-expected to turn into stone right then and there. He flattened himself as much as he could under Tikki’s glare. After all, it wasn’t his fault that he was the first halfling to ever use a Miraculous and it also wasn’t his fault that the magic of Marinette’s lucky charm interfered with the magic of the transformation.

“Why did you give her a charmed object in the first place? What do you want to do with her?”

Tikki was scary. Way scarier than any Court chief or faerie queen could ever aspire to be. Her raw power was enormous and Adrien was again reminded that she had created the fae in the first place. She must have created Tír na nÓg as well, the very thing that threatened his mere existence. She was probably more powerful than the pull of Midsummer and could send him to Faerie with a snap of her fingers. Cowering in fear in front of her was not enough.

“I want her safe,” Adrien eventually managed to say with a small voice. “There are dangers out there she doesn’t even know about because they’re invisible to her, but I can see them. I just want to protect her from them, please. I…I understand why you don’t trust me, but I don’t want to cause her harm. She…she…” Adrien felt his voice break and a human would have no doubt shed tears by now. He was no human though. “She’s very important to me and I’ll do anything to keep her safe!”

Tikki was quiet and so was Plagg. Neither of their expressions let on to what they were thinking, but Adrien knew that they were both judging him. He was a halfling, so he could lie. They, especially Tikki, were no doubt looking for the untruth in his words, but there wasn’t one to be found.

“Vow it,” Tikki eventually said, her tone stern. Adrien looked at her fearfully.

“W-what?”

“Vow that you won’t ever cause my chosen any kind of harm. If you break that vow, I’ll personally make sure that it will be the last time you’ll ever harm someone.”

Adrien gulped. While the vow itself didn’t require a second thought, he still hesitated upon that threat. Then again, since he would never harm Marinette, there really wasn’t anything to be afraid of. Hopefully this would set Tikki a little at ease with him.

“I vow it and accept your conditions.”

It had taken a lot of effort to keep his voice steady and not stutter. He just hoped that the kwami was a goddess of her word.
Adrien nervously fidgeted on the chair in the corner while Marinette worked on the order of macaroons. Tikki had eventually dismissed him with the suggestion to go downstairs—an offer he hadn’t hesitated a second to take. Now the two kwamis were up in Marinette’s room and were talking among themselves and he didn’t know if he should be nervous or not. Plagg didn’t trust him yet either and Tikki was definitely highly sceptical, bordering on hostile, towards him, so there really wasn’t a good outcome for him in sight.

Always, no matter if it was as a fair one or as a human, he was judged by his heritage and looks first and foremost. Perhaps that’s what it meant for the universe to despise him.

“Adrien?”

He almost jumped out of the chair, that’s how wound up he was with nerves. Instead, he just flinched and looked at Marinette. She opened her mouth as if to say something else, but then closed it again and shook her head.

“What is it?” He asked, genuinely curious and hopeful that her question would provide some sort of distraction for him.

Marinette bit her lip and he had to put a conscious effort into not staring at it.

“It’s just…you look troubled. Is something wrong?”

Oh, so it had been obvious.

“It’s nothing,” he automatically deflected with an untrue smile, the kind he used for photoshoots. He should have known that Marinette could see through that in a heartbeat.

“Is it really nothing or is it just something you can’t tell me about?”

He sighed. “Would you be mad if I’d say it’s the latter? It’s something very personal with Fé and I, so I can’t really talk about it.”

“It’s okay, you don’t have to,” Marinette said with a small smile. “But that’s not the only thing, is it? You’ve been awfully quiet today.”

“Guilty as charged, Princess,” he said and decided to be vague to at least be able to say something. “I’m worried about the Akuma attacks and when the next one will be.”

“Yeah, me too,” Marinette replied, her voice suddenly taking on a more sombre tone. He internally cursed himself. That was the worst topic he could have chosen! Now Marinette was worried too.

What was she thinking about all of these new revelations? What did she think about the existence of magic? She was probably scared. Gods, she must be terrified right now. How could she not be? Even he was scared and he had known of magic his whole life!

To have a city that was your home suddenly turn into a magical war zone? That would terrify anyone, even without having to fight said magic. Would she ever be able to go somewhere in Paris again and feel safe? Would he have to watch that warmth and mirth slip out of her gaze slowly as fear would settle in her eyes?

“I’m sure it’ll be alright. As long as there are no attacks, we can just continue like before. Maybe we should see it as something like tornados or earthquakes. People who live in affected places still manage to live their lives, so why should this be any different?”
Marinette threw him a wry smile. “You’re trying to convince both of us right now, aren’t you?”

“It’s a lifestyle change, so a little convincing is part of it,” Adrien said with a shrug. “I’m just trying to rationalize things so that I’m not panicking like some other people do.”

“That’s actually a good way to look at it. But...I think after yesterday, a lot of people are relying on Ladybug for that peace. Do you think she’ll actually be able to succeed every time like she promised?”

Adrien stared at her for a few seconds as he picked out what the question really was. It was just like Marinette to still have doubts after the fact.

“She’s new at this, so I think that there are bound to be a few hiccups for her and Chat Noir, but they’ll be fine.”

“Why are you so sure?” She asked.

“Because practice makes perfect. It’s just like designing for you. Were you able to sew a catwalk-worthy dress on your first try? Of course not. That’s just not realistic. Are you able to sew one now? I’d say ‘yes’. Just like you got better at designing, Ladybug and Chat Noir will get better at fighting villains.”

Marinette smiled. “Th—that’s reassuring. And you're clearly biased when it comes to my designs.”

“Purrhaps I am, but keep in mind that an actual model wore and loved these designs of yours,” he said with a wink.

“That didn’t count, KitKat,” she said and bopped him on the nose with some frosting. The laugh he drew out of her when he went cross-eyed was the sweetest sound and he was convinced that he would never hear anything more beautiful in his life.
The storm that had been predicted eventually came in the late afternoon, effectively trapping Adrien in the bakery. Not that this would be a bad thing in itself, but once the order of macaroons was finished, her mother sent them upstairs to cook dinner. That meant that they’d be alone again and Marinette really had to get a grip. She just hoped that the cold wind from earlier had been an effective cover-up when it came to her probably very red cheeks. Especially when Adrien had handed her the planter with the red roses while knowing exactly what their meaning was.

Preparing dinner was surprisingly uncomplicated though. They talked about things Adrien had noticed at school that he found interesting or didn’t quite understand yet. She was more than happy to explain to him that he had to ask a teacher’s permission if he wanted to leave the classroom, or that if he was handed a stack of papers, that he should take one and pass it on. All these little things that she herself had never really thought much about were things that were new to him. He was, for example, ranting about the fact that classes could just spontaneously switch if a teacher was ill, so another class would be held in its place.

All the talk about school reminded her that she still had homework to do. So, when her mother came upstairs to take over dinner preparations, the two of them went back up to Marinette’s room to start on the maths homework together. They almost got it done by the time dinner was ready. Dinner itself was a pleasant affair with the majority of the conversation being between her father and Adrien, who started having a pun-off at some point. At least until her mother put a stop to it.

When the storm let up shortly afterward, Adrien hesitantly went home. Or rather, he made it sound like some impossible mission crossed with a dramatic novel if his texts were any indication.

**KitKat:** on my way home through the streets still wet from the departed storm

**Princess:** get home safely! <3

**KitKat:** I sneak in the darkness! >:3

**Princess:** it’s like six in the evening you still got two hours until sunset
KitKat: irrelevant! D:<

darkness follows me around!

Princess: I swear to god if you say 'I'm the night' I'm gonna throw something at you the next time I see you

KitKat: ...the night is my domain! >:3c

Princess: -___-

KitKat: shit the gate is closed
guess how I'll get in >:3c

Princess: it just rained! you can't climb over a wall and through your bedroom window!!!

Adrien?

ADRIEN AGRESTE!

IF YOU DON'T REPLY IN 30 SECONDS I WILL CALL YOUR BROTHER!

KitKat: too late! I'm in my room! ^w^

Princess: ...why are you like this?

KitKat: you know you love this dramatic dork! ;D

**That** text alone had driven her into a miniature freakout. Did that mean that he *knew* that she had a crush on him or was he just messing around?! No, it was probably just a joke. Those things were common for them...right? To be completely honest, Marinette didn’t have the solidest of grips on what was normal anymore.

Princess: you're a dork alright

Eventually Marinette decided to put her phone aside and change the sheets on her bed. They needed changing anyways, and with the constant walking up and down Adrien and she had done earlier, it was more than overdue. Once that was done, she let herself fall face down on the fresh sheets and decided to stay like that for a few minutes. Yes, there was still homework to do, but she had time. After about one minute said peacefulness was disturbed though.

“Marinette?” Tikki piped up as she worriedly hovered over her.

“What?” Marinette replied, voice muffled by the pillow. She did not want to get up for at least two more minutes. *Then* she would start on her history homework.

“Chat Noir called.”

She instantly shot up from her bed.

“What?!”

He had *called*?! How?!! But when he knew her number, that meant that he knew her identity, which meant she had messed up big time! Who else knew?! Maybe it had even gotten to the press by now and—
“On your yo-yo,” Tikki clarified, which snapped Marinette out of her panic.

“What?” She asked again, this time confused.

“Your weapons can act as communication devices. He called you while you were not transformed so I noticed it. I don’t know what he said though so you’d have to transform and check.”

“My yo-yo has a mailbox,” Marinette stated flatly. At this point it seemed wise to just not question things anymore.

“You should check it as soon as possible. Maybe there’s an Akuma and Chat Noir needs your help.”

“Again?! It’s only been two days since Stoneheart! I don’t know if I can do that again so soon.”

She bit her lip in worry and then climbed down the ladder from her bed to lock the hatch. The last thing she needed was for one of her parents to pop in while she was transformed.

“Maybe it’s something different. Just checking for messages won’t hurt, Marinette,” Tikki said, clearly trying to calm her down.

“Okay. Okay, okay, okay,” Marinette said and took a deep breath. She still was not used to this, but she guessed she’d have to get used to it at some point if she wanted to be any good as a superhero. She had gotten lucky—*heh*—last time, but she didn’t know if she could do it again, despite her promise to all of Paris.

“Tikki, spots on.”

The magic was warm and comforting, like being wrapped in a fluffy blanket in winter. Despite the alien feeling of it, Marinette couldn’t help but admit that it also felt good. She regarded her reflection for a bit as Ladybug stared back. It still needed to settle in that she was a hero. Someone people looked up to and turned to when they needed help.

She jumped when her yo-yo gave a beeping noise, clearly a signal that there really was a message on it. The reminder instantly diminished the warm feeling she had felt before. With shivering hands, she plucked the weapon from her hip and opened it.

Just like Tikki had said, there was one new message from Chat Noir. She had to take another deep breath, her heart beating nervously, before she clicked on it and held the yo-yo to her ear like a phone.

*Please don’t be about an Akuma. Please don’t be about an Akuma. Please don’t be—*

“Hello, my lady! You’re probably not transformed right now, so you’ll hear this later. I just wanted to ask if you can make it to the Eiffel Tower today at nine. Just thought we should talk a bit outside of battle. You don’t have to of course, but I’ll be waiting there until ten. Hopefully see you later!”

Marinette lowered the yo-yo from her ear and stared at it in relief. Not an Akuma, but just Chat Noir being friendly. She had to admit that meeting him and getting to know him outside of battle sounded like a good idea. They could talk strategy and maybe even practice fighting so that they were prepared for the next Akuma. The more she thought about it, the more she actually came to like the idea.

“Spots off,” she said with a grin.
Maybe she should bring him something? Yes, the bakery would have plenty of leftovers from the day she could take with her. Her parents’ pastries had yet to fail to break the ice and she had no idea what her partner would be like outside of battle. She would have to be considerate and take a few different pastries in case he had allergies. Maybe something he could take home for his kwami, too. Tikki liked cookies after all; maybe his kwami was similar.

“Hey Tikki, what is Chat Noir’s kwami like?” she asked as she sat down at her desk, suddenly motivated to finish her homework as soon as possible.

“Plagg? Oh, he’s a glutton and a lazy cat, but he has a good heart. He’s my other half.”

Marinette smiled. “Like a soulmate?”

Tikki nodded, then paused and shook her head. “Not exactly, but something similar. Soulmate is a word that has many different meanings. We’re two halves of a whole. One wouldn’t exist without the other. If that is your definition of soulmates, then I guess we are. Just a little more than that, too. Our holders are usually soulmates in that sense.”

Marinette spluttered, the question about what Plagg would like to eat instantly forgotten.

“Chat Noir is my soulmate?!”

It took a lot of restraint not to screech it. Tikki seemed hesitant but nodded.

“I already told you that the Ladybug and the Black Cat Miraculous require certain traits from their holders. These traits compliment each other so that the two are a good match.”

“But Chat can’t be my soulmate! I’m in love with Adrien!” Marinette whisper-yelled. Warmth flooded her face when she realised that she had never really said those words out loud before and Tikki was the first to hear them. Not that she was afraid that her kwami would tell anyone, but even after two months she was still coming to terms with it. Being in love with her best friend was… complicated, to say the least.

For some reason, that revelation seemed to shock Tikki.

“I thought you two were friends?”

Marinette groaned and let her head sink down on her desk. “We are and that’s the problem, Tikki! I don’t know when I started to have a crush on him, I just realised it one day. But he doesn’t know that so we’re still friends and urgh it’s a mess!”

Tikki didn’t say anything and just quietly floated down to Marinette’s desk.

“Marinette,” she eventually said hesitantly. “Are you sure that Adrien is really your friend?”

“Oh, not you too!”

Marinette sat up and looked at her kwami in disapproval.

“I understand that Alya is suspicious because she doesn’t know that Adrien and I have been friends for over a year, but I told you about that, Tikki.”

“I know, I know,” Tikki said and waved her arms in a placating motion. “Just...be careful, please.”

“If this is about my secret identity then don’t worry. I’m not going to tell anyone I’m Ladybug and that includes Adrien too.”
Deeming the topic thoroughly discussed, Marinette took out her history textbook and started reading the chapter they had been assigned. She only spoke again when she was done taking notes and was about to switch to physics homework.

“Tikki, I know you’re looking out for me, but please don’t be too hard on Adrien and Félix. Their mother disappeared almost two years ago and their father is neglecting them. I don’t even want to know what would have become of them if I wouldn’t have met them when I did, but I know they’re a lot happier now than they were before.”

A small pause followed. “Alright,” Tikki eventually said. “I’ll take that into consideration.”

That was not as reassuring as Marinette would have hoped, but she’d take it for now. Tikki just got to know her after all, so she would get plenty of opportunities to observe both Adrien and Félix and form her own opinion of them.

When Ladybug landed on the grass in the Champ du Mars, she breathed a sigh of relief. After thinking about how to transport a bag with pastries while swinging through the streets with her yo-yo, she had decided to take one of her old backpacks. It was a generic red one that wouldn’t give much hints to her identity. Half of Paris probably had a backpack like that, after all.

She looked around, but Chat Noir was nowhere to be seen. Luckily, she had not been spotted by nosy reporters…yet.

Her yo-yo started ringing and made her jump. It took her a second to realise that Chat Noir was calling her.

“Good evening, my lady,” he said with a laugh in his voice. Ladybug frowned.

“Where are you? You said at the Eiffel Tower.”

Chat Noir snickered.

“What I meant was on the Eiffel Tower. Shall I climb down real quick and get you?”

Ladybug rolled her eyes. “Stay where you are, I’m coming up.”

She hung up and looked up to the imposing structure in front of her. Time to find out if she had developed a fear of heights after jumping off of it mere days ago.

When she swung her yo-yo and let it catch on beams, she noticed a certain familiarity settling in. It was reassuring that she had done this before and that the tower was brightly lit at night. She still let out a huge sigh of relief when she arrived at the top platform where visitors were not able to go.

“Good evening again,” a by-now familiar voice said.

“Seems like I’m not the only one who wants to check for a possible fear of heights,” she said with a grin.

Chat snickered again as he emerged from the shadows. “I’m sorry to disappoint you, my lady, but I’ve risen above being afraid of heights. But since we are on the topic: Do you have a fear of heights?”

Ladybug shrugged. She had stubbornly not looked down yet. Suddenly her nerves returned and she
instinctively took a step towards the centre of the platform, where she would be as far away from the edge as possible. Chat Noir noticed.

“Hey, it’s okay. Let’s just sit down here and talk for now,” he said with a reassuring smile which Ladybug gratefully returned. Or at least she hoped it was grateful. In reality it was probably bordering on hysterical. She leaned her back against the centre structure and then remembered that she wore a backpack.

“I…uhm…brought you something,” she stammered as she took it off and pulled out the bag with the pastries. Even with as little light as there was, she could see Chat Noir’s pupils get comically large, not unlike those of a cat who had spotted something that captured their attention.

“What ever it is, it smells delicious,” he said and shuffled closer.

“I didn’t know what you’d like, so I just brought a lot of different things. Are you allergic to anything? Because I also brought pastries without nuts and even a gluten free one and oh one with cheese because my kwami said yours likes cheese.”

Chat Noir had a smile on his face as if Christmas had come early. “That’s very sweet of you. Thank you, Ladybug.”

They just sat there and ate the pastries for a while—it turned out Chat Noir was not allergic to anything she had brought, which was a huge relief. Eventually, it was him who broke the silence.

“This whole thing is pretty scary, isn’t it?”

“It’s terrifying,” Ladybug agreed gravely and sighed. “I mean, even all the magic stuff aside, I held this big speech and made a promise to all of Paris…but we’re just teenagers. How are we gonna be able to do this?”

“By doing just what we did earlier this week. And getting better at it too. I think the hardest part will be accepting how much things have changed from how they were before.”

She hummed. “Tell me about it. There has been a lot of screaming into a pillow in the last few days,” she said with an ironic grin while looking at her half-eaten croissant. It felt good to finally have someone else but Tikki to talk to about this.

“About the ‘getting better’ part though,” Ladybug said and looked at Chat Noir who had gone back to stuffing his mouth with an éclair. He turned to look at her with his cheeks full, looking like a hamster. She almost snorted with how silly it looked.

“I thought that maybe we could meet up like this one or two times a week and train a little bit. You know, getting used to our weapons—so I don’t accidentally hit you on the head with my yo-yo again—and learning how to fight.”

Chat Noir finally managed to swallow his bite and gave her a wide grin.

“A marvellous idea, my lady!” he said and his ears twitched. That drew Ladybug’s attention to them. Yes, they really seemed to be made out of fur. When she had seen Alya’s videos and what had been on the news, she had first thought that she must have remembered something wrong because there, his ears looked like they were fake. The material looked leather-like and it was accompanied by a belt that was long enough to look like a tail. Now that she looked at both ears and tail, she realized that they did not look like they did in the videos at all.

“Ladybug? Is something wrong?” He asked, which made his tail lash. Didn’t that mean that he was
angry? She really wasn’t good with cat body language.

“No, I was just thinking about how your ears and tail look different than in the videos. Or how people who have seen you describe them.”

Chat Noir visibly tensed for a second. “-it must be the glamour,” he said with a slightly higher voice while looking anywhere but at her.

“Glamour?”

“Magic that keeps us from being recognised. I mean, with face recognition software and all that it would only be a question of minutes to find out our civilian identities otherwise. Maybe the glamour works different for us two since we both have a Miraculous.”

“Yeah, that might be it,” Ladybug said thoughtfully. “Do I look any different to you?”

Chat Noir grinned. “You’re as radiant as the sun, my lady.”

It was then that she found out that Adrien’s constant comments of this nature had, in fact, not made her immune to them. She could feel a blush creep into her cheeks and she quickly looked away before her partner could see it. The last thing she needed was to give him any wrong ideas.

“Anyway, my kwami told me a bit about your powers and why you didn’t use them in the last fights. Have you ever tried them out before?”

Chat’s ears flattened and he looked away. “To be honest, it’s quite scary to have magic that can destroy everything I touch. What if I make a mistake and it can’t be fixed? And no, I haven’t tried it out before.”

Ladybug put a hand on his shoulder and gave him a reassuring smile.

“Maybe you should try it out on things that should be gone. Something no one would miss. Like… literal garbage? Or a pebble. You know, try it out in private so you get used to it in your own time. Then it’ll be easier to use in battle when you have to.”

She chuckled. “Let’s just look at it this way: You can at least practice with your power. The most I can do is to randomly click through Amazon and see how different items would help me in different battle scenarios.”

Chat Noir snorted and his ears perked up. “Yeah, I guess you’re right, but let’s bin that idea for now.”

His face darkened again.

“This magic is scary though. I don’t think Hawkmoth is prepared for the consequences it will have for him.”

Ladybug paused at that. With all the screaming she had done about her own powers, she had thought way too little about this evil she was actually fighting, or better said, about the person behind it. A person she has never even seen except for a face made up of a swarm of magic evil butterflies.

“Consequences?”

Chat Noir gave a wry smile. “Magic always comes with a price, even ours. I don’t even want to
know what misusing a Miraculous would do to you.”

“Wait, wait, wait! What do you mean it has consequences for us?!” Tikki had not said anything about consequences or any sort of price. Well, except for the part where she would spend her free time fighting supervillains.

Chat Noir turned around to her with concern and surprise written all over his face. “Tikki didn’t tell you?”

“Tell me what?!”

He bit his lip—an action that allowed Ladybug to notice that he had fangs—and looked away for a moment before focusing back on her.

“The magic for the transformation and our powers is stored in our Miraculous. After a power is used, the magic that is left in a Miraculous will last for five minutes at most. If the transformation has to last beyond that time limit, it will not just be taxing on the kwami, but it will also transfer some of their magic into us. Plagg didn’t go into detail, but in theory it would mean that a wielder of my Miraculous gets cat traits.”

“So, I could get ladybug traits? What do ladybugs even do?!” Now there was a legitimate reason to panic. Why did Tikki not mention something important like this to her?! “Seriously, why didn’t she tell me about this?! The next thing I know I’ll find out that the earrings sucked out my soul or something!”

Chat Noir gave her a sympathetic smile. “Don’t worry, your soul is safe, my lady.”

“How do you know?!”

She was aware that her voice had breached the border to hysterical screeching now, but she couldn’t bring herself to care. Finally, she could freak out with someone who shared her fate. Though why wasn’t he freaking out like she was?!

“Plagg told me.”

Oh yes, of course. His kwami was apparently more forthcoming with information than hers was. Or he had just used the last couple of days to ask them one question after another instead of spending that time screaming into a pillow. Maybe Tikki would have told her if she had just asked. Well, she would definitely ask once she got home. As thoroughly as possible!

“Sorry, this…it’s just a little too much at once,” Ladybug said.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Chat Noir said and nudged her reassuringly. “We’re in this together.”

She smiled. “Yeah, you’re right.”

He suddenly stood up, his movements much more graceful than that of a normal person, and offered her a clawed hand.

“Let’s just take one step at a time,” he said with a grin. Ladybug hesitated only a second before putting her hand in his and letting herself get pulled up. Contrary to her expectations, he didn’t let go of her hand though.

“What’s step one then?” she asked quietly. Chat Noir grinned.
“Well, you said something about a possible fear of heights earlier, so let’s check if that is true and then we’ll see where we can go from there.”

Ladybug tensed. She had ignored the skyline all around them so far and especially a glance downwards. Her mind’s eye did not hesitate to supply the image of how the height looked like from where she stood, showing her a falling Mylène.

She closed her eyes and shook her head.

No, don’t think about it. She’s safe. You saved her!

“Don’t worry, my lady, I’m here,” Chat Noir’s voice said and his thumb stroked the back of her hand reassuringly.

It took not one but seven deep breaths until she successfully managed to will that image away and open her eyes again.

“Alright. Now we’ll both look down on three,” Chat Noir said and she nodded.

“One.”

She was tempted to close her eyes again.

“Two.”

Everything in her tensed.

“Three.”

She looked down.

Paris at night greeted her in all its glory. From this vantage point there was no question as to why her home was called the city of lights. If she tried hard enough, she might even be able to spot her house.

“Wow,” she said quietly. “It’s so beautiful.”

“This doesn’t look like a fear of heights to me,” Chat said with a chuckle and Ladybug let out a small laugh too.

“Seems like step one is complete then,” she said with a grin and stretched her first out to him.

“And whatever step two will be, I’ll be right there beside you,” her partner said with a grin of his own and bumped her fist.

“Bien joué.”
Happy Thursday everyone!
And happy 4th of July to all you Americans!

Have a grumpy cat chapter!

A huge thanks to Tempomental, Draxynnic and Djaeka for betaing this and therefore saving me! ;A; ❤️❤️❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Mari, how dare you!” Adrien exclaimed, outraged, as Marinette’s cart drove past his, which had just been assaulted by a red shell.

“Protect your butt next time,” Marinette shot back with a smirk as she kept driving with ease.

“I’m in seventh place now because of you! Even Nino is ahead of me!”

“Oi, leave me out of your quarrel! I’m just trying not to be last,” Nino said.

“I’m winning~,” Marinette said in a sing-song voice.

“Please someone throw a blue shell,” Adrien muttered as an answer.

“Don’t you dare jinx that!”

“Oh, you can shell it out but you can't take it? Blue Shell! Blue Shell! Blue Sh—Ow!”

Adrien’s chanting was interrupted by a solid kick to his right shin by a still smug Marinette.

Félix sighed, having long since given up reading his book. With all the noise the other three were making there was no chance of getting any peace. And since Plagg apparently preferred to nap in his shirt pocket today, he also couldn’t go far away from Adrien in case of an emergency. Which was really a shame.

After the seemingly catastrophic encounter his brother had with the goddess of creation, Félix had grown incredibly curious. It would be interesting to sneak into Marinette’s room to have a small talk with the kwami himself, but he knew he shouldn’t risk it.

The four of them were sitting on the sofa in the living room of the Dupain-Cheng’s while they waited for Alya’s inevitable arrival. They had talked most of the things through already and now just had to kill time. Ten more minutes to be precise.

Félix kept an extra-close eye on his brother who, despite his concentration on the game, displayed signs of irritation. With the glamour in place, there were no obvious things like a lashing tail or twitching ears, but a clenched jaw and a tense posture were dead giveaways too. He wasn’t sure if Adrien was jealous of Alya’s sudden closeness to Marinette, if he was protective of his best friend
and crush, or if he was still fearing Tikki’s wrath. Each of the options were equally likely.

“Yes!” Marinette suddenly exclaimed. She did a little victory dance while her character on screen was celebrating a first place finish. Adrien silently growled when he crossed the finish line and the screen announced his fourth place finish.

“Rematch!” Adrien demanded almost instantly.

“Sure! I don’t mind winning three times in a row,” Marinette countered with a grin, which earned her a shove.

“Can’t we do the balloon thing instead?” Nino suggested, which received immediate approval. They were halfway through the tournament when the doorbell rang. Félix almost got hit in the head with Marinette’s controller when she threw it over to him.

“Take over for me for a sec!” She called as she dashed towards the door. Knowing her wrath would be upon him if he performed badly, he really did his utmost best to avoid Adrien, Nino and all the NPCs, but by the time he heard Marinette and Alya chatting while walking up the stairs, he had already lost four out of his five balloons.

“May I remind you that your revenge is aimed at Marinette and that you therefore shouldn’t focus on me?” Félix tried to argue in vain as Adrien stubbornly persecuted him. It was sweet irony that the person who ended up saving him from a loss was Alya.

“And? Where is he?” she squeed happily as they entered the door, which made Adrien fall off the sofa and cover on the floor. If he was trying to hide, then he was doing a terrible job.

“He’s consumed by shame,” Félix replied in Marinette’s stead as he paused the game and turned around to the two girls. Alya visibly froze while Marinette gave him a flat look.

“Can you two stop being dramatic for a second?” Félix shrugged. “I’m not the one hiding behind a sofa.”

“Wait, what’s going on here? Why are they here?” Alya asked and narrowed her eyes on Félix and the sofa—he supposed that the latter glare was meant for Adrien.

“Alya, let’s just all go up to my room while my mum makes dinner and then we’ll explain, okay?” Marinette said and her voice sounded like she was afraid Alya would attack the two of them any second.

The bespectacled girl still sent suspicious glares their way, but she nodded and then followed Marinette up to her room. Nino followed suit and Félix had to mostly drag a very unwilling Adrien towards the stairs. His brother hated confrontations, especially when they were of a hostile nature. Félix liked to avoid them himself, but he was willing to put his comfort aside in favour of solving a frustrating conflict.

When they had all assembled in Marinette’s room and taken a seat, a moment of tense silence passed. Adrien studied the carpet like it was the most interesting thing in the world while Félix eventually threw Alya a prompting gaze with a raised eyebrow. He did not appreciate her scrutiny at all.

“So, Alya, these are the friends I’ve been talking about,” Marinette said to break the silence, though she wore a nervous grin.
“But you’ve only known them for like four days now!” Alya argued and angrily pointed at Adrien. Félix couldn’t help but roll his eyes.

“No. That was just your assumption,” he responded, which earned him a look of confusion.

“I’ve known Adrien and Félix for more than a year now. We met by chance and then started hanging out,” Marinette supplied.

Alya still seemed confused. “Then why did you act like you didn’t know each other?”

“Because of Chloé,” Nino said. It was the first thing he had said since they have entered the room.

Adrien took that moment to timidly speak up as well.

“Félix and I have known Chloé since we were little and she really hates Marinette for some reason. If she’d know that we were friends with her for over a year, then she’d probably do something horrible in retaliation. We don’t want to risk that.”

Alya huffed. “She’s just some spoiled rich kid. What can she even do?”

Everyone suddenly grew very quiet. Félix watched how Adrien’s look fixed on the ground once more while Marinette absentmindedly twirled a strand of hair around her finger.

“Much more horrible things than you can even begin to imagine,” Félix eventually said in an effort to break the tense silence. “Just trust us on that point. We’ve got experience with Chloé’s cruelties.”

Silence spread again and everyone watched Alya, who seemed to be contemplating what she was going to say.

“Alright, I promise to not say anything. But you’ll have to run this friendship thing by me again.” She turned to Marinette. “How did you just happen to meet a rich model, girl?”

Marinette threw her a smile. “Through a stupid misunderstanding.”

Adrien sighed. “Here we go again. Do you want a dramatic re-enactment of it, Alya?”

The girl smirked. “Absolutely!”

“This is the best thing I have ever eaten!” Adrien said, like he always did, while he shovelled spoonfuls of the frankly delicious rice dish into his mouth.

Sabine chuckled. “Eat as much as you want, dear. I certainly made enough for everyone.”

Adrien made a happy noise, prompting Marinette to lean to Alya and whisper in a volume that was easy for everyone to hear: “He eats enough for all of us combined.”

Unsurprisingly, that earned her a jab in the side and a teasing grin. It didn’t take long until a poking war had broken loose between the two of them.

Félix watched the whole spectacle with only mild interest, as this was a common occurrence when they ate dinner at the Dupain-Cheng’s house.
“And here we go again,” Nino sighed, who was used to the sight as well. Only Alya threw them odd glances.

“Are they always like that?” She eventually asked Tom, who sat next to her. Marinette’s father chuckled.

“Most of the time, yes. Adrien and Félix eat dinner with us at least once a week.”

Alya suddenly looked conflicted, though Félix had no idea as to why that was.

They had spent about an hour or so looking at pictures from the past year and retelling stories. Nino had even shown Alya the video he had made of the day Adrien spent disguised as a girl. It was no doubt a glorious video and it had made all of them laugh again, most of all Adrien himself. Alya had asked about twenty times how Adrien had managed to let his voice sound as girly as it had after initially accusing Nino of having auto-tuned it. Luckily, Adrien had been able to convince her that he just had a talent for voice acting and the inquisitive girl had left it at that.

“I’m sorry, Adrien,” Alya suddenly said out of nowhere, making Adrien and Marinette pause their play-fighting to blink at her. “I never really apologized for being so rude to you this week and for jumping to conclusions.”

Adrien threw her a small smile. “It’s alright. You only wanted to look out for Marinette and I appreciate that.”

Félix didn’t resent Alya for not apologizing to him as well. Just the previous day he had overheard a conversation between her and Marinette where Alya had claimed him to be the silent but deadly type. Apparently, she feared that he would strike when people least suspected it.

“What do you think he’s gonna do? Throw a book at me?” Marinette had said.

Then again, Alya didn’t know that he had overheard that conversation and she had never said anything of the sort to him directly, so in her eyes there was probably nothing to apologize for. Even though her suspicion had been the only truth she had uncovered in her paranoia to protect Marinette. A truth nobody but himself knew.

The corner of his mouth twitched when the rest of the table laughed about a joke Adrien had told, but it was just an act. Both of them were acting, like always. Being human was complicated when they actually weren’t, and one year was not enough time to learn all the necessary mannerisms. In addition, there were the things they just straight up couldn’t do. A lack of real empathy and the inability to cry were just two of those things.

From the moment they had entered the house till now, they had been walking on eggshells. Before, it had been easy banter and a liberating friendship, but now they had the eyes of none other than Danu on them. And she was undoubtedly watching them very closely. It was like dancing a dance they were familiar with, but performing it in front of an audience for the first time. An unnerving feeling had long since settled inside Félix’s stomach, but he was determined not to fail here. Especially not since his brother had so far ignored one very important factor: Plagg didn’t trust them either.

The god of destruction might hate them less, but that didn’t mean affection either. Félix knew that he was wary of them, which was understandable. Working together with the fair folk was risky and the power Plagg offered was enormous. The Camembert that they offered him was no bribe. It was a small price to pay for this power, but a price nonetheless.
It was a dangerous but necessary game to play if they wanted their loved ones to be safe.

When Félix looked around the table, full of the people he treasured—minus Alya, he didn’t know what to think of her yet—he couldn’t help but feel a little guilty. Acting like he was like them felt like betrayal. He didn’t belong in a place of warmth, love and affection, which ironically made his own cold home ideal for his fae nature. He didn’t have to act there, didn’t have to betray anyone that mattered to him. Playing make-believe hurt sometimes and he was sure that his brother was feeling the same way about it.

At least his honest regret wasn’t an act. The gods would probably appreciate that.

He used a conversation he wasn’t involved in as an opportunity to concentrate on the magic in the air. Their own barriers and charms were laughable now that there was Tikki’s power as a comparison. Despite it being a Friday—the day of the week where the fair folk was strongest—Félix couldn’t even begin to decipher the spell matrixes of the goddess’ wards. They were truly stunning works of spellcraft and he was glad that Marinette would be under such strong protection now. He only wished that the price for it wouldn’t be for her to fight cursed people who threatened to destroy the city.

It still worried him that it was Marinette who swung around in polka-dot spandex and beat up villains. It just did not fit into the image of the quiet and peaceful designer, but maybe this was a good thing. This way no-one would suspect her. And he knew without a doubt that Adrien would rather die than put her in any danger, so she would most certainly be very well protected. But while Adrien protected Marinette, who would protect Adrien?

He looked around the table and frowned as the others laughed and joked, blissfully unaware of the forces at work around them.

Chapter End Notes

This was a little of a filler chapter. Necessary but a little meh. I'm sorry! ;n;
I have a writing block right now when it comes to chapter 40 and it's frustrating me. Hopefully I'll get out of it soon so I can keep working on that buffer ;D
Chapter Summary

Option A: Stay at home and mope
Option B: Shift and mope as a cat
Option C: Transform into Chat Noir and sing at the top of your lungs while running over rooftops

guess which option Adrien settles on

Chapter Notes

500 KUDOS!!!!!!!!!!!
YOU GUYS ARE AMAZING I LOVE YOU SO MUCH!!!!!!!
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“I’ve been one full week and we’re still allowed to go to school! Can you believe it!? Adrien said and tore another piece off his chicken. Not only could they go to public school now, but they had also—an order placed by Nathalie maybe?—been served rotisserie chicken thighs for lunch. With bones and everything! Adrien couldn’t believe his luck! He purred contently as he savoured the rich taste of every bite and kept an eye out for tiny bones, just like his mother had taught him to.

“Stop jinxing it. It’d be nice if things stayed this way for a bit,” Félix said with an eye roll.

“I’m just saying,” Adrien said unperturbed, and threw Plagg a fanged grin. Since they were the only ones in the dining hall, the kwami had decided that it was safe to come out and devour the cheese platter before anyone else could.

“Do you want something too, Plagg? It’s delicious!”

The offered chicken thigh was eyed with scepticism.

“I might be a cat, but I very much prefer my cheese. Keep enjoying your meat yourself,” Plagg said and threw Adrien a look where it was hard to say if it was exasperated or even disgusted. Adrien just shrugged. His loss.

“Hey Fé, do you remember when we used to eat those every week? Father always said that he felt like he was witnessing the feeding of predators at a zoo.” Adrien snickered at the memory. Before their mother had disappeared, they had eaten rotisserie chicken thighs every Saturday but that was
just another tradition that had stopped completely. Back then, their father still had fractions of a sense of humour and he had overall been less strict and more...fatherly.

“Yeah, I feel like that too,” Plagg remarked dryly as he watched Félix tear a piece of meat off with his teeth.

“Cutlery doesn’t really work with these,” Félix remarked.

“Besides, it’s more fun this way,” Adrien added. He could have sworn that he heard Plagg mutter “Why did they have to be kittens?”

“So, you spoke of your dad in past tense. How come he doesn’t join you at lunch?”

Silence followed Plagg’s question.

“He’s probably busy,” Adrien said, which drew an annoyed snort out of Félix.

“Yeah, busy with ignoring our existence,” his brother mumbled.

Understanding dawned on Plagg’s face.

“Let me guess: He hit your mum three times, so she left him and now he’s stuck with you two.”

The snap of a breaking chicken bone made Adrien flinch. Félix held the two bone halves in clenched fists and looked at his lunch with gritted teeth.

“No. She left on Midwinter and never came back,” Adrien said quietly and wiped his hands and mouth with a napkin. He suddenly wasn’t hungry anymore.

“Listen, you two. Faeries make deals that seem weird to humans sometimes. Maybe your mother made such a deal when marrying your father and he didn’t take it seriously enough to value it. It’s not uncommon for them to leave their partner then. That she left on Midwinter of all days further supports that theory.”

Adrien suddenly felt lightheaded. His voice was barely audible when he said: “You mean…she left us voluntarily?”

Plagg shrugged.

“I don’t know, kitten. It’s a possibility though. Faeries are not known for their fidelity after all.”

“We don’t know for sure though,” Félix voice suddenly cut into the silence and he glared at Plagg. “And until we can be certain, I don’t want to hear any of your prejudiced assumptions anymore.”

Adrien stood up. No matter what his brother had said, the what-ifs were already swirling around his head. He needed to get out of the dining hall and think happy thoughts. Distract himself. Maybe he could visit Marinette!

“Adrien, where are you going?” His brother’s voice only barely registered as he walked out of the dining room.

No, visiting Marinette would be a bad idea. He was too distracted and he couldn’t risk that his lashing tail would slip through the glamour. He needed another distraction. A distraction where he didn’t need to hide and where he would not be caged.

He opened the door to his room and started pacing.
Running around as a cat might help, but that would also put him closer to this faerie side and he didn’t want to think about the Court and the fae right now. Not after what Plagg had just implied.

“Hey, kitten,” said kwami said and sat down on Adrien’s shoulder. “You know I didn’t mean to upset you.”

Adrien stopped as an idea struck him.

“Plagg…am I allowed to use the Miraculous when there is no Akuma attack and when I’m not meeting up with Ma—I mean Ladybug?”

The tiny god floated off his shoulder and shrugged.

“I don’t see how it would be damaging. You’re just human enough to make it work without leaking bad luck and destructive magic, so it should be fine.”

Adrien gave a small smile.

“I…uhm,” he looked away. “No, nevermind! It’s probably rude to misuse a god’s power.”

Plagg sighed.

“Kid,” he said with emphasis, “if you need a break as Chat Noir then go ahead and transform. I don’t mind. You still need to listen to your girlfriend’s suggestion and try out Cataclysm so that you know how to use it. Maybe destroying something worthless will help.”

Adrien looked at the kwami for a long moment, seeking out the twist of words that could hide a loophole and therefore disguise a lie. He quickly shook his head though. Thinking like that about Plagg wasn’t fair. He wasn’t like the fair folk at all, apart from being able to use magic. And even if a break as Chat Noir would help him right now, Plagg had worded it in a way that made it clear that even a small breather would come with a price.

“You’re right, Plagg. I should stop being a coward.”

As a cat, Adrien was used to treading around on silent paws. Making noise would mean drawing attention to himself and that wasn’t really the point of sneaking around on rooftops. No matter how much he wanted to hum a tune or even give the occasional exclamation, he had learned to keep those urges buried deep inside. ‘Cats don’t make human noises’ was one of the very first things their mother had taught them after all.

What applied to cat-him did not apply to Chat Noir though.

“We wrote a prelude to our own fairytale—”


“Singing? You said that it had no effect on humans when I’m transformed.”

“The Court will keep an eye out for you and your girlfriend right now and they’ll certainly listen.”

“Then they’ll spot me even when I don’t sing. Let me have some fun, please? I never felt this
“You damn faeries and your addiction to freedom.” Plagg grumbled and Chat Noir took it as an ‘okay’ to keep singing. He grinned as he jumped over a gap between rooftops and continued where he stopped.

“And bought a parachute at a church rummage sale.
And with a mean sewing machine and miles of thread
We sewed the day above L.A. in navy and red.

We rounded a racetrack through your mom’s kitchen chairs
And fought the shadows back down your dark basement stairs.
I lit a match and let it catch to light up the room.
And then you yelled as we beheld an old maroon.

Hot air balloon.

I’ll be out of my mind,
And you’ll be out of ideas pretty soon.
So let’s spend the afternoon
In a cold hot air balloon.
Leave your jacket behind,
Lean out and touch the tree tops over town.
I can’t wait to kiss the ground wherever we touch back down."

“Nice voice, Chaton.”
Chat Noir almost pole-vaulted into a wall. ‘Almost’ being the decisive word.
He caught the roof’s edge at the last second and pulled himself up. And no matter how much a snickering Plagg insisted on it, he definitely had not yowled.

“Good afternoon, my lady!” He greeted as if nothing happened. Ladybug stood on the roof beside him and offered him a hand which he gladly accepted.

“Taking a stroll over the rooftops too?” she asked as she pulled him up. Amusement danced in her
Chat Noir smiled giddily. Of all the things that had gone through his head since they got their Miraculous, it hadn’t yet crossed his mind that he could now share his love of the rooftop perspective with his best friend. Strolling across the rooftops together sounded wonderful! Especially if he was allowed to hold her hand.

“Yeah…I just…yeah,” he said and nervously rubbed the back of his neck as the entire situation caught up to him. She had just witnessed him singing and almost hitting a wall afterwards. It wasn’t like he was self-conscious about his singing…he had just not expected that Marinette of all people would listen.

“Would the fair lady like to stroll across the rooftops with this fine cat?” He said, as he slowly gained confidence and bowed, holding one hand out for her to take.

She giggled and he was sure that his heart was about to leap out of his chest at the sound. Hopefully she did not feel his increased heartbeat when she laid her hand in his.

“I’d love to!”

L-love? Did she just say that she lov—no, she said that she’d love to take a stroll with me. Big difference!

“Then follow me,” he said and regrettably let go of her hand to pole-vault over a gap between two buildings.

Wait, regrettably? There shouldn’t be something to regret! The two of them were not together on either sides of the masks and it was stupid of him to even think about it. If their friendship had already gotten Marinette in danger, then a relationship would doom her. No, he couldn’t do that to her. He couldn’t risk it. Her safety was so much more important than his selfish desires.

“Uhm…Chat?”

He paused. When he looked back, he saw that Ladybug was still on the other roof and looking over to him uncertainly. He tilted his head in a silent question.

“There is nothing for my yo-yo to latch on to,” she said.

Oh, right. She’s not used to this yet.

He tucked the baton behind his back—he had gotten a little overeager using it—and jumped back to her roof without any difficulty.

“It’s not that far of a jump. I’m sure you can do it without your yo-yo,” he said with a grin.

Her response was a disbelieving stare, completed with an open jaw.

“Not that far?! It’s over three metres!” She waved her arms around wildly as if to underline her point and he couldn’t help but chuckle. It was so cute when she did this.

“If I could make that jump, then you can too.”

Which was a lie. He had no idea if that had been the increased strength of his suit or his natural strength and cat tendencies. Therefore, he couldn’t help but add: “And if you can’t, I’ll catch you.”

“This is crazy,” she said.
“Crazier than jumping off the Eiffel tower?”

Chat Noir chuckled when she pouted.

“Come on, my lady. Just see this as step two. We’re in this together, remember?”

She sighed. “I have a feeling that there will be a lot of steps.”

“Oh, most definitely! But we’ll take them one at a time, so don’t worry about it. You already have no fear of heights, so let’s work on no fear of jumps now.”

“You’re enjoying this way too much, kid.” Plagg commented and Chat Noir had to suppress the urge to roll his eyes.

“Why do I have the feeling that it’s only me who has to overcome fears here?” Ladybug asked as she took a few steps back, her eyes set on the gap between the buildings with nervous determination.

“Pure coincidence, my lady!”

Ladybug rolled her eyes.

“Okay, then here’s the deal: I’ll jump over that gap and if I make it to the other roof by myself, you’ll tell me a fear you need to overcome.”

“Deal,” he said even before he fully registered what he was agreeing to. What he did register though was that his friend took a deep breath and then started running towards the rooftop’s edge. He took his baton and got himself ready in case she needed his help, but to both of their relief, she sailed through the air flawlessly. She even landed a few metres away from the edge of the other roof.

Chat Noir jumped over with a grin. “Told you!”

“Yeah, yeah,” Ladybug said with an eye roll and then took on a confident and awfully smug stance. Chat Noir was instantly reminded of all the times Marinette had adapted that same stance and therefore knew that something akin to an ‘I told you so’ would follow.

“Let’s take that stroll and discuss how to tackle step three then,” she said with a grin. He fell in pace beside her.

“Step three?”

“You fears, Chaton,” she said and his face fell for a bit. Right, that had been the deal. It wasn’t something he wanted to admit out loud but he knew from experience that his friend wouldn’t relent. She wanted to help him too badly to be able to give up on him this early on.

“Just spit it out, kid,” Plagg said which made Chat Noir grimace. His kwami probably wouldn’t like this.

“Do I have to?” He asked timidly and Ladybug’s smug grin immediately turned into a compassionate smile. When her hand landed on his shoulder and gave it an encouraging squeeze, he could feel his cheeks warm. He could also hear Plagg’s snickering but that was beside the point.

“You don’t have to tell me right away. But it would be good to be on the same page so that we know what to look out for when we have to fight an Akuma again.”
What she said made sense, but rationality had never been one of his strong suits. He was a creature of magic and hijinks, so logic and reason didn’t take high priorities for him naturally. He didn’t want to make her think that he was immature though, so he forced himself to reply.

“I’m afraid of using my power,” Chat Noir blurted out and didn’t dare to look at her. They had stopped in the middle of a rooftop and he was intently studying the shingles. Her comforting hand didn’t move from his shoulder, but was even joined by a second on his other one. Ladybug turned him around so that he had no choice but to face her. Those bluebell eyes would be the death of him.

“What?”

It was not accusing, demeaning or even confused. She was just gently imploring for his reasons and he appreciated that. It took a few moments to find the right words though.

“I…it’s just…Plagg said that it can destroy everything, even living things. What if I’m clumsy and touch someone by accident? …What if I touch you?” The last sentence only came out in a whisper, but by the way her eyes widened she had clearly heard it. Before he knew it, he was wrapped in a tight hug.

“Oh Chaton,” she said and it sounded…sad. He didn’t want her to be sad! The comforting purr was pure reflex, so he tried to cover it up by continuing to explain.

“I mean, I’m literally wielding the Miraculous of Destruction. It’s only wise to be as careful with it as possible. If I just go around and use my power in every battle, then I’d eventually mess up. This…this magic is scary.”

Plagg was surprisingly quiet through all of this.

“Let’s try it out,” Ladybug eventually said, which made Chat Noir jolt back in shock.

“What?!”

“I mean, like I said, you could just try it on a pebble or something. I’ll be there for moral support…at a safe distance.”

Now it was his turn to stare at her in disbelief. They were talking about a power that could destroy the entirety of Paris with a single touch and she suggested to use it on a pebble? Who’d say that it would stop there?!

“Calm down and listen to the bug. She’s right,” Plagg said; the first thing he had said since the topic of Cataclysm had come up at all.

Chat Noir shifted uncomfortably. The whole point of becoming Chat Noir had been to keep Marinette out of danger. Now he was getting her close to the power of ultimate destruction. Things were very much not going according to plan!

“Fine, but…you’ll have to be at least fifty metres away. No, one hundred!”

Ladybug threw him a flat stare.

“I’ll be ten metres away. Tikki said the power can only become a danger if it would touch me directly. So, I should be safe as long as I’m out of swiping distance.”

“B-but will that really be enough?” Chat Noir asked as he realised he would not be getting out of this plan.
“Last time I checked your arms weren’t ten metres long.”

That made him grin, but only for a moment. Even when Plagg said it was alright, something could still go wrong. The kwami had said himself that he didn’t know how the Miraculous would work with a halfling as a holder, so who said it couldn’t extend to the special power as well?

“I still don’t think it’s a good idea,” Chat Noir muttered.

Five minutes later he found himself in an alley, away from the curious stares of Parisians and tourists alike, and held a pebble in his left hand. Ladybug, as promised, stood on the other side of the alleyway and gave him a thumbs up. Her encouragement was adorable, but when it came to magic, she sadly didn’t know enough to be able to properly access the danger she was in.

“Alright, kid, just take a deep breath and summon Cataclysm. You don’t have to be afraid of accidentally touching your suit since it’s immune to the power. Just don’t facepalm yourself with your right hand, please.”

Chat Noir frowned. He had not planned to facepalm himself with Cataclysm, but the fact that this was a possibility made him anxious. He took a deep breath and dispersed the intrusive thought.

“What if something goes wrong?” He couldn’t help but ask. The question had been directed at Plagg, but it was Ladybug who answered.

“Then I’m here to fix it with the cure.”

Chat Noir turned to her and blinked. He had almost forgotten that that was an option.

“I can’t stress this enough: Listen to your girlfriend! Stop being a scaredy kitten.”

His tail was lashing nervously and he was glad to not have to hide it beneath a glamour. It no doubt would have slipped out.

“Okay, here goes nothing,” he said with a sigh and closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again, he looked at his right hand intently.

“Cataclysm.”

There was no dramatic light or anything following the command, but just dark energy that suddenly bubbled up and engulfed his right hand. Tiny sparks flew off of it like rot and he gulped. He knew Ladybug couldn’t feel the magic itself, but he could. It felt…strangely right, which he honestly should have expected. The Unseelie were beings of destruction and Plagg had even said that it was his Court. An affinity to destruction therefore was a given.

Cataclysm didn’t feel like Unseelie cruelties though... and besides, it was only a faint cry from his own magic, after all. This power was strong, destructive and unforgiving. He felt the potential it held and only then realised that destroying the entirety of Paris was not the furthest extent of what it could do.

His right hand shook when he very slowly moved it to the pebble in his other hand.

“Concentrate on what you want to destroy and how you want to destroy it. For now, concentrate on letting this pebble, and only this pebble, crumble into dust,” Plagg instructed patiently.
Chat Noir did as his kwami said and watched as the pebble disintegrated. A small black pile of dust was everything that was left in his hand only moments later.

“You did it!” Ladybug’s joyous shout startled him out of the frightened stillness he had fallen into. He looked up to see her jog over to him.

“Well done, kid,” Plagg said in his head and Chat Noir couldn’t help but let a small grin grow on his face. He really had done it. The most shocking part of it all was how easy it had been in the end. Nothing malfunctioned, no one died, Paris was still standing.

“Wow, there really isn’t much left of it,” Ladybug said as she regarded the dust pile he still held in his hand. Then she suddenly threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly.

“And that was step three, Chaton,” she said and ended the hug much too soon. He threw her a bright grin.

“Onto step four then?”

The beep of his ring startled him. Right. Five minutes until the transformation would fall away.

“Let’s raincheck on that,” Ladybug said as she also regarded the disappearing paw pad on his ring.

Chat Noir sighed. So much for taking a nice stroll with his lady over the rooftops.

“Hey,” Ladybug said encouragingly, probably having noticed his disappointment. “How about we meet up tomorrow and train a little? I could bring some cheese and cookies so we could practice our powers too!”

Chat Noir tilted an ear in confusion. “What do cheese and cookies have to do with our powers?”

“The kwamis will need to refuel after they use it and Tikki said that your kwami likes cheese, so he’ll probably need it.”

“Now I see why he fourmed the idea of me testing out Cataclysm.”

The answering snicker in his head was all the confirmation he needed.

Chapter End Notes

So, I let Adrien sing "Hot Air Balloon". I really like Owl City, does it show? ;w;

PS: Thanks Drax for the cheese pun at the end! Fourme is a type of French cheese ;D

The More You Know
The weeks just flew by after school had started and Marinette felt herself struggling to keep up with everything. Before she knew it, the twenty-first of September dawned and she giddily jumped out of bed. It was Adrien and Félix’s birthday and while it had been hard to get their presents done in between homework, helping in the bakery, hanging out with her friends and most especially training with Chat Noir, she had eventually done it! Both presents lay neatly wrapped on her desk and she intended to give them to the twins before school. This led to the rare occasion of Marinette being up early.

“Have a nice day, sweetie,” her mother said as Marinette hurried down her stairs and through the living room, clutching the two presents to her chest.

“Have a nice day!” She quickly called back before rushing out the door and doing her best not to trip while running down the stairs. A few key choices of baked goods and a kiss on her father’s cheek later and she was out the door.

The actual birthday cakes would have to wait until later since it would no doubt draw unwanted attention if she brought them to school. Also, knowing her clumsiness, she’d probably drop them at some point and then all her work would be ruined. Marinette just hoped that the twins could sneak away after school so she could give them their cakes in person and maybe even celebrate a bit like they had done the previous year.

And so she was early, sitting on the steps of the school and waiting. Nino was already there as well, sitting beside her and blowing bubbles to pass time. It had been an ‘I’m sorry I was such a jerk, please don’t hate me’ gift to him from Alya. Adrien and Félix had gotten the same bubble
wands, which had been received with mixed reactions. Adrien, who had for some reason never seen one before, had been ecstatic while Félix had looked at his as if it would explode at any second.

“Hey, I was thinking,” Nino said, “Since we now officially—” he made air quotes at the word, “—know the dudes, do you think we could throw them a birthday party at their place?”

Marinette tapped her chin in thought. It was a good idea in theory, but when she recalled all the things Adrien and especially Félix had told her about their father, she realised that their chances of success were basically zero.

“It would be nice to finally see their house,” she admitted instead of voicing her thoughts.

“Yeah! Remember the pictures they showed us of their room? We could fit the entire class in there and still have room to dance!”

Marinette chuckled. “I don’t think Félix would appreciate that much. But maybe we can go over with them at lunch and go ask their father personally.”

“You really think that could work?” Nino asked excitedly and Marinette could see that he was already putting together a song selection in his head.

She sighed. “Here’s hoping for a miracle.”

As if on cue, a silver car stopped in front of the school.

“—last thing we need is for her to make father even more unbearable,” Félix was saying as he climbed out.

“Maybe she’ll be able to convince him about the herbs at least.” Marinette didn't know why anyone would need convincing about herbs of all things, but her confusion quickly lifted as Adrien looked at her and her treacherous heart skipped a beat. Being in love with her best friend was indeed a complicated mess.

Knowing that the twins were not likely to get swarmed by fangirls when there was still half an hour until class started, Marinette dared to jump up from the stairs and skip over to them. Nino followed.

“Happy Birthday!” She said in a sing-song voice and wrapped both of them in a hug. Well, as best as was possible while still holding a present in each hand. When she ended the quick hug, Adrien’s smile was so bright that it could rival the sun and even Félix had a smile on his face—his equivalent of a big grin.

“Thank you, Marinette!” Marinette could practically sense Adrien vibrating with joy. Félix gave her a polite nod, which coming from him, was high praise.

“Welcome to the old socks club, my dudes!” Nino jovially joined in and hugged each of them separately.

“I do not think that fifteen qualifies any of us as ‘old’ quite yet,” Félix threw in, but it was obvious that he was amused.

“Well, we are fifteen years old, so I think it qualifies,” Adrien snickered.

“Old or not, I come bearing gifts!” Marinette said and finally held out the two wrapped packages to
each twin. Even though they really should have expected it, Adrien’s eyes grew big as saucers as he stared at the blue gift box in awe.

“And also, a little something from me,” Nino said and placed two small rectangular gifts on each of Marinette’s.

“Oh my god, thank you!” Adrien said and hugged both of them while being careful not to crush his presents. Félix didn’t go for a hug, but his grateful look was more than enough.

“Let’s go to the classroom to open them in case the devil with designer sunglasses shows up,” Félix said. Everyone more than willingly followed his suggestion.

“Open mine first. Nette’s gifts are definitely better,” Nino said once they entered the classroom, which prompted Marinette to elbow him in the side.

“Don’t devalue your gifts! You put thought into them!”

“I’m sure we’ll love—woah!” Adrien said as he tore away the wrapping paper and uncovered the CD below.

“This band was one of the opening bands at a Jagged Stone concert and their sound is similar. Thought you’d like them,” Nino explained with a grin.

“I can’t wait to listen to it!”

“It was tricky to find something for you,” Nino continued, this time addressing Félix, “You really have a difficult taste, but I found this one band that was totally your style, dude.”

When Félix unwrapped his own CD, it turned out to be a Scott Bradlee’s Postmodern Jukebox album. Nino had burst into Marinette’s room a few weeks ago and excitedly told her about it, saying he found the perfect gift for Félix. Now she watched as a small smile appeared on Félix’s face.

“That is very thoughtful of you. Thank you,” he said and Nino beamed.

“Now mine!” Marinette said and bit her lip in anxious anticipation. She wanted them to open her gifts before Chloé had a chance to arrive and at the same time she was irrationally worried that they wouldn’t like them. After all, she had given them much better, bigger things in the past, but due to the very little time she had, she had only managed to knit two scarves. Granted, they were fabulous scarves and probably the best she had ever made, but they paled in comparison to the photo album.

Her worries were unfounded, as she was almost tackled by Adrien when he unwrapped the sky-blue scarf she had made for him.

“Oh my god, thank you Marinette! It’s so soft! And my favourite colour!” Adrien exclaimed and immediately buried his face in it.

“This is quite detailed work,” Félix said in what she interpreted as awe—it was sometimes hard to tell with him. His scarf was knitted with a warm dark grey wool and had lighter grey specks sewn into it. He had once lamented the fact that a green scarf would not go well with his regular attire—he still very much loved the green scarf she had gifted him for Christmas though—so she had taken it upon herself to knit one that would fit.
“I’m never going to take this off!” Adrien said as he wrapped the blue scarf around his neck.
Marinette beamed.

“Maybe you should, unless you want to have crumbs stuck in it,” she said and smugly dangled the bag with baked goods in front of him.

“You’re the best!” He squealed as he snatched the bag from her and scavenged through it.

“Leave some for us too, dude.” Nino chuckled and tried to take the bag away from Adrien.

“No! My precious!” Her silly crush hissed protectively.

It was at that moment that Alya entered the otherwise empty classroom. They must have looked odd, with Nino on Alya’s seat and half hanging over the table to get the bag of pastries away from Adrien. Félix was half out his seat—originally Nino’s seat—as he leaned away from Nino while Marinette just grinned in amusement at the scene.

“Good morning and happy birthday! What did I miss?” She asked thoroughly amused.

“They won’t get my precious!” Adrien supplied and Marinette rolled her eyes.

“I brought pastries and Adrien thinks they all belong to him.”

Adrien suddenly squeaked when Nino put his hat on him and pulled it over his face. The momentary distraction was enough for him to grab the bag.

“Hey, not fair!” Adrien said as he threw Nino’s hat back at him.

“All is fair in love and war, Sunshine,” Alya grinned. “And I’m pretty sure that a war will eventually be fought over Marinette’s parents’ baked goods.”

Adrien pouted until he found a chocolate croissant and an éclair placed in front of him on a napkin—his favourites.

“What the hell?! It’s your birthday and your father scheduled a photoshoot?!”

Marinette was furious.

“It is how it is,” Adrien said with a shrug and a dejected sigh.

“Dude, that’s just…wrong,” Nino said.

“You know what? No. We’ll march to your house now and have a word with that douchebag!” Alya declared with the same determination she had when she had biked after an Akuma to catch the best footage.

“Be our guest. You’ll just waste your time,” Félix said as the silver car stopped in front of the school.

“Come on, dude, you’ve rebelled against your dad before!” Nino tried one last time.

“Yeah, but now he actually lets us go to school. I don’t want to risk it.” Adrien frowned.
“Don’t worry, we’ll fix this for you,” Marinette chimed in confidently, which drew a small smile from him. Then he and Félix climbed into the car. The vehicle had barely sped away when Alya stepped up and raised a fist as if she was about to make a war declaration.

“Alright, squad. Let’s save this birthday!”

“Monsieur Agreste will see you shortly,” Nathalie said as the three friends waited in…the lobby? Marinette still couldn’t believe that they were let in at all, though the view that presented itself was absolutely not what she had expected. The mansion might be big, but it was also cold and empty. Neither of the twins had ever gone into detail about it, but now she finally saw what they meant. The depressing painting of their father and the twins that hung above the stairs did not help either. She immediately had the urge to steal it and burn it down. A picture where her friends looked that sad and hopeless shouldn’t be allowed to exist!

Beside her, Nino nervously played with his bubble wand while Alya looked like she was ready to get into a fistfight. Tikki meanwhile poked Marinette encouragingly through the bag, which helped, although not as much as Marinette would have liked.

A few minutes later, Gabriel Agreste himself walked down the stairs and stopped on the landing. He was therefore towering above them even more than he already would have. It was probably on purpose, as he regarded them sceptically.

“My sons are not home yet,” he said, obviously annoyed.

“We actually came to talk to you dude—err…sir,” Nino said and all of them cringed when Gabriel’s eyes narrowed.

“Me?”

“Yes, you see, it’s Adrien’s and Félix’s birthday today and we wanted to throw them a birthday party,” Marinette continued.

“And what good would that do?” Gabriel scoffed.

“Uh, to have some fun?” Alya said as if it would be the most obvious thing in the world. Marinette elbowed her friend in the side. Antagonizing Gabriel Agreste was not a good idea.

“They are always busy with piano, Chinese, basketball, fencing, photoshoots and all the other stuff you have them do. It’s only fair that they should let loose once in a while and have fun! Especially on their birthday,” Nino continued.

In that moment the door opened and in came the twins. The photoshoot must have been cancelled for them to be back already.

“Marinette? Nino? Alya? What are you doing here?” Adrien asked utterly confused as he came to stand next to them. Félix had meanwhile frozen in the doorway and was glaring daggers at his father.

“Trying to secure your birthday party,” Alya said exasperated. “Though it doesn’t seem to be working.”

Marinette elbowed her again.
“Indeed,” Gabriel Agreste said, his voice cold as ice.

“Monsieur Agreste, it would be just a small party and we can go somewhere else if you think we would disturb you here,” Marinette tried after another encouraging poke from Tikki. It was like talking to an iceberg though.

“Yeah du—sir! Only the best of the best!” Nino threw in, though that seemed to be the wrong thing to say.

“I decide what is best for my sons,” Gabriel said with a voice that left a shiver running down Marinette’s spine. She heard Félix scoff behind her. “In fact, I have just decided that you are bad influences. Leave this house. Now!”

Marinette cringed.

“Why you—” Alya started, but it was Adrien who held her back this time.

“Don’t. It won’t do any good,” he said dejectedly.

“I’m so sorry, you two. We only tried to help,” Marinette said.

When the three of them turned around, they saw that Félix’s previous death glare had changed to something even more murderous. Marinette had never seen him this angry.

“So, do you two want to come to my place and think of a plan B there?” Marinette suggested once the heavy gates of the mansion fell closed behind them.

“You bet, girl!” Alya said, a grin once again on her face. Nino, though, just sighed.

“Sorry, Nette, but I just…need a moment to think.”

Marinette, who knew this side of Nino, immediately grew worried. While he was generally the more introverted and silent one of the two of them, he tended to really take it a little far with his brooding. One time he had been in a bad mood for over a week because a trip he had very much been looking forward to had been cancelled at the last minute.

“Alright,” she therefore said. “But come by later, okay?”

Nino sighed.

“Dunno. This whole thing just makes me so angry, you know? And it’s not just the birthday! That douchebag went on a business trip over Christmas and also left them alone for weeks back in May! That’s just not okay!”

“I know, Nino. I know,” Marinette said and put a comforting hand on his shoulder. She very much sympathized with him on that point, but there was little they could do about it.

“Wait, he did what?!” Alya asked and suddenly looked like she was about to turn around and storm right back into the mansion.

“Guys,” Marinette said and grabbed Alya’s arm out of precaution. “I know this is frustrating, but there really isn’t a whole lot we can do about it. Besides, it’s just lunch break. Maybe we can steal Adrien and Félix away for half an hour after school and bring them to my place to have a small
Alya sighed. “Yeah, let’s do that! We can even decorate your place now so that it’s finished for later!”

Marinette smiled. It wasn’t a perfect plan, but it was at least a rough plan B.

When they arrived at her house, Marinette wasn’t surprised that Nino just kept walking in the direction of the park. Just as she liked to go to her balcony (or lately various Parisian rooftops), Nino liked to go to parks when he needed to think. Alya was about to call out to him, but a hand on her arm and a shake of the head from Marinette made her close her mouth again.

“He’ll follow soon, don’t worry,” she explained as the two girls walked up the steps.

“Oh, so he does that often?” Alya asked.

“Not exactly often, but I’ve known him long enough to know how he acts in certain situations.”

“Right, you’re childhood friends.”

Marinette turned around to Alya with a raised eyebrow at the bitter tone of the statement.

“Sorry,” the bespectacled girl said with an apologetic grin. “You all just already know each other so well and I’m the newbie. Kinda feels like I’m disturbing the peace.”

Marinette couldn’t help but snort at the latter statement.

“Are you kidding? I’m thrilled to finally have a girl friend! And I’m sure we’ll all get to know each other better with time. You’re part of the squad now!”

She lightly boxed Alya on the arm.

“Ouch! It shows that you’ve been hanging out with guys a lot.”

All Marinette could offer was an unapologetic shrug.

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Eating lunch and preparing the living room for a small birthday party went by without a hitch. Marinette was glad that her mother had already started those preparations beforehand, seemingly guessing what the plans would be before even they knew them. Marinette and Alya meanwhile turned the whole thing into a game of twenty questions. Or rather, one hundred questions.

“Favourite animal?” Alya asked and Marinette had to think for a moment.

“I really like hamsters, but cats are slowly growing on me too.”

A sly grin appeared on Alya’s face at that. “Cats are growing on you, huh? Is it because they happen to be Adrien’s favourite animal?” The suggestive tone of the question made Marinette blush.

“N-no! T-that’s not it. Besides, it’s my turn to ask a question!” She said defensively.

“Oh, come on! Just when we were getting to the interesting stuff.”
“What’s your favourite animal?” Marinette asked and put much more concentration than was usually needed into smoothing out a tablecloth.

“Foxes!” Alya said without hesitation. “Did you know that you can have a fox for a pet? I really want to own one when I have my own place someday. What about you? Do you want a cat once you move out?”

Marinette groaned. How did her friend manage to loop the question back to the previous topic?

“Technically, I already have a cat. I don’t own him, but there’s a stray who visits me from time to time.”

“Are you talking about Adrien?” Alya asked and waggled her eyebrows. It seemed like she wouldn’t let that topic go.

“No, I mean a real cat! You know: small furry animal with a tail?”

“Oh, that’s so cute! What does he look like? Do you have pictures?” Alya asked eagerly and Marinette grinned.

“My turn to ask questions,” she said smugly.

“Oh, please, Mari!” She rolled her eyes.

“Okay, okay. It’s a black shorthair cat with a white spot on his chest and green eyes. He’s very cuddly, too. Sadly, I don’t have pictures since he’s camera-shy.”

“What’s his name?” Alya asked, and Marinette eventually accepted that their game was over and that this had turned into an interrogation. Albeit a friendly one.

“I just call him ‘kitty’. Giving him a name at this point seems weird, so I’ll just keep calling him that.”

“Aww, that’s boring,” Alya pouted, but then her eyes lit up again. “Hey, when he’s a black cat, then why don’t you call him Chat Noir? You know, in honour of the real Chat Noir!”

Marinette giggled. After all, she already had a Chat Noir in her life. Not that Alya should know that.

“I think I’ll just stick with ‘kitty’.”

Alya opened her mouth, probably to argue, but at that moment Sabine came in.

“Oh, this looks wonderful, you two,”

She had been in the bakery for the rush hour while the two of them had decorated everything to the best of their abilities. Her presence upstairs meant that the stream of customers had calmed down enough for Tom to handle it for a few minutes while she could eat lunch.

“Thanks, Maman,” Marinette said with a grin. “I just hope that Adrien and Félix can make it after school since their dad didn’t seem very… supportive of a birthday party when we went to ask.”

“That’s the understatement of the year, girl! He threw us out of the house permanently!” Alya said, her rage with the situation fuelled again.
“Oh dear, that doesn’t sound good,” Sabine said worriedly as she opened a window. Marinette knew that her mother was as concerned as she was—if not, even more—about the twins’ wellbeing and their difficult family situation. Maybe she would even go to the mansion herself and talk to Gabriel Agreste. Perhaps he would be more willing to listen to another adult and parent.

Marinette’s thoughts were disrupted when her mother suddenly let out a distressed cry as she was wrapped inside a bubble and carried out the window.

“Maman!” Marinette cried and ran to the open window, trying to grab onto the bubble or her mother, but she was already too far away. She then saw that her father had also been trapped in a bubble, as had apparently every adult in Paris. All of them floated up into the sky now.

“Maman! Papa!” She cried, even though it was no use. “Do you think it’s another Akuma?” Marinette asked. The question, in her panic, had been directed at Tikki, but it was Alya who replied.

“Must be, right? What else could do this!?” Her tone was a mixture of worried and excited.

Marinette knew that she needed to transform, but not with Alya right there. She needed to shake her off somehow, but she couldn’t do that while in the house.

“Let’s go and see if we can do something to help,” Marinette said as she dashed to the door and nearly fell over when she hastily put on her ballet flats. Not the best shoes to run from supervillains in. She might have to invest in some roman-style sandals or something else that was fitting for summer and didn’t easily fall off.

“Right behind you, girl! I can also get footage for the Ladyblog!”

Making sure one last time that she wore her purse and that Tikki was inside said purse, she ran down the flights of stairs and burst through the door. She abruptly stopped in front of the bakery as bubbles with the face of what was no doubt the Akuma appeared. This caused Alya to run into her and for the both of them to fall. Ouch.

“Today’s your lucky day, dudes. The adults are taking the day off, so make the most of it. No chores, no homework, no more nagging, just fun, fun, fun. This is the Bubbler’s gift to you.”

Marinette didn’t make an effort to get up as she lay frozen on the street. She knew that voice and when she looked closely into the twisted face reflected in the many bubbles, she could also see Nino.

Her fault.

This was all her fault!

While she knew it was best for Nino to brood undisturbed, she had totally forgotten that negative emotions would make him a target for Hawkmoth! The whole magic supervillain thing was just too new for her to have considered it. But had she just thought for more than a second, she would have remembered and been able to prevent it!

Did that mean that she had to fight the person who was basically her brother? She didn’t know if she could do that.

“Come on, get up girl,” Alya said as she pulled on Marinette’s arms. Beside them, two small kids cried and car alarms could be heard from various streets where vehicles had no doubt been abandoned mid-drive. The atmosphere reminded her of her previous battle where Alya had gotten
stuck behind a car and it gave her the strength to snap out of her shock.

_That’s right, I’m a hero. I can handle this!_

She let herself be pulled back to her feet by Alya and then walked over to the crying children.

“Don’t worry, your parents will come back. I’m sure Ladybug and Chat Noir will set things right in no time,” she said, which luckily calmed the two children. For that promise to be fulfilled though, she had to go to the source and she’d rather not leave two small kids all alone. Luckily, there was a boy her age beside them.

“Please keep an eye on them, yes?” Marinette said and started running before the black-haired boy could protest.

“Hey, where are you going?” Alya asked, running after her.

_Damn it._

“That was Nino,” Marinette said bitterly. “Which means he’ll be heading to the Agreste mansion. So that’s where I’m going too.”

She had barely known anything about Ivan except that he liked Mylène, but she _did_ know basically everything about Nino. Maybe it was possible to talk him out of it and come to a peaceful solution rather than having to fight him.

“Damn, we shouldn’t have left him alone after all,” Alya winced. “But Ladybug will definitely show up and save him! And when I’m there, I’ll get front seats to the fight this time and the best footage for the Ladyblog!”

Marinette didn’t need to look at her friend to know that her eyes sparkled excitedly. And since Alya couldn’t see her face either, she rolled her eyes. She only hoped that she’d find a place to transform so Ladybug _could_ actually show up.

The Agreste mansion was just as intimidating and cold as before. In comparison to earlier, though, there was now a DJ booth in the front court and her very frightened looking classmates. Well, everyone except for Chloé. She was strutting around like she owned the place despite there being an Akuma.

“Nino, you don’t have to do this,” Marinette said when she approached the Akuma. “I understand that you’re angry at Monsieur Agreste, but the other adults haven’t done anything wrong.”

Her heart broke a little when she saw Bubbler’s face contort in anger. This wasn’t her friend. The boy she knew had once saved a puppy from dying in a trash can where it had cruelly been dumped. He had fought to keep it alive, staying awake all night to give it medicine and pet it. No, _Nino_ would have never taken away parents from the children that needed them.

“Wrong! Adults always ruin all the fun and tell kids what to do,” Bubbler said and raised his bubble wand. “If you want to be like that too, telling me what to do, then you can join them up in the sky,” he said. Marinette blanched. Her plan of _talking_ Nino out of this had thoroughly failed.

“No need for that. I’m here to party,” she said with a too-wide grin. It seemed to satisfy the Akuma though since he put the bubble wand away.
“Then do so, dudette,” he said, which gave her another painful reminder that this was indeed Nino. Marinette looked around and eventually spotted Félix who intentionally held himself at the edge of the crowd. Adrien was nowhere to be seen. Since it looked like she wouldn’t get away any time soon anyway, she grabbed Alya by the hand and made her way over to him.

“This is ludicrous,” Félix muttered as they reached him.

“Where’s Adrien?” Marinette asked as she looked around again. Félix nodded towards the mansion’s entrance.

“He locked himself inside and is biding his time.”

“But wait, it’s your birthday too, so why aren’t you the focus of all this if Nino wants to throw you a party?” Alya asked. Marinette, meanwhile made a side-step to the snack table and shovelled as many cookies as she could into her purse. Better safe than sorry.

Félix shrugged. “Adrien is more interested in this kind of party than I am. Perhaps, even under the influence of corrupted magic, Nino remembers this and lets me be.”

“Alright everyone, DJ Bubbler is in the house! Let’s get this party started! Now dance unless you want to end up like the adults!”

Félix sighed. “Or not.”

Before either of the three could follow the Akuma’s orders, the music suddenly stopped and a furious hiss was heard from above. Marinette looked up to see Chat Noir perched on the mansion’s wall and glaring at Nino—or rather Bubbler, as he called himself.

“I’ll have you know that this is one of my favourite songs. Do me a favor and don’t ruin it for me!” her partner said. She noticed a slight shiver in his voice and saw that his claws were digging into the stone wall. Something had unsettled him.

She didn’t waste another second and snuck towards the mansion while everyone else was focused on Chat Noir. Only Félix sent her a glance and nodded. He probably thought she wanted to go and find Adrien, which she really ought to do once all of this was over, but saving Nino was more important at the moment.

“Don’t worry Marinette, you can do this!” Tikki said once they were inside the mansion. Marinette nodded.

“I really hope so, Tikki.”

This Akuma was a lot more personal than the last one had been. After all, not only was the Akuma itself her childhood friend, but also her own parents were at risk. Losing wouldn’t be an option.

A paw touched her cheek and patted her reassuringly. “You trained for this with Chat Noir, so you’re a lot better now than you were when you fought Stoneheart. I’m certain you can win. Just remember what you know and use every advantage you can think of.”

She gave her kwami a small smile. “I will, Tikki. Thank you. Spots on!”

Ladybug took a moment to take a deep breath. She was scared of fighting her childhood friend, but then again, this wasn’t Nino. She had to save Nino from this dark magic. Could she really do it though? Could she be the hero everyone needed and depended on?
A scream from outside snapped her out of her doubts and made her jump out of the nearest window. It didn’t matter whether or not she could do this perfectly, since nobody else could purify the akuma. She had embraced this realisation at her last fight already, but it was still a little hard to wrap her head around it.

She arrived just in time to shield her partner from an onslaught of bubbles. Their training was already paying off. They had discovered her yo-yo could act as a shield at a training session where they had thrown tennis balls at each other and tried to block them with their weapons. She gave her partner a brief glance to see if he was alright before she focused back on the Akuma.

“You okay there, Chat?” She asked.

“Much better now that you’re here, my lady,” Chat Noir said and moved into a fighting stance next to her. “Looks like it was a good idea to practice for projectiles after all.”

Not a second later, the bubbles were thrown at them again and their banter had to stop in favour of dodging and blocking them all. Ladybug could feel herself falling into the familiar movements they had practiced—like a dance—and could only barely contain a grin when the bubbles stopped and she and Chat were still standing without a scratch.

Turns out there was no time for victory celebrations yet, because the bubbles they had deflected suddenly turned green and surrounded them. Instead of being able to bat them away though, they stuck to them.

Before Ladybug knew what was happening, she and Chat Noir had been trapped in a bubble themselves. She instantly looked around in panic and tried to break out of the bubble. It was as solid as glass though.

“Give me your Miraculous before you run out of air,” Bubbler said.

“Dream on, Bubbler,” Ladybug heard herself say and only a second later realised that this had probably not been the wisest move.

“Total party poopers. Just like adults!”

“Kids need adults!” Ladybug countered, even though she had had a similar conversation with the Akuma before. One last try couldn’t hurt.

“False! Kids need freedom and fun! To let loose and live it up! Adults are just controlling and bossy.”

Well, she had expected that reply. There was apparently no common ground to be reached with an Akuma. A retort of adults keeping children safe and protected lay on her tongue, but she didn’t dare say that while Félix was in hearing range. That didn’t keep Chat Noir from saying something though.

“Not all adults are like that!” He snarled. “And freedom and fun are very subjective. Maybe not everyone wants to party like you do, ever thought of that?”

“Don’t antagonize him, Chaton,” Ladybug hissed at her hostile partner.

“Know what? Since you care about these adults so much, why don’t you go float with them for a while?”

Having the bubble suddenly fly upwards at breakneck speed was worse than any freefall tower.
Chat Noir’s kicks at the bubble’s wall did nothing either.

“I think you have to use Cataclysm, Chaton,” she eventually said and could feel her partner freeze up. After that first time, they had also practiced Cataclysm on several other occasions on different things. But all of those times she had been at least a few metres away since Chat Noir insisted on a safety distance. They didn’t have this luxury now.

“B-but what then? We’ll just fall from the sky and break our everything.”

His voice was shivering and his tail continuously hit her as it nervously lashed around. She took his face in her hands and looked him in the eyes.

“Walking around in a costume and a mask doesn’t make you a hero. Facing your fears and overcoming them does. It’s just another step, alright?” She said with a smile. “And we’re in this together.”

Chat Noir sighed and then gave a faint nod.

“Get behind me,” he said quietly and she did as he said. Even when she gently put a hand on his back—a gesture she hoped to be reassuring—her partner still shook with nerves.

“C-cataclysm,” he eventually called. “Brace yourself, my lady.”

She unhooked her yo-yo from her belt and secured the ring at the end of the string around her finger. “Ready.”

Chat Noir touched the wall of the bubble with his right hand. They instantly started to fall and Ladybug had to suppress another scream. Panic wouldn’t help in this situation.

She remembered what Tikki had told her before transforming: remember what she knew and to use every advantage she could think of. Her eyes darted around, desperate to find something tall to throw her yo-yo at. Only the Eiffel tower next to them came to mind, but even if she could wrap her yo-yo around one of the beams, they would just end up swinging into the structure at full force.

Her eyes then landed on her partner’s baton.

“Chat, your baton! Throw it at the tower!” The idea was instinctual, like she just knew that it would work. Something similar had happened at the last fight where she had just known that making Stoneheart and Mylène kiss would solve the problem. She idly wondered how Chat’s blunt weapon would stick in a metal beam, and how strong the two of them were while suited up. They’d have to try that out more.

She grabbed Chat Noir’s hand and threw her yo-yo. It obediently wrapped around the baton and the effect was immediate. Her shoulder ached for a few seconds while the string went taut—under normal circumstances that would have torn off her entire arm—and then she pulled, making the baton come loose and letting the two of them fall to the street below. By some miracle, they landed on their feet, safe and sound.

“I’m glad cats aren’t afraid of heights,” Chat Noir said as she threw him his baton. She was still too shaken from their fall to really appreciate his joke though.

“We’ve got to get his weapon. That’s probably where the Akuma is,” she said. Nino’s headphones would have been the more obvious choice, since he basically never took them off, but she hadn’t seen any headphones on Bubbler. And even if the bubble wand didn’t hold his Akuma, it was still his main weapon and without it he would be much easier to beat.
The beeping of Chat Noir’s ring drew her out of her contemplations.

“We’d better hurry.”

“I can say with absolute certainty that this was the most exciting birthday I have ever had,” Félix deadpanned as he, Adrien, Nino, Alya, Marinette and her parents sat in the living room of the Dupain-Cheng bakery. After detransforming, Marinette had been quick to snatch both twins from the mansion before their father, Nathalie, and their bodyguard could fully come back to their senses. School had been cancelled for the rest of the day and a lot of businesses had been closed as well, including the bakery, though that had been for a different reason.

Now all of them sat in the decorated living room around two birthday cakes and talked about the events of the day.

“I’m sorry, dude. I don’t even remember what happened. One moment I was in the park, being angry at your dad, and the next thing I know I’m sitting on the Eiffel tower,” Nino said as he poked at his generously large piece of chocolate cake.

“It’s not your fault, Nino,” Adrien said.

“Exactly. It’s Hawkmoth’s fault. And technically Monsieur Agreste’s too for being an asshole,” Marinette added and then ducked under the reproving look her mother threw her. Right, they might agree that Monsieur Agreste wasn’t the nicest person—a strong understatement—but curse words were still forbidden in their household.

“Maybe being in a bubble for an hour and missing all his appointments has taught him a lesson at least,” Alya muttered which made Félix grin in return. Well, his version of a grin at least. “And I got amazing footage of Ladybug and Chat Noir in action!” Alya continued, this time squealing in glee.

“Glad to see that I could do a little bit of good after all,” Nino said. His grin was not as bright as it usually was, but it was still better than the absolutely devastated expression he had worn when she had dragged him to the bakery with the twins and Alya earlier.

“Now eat up, son. You know you’ll feel better afterwards,” Tom said with a smile and Nino complied. The result was a slightly brighter smile on his face after the first bite. Her father beamed at that.

“Let’s look at it this way,” Adrien then said. “If all of this wouldn’t have happened, then Marinette couldn’t have kidnapped us to bring us to our real birthday party. So, in a way your plan worked out after all.”

“And I’ll gladly kidnap you again if it’s necessary,” Marinette added without thinking and only registered what she had said when Alya threw her a suggestive grin and Félix poked her in the side. She poked him back. Adrien remained oblivious and just snickered.

“Just don’t let the police hear that,” he said, which drew a round of laughter from the table.

Marinette smiled when she lay in her bed that evening and thought back on the entire day. She had
not only managed to give Adrien and Félix a small but still great birthday party, but she had also
saved Paris for a second time. Chat Noir had even used Cataclysm while he was close to her, which
had been a first.

The both of them still held a lot of fears and insecurities, but she felt like they were slowly getting
somewhere. They already were heroes; they would just become even better ones in time.

“You did a very good job today, Marinette. And not just with the Akuma,” Tikki said as if reading
her thoughts.

“Thanks, Tikki. I think so too.”

“I’m proud of you,” the kwami said and gave her a kiss on the forehead. “And now go to sleep or
you’ll sleep through your alarm again.”

Marinette chuckled at how well Tikki had gotten to know her already in these past few weeks.
“Alright, alright. Goodnight Tikki,” she said as she turned off the light.

“Fair dreams, Marinette.”
Helpless

Chapter Summary

Félix wants a miraculous too ;A;

Chapter Notes

Last week you got Bubbler, this week you get Lady Wifi! ;D
It's interesting how different things play out as soon as you throw Félix and fae into the mix! c:< needless to say, I had a lot of fun writing this! ♡

Thanks Tempomental and Draxynn for beta-reading the chapter! ☆

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Laughter rang through the mansion.

“Don’t charm your father, kitten,” the black cat said, clear amusement dancing in her eyes as she groomed Adrien’s fur.

“But I want to play with him,” Adrien pouted.

“There is a time for everything, my little fluffball, and this isn’t it,” his mother replied. Sage words that held fairly little instruction on how to do it better the next time.

Her green eyes were old and wise, like they have always been. One could never know when smiles would reach those eyes and when they wouldn’t. Even if a smile would make her eyes sparkle, it was hard to tell if she was happy about a situation or if she was simply revelling in some malicious joy. She couldn’t lie, so she twisted her words, speaking with a silver tongue. They grew up learning to speak like she did.

“My little fluffballs,” she said, looking at them fondly and running her soft hands through their hair. “When did you become so big?”

The St John’s wort blended with her golden hair and made her look even more ethereal than she already was.

“Take care of each other until I come back, alright?”

Then she went out the door and took all the warmth with her.

Félix startled awake and needed a few seconds to realize that it had just been a dream. Well, it had
been real once upon a time, but that had been years ago.

It was hard to tell with his night vision if the sky outside was already starting to get brighter, but the distant birdsong was indication enough that it was early morning. Seeing how he probably wouldn’t fall asleep again for the hour that was left, he shuffled out of bed, careful not to wake Adrien.

Climbing out of a window and up to the roof was something he had learned how to do when he was five years old, so it was barely a challenge, even in his half-asleep state. The cool air of the early morning woke him up further and caused him to shiver a little. October was a strange and scary time when the weather couldn’t decide whether it wanted to be warm or cold. Samhain was also looming, but at least this year they didn’t get an invitation to the revel. Félix didn’t know if that was because no one had business with either of them this year or because of the agreement with Chloé. Either way, he wouldn’t go as far as to be grateful towards her for it. Not having to go to a sídhe again was a huge relief anyway.

Things had changed a lot since the previous year, one of them being the Miraculous. Even after an entire month of living with the kwami of destruction, it was still something Félix needed to get used to. And that did not even touch upon the Akuma attacks. Adrien had taken the one on their birthday quite personally, especially when his favourite music had been involved—it was too easy for fae to get lost in music, so it would have been a huge handicap for his brother if he hadn’t done anything.

Félix, meanwhile, had never felt so utterly helpless in his entire life. Well, there had been a few instances where he had felt helpless, namely on the previous Samhain or on the Midsummer when Adrien had met Marinette. This was another kind of helpless though. He had been forced to watch his brother and his best friend fight against his other friend who had been possessed by dark magic. He had been extremely close to a panic attack while watching Ladybug and Chat Noir fall out of the sky. And then he had been trapped in a bubble himself and even his claws hadn’t been sharp enough to burst it.

“Take care of each other until I come back, alright?”

The last words of his mother ghosted through his mind. How was he supposed to take care of his brother when they had become so very different? Adrien could use the powers of a literal god and Félix had…basically nothing. The little magic he could do wouldn’t help much in an actual fight. And then there was the problem of the Court’s opinion. Nothing definitive had been said yet, but he could tell that the fair folk were enraged by having magic exposed on such a large scale. Danu or not, they wouldn’t forgive this any time soon. Following the Court therefore meant not getting involved in Akuma fights, since while the public now knew of magic, they didn’t know about the fair folk yet.

Staying on the sidelines didn’t quite sit well with Félix though.

Félix did his best to pay attention to what Mlle Bustier said, though it was hard when he saw Marinette’s and his brother’s seats so obviously abandoned. They were out there fighting another Akuma and he was in class. What was he doing in class? He should go out there and…and what? Help them? He couldn’t help them! He clenched his jaw in irritation and instead opted to watch Alya and whatever she was doing instead of concentrating on class.

He had warmed up a little to Marinette’s new friend and appreciated her analytic side and
dedication. What he did not appreciate was that Alya quickly jumped to conclusions without much proof. A fatal flaw when she wanted to become a journalist. Maybe he should point it out to her sometime.

Félix narrowed his eyes when Alya started holding a picture of Ladybug with her face cut out to everyone in class, probably to see if the faces matched. He was aware that Alya’s blog was all about finding out Ladybug’s identity, but he had so far made it very clear to her what he thought about that. Or at least he thought he had. It was irresponsible and dangerous, even without adding the fair folk to the mix! Maybe he should try to appeal to her with some common sense. If that failed, he could always ask Adrien if it was alright to charm her. For Marinette’s and his sake of course. Yeah, that would definitely be a fun conversation to have.

“May I charm your new friend so that she is dissuaded from pursuing her passion of unmasking you and Marinette?”

He would very much prefer if that was a conversation they would never have to have. He just hoped common sense would win.

When lunch break came around, Félix walked down the stairs with Nino. They had just had a conversation about the proper ways of handling a dog when someone suddenly grabbed both of them by the arms. Félix was about to reprimand whoever had dared to touch him without his consent, but then noticed that it was just Alya. She received a displeased scowl from him but didn’t even seem to notice.

“Nino, Félix, I need your help!” She declared and didn’t give them a moment to protest before pulling them away. Félix was not pleased with this, since he had been on his way to the Dupain-Cheng bakery. Once the Akuma was defeated, his brother and Marinette would arrive there. Besides, he was hungry.

“So—” Nino began to ask as the three of them sat down on a bench by the Seine, but Alya quickly silenced him with a finger on his lips, as she tried to call someone on the phone. The mailbox revealed that said person was Marinette.

“Ugh, I hate when she goes AWOL. She’s not calling me back. Where is that girl?!” Alya ranted. Félix rolled his eyes. That was the reason why he was kept from lunch?! How ludicrous.

“Seriously, my man Adrien is the exact same way,” Nino said and then threw Félix a knowing grin. “Do you think the two snuck off together?”

Félix raised his eyebrows as high as physically possible. He was aware of what Nino was implying, but he did not want to start unnecessary and possibly damaging rumours.

“Possibly, but probably not for the reason you would like to hear. They’re too oblivious for that.”

“Yeah, true,” Nino sighed just when Alya’s phone beeped with a notification.

A news report showed that Ladybug and Chat Noir had defeated the villain. Félix only got a small glance at an awkwardly waving Ladybug with Chat Noir in the background as he talked to the victim before Alya turned off her phone and let out an excited gasp.

“I think I just found out who the real Ladybug is!”
Félix blanched.

Oh no.

He would have to do a lot of damage control and swear Alya to secrecy, maybe even charm her so she would forget—morals be damned. Worst case scenario, he had to curse her so she couldn’t communicate the identity of the heroes in any way and—

“Chloé,” Alya suddenly whispered, making Félix’s train of thought come to a screeching halt.

A moment of silence passed before Nino started laughing.

“Miss self-absorbed and ‘I’m gonna call daddy’ is supposed to be Ladybug? Are you nuts?”

Félix, after he was done facepalming, was tempted to throw in his own two cents because it would do Alya no good to get close to Chloé in order to prove her theory.

“I am not crazy,” Alya said, obviously ticked off, before Félix could even open his mouth. “And I’ll prove it to you.”

Before either of them could say anything, Alya stormed off. Félix winced. He was a creature of misfortune, and therefore, sometimes, he could feel disasters before they happened. This was one of those times.

The disaster Félix had felt unfolded itself in front of the twins as they entered the locker room the next morning. Somehow Alya had managed to rope Nino into her crazy scheme, so he was distracting Chloé while Alya not so sneakily took a picture of the inside of Chloé’s locker. Sabrina, bound to the Court princess as she was, saw it and immediately called Alya out.

“This isn’t gonna end well,” Adrien winced and Félix could only nod in agreement.

Alya ended up suspended and Félix couldn’t tell if that was for the best because it kept her away from Chloé, after all, or for the worst because it really didn’t make Alya happy. When all of them sat in class later and Marinette snuck in late, he watched as she tapped Adrien’s shoulder to ask where Alya was.

“She’s been suspended,” Adrien supplied quietly.

“What?” Marinette exclaimed and the sheer volume and pitch made Félix flatten his ears under the glamour.

Not even being scolded by the teacher stopped her from further inquiring though. This time it was Nino who answered.

“The short story: She got accused of breaking into Chloé’s locker. I mean, Ladybug’s locker.”

“What?” The shriek this time was even shriller. It was unsurprising that Marinette was sent to the principal’s office after that. He just hoped that she wouldn’t get suspended as well. Adrien seemed to have the same worries, as he threw a glance back at Félix. For the next couple of minutes, he could hear his brother nervously bouncing his leg under the table, until suddenly the projector lit
up by itself and a video started playing.

“I’m Lady Wifi, revealer of the truth!” the obvious Akuma said. “For our first exposé, our principal would like to share a little tidbit with you. So, Monsieur Damocles. Is it true that you wrongly suspended a student named Alya today?”

By Danu.

He should have known that this misfortune wouldn’t have stopped with Alya’s suspension. While there had been some Akumas since the incident with Nino on their birthday, Félix wasn’t sure how well Marinette would do with having to fight yet another one of her friends. And how would Adrien handle it? He couldn’t see his brother’s expression, but the body language pretty much screamed that he wanted to run and do something.

When Lady Wifi finished declaring her mission to unmask Ladybug—a very dangerous goal for an Akuma—Mlle Bustier immediately sent them home. The homework assignment she was yelling after them got swallowed up by the noise of general panic as everyone left the classroom in a hurry. Adrien was the first one out and Félix did his best to follow him. He would not lose sight of his brother this time.

The bathroom might not be the most creative hiding spot to transform, but it was empty and abandoned for the moment, which was all that counted.

“If Lady Wifi thinks that Chloé is Ladybug she’ll go straight to the hotel,” Adrien said just as Félix entered the bathroom. His brother jumped at the squeak of the door.

“Just me,” Félix said and gave Plagg a grave look.

“What do you think will happen when an Akuma threatens the daughter of the Court’s chief?”

Plagg snickered.

“You think the faeries can do something about it? They know as little as you do about who Hawkmoth is and if they’d find out, it would be one worry less for you, wouldn’t it?”

“Alright, let’s help Marinette. I don’t know what she’ll do since we have to fight Alya this time. Plagg, Claws Out!”

Félix watched his brother transform and had to swallow the tiny bit of jealousy.

“See you later,” Chat Noir said with a wink and then ran out the door.

Félix stayed behind for a few seconds before uttering a curse and shifting to his cat form. He bounded after his brother and up a rooftop, only to see him long gone already.

“Smelt it,” he hissed and started walking into the direction of the Bourgeois hotel. Since school had just let out, Chloé was probably still on her way home, which meant that he wasn’t in a hurry.

If the Akuma was really targeting her, then he only hoped that Ladybug and Chat Noir would wrap this up before sunset. And if not, he prayed that his brother was smart enough to keep Ladybug away from any fair folk. Because if Mélusine’s and his fears were true, then most of the Court would crawl out of hiding during an Akuma attack at night.

“Waiting for the chaos to unfold, Félix?”
He startled so bad that he almost fell off the roof. When he whirled around, he was glaring at a very unapologetic Alix. He had tried to avoid her and also Juleka for the most part so far, but he should have guessed that a confrontation would happen sooner or later. More than once he had thought of how to start such a conversation civilly and with as much finesse as possible. The only thing he managed to say though was: “Why are you on a roof?”

It was, frankly, a stupid question. He had a pretty good guess why she was on a roof, so the better question would have been how she had gotten on one. And while he was curious, he was still not brave enough to ask her what kind of fair one she was or even what Court she belonged to.

Alix shrugged. “Why not?”

Félix narrowed his eyes. “Are you following me?”

“Chill! I’m just checking out what’s up with Alya going crazy. Since she’s after Chloé, this is bound to be fun.”

He wasn’t sure if ‘fun’ was the word he would have used to describe the situation.

“That’s why you’re here too, right?” Alix continued with a grin and walked over to him. Félix tensed.

“I am simply keeping an eye out for fair folk, that’s all. An Akuma attack is bound to tempt some of them out of hiding and I don’t appreciate additional trouble.”

“An Unseelie as the fun police? That’s new,” Alix snorted, sat down on the roof next to Félix and let her legs dangle over the edge.

Félix kept quiet. He wanted to keep looking for his brother, but he couldn’t do that with Alix around.

*Looks like I need to humour her for a bit.*

“You’re quite stuffy for a fair one,” she said.

*Rude.*

“That might be so. Why are you interested in a conversation then?”

Alix shrugged again. “Just felt like talking to another fair one in the class about what’s going on and you’re the only approachable one.”

“I beg your pardon?” Since when was *he* the most approachable one?! “You should have tried talking to my brother then,” Félix said, even though he didn’t like the thought of a fair one talking to his brother.

“Nah, he was busy playing human. Didn’t want to mess up his act. Guess I don’t need to explain why Chloé and Sabrina are a clear out, and Juleka doesn’t have a good grip on this time period yet since she stayed in Tir na nÓg for a while. That leaves you.”

“Should I consider myself honoured now?”

Alix snorted. “Sarcasm. That’s new.”

“Let me guess: You have not spent much time in human company so far,” Félix said and flicked his tail. No sarcasm meant the inability to lie. This just proved his hunch that she was a real fair one
and not a halfling like him. Then again, that he knew three other halflings, one of them his brother, was extraordinary enough.

“Bingo. My dad is an archaeologist, though he’s not interested in finding things from previous human civilizations. It’s fun for him to hide things somewhere and then come back to that place hundreds of years later to dig it back out. He knows where lots of ancient sites were, so he always discovers new grounds. He’s currently working as an historian at the Louvre, which gives us a little break from traveling around the globe. How about you?”

“Me?”

“Yeah, what’s your story?”

Félix rolled his eyes. “Nothing unusual. My father is human and my mother was a Cat Sidhe. She left on Midwinter and never came back. End of story.”

“My mum left too,” Alix said with dangling legs and looked at the sky. “Or rather, we left and she stayed. She didn’t want to leave Scotland while dad wanted to travel. Only my older brother and I went with him while the rest of my siblings stayed with mum.”

“How long ago…” Félix started but then trailed off. He shouldn’t ask such personal questions, but the whispers of the universe combined with his natural curiosity brought out the worst in him.

Alix grinned. “Thirty years.”

His poker face must have failed him because she started laughing.

“You should see your face,” she snickered. “I don’t look that old yet, huh? But when you’re immortal it doesn’t really matter how long you drag out your youth. I could stay like this for hundreds of years if I wanted to. The eternal 15-year-old.”

Finally, Félix found his voice again. “Why are you going to school then?”

“Because I haven’t yet. I was always at archaeological sites or searching for the nearest lochs. Being this close to humans is exciting!”

“Wait, lochs? Are you a Fuath?”

Fuath—water spirits, inhabiting the sea, rivers, fresh water, or sea lochs—were the first thing that came to mind when he thought of the fair folk, Scotland and lochs. He just hoped that he was right and hadn’t accidentally insulted her.

“Yes, my mum’s a Beithir.”

Félix immediately jumped up and took a few cautious steps back. A growl threatened to escape him but he held it back.

His mother had told him stories of Beithirs. Huge venomous snakes that were faster than any human. If they bit someone, the person had to reach the nearest waters before the Beithir did, otherwise the poison would kill them. Those snakes were creatures that were built to kill and now one sat in the midst of their class.

“Woah, prejudiced much?” Alix said and then patted the roof next to her. “Come on, sit back down. I won’t bite you.”
“How about other people? Would you bite them?” Félix asked suspiciously.

Alix blinked and then tilted her head. “I can’t promise you that I won’t poison people that threaten me or those that really deserve it. But I’m Seelie and don’t care much about killing. Pranks? Yeah, sure. But killing is more the Unseelie Court’s specialty, isn’t it?”

“A Beithir can’t be a Seelie,” Félix argued. They were as inevitably Unseelie as Cat Sidhe were, so if he couldn’t change Courts, then neither could they.

“Yeah, but Aos Sidhe can be. My dad is an Aos Sidhe from the Seelie Court, so that also counts for me. Looks like both of us are half royalty then, huh?”

“Lucky,” Félix muttered.

“That’s what it means, yes. Also ‘happy’ and ‘blessed’,” Alix said, apparently misunderstanding what he had meant to say. It was just rubbing salt into the wound, though.

That’s right, the Seelie were the blessed, happy and lucky ones while he was an Unseelie and therefore an unholy abomination of misfortune and unhappiness, loathed by reality itself.

The sound of an incoming message prompted Alix to get out her phone and groan in annoyance.

“And that’s my cue to leave. Dad just got wind of the Akuma attack and he doesn’t want me to get in trouble with your Court. Was nice talking to you Félix, let’s do this again sometime.”

She threw him a grin as she stood up and then walked back to the fire escape she had probably also used to climb up.

What an unusual encounter that had been.

“I’ve been meaning to ask you a question for some time now,” Félix said. He had eventually found his brother and, since nothing had happened for hours, the two of them were waiting on a roof close to Le Grand Paris hotel. Sooner or later, the Akuma, Ladybug, or both would show up. Chat Noir had said that the two of them had met up earlier, but since nothing had happened for over an hour, she had said that she needed to go home for a bit to check on her family. Considering that Alya was potentially angry at Marinette as well for ‘going AWOL all the time’, as she put it, this had probably been a good idea.

“Shoot,” Chat Noir said while leaning with his back against a chimney and tapping around on his baton.

“How can you stand wearing a bell?”

“It’s silent,” Chat Noir said and poked said bell to demonstrate. It didn’t make a noise.

“Now that this mystery has been solved—” Félix said and jumped on his brother’s shoulder to be able to see better, “—how is the spoiled brat doing?”

They had figured out that the zoom of the video feature could work like binoculars, which was how they kept an eye on Chloé. So far, nothing particularly interesting had happened, especially not since Chloé had left her room half an hour ago.

His brother suddenly clapped a hand over his mouth and started shaking from barely contained
laughter. Apparently, something had happened now. When Félix looked at the baton’s display, he had to stifle laughter too.

Chloé was in her room again, though this time she wore a ladybug cosplay and danced around with a yo-yo.

“Looks like someone has an admirer,” Chat Noir snickered at the same moment as Félix heard the whirr of Ladybug’s yo-yo. He quickly jumped off his brother’s shoulder and hid behind a chimney. And not a second too soon, as the heroine presently landed next to Chat Noir.

While the two of them talked, Félix threw a worried glance at the sky. The fair folk were twilight creatures, beings of dawn and dusk, of not quite and almost. They would no doubt crawl out of hiding at this time of day.

With Chloé in the hotel, there would no doubt be others of the folk too. Real fair folk that didn’t give second chances and laughed about despair. Magical protection from a goddess or not, he really didn’t like the thought of Marinette going in there in the middle of a crisis where Chloé was involved.

Therefore, when Ladybug and Chat Noir spotted the Akuma, Félix followed them.

Félix might have said that he was done with being just a helpless bystander, but participating in a fight without being seen by the Akuma, Ladybug, or the various cameras Lady Wifi had set up proved to be a challenge. Luckily, magic could be invisible, so he just had to wait for the right moment to use one of the spells Plagg had taught him. A small inconvenience, like making the Akuma trip, could be enough to turn the tide. With all the moving around the three of them did, there was no guarantee that his magic would hit the intended target though, so he practiced patience while following them around as invisible as he could. Though following them involved a lot of running up and down stairs.

He started to genuinely panic when Ladybug got locked in the kitchen. Since Lady Wifi was in the kitchen as well and the building was evacuated, Félix allowed himself to swear.

“Iron bells!” He hissed. “Can you Cataclysm the door?”

Chat Noir meanwhile concentrated on something on his baton.

“Not if I don’t have to,” he muttered and then grinned. “The service elevator. Perfect!”

Félix ran after his brother when he took off to the hallway and jumped into the service elevator with him at the last second.

“This would be much less crowded if I could shift right now,” Chat Noir grumbled while Félix wiggled in the small room behind him. As much as he wanted to make sure to not be left behind again, he also didn’t want to be seen first thing when the service elevator arrived.

“Concentrate!” Félix hissed. “You’ll probably get attacked as soon as you get out of this thing.”

“I’m more worried about Ma—”

Félix bit his brother’s tail, turning what he wanted to say into a hiss.
“Are you crazy? Don’t say her name while transformed, no matter how secluded you think you are!” Félix scolded.

They didn’t have time to discuss the topic further because at that moment, the service elevator arrived. Félix did his best to be invisible in the furthest corner while his brother stepped out. Through a reflection on a pot he could see that Ladybug had been pinned to the wall with two lock symbols. The sight made his fur stand on end. It seemed like they had arrived just in time.

When Lady Wifi looked away, Félix took his chance to jump out of the service elevator and hide. He sneaked over to where Ladybug was pinned while Chat Noir started to fight with the Akuma. Félix frowned at the camera icon while remaining out of its range. He might be able to destroy the lock signs—their spell matrix seemed rather simple—but he would be filmed and broadcasted to all of Paris while doing so, which meant it wasn’t an option.

Félix snapped his head around when his brother let out a yelp and was pushed into the freezer. He heard muffled cursing from within but didn’t pay it much mind. His brother could take care of himself but Ladybug was still pinned to a wall and now without any help.

No, that wasn’t true. He was there to help. All he needed to do was to go back to plan A, though it would probably take more than an inconvenience for it to work. His mind went to the only other thing.

“How about curses? Do they work on Akumas?” Félix asked which earned him a scowl from Adrien.

“Yes, but they’ll stay on the person even after the Akuma is purified. I wouldn’t recommend it because to let them work at all you’ll have to make them especially strong. If you want to lift them afterwards it’ll require direct contact and a loudly spoken counter-spell, so that could become problematic,” Plagg said in between bites of Camembert.

“Félix, we talked about this: No cursing anyone,” Adrien said surprisingly sternly.

Félix would get an earful from his brother later, but depending on what he’d curse Lady Wifi—no, Alya—with, it could even become beneficial. Some curses might be pretty bad, but simply bothersome ones were barely worth a mention.

He snuck closer and touched the Akuma’s leg with a paw. Both her and Ladybug were too preoccupied to notice him and the touch was too faint to gather attention. It was enough though.

*Fail to unmask Ladybug, no matter how hard you try.*

The effect was immediate as misfortune took its course. Taking Ladybug’s earrings would have meant to unmask her, so the universe didn’t allow it. When Lady Wifi held up her phone, no doubt for a similar purpose, the phone charm caught in her hair, making her yank at it in frustration. The phone was dropped in the attempt to free her hair from it and Félix immediately darted over to the possessed device.

Paws were not the best to work touchscreens, but this was a magic phone and Félix had practice. Cancelling out the pause symbols and the camera were therefore an easy feat for him. Ladybug was freed and he back in hiding before Ladybug or Lady Wifi—who had coincidentally hit her head when bending down—could notice him. He slid the phone over the ground to Ladybug and prayed.
to whichever god might be merciful to him that the embodiment of good luck would continue to be oblivious to his presence. Even though speaking curses gave him good luck—it was no doubt the only reason why he hadn’t been spotted yet—he didn’t want to test out how far said luck would go when put against the powers of Danu.

Deciding it would be best to let Ladybug handle the rest of it, he snuck below serving wagons and kitchen counters to get to the freezer. He could hear swearing from inside and then the door fell apart after a muttered “Cataclysm”. Chat Noir immediately jumped out just in time to see Ladybug break the phone and purify the Akuma. Then she ran over to Chat Noir and hugged him.

“You’re alright!” She said and Félix had to grin as he saw his brother’s cheeks darken from more than just the cold.

“Takes more than some cold to defeat this cat! What about you? How did you manage to free yourself?” Chat Noir looked her over worriedly, as if she had been the one that had been thrown into a freezer.

“I’m okay. Lady Wifi dropped her phone and that must have cancelled the locks.”

“Lucky,” Chat Noir said with a wink that made Ladybug roll her eyes. Then his ring beeped, making her eyes dart to the destroyed door.

“I don’t have a…you know…to fix this,” she suddenly said in a panic. “Tikki said I should only use my power when I really need it but I didn’t need it this time and I already purified the Akuma and—”

“My lady, breathe,” Chat Noir said. “If a Lucky Charm is created by using magic from your yo-yo, and throwing a Lucky Charm in the air activates the cure, then logically throwing your yo-yo in the air and calling for the cure should work too. It’s the same magic after all.”

It was not exactly logical, since there was nothing logical about magic, but the explanation seemed to at least calm Ladybug down. Félix guessed that Plagg had just given his brother instructions to say that.

While she threw her yo-yo into the air to fix the freezer door and everything else that had been damaged in the fight, Félix fixed his attention on Alya. The Ladyblogger had been mourning her destroyed phone but switched her attention to the conversation between the two superheroes. Félix narrowed his eyes at her. She was cursed now, but that only meant that she would never find out Ladybug’s civilian identity. That was a good thing, since it would keep both her and Marinette safe. Well, relatively safe. But a curse was a curse and he couldn’t help but be nervous about possible side effects. He’d have to keep an eye on her.

“You won’t ever get involved in an Akuma fight again!” Adrien yelled, seething to the brim with anger. Félix actually cowered at this, since it was rare to see his brother this angry. His defiant and rational side won out though.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but you were locked in a freezer and the Akuma was about to take Ladybug’s earrings while having a camera pointed at her. Should I have just done nothing? Besides, what took you so long? You could have used Cataclysm immediately.”

At this, Adrien suddenly looked sheepish.
“I lost the ring,” he muttered but then shook his head and fixed a glare on Félix again. “But you still could have done something else! Why did you have to curse her?! I thought we talked about this!”

Félix took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I did not have many options.”

“You had other options though!”

“Adrien, will you stop complaining for a moment about what-ifs and listen?!”

His brother shut up but didn’t stop glaring.

“Alright,” Félix said, “I admit I messed up a little—”

“A little?!”

“—but anyways, this outcome is favourable to alternative options. The curse prevents Alya from unmasking Ladybug, no matter what she does, so that keeps Marinette safe.”

Adrien’s glare softened to a frown. “Strong curses have side effects.”

“Meh, so she’ll trip more often and maybe fail a test. Big deal,” Plagg said while hovering nearby. He was surprisingly unfazed about the whole ordeal.

“But that’s not fair, she—” Adrien started, but Plagg didn’t let him finish.

“Kid, I’m not saying I’m on your brother’s side or that I agree that there wasn’t a better way to handle the situation. But now you won’t have to worry that your reporter friend will unmask Pigtails eventually. Worrying if she’ll hurt her ankle while tripping is much better than having to worry that the Court will rip your girlfriend apart if her identity is compromised.”

Adrien visibly paled.

“And you,” Plagg continued and now turned towards Félix. “You’re messing with magic way beyond you. Akumas are unpredictable and we never know if your magic might even help against them. You were lucky this time, especially considering you’re a Cat Sidhe, but you won’t always be on the winning end. One day an Akuma might get you and that would make the entire situation a lot worse.

“If you want to help so badly, then do what your brother can’t actively do and keep the fair folk away. If you need to hover close to fights, then at least do that much. It wouldn’t do us any good if Ladybug would spot them and think they’re another Akuma.”

Now Félix paled too. Plagg was right. They had been in Le Grand Paris hotel for Danu’s sake! Encountering fae had been his primary worry but it had shifted once he’d seen Marinette in danger. Sure, his brother had not been able to help at that moment, but that didn’t mean that Félix was allowed to step in and act.

Félix wasn’t helpless; the fight had proven it to him. He didn’t belong on the sidelines either. No, his battle lay elsewhere. He had just not been able to see it before. The fair folk liked to avoid Cat Sidhe because of their bad luck. Finally, he would be able to use this to his advantage.

Chapter End Notes
So...Félix cursed Alya. And I always thought he was a clever kitten! Let's see to which disaster this will lead ;w;

PS: someone give the grumpy kitten his coffee. he deserved it!
The Art of Magic

Chapter Summary

Samhain again! c:<

Chapter Notes

Anxiety is kicking my butt right now and I'm only two chapters ahead (currently writing on chapter 42). Considering that I'm gonna go on vacation next week, this is certainly a reason to worry! Or so my brain thinks. I'm guaranteed to have WiFi where I'll go so I'm definitely gonna update and let's see how much writing I'll get done while stuck in the middle of the Alps with my sister (whose birthday is today by the way! Can't believe she's 19 already! 🎂).

Definitions:

*Samhain* [sow-en] = November 1st but is celebrated from sunset of October 31st to sunrise of November 2nd (days on the Celtic calendar start at sunset)

*liminality* = (literally, “shadowy”) the thinness of the border/veil between "our world" and the Otherworld (Faerie; Tír na nÓg)

*lunantishee* = The fairy of the blackthorn tree, one of the trees most beloved of the fair folk. The lunantishee is especially active on the feasts that begin summer and winter, respectively, Lughnasadh and Samhain

Adrien knew better than anyone else that Misfortune and Destruction didn’t need to be as bad as they were made out to be. It therefore came as no surprise that the spells Plagg taught Félix and him were actually quite helpful. Then again, not all of Plagg’s magic was destructive. There was a lot of neutral ground he could cover, starting with glamours. (He didn’t stop boasting about how great his glamours worked, so good that even cameras couldn’t detect him.)

That, however, didn’t mean that all of the spells they learned worked perfectly well when they tried them out.

Plagg had sworn that onyx was a great fit for Cat Sidhe and that they should therefore switch to them as holder stones for the glamour spell. Since Félix was still a little sceptical about the idea—apparently, he had studied gemstones recently and therefore had his doubts—Adrien was the one to try it out first. If only he had listened to his brother instead of the deity of destruction.

“It doesn’t work,” Adrien said disappointed and threw the onyx stone at Plagg. To his utter horror, that didn’t dissolve the glamour at all. A glamour that worked perfectly except for one tiny detail: His hair was black.

“Why is it still active even though he doesn’t carry the stone on him anymore?” Félix asked as if he had read his mind. “You said it would work, Plagg.”
“I said that onyx is compatible. The glamour will hold for twenty-four hours even when you lose the stone. Pretty neat, huh?”

“Plagg! My hair is black!” Adrien screeched and frantically pointed at his head. “I can’t go to school like this!”

Plagg didn’t seem troubled. “Don’t humans dye their hair all the time?”

And that was how Adrien had to awkwardly explain to his father the next evening why the tabloids were talking about him dyeing his hair. As expected, the explanation of testing out different glamours was met with a deep scowl and a few extra photoshoots on his schedule.

“You know, if you want people to stop crowding you, then you could just use a spell to redirect their attention,” Adrien heard Plagg say one evening after Félix had complained about a group of excited girls in the library that had been desperate to get autographs and hold a conversation.

“Yes, I know that spell,” Félix simply replied.

“I could teach you a better one.”

“Fé,” Adrien said in a warning tone, “please tell me you didn’t try out that deviation spell.”

“Just a simple one,” his brother admitted with a wince when he realised that it apparently wasn’t as simple as he had thought to be. Marinette had just walked past them without any sign that she saw them at all. She wasn’t the only one either. No one in their class seemed to realize that they were there. Well, no human at least.

“Simple?” Adrien asked incredulously. “Simple has the effect of being easily overlooked. We are practically invisible!”

A snicker from their right drew their attention. “Unlucky day?” Alix asked.

Because no one that could find it strange noticed them anyway, Adrien hissed. That only seemed to amuse the Seelie fae further.

For the entire day, they stubbornly stayed in school even though their presence wasn’t acknowledged once and they were marked absent for every single class.

Adrien should have learned from the black hair incident when it came to casting spells on a whim. Well, apparently, he hadn’t.

“This time you can’t blame Plagg. You brought this upon yourself,” Félix said which was answered with a glare. Or at least as well as one could glare while in the middle of a coughing fit.

“Bi—cough—bite iron!” He got out just before he started coughing again and spit out a feather. It was like he had caught the fictional Hanahaki disease, just with feathers instead of flowers. And hopefully without the part where he died because his true love wouldn’t return his feelings. After
all, this was just a stupid curse.

“Kid, I don’t think you’re quite ready for curse-breaking yet,” Plagg pointed out.

You don’t say!

He tried to throw Plagg a look that conveyed just that.

“Can you fix this?” Félix meanwhile asked Plagg.

“Sure, but let’s wait a little. I wanna see if he spits out a peacock feather eventually.”

“Plagg!” Adrien yelled before coughing again. Trying to break his allergy-like curse, because of how often it annoyed him lately, had been a big mistake. He was a fifteen-year-old halfling and he has had that curse for almost ten years now. No wonder he couldn’t break it. He hadn’t expected to make it worse though!

Lots of the spells Plagg taught them did work out exactly like they should have. And even the ones that initially didn’t were mastered in time. Like how they each had eventually found a gemstone to cast their glamour spells on that cooperated without any visible side effects. So, after about a week without anything going wrong, Adrien was quite optimistic that they were getting the hang of more advanced magic.

That was, until a perfectly working spell misfired. Félix had intended to make Chloé trip—she had been cruel to Marinette again—but his aim was off so that he hit Mlle Mendeleiev instead. And unfortunately, she did not only trip, but also scattered a stack of class tests in the process. The spectacle had been hard not to notice so Chloé had immediately turned her attention to them with a raised eyebrow. Adrien winced, as he hoped that this attempted prank wouldn’t prompt any retaliation.

For the first week of Toussaint break, Félix and Adrien had photoshoots scheduled back to back. Not to mention also traveling to all sorts of locations and shooting clips for the short commercial that was supposed to air. Adrien had first been nervous about being outside of Paris for a few days in case of an Akuma attack but luckily nothing had happened.

Finally, they had an afternoon to themselves and decided to spend it with their friends. Being back in Paris was comforting. The magic in the air was unique and felt like home to Adrien. Ruled by an Unseelie Court or not, he loved the city. But as it was his birthright, luck didn’t seem to be on his side on that day.

With the increasing pull of the Otherworld, he really had better things to do than be pursued by starstruck fangirls. He just wanted to eat ice cream with his brother and his friends, but it only took two minutes until they were mobbed and had to flee—before they could even order! For situations like these, silent spells were practical, but only when cast correctly. Adrien had honestly intended for the attention to be moved to a random person of the mob of fans, but instead it hit his brother. His brother, who quickly got separated from the group as the fans started chasing him with renewed vigour.

“Why are they running after Félix all of a sudden?” Alya asked. “I thought you were the one in the
Adrien winced. “Who knows…”

“Don’t worry, I’ll save him. You dudes better get out of here before those crazies change their mind,” Nino said. The last they saw of him was how he bravely threw himself into the mass of fangirls and tried to fight his way to the front.

“Let’s hide in the bakery. We probably have some ice cream in the freezer,” Marinette suggested and then dragged Adrien and Alya with her.

“Sorry for ruining the day,” Adrien muttered, knowing he’d have hell to pay for this accidental stunt later.

“That wasn’t your fault!” Marinette insisted vehemently and only then did he notice that she still hadn’t let go of his hand. Granted, she still held Alya’s hand too as she dragged both of them into the direction of the bakery, but he couldn’t help the warmth that shot into his face.

Okay, maybe the day isn’t entirely bad.

He quickly looked away once he caught Alya’s knowing smirk though.

In the evening, they saw Félix and Nino again as they stumbled into the bakery in a state of disarray that was extreme for Nino’s standards and the end of the world for Félix’s. And his brother was furious.

Adrien sat on the roof of the mansion and took a deep breath. Samhain was tomorrow and he could already smell the thick magic of the thinning veil in the air. Félix had not been doing well these past few days, as the approaching day gave him flashbacks of what had happened the year prior. He had done all he could when it came to comforting his brother, being there for him and grounding him. After hours of that, he had finally fallen asleep.

Now it was Adrien who couldn’t sleep. He had protected Marinette that past Samhain by being there for her and she had in return been there for him. She had Tikki this time, who would no doubt be much better at keeping her safe.

He sighed in bliss as a sweet melody silently drifted over to him on the wind and he allowed himself to listen to it like a lullaby for a few seconds before tearing away.

“I hate Samhain,” he cursed silently.

“You hate sewing?” A new voice suddenly piped up and Adrien turned around to see Plagg float up behind him with a piece of Camembert. “Isn’t your girlfriend a seamstress?”

“Sow-en,” Adrien repeated, putting emphasis on the syllables. “You know, that dreaded festival on November 1st? And Marinette isn’t my girlfriend, so stop calling her that!”

Plagg snickered and sat down on the roof next to Adrien. “I know. I’m just messing with you, kid.”

The Cat Sidhe sighed and licked his paw to groom his whiskers. It felt like all the magic in the air
was catching in them like leaves in a stream and he didn’t like it.

“It’s really getting to you, huh?” Plagg suddenly asked and Adrien paused mid-lick. He had to think about the question for a few seconds before he could answer.

“It feels like the universe is continuously trying to sing the most beautiful lullabies and they just get more beautiful and more persistent the thinner the veil gets. Resisting is very difficult sometimes. I’m gonna go ahead and guess that you don’t have this problem.”

Plagg shrugged. “I’m immune to Faerie’s magic since I don’t belong to Tír na nÓg like you do. I can hear the songs but they’re not pulling me anywhere.”

Silence descended on them then. Well, relative silence since the universe was still performing its silent and eerie concert.

Adrien finished grooming his whiskers and noted with displeasure that it hadn’t helped at all. Maybe Plagg knew a spell to help with it. He was about to ask him for one, when his kwami spoke up again, the cheese long devoured.

“You’re both doing pretty well with those spells I taught you by the way. Even the occasional blunders aren’t so bad.”

Adrien perked his ears at that. It was rare that he got direct praise from Plagg.

“May I say ‘thank you’?”

Plagg threw him an incredulous look. “Of course, you can say ‘thank you’! I’m not as arrogant as your folk and think I owe you a favour for it. Or was it the other way around?”

“It’s both, depending on who you ask.”

Plagg rolled his eyes. “Of course, it is. Your folk is weird, kid.”

Adrien winced, not liking to be thrown together with the rest of the fae, though it couldn’t be helped.

There was a snort from his left. “This whole thing is quite ironic.”

“How so?” Adrien asked, equally parts curious and confused.

“You know, kid, I didn’t always have the best holders. The Butterfly Miraculous isn’t the first to ever be misused, after all, and I might just hold the record. Not that I’m counting. Guess that just comes with the Miraculous of Destruction.”

Adrien rubbed his head against his kwami with a silent purr for comfort and tried to ignore the cheese stench. Plagg, not being the affectionate type, just batted him away though.

“That explains why you didn’t like me much at first. When humans already let you down then there’s not much to expect from a Cat Sidhe,” Adrien said as he straightened up again and flattened his ears. He had to think of Plagg’s first reaction to him and also Tikki’s first reaction. Come to think of it, Marinette had also not had the best first—second?—impression of him when he had first introduced himself to her. Who knows what Nino’s reaction would have been if Marinette hadn’t told him about him in the first place? And then there had been the misunderstanding with Alya. Maybe it was just in his nature to be hated at first sight by the people who really mattered.
Plagg nudged him. “You didn’t turn out to be so bad,” he said and then gave a wry chuckle. “Though that’s exactly the ironic part, since it’s because of one of those bad past holders of mine that Cat Sidhe exist at all.”

Adrien froze.

“Remember how I said that I was responsible for Cat Sidhe? Well, there’s a story to it.”

“Can you tell me? Please?” He was anxious as the origins of a creature of misfortune couldn’t be good. Especially not if it involved someone who had misused the Miraculous of Destruction.

“Guess there’s no harm in telling you,” Plagg said and looked out to the Parisian skyline.

“It wasn’t long after the faeries came into existence, only about one or two hundred years later. There was a war and my chosen was killed. The one who killed him took my ring and misused it to win the war. He killed many people.

“There is a way for a kwami to get rid of a Miraculous user though, which is to make the Miraculous unusable for them. And I don’t mean cutting off fingers to not be able to wear my ring, or anything ridiculous like that.”

Adrien swallowed. “It’s the magic you told me about, right? The one that gets transferred to a human when they’re transformed for too long after using their power?”

Plagg nodded. “That is one way, even though it’s slow. The more magic there is in a person, the less human they are and the less a Miraculous works for them. So, in order to abruptly get rid of someone who misuses my Miraculous, I give them what they most desire: power. In turn they’ll have to give up my ring. They’re usually too blinded by the prospect of magic to ask questions.”

Adrien frowned. “But that much magic would transform them into something inhuman. Human bodies can’t take that much magic.”

“Exactly. And since it’s my magic they’ll get, the magic chooses the form it’s most familiar with: a black cat. I had no regrets when he yelled at me that I tricked him and called me a faerie. He fully deserved what he got after all. He was chased out of his village by the people that had once adored him. They thought he was a faerie and I guess that’s what he became.

“When I was in Ireland again a century later, there suddenly were a lot of black faerie cats. Bastard must have mated with the fair folk.”

Adrien threw Plagg a small grin.

“You’re right, that really makes our situation very ironic. You made him a cat to be rid of him and now a descendant of him is your chosen.”

“Kid, do me a favour and don’t associate yourself with your origins. You don’t choose what you’re born as and from what I’ve seen so far, you would have been a darn good human if you’d have been born as one.”

Plagg gave his paw a pat. “You’re doing great, Adrien.”

His name! Plagg had said his name! So far it had always been “kid” or “kitten”, but he couldn’t recall that the kwami had ever called him by name. That must be a good sign.

“Thanks, Plagg,” Adrien said and couldn’t keep back a content purr.
It was raining and it didn’t look like it was about to stop any time soon. Thick raindrops splashed against the windows and trailed down in tiny rivers. It was comforting to watch, but comfort could only go so far in Chloé’s room. Mental comfort that was, because it in no way lacked in physical comfort at all. Sofas, chairs and Chloé’s bed all had fluffy pillows placed on them.

The hotel staff had even carried in an additional double bed for Adrien and Félix and placed it at the other end of the room. There were also dozens of rose bouquets in the room. Adrien couldn’t tell if their scent was meant for grounding, or if they were just present because roses were Chloé’s favourite flowers.

The sun hadn’t even set yet, but the pull from Faerie got more obvious by every passing hour. He could see how Félix and Sabrina grew marginally more restless the closer it got to sunset. Chloé, on the other hand, was applying nail polish seemingly without a care in the world. The alcoholic smell of the paints made Adrien wrinkle his nose in distaste, but he didn’t want to say anything. This was Chloé’s room, after all, and if she wanted to paint her nails then she could very well do so.

“Can you stop prowling around like a feral cat already? You’re making me nervous,” she suddenly sneered at Félix with a glare.

“We’re all a little on edge here, Chloé,” Adrien said before his brother had the opportunity to throw various faerie profanities at her.

“How about some chocolate?” Sabrina piped up with a nervous smile and picked up the tray with pralines from the coffee table. Adrien was marginally grateful for her presence, since that brought the number of people who were not out for conflict up to two.

Chloé sighed in annoyance. “Later! It’s there to help with this annoying liminality,” she said and then gave Sabrina a pointed look. The redhead winced and sat the tray back down, but not before Adrien had snatched a piece. Chloé might not want to eat sweets now with her still wet nails, but that didn’t mean that he had to wait. Besides, the liminality she mentioned—the thinness of the veil between reality and the Otherworld—was already getting on his nerves.

“H-how about talking about the losses of the year?” Sabrina suggested next, while shifting from foot to foot nervously.

“I don’t see how a Samhain ritual is supposed to help with distracting us,” Félix huffed and let himself fall on a chair with a frown. Adrien didn’t blame him from being snappy and a little rude. After all, it hid all the anxiety and utter terror his brother felt ever since the day began.

“Sorry Sabrina, Félix doesn’t mean it like that. It’s just that—” Adrien started, but Chloé interrupted him.

“So, you’re avoiding it then?”

The question, voiced in a serious tone that had become almost unnatural to Chloé, was not directed at him.

“Not your business,” Félix hissed from behind gritted teeth. It would have probably been a snarl if an especially sweet song wouldn’t have drifted in from outside at that moment. An unnatural and highly unwelcome calm overcame them and Adrien shook his head as if that could disperse the otherworldly voices.
“You’re right,” Chloé said after about a minute. “It’s not my business, but that doesn’t mean I can’t meddle.”

“Chloé”, Adrien said in a warning tone. The last thing they needed now was for Félix to viciously use Chloé as a scratching pole. Even though that would be a sufficient distraction.

“Shush, Adrikins,” she said with a dismissive wave in his direction. “You’ve never been in a sídhé so stay out of this.”

He blinked as his song-muddled brain slowly drew a horrifying conclusion out of that statement. His brother was faster in voicing it.

“You’ve been in a sídhé before?”

Chloé nodded and even set her nail polish aside. Like this, without a cruel snarl or an egocentric haughtiness on her face, she almost looked like the Chloé he had once known. The one he had been good friends with.

“I learned a lot from it. Namely that humans are not worth it. They’re incredibly weak and won’t ever measure up to us. Trying to indulge them, like you and Adrien do right now, is a waste of time. They’ll be dead in a few decades anyway. Better end that nonsense before you become too attached.”

And there she was again, the haughty Chloé who had transformed into the ideal picture of an Unseelie fae over the last couple of years. Adrien frowned at her, though that did nothing.

“Just because you’ve never tried having human friends before doesn’t mean you can give us shit about it,” he heard himself say and internally cursed himself for being rude. This wouldn’t do. “I mean—”, he tried to correct himself, but Chloé once again didn’t let him finish.

“You meant exactly what you said,” she stated, the gaze of her blue eyes cold. “And I was only giving you advice so that you don’t come to me whining afterwards.”

“I wouldn’t have anyway,” Adrien replied and tried to sound equally icy.

If the entirety of Samhain was going to be like this, then it would be a very long night and following day.

“I heard there’s a lunantishee in the hotel right now. Maybe she expected a feast or something, which is ridiculous since mother is at a revel in a sídhé and it’s not like I am going to provide anything.”

Several hours later they had all settled for a truce. No talking about human friends or faerie mannerisms…which frankly didn’t leave much to be discussed.

“Are there even any blackthorn trees in Paris?” Adrien asked to which his brother just gave a shrug and Chloé a disinterested snort.

“There must be, right? Lunantishee live in them after all,” Sabrina said meekly.

“As long as she doesn’t bother us, I’m fine with it. I’m sure our chefs can prepare food for her if she orders something,” Chloé said and flipped the page of her fashion magazine.
“Maybe she’s trying to wish us a happy season,” Félix said with an eye roll.

“Woohoo for winter,” Adrien said sarcastically and let himself fall back on the sofa with a bored sigh. “Can’t we talk about anything else?”

“Like what?” Chloé snipped.

“Oh, how about we talk about Ladybug and Chat Noir!” Sabrina enthusiastically piped up which made Adrien sit up abruptly. He could feel Plagg shifting in his shirt pocket and dig his small claws through the fabric. A clear sign to change the topic.

“I owe Ladybug a favour because she saved me,” Chloé said in annoyance. “I bet she’s Seelie with that goody-two-shoes attitude of hers.”

Not quite, but close.

“I think she’s amazing,” Adrien automatically defended his lady, which earned him another painful poke of tiny but effective claws from Plagg.

Chloé snorted. “Of course you’d think that.”

“What about Chat Noir? Do you think he’s an Unseelie? With his magic it would fit,” Sabrina continued and alarm bells started ringing in Adrien’s head. Dangerous topic!

“Do high gods even belong to the Courts? I mean, Ladybug clearly is Danu. There is no fae or other god who would be able to do what her magic does,” Félix very helpfully cut in and threw Adrien a look.

Chloé hummed but otherwise didn’t say anything, while Sabrina seemed thrilled. “Oh, that’d be amazing! Our gods are fighting to protect us from the magic attacks!”

“Hopefully they’ll disappear once this is all over. The less the humans see of magic, the better,” Chloé said in annoyance and reached out to for another chocolate, through the tray was empty. She stared at it darkly.

“Sabrina, get us more chocolate and something salty too.”

“Can’t you just order room service or something?” Adrien asked, not liking how Sabrina was pushed around by his former friend. Chloé raised an eyebrow.

“Oh yes, that will go over fantastically with us looking like this,” she said sarcastically and motioned to the three of them. Neither of them wore glamour, which was more obvious in Adrien’s and Félix’s case and less obvious but still noticeable in Chloé’s. With her hair in a ponytail, her pointy ear tips weren’t hidden at all and she only needed to open her mouth for the shark-like pointy teeth to be visible. In that sense Chloé was right; The only one of them who looked like a human at the moment was Sabrina.

“It’s okay, Adrien. I know my way around the hotel,” she assured, though he could still make out a nervous tremble in her voice.

“Are you sure?”

“Of course, she’s sure! Now stop making us wait and go!”

Sabrina didn’t waste any more time after that and hurried away. The second the door fell shut;
Félix sent a glare Chloé’s way.

“Give her her coat back.”

Adrien was glad that there weren’t any chocolates left, because he would have surely choked on one upon that demand.

“Fé,” he hissed. “You can’t just say that!”

“I can’t,” Chloé simply said without looking up from her magazine.

“Like hell you—”

“Mother locked it away so I don’t know where it is. Even if I wanted to, I wouldn’t be able to get it back.”

“You’re not even trying!”

“Why would I? I don’t have a death wish.”

“Guys, stop it!” Adrien yelled, which immediately put a stop to the arguing. The glares his brother and Chloé threw each other could probably kill a small rodent though. “Chloé, maybe you can consider it again and Fé, please don’t be so pushy. It’s a delicate topic after all,” he said and threw the door an anxious look even though it would still be a few minutes until Sabrina would return.

“Delicate indeed. Try to lecture me about it again when you have learned more about Court etiquette,” Chloé sneered and picked her magazine back up.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Félix hissed which made her roll her eyes.

“That you’re naïve when you think that getting Sabrina’s coat back without it being noticed is that easy. She’ll just have to make do without it.”

Adrien sighed, eventually realizing that if the two wanted to argue about it, then there’d be nothing he could do to stop them. He walked to the other room to get a small break from the seemingly constant tension. When he was sure to be out of earshot of especially Chloé he peeked into his inner shirt pocket where Plagg had curled up in.

“Psst, Plagg,” he whispered, making the sleeping kwami stir. An annoyed eye slid open.

“What?”

“Can you do me a favour?”

“You mean a regular favour or the fae kind?”

“Regular…I think. I need to go outside for a bit but with how much I have to concentrate on grounding, I don’t know if I can make a convincing enough glamour.”

Plagg yawned. “Easy peasy. But don’t make it too long, yeah? I want to keep napping.”

Adrien grinned. “You know, I was going to follow Sabrina to the kitchen to get snacks, so maybe I can find some cheese.”

As expected, that got Plagg’s attention. “Why didn’t you say so?! Let’s go!”
It was amusing how quickly he could change his mind when cheese was involved. So, with a
glamour spell cast and with Chloé and Félix still fighting, Adrien slipped out of the room.

Much like Sabrina, he knew his way around the hotel from various visits, even though most of
those lay years back. It was therefore no problem to find the kitchen.

The bustling and organised chaos of the people preparing meals was such a stark contrast to the
atmosphere up in Chloé’s room that Adrien froze for a few seconds to adjust himself to the new
situation. In the inevitable confusion, he heard strings of songs float through the air, so perfectly
attuned to the chaos that he only noticed their fae nature when he was snapped out of his stupor by
a voice.

“Can I help you?” A woman asked him and Adrien flinched.

Damn it, stupid Faerie songs!

“Uhm, y-yeah. I’m looking...Madame Césaire?” He fully blamed the general distraction for not
recognizing immediately who he was talking to. After all, he had met Alya’s mother when he had
been invited to her place two weeks prior.

“Oh, Adrien!” She said with a smile, apparently just recognizing him as well. “It’s nice to see you
again, though why are you in my kitchen?”

He immediately saw where Alya got her attitude from. The amused twinkle in Marlena Césaire’s
eyes was almost identical to that of her daughter when she sassed him.

“I’m looking for my friend Sabrina. She wanted to get us snacks from the kitchen,” he stammered
and awkwardly scratched the back of his neck.

“Hmm, the name rings a bell. What does she look like?”

“She has red hair and wears glasses. Oh, and she is usually with Chloé!”

“Ah, yes, I remember her. I’m sorry, but she hasn’t been here since this afternoon.”

Adrien blinked as he took in that piece of information. Then he blinked again because it didn’t
make sense. Chloé had ordered Sabrina to get snacks and Sabrina inevitably always did what Chloé
said. And she had been gone longer than Adrien had, so there was no way that she got stuck on the
way or something.

Panic started to rise in him.

“Oh, okay. Guess I’ll have to look somewhere else then. Thank you,” he said while his body felt
like hundreds of bugs were crawling around inside it. A fae going lost on Samhain was never a
good sign!

“Good luck,” Madame Césaire said and then got back to work.

Adrien just remembered to pick up a piece of cheese for Plagg—which would probably be
devoured instantly—before he left the kitchen in a hurry. Where would a selkie without her coat go
on Samhain? To the water most likely.

“Iron bells,” he cursed under his breath as he sprinted to the elevator. There was a likely chance she
was on the roof where the pool was. At least he hoped so, because the alternative was that she was
outside in the rain, possibly inclined to jump into the Seine. He just hoped for the lesser evil.
“Kid, you know when you go outside now, the liminality will hit you like a speeding train, right?” Plagg said as they were alone in the elevator and Adrien nervously paced up and down the small space.

“I survived being outside on Midsummer, so I can survive being outside on Samhain,” he growled in irritation. It would just be for a few minutes anyway!

He felt sick when thinking about how he had been up in Chloé’s room just a few minutes ago, blissfully ignorant of the danger his friend was in. It took a lot of effort to keep his breathing to a normal rhythm while he desperately begged the elevator to go faster.

*Please don’t let me be too late!* He begged towards any divinity that would listen to him. Besides Plagg that was.

When the elevator slowed to a halt, Adrien almost jumped out of the doors, only to realize that he wasn’t on the roof yet and that another person was just entering to go up as well. A person he almost ran into and who seemed to favour a perfume whose smell made him feel sick. The next few minutes were torture. Everything seemed to go in slow motion when yet another person entered! He had half a mind to claw at the walls in frustration or hiss, but that wasn’t possible as long as other people were around. It was like the room in the elevator seemed to shrink, even when the other passengers left.

It therefore felt like he was thrown into a wide plain once the elevator doors opened and the rain hit his face. It was usual rain, he was sure of it, but to him it looked like falling crystals. Horribly painful with how cold it was but still breathtakingly beautiful. Then he heard the horns of the Wild Hunt and everything got worse. Sweet songs and laughter intertwined themselves into the noise of the downpour, making the two almost indistinguishable. All of it seemed to fall with the rain, being part of it, so not even the cold wetness was grounding.

Then he saw Sabrina. She had pulled back the protective cover of the pool and looked like she was about to jump in. *That* managed to ground him enough to move.

“Sabrina, don’t!” He yelled as he moved over to her. He wanted to run, but his movements were sluggish and shivery, like in a nightmare.

She either did not hear him over the roaring noise of everything around them, or she was too enthralled by the water. Adrien reached out grasping for her.

His hand grabbed air at the same time as there was a loud splash.

He didn’t waste a second and jumped after her.

The bite of the icy water and the sudden and disturbing silence enveloped him immediately. Everything was blurry, cold and dark. Well, not *fully* dark. Adrien had never been more glad for his night vision as he spotted Sabrina underwater.

He could hear the voices that tempted him to stay in the water, but he wasn’t unrooted enough that he would even consider listening to them. Instead, he firmly grabbed Sabrina’s arm and pulled her to the surface. The sound of the rain hitting the pool’s cover and the roof was deafening when he resurfaced, but all of it was nothing in comparison to Sabrina’s screams.

“No, let me be! It’s so beautiful!” She yelled as he dragged her out of the water.

“I-I k-know, I know. B-b-but t-t-this-s is *r-really* not t-t-the t-time f-f-for a swim,” he said through chattering teeth. He saw Plagg floating next to him in the darkness, out of sight of Sabrina. Good,
he seemed to have flown out of his pocket before he jumped into the pool.

“L-let’s g-g-go inside a-and g-get w-w-warmed u-up.”

“But the water!” Sabrina argued, clearly very out of it.

“S-sorry Sabrina. N-not w-without your c-c-coat and not on S-s-samhain,” Adrien gritted out as he pulled a thrashing Sabrina away from the pool and towards the elevator. Gods, it was so cold! At least now it managed to ground him somewhat.

Sabrina sniffed. “But I want to swim!”

Pandemonium broke loose when he arrived back at Chloé’s room with a struggling and crying Sabrina. Félix immediately went and got towels and dry clothes for them while Chloé screeched about them getting water everywhere. As soon as Adrien was relatively dry and dressed, he went downstairs despite his brother’s protests to get the snacks they very desperately needed. While it had been quite a scare, they really needed something salty now to ground them. Madame Césaire, upon seeing him with wet hair and changed clothes, immediately went into what he could best describe as mum-mode. Only minutes later he was back upstairs with enough sandwiches to feed an army and with a can of hot chocolate—he had already been forced to drink a mug full of it back in the kitchen.

“One day,” Félix said with a heavy sigh as they ate the sandwiches. “I’m just asking for one day where I don’t have to fear a cardiac arrest!”

Chloé laughed, obviously thinking it to be a joke. “Try decaf if you’re worried about a heart attack.”

“Not funny,” Adrien grumbled as he took a bite of his third sandwich. He looked over to a shivering Sabrina who was cradling a mug of hot chocolate in her hands. She had calmed down again and had since been very quiet. He threw her a sympathetic look. Not having her coat was like not shifting for him. And the thinner the veil, the bigger the temptation was. What had just happened to her must have been exactly what had happened to him on Midsummer over a year ago.

“You and Fé were in a sídhé and Sabrina and I almost fell into Faerie. Are you happy now?” Adrien asked Chloé, his tone as cold as the water of the pool. All humour immediately disappeared from her face.

For the rest of the night and the following day, Chloé was uncharacteristically quiet. Before they went home the following evening, she grabbed Adrien’s arm though.

“Stop being so reckless. You’re putting us all in danger.”

He didn’t have time to ask what exactly she meant with that, as she promptly let go of his arm and pushed him out of her room. The door slammed shut behind him.
Something had happened again. Marinette knew it by just looking at Adrien and Félix. It wasn’t as severely noticeable as it had been the previous year when she hadn’t seen Félix for an entire month, but something was still off. Since she still didn’t know what had actually happened on Halloween back then, she just guessed that the memories of whatever that had been had darkened the mood.

Luckily it only lasted until the following Friday, when Alya entered the classroom and slapped five tickets on the desk.

“Got ‘em!” She declared victoriously.

“Got what?” Adrien asked as he turned around in his seat.

“The zoo tickets for tomorrow! Papa said that he can give us a short tour during his lunch break and then he can show us the new panther when it’s feeding time!”

Marinette grinned when she watched Adrien’s eyes light up immediately. “So that’s why you kept asking if Félix and I are free on Saturday!”

“Yep! And if your dad dares to throw in a last-minute photoshoot, I’m gonna walk through your fancy front door and punch him in the face!”
“Alya!” Marinette exclaimed, though she couldn’t keep the grin off her face at the mental image of her best friend punching Gabriel Agreste.

“I’d gladly open the door for you in that case,” Félix commented with a small grin of his own as he leaned on Adrien’s desk. He often lingered around at the front before class started, especially over the last few days.

“See Mari? Félix gets it,” Alya said and held out her fist to Félix. He bumped it after a small hesitation.

“How much is a ticket?” Nino meanwhile asked as he looked at the tickets on Alya’s desk.

“It’s ten Euros with our student discount,” she said. “I tried to get free admission since Papa works there, but no chance. But at least we don’t have to pay the full price, so we save three Euros each.”

“Sweet!” Nino said and rummaged around in his bag. “Damn, I only have five. Can I give you the other five tomorrow?”

“Sure,” Alya said with a grin while simultaneously accepting a ten euro note from Marinette. She only had money with her at all because Alya had sent her a text that morning—a text that had woken her up—telling her about the tickets.

“Why do you have the tickets already by the way? Couldn’t we just buy them at the zoo tomorrow?” Adrien then asked.

“Oh, my sweet summer child,” Alya chuckled. “If you want to wait in line for half an hour then be my guest. Just thought I’d save us the trouble.”

“A good idea,” Félix chimed in. “I loathe waiting in line.”

“Yeah, rub your prestige in our faces,” Marinette deadpanned with an eyeroll but couldn’t quite keep the grin off her face.

“Can we pay for the tickets tomorrow too? Father doesn’t like us carrying cash around,” Adrien said awkwardly. Alya waved it off.

“It’s fine! Just be sure to actually show up tomorrow. No excuses!”

“Alright, operation Adrinette is starting now!” Alya declared while Marinette squawked indignantly.

“Alya!” She protested while her mother chuckled in the background.

_Traitor!_

“What? This is the perfect opportunity, girl! Just walking through the zoo, holding hands, looking at all the animals. Don’t worry; Félix, Nino and I will find a way to ditch you early on.” Alya winked in a way that was probably meant to be encouraging, but Marinette only buried her head in her arms on the table.

“Alya!” She said again, this time muffled and accompanied by a whine. She started to regret offering her place as a meetup point rather than suggesting the zoo itself. Alya had shown up one full hour too early, thrown Marinette out of bed—that was the second day in a row where she had
been woken up because of her friend—and now sat at the breakfast table with her. It would still be fifteen minutes until the others were supposed to arrive.

“I’m sure all of you will have a great day. Just remember the last time you were at the zoo with Adrien and Félix, sweetie. It was a lot of fun, wasn’t it?” Her mother said.

Marinette lifted her head and sighed. Yes, the last zoo visit had been a ton of fun, but that was an entire year before she had realised that she had a crush on Adrien! It would be much different this time.

Despite how silly it was, her brain had come up with several worst-case scenarios where Adrien would end up hating her. One of said scenarios had even included that he got eaten by a snow leopard because he had wanted to cuddle it.

“And just wait for his face when he sees you! You look damn fine, girl!” Alya winked at her again, which prompted the same reaction from Marinette that it did a minute ago.

Right, Alya had convinced her into wearing the black jacket she had been practicing on over the last couple of weeks. She had finished said jacket—a form-fitting sleek piece with a diagonal zipper—only the previous evening. It was the best jacket she had ever made, in her opinion, and there was nothing wrong with wearing it.

At least that’s what she had thought until Alya had convinced her to wear skinny grey jeans and black boots instead of the slightly old—they were going to the zoo after all—but still good-enough looking blue jeans and comfortable sneakers to it. Marinette had also not been allowed to wear her hair in pigtails like she always did these days. While, yes, the outfit looked better when she had her hair down, it also made the change very obvious and she was worried that it would look very intentional. She didn’t want Adrien to get the wrong idea and embarrass herself. Well, it wasn’t really the wrong idea per se, but she still planned this outing to not be a date!

There was a knock on the door and Marinette barely had time to compose herself as her mother let in their guests. Plural. As in, the twins had arrived a full thirteen minutes too early! She should have known this was going to happen.

“Good morning!” Adrien said, chipper as ever. She was sure that if she’d turn around to look at him, she’d see him bouncing on the spot in excitement.

“You guys are early,” Alya said with a grin, not looking the least bit disappointed.

“Hypocrite,” Marinette coughed and her friend threw a piece of croissant at her.

“So are you,” Félix stated.

“She had the audacity to throw me out of bed!”

Marinette finally turned around to the twins who had just taken off their shoes and were hanging up their coats. Her breath caught in her throat when her eyes fell on Adrien. With the last two months of seeing him exclusively in designer clothes at school—apparently his father insisted on it—she had almost forgotten how he looked like in his regular clothes. And with regular clothes she meant the seemingly bottomless collection of pun shirts—especially cat pun shirts—he owned. Today’s shirt was navy and proclaimed in white letters: meowgical, ameowzing, meowvelous, meowgnificent. And the look wouldn’t be complete without hopelessly ruffled hair.

Meowgical, ameowzing, meowvelous and meowgnificent indeed.
She honestly preferred this Adrien over the perfect model image he had to parade around all the time.

“That’s cruel, Alya,” Adrien said and it took Marinette a moment to realize he was referring to her comment of being thrown out of bed.

“All’s fair in love and war,” her traitorous friend said—it seemed to be her life philosophy at this point right next to Majestia’s slogan—and sipped her coffee with the calm of a saint. Since the L-word had been mentioned, Marinette desperately needed to change the topic.

“Let me guess, you snuck out?” She said, nodding towards Adrien’s outfit. After all, there was no way that Gabriel Agreste would let him leave the house looking like that.

“Out the window!” Adrien added with a gleeful smirk.

“The window?” Her mother suddenly exclaimed in disbelief, making Adrien flinch. “It’s almost freezing at night and your room is on the first floor! You’ll break your necks one of these days! Next time, you sneak out of the front door or at least a ground floor window like normal people!”

It was almost comical to see the twins get encouraged by her to sneak out of their house by her mother and at the same time get scolded by her. She was probably one of the only people in the world who could make a dishcloth look threatening enough to cease any further argument.

“Yes Sabine,” Adrien winced. Félix, who meanwhile had made his way over to the breakfast table and sat down next to Alya, just looked away.

“Jesus Christ, what’s your father’s problem?!?” Alya suddenly exclaimed. “First, he stuffs Toussaint full of photoshoots for you, some not even in Paris, and now when you want to have one day of free time he doesn’t let you leave the house?!”

Judging by Félix’s clearly annoyed frown, the frustration was mutual. “Welcome to our lives,” he deadpanned.

“And Alya threw you out of bed? How early exactly?” Adrien asked, grinning again, as he sat down on the seat next to Marinette.

Dear god, help me! I’m not strong enough this early in the morning!

“Too early,” she just said.

“It was just eight. No biggie,” Alya shrugged.

“You haven’t learned anything from the sleepover, have you?”

During Toussaint, Marinette had invited Alya for a sleepover. Since she never had a real girls-only sleepover before, it had been an enlightening experience. She had no idea if it was just Alya, or if all girl-sleepovers were supposed to be this terrifying, but that’s what it had been. Alya had asked her about every little secret. Some of those things she hadn’t even told Nino before—mostly because he hadn’t asked, not because she didn’t trust him. One of the main topics Alya had wanted to talk about was Marinette’s crush on Adrien. She had eventually gotten the information she desired, at the price of a few ruined fingernails.

“Oh, I have learned plenty, thank you very much!” Alya said and her smile turned almost predatory. Marinette had a pretty good idea just what she was referring to and therefore tried her hardest not to glance at Adrien.
“Yeah, don’t throw her out of bed before or at eight. Horrible things happen when you do,” Adrien said, which earned him a light punch in the arm.

“Just what are you implying?” Marinette said, though she knew very well what he was talking about.

“I think he was referring to the time you kicked him down from your loft bed when he tried to wake you up,” Félix helpfully supplied.

“I hate all of you,” she grumbled and took another sip of her tea, hoping it would wake her up further.

Nino earned the position of Marinette’s favourite person that day by not only getting to her place on time but by also being the only one who didn’t nag her about her existence as a night owl.

They arrived at the zoo about an hour later. Alya seemed to have told Félix and Nino about “operation Adrinette” already because they kept a noticeable distance to her and Adrien after a short while.

“Alya said that we’re gonna go to the big cats around feeding time so her dad can give us a tour and tell us some insider stuff,” Marinette said, deeming it a safe topic. And it seemed to be the right topic to choose since Adrien beamed at her.

“That’ll be amazing! I haven’t been to the zoo since we were here last year so that’ll be fun.” He snickered to himself. “Do you think the same thing will happen again?”

“If it does, then let’s hope you’re out of reach of any of the cats. Can’t have you mauled now, can we?”

Marinette bit her tongue the moment she realised what she had said. “I mean, uh, I’m sure that won’t happen!”

“Don’t worry, I think even when Alya’s dad gives us a tour there will still be glass or bars between me and any cat that could potentially maul me.”

This was really not the conversation Marinette had planned to hold with Adrien and definitely not what Alya had had in mind when she had explained “operation Adrinette” earlier. She needed to change the subject.

“So, since we won’t go there until later, where do you want to go first?” she asked and took out the map of the zoo she had gotten at the entrance. Her heart started to beat faster when he leaned into her space to have a look at it too.

“How about the red panda? It’s pretty close.”

“Aren’t they nocturnal?”

“Aren’t you too?”

Marinette had given him a light shove without even registering it. Adrien just laughed.

“Okay, I give in,” he said with raised hands, the grin never leaving his face. “I-is that a new jacket by the way?”
The speed in which he changed from teasing to bashful almost gave her whiplash.

“Y-yeah,” she stuttered with her voice higher than this normal question warranted. “I wanted to practice winter clothing. More than just hats, scarves and sweaters, I mean. It’s just a first try but I like it enough to actually wear it. Maybe next time I’ll try to make a coat.”

Marinette mentally patted herself on the shoulder. Slipping into practical explanations of designing always helped to calm her nerves.

“You look amazing,” Adrien said with a soft smile and Marinette barely had time to realize what he said before his eyes widened and he kept on talking, accompanied by panicked hand gestures. “I meant, it looks amazing! The jacket!” One second of silence went by before he blushed furiously. “Oh god, I mean you look amazing too! I didn’t mean to say that you don’t look good, because you do! Look good, that is. Especially with your hair down and that outfit and…please bury me.”

Marinette, who was probably blushing as well, let out an amused snort. She knew the feeling of desperately scrambling for words to prevent a misunderstanding and digging herself a grave along the way all too well.

“Don’t worry, I know what you meant,” she said.

When they arrived at the red panda enclosure, they actually got lucky and saw the small furry beasts. Or at least one of them.

“It’s so cute!” Marinette squeed as she watched the red panda balance on a construction of bamboo.

“Look at the fluffy tail!” Adrien squeed with her while she caught Alya’s amused glance. She made some gesture with her hand that she was probably meant to understand, though Marinette wasn’t sure what it meant. No doubt it had something to do with “operation Adrinette” and therefore most likely meant something along the lines of “make a move”. That was exactly why she chose to ignore any gesticulations Alya did for the rest of the day.

“The little dude is very cute, isn’t it?” Nino said while watching it try to eat some bamboo leaves.

“Papa said that there are two and this one is the older one. I think her name is Maya,” Alya explained. Adrien ‘aww’ed and then started to make clicking noises with his tongue that were probably supposed to lure the red panda closer. It proved ineffective though.

Marinette had to hold back an ‘aww’ of her own when Adrien pouted. He could effortlessly compete with the red panda when it came to sheer cuteness.

Their venture through the zoo continued in a similar fashion. Marinette and Adrien would squeal about the cuteness of most of the animals or laugh about the weirdness of others—Nino usually joined them in the latter—while Alya threw in some things she had heard from her father. Félix only rarely commented on anything, as he seemed more interested in reading the signs and then silently watching whatever the animals did. He also threw the occasional annoyed glance at screaming children or at people who got the names of animals wrong—though seriously, there was a clear difference between a rhino and a hippopotamus, so he had a point.

“It smells quite strongly here, doesn’t it?” Félix asked after a while as they dodged several strollers and small children.
“Well, it’s a zoo. What did you expect?” Alya asked, bemused.

“We were here last year already, but I also kinda forgot the smell,” Adrien said.

“It’s not that bad,” Nino said with a shrug.

“Yeah, because you have a cold,” Marinette threw in, though she silently agreed with him. She’d encountered worse. Then again, Adrien and Félix had always seemed to have an incredibly good sense of smell.

When they came out of the monkey house and waited for Nino and Alya to finish cleaning their fogged glasses, they heard their names shouted from their left.

“Hey guys, you’re here too?” A familiar voice said and Marinette turned around to see Kim jogging up to them with Max in tow.

“Yeah, we wanted to see the new panther,” Alya said immediately. “My Papa is her handler,” she added proudly.

“Cool! Mind if we join you?”

Marinette shrugged. “Sure, it’s almost feeding time anyway, isn’t it?”

“It’s another half an hour until then,” Félix immediately supplied.

“Nice! Then let’s go and find Papa! He can give us the tour before feeding time!”

And so, the newly-expanded group of seven walked over to the house of big cats. Félix seemed a little uncomfortable so Marinette intentionally hung back a little with him.

“You okay?” She asked carefully.

Félix shrugged in reply.

“You know I’m not gonna dwell on it, but you’ve been very quiet today. Is it just one of those days or is something up?”

Félix seemed to think about what he was going to say for a few moments before he replied. “I’m fine.”

“Ah, I see,” Marinette said, knowing quite well by now what Félix meant to say with that. He was a secretive person, as was Adrien, and that was fine. If he didn’t want to talk about it, then she wouldn’t bother him.

“Alya involved me in your plan by the way. Just thought you should know.”

Marinette sighed deeply. “It’s not my plan, it’s her plan.”

“That makes sense.”

“What do you think about her so far?” She had never directly asked Félix for his opinion, so she was curious. He at least seemed to like Alya a little bit.

“Alya is impulsive and stubborn. Even if she means well, those are fatal traits to have as an
aspiring journalist.”

Marinette hummed, agreeing with his assessment so far.

“She is otherwise quite agreeable, yet also a little loud and enigmatic.”

“That’s praise coming from you,” Marinette remarked with a grin. Félix just rolled his eyes.

“She’s a little too nosy for my tastes. It might get her in trouble someday.”

“Someday?” Marinette snorted. “Have you missed the last few Akuma attacks where she ran headfirst into danger to get footage?”

“That too.”

Marinette’s attention was drawn back to the front when Adrien let out a squeal of joy. It was all the heads up she needed to know that they had arrived at the house of the big cats.

Just moments later, Adrien and Kim started racing each other to the enclosures while Alya was on her phone, probably with her father. Nino, meanwhile, filmed Adrien and Kim.

“If you want a break from Alya’s silly secret date operation, maybe you can talk to Max? I’m sure he’d appreciate a like-minded person to talk to,” Marinette said with an encouraging smile. Félix raised an eyebrow.

“Like-minded?”

“You know, you’re both very interested in science and facts and all those things.”

“If you’re referring to impeccable grades in school and an introverted lifestyle, then you could just say ‘nerds’, you know?” Félix gave one of his rare amused grins and Marinette beamed back at him. This was a huge improvement!

“Just don’t be too rude, please?” she said while she skipped ahead, still facing him.

“I will make no such promises.”

Marinette snorted before turning around again just in time for Alya to end her phone call.

“Papa said he’d meet us in front of the snow leopard’s enclosure,” she informed them.

“Hey guys! Look what the lynx is doing!” Kim suddenly hollered.

“That’s not a lynx, Kim. That’s a caracal,” Adrien said at the same time as Max opened his mouth, and closed it again, probably having been about to say the same thing. The caracal was currently on its hind legs, with its front paws on the glass, headbutting it.

“And here we go again,” Marinette said with a snort, quiet enough that Kim and Max didn’t hear, but loud enough for Nino next to her to pick it up.

“Dude, I thought that would have been a one-time thing.” He said while still filming.

“Doesn’t seem like it.”

Right when she said it, she noticed Adrien actually backing away from the enclosure. That was odd, seeing how he had looked forward to exactly this for the entire day. Or so she had thought.
She walked over to him and he actually flinched when she put a hand on his arm.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” She asked softly and Adrien visibly relaxed.

“It’s stupid,” he said and rubbed the back of his neck.

“Try me.”

“Well, I was kinda hoping that this wouldn’t happen again. I mean, it would have been okay with just you, Nino and Alya, but now it’s not just us anymore. And Kim seems to have a nag for gossiping and Max always tries to find scientific proof and…well…I don’t want to be the weird cat guy.”

“You are the weird cat guy,” Marinette said with a grin and nudged his shoulder. He gave her a faint smile.

“Yeah, like I said, it’s alright with you guys, but…the others…”

“Gotcha. If he didn’t tell Alya, then only Nino knows of it anyway. Well, and Félix, but I doubt he’d tell anyone. We can just huddle together in a group so no one will suspect you to be the one responsible. Okay?”

“Yeah, that could work. Thanks, Marinette,” he said. As they walked back to the group, Marinette couldn’t help but notice that he’d said her name instead using of one of his various nicknames for her. It was rare that he did so, especially in public, which meant that for him this must have been a much more serious and important moment than she had thought it to be. Or he had just slipped up and she was reading too much into things. That was an option too.

The others were already on the way to the snow leopard’s enclosure when Adrien and Marinette rejoined the group.

Alya’s father, who introduced himself as Otis, was waiting for them.

“The snow leopard here is named Manjula. She’s eight years old and had a litter of cubs a few years ago. Our enclosure is not big enough to keep them all, so they went to a different zoo last spring,” Otis explained while Manjula pawed at the window. “She’s usually quieter than this,” he added when he registered her odd behaviour, causing Adrien to duck slightly behind Marinette.

They continued on to the following enclosures, where Otis introduced each of the animals and answered Marinette and her friends’ questions. After they got all the way around, they finally stopped at the enclosure with the new panther.

“And this is Aretha. She’s three years old and got transferred here from the zoo in Marseille where I worked before,” Otis explained while the previously napping feline raised her head and looked at them curiously. Or better said, she looked at Félix.

“Papa raised her since she was a cub!” Alya threw in proudly. Otis chuckled and raised his hand to show off a fang attached to his bracelet.

“This here is one of the milk teeth she lost back then.”

Aretha, at this point, started to pace up and down the glass and occasionally stopped to paw at said barrier.

“She knows it’s feeding time soon, so she’s impatient now. We try to not feed the cats too much so
they won’t get fat and she didn’t get anything yesterday,” Otis explained.

“How fast is she?” Kim asked excitedly, to which Max provided the answer.

“A feline of this size usually runs at a top speed of sixty kilometres an hour.”

“Only sixty? I thought they ran faster than that.”

“Cheetahs are the fastest felines. They can run twice as fast as leopards like Aretha,” Otis said.

Aretha let out a low rumbling sound. Was she going to roar?

“Yo, is she purring?” Nino asked as he also seemed to notice it.

“No, it just sounds like it. Members of the Felidae family that are of the genus *Panthera* lack the ability to purr and meow because they have a different bone in their throat. They roar instead, which is something other felines cannot do,” Max explained automatically to which Otis nodded.

“That’s right. Leopards sometimes do make a sound similar to purring to make themselves look friendly and approachable. It’s like the beginning rumbles of a roar and they can only produce it when exhaling.”

“Aww, so she’s just a *harmless little kitty*!” Kim taunted. Marinette could feel Adrien tense next to her. He hated conflict.

“She is still very much a wild animal, not a house cat,” Otis replied with a frown, before looking at his watch. “Alright, feeding time.”

“Can we go into the cage with you?” Alya immediately asked, to which Otis just shook his head.

“No, that would be too dangerous. Aretha needs peace and quiet when she’s fed and with the way all the cats have been acting today I’m a little worried. Just stay here and watch from the outside.”

Alya’s shoulders sagged as she sighed. “Fine. But can you keep telling us stuff about her while you feed her?”

Her father nodded. “That, I can do,” he said and then left.

“This panther is a joke! It’s just a spoiled overgrown kitten,” Kim said once Otis was gone. Alya whirled around to him and Marinette took a few steps back as a precaution, with Adrien following her. It looked like her friend was out for *murder*.

“What’s your *problem*, Kim?” She thundered, drawing the attention of several other visitors that had surrounded the enclosure to witness the feeding.

“Problem? Oh, nothing. Everyone just hypes up this panther so much so I thought it would be something cool, but I guess I was wrong.”

“Marinette, hold my phone!”

“Err, Alya, how about we all just calm down?” Marinette suggested.

“Yeah, it’s not worth getting into a fight about this,” Nino said and took her arm to keep her from advancing towards Kim.

“It’s Aretha’s and my father’s honour I’m protecting! Let go, Nino!”
At that moment, Otis entered the panther’s cage which luckily made everyone’s attention be directed at him and the panther instead.

“Leopards in the wild are ambush predators,” Otis explained. “They always try to get as close as possible to their prey and then make a brief and explosive charge.” He looked at Kim. “That’s when they reach speeds up to sixty kilometres an hour.”

Meanwhile, Aretha prowled up and down along a fence that Marinette had not noticed before, eyes locked on the piece of meat.

“Leopards are not meant to run for very long distances though, so if they lose the element of surprise and fail to catch their prey, they won’t try again. When they do manage to pounce on their prey, they dispatch it with a bite to the neck. After the prey is dead, they drag it into the fork of a tree several metres off the ground. This way it’s out of reach of scavengers and it allows for a few days of undisturbed feeding.”

Otis threw the piece of meat to the other side of the cage and Aretha immediately leapt for it. She pounced on her food and tore off a big piece of meat.

“Aretha here also likes to be mostly undisturbed when eating, so she usually carries it off to where she can do so in peace.” As soon as he said it, the panther disappeared behind a few plants and stone pillars and out of sight.

“Fé, calm down,” Marinette suddenly heard Adrien say from behind her and she whirled around. Félix looked like he had seen a ghost. His brother had one arm around him and was looking at him with immense worry.

“We’ll be right back!” Adrien said and then hurriedly led Félix away.

“I’ll go after them, you stay here,” Marinette said to Nino and Alya and then followed the twins. She first thought she had lost them when she didn’t see them anymore, but then she suddenly heard Adrien’s voice.


Was Félix having a panic attack?! Maybe he hadn’t taken the sight of the panther eating a piece of meat very well. Or had it been the crowd that had set him off? When she walked around a tree, she saw that Adrien had dragged Félix to a secluded bench where he was obviously trying his best to calm him down.

“I-I just wanted to see if you need anything. I could get some water or…” She trailed off and bit her lip. Was it even a panic attack? What should she do in this situation!? Could she even help?

“No water,” Félix whimpered and Marinette’s heart broke. She had never heard him sound this weak and scared before. The longer she stayed, the more she got the feeling that she was intruding on something personal she hadn’t been meant to see.

“Shh, Félix. Everything’s okay,” Adrien said soothingly and trailed his fingers through Félix’s hair. She had never seen him do that before. Then he looked up to her.

“Don’t worry, I got this. Better keep Alya from punching Kim in the face. We’ll catch up with you later.”

Despite knowing that she couldn’t do anything to help, she was still hesitant to leave. Her friend
wasn’t feeling well and just leaving him like this felt wrong.

The sound of screaming tore her away from the scene though and made her head snap around to where she had come from. Several animals were running around outside of their cages. No matter if someone had just been inattentive or if it was the work of an Akuma, she needed to be Ladybug right now and help.

“Adrien, keep an eye on Félix!” She said before running back into the direction of the panther’s cage. Halfway there she ducked into the bushes.

“Tikki, Spots on!”

Ladybug had learned to trust her gut feeling when it came to using Lucky Charms. Her gut had told her to make Stoneheart and Mylène kiss, her gut had told her how to use the ridiculously big wrench to defeat the Bubbler. It was a clear way to victory.

Now, though, she was certain that her gut had lost its mind.

‘Jump into the dinosaur’s mouth’ it said. ‘It will be fine,’ it said! This was the worst plan ever!

“Chat Noir, wait!” she yelled and then pulled her partner back by the tail. It startled a yowl out of him, but at least he was out of reach of the T-Rex’s sharp teeth.

Ladybug ignored Chat Noir’s silent cursing and instead looked back to where Animan still lay on the ground. She knew her gut feeling was right and she had gained confidence in the past two months as Ladybug. But was it enough confidence to jump to her potential death? She had seen the Jurassic Park movies, so she knew that a mistake would end up very ugly.

No hesitation it was, then.

“Bon Appétit, T-Rex,” she said as she ran towards him. She almost came to a full stop and noped out of the situation when he opened his mouth and rows of dangerously sharp teeth greeted her. Her intuition urged her to keep going, though.

One daring jump later and she was engulfed in darkness. She was in a T-Rex’s mouth and was not hurt. Two statements that neither belonged in the same sentence nor this time period, but Ladybug had accepted the crazy as her life now. Using a car jack to open a T-Rex’s mouth definitely counted as more insane rather than simply crazy, but she’d take it. If it worked, it worked, after all!

After throwing Chat Noir a reassuring smile—he must have been worried sick!—she went over to Animan’s side and broke the bracelet that held the Akuma.

One purified butterfly and a Miraculous Cure late, she walked up to her partner.

“Bien joué?” She asked and held a fist out for him to bump. To her surprise he wrapped her in a tight hug instead.

“Never do that again! I’m so glad you’re okay.”

She hugged him back.

“Don’t worry, Chaton. Everything’s fine,” Ladybug tried to reassure him which resulted in a rumbling sound. Was he purring? He had done it before back when they had first tried out
Cataclysm, but she hadn’t been sure if it had been her imagination.

A beeping broke the moment.

“Oops, I better get going,” he said as his last paw pad on the ring beeped. Before he could completely vanish though, Ladybug put a hand on his shoulder.

“Wait! Patrol at seven?”

He was definitely distressed from what had just happened. Hell, she would have been too if their roles were reversed. She knew him well enough by now to see that he needed reassurance more than anything.

Chat Noir grinned. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

And then he vaulted away and disappeared over a roof top.

“See you then,” she said quietly to herself and walked over to Alya’s father.

“What happened?” He mumbled as he rubbed his head.

“You’re alright, Monsieur. You should go back to the zoo now, though, to check on your animals,” Ladybug said just as her earrings beeped.

Marinette landed on her balcony just in the nick of time as her transformation wore off. Maybe that hadn’t been the smartest idea since she now needed to get all the way back to the zoo, but her house had just been much closer than the zoo. She slumped down on her chaise to allow herself a moment to breathe. Just in time for Alya to call her.

“Oh no, Alya will kill me!”

While it had technically been Ladybug and not Marinette who had locked her in the panther’s cage with Nino, it had definitely been Marinette who had ditched her. And, oh god, hadn’t Félix had an attack right before she had to run off and transform?! Hopefully the animals had not bothered him and he was fine. Adrien had been with him, so he must be fine!

She picked up the phone and at the same time ran down the stairs. The sooner she reached the zoo the better.

“Listen Alya, I’m so sorry about just running away but something was wrong with Félix and then the animals ran wild and I had to hide. How are Félix and Adrien? Please tell me they’re okay! I’ll be back at the zoo as soon as possible!”

Marinette had just stormed out of the house and rounded the corner when she saw Alya. She hung up the call.

“Are they okay?!” She demanded as she shook her friend by the shoulders. Alya snorted.

“Chillax, girl. We’re all fine.”

At that moment Nino opened the door to the bakery.

“Hey ’Nette, thought I heard you storming down the stairs. I think Félix is trying to set a record
with how much coffee cake someone can eat in one sitting.” He pointed back over his shoulder and Marinette didn’t waste a second to storm inside.

“Félix, are you okay?!” She must have been louder than she thought, because some customers turned around to her and gave her funny looks. Félix, meanwhile, sat at a table and, just as Nino said, was in the process of eating a coffee cake. Not as delicately as he usually did, but in the eat-as-much-as-possible way. She blinked at the unusual sight.

“Yes, I am fine. I let those two out of the panther’s cage and then we came over here. Your parents were hiding Kim upstairs, but Nino and I had to hold Alya back from running out there to film the attack.”

Marinette breathed a sigh of relief but then froze when she noticed the significant lack of one specific person being mentioned in this course of events.

“And Adrien?”

Félix grinned, which should have given her the first clue that something was about to happen. Then the bakery’s door swung open and she was picked off the ground from behind.

“I’m so glad you’re safe, Princess!” Adrien’s voice was muffled as he buried his face in her shoulder. When he finally set her down again he was wearing a shy smile.

“Sorry, I was just…very worried.”

Behind her, Félix snorted. “He was frantic when he didn’t find you with Nino and Alya and then ran away looking for you.”

Marinette couldn’t help but smile, especially when Adrien blushed. It was so sweet that he had been looking for her, but she felt bad about making him worry. She gave him a hug.

“I’m sorry for running away. But I’m okay. Ladybug fixed everything.”

Adrien chuckled. “She sure did.”

“You okay, kitty?” Ladybug asked when she landed on the rooftop next to her partner. Chat Noir was sitting a few meters away from where she stood with his legs dangling over the rooftop’s edge and his eyes focused on the city. He turned around to look at her as soon as she spoke.

“Yeah,” he said, but his drooping ears and lashing tail betrayed him.

With a sigh Ladybug walked over and sat down next to him. “I’m sorry about earlier. It was a crazy plan,” she said. Looking back at it now, she really couldn’t believe her luck. She’d probably have nightmares about it for weeks!

“Crazy?” Chat Noir said, his laugh humourless. “My lady, convincing me to try out Cataclysm just for fun is ‘crazy’. Jumping into a Tyrannosaurus Rex’s mouth is insane! You could have died!”

“I know,” she said quietly and looked at her hands in her lap. She knew he was upset because he had been worried, but it still made her feel like she had made the wrong decision. Maybe she had. Chat Noir leaned against her.
“I’m just glad that it worked and that you’re safe,” he said and rubbed his head against hers. She giggled as his hair tickled her neck.

“Trust me, I’m glad too,” she said as she tousled his hair playfully. A scratch behind his ear—the fur was so soft!—drew a purr out of him and she giggled. The purr died.

“So, you do purr,” Ladybug said with a smirk that made Chat Noir whine.

“And now I’m embarrassed,” he mumbled while he buried his face in the crook of her neck.

“I think it’s cute.”

Ladybug was curious just how cat-like her partner could get and therefore kept petting his head in all the places she knew a cat liked to be petted—or at least where her kitty liked it.

“You’re doing this on purpose,” Chat Noir grumbled after a minute, his voice sounding odd with the underlying purr.

“Of course I am,” she said, not the least bit ashamed.

“Why are you mortifying me?”

“Because you need some proper pampering after today’s battle. I even brought you some croissants.”

“You spoil me,” her partner said with a chuckle and sat up. “So, where are those croissants?”

Ladybug snorted. “Hungry, are you?”

“Always.”

She stood up and walked over to where she had set down her backpack earlier.

“Well, if you want those,” she said as she picked the backpack up and held it out to her partner, “you’ll have to finish your patrol route first,” she finished with a smirk as she shouldered the backpack. “Whoever’s first at the Eiffel Tower will get the box of macaroons!”

When she swung away, she couldn’t help but laugh about how her partner’s face had shifted from confusion to betrayal and lastly to an excited gleam.

“See you at the tower then!” He called after her before taking off in the opposite direction.

Ladybug smiled to herself. Yes, her life was chaotic and more than just a little crazy at this point. But feeling as free as she did when she parkoured high above the streets of Paris was something she didn’t want to trade for the world! And being able to share this extraordinary experience with someone else made it all the more special.

Chapter End Notes

I’m gonna repeat the question from the notes at the beginning: who is interested in a collection of outtakes for Spellbound?
Safety Measures

Chapter Summary

and yet another Midwinter

Chapter Notes

Judging by your reactions on the previous chapter I'll assume that most of you are quite enthusiastic about the prospect of outtakes! :3
I'm currently busy with writing ahead (I'm on chapter 45 right now) so I don't have time to proof-read them currently (they're all full of typos, etc.) but I'll upload a seperate outtakes story for Spellbound eventually! ;D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The request of something salty for dinner had resulted in something their chef called “Tilapia Veracruz”. They were usually not fans of such meals, but this evening was an exception. Well, they still didn’t like the taste much, but it was Midwinter, so everything that caused their fae sides discomfort was welcome. Salt was enough to make the call of Faerie a little less intense and the itchy St. John’s wort did the rest.

Just like the year before, they had attempted to convince their father to put down the iron shutters, but apparently, he had modified them to automatically call the police upon activation. Even if they wanted to, they really couldn’t risk it.

Félix sighed as he put down his cutlery and resisted the urge to drown the salty aftertaste with water.

“Don’t worry, Fé. We’re safe this time,” Adrien said immediately.

“I’m not worried,” he lied.

Adrien had finished his dinner as well and looked on in displeasure at the otherwise empty table.

“How about we raid the kitchen for some bread and cheese?” He suggested. The bread was another small protection against the fair folk and the cheese was obviously for Plagg, who was a protection in and of himself. Adrien had the right idea to bribe him with cheese.

“And oat flakes,” Félix added as he stood up from the table. One could never be too careful on a Solstice.

With a loaf of bread each and with enough cheese to make Nathalie question them when they snuck past her office, the two of them returned to their room. Félix didn’t waste a moment, letting himself fall down on the couch and shift. The stress of Midwinter had shown itself in an annoying
itch that didn't have anything to do with the St John's wort. It was the same discomfort he felt when something was out of place, so he started grooming his side in an attempt to get rid of it.

He should have known that Adrien would immediately notice it. His attempt at comfort, however, was to pick Félix up and squish him like a stuffed animal. Usually Félix didn’t consent to such things, but there were exceptions for everything. He allowed it for a few seconds before swatting at Adrien’s face with a paw.

“Ow! Damn it Fé, no claws!” his brother said and let himself fall back on the couch with Félix on top of him. “You’re more of a grumpy cat than usual.”

“It’s Midwinter,” Félix grumbled as he made himself comfortable on Adrien’s stomach. Adrien was wearing a grey hoodie with a cat on it that said ‘stay pawsitive’. It was a horrendous piece of clothing but Adrien obviously loved it as shown by how worn it was. Félix purred when his brother started petting him.

“Things are gonna be different this year,” Adrien said after coaxing an especially loud purr out of him. He loved that spot behind his ear.

Félix just made a huffing noise in reply to what his brother said.

“I mean, Plagg is keeping us safe now.”

“Different and safe are both relative terms,” Félix said and flicked his tail in irritation when an especially insistent eerie feeling tried to penetrate his mind.

“Last year we were on our own and the year before that…”

Adrien trailed off, though Félix’s mind filled the silence with what was left unspoken.

Mother left us.

He was still not certain if he should give Plagg’s insinuation any real thought, but the seed of doubt had been planted. He despised the sprite for that, but it made it all the more important not to mention anything. Talking about it would make this doubt real, and more importantly, Adrien could hear and then start to have doubts of his own. Or at least further doubts.

“Let’s watch a movie,” Adrien suddenly said and grabbed the remote from the coffee table.

“A cheese documentary!” Plagg suddenly piped up as he floated over with a piece of Camembert.

“Maybe later, Plagg. Fé, you choose first.”

Félix raised his head. “Why me?”

Adrien shrugged. “We can take turns in choosing a movie to watch. Something very non-fae that can help keep us in the here and now. It worked last Midwinter and on Midsummer too, remember?”

“Well, in that case let’s watch Intouchables.” He hadn’t even needed to think about this decision. It was one of his favourite movies, very real and very human. When it came to grounding him in something non-fae, then it was perfect.

“Nice! We haven’t watched that one in a while,” Adrien said while Plagg yawned.

“After this it’s my turn, right?”
“Only if what you choose helps,” Félix said.

“I’ll have you know that I have impeccable taste!”

Their attention was drawn to the screen when the opening music started to play.

“That’ll help. You’ll see,” Adrien said while munching on a slice of bread and scratching Félix behind the ears with his other hand.

Usually Félix would watch the credits since he enjoyed *Una Mattina*—he had even learned to play it on the piano once upon a time—but to his surprise, Adrien not only exited the movie but shut off the TV completely.

“Hey! It’s my turn now! Why did you shut off the TV!?!” Plagg complained.

Félix was about to ask the same question, but it turned into a hiss when his brother suddenly got up and picked him up. *Again.* He grabbed Adrien’s arm with his front paws and bit him, a clear sign to let him down. Adrien hissed in displeasure but didn’t let him go.

“Sorry Fé, but I wanted to catch Nathalie before she leaves and you’re not staying here on your own.”

Félix squirmed in his brother’s hold and was disgruntled when he was held in a way that made swiping at Adrien’s face impossible.

“I can take care of myself!”

“Not on Midwinter you can’t.”

“Bite iron,” Félix hissed and bit his brother again.

“Smelt it, Fé! Stop being such an ass! I just wanted to ask her about mother.”

Félix immediately stilled.

“Oh, that ought to be interesting,” Plagg said as he floated over to them from his nest of empty Camembert wrappers.

“I mean, we don’t—ow! Fé, just ask like a normal person!” Félix had eventually managed to turn around and now dug his claws into Adrien’s shirt to climb up to his shoulders where it would be a little more comfortable. “As I was saying,” his brother continued, “We don’t have mum to ask about friendships with humans, so let’s just ask Nathalie. She has been friends with mum even before our father knew her, so she can probably give us some advice.”

“She will be suspicious why we’re asking,” Félix pointed out as he draped himself around Adrien’s shoulders.

“Nope, she won’t be! We’re at school now, so making friends is part of the deal. She’ll understand why we’ll want to be careful.”

“Well, then you go ahead and ask. I have no interest in her advice.” With that, he immediately gave up his perch on Adrien’s shoulder and jumped on the ground. He hissed again when Adrien made a move to pick him up once more.
"Excuse you, but I can walk on my own."

"Well, excuse me for being careful because someone had to be hit atop the head with a bouquet of St John’s wort last Midwinter to not jump out a window," Adrien countered with an eye roll.

Félix glared at him.

When exiting their room and making their way to the entrance hall they already heard the clacks of Nathalie’s heeled shoes. Without any warning Adrien started sprinting and Félix did his best to keep up.

"Nathalie, wait!" His brother called as he slid down the banister while Félix chose to rather take the stairs in a civilised manner.

Nathalie stopped with one hand on the doorknob, her winter coat already donned and obviously about to leave the mansion for the night.

"Shouldn’t you two be in your room?" She asked and Félix detected the slightest hint of concern in her voice.

"We wanted to ask you something about mother!" Adrien said. Félix meanwhile stayed silent and sat down next to him on the cold, tiled floor.

They must look exceptionally odd to Nathalie because she stared at the two of them for what felt like half a minute in silence. Maybe she just wasn’t used to seeing Adrien in non-designer clothes anymore since he was still required to wear their father’s brand when he went to school. Or she was confused to see Félix as a cat outside of his and Adrien’s room. Her obvious confusion was most likely caused by a combination of both of those things and the very unexpected question Adrien had just asked.

"Oh," she eventually said and took her hand off the doorknob. Maybe her silence had just been a silent contemplation whether it was worse to go home through the falling sleet or to stay and tell them stories. Félix was glad that, if that was the case, she had chosen the less offensive option.

"Yes, of course," Nathalie said after another small break of silence and then looked around as if someone was watching them. After a few moments, she seemed to come to a decision because her searching look settled on the dining room door. She motioned for the two of them to follow her as she walked towards it. They did.

The dining hall was traversed and left behind without hesitation, leading to the hallway beyond and then into the living room. It was a rarely visited part of the mansion these days with their father mainly staying in his office and Adrien and him only ever being in their room or the dining hall during the time they actually spent at home. Still, Félix had a lot of fond memories with the place.

Adrien sat down on his favourite armchair and Félix didn’t hesitate to jump on his lap.

When Nathalie sat down in the chair opposite of them, she shifted nervously. Without a fire in the fireplace and with just the bluish lighting from the ceiling, the room seemed cold and lifeless. Félix hated it.

With a dissatisfied noise he jumped back down from Adrien’s lap and trotted over to the empty fireplace. A small pile of logs was still kept next to it, dust collecting on the wood due to disuse. It must have been over a year, maybe two years, since the fireplace had last been in use. That
“Don’t mind me, I’m just going to start a fire. This place feels like a clinic.” He shuddered, then shifted and started piling the logs in a way that they wouldn’t fall over.

“So,” Adrien said, and without even looking Félix could tell that he was both excited and uncomfortable. “Since Fé and I are going to school now and we’re making friends, I wanted to ask how you and mum became friends. How did she keep you safe from the Court?”

Félix kept to his work, laying two logs next to each other, then two across them and then two across those. He built them up to a small tower while keeping a keen ear on the conversation that was going on behind him.

“Your mother and I first met in lycée,” Nathalie eventually said. “She pretended to be seventeen and enrolled just for fun. I was at the top of the class and also class representative so it was up to me to show her around. She asked me where to have the most fun at school and I told her that I wasn’t the right person to give such advice. That’s when she decided to make my life more...interesting.”

“Did she play pranks on you?” Adrien immediately asked while Félix scoffed.

“She surely was more careful than that. She tried to convince you to go out more, didn’t she?” He couldn’t help but comment while crumbling up old newspapers—there luckily was still a stash of them next to the fireplace too—and sticking them under the tower of logs.

Nathalie nodded. “You’re both right. She started by sneaking rowan sprigs into my bag and at one point even an iron horseshoe.”

“But those are precautions, not pranks!” Adrien argued.

“Well, the frog in my locker was definitely a prank,” he heard her grumble. “In any case,” she continued more audibly, “we ended up becoming friends. Everyone found it quite unusual how a blithe person like Emilie could get along so well with someone dull like me. She loved spiritual and wiccan things, but even when people started realising how strange she was, they were still enamoured with her.”

“No surprise there.” Félix snorted and tried lighting the fire with a match. The newspaper burned down and he waited to see if the logs would actually catch the flames or if he’d have to try again. Maybe he should have gone and seen if they had some wax lying around somewhere since it usually did wonders to start a fire.

“I couldn’t help but live in denial back then. After all, her interest in witchcraft would explain the rowan sprigs and all the other stuff she kept giving me. Since she was my friend, I decided to humour her and actually carried all those talismans with me to school and to the occasional outing.”

“So, everyone thought mum was a witch? Not a bad cover,” Adrien mused.

“Just don’t you dare suggest anything of the sort to Marinette and Alya,” Félix threw in before his brother could get any ideas. He could vividly picture particularly Alya jumping on the opportunity to learn something new, especially when it was sold to her with a possible connection to the heroes of Paris. And the more Alya—who was already cursed and therefore prone to having insignificantly small happenings of misfortune plaguing her as a side effect—knew, the more she would notice. Since their goal was the entire opposite, getting Alya, and by extension Marinette,
interested in Wiccan customs was a *horrible* idea.

“Marinette and Alya?” Nathalie repeated, confused.

“They’re our friends from school!” Adrien supplied before Félix has the chance to say something. “You met them and Nino on our birthday when they tried to convince father to let us have a party.”

Félix frowned deeply when remembering that particular instance. Not only had their father been excessively *rude*, but he had also banned the three of them from the mansion. The door had barely closed behind him when Félix had already torn into his father verbally for this effrontery. A rant that hadn’t moved his stone-faced parent at all.

“Ah, yes, I remember them,” Nathalie said after a few seconds. “They don’t…*know*, do they?”

Her question, while worded carefully, still sent a spike of guilt through him.

“No, they don’t,” Adrien said before he could and sounded strangely determined. “And it’s staying that way.”

“How did you find out? You never told us,” Félix said to get to the important part. Meanwhile, he went back to crumbling more newspapers because the fire had not caught and gone out.

“It was a stupid coincidence,” Nathalie said after some time. “I was at the wrong place at the wrong time and saw her shift. She noticed me of course and immediately dragged me home with her. Even though she explained everything it took me a while to really accept it.”

“How long was a while?” Adrien asked.

“A few weeks to really fully accept it and then a few more months to get used to it. But keep in mind that I don’t have a feeling for the otherness at all. That’s also a reason why your mother sought me out specifically. There are people out there who notice the fair folk more easily than others and it’s usually hard to keep them ignorant forever.”

Félix swallowed when he thought about Marinette and all the close calls they have already had with her. She definitely belonged to the latter group of people.

“Anyway, things changed after that, as did her idea about introducing the concept of *adventures* to my life. Like, one day after school she took me to Mélusine’s—they were already friends back then—and asked if I liked the mountains. It was an odd question, but I said yes. What I didn’t expect was to be pulled through a door by her and to get out in a mountain hut on the other side.”

“Mélusine has a hut in the Alps?!”

“That’s what you got out of that? Seriously?!” Félix turned around to Adrien who then proceeded to blush and smile sheepishly. Nathalie cleared her throat, getting both of their attention back to her.

“We did nothing really special there, just our homework, but it still had a certain thrill to it.”

“How long did you know her at that point?” Félix asked as he started his second attempt at lighting the fire.

“For half a year,” Nathalie admitted.

He turned around to her with raised eyebrows. “You went along with her even though you only just
found out she was fae and even though you knew her for only half a year? I thought you were more rational than that.”

Was he imagining it or was Nathalie actually blushing? That was certainly a new emotion on her.

“I was not as mature back then and your mother was very convincing. She might have actually charmed me at some point, I’m not sure.”

“So… you didn’t think it was scary?” Adrien eventually asked timidly.

“Scary isn’t necessarily the word I would use to describe it. Surreal, yes, but not scary. Over time I got used to the strangeness.”

Finally, the logs were catching fire. Félix shifted back into his cat form and decided to just stay on the Persian rug in front of the fireplace. While he wouldn’t get pets there, it was at least nicely warm.

“It only got scary when after graduation, your mother decided to take me on several vacations and on one of them I met Audrey Bourgeois.”

There went the contentment. If the topic shifted to her, it would never stay pleasant for long. He heard Adrien take a startled breath.

“As you can probably imagine, she was not pleased with your mother’s acquaintance to me and therefore tried to silence me. Emile then bought this house and bargained with Audrey for my safety and the safety of everyone else living inside it. She thought it would be big enough to fit several families, so I could convince my parents and brother to move in here too. I tried, but they didn’t want to move into a house that wasn’t their own. When I went to them one morning to try to convince them one more time, they were just…gone.”

Silence, apart from the cracking of the fire, filled the living room. Félix had frozen on the spot as he looked at Nathalie in shock. He had always assumed that her family lived outside of Paris and that he therefore never heard of them. To think that all this time they have probably been dead or worse. Of course the fair folk took them. They took lots of things they had no right to.

“That’s horrible,” Adrien eventually said quietly. “I’m so sorry.”

Nathalie shook her head, her eyes shining with unshed tears.

“It’s been twenty-four years since then,” she said, her voice sounding strained.

“Wait, but when you tried to make your family move here because the mansion is kept safe, then how come you don’t live here right now?” Adrien asked carefully.

This was a question Félix could answer. “Mother also bargained for no harm to come to anyone who works here. Audrey was trying to make me go back on the bargain on Samhain last year.”

Nathalie visibly blanched at that.

“You went to a revel, Félix?”

Now it was his turn to shrink in discomfort. “It couldn’t be helped. We got invited and at least one of us had to go.”

“Why did you move out?” Adrien asked, probably to distract from the topic.
“Because your father didn’t want me here.”

Félix sat up with his fur standing on end in righteous anger. Nathalie had lost her family to the Court and their father had the nerve to throw her out of the place that was safest for her?!

“How dare he!” He hissed.

“But you were here first!” Adrien threw in at the same time, equally angry.

Nathalie shrugged. “I lived here for two whole years before your mother started to date your father. Three years after that they got married and since Emilie didn’t want any future complications, she transferred the ownership of the mansion to Gabriel. It was his house at this point, so he had every right to throw me out.”

“No, he didn’t.” Félix threw in, his voice dark. “When mother made bargains about the house, then in the eyes of the Court the house still belongs to her. And as it is right now, it actually belongs to Adrien and me in mother’s absence.”

“Not legally though,” Adrien threw in quietly and Félix immediately knew what he left unsaid.

If their father would fire Nathalie, then even if the two of them would tell her she could move into the mansion, it wouldn’t work with human laws. And if she couldn’t move in, then she was basically fair game for the Court. At least that explained why she had suddenly become so inexplicably loyal to their father after their mother’s disappearance. She basically had no other choice.

Adrien and Félix had wished Nathalie a good night as she had eventually left, but they stayed in the living room and curled up in front of the fire.

“What if they find out someday?” Adrien said after a while. He was sprawled on the rug in a position that couldn’t possibly be comfortable with a human body and absentmindedly petted Félix’s fur.

“Then we keep them safe,” Félix replied to at least say something. It was a worrisome subject.

“But how?” His brother urged.

“By whatever means will be right at the time.”

“I’d like to see the faeries try getting past Tikki!” Plagg snickered and landed on Félix’s head. He swatted at the kwami in annoyance.

“Yeah, but…still. What if it won’t end well?” Adrien asked. “What if it’ll be like with Nathalie and her family? …What if we can’t save everyone?”

Yes. What if?

Chapter End Notes
Yeah, *what if*? It would be a *shame* if something would happen to Marinette, wouldn't it? c:<

next up: Evillustrator!
look forward to a jealous kitten! ;D
hello from the North of Germany! I was in St Perter-Ording at the North Sea yesterday with my dad and it was so nice! Tomorrow is my cousin's wedding so I'm super excited for her!

I've been looking forward to uploading this chapter! Hope you'll like a jealous kitten! ;D

Adrien pretty much skipped through the hallway to his next class—Physics, his favourite subject! Félix, who plodded along beside him, seemed to be anything but enthusiastic though.

“What’s wrong, Fé? It’s Physics! You like Physics!”

“I have nothing against the subject, but you aren’t the one that got seated next to Rose.” Félix said the name in the same way he talked about cold coffee or a bad book.

“Come on, she can’t be that bad,” Marinette, who was walking behind them, argued. She somehow performed the feat of not only carrying her school bag, her purse and her coat, but also holding her sketchbook and tablet while reading something on the latter. Adrien had offered to at least carry her coat for her, but for inexplicable reasons that had thrown her into a stuttering frenzy. It probably had been another one of these customs regular people just knew and he utterly failed at. Not wanting to make her uncomfortable he had dropped the subject, though now she looked like a pack mule. …A very adorable pack mule. He quickly looked away as the thought warmed his cheeks.

“On Tuesday she kept browsing her phone and squealing about celebrities and scrapbooking instead of concentrating on the task we were given. I much prefer Nathaniel as a partner,” Félix said.

“Maybe you can ask Madame Mendeleiev if you can sit next to Ivan instead? He’s relatively quiet and when Rose is on her own, she can’t talk to anyone. Problem solved,” Marinette suggested while not looking up from her tablet. A closer look told Adrien that she was reading the text about particle physics that had been their homework. He frowned. It wasn’t like Marinette was a bad student, but Physics just really wasn’t her cup of tea. Should he offer to help her with it?

“It’s certainly worth a try,” Félix said.

“I heard Madame Mendeleiev gave another class group projects yesterday so maybe we’ll get assigned presentations too,” Nino threw in.

Group projects? That sounded amazing! Maybe he’d get paired with Marinette and then he’d have the perfect excuse to help her! Maybe they would still have some time afterwards where they could take turns in trying to beat Sans in the genocide run of Undertale again. They had spent the entire weekend and the last day of the Christmas holidays on Monday with playing through almost the entire game, but they were just stuck on this one battle. It was ridiculously hard.
“Oh fantastic. As if there wouldn’t be enough to dread already,” Félix said and Adrien rolled his eyes.

“Don’t be so dramatic, Coffee Boy. Group projects are fun!” Alya threw in.

Félix just gave a resigned sigh and grumbled something about needing to make a trip to Starbucks a morning routine.

In a cruel twist of fate, Félix had been right when he’d said that there was something to dread, even though that thing didn’t turn out to be what Adrien had expected.

“Look, Sabrina, it’s him as a superhero. And look who he’s saving, it’s Marinette. He’s totally crushing on you, Marinette.”

Adrien was halfway out of his seat before he even noticed it. Before he could do anything though, Nathaniel, clutching his sketchbook, was sent out of the classroom. When Adrien turned around to Marinette he was surprised to see neither embarrassment nor any other sort of discomfort on her face. Instead she looked in the direction Nathaniel had disappeared into with a worried frown. An ugly stinging feeling of jealousy settled in his stomach and the only thing keeping him from growling was Mme Mendeleiev who walked back to the board and continued class as if nothing had happened.

Just like Nino had predicted, they were arranged into groups to work on presentations about particle physics. Adrien tried to get his thoughts away from this irrational anger since he knew that it would only get worse if he’d allow it. Only when he heard his name did he look up.

“—Adrien, and Alya,” his teacher said. Nino held out a fist for him to bump so apparently, he was in their group too? He really should have paid attention.

“So lucky,” he heard Marinette whisper behind him.

“And Sabrina, Chloé, and Marinette,” Mme Mendeleiev ended. Adrien froze and sent an anxious look back to Félix who was already throwing a dark frown at Chloé.

“So unlucky,” Alya muttered and Adrien couldn’t help but flinch. Wasn’t Alya supposed to be the one with bad luck?! She should have been—

No, this wasn’t Alya’s fault. He shouldn’t blame her for the unfortunate division of study groups. Unexpectedly, it was Chloé who spoke up.

“Madame? Can’t you add her to another group? We work better on our own.”

For once, he agreed with Chloé.

“This is a group presentation, not pairs. Deal with it.”

Now Adrien had to really stop himself from growling. He didn’t like this at all!

When the bell rang, he immediately went to the front.

“Madame?” He asked timidly and Mme Mendeleiev’s piercing eyes turned to him. “Is it possible to maybe trade groups?”
“Are you not happy with your group?” He winced at her sharp tone.

“No, my group is great! But I wanted to ask if I can still switch groups with Marinette?” He could think of a thousand things he would rather do than work on a group project with Chloé and Sabrina, but letting that fate fall upon Marinette was something he wanted even less.

“I arranged the groups so that at least one student in each group knows the material enough to help the weaker two. I can’t switch you with Marinette because she needs someone who understands the subject matter and can explain it to her if needed.”

From the corner of his eye he saw that Chloé and Sabrina were about to leave the room. He had to act quickly.

“And what if I switched with Sabrina?” He asked in a last try to persuade his teacher. If he couldn’t get Marinette out of the study group with Chloé then at least he could be there personally to ensure her safety.

Mme Mendeleiev arched a sceptical eyebrow.

“May I ask why?”

Adrien swallowed. “Well, Marinette and Chloé don’t get along very well—” The understatement of the year, “—so I wanted to prevent that they start…uh…fighting.” Or worse. “Nothing against Sabrina, but I don’t think she’d be good at settling a dispute.”

Now he just hoped that his Physics teacher didn’t really have a heart of stone like a lot of students said. After a few moments of contemplation, she called Chloé, Sabrina and Marinette over. The latter was so annoyed and anxious that Adrien could feel the weird phantom sensation of the fur on his tail standing on end under the glamour. He automatically moved closer to her in an attempt of silent comfort.

Mme Mendeleiev was very concise about the whole thing. “Adrien has voiced concerns about the group arrangements, so Sabrina and he will switch groups.”

Adrien saw Nino and Alya throw them confused glances from where they waited at the door while both Sabrina and Marinette looked at him as if he had grown a second head. The reaction he had dreaded the most was Chloé’s, though she surprised him by staying calm and just giving a curt nod. As soon as their teacher turned around though, she stormed out of the room with Sabrina hurriedly scurrying after her.

“Why did you do that?” Marinette asked as she picked up her coat and the two of them wandered in the direction of the locker room.

“As if I’d leave you alone with Chloé!”

“I can hear you, you know!”

Both of them jumped at the sudden voice behind them and whirled around to see none other than the Court princess herself. Adrien shouldn’t have been surprised at her appearing seemingly out of nowhere, but he was certainly unsettled by it. Was she angry? Gods, don’t let her be angry! An angry Chloé was not a Chloé he wanted to have to deal with for an entire day. And definitely not one he wanted anywhere near Marinette.

“You know what I mean,” Adrien said and threw Chloé a meaningful look. She seemed unimpressed.
“Yeah, yeah. Let’s just get this over with,” she said with a flip of her ponytail and then strode by them in the direction of the locker room.

“We’ll wait for you in the library,” Adrien called after her, not knowing if he was actually hoping for her to show up or not. Marinette sighed.

“This is gonna be a long day,” she said.

“Ah ah ah, no jinxing, Princess,” Adrien said with a raised finger and a grin. She scrunched up her nose when he poked it. Adorable.

“When you two are done flirting,” a voice—Félix—said behind them and Adrien whirled around again, this time with quite a deep blush, if the reflection in the classroom window wasn’t lying. Marinette let out a squeak and blushed scarlet.

“W-we’re not—we w-weren’t”— She stuttered.

“Why were you waiting for us? We’re not in the same study group,” Adrien asked instead and Marinette visibly relaxed next to him at the change of topic. Félix rolled his eyes.

“Nathaniel is nowhere to be found and Ivan had to help Mylène with something. And the last thing I am looking for is to be joined at a table by Nino and Alya when instead of working they’re just going to flirt and even think they’re being subtle about it.” Another eyeroll followed.

Ever since the Akuma attack at the zoo, the two had gotten quite close. Being locked into a panther cage had apparently been all that was needed for them to get closer. Adrien and Marinette were very much seizing the opportunity for well-deserved revenge against Nino when it came to poking him.

“Yeah, they really aren’t fooling anyone, are they?” Marinette said, her voice steadier again.

“You know, you could just drop your solidarity with Nino for the time being and just start this stupid poking game with him too. I’m sure he’d stop flirting then,” Adrien remarked with a grin. His brother chose not to comment on it.

“By the way, congratulations on dooming yourself,” Félix said instead with a flat stare. Adrien’s grin dropped.

“Ha ha, very funny,” he deadpanned.

Marinette sighed again. “It can’t be helped now, so let’s get this project done and move on with our lives,” she said, took Adrien’s hand and dragged him in the direction of the library.

“Hey, you can’t just steal our partner, Chloé!” Nino argued as Chloé dangled a hat in front of Sabrina. It seemed rather unfortunate that she had shown up in the library at all. None of them would get anything of the project done at this point.

“It’s a very cute hat though,” Sabrina muttered. Adrien heard Félix scoff from where he stood in front of a bookshelf.

“Stop bribing her. It’s just one stupid project,” he said and Chloé sent him a look that could best be described as a soft glare. A look bordering on the edge of contempt without being downright
murderous.

“She can just switch with Dupain-Cheng then,” Chloé huffed.

“Chloé, you know what Madame Mendeleiev said,” Marinette threw in, looking thoroughly annoyed.

“Do I look like I care?”

Adrien was about to argue that she better shouldn’t mess with their Physics teacher but in that moment, a rain of berets, looking just like the one Chloé was dangling in front of Sabrina, materialized out of nowhere and assaulted her. He blinked and looked around for an imp or another likely trickster. He even looked at Félix with a questioning gaze, but his brother seemed as surprised as he was.

Only when a giant hairdryer appeared and chased Chloé through the entire library did things click. Not the fair folk playing tricks, but an Akuma that was apparently out for revenge on a certain blonde. Not at all surprising, honestly.

Adrien quickly ducked out of the library with a few other students who stumbled out the doors into the hallway in a panic. One trip to a broom closet and a transformation later and he was back in the library where Ladybug—had she transformed right there with an Akuma in the same room?!—was already doing her best to get the floating hairdryer under control. Chat Noir couldn’t help but snicker at the display of her riding it like one of those bull riding machines. To be fair, she had been excellent at the one they had encountered a few months back and now she also had superpowers to help, so he wasn’t too worried.

“I got wind you were being blown away by a hairy situation,” he therefore joked, though his lady wasn’t all too impressed.

“Fewer puns, more action!”

The giant hairdryer was surprisingly easy to destroy. Only one hit with his baton let it disintegrate into blue glowing lines. That was also when Chat Noir noticed the Akuma on the first level. His eyes narrowed.

“That guy looks sketchy.”

They immediately pursued him, only the run into an invisible wall that appeared out of nowhere. No, not out of nowhere. He seemed to have drawn it on his tablet. Chat Noir watched as he disappeared and gave a silent growl. An artist who was angry enough to be akumatised and who had it out for Chloé? He could only think of one guy that fit the bill.

It was enormously weird to be in Chloé’s room as Chat Noir together with Ladybug. His lady didn’t seem thrilled by the situation at all and he caught her throwing glances at the untouched Physics project on the desk. On that part he shared her frustration. If the Akuma wasn’t defeated soon, neither of them would be able to finish it.

“The Akuma is targeting you specifically, Chloé, any idea why?” Chat Noir asked while the blonde was busy reading a magazine.

“Well, clearly because I’m important,” she said with an eyeroll.
“Yeah sure,” Ladybug muttered and he almost had to laugh at the offended look Chloé sent her.

“Not more important than you, obviously. We can’t all be gods,” she said in a surprisingly polite tone.

Suddenly Chat Noir realised with terrifying clarity what was going on: Chloé was idly talking about Court business while Marinette—well, Ladybug—was right there! He had to put a stop to it before things went out of control. Plagg seemed to agree.

“Get the bug out of here!” he hissed.

“Say, my lady, don’t you have other things to do this afternoon? We could take turns in watching Chloé so we’re not both held up,” he said as he lightly pushed her in the direction of the balcony door. Ladybug sent him a puzzled look but then sighed.

“You know what? Yeah, actually I do have something to work on,” she said and took her yo-yo. “I’ll get back here in two hours, okay? Contact me if anything happens.”

“Will do,” he said with a wink. “See you then.”

“Later!” she called and then swung off Chloé’s balcony. Chat Noir had to restrain himself from sighing in relief.

When he walked back into the room, he looked over Chloé’s shoulder at the magazine she was reading. He had to blink when he noticed the runes and incantations.

Plagg snorted in his head. “I have to admit, she’s sneaky. Enchanting a spell book to look like a fashion magazine is a good cover. Take notes, kid.”

“Brushing up on some spellcraft, are you?” Chat Noir asked and Chloé shrugged.

“Like I said, we can’t all be gods.”

He hummed. “Glamour spells, huh? Yours doesn’t seem to be failing yet,” he said as he skimmed over the page she had been reading.

Chloé touched her necklace that held a blue stone. He had never asked her which stone exactly it was. A blue diamond? A cut sapphire? Something else?

“It’s not good enough. It failed on Samhain and on Midwinter.”

Ah, yes, the liminality problem. He was more than familiar with it.

“Then good luck,” Chat Noir said and sat down in an armchair across from her. It was still surreal to talk to her as someone she regarded as a god. A few minutes of silence passed in which he once again reflected on what a close call it had just been. He couldn’t risk that happening again.

“Let me make one thing clear, Chloé,” he, therefore, said after another minute of silence and she immediately whipped her head around. The look she gave him was unlike anything he had ever seen on her face: fear, insecurity and terror. He was genuinely rattled for a moment before he regained his composure. “Ladybug and I aren’t here for Court business, nor do we want to have anything to do with your messy deals and favours. We’re here to fight Akumas and get a Miraculous back from someone who misuses it. That’s it.”

Chloé looked like she was about to start begging for mercy, which was both surreal and hilarious,
but he bit his lip to hold back a grin.

“I—I don’t—I didn’t mean to insult you.”

Chat Noir grinned. “Oh, I’m sure you didn’t. None of the fair folk would be foolish enough to deliberately offend the god of destruction.”

“You’re laying it on a little thick there, aren’t you, kid? Don’t sully my title or I’ll hide Camembert in your shoes.”

The thought of stepping into gooey, stinky cheese sobered his bravado a little. Right, he might wear the Black Cat Miraculous, but that didn’t mean he was a god. That title belonged to Plagg.

“Anyway, it would be beneficial for all of us if you wouldn’t draw a connection between the fair folk and Ladybug and me. The less the humans suspect, the less likely they’ll find out about the folk and everything that entails.”

Despite the serious topic, he just couldn’t help the pun at the end there.

“Okay,” Chloé said timidly. He couldn’t recall the last time he had heard his old friend talk in such an intimidated way. Was it seven years ago? Eight years? Ten years? He honestly couldn’t tell.

“Be reminiscent about childhood days later! You can’t slip out of your role now.”

“I get it, it’s risky. Can I still ask you a question though?” Chloé asked.

“You can, but I’m not gonna promise to answer it,” Chat Noir said and crossed his arms.

“I talked about it with some…acquaintances from the Court and…is Ladybug really Danu?”

To tell the truth or to lie? Technically Ladybug was Marinette, but the magic she used was Danu’s. He decided for half the truth.

“Tell me someone else who could use the magic she does,” he said with a shrug. “And by the way, she doesn’t have the best opinion of you, so better not get on her bad side.”

After all, he knew from personal experience what it was like to be on Danu’s bad side. Chloé paled, but before she could say anything else, Chat Noir’s baton started ringing.

“Seems like my lady sensed that we’re talking about her,” he joked and picked up the call. “I thought I was supposed to call you.

“Nevermind that,” Ladybug said just as he stepped outside again, hoping for some privacy, even though there was none to be had with a Sidhe sitting less than ten metres away from him. “Good news: You can leave Chloé.”

“Well, that’s nice to hear, but why the sudden change of plan?”

“I need you to protect this girl, instead.” His baton beeped and he looked at the screen.

Chat Noir almost dropped his weapon when a picture of Marinette showed up.

“Her name is Marinette. Cute, isn’t she?”

The cutest, but also the most insane! His brain supplied while his jaw was still dropping. What in the netherworld was she thinking?!
“The Akuma is called the Evillustrator and he’s in love with her,” she continued, oblivious of what these words did to him. The same poisonous feeling from before in Physics boiled in his stomach again and he felt himself clutch the baton tighter. Good thing it was unbreakable. “He won’t harm Chloé if Marinette comes to his birthday party. While he’s distracted, you take him down.”

Had. Marinette. Lost. Her. Mind?!

At the last second, he bit back his retort of ‘You can’t fight an Akuma as a civilian!’ and instead remembered that Chat Noir wasn’t supposed to know Ladybug’s identity. So, acting, it was.

“And what about you?”

“Uh…I’m going on a secret mission,” she said.

A secret and horribly reckless mission.

“I’ll catch you later. Can you handle it?”

“Did you forget who you’re talking to? No worries, my lady. That girl is in good claws.”

First impressions were important and ironically enough, this was the fourth first impression he would make when it came to Marinette. Though, she already knew Chat Noir as Ladybug, so did it actually count?

“I hole-heartedly think that your window is in need of some repairs, Prerrretty girl,” Chat Noir said as he dangled upside down from the outer wall and looked through the quite strange hole into her room. First sentence and he had almost messed up by calling her ‘Princess’. That wasn’t a mistake he should repeat any time soon. Unfortunately, his save had sounded suspiciously like flirting and he just hoped that if he was blushing, that it at least would be hidden by the mask.

“Chat Noir! We have a door, you know?!” He snickered as he saw her eyes widen in panic when she realised that her first words to him had been a reprimand. “I mean, uh, why are you here?”

He loved her dearly, but acting really wasn’t one of her strong suits.

“Well,” he said, swinging into her room and looking at her with raised eyebrows. “Ladybug told me that someone had quite the reckless plan, so I’m gonna be your bodyguard for the day.”

He more felt than saw her cringe.

“The Akuma came into my room and said he wouldn’t harm me and he invited me to his party. So, all things considered, he seems rather harmless.”

That the Akuma had been in her room was pretty much clear. His scent still lingered around and it took a lot of self-control not to growl at having this sanctuary sullied with what didn’t belong.

“If you don’t mind, I’ll be the judge of that. Until then, I’m afraid I’ll have to stay and make sure you’re as safe as possible.”

No way would he leave Marinette alone while there was a chance that Evillustrator—what a stupid name—changed his mind and would come back, possibly to harm her.

“O-oh? You’re…going to stay? But the date isn’t until this evening, so you could go home until
Date. She said *date!* The poison was back with a vengeance and it took a lot of effort to mask it. Nathaniel would be lucky if he got out of this with all his bones intact!

“I don’t mean to be rude,” he said with a bow to mask his inner rage, “but your safety is at stake here and I wouldn’t be able to forgive myself if something were to happen to you. Especially since my lady is temporarily unavailable and has given me this very important task.”

For the record, he didn’t like to make Marinette feel bad, but making her squirm a bit was completely justified. He really didn’t like her plan, but he had to play along.

She sighed. “Alright. Let’s go downstairs then,” she said and rubbed her arms when an especially cold January breeze blew into her room through the very defective window. “It’s getting freezing up here. We also have to tell my parents what’s going on or they’ll be worried.”

*Yeah, no doubt.*

“You go ahead. I’ll quickly put a blanket in front of it or something in case it starts to rain and also to keep pigeons out.”

“Okay, then I’ll tell my parents and come back with some plastic bags to tape over it. They might work better than a blanket.”

“Good idea,” he said and at that moment his stomach rumbled. Oh, right. He hadn’t eaten lunch yet. Marinette threw him a knowing grin.

“And I’ll see if I can find something to eat for my brave bodyguard,” she added and then disappeared downstairs.

He waited until she was down in the kitchen until he silently hissed out: “Tikki, are you here?”

The red sprite appeared almost immediately from behind a stack of books on Marinette’s desk.

“It was good thinking to get her away from Chloé.”

Chat Noir blinked. Praise? From *Tikki*?! That was a first. He couldn’t linger on that thought though since Marinette would probably be back soon.

“Why did you agree to this plan? It’s insane and unnecessarily risky!”

Tikki frowned and he was afraid that she was going to give him a scolding of a lifetime for daring to speak to her that way.

“You’re right,” she said instead, surprising him so thoroughly that he needed a few moments to understand what she had said.

But even then, he didn’t bring out more than a confused “Huh?”

“I don’t like that she’s putting herself at risk, but she trusts you to keep her safe. As much as I hate it, lulling the Akuma into a false sense of security as her civilian self is a good strategy. She’s skilled enough to pull it off, even though she would be without my direct protection.”

“Even if it prevents a fight, it’s still too risky. She hasn’t even had the Miraculous for half a year yet and now she’s supposed to take on an Akuma as *herself*? I don’t think this is what you had in mind when you gave her your earrings.”
And just like that, the terrifying version of Tikki was back.

“Let me make this crystal clear to you, Cat Sidhe,” she hissed and flew so close to his face that he had to cross his eyes to keep his focus on her. “How I deal with my chosens is my responsibility and my decision. You might have some attachment to her but you don’t own her, nor do you decide the risks she does or does not take. Your only role here is to be a support and a safety measure.”

“Oi, tell my sugarcube to not talk to my kitten like that.”

“No, thanks, Plagg. I don’t have a death wish,” he muttered under his breath.

Tikki’s eyes narrowed.

“You can talk to Plagg while transformed?”

“Another side-effect of my magic,” he said meekly. “And I wasn’t implying to doubt you, I’m just very worried for her.”

He shivered as another breeze blew through the hole in the window.

“And to be quite honest, the Akuma doesn’t seem to have her best interests at heart when he just lets her become an icicle.”

Tikki backed off again. “Just because we both worry about her doesn’t mean that I have to trust you.”

Four months and still barely anything had changed between Tikki and him. It wasn’t really surprising but he had still hoped that it wouldn’t take quite that long to convince the goddess of his pure intentions.

Hurried footsteps on the stairs made Tikki duck back into her hiding place and only seconds later Marinette re-entered her room with a roll of bin liners and some tape.

“So,” he said as he held the plastic bag in place while she taped it to the remains of the window. “You seem surprisingly calm about all this.”

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“So,” he said as he held the plastic bag in place while she taped it to the remains of the window. “You seem surprisingly calm about all this.”

Marinette shrugged as she tore off another bag and taped it next to the first one. “Two of my friends have been akumatised and I’ve been chased around Paris by zoo animals. Going on a date with an unusually friendly Akuma to get his pen away from him sounds quite harmless in comparison.”

There was it again. That cursed word.

“Why do you keep calling it a date when it’s a birthday party?” He couldn’t completely keep the sneer out of his voice unfortunately.

“He said it would be just me and him and he did say he was in love with me. Most people would consider this a date,” Marinette said and stepped away from the hastily covered up window. “That should do until the cure fixes it. Should we go downstairs now? We probably have some leftovers from lunch if you want to eat something and I’m sorry in advance if I’m gonna bore you, but I have a Physics assignment to do.” She sighed.

The audacity! How could she just talk about a supposed date like it was nothing?! Especially since he had it in good conscience that it was her very first date ever!
“Do you like this guy that got akumatised?” He asked and suddenly had the intense urge of scratching something—or most preferably someone—with his claws.

Apparently, he had gone too far because Marinette raised an eyebrow at him. The expression looked hauntingly familiar to the one Félix always wore when he told him he was being an idiot.

“Yes, in a platonic way, though I don’t see why that’s your business?”

He swallowed the growl. “Just…uh…checking,” he grumbled and then followed her downstairs.

While he had been revived by Sabine’s cooking—the leftovers of a delicious noodle dish to be exact—Félix had more than earned a week’s worth of Starbucks coffee by being a lifesaver. It really was very useful to have a brother who could imitate his voice and therefore make believable excuses, as well as reschedule working on the project. But to be fair, being involved in an Akuma attack was a pretty solid reason to be a little tardy with homework.

Being stuffed with all kinds of baked goods, including a marvellous piece of marzipan cake, had almost succeeded in making him forget why he was even at Marinette’s. The day felt so normal that he even almost slipped up several times by forgetting that he was Chat Noir at that moment and not Adrien. Plagg was very good at reminding him of that fact though.

At five in the afternoon—when it was already dark outside—Marinette eventually left the house, wrapped in that adorable black coat she had made during Christmas break. Chat Noir, on the other hand, kept to the rooftops and did his best at not being seen while still staying close to her.

“Kid, I hope I’ll only have to say this once: Don’t. Freak. Out! Your girlfriend is smart and can keep her cool.”

“Stop calling her my girlfriend already,” Chat Noir growled. Especially under the current circumstances the teasing nickname Plagg had given her hurt. “Even if I would want her to be, it’d be too dangerous with the Court breathing down my neck. Besides, she doesn’t like me that way. We’re just friends.”

Plagg let out a sigh that sounded like he would have gladly hit him atop the head if he could.

“Urgh, I didn’t think a Sidhe could be such an idiot.”

“Hey!”

“Head in the game, smitten kitten. She’s almost there.”

Plagg was right. His eyes were drawn back to Marinette among the still steady flow of tourists that were probably on their way to the nearby Notre Dame. Not even the early darkness of winter seemed to daunt those persistent people with their cameras and phones at the ready to take as many pictures and memorials as possible. Some of these pictures even ended up being of a certain boat. Meanwhile, none of those oblivious foreigners seemed to realize that the person sitting on said boat had quite the unusual skin tone and was wearing an outfit that was definitely not meant for these kinds of temperatures. Or they just thought him to be an actor, which was a reasonable conclusion to draw, since Marinette had been right: Evillustrator was surprisingly non-destructive for an Akuma.

Chat Noir decided to stay in the shadows nearby while watching with growing interest how
Evillustrator suddenly seemed to be in pain. He even smelled a little bit of fear as a result. Could Hawkmoth inflict pain over the link he had to his victims? Was he perhaps displeased with how non-threatening his latest villain was? He would have to ask Plagg about it later because for now, he had to pay close attention as Marinette approached the boat.

“Happy Birthday,” she said when she was already on the boat and the Akuma turned around to her.

His breath formed a small cloud this time when Chat Noir couldn’t hold back the growl anymore. 

Too close!

He wasn’t even sure anymore if he was more concerned for Marinette’s safety or if he just wanted to tear Nathaniel apart limb from limb for daring to bring her to such a romantic setup and acting all innocent. If it wasn’t for the powers, he would have doubted he was even akumatised. Maybe he should have been impressed about the amount of control he kept even while under the influence of dark magic—Nino and Alya had both been much more unreasonable as Akumas. As things were though, he didn’t want to allow himself a single positive thought about this…this…princess thief!

“Stop complimenting him,” he hissed and dug his claws into the stone with an unpleasant scratching sound when Marinette called the boat beautiful. Hadn’t he thought just earlier that afternoon that she wasn’t a good actor? Well, based on that, she must be serious in her admiration to at least a certain point to make it sound believable. The fact that she was even a little impressed irked him immensely.

He would have to dwell on it later, because suddenly the boat started moving. Following its course from the rooftops was easy enough and he also caught Marinette glancing in his direction once. When she started talking to Evillustrator, Chat Noir used the Akuma’s distraction to sneak to a nearby bridge.

Oftentimes he asked himself what he would have done in situations like these if he wasn’t a Cat Sidhe and therefore couldn’t use magic. Sneaking past the crowds on the bridge unnoticed as a hero of Paris was basically impossible after all. A simple spell of redirecting everyone’s attention was all he needed to get into position unnoticed and jump on the boat noiselessly. There was no doubt that a small spell like this wouldn’t have worked with the Akuma at all though.

“I actually draw a little too. I’m not as good as you, of course,” he heard Marinette say just as he climbed onto the boat cabin’s roof. He knew that she was trying to get the pen—no doubt the akumatised object—away from Evillustrator, but couldn’t she do that without complimenting him? At this point he wasn’t sure if he could promise not to claw Nathaniel’s eyes out.

“I’m sure you’re great,” he said.

Chat Noir glared. Marinette was more than just great. She was an absolute genius! If it weren’t for Tikki—the literal goddess of creation—he would have even called her a goddess. This boy was as shallow as Adrien’s hundreds of fangirls that kept saying they ‘loved him’. Idolisation and obsession were not love and—

“Focus, kid. I may not be able to read your thoughts, but I can feel that you’re getting worked up over nothing here. She just gave you a signal, slowpoke. Pay attention!”

Once again, Plagg was right. In the time he had spent attempting to glare a hole in the back of Evillustrator’s head, Marinette had actually managed to grab hold of the pen. Chat Noir shifted silently into a very feline position, ready to pounce and make mincemeat out of the Akuma at any second.
Suddenly the mission became very easy as clarity overtook him. It was just like the games of catch and release he always played with Félix. All he had to do was to wait patiently for Marinette to successfully get the pen and get out of the way. He knew she hated violence, so he wouldn’t hurt the Akuma…much. A few swipes of his claws should be tolerable under the circumstances when even innocent games between him and his brother often resulted in unintentional scratches.

Chat Noir lingered in his position; his focus now hyper-fixated on the pen in Marinette’s hand. Like always, his lady was in command and he was fully at her beck and call. He would do nothing until she gave him a signal.

“Kid.”

His muscles were tense as he readied himself to jump.

“Yes!”

He suppressed the excited growl that threatened to escape him. Some part of him, and for the moment he didn’t care which part it was, was immensely enjoying the anticipation of finally being able to rip this threat to shreds.

“Adrien!” He blinked at the sound of his name. While his focus didn’t lessen, he felt something primal and dangerous within him retreat again. “You’re Chat Noir right now, so act like it! No faerie business, got it?!”

With not a small amount of shame he had to admit that his first instinct was to defy Plagg’s orders. Marinette was his and—

“You might have some attachment to her but you don’t own her.”

Tikki’s words suddenly echoed in his mind.

Right.

He had almost forgotten.

He couldn’t claim what wasn’t his, but he could protect what he considered dear. And ‘protect’ didn’t necessarily mean mangling the enemy, no matter how much he wanted to.

“Chat Noir, now!”

He pounced, effectively pinning the Akuma to the ground while Marinette held the pen out of reach.

“Marinette? You’re working with him?”

Chat Noir growled viciously at the Akuma but otherwise did his best to ignore him.

“Steer the boat to the shore and bring the pen to Ladybug!” he said and nodded to the boat’s cabin that hopefully included a steering wheel. The whole vehicle was drawn after all, so who knew how it worked? “I’ll hold him here so he can’t escape.”

“I’m so stupid,” Evillustrator muttered.

Finally, something we can agree on.

“I thought you liked me but you’re just like Chloé!” He yelled after a hurriedly retreating
Marinette. Chat Noir’s growl picked up again. Enough was enough!

“Now, listen here,” Chat Noir said and intentionally dug his claws a little deeper into Evillustrator’s shoulder. He doubted that Akumas had the same sensory sensibility that humans did, so he wasn’t very worried about causing permanent damage. “You just compared her to the one who tormented her for years and the one you despise. If you would really love her, you wouldn’t dare to even think about comparing the two.”

His voice had dropped to a calm and at the same time threatening tone. It was the sweetness that came from faerie tongues that at the same time promised doom. A paradoxical, terrifying mix that seemed appropriate for the occasion. No, he wouldn’t mangle the boy, but he could scare him.

“Don’t disgrace her name just because you lost,” Chat Noir hissed with a voice as sweet as honey and with his claws digging deeper. A fearful whimper and the absolute terror in the Akuma’s eyes made it clear that the message had come through. The superhero grinned and then turned his head when the boat suddenly swerved and stopped on the bank of the Seine.

His malicious grin turned soft when he watched Marinette emerge from the cabin—akumatised pen still in hand—and attempt to climb over the side of the boat.

“No disgrace her name just because you lost,” Chat Noir hissed with a voice as sweet as honey and with his claws digging deeper. A fearful whimper and the absolute terror in the Akuma’s eyes made it clear that the message had come through. The superhero grinned and then turned his head when the boat suddenly swerved and stopped on the bank of the Seine.

His malicious grin turned soft when he watched Marinette emerge from the cabin—akumatised pen still in hand—and attempt to climb over the side of the boat.

“See you around, bakery girl,” he said, too afraid to use her name out in the open at night. The fair folk was surely listening.

She turned around to him with a grin of her own. It just so happened that hers was the confident one she also sported as her alter-ego. “Thank you, Chaton!” And then she was gone.

“Sorry again that we couldn’t work more on the project yesterday,” Adrien said as he leaned on the closed locker next to Marinette’s while she rummaged through her open one.

“As if we haven’t been over this a hundred and one times already,” she said and rolled her eyes. “Your dad locks you and Félix up even when nothing happens, so obviously he’d do so when there’s an Akuma attack.”

He internally cringed at the lie, but knew there was nothing to be done about it.

“So, I heard about your adventures with Chat Noir.”

Marinette snorted. “Yeah, because I told you on the phone yesterday while he was at my house.”

“How did it go?” Adrien asked, beyond curious to find out what she thought of his alter-ego when she was just herself.

“Well, he helped me with the Physics project, ate even more cake than you can stomach and when we went out to confront the Akuma, he held Nathaniel in place while I brought the pen to Ladybug.”

“How can you just say that so casually? Weren’t you scared?” He knew for a fact that she hadn’t been, not even for a second. That should actually be worrisome.

“Nah,” she said and closed her locker. “I knew he had my back. If Ladybug trusts him then I trust him too.”
Adrien felt his cheeks warm and masked it by going ahead.

“And how much nagging do you think you’ll have to endure once Alya gets here?” He asked with a grin. Marinette groaned.

“Don’t remind me. She’s probably already in the classroom, just waiting for me to arrive.”

“Aww, come on. Do you really want to deprive her of the deets? Maybe I could tell her about your tea party slash study session with one of Paris’ heroes?”

“Oh, don’t you dare!” Marinette laughed and hit Adrien lightly with the notebook she was carrying. “She’d never let me hear the end of it.”

When the two of them turned the corner, they almost ran into Chloé. Silly grins were instantly forgotten and they were about to just go around her when she suddenly held an arm out in an obvious stopping gesture.

“I can’t risk my grades slipping now that Sabrina is not here to do the work for me. I expect you two in the library at lunch to get this annoying thing over with,” she said, threw her head back in a typical Chloé fashion, and marched off.

Both Adrien and Marinette stood there frozen for a moment, staring after her.

“Did I just hallucinate or did Chloé say she’d actually work with us?” Marinette asked eventually.

“Unless this is some sort of mass hallucination, since I saw the same thing, she really did. Wow,” Adrien said and looked back to the locker room where he caught Chloé’s eye.

She raised her eyebrows at him challengingly.

He looked away. “Let’s just get to class,” he said.
...and take good care of yourself  
the miller of the black mill  
wants you as his wife tonight

♫ Faun - Die wilde Jagd

Chapter Notes

Okay, welcome to the rewrite of the Dark Cupid episode! And since you know the episode, you can already guess that some shit will go down here. Strap in folks and enjoy this rollercoaster! ;D

Did anyone say Februari? 😃

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And before anyone is confused when it shows up in the middle of this chapter:
The long s (ſ) is an archaic form of the lower case letter s. It replaced a single s, or the first in a double s, at the beginning or in the middle of a word.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Foxy Babe: hey girl

Marinette: have you changed your contact name on my phone again?

Foxy Babe: yeah ;p

you ready for TOMORROW?

Marinette: the caps make it sound ominous

and it's only the 12th

actual valentines day is sunday

Foxy Babe: not like you'll see Adrien then. Doesn't he have some event to go to?

Marinette: nope he doesn't

Foxy Babe: and how do you know that? 😕

Marinette: I asked?

why?

Foxy Babe: ohoho you asked if he was free on Valentines day? 😬
Marinette: NOT LIKE THAT

Félix and he had to go to some boring gala last year and I wanted to send my condolences if that was the case again

Foxy Babe: what a thorough explanation 😐

Marinette: Alya no

I know what you’re thinking but that’s not it!

Foxy Babe: are you suuuuuure? ;D

Marinette: yes

Foxy Babe: oh come on! This is your chance girl!

Marinette: I dunno if that’s a good idea

Foxy Babe: spare me. I’ve seen you stare at each other longingly

Marinette: ajsgshhzvshsh WE DO NOT!!!!

Foxy Babe: AND I know you already have a present for him so don’t try to wiggle your way out of this one!

Marinette: who says it has to be romantic???

Foxy Babe: GIRL! THIS IS THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO CONFESS!

Marinette: I dunno. I don’t feel like it is the right time

Foxy Babe: uh hello? Valentines Day? The day of love? When could be a more perfect time?

Marinette: Adrien and I are friends!

I can’t just confess to him

just…let me find the perfect time for it myself okay? I just don’t think this is it

Foxy Babe: fine

but then I don’t want to hear any whining afterwards

and I reserve the right to tell you “I told you so”

Marinette: deal!

With a sigh, Marinette let herself fall back on her bed. Alya really was stubbornly persistent when it came to convincing her to confess her feelings to Adrien, but she just didn’t get it. Or at least that’s what Marinette told herself: Alya didn’t understand her friendship with Adrien, thus she couldn’t correctly judge the right approach.

Deep down Marinette knew that this wasn’t the case. Or at least not fully. Procrastination and an immense fear of rejection were the real reasons she hadn’t told Adrien anything about her crush yet and also didn’t plan to do so in the near future. It just wasn’t the time. Yet.
Asking Tikki for advice didn’t help either, especially since her kwami seemed to have an odd dislike towards her best friend and crush. Marinette would say it was unfounded, but a being as old as the universe wouldn’t just make unfounded accusations, would they?

Even though she really didn’t want to admit it, Tikki’s distrust was also a tiny reason why Marinette was hesitating. Not that she’d say Tikki was right in her assumptions that Adrien was somehow deceiving her—hello? They were talking about Adrien!—but the smallest speck of doubt was whispering cruel things in the back of her head anyways.

Her phone chimed and Marinette blindly fumbled around on her blanket for it, not wanting to go through the effort of sitting up or lifting her head. As she found it and held it over her face, however, to see the new message, she instantly dropped it.

“Ow! Is that thing secretly a brick?!” She exclaimed as she held her nose. It hurt much more than it had any right to!

“Marinette, is everything alright?” Tikki asked as she floated down from the shelf above.

“Yes, phone just fell on my face,” Marinette explained and picked the offending object back up. This confronted her once again with the reason she had dropped it in the first place: A message from Adrien.

She took a deep breath before unlocking her screen.

KitKat: Alya just texted me something very cryptic

Is tomorrow a special day I didn't know about?

Yes, tomorrow is the day I’m going to murder Alya.

Princess: don't listen to a word she says!

KitKat: Okay?

Princess: tomorrow is the unofficial valentines day if that helps

KitKat: Why does there need to be an unofficial one? Is the real one not good enough?

Princess: not when it falls on a weekend instead of a school day

KitKat: ...I still don't get it

Bless his obliviousness.

Princess: for secret admirers it's easier to just leave a message or a gift on someone's desk than to have it delivered to their home. less effort and less expense

KitKat: Ooooh now I get it!

Princess: glad to be of help c:

KitKat: In that case I should probably get ready to take cover and run around a lot. My fangirls can be crazy

Princess: I know. I was there last autumn remember?
Marinette spent the next hour wide-awake, contemplating the meaning behind the red heart emoji in that context.

“Morning,” Marinette grumbled as she made her way downstairs. It annoyed her that she was well on her way to being late even though the sun had not even risen. Stupid winter.

“Good morning, sweetheart!” Her father said joyfully and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “Take this with you, will you? I want to know which of these are best so I know which ones to make most of on Sunday.”

She was handed three boxes which undoubtedly all contained pastries of some kind.

“Sure thing. I’ll tell you the results at lunch,” she said with a tired smile and then carefully walked out the door.

It was dark and cold; people were tired and the Parisian traffic was as busy as ever. Not the best conditions to be carrying three boxes with delicate goods around, which made Marinette endlessly thankful that she lived right by the school. The most dangerous thing she’d have to brave were quite a lot of stairs and those were luckily mastered without any incidents.

“Good morning,” she said, the greeting being returned to her from all sides, as she entered the classroom just two minutes before the bell rang and set all three boxes down on Adrien’s and Nino’s desk.

“Samples?” Nino immediately asked and took the top box. Marinette nodded and repeated what her father had said when he had handed them to her. She couldn’t help the warm feeling that filled her when she saw Adrien’s eyes light up in delight at the news. It made her happy to see him happy. Was that love? Most likely. But that didn’t mean it was the time to tell him.

“I just want to know who decided that the coldest month of the year would be the ideal time to have Valentine’s day. It snowed just last week for goodness’ sake!” Marinette ranted as she bit into a strawberry éclair.

“That would have been Pope Gelasius the first in 496,” Max supplied.
“Isn’t it cold in Rome too? He should’ve known better!” Nino threw in with his mouth full.

“Lucky people in the southern hemisphere,” Alya said with a sigh. “They can just walk around in summer dresses right now.”

“And they have barbecues on Christmas. Is that really the life you want to live?” Alix threw in, which made Alya seem to reconsider her standpoint.

Everyone hurried back to their seats as Mlle Bustier entered the classroom and Marinette pointed to the boxes with a questioning look. Her teacher, already familiar with the ritual, accepted a macaron with a thankful smile and laid it on a tissue on her desk.

“I don’t get how Tom expects us to tell him which the best ones are. They’re all perfect!” Adrien whispered while their teacher was preoccupied with the class register.

“Oh really?” Alya said with a grin before Marinette could get a word out. “If I remember correctly, then it was you who hoarded three whole passion fruit flavoured macarons.”

“Yeah, dude. You totally missed out on the peppermint ones. They’re the best!” Nino threw in.

“I think the toffee ones are even better,” Marinette said with a shrug and watched as Adrien suddenly blushed.

“I mean…I know the others probably taste just as good, but I just prefer the passion fruit ones,” he admitted shyly.

“It’s okay, I know you don’t like mint,” Marinette said. It might be her still lingering tiredness that made her imagine it, but Adrien’s eyes gleamed with joy all of a sudden. She had no idea what could have prompted this reaction from him though.

“Adrien, turn around please,” Mlle Bustier said, an amused smile on her lips, as Adrien whirled around to her and nervously scratched the back of his head.

“Pardon Madame. And…uhm…present,” he said quietly, making some of his classmates chuckle at his awkwardness.

Apart from the pastry sampling and it being unofficial Valentine’s day, the school day went on like it usually did. In literature, Mlle Bustier actually talked about love stories and fairy tales, which some students like Rose or Mylène were very enthusiastic about.

About ten minutes into the lesson, Adrien started to write something in his notebook. Every so often he seemed to give up and turn a page to start anew.

What is he doing?

“In most fairy tales the prince breaks the spell by kissing the princess. Who can tell us why?” Mlle Bustier asked the class.

“Because only love can conquer hate,” Rose immediately said dreamily.

“That’s right, Rose.”

“Technically this is only true in 87% of all fairy tales—”
“Thank you, Max,” Mlle Bustier interrupted before Max could fall into a speech about statistics.

“Adrien, I hope what you’re writing are notes about the lesson. Can you repeat what I just said?”

_Oh no, he didn’t pay attention!_ Marinette panicked, but he surprised her by repeating perfectly what has just been said.

“The Prince breaks the spell by kissing the princess because love conquers hate.”

“Very good, Adrien.”

She let out a sigh of relief she didn’t know she’d been holding.

At that moment, the bell rang. While everyone scrambled to pack up their things and shrug on their coats, Mlle Bustier raised her voice to let the homework assignment be heard over the sound.

“Are you incognito or are you just cold, dude?” Nino asked when Adrien wrapped his blue scarf—the one she had given him for his birthday!—around the lower half of his face and put on the black hat with cat ears—the one she had given him on their first Christmas together!


“Ah yes, the fangirls,” Nino said, his voice suddenly gravely serious. He threw a look at Félix who just descended the stairs and shuddered a little. He had probably just re-lived what they all had dubbed “The Fangirl Mob Incident” from last autumn where Félix and Nino had been chased around by crazy fans for hours until they had been able to escape them.

“Meaningless sentimentalities,” Chloé sneered from behind them, making them all turn around. “They don’t even know who it is they’re supposedly in love with.”

There must have been some hidden meaning in her words, because Adrien and Félix immediately tensed and sent Chloé warning looks in return. The class bully just rolled her eyes, threw her head back and walked out of the classroom with Sabrina stumbling after her.

“Anyway,” Alya said as if nothing had happened. “We all agree that we’re going to Marinette’s now, right?”

“Yes! More samples!” Nino celebrated and pumped his fist.

“If you feed Adrien any more of those, our nutritionist is going to throw a fit,” Félix pointed out, the grin he wore standing in contrast to his serious tone.

“It’s not like I’m gonna gain weight,” Adrien shrugged. This was a train wreck waiting to happen and Marinette _needed_ to prevent it. After all, she didn’t want her parents or her to be blamed if Adrien would actually gain weight, which could end his modelling career and—

A nudge from her purse kept her from spiraling further.

“I think you already had enough samples for today.”

And thus, she encountered the puppy eyes of _betrayal_!

She tried very hard to not be influenced by the cutest display in the universe. She failed horrendously and ended up having to look away with what she suspected to be a furious blush.

“Oh, come on! You know fully well that Mama is gonna shove _real_ lunch your way and you’ll still
somehow end up with a full plate of samples,” she said.

“More samples!” Nino repeated enthusiastically, efficiently breaking the moment but also using the opportunity to poke her in the side. She fixed him with a soft glare which morphed into a mischievous smile as she got an idea.

With newfound courage, she grabbed Adrien’s arm and pulled him out of the classroom. “Let’s go then!” She said, which was a good idea since the winter clothes were starting to get a little too warm for the heated classroom. At least Adrien’s face was all red already.

“Listen, I got a plan,” she said when the two of them hung far enough back to be out of Nino’s and especially Alya’s earshot.

“A plan?” Adrien squeaked and she did a double-take. Maybe he had caught a cold from their snowball fight the past week.

“You know how Nino and Félix have been teasing us with projectiles and pokes since summer?”

Adrien’s eyes brightened as he seemed to catch on to her string of thought. “And how we’ve been paying Nino back for it since November?” The scarf covered his mouth but she was pretty sure that he was grinning.

“Let’s use the real Valentine’s day on Sunday to retaliate mercilessly!”

Adrien snickered. “An excellent plan, Princess.”

It was unfair how much faster her heart started to beat every time he called her that. Though the origins of the nickname were absolutely harmless, she couldn’t just overlook how much potential for a pet name it had. Or how easily misunderstood it was without context.

“You’re aware that you two will have to follow Nino and Alya around all day to get any sort of retaliation, right?” Félix piped in and Marinette jumped. She hadn’t noticed him falling back to them.

“That’s kind of the idea, Fé,” Adrien said.

Félix shrugged. “I’m merely trying to point out that it’s not a good idea to have Adrien run around in public accompanied by a girl on Valentine’s Day.”

He was right. If they got caught, they’d be in a lot of trouble, especially with Gabriel Agreste. Maybe he would even pull Adrien and Félix out of school! No, they really couldn’t risk that.

“Maybe you’re—” she started, but couldn’t finish because at the same time Adrien said.

“We won’t get caught, trust me.”

There it was again, that conspiring wink and she’d bet also a grin. It was a familiar gesture Adrien threw Félix once in a while, which his brother always answered with the same judging frown. She had no idea what this really was about, but it always seemed to have something to do with taking risks. Marinette didn’t know how to feel about that.

Ladybug had been expecting an Akuma on Valentine’s day—it was as much the day of heartbreak that it was the day of love after all. The problem was that it technically wasn’t Valentine’s day yet
and that really made her dread what her Sunday would look like when her Friday afternoon plans had already gotten wrecked.

Dark Cupid targeted Chloé, which really wasn’t a surprise. Since the last Akuma had already targeted her though, Ladybug had really thought she had learned her lesson.

“`You really should know better,” Chat Noir said, pretty much voicing her thoughts, while he carried Chloé and dodged arrows.

“What do you expect?! I can’t go out with someone like him! That’s beneath me!” Chloé screeched and Ladybug rolled her eyes.

“And who would he be?” Chat Noir asked, which for some reason seemed to startle Chloé.

“What do you need his name for?!”

“Nevermind,” Chat Noir muttered and set Chloé down in an alley. “Just hide for a bit and don’t get in our way.”

“You think she’s gonna listen to that?” Ladybug asked as she spun her yo-yo like a shield to block another incoming arrow.

“Who knows?” Her partner said when he rejoined her on the rooftop.

As she dodged another arrow, her usual clumsiness kicked in, making her trip on a shingle and fall forward. Only at the last second did she manage to catch herself with her yo-yo, hanging from nothing but a rain gutter. She would have been glad about that if she had seen Dark Cupid fly by overhead like she thought he would, passing them by. He, in fact, didn’t do so though. Instead, she heard a startled yelp by none other than Chat Noir and her stomach instantly dropped with fear. She didn’t dare pull herself back up to check, fearing the Akuma would count on it and get her (as well?).

“`You shouldn’t have done this.”

The voice that said it made an icy shudder run down her spine but at the same time it held a hauntingly familiar sound. It was Chat Noir, but gone was the warmth and any speck of friendliness.

“Y-you can help me bring Ladybug down,” she heard the Akuma stutter, suddenly not sounding so confident anymore.

“`Hm? And why would I do that?” Chat Noir asked. While he sounded casual, there was something undeniably dangerous underlying his tone. Was it still Chat Noir? From what she could tell, Dark Cupid had hit him so his mind had probably been warped.

“Because you hate her?” Dark Cupid sounded meek at best now.

There was a deafening silence that was only filled with the sounds of steps. “An interesting concept, but no. Maybe regard this as a foretaste of what’s to come, Hawkmoth. The Court is very irlful and I’m willing to be gracious for my lady’s sake.”

Ladybug was honestly a little frightened herself. She had no idea what Court Chat Noir talked about and she wasn’t sure if she even wanted to know. For the moment, all of her senses screamed at her to run away.
And that’s what she did. She didn’t even look back as she let herself fall down half the height of the building, snatched the yo-yo on a street lamp and then let herself down gently. Darting into an alleyway a few buildings over and up to the nearest roof, she started a mad sprint.

Her partner had been hit and even though the arrow seemed to affect him differently than it did affect other victims, it was still terrifying. And she had only heard his voice! What she needed now was to get away from both Chat Noir and the Akuma to rethink her strategy. If she wouldn’t be able to think of anything, she’d detransform and ask Tikki for help. After all, this was the first time she had to cope without her partner.

Ladybug had already reached a completely different arrondissement when she finally slowed down and stopped on a rooftop. She leaned against the wall separating two buildings from each other and allowed herself to take a small breather. To think that just an hour ago she had been happily at home, trying to keep Adrien from eating all of the sample pastries. It felt like it happened days ago at this point.

“Run, luv, run. Take good care of yourself. The master of the black mill wants you as his wife tonight.”

Ladybug froze and instinctually pressed herself closer to the wall, as if it could hide her. It was just a song, a very creepy one, but a few lyrics couldn’t hurt her. She wasn’t so sure about the one who had sung them though. Slowly she raised her head and looked back to the top of the dividing wall.

There, perched on that very wall and with the most unsettling grin she had ever seen on anyone’s face, was Chat Noir.

“Gotcha,” he whispered when they made eye contact and he started cackling as if her fear was a great source of amusement to him.

Ladybug jumped back and instinctively grabbed her yo-yo. She hated having to be wary of her own partner. Chat Noir meanwhile calmed his laughter and kept grinning at her, all fangs, and in a very unnerving fashion. The display was only made more frightening by the black lipstick. He really had been hit. She couldn’t quite put her finger on what it was that made his behaviour so distressing to her, since she could still tell that it was him, but...something was missing. She took a few more steps back and Chat Noir’s grin promptly dropped.

“What’s the matter? It’s just me, my lady.”

Wrong.

She took another step back and clenched her fist tighter around her yo-yo.

This isn’t my Chaton.

He always called her ‘his lady’, but it had never been more than a fun nickname and a platonic endearment. The way he had said it now though made it sound possessive. As if she belonged to him.

Danger. Run!

She didn’t know if it were ancient survival instincts that made her move or some instinct the Ladybug Miraculous gave her. Maybe it also was Tikki who subconsciously was screaming at her to get away. With how she had always evaded questions about Chat Noir and not talked much about her partner as a whole, she was pretty sure that the kwami was willing to adapt the same protectiveness that she executed when it came to Adrien.
Ladybug didn’t get far as Chat Noir was suddenly in front of her. With no time to stop, she had no choice but to run into him. Contrary to her expectations, he didn’t forcefully grab her by the arms to keep her in place like an Akuma would have done. He also didn’t make a grab for her earrings or anything like that. Instead he ran a claw down the side of her face, which might have even been worse. He tutted at her.

“It’s quite rude to run away when someone is talking to you, bugaboo.”

She swallowed audibly, trying desperately to calm her nerves.

“Y-you got hit by the arrow,” she eventually stuttered silently.

“Mhmm.” He didn’t stop looking at her with no real expression whatsoever and kept stroking her cheek. Under other circumstances she would have described the gesture as ‘lovingly’ but she knew that this wasn’t what it was. The problem was…she didn’t know what else it could be either. She couldn’t read him and that was probably the most distressing part of it all.

“You should hate me now,” she said.

“Oh, part of me does. The weaker part that is, held back by emotions and morals.” He was grinning again. “But let me tell you a secret.” His face was suddenly very close and his voice had dropped to a whisper. “That’s not all there is to me.” He chuckled. “But I gotta be careful. If they find out, they might f*ck you away from me and we can’t have that.”

Ladybug felt very much like a mouse that had been cornered by a cat. But that wasn’t right. First of all, she wasn’t a helpless damsel, but a super heroine. Secondly, they were partners and this was very much not the dynamic they were supposed to have.

Wait a second…we are partners! No one knows Chat Noir better than me!

And when there was one thing she knew her Chaton loved, then it was a challenge.

“Alright,” she said at length, ignoring her nervously fast beating heart she was sure he could hear, “Can this other side of you defeat an Akuma as well when it’s supposedly stronger?”

There was an odd glimmer in his eyes that seemed familiar but also so foreign at the same time.

“Watch out. I might just set a record today,” he said.

Chat Noir didn’t stop being a terrifying presence. In fact, he got worse. If Ladybug had thought that she had been his prey before, then she had been sorely mistaken. What he had done before, grinning eerily and claiming her to be his, had been nothing but an idle game. This was a hunt and it had come to the point where Ladybug was tempted to tie her feral partner down with the yo-yo and finish the fight herself. There honestly wouldn’t be much left until Dark Cupid would surrender his akumatised object willingly.

“You think this is all fun and games, don’t you?” Chat Noir just said while Ladybug regarded her yo-yo contemplatively.

“N-no,” the Akuma said and backed up against a fountain. His arrows lay uselessly scattered one block away and one of his wings was broken.

“Well, it’s certainly fun and games for some folks out there, I bet. But you will certainly pay for the
She had heard Chat Noir hiss before, but never like *this.* It sounded like a broken wing would not be the only injury the Akuma would have to endure today if she didn’t do something.

“Lucky Charm,” she said with a desperate edge to her voice and threw her yo-yo in the air.

“No need for that, bugabo. I got *this,*” her partner said and mumbled “Cataclysm” at the same time as a horseshoe fell into her hand.

A horseshoe?! Really, Tikki?!

When she looked around though, the solution seemed pretty straight-forward.

*Alright, here goes nothing,* she thought, drew her arm back and *threw* the horseshoe at Chat Noir. It hit his face with an ugly sizzling noise as if the metal had been searingly hot.

There was one downside to the Lucky Charms: they didn’t always lead to the immediate end of the battle. Her goal had been to get Chat Noir away from Dark Cupid but after that, she was forced to improvise. And improvising was a little difficult when there was a *very* frightening superpowered cat boy staring at her with eyes that screamed *murder.* And with an active Cataclysm no less.

Ladybug barely had time to blink, much less to throw her yo-yo and dart away when he was already throwing her to the ground, his right hand with the active Cataclysm hovering threateningly above her face. An ugly snarl contorted his features into absolute rage and the very thin slits that were his pupils pierced her with a murderous glare.

“How DARE you!” He roared and suddenly Ladybug was *very* sure that this was nothing like the game he had played before. The lingering imprint—it looked like a burn—of the horseshoe on his face should be indication enough that playtime was long over. Now she had really become the prey. “Iron,” he hissed. “*You will pay for this, Danu!*”

There were a million things that should go through her head at that moment. First and foremost, escape plans. Still, her thoughts grabbed onto one insignificant question: *Who is Danu?*

“Hey, hypocrite!” An annoyingly familiar voice suddenly yelled from their right.

*What is Chloé doing here?!!*

What her shout did, though, was to distract Chat Noir. Ladybug went through plans in rapid speed in that short moment.

She couldn’t get to the Akuma, her yo-yo was useless in this position and her earrings were counting down. Chat Noir had an activated Cataclysm and was behaving very much not like himself.

Her eyes shot open with a sudden realisation. When she had asked him if he hated her earlier, he had said that a *part of him*—the weaker one, whatever that meant—*did* hate her, so the Akuma’s powers *did* actually work on him.

“You have some nerve telling me to not bring up the Court and then you’re acting like *this,*” Chloé huffed disdainfully, but Ladybug had another realisation. Her bully’s disdainful voice reminded her about what she had said in school earlier, which in turn reminded her of the lesson which had concluded with: only love can conquer hate, usually through a kiss.
Alright, that plan might be a very long shot, but if the affected part of Chat Noir was the one that was her partner, then by curing the hate she’d be able to bring him back to normal.

“Quite forward of you, Court Pr-”

Chat Noir didn’t get further because in that moment she pulled his head down and kissed him on the lips. She had never kissed anyone like this before and she also felt a little guilty for her first real kiss to not be with Adrien, but if this would give her her partner back, then she gladly did it.

When Ladybug ended the kiss, she wasn’t sure how much time had passed, but what she saw was a furiously blushing Chat Noir without black lipstick. Her absolute relief at that sight almost overshadowed her screaming mind that was very insistent on reminding her just what she had just done. Her partner, meanwhile, was gaping at her like he couldn’t believe what had just happened. To be honest, she couldn’t quite believe it herself.

“Chaton?” She still couldn’t help but ask.

He squeaked and stumbled backwards.

Yes, definitely my partner.

She looked to where the Akuma was, who stared at Chat Noir warily, apparently confused as to what was going on.

You and me both.

“Chat Noir, the brooch!” Ladybug said and breathed a sigh of relief when he sprang to attention and destroyed the akumatised object.

She didn’t waste a second purifying the butterfly, glad that this nightmare was over. She walked over to where the horseshoe lay and picked it up. When she turned around to where Chloé was, to finally ask her why she had followed them after all, she was gone. Odd. Wouldn’t she usually drink up an act of fame like this and boast with it?

“Ladybug?” Chat Noir asked and his tone of voice immediately made her turn around to him. His dejected state was accompanied by a drooping tail and ears. “I…about what…” He looked away and bit his lip.

“Look, I’m sorry about the kiss. It was the only thing I could think of,” she said and didn’t bring up the courage to look him in the eye. Instead her eyes fell on the Lucky Charm in her hand. “And I’m sorry for throwing this at you.”

When she dared to look up to him again, he looked even more miserable, if that was even possible. More importantly though was the burn she noticed again on his cheek. She tentatively held the horseshoe to her own face. Nothing. It was neither warm nor cold and even if he somehow had an allergic reaction to iron—which she was pretty sure didn’t exist—it wouldn’t look like she would have thrown a burning iron at his face.

Without even thinking, she reached out to examine the injury, but Chat Noir shied back and covered it with his hand.

“You have nothing to apologize for,” he eventually whimpered so quietly that Ladybug almost didn’t catch it. “I’m sorry. This was never supposed to happen.”

A few moments of tense silence passed.
“Chaton, I—”

“You should use the Cure,” he interrupted and nodded to the horseshoe.

She sighed and threw the Lucky Charm in the air, watching it explode into a swarm of ladybugs.

“But we really…” She trailed off. Chat Noir was gone.

Saturday was a lonely day. Tikki refused to answer any of her questions regarding what had happened to Chat Noir, which didn’t leave her with any other choice but to spin wild theories in her head she drove herself crazy with. As if that wouldn’t be bad enough already, Nino and Alya were on a date since the forecast for Sunday promised rain. Well, it wasn’t bad that they were on a date, but her original plan to follow them with Adrien fell flat because he just didn’t pick up his phone nor answered any messages. Even texting Félix only ended in unhelpfully vague replies.

Marinette: hey Adrien doesn’t reply. is he alright?

Félix: Can't really say.

Marinette: okay? you don't have anything scheduled today, have you?

Félix: No. But today isn't a good day.

Marinette: do I need to worry?

Félix: Not really. He'll figure this out.

Marinette: tell him I'm worried, okay?

Félix: I will.

In the end, it had only added to her worries instead of clearing them.

Marinette looked to the neatly wrapped gift on her desk. Maybe it was a bad idea after all to want to give Adrien something on Valentine’s day. Even if it was something platonic, she didn’t want to needlessly stress him out when he obviously wasn’t doing well.

Just as predicted, it was raining buckets on Valentine’s Day. And sleet definitely wasn’t the comfy kind you could relax to inside with a hot chocolate to either. Just cold, grey weather which was honestly a little depressing, especially for the day of love. Marinette just hoped that Hawkmoth didn’t get the brilliant idea to akumatise someone since the last thing she wanted to do was to go outside.

She was in the kitchen, cooking some soup when she suddenly heard someone come upstairs. Just to be sure, she checked the clock, but no, it wasn’t either of her parents’ breaks yet. Then again, business was probably slow due to the weather.

“Oh sweetie, what were you thinking going outside without an umbrella?” She heard her mother say. Wait, hadn’t she said that she was running an errand? There was no time to think about it further, as she suddenly called upstairs: “Marinette, get some towels please!”
Marinette put the soup on a cold spot of the cooktop, turned off the hot one and swiftly jogged to the bathroom. Whoever had gone outside in this weather without an umbrella had either gone outside when it wasn’t raining yet _hours_ ago, or was plainly insane.

When she returned to the living room, she was greeted by the sight of one absolutely drenched and shivering Adrien Agreste. She froze for a second and then mechanically handed him the towels. The odd thing wasn’t that he was at her place—he practically _lived_ at the bakery after all—but that he wasn’t looking at her. Even the towels were only accepted with a silent nod.

“No, that won’t do,” her mother suddenly said and shook her head. “Take a shower while I put your clothes in the dryer. You can have some of Tom’s old clothes until then.”

“I really don’t—” Adrien started to say and his voice was oddly raspy and silent, as if he’d been screaming for hours.

“No buts, young man,” Sabine insisted and before Marinette could fully comprehend what was happening, Adrien had already been shoved into the bathroom and given a stack of her father’s old but not smaller clothes. In fact, she was unable to do anything but stand stranded in the middle of the living room while trying to comprehend the situation until her mother returned.

“What happened?” Marinette asked and Sabine sighed.

“He didn’t say. I just found him outside the bakery when I went to deliver something and he looked like he has been standing there for a while. No umbrella and not even a jacket! The poor boy will probably catch a nasty cold.”

She kissed Marinette on the forehead. “I really have to go do the delivery now so take care of him, alright? I’ll tell your Papa so he can bring up some warm croissants.”

And with that she was gone.

“Marinette?” Tikki asked as she peeked out from the ajar pantry door she had been hiding behind.

“Right,” Marinette said and shook her head. When Adrien was cold, then he needed something warm. Good thing she had been cooking soup anyways. It might not be chicken soup, but it would hopefully do the trick in preventing the worst anyway.

While cooking, Tikki settled down on her shoulder and stayed mostly quiet. At least until she stated the obvious.

“You’re worried.”

Marinette snorted. “Yeah, no kidding. First he goes radio-silent for almost two days and then he shows up here after getting drenched in sleet.”

Tikki hummed and then flitted back to the pantry when the bathroom door opened. When Marinette turned around, she saw Adrien in the comically large shirt that almost swallowed him whole. He _still_ wasn’t looking at her.

A few tense moments of silence passed.

“I made soup,” she eventually said. He acknowledged the statement with a nod and sat down at the kitchen table. That he didn’t speak a word worried her even more than the fact that he didn’t look at her. Something was definitely very wrong.
Adrien had only taken a few spoonfuls of soup in the time she had eaten her entire bowl. It was about the same amount of time it took her to build up the courage to actually ask him the question that had been on her mind since he entered the bakery.

“What’s wrong?”

Adrien set the spoon down and bit his lip, followed by another moment of tense silence.

“I’m sorry,” he eventually said to his soup bowl, his voice as hoarse as before but also with a note as if he was about to start crying.

“About what?” Marinette asked, regardless if she felt addressed or not.

“About worrying you yesterday. I was a real jerk for just ignoring your texts like that,” he said and finally looked up at her.

“Apology accepted, jerk.” She ruffled his still wet hair fondly. “Can you tell me now what was going on or is that one of these hush hush things again?”

Adrien sighed. “The latter. I’m sorry, I really hate that I can’t tell you, but…you know, family stuff.”

She nodded. It usually was ‘family stuff’ when something happened that he couldn’t tell her about. Though with Gabriel Agreste as their father she wasn’t really surprised that there were some things he and Félix would rather not want her to know.

“Okay,” she said. “That doesn’t explain what you did outside in the rain though.”

Adrien visibly cringed.

“That…it’s kinda hard to explain.”

Marinette leaned back and crossed her arms. “I have time.”

He looked at his soup and took another spoonful of it instead of answering her. She frowned. Apparently, she needed to try a different approach.

“Adrien, imagine things were reversed and you would have found me drenched outside of your house in the middle of winter. What would you do?”

He lifted his head and threw her a weak smile. “I’d do the same thing you’re doing right now. Probably with a lot more panicking though.”

Another silence fell upon them, just that this one was much more comfortable as Adrien looked deep in thought. Eventually, he huffed out a humourless laugh.

“Guess I’m just at a loss for what to do.”

And just like that, she could suddenly see the weight behind his gaze. As if he was Atlas, carrying the burden of the entire world.

Screw customs and symbolism!

“Eat up your soup! I’ll be right back!” She said and jumped up from her chair to run upstairs to her
room. The present she had originally intended as just something fun and cute could maybe actually help the situation. It didn’t matter that her original intention had been to just get a laugh out of him. That boy desperately needed a hug and she couldn’t always be there to give him one.

Only seconds later she stormed back downstairs into the kitchen where Adrien was watching her with a mixture of shock and curiosity. Before he could ask questions, she practically shoved the blue-wrapped present into his face.

“I actually wanted to finish it for Christmas but it took longer than I thought and to give you a belated Christmas gift at the end of January seemed kinda dumb, so I wanted to wait for the next best occasion and I think this is it. You know, since it’s Valentine’s day and people give each other presents then. It doesn’t have to be romantic! J-just something platonic I wanted to give to a friend!” She bit her lip to stop rambling while Adrien looked back and forth between her and the present before finally taking it.

Marinette fidgeted nervously as he carefully tore open the wrapping paper and then let out a gasp. He stared at the contents of the present for a moment in frozen awe before he ever so gently pulled the snow leopard plushie out of it.

“You always went on about wanting to cuddle a snow leopard so I wanted to give you the opportunity to. I didn’t like the ones I found in shops though, so I tried to make one myself. It’s my first try ever at making a plushie so it isn’t very good and the eyes took so long to find and—”

She was cut off by a smothering hug.

“I don’t deserve you,” Adrien mumbled into her hair.

Her voice softened. “You deserve the world.”

Chapter End Notes

And? How did y'all like Faedrien? >:c
gotta be honest, this type of faerie-insane is what I like to write the most ❤
Also, I'm sorry for making the kitten sad! 😔 He's so devastated about the whole thing!
;A;

PS: Any fellow Germans here who can understand the song I mentioned in the summary? I tried my best at translating the refrain because I like how eerie it sounds, but if I made a translation error then please let me know! ❤
Spring Times

Chapter Summary

A LadyNoir talk and some spring time fluff! ❤

Chapter Notes

Thank you for liking Faedrien or for having mixed opinions on him! ;D You can thank Bridgetinerabbit for it since she made a comment that inspired this whole mess back when I was still planning the chapter! >:)c

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Adrien felt like the scum of the earth. There was every reason to, because, after all, he was a horrible person deep within. A fae. He had always known that a more wicked side of him existed, but the Dark Cupid incident had still been a shock. The Cure had done a good job of making everyone who had gotten hit with an arrow forget what they have done, blessing them with amnesia previously only known by the Akuma victims themselves.

Chat Noir had not been so lucky.

He remembered everything!

Worse yet, he remembered meaning all those things he had said and done. It was like one of his worst nightmares had suddenly manifested in reality and there was no going back. And even if he would have forgotten, there was no way Marinette would forget it any time soon.

The memory of her fear-filled eyes had etched itself into his mind and he felt all the worse for having to lie to her. She had no idea that this nightmarish thing had been Adrien. She had no idea that she was talking to him almost daily. She had no idea what it all meant. And he couldn’t tell her either.

He hugged Emilie and the snow leopard plushie that still needed a name, and felt miserable. He didn’t deserve either of them, but they still gave him comfort.

In all of this, Marinette wasn’t the biggest issue. It was Ladybug.

Well, theoretically they were the same person, but Adrien couldn’t apologize to Marinette for something Chat Noir had done to Ladybug. To set that right, it was Chat Noir who had to apologize to Ladybug.

Adrien wanted to. By Danu, he needed to apologize for that! But, whenever patrol came around, he found a reason to chicken out at the last second. No Akuma had attacked for weeks and it was already March, which meant he had avoided the issue for far too long already. He knew that he couldn’t procrastinate any longer.
“Stop feeling sorry for yourself and go out there,” Félix said that Saturday evening—it was patrol
day.

“But she’s gonna ask questions and then what will I say?! ‘Oh, I’m sorry, my lady, but I’m a
halfling and the Akuma’s powers only affected my human side so all that was left back then was a
fae’.”

Félix rolled his eyes and forcibly dragged Adrien out of bed by the legs. He yowled in surprise and
almost ripped the bedding when he instinctively wanted to hold on to it with his claws.

“We’ve gone over this hundreds of times now. You know what to say.”

“But—”

“Kid, your whining is not helping anyone,” Plagg cut in and yawned. “I’m not one for much work,
but I agree with your brother for once. So, get out there and explain yourself to the bug.”

Chat Noir didn’t like this. He had almost turned around three times already to go back home. But
Félix, Plagg and his common sense were right: he couldn’t procrastinate this any longer.

He sat on the edge of the rooftop Ladybug and he always met on for patrol and wrapped his tail
around himself. Not neatly and with poise like Félix usually did, but in a way that gave him
security and comfort. His nerves let the fur stand a little on end and he petted it in the direction it
grew. It was a little unnerving to not feel it through the material of his gloves so he ended up
rubbing it against the exposed skin on his face. It felt softer than usual.

He laughed to himself when he thought about how the miraculous of the god of destruction—who
smelled like cheese no matter how often Adrien and Félix insisted he should take a bath or a
shower—worked like some sort of conditioner. Plagg must have guessed his train of thought
because he gave an indignant huff. His kwami would no doubt have started a tirade about how his
Miraculous was the epitome of perfection and how Adrien should be thankful for being allowed to
use it at all, but in that moment, there was the sound of someone lightly landing on the roof behind
him.

Chat Noir turned around to see Ladybug standing there with an indiscernible expression. She
looked both happy and unsure to see him. At once, his nerves returned and the fur of his tail fluffed
up in response.

All the times he had practiced what to say to her seemed to be wasted effort as his mouth suddenly
felt dry and he didn’t even get out a simple greeting. The instinct to jump up and flee overcame
him, so he dug his claws into the cement to forcefully stay where he was.

She was no danger, so there was no reason to flee from her. The conversation they were long
overdue to have though, that would be dangerous. Tikki would no doubt twist his neck personally
if he screwed this up and let anything further slip.

“Hi Chat. How are you?” Ladybug eventually asked awkwardly after what felt like an eternity of
silence. He noted that she didn’t come closer to him and he’d lie if he’d say that it didn’t hurt.

Don’t worry. It’s just me. You don’t have to be scared.

He couldn’t say that. That didn’t stop his ears from drooping when he picked up on her fear. Curse
his cat senses. Humans were truly blessed with obliviousness, not being able to so easily pick up on other people’s emotions.

“I’m sorry,” Chat Noir said and got up from his sitting position. He didn’t dare to come closer though. Predators were the ones that prowled closer to their prey and he had to do the opposite. Let her approach him on her own terms while he needed to just look as innocent and approachable as possible.

“It’s okay. It’s not your fault you had urgent civilian stuff coming up.”

He blinked a few times until he realised that she had referred his apology to how he had skipped out on patrol for the last few weeks.

“Err, yeah. And that’s also something I’m sorry for.” He shuffled on the spot awkwardly and looked at the gravel-covered flat roof. He could do this. Félix was right when he had said that he technically knew what to say. He had carefully crafted together something of a speech/interview. It was something he had done for public interviews as Adrien Agreste hundreds of times and it had never been an issue. All of a sudden, it seemed like an impossible task to remember the dos and don’ts though. Maybe because the fate of the love of his life was at stake here.

“Are you talking about the Dark Cupid thing?” She asked and hesitantly made a step in his direction. They were still five metres or so apart but it was progress. He nodded.

“I shouldn’t have said or done all these things and I’m sorry for scaring you.”

Her eyes mirrored her emotions as she seemingly recounted what exactly had transpired back then. He had never wanted to be able to cry more in his life than in this moment. The most human way of showing genuine emotion and he couldn’t even do that much.

“It’s okay, you—”

“Don’t say that,” he whimpered. “It wasn’t okay at all. Don’t pretend like it doesn’t haunt you and don’t downplay it, please. It’s…it’s not okay and it never will be.”

Chat Noir had thoroughly deviated from his script at this point, so he bit his lip and looked back down to the ground. He couldn’t let her think that this was a recurring thing but he also needed to tell her that it might happen again in the future if an Akuma with similar powers hit him. He hadn’t been careful enough, so all that had happened had truly been his fault. She had tripped and fallen, so naturally he had focused solely on her, ready to jump to her rescue. Of course she had been able to save herself and he should have known that, but his subconscious didn’t want to let go of the ‘she’s a fragile human’ mantra. If he had trusted her more and paid attention to the Akuma instead, then all of this wouldn’t have happened. He truly was the worst partner ever.

Ladybug looked at him, stunned. She opened her mouth and closed it again a few times before finally settling on what she wanted to say.

“Tikki explained it to me a bit.”

Chat Noir could feel the blood draining from his face.

“Tikki had what?!”

“Oh-oh?” He said and suddenly had to sit down again. To his utmost relief, Ladybug came closer and sat down across from him. Still at a more than polite distance, but he’d take whatever he could get from her that night.
“She said that the Akuma’s arrows didn’t mingle well with your magic. Or Plagg’s magic, I guess. And, I mean, it somehow makes sense? It’s the power of destruction and Plagg is a black cat, so I guess it could make you act more…feral when messed with.”

Chat Noir blinked and tilted his head.

“Tikki is smart. Did you really think she’d tell your bug that you’re a halfling?” Plagg said in his head.

Now that he thought about it, Plagg was right. It really wouldn’t make sense for Tikki to tell Marinette anything that had any relation to the fair folk when she wanted to protect her from ever finding out about it. Planting a half-truth in her head and then letting her spin her own explanation to it was a much better way to approach it than what he had planned to say.

He breathed a sigh of relief. “Yeah, that’s pretty much it,” he lied. But then he remembered something and his expression saddened again. “But that’s still no excuse. I remember everything and it’s…it’s terrifying to know that I meant all those things back then. Just what kind of psychopath does that make me?!”

Again, he would cry if he could.

Ladybug scooted closer to him and before he really knew what was happening, he was wrapped in a hug.

“Shh, it’s okay, Chaton,” she said and let a hand glide through his hair in an obvious try to comfort him. He usually loved it when she petted him, but he was currently too distressed to really appreciate it.

“Stop saying that,” he said throatily.

“You’re not a psychopath. You’re my partner. I’m not gonna lie, it was very scary when you suddenly acted like you did back then, but I knew that it wasn’t…you. The magic forced that side out of you.” She paused for a bit. “You know, when you were like that, you said that you were affected by the arrow, but that it was the weaker side of you that was hating me.”

He whimpered.

“And that got me thinking,” she continued. “Somehow you must have been able to lock that hatred away that would have made you attack me, maybe even side with the Akuma and Hawkmoth. So even when I didn’t like who you became as a result, you were still strong enough to pull this off and kind of stay on my side.”

When she suddenly laid her head on his shoulder, he was sure that he was going to spontaneously combust at any second.

“You did everything you could do in that situation. I’m proud of you.”

They stayed in comfortable silence for a while, only interrupted by his silent purr that started to grow in volume the longer they stayed like this. It was clear that they wouldn’t get any patrolling done tonight.

“There’s still something that bugs me though—” Chat Noir snorted at her accidental pun, “—and Tikki won’t tell me anything either.”

_Uh oh._
He tensed. If it was something Tikki wouldn’t tell her, then he definitely wouldn’t like what came next.

“When you were, well, affected, you said something about a Court…and Chloé mentioned it too when she distracted you later. What does it mean?”

*Oh, by Danu, NO! Anything but this question!*

“Forget it,” he said, more harshly than he intended. He didn’t want her to say this word ever again. It didn’t belong on her tongue.

“What?” Ladybug ended the hug and looked at him, bewildered.

*Please, my lady. Nothing good will come of it. It’s already risky that I know of it. Tikki has a very good reason not to tell you. Please trust me and trust her.*

He wanted to say more. He wanted to warn her of how lethal the knowledge was, but the more he talked about it, the more dangerous it would become. Instead, he tried to put all insistence and desperation into his expression to convey how serious the matter was.

Ladybug sighed. “Fine, I’ll drop it,” she said and he could tell that she wasn’t happy with being out of the loop.

“It’s better like this, trust me,” he said. “And if anyone talks to you about the Court again, just run away. I’m sure Tikki will agree with me on that one.”

“That was a close one, kid, but you managed. Now change the topic before you mess it up,” Plagg said in his head.

Silence stretched between him and Ladybug once more. A silence Chat Noir used to wrack his brain about what else they desperately needed to talk about. There had been something important even, but with all the close calls concerning the Court he had momentarily forgotten what it was.

“There was something else,” he muttered, angry at himself for not remembering.

“Seriously, kitten? The KISS!”

Chat Noir flinched out of several reasons. One, Plagg’s voice was *very loud* in his head. Secondly, how could he have actually forgotten the *kiss*?! And last but not least, now he had to *talk* about it with Ladybug which made him all kinds of flustered.

When he looked up, he saw his partner look at him, her head tilted. What was she supposed to think now?! First he mumbled to himself like a maniac and then he flinched so hard he almost fell off the roof.

“Uhm...yeah...there is...something else, I wanted to talk to you about,” he eventually said and prayed that he wasn’t blushing so much that it would be visible. She made an affirmative noise, silently prodding him to go on.

“Well, uh, about how you snapped me out of it back then…” He trailed off because Ladybug suddenly blushed as red as her suit.

“Oh, *that*…” she said and bit her lip. “I just had a hunch it would work and it did. Since, you know, in fairy tales”—he couldn’t help but flinch at the word—“it always works and I don’t really have
much else to go on with in regards to magic. So, yeah, I tried it because I couldn’t think of anything else.”

“O-okay then. But...isn’t it an act of love in fairy tales rather than a simple kiss?” Chat Noir had absolutely no idea where the courage to ask that question had suddenly come from. Well, curiosity killed the cat but satisfaction would bring it back. Stupid cat habits.

“Platonic love counts too!” Ladybug said a little too loud and a little too nervously to make it believable. Chat Noir was stunned.

“My lady...do you love me?” What had that been about? Curiosity killed the cat?

“Platonically!” Ladybug insisted loudly while still blushing furiously. “Let’s just...not talk about it again, okay?”

“But…” He wasn’t even sure why he wanted to argue this point. The less they talked about it, the less awkward it would be.

“It didn’t mean anything, I just wanted to save you. Can we leave it at that?”

That sentence hurt more than it had any right to. Of course it wouldn’t mean anything to her. Chat Noir and Ladybug were crime fighting partners after all and nothing more. Still, it was often hard to forget that she also was Marinette, his best friend and his one and only love. And to hear her say that kissing him didn’t mean anything...kinda hurt.

“Yeah, let’s just drop it,” he said with a sigh. The conversation was a dead end anyway, so he shouldn’t needlessly get worked up about it.

“Alright, alright!” Ladybug then said and stood up. “Now, how about patrol?”

Chat Noir frowned at her. “Wait, we’re actually doing patrol tonight?”

She raised an eyebrow at him. “You have three weeks to catch up on,. Besides, I’ve been cooped up in my room all day so I am actually out here for a good run. Wanna join me or take a nap on this rooftop?”

He loved the way she grinned at him. Just half an hour ago he had been afraid that he would never see that grin thrown at him from her masked face ever again.

“Whoever is first at the Louvre?” He challenged as he stood up as well.

“You’re on!”

Adrien sighed in bliss at the flowery scents that surrounded them and curled up further on the picnic blanket while stretching in the warm sunbeam. He loved spring, even when it came with its own hindrances. Beltane was one of them, but that had been yesterday, so he enjoyed the feeling of the veil thickening again. It would get thinner again for the much-dreaded Midsummer, but that was over a month from now and therefore a worry for future-Adrien.

Speaking of Beltane—its importance equal to Samhain, just on the other side of the year—there had been a very close call. Roger, Sabrina’s father, had been akumatised and not only had Adrien been forced to fight an Akuma while the laminarity was bugging him, but he had also needed to
deal with Chloé who had sided with the Akuma willingly and made this particular task all the more difficult. It had all been Plagg’s fault anyway. Him and his stupid obsession with Camembert cheese.

“Finally, we get to hang out without screaming children or snow storms,” Alya said as she lay with her head on Nino’s lap. The two of them had eventually stopped being frustratingly oblivious and started dating. Them, Marinette, Félix and he were currently in the middle of enjoying the last day of the spring holidays. The last relaxation they would get before school started again with the much dreaded final exams.

“Don’t jinx it, Al,” Adrien said and closed his eyes. He would also love to lie down with his head on Marinette’s lap, but he couldn’t do that. He loved her, but he couldn’t risk their friendship…yet. Back on Valentine’s Day he had originally wanted to confess: he had spent a lot of time trying to write the perfect poem, but then Dark Cupid had happened. There was no way he could confess to her in good conscience after what he had done back then, even though she didn’t know it had been him. It was hard to believe that it had already almost been three months since that horrible day.

“I’m just saying. This past month has been hectic as all hell. Which reminds me, Agreste, you still owe someone an extra model spot in one of your next photoshoots.”

Adrien opened his eyes again to see Alya wiggling her eyebrows at him. He tried to glare at her but by the way she was smirking he was probably blushing instead.

“Alya!” Marinette threw in and one look at her told him that she was blushing as well.

“We could ask Nathalie to schedule something,” Félix unexpectedly said.

“Fé!” Adrien’s blush probably worsened.

“Yeah, do that, bro!” Nino agreed and held out his fist for Félix to bump. He did, having grown more comfortable with such mundane gestures ever since they started going to school. “I always thought Marinette belonged in the modelling business.”

“I don’t know. I’m not a model and I don’t know if those clothes would even fit me since they’re tailored for taller people and I wouldn’t know what to do at all and—” Marinette started rambling at lightning speed.

“Adrien can teach you,” Alya interrupted her with a wink. “Right, Sunshine?”


“Anyway,” Marinette said, a little louder than strictly necessary and stood up, “I wanted to walk around the park a little for inspiration.”

“I’ll come with you,” Adrien said and jumped up as well. As much as he wanted to keep lying in the sun, he didn’t want to risk the teasing that was no doubt going to ensue in Marinette’s absence if he stayed behind.

“Oh? O-okay then,” Marinette said and fidgeted with the string of her bag. Against his will he sensed her nervousness, which probably meant that she was as eager to get away from the gentle teasing as he was. A little walk through the blooming trees seemed perfect.

Adrien bowed. “Lead the way, Princess,” he said and had to smile when it made her giggle. When a pebble lightly hit his shin, the smile turned into an accusing frown that was directed at his brother. Félix feigned innocence though. When he looked up, Marinette was throwing a similar
frown towards Nino. Adrien couldn’t believe that after ten months neither Nino nor Félix had stopped with this childish game.

Things quieted down once they were out of earshot of their friends and only the general noise of other park goers and the city beyond the trees surrounded them. Adrien couldn’t take his eyes off Marinette, who was practically 
*dancing* through the blooming trees. A wind gust made white petals fly off a tree he didn’t know the name of and surround her like snow while she laughed. He would burn this image into his memory to hold onto on dark days. She was so beautiful and full of life.

He *loved* her.

“How is the inspiration coming along?” He asked after she re-joined his side once again. For the past few minutes she had been darting around beyond the park’s path to take pictures of flowers and blossoming trees or to just look at them.

“Amazingly!” She said, her eyes sparkling with joy. “I was thinking that a white dress with pink accents and maybe lace would be nice. I’ve never sewn lace before so it would be a nice challenge! Oh, and I could use differently coloured threads for it, so that it isn’t just one colour!”

Adrien smiled. She was so cute when she was inspired.

“That sounds very cute. Will I get to see you wear it?”

Marinette grinned mischievously. “Maybe. Unless *you* would rather want to wear it instead?”

He snorted. “I still have last year’s outfit, so I’m good. We’ll definitely have to do that again now that the weather is getting warmer though. It would be a lot of fun to have Alya along as well.”

She giggled, as heavenly of a sound as ever. “Yeah, that’d be fun. But it’s not quite warm enough for that yet,” she said and tugged at his jeans jacket—another Marinette original he had commissioned from her. He loved wearing clothes that she made and not only because they looked amazing and fit him perfectly. She put so much effort into them, so he wanted to show her talent to the world. He was so proud of her.

“Maybe we could make a bet with Fé and if he loses, then he’ll be the one who’ll have to disguise himself as a girl this time,” Adrien snickered and a mischievous smile took over his face. His brother would, of course, never agree to such a thing, but the thought alone was amusing enough.

“I don’t think he’d agree to a bet like that. He has a reputation to uphold after all,” Marinette said with an equally amused expression.

Comfortable silence settled on them until Marinette let out a delighted gasp and ran forwards again. Adrien first thought that something inspirational had caught her eye once more, so that he was absolutely unprepared when it turned out to be *someone*.

“Mel!” Marinette called and Adrien absolutely *froze*. Only for a moment though, because he quickly caught up to her and the blonde that was now turning around with a smile.

“Oh, hello dearie. Out for some fresh air?” She asked and then her eyes met his. “And Adrien too! I haven’t seen you in months! How are you and Félix holding up?”

Adrien tried his absolute hardest not to frown. He knew that Mélusine knew Marinette and he also
knew that Marinette knew that Mélusine knew Félix and him. But to address him in public while Marinette was right there was risky anyways. Then again, it was the middle of the day, so most of the fair folk were probably asleep. Which begged the question why Mélusine was up and about.

“We’re doing good,” he said shortly and then gently tugged at Marinette’s arm. “Maybe we should go back, otherwise Nino will eat all the cake.”

Marinette blinked at him, confused. “In a minute,” she then said and turned back around to Mélusine.

“Do go on, dearie. I have errands to run anyways. Maybe stop by for some tea next week though?”

“I’d love to!” Marinette practically beamed.

“Adrien, can I have a word with you? It’s been a while and something has come up,” Mélusine suddenly said and Adrien swallowed.

“I’ll catch up in a minute,” he said to Marinette who just nodded with a smile—ignorance truly was bliss.

“I’m just gonna go over there for a bit,” she pointed to her right. “I saw a nice flower garden that way earlier and wanted to check it out,” she said and just like that she was off.

“You’re horribly reckless, kitten,” Mélusine said once Marinette was out of earshot and he flinched.

“What?”

Chloé’s very similar words from Samhain ghosted through his mind.

“Stop being so reckless. You’re putting us all in danger.”

“She noticed that you tried to get her away from me. If you want her to stay ignorant, you have to be more subtle about pulling her away from the fair folk.”

Adrien blanched. She was right. He hadn’t considered that at all, only thinking as far as getting Marinette away from any fae influence and then inventing a fitting lie for any weirdness afterwards. Now that Mélusine pointed it out, it was horribly obvious.

“I’m glad I just saw it and could point it out to you since you don’t have the luxury of making any mistakes.”

His mind immediately offered the image of an absolutely insane Chat Noir from the Dark Cupid fight. Videos of it were all over the Ladyblog so that he had the opportunity to observe his biggest slip up yet from an outsider’s perspective.

“I know,” he said guiltily and looked in the direction Marinette had disappeared into. Mélusine patted his head.

“Cheer up, kitten. Now that you know it, you can avoid it. And with the Akuma attacks you even have good excuses for a lot of weirdness, so that works in your favour.”

Adrien wore a strained smile. That would work if Marinette didn’t also happen to be Ladybug. He could feel Plagg squirm in the pocket of his jacket.

“I hope you will visit me again soon. It seems like not only Félix needs some advice and
education.”

And with a last fond ruffling of his hair, she was off, basking in the beauty of this sunny spring afternoon.

Chapter End Notes

*screams at the void* the chapter buffer is catching up to me! D: Only two chapters pre-written now. Gotta hurry before uni starts again! 😒
Chapter Notes

The song I used in this chapter is "Silver Moonlight" by Within Temptation. c: It originally inspired a similar but different scene, but I'm glad what this chapter ended up with anyway and that I could still use the song!
PS: Thank you for all the nice comments and Kudos on the one shot I uploaded last week. I never thought I'd be able to even write a one shot, yet here we are. ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

There was a certain contentment that accompanied a sugar rush. Most people would find it odd to see the Félix Agreste indulge in something atrociously calorie-heavy like the lemon creme cake he was currently consuming, but it frankly wasn’t that out of the ordinary. He was a fae after all and the fair folk lived for sweetness.

Of course, the exception proved the rule, as he was also quite fond of the bitterness of coffee or the herby tastes of tea. At his core though, was and still is a sweet tooth and indulging was a guilty pleasure of his.

“Careful there, if you eat more than one piece you will get sick,” Marinette said from where she stood at the kitchen counter and washed the dishes. He raised his eyebrows at her and purposefully shoved a large spoonful of cake in his mouth.

“I warned you,” she said with a shrug and then got back to rinsing a plate.

Adrien was at a photoshoot that Félix was not required to attend. Instead, he spent the time where he most liked to be: at the Dupain-Cheng bakery. It had become rather rare that he had found relative silence there, since Alya would usually be a very constant presence. And as long as the Ladyblogger was around, there was barely a silent minute.

But she was on yet another date with Nino, which led to the fortunate circumstance that only Marinette was home.

“So, is that a new dress?” Félix asked as he regarded the white dress with pink flowers on it that she wore.

“Yeah, it is!” Marinette said, obviously delighted that he had noticed. “When I went fabric shopping last week, I found this nice fabric and I just had to make something from it! I wanted to add lace to it originally, but I’ll save that idea for something else.”

Félix nodded and ate the last piece of his slice of cake. “If I wouldn’t know better, I’d say you got all dolled up in the hopes that someone else would be your company today.”

There was a loud clattering noise from the kitchen when Marinette dropped a plate into the sink.

“I don’t k-know what y-you’re talking about!” She spluttered and her face turned as red as a tomato.

“Marinette,” he said at length and raised an eyebrow. “You know you’re talking to me, right?”
She sighed. “I know, I know. I was just hoping…urgh, forget it!” She started to scrub the plate furiously.

He would have chuckled about her flustered state if he hadn’t also picked up on the very real embarrassment that accompanied it—and it wasn’t the good kind.

“I’m probably the least oblivious person you’ll ever meet, but don’t worry, Adrien doesn’t know.”

She paused rinsing the plate and looked at it for a moment as if it had personally offended her. Then she said: “I just don’t think it’s a good idea.”

Félix rolled his eyes, since Adrien basically told him that exact same thing every single day. It had become seriously annoying at this point.

“Why?” he asked and took a sip of the Latte Macchiato he very much needed to get through this conversation with a straight face. Marinette looked at him as if he’d grown a second head.

“Because Adrien and I are friends! I can’t just ask him out!” It took a few seconds for another blush to overtake her and for her to start fidgeting with the dish cloth.

“People say the best relationships are based on friendships, so I’d say you have a good chance.”

“You’re just saying that,” she grumbled.

Félix turned his eyes heavenwards again. “Fine. Go ahead and don’t listen to valuable advice from the person who has been stuck with Adrien since birth.”

“You really think I have a chance?” She asked quietly.

I’d say more than just a chance.

“Why don’t you find that out yourself? I’m not giving you any guarantees since my brother is so oblivious that it’s painful to watch sometimes, but I think even he would recognize obvious flirting.”

“F-flirting?” And once again, Marinette turned into a tomato.

“It’s just a suggestion. I never said that you have to go through with it. Just think it over for a bit.”

Félix really wasn’t the right person to play Cupid. He should just leave that to Alya and Nino who knew more about love and relationships than he did. Though he couldn’t deny that it would be pretty amusing to see Adrien’s reaction if Marinette actually started flirting with him.

Suddenly Tom was calling up from downstairs and he could see more than hear Marinette’s sigh of relief when her posture relaxed.

“Coming!” she called and quickly dried her hands. “I’ll just be a few minutes.”

“No rush. I’m perfectly fine on my own,” he replied but Marinette was already rushing down the stairs. For a moment, the idea of finishing cleaning the dishes ran through his head, but with the luck he was having lately he didn’t want to risk it. The last thing he wanted to explain to Marinette was a smashed plate that was possibly worth a fortune.

“Cat Sidhe,” a quite sour high-pitched voice suddenly said, making Félix choke on his coffee.

“You must be Tikki,” he said as he calmed down from his coughing fit and looked into the eyes of
the ladybug kwami. Adrien had described her to him before, but in the entire nine months he had never met the goddess himself. It would have been an honour, but he had a hunch that her presence wasn’t a good thing.

“I am,” she said and her voice was as cold as Plagg’s had been the one time Félix had accidentally turned his cheese into dirt. “Though you should not even know that much.”

Félix managed a passive frown. “If anyone understands secrecy, then it’s me. I’m not as reckless as my brother.”

“I know. I’ve watched you a lot.”

Well, that isn’t unsettling or anything.

“Well, that isn’t unsettling or anything.”

“Then what’s your verdict?”

“My verdict is that I might not trust you, but you’re caring for Marinette and keep her away from the fair folk. I respect that. Which brings me to why I’m here.”

She floated closer and Félix swallowed, nervous what a goddess would want from him.

“Plagg and I can’t see the future, but time can be relative, especially with the fair folk. When it comes to them, we get hunches from time to time of things that could happen in the foreseeable future. I got such a hunch this morning. They’re not always correct, but since you’re always working to keep the fair folk away from Akuma fights, I thought it would be useful to tell you.”

“And Plagg couldn’t tell me that because?” Félix prompted, really not liking the direction this conversation was going in.

“Because he often doesn’t listen to those hunches.”

Yes, Félix could imagine that. After all, the kwami had the annoying habit of telling him that he was being too paranoid. As if there was such a thing when it came to the fair folk!

“Anyway, it was interesting to make your acquaintance,” Félix said. He wouldn’t lie to her face and say that it had been nice or even a pleasure. False pleasantries should be spared for people who would believe them.

Tikki nodded. “Likewise.”

And just like that ended what Félix believed to be one of the most unusual conversations of his life.

“Ugh,” Adrien said with his face buried in a pillow while Félix didn’t so much as raise his head from the book he was reading.

“The photoshoot took longer than usual,” he commented dryly and flipped a page.

“Vngmnt fhnd thht mn fmnlm whf thh tmfm.”

Félix prided himself in understanding Adrien in almost all situations, but even he couldn’t make out what his brother was trying to convey.

“Try again without the pillow.”
“Vincent said that my smile was too tense,” Adrien repeated, this time clear as day.

Plagg snorted. “I wonder why,” he said sarcastically and with that he, for once, expressed exactly what Félix felt.

“Stop stressing about the thing with Marinette every waking minute of the day. The more you worry about it, the crazier you’re gonna drive yourself,” Félix said, intentionally wording it in a way Adrien would understand. One never knew with his brother’s obliviousness after all.

“But I have to be careful!” Adrien argued. “Mélusine said it too: Just one slip up and it’s over!”

Well, he wasn’t wrong.

“I’m not saying you should just jump into things without thinking them over. What I meant was that you should also focus on things besides your relationship status.”

Adrien blushed and looked like he was about to let loose another string of annoying denials, but fate itself interrupted him. Félix picked up his vibrating phone and then let out a resigned sigh. An Akuma Alert. As if Tikki’s hunch hadn’t been bad enough already, there really needed to be an attack at eight o’clock in the evening!

“Well, fate seems to agree for once,” Félix said as he shifted and trotted to the open window. “And in an unpleasant way, unfortunately.”

“You can say that again,” Adrien snorted. “Let’s see what this is about. Plagg, Claws Out!”

They didn’t have to go far, just one block over, when they heard the first scream. It wasn’t the usual kind of scream a civilian would make upon spotting an Akuma. No, this kind of scream was eerie and unnatural, like straight out of a horror film and amplified in volume in a way that couldn’t be anything but magic. Worse yet, they recognized the voice, as it started or continued—they weren’t sure—singing.

“I’m hellhound in this life

Keep fighting this endless war

It’s always been like this, I don’t know why”

“That’s Sabrina,” Chat Noir said as if it hadn’t been obvious enough already with the way Félix’s fur stood on end.

“Enslavement of your mind

Your fear it ties me down”

“I thought fae couldn’t be akumatised,” Félix said as he tried his best to keep up—fae or not, being a regularly-sized cat while his brother was a superhero was an unfair disadvantage. There was a short silence in which Adrien most likely listened to something Plagg said.

“Going down, I won’t bow, no!”

Another scream tore through the air once again, filling the space of where there would have been an “oh” or an “ah” in the song.
“They can’t,” Chat Noir eventually said. “Sabrina is a halfling though, so there’s room for foreign magic. Not enough to be fully akumatised though.”

“They're closing in on me”

“So, Hawkmoth is forcing her to wield more magic than she was ever meant to have,” Félix hissed and that was putting it lightly. Poor Sabrina.

“I hunger for the vertigo, the silver moonlight
It's where I wanna be”

When the next scream tore through the air, Félix finally caught sight of her.

“Screaming at the walls of fire
But I'm still running free
In the silver moonlight I can breathe”

She was standing on a bridge that was empty of civilians and she was obviously in pain. Occasionally she was lashing at herself with a wave of murky water from the river. He couldn’t tell if she intended to drive the Akuma out with it or rather calm herself down.

“She might be partly in control,” Félix said and flattened his ears at the sheer volume of Sabrina’s voice. It was like someone had handed her a microphone at a rock concert.

“Which also means that she has common sense,” Chat Noir said darkly. “I’ll have to keep Ladybug away from her or Sabrina might start pleading to Danu for help.”

Félix shuddered at the mere thought.

At that moment, there was a whirring sound.

“Speak of the goddess,” Chat said. “You keep the Court away.”

And with that, he was gone.

Yeah, right. As if I’m just gonna play shepherd while Sabrina is in direct danger.

If anything was Court business, then this was it.

“These days are lonely now”

Félix didn’t waste another second and jumped into the nearest empty alleyway to shift. Approaching Sabrina would definitely be easier when he wasn’t just forty centimetres tall.

Before he even knew it, he was running. His senses told him not to but he just couldn’t help it. He couldn’t just stay on the sidelines when his oldest friend was in danger. Not this time!

“Breathin’ in the coldest lies
I think that's only what you have in mind”

What the fair folk called ‘charming’ when it came to their voices, could also work the other way
and repel people instead of attracting them. Sabrina had obviously used this to clear the area. No one should come close. No one else should be in danger. Félix didn’t care.

“Holdin’ on to the best of you

I hit the pavement”

True to the lyrics, she really fell down on her knees, though it seemed deliberate. Every step so far had looked like she was fighting against an invisible force. A force that urged her to move forward against her will. He knew what was on the forward path: The Grand Paris Hotel.

“Goin’ down, I won’t bow

Down!

Félix cringed at the volume.

Almost at the bridge.

It wasn’t a significant distance, but the screams almost made him retreat. ‘Stay away from me!’ Sabrina seemed to say without using any words. He couldn’t listen to that. He had to help!

Fog suddenly started to rise from the river, thickening at an unnatural speed and coating the surrounding streets, if not the entirety of Paris. It was too little too late. Sabrina should have tried this before people had noticed her. Tried it before the Court had gotten wind of it. Now all it did was stretch this fight out even longer.

The screaming led him on until he suddenly got slapped in the face and the fog cleared a little.

“Félix!” Sabrina’s voice had an eerie, echoing quality to it and the pain in it was all too obvious.

“Run away,” she said weakly and sobbed. “Help me. They want my coat. I want my coat. They’re gonna take it from me. I’m gonna take it from them. Help me. Run away.”

Félix honestly couldn’t tell if it was Sabrina’s panic speaking—after all, fae minds were contradictory—or if it was a sign that she was fighting the akumatisation. Either way, it was unsettling.

“What’s the akumatised object?” He asked and Sabrina sobbed again before letting out another bloodcurdling scream.

“My coat. They have it,” she sobbed.

“I know, Sabrina, but—” He paused.

Wait a second…

“You mean your coat is the akumatised object?!?”


He had to tell Adrien. This was bad. No, it was the worst-case scenario!

“Come on,” he said and took one of her hands to lead her in the opposite direction. He had to get her as far away from the hotel as possible.
“No, I can’t,” she sobbed. “My legs won’t—urgh!” Sabrina clenched her middle as if someone had stabbed her. “Let go of me. I can’t help you,” she whispered desperately and it took Félix a moment to realise she wasn’t talking to him.

“Iron bells,” he cursed and quickly picked Sabrina up bridal style. If she couldn’t walk, then he would carry her. She kept wailing all the way and he prayed to Danu that he wouldn’t go deaf after all this.

His first priority was to get Sabrina to safety, but he also had to somehow find his brother and tell him about the coat. Because, if it really was the akumatised object then they couldn’t destroy it. That would kill Sabrina.

The selkie’s form flickered like light reflections in water while he carried her. Parts of her became invisible or see-through and then reappeared again. He guessed that was a side-effect of the akumatisation not working. It was both beautiful and disturbing.

“My coat,” she whimpered before she started to sing something in Irish. It sounded like a lullaby. Poor Sabrina. She was just trying to calm herself down, but by the way some parts were sung louder than others while she tensed up, he could tell she was still in incredible pain. No wonder she had sung what had sounded like a metal song before. It had helped her to express her pain and simultaneously fight it. Now that he was doing the hard part with making her move from point A to point B, she had calmed down a little. Too bad it didn’t seem to lessen the pain apparently.

“Hawkmoth will pay for this,” he muttered darkly and Sabrina whimpered.

A hand clamped down on his shoulder.

Since he was holding Sabrina, he couldn’t even punch the offender. Instead, he ducked away and tried to escape, but a metal pole was suddenly in his way.

Wait…

“What do you think you’re doing?!” Chat Noir hissed and he didn’t sound happy at all. Félix didn’t care.

“Getting her away from the hotel,” he hissed back.

“At least give me the akumatised object.”

“I can’t. It’s her coat.”

He could see how Chat Noir froze.

Sabrina chose that moment to let out another scream, probably the loudest one yet.

“He wants…I can’t…go away,” she sobbed and Félix turned her away from Chat Noir when she made a blind grab for his ring. A decision that had clearly not been her own one judging by the horrified look on her face.

“Where’s Ladybug?” Félix asked.

“A few rooftops away from here. She can’t use her yo-yo with this fog.”

“Okay, I’ll bring Sabrina home and you get the coat and return it to her afterwards.”

Chat Noir gave a grim nod and then vaulted away.
“Félix,” Sabrina whimpered. “He doesn’t understand magic. It hurts so much.”

He squeezed her a little in the hope that it was comforting and then took off again. Screw being angry about Hawkmoth terrorizing the city. Now it was personal! Félix looked forward to the day where to Court would deal with him accordingly.

That didn’t mean Sabrina was out of the woods yet though.

The Court would blame her, no matter if she was truly at fault or not. They always found a way to blame someone they wanted punished.

“Everything will be alright,” Félix said under his breath, not knowing if the empty reassurance was meant for himself or for Sabrina. He didn’t believe the words for a second.

He ran. He ran for what felt like hours. He ran until he was halted by a very frantic Roger who was shouting Sabrina’s name.

He took his whimpering daughter from Félix’s arms.

“What’s wrong with her?” He asked as the three of them hurried to the apartment building the Raincomprix family lived in.

“Hawkmoth tried to akumatise her but it’s not working. He’s a stubborn bastard who doesn’t understand magic though, so he doesn’t call back the Akuma,” Félix explained while taking the set of keys Roger had pointed to, to open the door. They had six sets of stairs ahead of them.

“Why didn’t you take the akumatised object and gave it to Ladybug?” He sounded on edge and accusatory.

“My coat,” Sabrina whimpered again.

“Shh, baby, it’s okay,” her father tried to soothe her.

“It’s her coat,” Félix clarified.

Just four more sets of stairs.

“B-but that c-can’t…she doesn’t have it on her!”

“Apparently that doesn’t matter in this case,” Félix muttered. A selkie’s coat was an extension of their being just like an arm or a leg. It wasn’t surprising that a connection to Sabrina could be made, no matter how far the coat was away from her.

“Then how—”

“I told Chat Noir,” Félix said and then fell quiet until he unlocked the apartment’s door. “He’s an Unseelie too so he can bargain with the Court,” he continued once they were all inside.

That was exactly the part Félix was most worried about. Adrien wasn’t the best bargainer given how much of a people-pleaser he was. Félix didn't dare jinx it by praying for a good outcome, but deep inside he still hoped for the best.

“But you should worry more about yourself right now,” he said and held Sabrina back who was about to move towards the door as soon as her father put her down.

“What do you mean?” Roger asked. Even for a redhead he was worryingly pale at the moment.
“The Court will blame Sabrina and punish her for this exposure. Once Chat Noir will get back with her coat, you’ll have to leave Paris. I’ll help you pack.”

“We can’t just leave like that! Moving takes months of preparation and—” Roger started to argue.

“The Court won’t give you that luxury,” Félix interrupted him. Then a thought crossed his mind. Even if they would drive away immediately, the Court would track the car down in a heartbeat and make it crash or worse. The same, just worse, would go for a plane or any other kind of transportation. The only way they could not be tracked would be through portals. And coincidentally, he knew someone who not only had portals at the ready, but also empty and fully furnished houses on the other end.

“Okay, listen. Pack up the essentials, as much as you can, while I help Sabrina pack her things. Once she gets her coat back, I’ll try to convince Chat Noir to keep an eye on you so you should be safe. Meanwhile, I’ll go to Mélusine’s and ask her for a huge favour.”

Roger still looked pale, but he nodded in understanding.

“All right,” he said. “Let’s hope you can actually convince her.”

“Don’t jinx it, I’m bad luck,” Félix said automatically.

“The music box,” Sabrina forced out quietly. Félix was holding her back with one hand on her arm while with his other one he was packing all the stuff Sabrina told him was important. Little trinkets she couldn’t live without or photos of her mother. He just hoped that he would actually be able to convince Mélusine. She most likely had no desire to get into trouble with the Court after all.

“Shells. Careful,” Sabrina said through gritted teeth as she held her middle again.

_Hurry up, Adrien._

Félix carefully picked up the shells on her dresser and wrapped them up in one of her shirts so they wouldn’t break.

It had already been about an hour since they had arrived at the apartment and one of Sabrina’s suitcases was already full. They wouldn’t have much time left until his brother returned, and then they’d be in even more of a hurry to leave Paris. Well, Sabrina and Roger would. Félix, if he was suspected to have played a role in it at all, would have to face the Court’s disapproval. But then again, Chat Noir was involved, so maybe they’d drop any charges when a god disapproved of them.

“The bed covers,” she sobbed and reached out to run her hand over the undoubtedly soft fabric.

“Those’ll come last,” Félix said, as he no doubt would need two hands for it. “What else?”

“How about a delivery?” A third voice suddenly asked from the window that had definitely been closed before. Félix sighed in relief when he saw a grinning Chat Noir crouching on the sill, holding something behind his back.

Sabrina stumbled towards him. “My coat! Do you…”

“Have it?” Chat Noir finished the sentence and hopped into the room. “Almost insane how easy it is to get what you want from the Court when you hold the position of a god.”
He made an elaborate bow. “Dear selkie, I believe this is yours,” he said and finally withdrew the coat he had hidden behind his back. It was even more beautiful than Félix remembered it to be. Pure white and shimmering in all colours of the rainbow, like oyster shells, though at the same time it seemed fluid like water.

Sabrina didn’t reach for it and instead looked at Chat Noir warily. Most likely sensing her nervousness, he adapted a reassuring smile.

“Don’t worry, I know the customs,” he said and dropped the coat on Sabrina’s bed. She let out a sigh of relief. “I’m not opposed to marriage in general, but my heart belongs to my lady only.”

“Y-yes, of course. I-I w-wasn’t implying that you would betray Danu or something like that!” Sabrina stammered in a panic.

“How did you get the Akuma out?” Félix meanwhile asked. Chat Noir suddenly looked guilty.

“We didn’t,” he winced and looked to Sabrina. “I have a theory though: Since you’re a halfling as long as the coat is not in your possession, you would become a full fae again if you’d take it back. The pure fair folk is impossible to akumatise, so it might force the butterfly out.”

Sabrina’s eyes darted from him to her coat and back again. She retracted her already outstretched hand a little fearfully as she looked at the thing, the one thing she had painfully longed for, for years now.

“I don’t know if…” Sabrina began and then shook her head, apparently coming to a decision. She stepped forward and picked up her coat. It unfolded like it weighed nothing, falling like water and shimmering even more beautiful than before.

Her pupils went wide when her hand touched the coat and for a moment it looked like nothing would happen. But then, a soft white glow overtook it and it flowed in an invisible wind, or rather current, since it suddenly looked like the raging sea.

Félix felt a snap that had definitely been the magic, since all of them—Sabrina most of all—flinched. As a black butterfly emerged, he eyed it sceptically. He hadn’t seen an Akuma butterfly up close since the Lady Wifi incident, but he was still certain that they weren’t supposed to look like they had trouble staying in the air at all. Chat Noir’s confused look secured him in that belief.

“Looks like you did quite a number on that one,” he said with a grin.

“Let’s hope that reflects back on Hawkmoth. He deserves it,” Félix muttered.

“Anyways,” Chat Noir declared and cupped his hands around his mouth. “My lady, you’re up!”

Even with the warning, Félix couldn’t help but jump when Ladybug suddenly swung into the room. Out of them all, she seemed to be the most confused about the weakly flapping butterfly that barely managed to keep itself aloft.

“What happened?” She asked. A question which no one really had an answer for.

“Let’s purify the Akuma and get this over with,” Chat Noir said instead and Félix watched how Ladybug’s confusion was replaced by determination.

“Right,” she said, though her purifying act lacked the dramas it usually included. A simple swing of her yo-yo, rather than a calculated throw, was enough to trap the butterfly this time. Even its purified version seemed sickly as it wobbly flew window-wards.
“Miracul—”

“Wait!” Sabrina said, earning a thoroughly confused look from Ladybug who had frozen mid-movement of throwing her yo-yo into the air and calling the Cure. “This won’t undo our packing, will it?”

“Packing?” Ladybug asked and looked around. “Why would you—”

“Nothing got destroyed during the attack, so there’s no need to waste your strength, my lady,” Chat Noir cut in with a shrug. Ladybug threw him a flat look.

“You mean apart from several windows, the door and, for some reason I still don’t get, the paperweight made out of glass that you broke? Seriously Chat, just because you don’t like the Bourgeois doesn’t mean you have to forcefully destroy their property!”

Chat Noir waved it off. “Small non-magic stuff. I’ll bet they have everything replaced before the night ends.”

“But—”

“Now, come on, LB. I believe our job here is done,” he said and pushed his partner back towards the window.

Somewhat unwillingly, Ladybug eventually climbed out and disappeared into the night. When Chat Noir went to follow her, Félix held him back by the shoulder.

“Wait a second, please. I want to talk to you about something. Could take a while,” he said and purposefully worded it in a way that would be non-suspicious to Ladybug in case she wasn’t all the way up to the roof yet and listening.

Chat Noir hesitated for only a second. “What’s the problem?” he asked.

“You have to watch Sabrina for a bit while I go to Mélusine’s and make a bargain.”

“No way,” his idiot of a brother said, no doubt without thinking. Sabrina shrunk back and bowed her head. Thankfully, Chat Noir noticed.

“I mean, I can easily watch over Sabrina for a short while, but you shouldn’t make a bargain,” he clarified.

“Why not?” Félix and Sabrina asked at the same time. The selkie blushed.

“Well,” Chat Noir said and fixed Félix with a warning look. “Considering the situation, I’m guessing you’re gonna bargain for something big, so the price will be accordingly significant. What valuables do you have that she could want? I doubt a song would suffice for this.”

“We have no other option,” Félix argued.

“Yes, you do,” Chat Noir said and looked at Sabrina. “You’re used to bargaining from all the years with Chloé, right? How about you make a bargain, since it’s also your and your father’s fate at stake here.”

Félix glared at his brother. “She’s been through enough and—”

“You’re right. I should do it,” Sabrina said quietly, effectively cutting him off. “No offense, Félix, but Chat Noir is right. You’ve tried protecting me for long enough and now that I’ve got my coat
back, it’s time that I take things into my own hands, starting with my fate.”

Sabrina, Roger and Félix stood in front of the wooden back alley door to Mélusine’s. It was the door that led to the hallway with many doors rather than the shop, including the one to her upstairs apartment among various portals.

“You really didn’t have to come with us, Félix,” Sabrina said, her two suitcases tightly in her hands and a backpack on her back.

Félix raised an eyebrow. “And not say goodbye? I might be socially awkward, but I’m not cold-hearted.”

Suddenly the door swung open and a very serious-looking Mélusine ushered them inside.

“What are you doing, waiting around here in the open?! The Court is onto you, you nitwits!” She scolded and then closed the door quite forcefully.

Félix refrained from pointing out that there was no way for them to enter through a locked door.

“I-I wanted to make a bargain,” Sabrina said timidly, which immediately brought forth Mélusine’s motherly smile again.

“I know, dear. And I already have something in mind, come!” She said and walked down the corridor. Sabrina eagerly followed though Roger seemed more hesitant.

“Are you sure she’s going to help us?” He asked Félix, who could just shrug.

“You never know with Mélusine, but she has helped Adrien and me before.”

“This one should be perfect! It’s close to the sea. There are a lot of seals there, so no one would find it an odd sight if you’d go for a swim there once in a while, dear,” Mélusine fondly ruffled Sabrina’s hair. “It’s also the lands of a Seelie Court, so you’ll fit right in.”

“Wait, how do you know we’re looking for a house?” Sabrina asked and Mélusine raised an eyebrow.

“You mean apart from the luggage you’re carrying?”

Sabrina blushed again. “What do you have in mind for the bargain then?”

“That you clean my places,” Mélusine said simply and motioned to the other doors. “I’m very busy with the shop these days and while I love all of my homes, I really don’t have enough time to keep them all in pristine condition. Some are hopelessly dusty and cleaning them is a never-ending task. This is really all I ask for.”

“That…sounds reasonable. For how long?”

“For as long as you live in one of my houses. Call it ‘rent’ if you will,” Mélusine said with a wink.

“How about money? My father will need to find a job again and we can’t live off house-cleaning.”

“Oh dearie, you still have a lot to learn. Take acorns, leaves and some glamour and the humans will think it’s money. That shouldn’t be hard, should it?”
“But that would be forgery,” Roger threw in, probably automatically. For the first time since she let them in, Mélusine’s eyes hardened.

“I cannot offer you money nor a job. Would you prefer to starve? A house is already a very generous offer. Don’t push it.”

“Alright,” Sabrina said before her father could argue further. “I agree to the deal.”

Mélusine’s entire demeanour immediately shifted to one of joy. “Wonderful,” she said and clapped her hands.

“I guess this is goodbye,” Sabrina said sadly as she turned around to Félix. Meanwhile, Mélusine proceeded to open the door, which showed the entrance hall of a dark house.

“Yeah, I guess it is,” Félix said and suddenly his heart seemed heavy. It wouldn’t be the same without Sabrina.

“Can you tell Adrien that I forgive him? It really wasn’t his fault that my coat got stolen and now that I have it back, we can all finally move on from it.” She smiled. “I’ll really miss you two.”

“We’ll miss you too,” he said and Sabrina let go of the handles of her suitcases to hug him one last time.

“Take care, and don’t get in trouble with the Court please.”

A wry grin overtook his face. “I’ll try my best.”

She took her suitcases again and rolled them to the door, stopping in front of it.

“Thanks for all your help, Félix,” Roger suddenly said and Félix was honestly a little taken aback by it.

“Anyone would have done that,” he said.

“Not from the Court and definitely not without ulterior motives. You and Adrien are a lot more human than you realise.”

And with that, Sabrina and him walked through the door and were gone. A silence that was way too quiet for the middle of Paris settled on the shop. It lasted for only two seconds, then Mélusine spoke up.

“Now, kitten, you will explain to me how you got wrapped up in all of this. Just let me brew some tea.”

“This was way too close for comfort tonight! And totally irresponsible!” Plagg ranted just as Félix slipped back into the room. It was around three in the morning at this point.

“What should I have done instead? Nothing?! Adrien hissed back and Félix didn’t even need to guess to know what the conversation was about.

“Yeah, what did you do? Apart from breaking several things,” Félix said as he perched on the back of the sofa. Adrien whirled around to him.
“Is Sabrina safe?!” He had left as Chat Noir shortly after suggesting that Sabrina should bargain. After all, it wouldn’t be good if the Court would think he was taking sides.

“She’s safe,” Félix said. “And she said I should tell you that she forgives you.”

“Okay, good. Now he doesn’t need to worry about that anymore,” Plagg said with all the sympathy of a rock. “Now tell your brother how idiotic it is to threaten the Court just to get a selkie coat back!”

“You did what?!” Félix said, his fur bristled in righteous appalment.

“Okay, when I got back the fog was still too thick, so I told Ladybug to wait on a roof while I dealt with it. Chloé still swore that she didn’t know where the coat was so I demanded to talk to someone who did know, who happened to be Audrey. So, I had to bargain with the Court chief for Sabrina’s coat, but they demanded to talk to Danu. I told her that if she wanted to talk to a god, then she had the god of destruction right before her and that I wouldn’t hesitate to let the hotel crumble to dust to prove my point.”

“Wait, wait, wait! You actually threatened Audrey Bourgeois?!”

“Now you see what I mean? The kitten has lost his mind!” Plagg said.

“You indeed have. What in the netherworld were you thinking?!”

“I was thinking that I had to get Sabrina’s coat back and I couldn’t get Ladybug involved!”

“Then what was that about broken windows, a broken door and a paperweight?”

Adrien waved it off. “The fog lifted eventually, so my lady followed me into the hotel. Luckily, I had just gotten Audrey to give me the coat. The paperweight was a distraction because Ladybug was starting to say something that would have sounded suspicious, the broken door was because Chloé had locked her room for some reason and the broken windows were out of spite.”

Félix sighed deeply. “I need a vacation after this.”

“You and me both, kitten,” Plagg agreed. “Especially since Ladybug asked him if this weirdness was about Court stuff.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm rusty when it comes to cliffhangers and this story. 😊 I promise to get better with it before Christmas! ;D
Another Kind of Bravery

Chapter Notes

*nervously stares at whiteboard* okay, now I'm only one chapter ahead of posting D:
I am very determined to keep up my uploading streak, but please don't be mad if a
chapter ends up being late a couple of days in the future, okay? You deserve better
than a half-baked product after all, so my betas and I try to make them as good as we
can! ❤ Especially since chapters 48 and 49 are very important ones and I want them to
be perfect!
A huge thanks goes to Tempomental and Draxynnic for always saving my ass with
these chapters! You two are godsent! 😊 Also thanks to all the other people who
occasionally beta my chapters and those who help me out with brainstorming ideas
when I'm stuck! You know who you are! ❤

PS: Bad timing as it may be, I'm taking a few days of a break from writing on
Spellbound to work on Clockwork Harmony instead. I finally have a plan and a rough
direction in which I want to take the story. No promises as to when I'll update it, but
I'm definitely working on it again! 😊

Sabrina was gone and Chloé was absent. That alone should have actually made for a pretty
relaxing day, but Marinette couldn’t help but think about what had happened on Monday night.

The Akuma attack had been strange, which she meant in the truest sense of the word. Akuma
attacks were always strange, but there had been something off about the latest one. Not only had
Sabrina not done any damage while an Akuma, but she hadn’t come after their Miraculous at all.
Not just that, but the object hadn’t been on her, but hidden somewhere in the hotel.

What concerned her most of all was Chat Noir’s behaviour throughout all of it. It had seemed like
he had wanted to keep her away for the entire time and really the only noteworthy thing she had
done had been to purify the Akuma. Which hadn’t been that big of a feat since the Akuma butterfly
had looked like it was about to drop dead any second anyway.

She remembered the way Chat Noir had reacted when she had asked him if it had anything to do
with this mysterious Court neither he nor Tikki wanted her to know about. He had tensed up,
stammered something incoherent, hissed at her to forget it, and then he had just run away.

Asking Tikki about it was a dead end, so she had done some thinking of her own. Her conclusion
was less than satisfactory, but the assumption that Chloé was part of whatever the Court was
seemed to be a good start at least. She had said something about it at the Dark Cupid incident and
the akumatised object—a coat apparently?—had been hidden in her father’s hotel. She still had no
idea why it had been hidden there in the first place when it apparently belonged to Sabrina, so she
shoved that thought to the back of her mind for now. It wasn’t as if anyone would give her an
answer to it anyway.

“Marinette?”

She jolted out of her thoughts and looked into Adrien’s questioning gaze. They were the only ones
still in the classroom and she hadn’t even packed up her things yet. Obviously, he had been talking
“U-uh…what did you say?” She asked as she hurriedly shoved everything from her desk into her bag.

“I was asking if you wanted to go to the library. They’re holding tryouts for an Ultimate Mechastrike III tournament there right now and I thought we could enter? Only if you want to of course, it’s okay if you’d rather do something else, I just thought—”

“Adrien, it’s okay!” She interrupted him with a grin. “Kicking people’s asses might actually be exactly what I need right now.”

The relief was written on his face. “Come on then! They’ll never see it coming,” he said and took her hand. While Adrien seemed blissfully oblivious about his actions, Marinette had to fight a very intense blush and at the same time reprimand herself for it. They were friends. Best friends even! Just because she had a crush on him which got worse with every passing day didn’t mean she had any right to ruin her friendship by being a flailing, blushing mess.

*Just be cool, Marinette. BE COOL!*

Not that such words had ever helped her body, and most especially her mouth, to obey. Specifically when she tried to be somewhat flirty or otherwise romantic, everything seemed to try to sabotage her. Her stuttering around him had never been worse and she had even started to randomly switch words. Never in her life had she dug herself more graves than when she was trying to be more than just friends with Adrien.

The things that mortified her were a great source of amusement for others. Especially Félix. His suggestion from Monday about just *flirting* with Adrien seemed more insane the longer she thought about it. She was trying, but if she wasn’t even able to get out a full sentence without stuttering around Adrien then how was she supposed to be able to make the guy realise it was a flirt?! Clearly, Félix was highly overestimating her abilities there. Or, more likely, he just wanted to see her suffer.

The only times she managed to talk to him like a normal human being were when the topic was something serious, when her focus was on something else, or when she automatically reverted to what she called the ‘just being friends’ mode. So, basically, she only screwed up when she tried to make progress in the love department.

Just when they were already in the hallway to the library and Marinette tripped on a step did Adrien seem to realize that he was still holding her hand. He let her go as if he had burned himself.

“S-sorry! I just…yeah,” he stammered and, no joke, *blushed*. He did that a lot lately…not unlike her, to be honest.

Suddenly, her thought process came to a screeching halt as the beginnings of a realisation nudged at the back of her mind.

Seeing as there was no reason to either *blush* nor stammer when they were *just friends*…

Marinette felt like she just had an epiphany.

Alright, maybe, *just maybe*, Félix had been *right*—wouldn’t be the first time—with implying that she had a chance. This was a *game-changer*! But just *MAYBE!*

“Marinette?”
“Yes?” she squeaked uncertainly. By the way he suddenly looked absolutely crushed, it had been the wrong answer. “I mean, no!” she said, a little too loudly, making both of them flinch. Meanwhile, she tried to puzzle out what she was actually disagreeing with.

“So, you do or you don’t want to rather play Ultimate Mechastrike with anyone but me?”

Marinette was even more confused than before. “Why would you even ask me that?”

She had stopped in front of the door to the library since this didn’t seem like a conversation anyone else should be privy to. Adrien shuffled nervously.

“Well, uh, you always win so I’m clearly not good enough and that’s got to get very boring after a while and—”

“I’m gonna stop you right there,” Marinette said, all awkwardness suddenly gone as she switched to protect-Adrien-mode. “You’re good enough to beat most peoples’ ass on Ultimate Mechastrike, Adrien. I might be a little better at the game than you, but that’s all. We’re pretty evenly matched on Mario Kart and you’re better than me on DDR. And that’s just mentioning video games. Don’t put yourself down like that again!”

Adrien gave her a small smile. “Okay.”

She sensed that it hadn’t been quite enough to convince him yet. “Adrien, I’m only gonna say this once so you better listen: you’re my favourite person in the world. And I love annihilating you in video games.”

Just seconds later she fled into the library as her words caught up to her. Let’s see, one thing was not like the others. Oh, right, it had been her unintentional declaration of…of what actually? Love? Simple adoration? Well, in any case, she had made clear where Adrien stood. And if it managed to cheer him up, then it was worth wishing to crawl into a hole and never come out again.

One look back told her that Adrien was still staring at where she had stood before, absolutely frozen in place.

*Great. I broke him.*

“Is that your way of listening to my advice?” Félix, who seemed to come out of nowhere but had probably stood there next to the door all along, said. Marinette jumped.

“T-t-that wasn’t! I w-wasn’t! I was just trying to—”

Félix patted her shoulder and walked away.

*What is that supposed to mean?!*

The screen declared Marinette the winner, which, for some reason, everyone in the library seemed to be surprised about. Well, everyone but Adrien, Félix, Nino and Alya. The latter had even recorded her fight and was now whistling in approval.

“You go, girl!” she screamed, but Marinette’s attention went to Max who seemed absolutely defeated in more ways than just losing the game. According to what Kim had said, he had practiced
for months to be able to compete in this tournament, and now he had lost. Because of her.

“With that, the candidates who’ll represent the school at the tournament are chosen,” Monsieur Damocles said, but Marinette was having none of it.

“Wait,” she said. “I was just entering for fun. I step back from being in the tournament, so Max and Adrien can compete.”

The principal seemed puzzled.

“No, you’re better than me. You should compete and I step back,” Adrien said which made her sigh in exasperation. She had expected that.

“But you wanted to be in that tournament too!”

“Yeah, with you.”

Max was looking back and forth between them like he was watching a tennis match.

“Hey!” Nino spoke up and everyone turned his way. “How about you three go to Marinette’s and battle out who works best with Max on a team? I’ll be the objective judge.”

“And I’ll record it for the school blog!” Alya threw in. “It doesn’t really matter who enters the competition as long as they win, right?” The latter question was directed at Monsieur Damocles. He still seemed unsure about what was transpiring, so he eventually shrugged.

“I suppose that’s fine,” he said.

“Objective judge’ my ass, Nino. You’re just here for the food!” Alya accused her boyfriend with her hands on the hips and a frown.

“Uhm, yeah? Isn’t that why you’re here too?” Nino said from the kitchen table where he was happily munching on a leftover éclair. Félix sat beside him with his own plate of leftover goods.

Apart from a quick glance, Marinette didn’t pay them much mind and rather worked on setting up the game. She sat next to Adrien on the sofa, controller in hand, and tried very much not to freak out about the close proximity they were forced into due to limited seating space.

“So, who do you want to go against first, Max? Or should we play a two against one match?” She asked and tapped her controller nervously.

“I suggest one on one matches where everyone gets a turn. That way it’s easier to collect data points on how strong each of us are apart from the matches before, which will help determine which combination is most favourable in a one against two match,” Max said.

Adrien nodded. “Sounds fair. So, who’s gonna start?”

“It would be best if you two play against each other first as I have not seen a battle between you two yet.”

“Alright then. Prepare to lose, KitKat,” Marinette said as she chose her bot. At the same time the conversation from earlier jumped back into her mind. Had she really told him that he was the most important person in the world to her? That could be understood as platonic, right? Right?! She very
much hoped so, because that had certainly not been her idea of a love confession.

Focus! You have a game to win! She told herself harshly when her bot was hit by a blast she usually would have dodged.

Marinette barely won that round. The next one she lost due to a very panicky string of thoughts that had been kicked off by Adrien leaning into her space. She should have been used to that. After all, he tended to flail and move around a lot when a battle was getting intense while she tended to stay calm and hyperfocused. At that moment it had caught her off guard for some reason. She won the last round by a landslide though.

Marinette moved over to the kitchen table when Adrien and Max played against each other.

“Hmm?” Alya said suggestively and gave her the grin. Marinette just took a croissant from Félix’s plate which was met with a disapproving frown from him.

“So, you lost one of the three rounds,” Alya said when she was tired of waiting for an acknowledgement from Marinette. She just rolled her eyes and bit into the croissant. “Care to elaborate on what distracted you?”

It was clear from her voice that Alya already knew what had distracted her, so Marinette didn’t bother to reply. Two seconds later she was poked in the side.

“Don’t you start with that too!” She hissed.

“Well, if what Nino told me is right, then that was your idea.”

“Yes, but only for Nino!”

“Well, actually—” Félix began.

“Don’t you dare say anything, copycat! As far as I know I never gave you permission to use it on me anyway.”

“Hey, it’s there to rid you of your obliviousness,” Nino, the traitor, said. Marinette rolled her eyes. As if she was still oblivious after almost a year of that silly poking game. In fact, she had realised her feelings the very day it had started.

“What I actually wanted to say, before I was so rudely interrupted, was that you’re using it the wrong way Alya,” Félix pointed out. Alya looked intrigued while Marinette just glared at him. “It’s to make any of them notice when they’re acting like a couple, not when they get flustered by each other. They very much notice the latter after all, so there is no need to rub it in.”

He stated it like a scientific fact and Marinette was tempted to throw the rest of her croissant at him. At least all of them were speaking quiet enough that at least Max wouldn’t overhear. She wasn’t very sure about Adrien as he had scarilly good hearing, but he knew of the whole silly game anyway, so there wasn’t much harm to be done.

Marinette endured her friends’ light teasing until it was her turn to play against Max. Under heavy protests, she took a chocolate croissant from Nino’s plate with her to the sofa and handed it to Adrien.

“Trust me, you don’t want to sit over there,” she told him and then took his controller.
The entire afternoon was spent playing matches in different combinations. At one point even Nino got included as a fourth player. When he and Max got paired against Adrien and Marinette as a team—for data points, as Max insisted—they had practically no chance.

“You two really work exceptionally well together. You must have practiced often to get this in sync,” Max said after that particular match, which made both Adrien and Marinette laugh awkwardly. If only he knew just how much time they had actually spent together already. And while Max’s comment had only been about video games, it made her think. Adrien and she really were quite in sync, even outside of video games. They guessed each other’s train of thoughts; they both were experts at dodging each other’s wild gesticulations when telling a story; they caught the other when they tripped and it just so happened that they had said the same thing at the same time on multiple occasions.

Automatically, she compared this level of closeness with how close she was to Nino and Félix, but neither of them came even close. Apart from Marinette wanting for Adrien and her to be more than friends, this realisation gave her confidence that it might actually work out. Now she just needed to bring up the courage to confess. And she couldn’t just fall back on her Ladybug-courage either because this required a whole other kind of bravery.

Marinette let her head sink onto the desk and groaned in exasperation.

“It’s like at a photoshoot, just without Vincent yelling something about spaghetti,” Félix said. He was probably the only person in the room who the tension hadn’t gotten to yet.

“How do I always get myself into these situations?” Marinette mumbled from where her head still rested on the wooden surface.

“You agreed to go along with Nino’s short film idea and be the producer.”

She lifted her head and turned around to him in exasperation. “Yeah, the producer, not an actress!”

“Don’t worry, girl. It’s just a short film. It’ll be over before you know it,” Alya said from beside her while avidly going through the script, probably to look for more changes Nino had made.

It was two weeks before the end of the school year and with homework being sparse and no one really knowing what to do otherwise, the class had agreed to enter a short film competition. With how things were going though, Marinette suspected that it was only a matter of time until an Akuma would flutter through the nearest window. The only ones not affected by the yelling and the back and forth were Félix and Rose.

Marinette would have actually preferred to transform and go up to the roof where she would just wait to spot a butterfly and purify it before it could get to anyone. It would surely save her from what was shaping up to be a very stressful afternoon. But as the producer and, as it seemed, also the lead actress, she had no chance to slip away unnoticed. Just her luck.

“I’m only doing this as a favour. When Mylène returns, she’ll have her role back!” Marinette said and still held on to the hope that their original lead actress would return.

“Of course she will, chill out,” Alya said and Marinette would have been thankful for her friend’s attempt to calm her down, if she would have stopped talking there. “And just think, before the evening is over, you will have finally kissed Adrien.”
The only appropriate reaction to that was a panicked squeal and hiding her face behind her copy of the script.

“Excellent job at calming her down, Alya,” Félix said sarcastically.

“I do what I can.”

“Can’t you just change the script back to how it was before?” Marinette begged. “You’re right, the kissing scene is unnecessary and I’m sure you have a backup of your original version somewhere and—”

“Nuh-uh. I’m not gonna pass up on this opportunity.”

“I agree with Marinette. If you want your short film to win, then the story itself needs to be believable. You might be able to film it, but I can already tell you that with the script as it currently stands you’ll have no chance to win.”

“Gee, did you have to join the downers club?” Alya said and Marinette lifted her head again to see her frown.

“He’s been in the downers club long before all of you,” Adrien, who had approached without Marinette noticing, suddenly said from right beside her. She jumped.

“I’m merely being realistic, that’s all,” Félix said.

“I know,” Alya said. “It’s just completely unhelpful because we don’t have time to change the script! Everyone would have to learn their reworked lines then and—”

“I don’t know my lines by heart anyway, changed or not,” Marinette interrupted Alya. “And I’m not an actress. Have you seen me trying to act?! This would be a total disaster!”

“You were the one who agreed to it!”

“I didn’t! You volunteered me!”

“Uhm…y-you don’t have to do it if it makes you feel uncomfortable,” Adrien unexpectedly threw in, but looked away once their eyes met.

“Nonsense!” Alya immediately said and slammed her hand down on the desk so hard that Marinette jumped. “You’re not trying to get rid of our third lead actress now, are you, Adrien?”

“I-I don’t, I’m just saying—”

“Okay, everyone, places! We can’t afford to lose any more time!” Nino suddenly shouted over the general commotion in the classroom. Marinette blanched.

In order to actually get to the front of the room, Alya had to pull her up from her seat and drag her there. Meanwhile, Adrien kept apologizing for some reason. She wasn’t really paying attention.

How was she supposed to just kiss Adrien?! She couldn’t do that! Flirting was one thing, kissing him was something completely different! Apart from Chat Noir—which had been an emergency and couldn’t really be considered a real kiss—she had never kissed a boy. Well, Kindergarten kisses didn’t count! She was going to ruin the short film by being not only a horrible actress but also a horrible kisser and Adrien would be revolted and never speak to her again and—

A pair of fingers snapped in front of her face a few times. “You still with us, girl?”
“How could you do this to me?! I thought we were friends!” Marinette hissed at Alya and ignored the fact that everyone was staring at them.

Alya—or should she rather say ‘her ex-friend’—just smiled unapologetically. “Enjoy~!”

Only hesitantly and with using all her strength, she managed to turn around and look at Adrien. Meanwhile, her brain was looping ‘oh god’ like a very insistent mantra. She wasn’t in any way averse to kissing Adrien but, as she already stated previously to Alya, not like this!

“I’m not good at acting, so this will be a disaster,” she managed to say, knowing that Adrien of all people would not judge her for just bolting. At least she had given a solid reason for a spontaneous escape! She was just about to make a dash for the door when Adrien suddenly laid a hand on her shoulder.

“Don’t worry. You’ll do fine.”

And how was she supposed to be able to flee then when he looked at her this softly?! So, she did all she could do in that situation: melt.

“Ready to roll? Camera…,” Nino said, which thoroughly jolted her out of dream-land. Right, time for her ultimate demise.

“Horrificator, take sixteen,” Alix said and Marinette tried her best to look like the character she was playing. A fearless fighter. Therefore…she chose the closest thing that she knew and borrowed some inner strength from her alter-ego.

“Action!” Nino commanded and Marinette immediately realised how difficult it was to act like Ladybug when she wasn’t wearing the mask and—most especially—when she was directly looking at Adrien.

“I’m not scared of that monster, Officer Jones,” she said, and she didn’t need to watch the recording afterwards to know that her voice was shivering and not sounding the least bit convincing. She couldn’t help but let her eyes stray from Adrien after just a few words, not able to keep eye contact with him at all, and the ‘Officer Jones’ part was said so weakly that it wouldn’t even have convinced Manon who willingly believed in humans turning into unicorns.

When she finally brought up the courage to look Adrien in the eyes again, all her worries dwindled to nothing. Like on auto-pilot she laid her hands on his chest, closed her eyes, leaned in—

“Cut! I knew it!” Marinette jolted back so violently at the shout that she almost fell over. She almost didn’t hear Chloé’s ranting over her racing thoughts.

She had almost kissed Adrien.

She had almost kissed Adrien.

SHE HAD ALMOST KISSED ADRIEN!

And he had leaned in too!

It was a wonder that her brain didn’t go into full meltdown-mode. Only the fact that she was still strongly against her first kiss being in a setting like this prevented it. She was also strongly conflicted over if she should thank Chloé for interrupting them. This way she had a second chance for a better first kiss. A real one. Not just some acting for a silly film project. That was at the same level as a kiss that happened during a game of spin the bottle. It wouldn’t mean anything.
Only horrific screaming from outside the classroom drew her back to the present. She internally sighed heavily.

*Here we go again.*
Focus

Chapter Summary

Adrien is having a crisis :D

Chapter Notes

Guys, you have no idea how glad I am that I was able to get this chapter out today. And on time too! 3 PM on the spot! ;D Or at least my 3 PM, I don’t know about anyone else. ;'D The reason I was worried was because our router stopped working on Monday, which means our internet was completely gone. Luckily the new router arrived yesterday (it was supposed to arrive today, so this was amazing!) and now it works again. Worst case scenario: you would have gotten a chapter one or two days late, but I’m sure no one would have been mad at me for that.

ANYWAY, it’s on time! :D

The next two chapters are both important ones. While I’m still furiously writing on chapter 49, the next chapter is already written but not edited yet. I’ll throw it at my beta(s) later today and see how much I messed up the English language! ;w;

Also, Autumn has officially arrived weather-wise here and now I have reached the summer chapters. *sips chicken soup* Why does it never match up? ;A;

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was raining so much that Paris almost looked foggy and it was hard to see through all the raindrops on the windows. The noise of the downpour was inexplicably calming though and the music that was playing did the rest. Adrien lay sprawled on Nino’s bed while the two of them listened to his demo. Nino to spot mistakes, Adrien to just enjoy the music.

‘Enjoying’ was too small of a word for it though. Songs to him were like water to a thirsty man and the longer he had to cope without them, the deeper he could fall into them. And it wasn’t like he was deprived of music—when worst came to worst, he still had a grand piano at home. It was just that it was even better when he could share it with other people. Singing was risky though, even with rowan berry bracelets and necklaces or other charm-deflecting trinkets around. And he’d never even dare to dance with someone.

That was part of the reason why he loved being Chat Noir so much. Barely any rules that applied to him in his civilian life applied to him then. Plagg deflected all the fae magic, so Chat Noir was free to break out into a song like a Disney princess whenever he felt like it.

Adrien couldn’t though. Instead he had trouble to smother the purr that always threatened to rise up in these situations. At the same time, he felt like that one time he and Félix had tried out if catnip affected them—it did.

While it was often annoying to be part fae—especially when it came to being stuck in between two worlds—Adrien couldn’t say that he entirely hated it. There were nice things too, beautiful things.
Things he would never be able to share with his human friends.

*It’s better like this*, he thought as he kneaded the blanket. *They’re already in too much danger as it is.*

“So, what do ya think, dude?”

Adrien had to blink a few times until he could even process the question. Midsummer might be over—*thank Danu for that*—but that was no reason to be reckless. He had let himself get lost a little too deep this time. As if waking from a slumber, he stretched and looked around the room, resituing himself with his environment. No trees, no wisps, no mountains, no endless meadows. He had no idea why his mind always wandered to those. Either it was a fae instinct or the Otherworld just looked like that around these parts and he had gotten small unintentional glimpses of it.

“It’s amazing,” Adrien said plenty late.

“But?” Nino prompted, having noticed his hesitation.

“But nothing! I just… zoned out there for a bit, sorry.” He smiled sheepishly

“Dude, I need you to *work* with me here! I can’t just deliver some half-baked product later!” Nino lamented and ran his hands through his short hair in frustration.

“None of your stuff is *half-baked*. You’ll be fine!” Adrien tried to reassure him.

“It has to be *better* than just *fine* though! This show is a super big thing and I have to make a good impression!”

Later that day, Nino would be at the TV studio where he had gotten a place in a show called ‘The Challenge’. That he had been invited there was no coincidence, though, but a birthday gift from Adrien and Félix. Nino had absolutely *lost it* when they’d told him and not stopped thanking them for *months*. No wonder he was bursting with nerves now.

“Nino, you’ve been preparing for this since March. You’re ready. There really is no reason to freak out,” Adrien assured him.

“Oh, apart from the fact that I’ll be live in front of thousands of people?!”

“Well, it might actually be around a million when you count the re-runs and—”

*Not helping, dude!*

At that moment, both Adrien’s and Nino’s phones dinged with a new message.

**Princess:** sorry can’t make it today

my parents grounded me for my absences :c

Adrien liked Tom and Sabine, but he couldn’t help but frown at the message. It wasn’t Marinette’s fault that she had to fight Akumas on a regular basis and Nino’s appearance on live TV was a very big thing. It seemed unfairly strict of them to ground her exactly then.

“Man, that sucks,” Nino said and Adrien could only agree.

**KitKat:** WHY?! ;A;
Princess: …I just told you

KitKat: Yes, but why would your parents do that to you?!

Princess: no idea

it sucks

DJ N: sorry Nette

wish they'd at least let you come with today

KitKat: can you sneak out???

Princess: I'm not you -__-

“Dude, how is she supposed to sneak out? Climb over the roof from her balcony and find a fire escape?”

Adrien adopted a quizzical expression at Nino’s sarcastic tone. “Yeah, why not? There’s a fire escape only three buildings over and the roof connects them all, so it’s pretty straight-forward.”

“…Please tell me why you know exactly how to get on and off Marinette’s roof.”

Adrien noticed his mistake way too late and froze. His mind was trying its best to work out a believable excuse that was anything but the truth. Because ‘I used to visit her as a cat until almost a year ago’ wouldn’t go over well at all. Luckily, he found an explanation that would hopefully deviate Nino’s attention.

“After the number of times I’ve snuck out of home, I’m always looking for escape routes. For instance, the way I’d sneak out of your house is…”

“Dude, please tell me you’re not planning to end up in a situation where you have to sneak out of my house.”

“I don’t plan to, but if I ever have to, I don’t want to have to stop and think about it.”

The ding of their phones saved him from further embarrassment. Or so he had thought.

Princess: besides that route didn’t seem safe last time you climbed it

and no need to be sorry Nino. I'M sorry for not being able to be there :’c

“Wait, what does she mean with ‘last time’?” Nino asked and Adrien looked away. It was the one truth he could have told, or at least half of it, to really explain how he knew the way around Marinette’s roof. He still felt ashamed of it though.

“Remember last year when Félix and I were still homeschooled? When Marinette and you were working on your homework, I sometimes went up to the balcony. When it was just Félix, Marinette and me one day I got bored and decided to see if I could climb up to the roof.”

The only lie with that one was that he had not been the least bit uncertain about his ability to climb on the roof.

“It…didn’t go as well as I thought it would…”

“…”
“Adrien?” He heard her call him and he was about to trot back when he froze. He couldn’t come back like this. He was a cat in broad daylight and he couldn’t just shift back on the roof where anyone could potentially see him. With no other choice, he turned tail and ran until he found a gap between the buildings.

The alley he landed in was dirty and offended his sensitive nose, but it was also empty and away from prying eyes. Adrien shifted and threw the rusty fire escape next to him a glare. There had been a reason he had rather jumped down a three-story building than climb down said structure. But if he wanted to get back up there as his human self, he had no other choice.

Iron bit into his hands and more than anything, he wished for gloves in that moment. The weather had grown too warm for them though and he had become too reckless. He once used to carry some with him at all times for exactly those types of situations. In this day and age, it was almost impossible to not touch something made out of iron after all. Now he paid the price for his thoughtlessness.

By the time he was on the roof again, his hands ached horribly and were terribly red, the skin burned. He gritted his teeth and put them into the pockets of his hoodie. Marinette’s calls for him were bordering on desperate now, so he needed to hurry anyways and not cause her more worry. Unfortunately, he needed his hands to climb over the wall that separated her balcony from the rest of the roof.

“I’m here, I’m here, no worries,” he said as he climbed over the wall and did his very best to not grit his teeth or otherwise show that he was in pain. Marinette noticed though. She always noticed.

“What did you do?” She asked at the same moment as he landed on the balcony and put his hands back into his pockets.

“Nothing,” he said and started to sweat under her probing stare. There was no way he could show her his burned hands and have a good explanation for them. “I mean, I climbed around the roof a bit.”

Her stare hardened. “And…I slipped, but I’m fine!” He said the last part with emphasis to erase the shock from her face. Without thinking though, he had raised his hands in a placating gesture, which only deepened her shocked look. Before he had a chance to pull them back she grabbed his wrists and pulled them up to her eye level to examine the burns. Adrien winced.

“This isn’t nothing,” she whispered and only then did he notice that she had tears in her eyes. He tried to pull his hands back, but her hold on his wrists didn’t budge. “Those are burns, not scratches. What did you do?”

He couldn’t tell her.

“Nothing.”

“Adrien, what did you do?”

“I said it’s nothing,” he said a little more forceful than strictly necessary and looked away.

Her hold slowly loosened until she dropped his hands entirely. “O-okay then,” she said and the strained sound of her voice made him look at her again. She was crying.

She was crying because he had deliberately lied to her. He had lied to her and they both knew it.
He had made her cry.

“Marinette, I—”

“It’s okay. It’s nothing after all.” She said and her smile didn’t reach her eyes. It was the saddest and most broken smile he had ever seen.

She hates liars and you’re supposed to be her friend, you asshole! His inner voice scolded. And it was right.

They never spoke about it again.

“I slipped and scared her quite a bit,” Adrien said, the understatement of the century.

“Man, that would have scared anyone! Why didn’t you tell me?”

Because I made her cry.

Adrien shrugged. “You didn’t ask.”

Adrien hadn’t thought about this occurrence for months now. Even though it lay more than a year in the past already, it haunted him throughout the day. Even at the TV studio where he was supposed to cheer Nino on, he couldn’t tear his thoughts entirely away from that very shameful memory.

There were things he could never tell her, an entire part of his life he could never share with her, and all discussions about his bad excuses would always inevitably end up in heartbreak and distrust.

Unseelie means unhappy, misfortunate, unholy. It had been a naïve assumption of him to think that any of this would end well. All he could do was to enjoy the little bliss he had while it lasted. If Mélusine was right, then things such as happiness were fickle.

“Just wait here,” someone said, which tore Adrien out of his thoughts again. Nino was still on stage, concentrating on his music and the challenge to get the mayor of all people to dance. Someone had stepped up next to Adrien and his bodyguard though, probably the next contestant for the show. Adrien gave a friendly wave in greeting but the man in the very garish pink jacket was stopped from offering a handshake by the Gorilla.

“No, it’s okay,” Adrien quickly intervened, as this was really not necessary. He had never found out if the Gorilla—Félix and he didn’t know his real name, a precaution set by Nathalie—knew something about the fair folk or if he just took his job very seriously, but whenever there was just the tiniest bit of danger, he would go on the defence.

Through the tiny commotion, Adrien almost missed Nino winning the challenge.

“Awesome, dude!” Adrien said and fistbumped Nino when he came back to him.

“Next up is a hypnotist. That’s gonna be cool.” Nino said after bowing dramatically. Adrien wasn’t
sure if he agreed. After all, hypnotism was just another word for charming someone. This man didn’t seem to be a fae at least, so it should be harmless in comparison to what was possible with magic.

Adrien had just managed to convince himself that it would at least be interesting, when his father suddenly appeared on the screen.

“Oh no,” he muttered silently. He didn’t need to be a Cat Sidhe to feel the incoming disaster.

“Dude, it’s your dad,” Nino said, obviously excited, and Adrien did his best to at least smile. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad? Oh, who was he kidding!? This was his father. If anything, he should be on the lookout for black butterflies.

“Let’s see if you can bring Monsieur Agreste here with your powers,” Alec, the moderator, said and Adrien winced quietly. Even if the hypnotist could really make people do what he wanted, he couldn’t succeed. His father was, after all, cursed to not be able to leave the house. Or…was he? It had been around this time last year, hadn’t it? Maybe the curse was broken by now?

Well, it didn’t matter much anyway, because it was at this moment that his father forcefully ended the video call, making Adrien wince again. “That’s my dad, alright,” he said to a frowning Nino.

“Looks like Monsieur Agreste turned down your challenge. Game over,” the moderator said and Adrien could feel his fur stand on end at the injustice.

“But…that’s not fair. I didn’t even get time to…”

Adrien was about to go after the man, but he was once again held back by his bodyguard.

_Iron bells!_

Should he stay with Nino or should he go to the failed hypnotist and comfort him before he’d become an Akuma? Actually, the chance was quite low. There already had been an Akuma just two days ago when they had filmed the short film at the school. Hawkmoth probably had better things to do than to go after every single Parisian with negative emotions. Because, by Danu, there were quite a lot of those to pick from.

“I shouldn’t have tempted fate,” Chat Noir muttered to himself as he tried his best to fight off his now animalistic bodyguard.

_Ya think, kid?!_ Plagg sneered from inside his head. “We’ll have to go over this whole jinxing thing again when you don’t get it after almost sixteen years of living it.”

“Alright, no more hoping for the best from now on. Got it!” Adrien said as he blocked another swing of his bodyguard’s muscular arm with his baton and dodged another by rolling to the side.

A head-on swing ended up being a bad idea as the Gorilla grabbed the weapon and threw it behind him. Now with only his claws and magic as his defence, Chat Noir faced his opponent with a smirk.

“Better watch out,” he said, even when he was suddenly taken into what he could only describe as a very painful hug. The fur of his angrily lashing tail stood up in discomfort as a response.
“You know, I’m a natural deliverer of karma,” he said with a weak smirk. Fortunately, the universe gave him small blessings from time to time, as the elevator dinged at exactly that second, letting out a woman that was probably just coming back from a coffee run.

“Hey there, Ladybug,” Chat Noir said, and as expected, the Gorilla was distracted for just long enough to be kicked back. Now free again, Chat Noir didn’t waste time. He pushed his mind-controlled bodyguard into the elevator.

“Enough already,” he muttered. “Cataclysm!”

Before the bodyguard could flee, the elevator controls were broken and the elevator itself fell down the shaft.

Chat Noir winced. “Karma delivered?” he asked no one in particular. The universe perhaps, not that it ever gave him any answers other than just urgent warnings of it being sleeping time for the fair folk during the day, just like a very annoying nanny.

He picked the baton back up and upon hearing footsteps approach him, swung it around and got into a fighting stance once more, ready to take on more opponents. To his relief, it was only his partner and Nino though.

“Nice seeing you too, Chat Noir,” Ladybug said, while Nino just looked at him with a slack jaw.

“Sorry, I thought you were the Akuma or his minions,” he said and held his baton in front of him. Do not freak out now, he told himself as he gripped the weapon a little more strongly than necessary. He had been thinking about Marinette way too much during the day to be in any way, shape or form prepared for an encounter. Alas, the universe despised him after all.

“I saw him. He’s got a whole army!” Nino said, interrupting the awkward moment.

“I hate it when they have armies,” Chat Noir muttered and thought back to Stoneheart and Dark Blade. “He’s looking for Gabriel Agreste. We should better get to him fast,” he said more loudly. His main concern, however, wasn’t his father, but rather Félix and Nathalie. Well, his brother would probably be alright. If worse came to worst, he could just shift and escape the house—no one would pay attention to a cat after all. Nathalie wouldn’t be so lucky though.

The beeping of his ring stopped his train of thought and he internally groaned. Right, he had used Cataclysm.

“You’re about to change back. I’ll have a look for Nino’s friend,” his lady said, which set off another reason for panic. The quiet snickering inside his head was undoubtedly Plagg who was enjoying this whole mess way too much.

“Forget it, he’s probably hypnotised.” If they wouldn’t look for him, then he’d have an easier time being Chat Noir. After all, he hadn’t yet found a way to be two people at the same time. Well, unless Félix covered for him, but Félix was back at the mansion. Wait…they were headed to the mansion! A plan quickly formed in his head.

“But he’s my buddy!”

Bless Nino, honestly.

“You’re right, he’s probably hiding,” Chat Noir said, quickly changing his strategy. “I’ll leave you to look for him. Let’s meet at Gabriel Agreste’s place.”
He ducked into the stairwell, not waiting to find out how Ladybug and Nino would react to his sudden change of heart and following hasty departure.

“This is an awful idea,” Plagg said as soon as the transformation ended. “Your father gets targeted so Adrien Agreste is a likely target too.”

“Yes, but Adrien Agreste is also a magic cat. I’m sure I’ll find a way out of it,” Adrien said and started running down a random hallway, attentive to the noises around him in case the Akuma himself or his minions were still in the building.

“Your brother won’t like this.”

Adrien snorted humourlessly. “I know.”

After some back and forth between the hallways and dodging the occasional minion—the supposed soldiers were walking around like zombies, what was up with that?—Adrien eventually heard steps that were too light to be those of adults.  

*Found them!*

And then came the acting. Again. Needing to pretend like he hadn’t known that Nino was safe and sound with Ladybug was luckily not as hard as he had thought as Nino promptly smothered him in a tight hug.

“Dude, you ok?” He asked which was frankly a very good question.

*Let’s review: My father is persecuted by an Akuma, my brother and Nathalie are probably in danger too, the love of my life—who I almost kissed just a few days ago (!!!)—is staring at me with those worried bluebell eyes, she is also a freaking superhero and BY DANU I don’t know if I can survive this as just Adrien!*

“I’m fine.”

Adrien was absolutely unable to look away once his eyes met Ladybug’s. He had never met her without being transformed and it was a very surreal experience. For one, he knew who she was, but he couldn’t just treat her like he’d treat Marinette. That said, he also couldn’t slip into the easy camaraderie he had with her as Chat Noir. This technically was their very first encounter after all!

Oh, the irony had returned! At this point he was convinced that he was at the butt end of a cruel joke from the universe. Time to make a fifth first impression to the love of his life.

His sudden frozen state of panic must have looked like a miniature heart attack or something because the worry in her eyes deepened.

“Are you *sure* you’re ok?”

*Absolutely not!*

“I’m fine, really,” he lied and finally managed to look away awkwardly. If that was how the rest of the day was going to go, then he was *doomed.*

Adrien had witnessed *many* surreal things in his life—being a fae inevitably brought that burden with it. This, however, would most likely make it into his top ten.
“So, what was someone as pretty as you doing at the TV studio? Were you going to perform something as well?” Ladybug asked, her cheeks tinted with a blush and her eyes glinting with Marinette-levels of confidence. Meanwhile, Nino was screaming bloody murder as they swung from building to building and Adrien just tried his best to hold on to both Ladybug and Nino as best as he could.

Surreality at its finest.

“I—uh—what?” If his ears weren’t as good as they were, he would have sworn that the rushing wind was messing with his hearing ability.

“I mean, I’m sure you’re very talented,” Ladybug said. Adrien stared at her and then looked at Nino for confirmation that he had heard correctly. His best bud, however, was much more concerned with mere survival at that moment to pay attention to what Ladybug said.

How was this reality? Had he somehow slipped and was now living in an upside-down parallel dimension? If that were the case, he wouldn’t even be surprised. After all, why in the netherworld would Ladybug flirt with Adrien Agreste?! On that note, why would Marinette want to flirt with her arguably best friend?! It just…didn’t make any sense. Then again, she also had leaned into the almost-kiss two days ago. But that had been acting, nothing more!

Or had it?

No! Bad Adrien! Don’t follow that train of thought!

“N-no, I…I don’t think so,” Adrien eventually got out and was glad that she had to concentrate on where to swing. One look at his face would have told her how utterly flustered he was by those simple questions.

Was this Ladybug’s idea of keeping it cool and professional? If yes, then she and Chat Noir would have to talk! Well, maybe she was just nervous that he would find out who she was—a little too late for that—and that was the reason she was acting like this. Yes, that had to be it. Any other explanation was just too confusing or at best even utopic to be considered as a possibility at this moment.

Nino screamed like a little girl when they swung down from an especially high building and Adrien tightened his vice grip. And being this close to his love while she was in a skin-tight suit was problematic, to say the least. Yes, they often got pretty close while fighting Akumas or even on the rare occasions when she would pet him, but he was Chat Noir then! This time he was Adrien and to his eyes she was superhero-Marinette which did strange things to his heart.

He was starting to regret showing back up as Adrien and not just feeding Plagg and transforming into Chat Noir again. Sure, it had given Nino some peace of mind, but at what cost!? 

“You’re an idiot,” was how Félix greeted him as soon as Adrien entered his room, closely followed by a gasping Nino.

“Dudes, I’ve seen stadiums tinier than your room,” he said while he looked around.

“Fé, did you stay here just to tell me that?” Adrien asked and leaned on the back of the couch on which his brother sat. He needed a moment. Just one minute to breathe and process the happenings of the previous half an hour. For some reason, his brain had trouble to keep up.
“Perhaps.”

Adrien frowned and then threw a look to Nino who was eyeing the cat playground on the ceiling in confusion. Perhaps Félix had stayed to keep him from finding out anything incriminating. That would make sense. Not that he could admit that out loud while Nino was present.

“Just help yourself to the arcade games, Nino. I’ll have to talk to Félix in private for a bit,” Adrien said and pulled his brother with him to the bathroom. Once inside, he sighed.

“Okay, you’ll have to pretend to be me.”

Félix arched an eyebrow. “And then I am suddenly impossible to find?”

“Come on, Fé! I can’t be Adrien and Chat Noir at the same time.”

“What’s the big deal? Just let the Akuma take your dad, send Nino home and then transform,” Plagg said, thoroughly unconcerned.

“I agree with that plan,” Félix said, earning nothing but disbelief from Adrien.

“Are you two nuts?! Listen, Fé, we don’t have time for this. Pretend to be me, explain the cat playground to Nino and then just keep him from finding anything suspicious like your gemstone collection.”

“Different plan: I’ll just be myself and say you wanted to take a shower.”

Adrien growled in irritation when he heard a loud noise from the front gate. He didn’t have time for this. “Fine,” he hissed. “Plagg, Claws Out.”

Chat Noir had barely climbed the roof when he already heard Nino’s voice from inside.

“Hey dude, everything okay?”

“Yes, Adrien just wanted to take a shower,” Félix said. Chat Noir hissed quietly. Why was that the excuse his brother had to use?!

“Now?” Nino asked, appropriately bewildered.

“It’s the model in him.”

“Plagg, remind me to hang Félix out the window by his tail once this is over,” Chat Noir growled as he took his baton to call Ladybug.

“Will do.”

“You know,” Félix said after a period of silence. Adrien looked up from his brooding. “You managed to keep your friendship with her on the low for an entire year. If you’re being smart about it, you could do the same with a relationship.”

“Fé, I already said that it’s too risky! What if the Court finds out?!”

“It would not be much worse than it is currently. Besides, do you really have the heart to reject Marinette if she confesses to you?”
That rendered Adrien speechless. He had been about to deny any sort of attraction his best friend could have towards him, but hadn’t this day been proof enough? She had definitely flirted with him. It had been as Ladybug, but that counted too!

What if she would confess?

Félix was right: he wouldn’t be able to reject her. With all the lying he had to do, he couldn’t break her heart on top of it. Especially not when he felt the same.

Adrien looked out the window to the darkening sky with a forlorn expression.

“It’s not fair to put her in that kind of danger,” he said.

“You should have thought about that before becoming friends with her. Now it’s two years too late.”

He glared at his brother but Félix wasn’t even looking at him. Instead, he was concentrating on an assortment of different gemstones and herbs while Plagg sat on his shoulder with a piece of Camembert.

“It’s still too dangerous,” Adrien muttered, more to himself than to the other occupants of the room. He should have known that since the room was solely occupied by cats with incredibly good hearing, nothing he said would remain unheard.

Plagg sighed deeply. "Kid," he said but didn’t move from his perch on Félix’s shoulder. “All I hear from you so far are excuses why you can’t move forward with your relationship. Your brother is right. Whether you’re friends with her or you’re dating her, both are equal to the Court. Since you can’t stay completely away from her and since she’s under Tikki’s protection, I’d say go for it.”

The kwami gagged. “Can’t believe you forced me to say that.”

Adrien stood up and started pacing while trying to sort through his thoughts. He quickly realised though that both his brother and Plagg were giving him annoyed looks.

“I need to think this through, okay?” He tried to defend himself.

“Well, do it outside, will you?” Plagg said.

“You know what? I will,” Adrien said and shifted. “I’ll be back in a bit.”

He hadn’t realised how much he had missed this. Just running around as himself on the rooftops at night with the wind brushing through his fur. Sure, being Chat Noir was amazing, but being himself was pretty cool too. While his mind wandered, his body automatically found the path he had walked so often he could find it in his sleep at this point. A path that had saved him on Midsummer all these years ago and a path that lead him to happiness.

When he was perching on the wall that separated Marinette’s balcony from the rest of the roofs, he intentionally kept to the shadows. He hadn’t visited her as a cat since they got their Miraculous, mostly because Tikki would kill him and also because further possible attention from the Court was always bad. What did it matter now though? They were practically always together anyway, at school and in their free time! If the Court wanted to draw a connection, then it would be blatantly easy to do so. Visiting her as a cat was no more incriminating than talking to her in his free time was.

There was still Tikki though, and he feared and respected her enough to keep his distance. Speaking of the goddess, she was currently deep in a conversation with Marinette over a design.
Through the occasional glances his way though, he was sure that she knew he was there. He wouldn’t approach, wouldn’t risk angering Danu herself.

Adrien watched the two for a bit and enjoyed the warmth of Marinette’s voice as she excitedly talked about possible fabric choices. Just for the fun of it, he let his mind wander, remembering all the times she had talked excitedly about something to him. Every moment of her angelic kindness passed his mind and all the times she had comforted him when things had been rough. Even when she hadn’t understood what was going on, she had been there for him. He couldn’t help the dopey grin the memories drew on his face. Good thing she didn’t know he was there, as he was probably looking like the Cheshire cat right now.

Some idiot he had been. A relationship wouldn’t doom her. They had both been doomed from the moment he had fallen onto her balcony. Which didn’t mean he had needlessly worried, but as long as he stayed careful, he could make this work. A future with the one and only girl he had ever fallen in love with. It sounded like heaven on earth.

When Adrien threaded back home over the rooftops, he finally made a decision.

He was done running away.

Chapter End Notes

Finally those two idiots are on the same page. Was about time! Now I take bets on who will confess first! ;D Write your theories down below, I'm curious! :3
“You’re very mistaken if you think that arranging grey tones in a classy fashion is an easy feat,” Félix said and crossed his arms. It had just rained and the lingering humidity made him uncomfortable, though it was no use, as Adrien had still not returned. During that same rain shower, an Akuma attack had taken place and even though Marinette had stumbled into the chemistry lab ten minutes before the class ended, his brother had yet to return. If he had to guess, he’d say that Plagg was being a pain again when it came to eating Camembert.

Nino had agreed to wait with him for Adrien and for some reason, that had kickstarted a discussion about Félix’s personal clothing habits.

“I’m just saying, dude. You’re not helping your doom and gloom act any if you also dress like it.”

A heavy sigh tore itself from his lips and nothing more. There was no reason to try and convince Nino that ‘doom and gloom’, as he had called it, was a quite suitable look for him.

“Hey guys!” That voice clearly belonged to his brother. And not just that, but Adrien was making quite a show of being out of breath after a sprint.

“Too late, dude. School’s out already,” Nino said and Adrien straightened again.

“Oh, damn it,” he said and ran a hand through his hair. He opened his mouth, probably to explain his absence, when he was interrupted by Marinette who, in typical Marinette-fashion, tripped over something on the stairs and fell directly into Adrien’s arms. Now, that was some development.

Although probably an unintentional one.

Ever since the ‘Ladrien incident’, as Plagg had dubbed it, there had been some very subtle flirtation from her part. Sadly, it was too subtle, so it flew right over Adrien’s head. He understood that she might not be brave enough to outright flirt with him in public, but at this rate it would take at least a decade until anything changed between them. Watching her try and fail was even more painful than watching them both be oblivious.

In any case, Marinette looked quite nervous.

“Yeah…I’m fine,” Marinette said as she was pulled up to her legs again.

“Hey Nette, can you solve a dispute for us?”

“A dispute?” Adrien and Marinette asked at the same time.

“Jinxed,” Alya, who had just joined them, snickered.

“Yeah. Félix here thinks that grey tones are fashionable.”

Félix couldn’t help but stare at Nino in disbelief. “I wasn’t aware that our conversation was actually a dispute.”

“Oh, well, they are fashionable when put together correctly,” Marinette stammered and only now did Félix notice that she was not only nervous, but also seemed to be distracted.

“I’m sorry, but I, uh, have to go. There’s…uh…something I need to do. See you!”

And with that she was off.

Something wasn’t right, and one look at Adrien confirmed that he had noticed it too. This wasn’t just nervous anxiety. Félix smelled fear.

What was wrong? The Akuma attack was already over, so there currently shouldn’t be any life-threatening dangers that she was aware of. Unless…

Félix witnessed an own short moment of fear when the possibility that Marinette could have found out about the Court ran through his head.

“What’s this?” As soon as the fear struck, it dissipated again and was replaced with a whole other kind of terror. There, not three metres away from him, Chloé was in the process of climbing into her limo while she held a small…red…creature…

He sensed Marinette’s fear spike too and a short glance told him that she had just noticed that her purse was empty.

If there had ever been a code red, then this was it. He couldn’t just go up to Chloé and demand Tikki back without alarming Marinette. And he also couldn’t let Marinette go forward to do the same because that would let Chloé draw a connection between Marinette and this obviously magical creature.

What do?

At that moment, several things happened at once. One, Marinette saw that Chloé had Tikki. Two, a crying Rose ran away—oh right, he had heard a commotion with Chloé a few minutes ago but hadn’t paid it any attention. Three, the limo started rolling. Four, Adrien looked seconds away from pouncing through its open window.

Félix decided to prevent the most likely catastrophe by quickly grabbing Adrien’s arm and holding him back. That, however, meant that he wasn’t quick enough to stop catastrophe number two from happening.

“Chloé, wait up! That’s my…my…” Marinette suddenly called and ran after the limo. Félix accidentally dug his claws into Adrien’s arm when he tensed, making his brother hiss at him.
“Not anymore. Finders keepers,” Chloé tauntingly called back before the limo was too far away.

“See you later, Nino!” Adrien suddenly said and dragged Félix, who had still not let go of him, away from the scene and down the street. He eventually made a sharp turn into an alley and didn’t waste a second to round on him.

“First off, ow!” Adrien said and accusingly pointed at the bloody scratch marks on his arm. “Second, why the hell did you stop me?! I could have—”

“You could have what?” Félix interrupted him. “Jumped into the limo and demanded Tikki back? In front of Marinette?”

Adrien bit his lip and glared at the ground. “She’s a goddess, I’m sure she can take care of herself,” he added.

“Not this time,” Plagg suddenly cut in, a stern look on his face. “Her aura is weak, which isn’t surprising. With all the wards she has to keep up for Marinette, it was just a question of time until she’d eventually overexert herself. And now a fight in the rain? No wonder she got sick.”

“Tikki is sick?! I didn’t know gods could get sick.” Adrien said and suddenly looked even more worried than before.

“Oh, we very much can. Just like fae, our sickness is always magic-related though and it happens when we’re very weakened.” Plagg suddenly glared at both of them. “Now, let’s get my Sugarcube back. I don’t like how close to the Court’s core she is right now.”

“Alright, we’re in. What now?” Adrien asked as they sneaked into the hallway out of the empty room whose window they had entered by. They usually would have shifted back to a human form by now, but as long as there was the possibility that Marinette would show up, they couldn’t take that risk. As a result, they just needed to be more stealthy than usual, as two black cats in a hotel would no doubt garner some attention.

“Sniff Chloé out and don’t be seen,” Plagg replied from where he sat on Adrien’s back.

“She will probably be somewhere on the upper floors rather than the regular hallways,” Félix said while he already made his way to the stairs.

“I heard her say something about a prince earlier, before the attack. Did she mean that literally or was that code for Court stuff?” Plagg supplied.

“I think she meant that one literally. A prince from Achu is coming to Paris and is most likely staying here.” Félix glanced up the stairs. The ballroom was on the top floor and it would be the best place to welcome a prince at. He glared at the stairs. “We should have taken a window further up,” he muttered in irritation.

It had been hard but not impossible to enter the ballroom from the staircase door unnoticed. Luckily everyone’s attention was on the prince so Adrien and Félix could hide behind the bar
“Okay, there are at least twenty journalists. We can’t exactly get past them and near the prince without causing a scene,” Adrien whispered.

“Some bad luck might help,” Félix mused aloud.

“No, not while Chloé is there. She might notice,” Adrien argued.

The sound of silent steps made both of them freeze and Adrien had just enough time to dart behind a bucket when a person with a bike helmet and a very unfashionable pink…scarf—was that a blanket?—snuck behind the bar. It took Félix only a second to realise that it was Marinette…in disguise. He pressed himself against the black bar and hoped that his fur would blend in with it.

But Marinette didn’t seem to pay attention to the ground at all anyway, as she was thoroughly focused on the other side of the room. For inexplicable reasons, she seemed to find it a good idea to then *climb over* the bar and fall to the ground on the other side with an audible “ack!” when she hit the ground. So much for stealth.

With her gone from their hiding spot, Félix dared to peek around the bar counter. The prince was currently putting Tikki into the breast pocket of his blazer, which raised a lot of questions. Why had Chloé given Tikki to him? Why did no one notice that Tikki was a living creature? And where was the rest of the Court to notice this spectacle? Sure, fae were twilight creatures and it was the middle of the day, but certainly the visit of an actual prince would pique the interest of at least a few of them? Well, the less of them were present, the better.

Adrien, meanwhile, let out a silent growl from beside him, which Félix connected to Tikki’s perilous situation, until he was nudged.

“Why now?” He whispered quietly enough for Marinette to not hear, who was, by the way, still crouching behind a stage that had been set up in the middle of the room. In any case, Félix’s eyes were drawn to the elevator where a green-skinned figure surrounded by pink smoke emerged. From the skin colour alone and the swirly designs below her eyes he would have mistaken her for a fair one, if it wouldn’t have been for her absolutely *horrendous* outfit. No fae with any self-respect would be caught dead wearing something like that.

She had what looked like a perfume bottle hanging from her braid and she didn’t waste time using it…as a gun. Her target was Chloé—well, that wasn’t surprising at least—and at first it seemed to not do anything. At least not until the smell reached them and Félix flattened his ears in disgust.

“Go,” Félix hissed quietly at his brother who for some reason seemed unsure of what to do. “I’ll handle Tikki, you handle the Akuma.”

“Be careful,” Adrien whispered back and then was gone.

“At your service, Princess Fragrance,” the horde of reporters suddenly said and bowed before the Akuma. Oh no, he hated it when it was mind control. The last time that happened had been on Valentine’s day and neither him nor Adrien liked to be reminded of that specific disaster.

“Who…who are you?” the prince said, which prompted the Akuma to introduce herself in a high, annoying voice. He *knew* that voice.

*Oh dear, Juleka will not like this,* he thought.

“Oh no, this is bad,” he heard Marinette whisper to herself and jump on the stage to mess with the
DJ table, or whatever it was, that was set up there. He hadn’t known that confetti cannons were involved in the entire thing and he jumped as high as the bar counter when they were suddenly set off.

The distraction it offered, allowed the mayor, Chloé, the prince as well as his chaperon to escape into the stairwell and Félix didn’t waste a second to follow them.

Fleeing from the Akuma and pursuing Chloé and the prince was difficult without being seen. Well, actually it was impossible. He could be as sneaky as he wanted, but Chloé’s eyes still immediately wandered to him when he slid into the room shortly before the door closed. He glared at her in return and gave an offended sniff since that horrible stench still surrounded her.

“We’ll be safe in here. This is a reinforced door,” the mayor said and Félix couldn’t help but roll his eyes while ducking behind a chair. Even the strongest door wouldn’t guarantee anyone’s safety when faced with magic.

With a frown, Félix watched the scene from his hiding place. He couldn’t just get close to the prince and snatch Tikki away, since Chloé would then know his intention. He needed to separate the two of them first.

Chloé kept watching him and threw him a questioning frown. He wasn’t interested in holding a silent conversation with her though and therefore fixated the door with a piercing glance. With perked ears he listened for the Akuma’s approach.

What is Adrien waiting for?

He heard the Akuma on the other side of the door where she was *singing* for some reason. Really, what was up with the atrocious smell *and* the singing? Was this Akuma specifically made to offend his senses?

Félix slowly retreated to the windows when a pink cloud started to spread from beneath the door. He might plan to get Tikki back, but if he’d get hit with the Akuma’s powers, that would all be for naught. If the incident on Valentine’s day was anything to go by, then neither he nor Chloé should be hit if they wanted to prevent going…well, not crazy but still something along its lines.

At least the blonde was smart enough to retreat to the very back of the room as well, even when the cloud of magic perfume receded again soon afterwards.

A screech of “Who *are* you?!” was heard from beyond the door. For some reason that prompted the mayor, the prince and his chaperone to approach the door once more.

“What are you doing here?” Chloé hissed quietly.

“Following Adrien who’s being an idiot. Lost sight of him though,” Félix explained. By the way Chloé’s eyes narrowed, she didn’t seem to believe him though.

“You’re lying.”

“What’s it to you?”

He wouldn’t get an answer to his question though, as the mayor’s panicked voice interrupted them.

“Oh no, there are two of them now. Run!”

Félix hadn’t been aware that Chloé could run this fast until now. He went to follow, but the Akuma
stopped right in front of the door: his preferred exit. He internally swore and turned right around, heading for the windows instead. While he didn’t know where the four of them would go, he suspected he would eventually catch sight of them again. So, up he climbed, away from the stupid magic fog.

“You seem to be in a pawsivitely unfurtruntate situation.”

“Are you kidding me? Where the hell have you been in the last five minutes?!” Félix hissed when Chat Noir grabbed him around the middle and sent both of them to the roof with his baton.

“Those were two minutes at most. And believe it or not, but finding an empty room without security cameras in this hotel while an Akuma is running around is actually incredibly difficult.”

“I hope you’re aware about the consequences if you get hit,” Félix said and strained his ears to pick up sounds from the floors below them.

“I’m not gonna get hit,” Chat Noir said defensively. Félix was about to reply to enforce the utmost importance of the matter, but Chat Noir’s ears twitched and he already walked to the edge of the roof.

“They’re one floor below,” he said and then was gone. Félix hissed as he scrambled to get to the restaurant. Unfortunately, he didn’t have a baton like his brother did, nor opposable thumbs, which made the climb one floor down along the hotel front a much too slow process. Claws digging into the wall, he eventually managed to land on the sill of an open window. Just in time to see Chat Noir jump out a window on the opposite side of the room, with the Akuma quickly following.

Félix crossed the room and jumped up to the sill of the window they had just disappeared through, only to see a silver car drive away. He hissed in frustration. Couldn’t his brother inconspicuously have snatched Tikki and left her here for Marinette or him to find?! Well, now it was too late anyway. He needed to follow that car before the Akuma caught up to them.

“Tikki, please be okay...”

Startled, Félix’s fur bristled and he whirled around to see Marinette stand right beside him to look after the quickly disappearing car as well. That was, until she turned around to look at him. He was frozen for a second and then promptly jumped out the window before there could be any speck of recognition from her side. She made a startled/scared noise, but he couldn’t pay that any mind as he landed on his paws on the pavement and promptly took off in the direction the car had disappeared into.

On second thought, he probably should have climbed back to the roof, as a chase would be much easier when he didn’t have to dodge the legs of several people or traffic. Due to having to step where feet didn’t go, he landed in several puddles left from the rain earlier. He hissed in displeasure at the entirety of the situation. Why did Hawkmoth need to send out a second Akuma anyway?! That had never happened before and the timing now couldn’t be worse, with Tikki and therefore Ladybug, down for the count.

Speaking of: Félix finally caught up to the car, only to find it crashed in the middle of an intersection. Damn it, he had missed them again! He still ran up to it, hoping to find a clue to their new location. He found quite a bit more than just that.

“Finally,” he sighed and carefully nudged the sick kwami with a paw. She frowned at him, though the expression lacked the strength and severity it had held on their previous encounter.
“What are you doing here?”

“I thought it would be obvious,” he said and moved forward to pick her up as best as he could manage it as a cat. At least that had been his intention until Tikki hissed at him.

“I don’t trust you.”

Félix was aware that she was the goddess of creation and therefore a being with unfathomable power, but desperate times called for desperate measures. Under different circumstances he’d have never dared to say something so audacious to her.

“You will just have to, unless you want another fae to find you.”

“I’ll…wait for Marinette.”

“And then risk letting a fae see her walking away with you during an Akuma attack while you’re too weak to even move? You might be willing to take that risk, but I’m not.”

Without asking for permission, Félix carefully took Tikki’s tail fin between his teeth and then he ran. Just in time to avoid Marinette who just arrived on a scooter.

“No, bring me to…her. She can take me…to a healer,” Tikki weakly said but Félix didn’t listen. He wouldn’t put Marinette into unnecessary danger now by drawing a connection between her and him and Tikki.

“I can bring you to a healer,” Félix said muffled. “Just tell me where to find them.”

“I can’t tell that to a Sidhe,” Tikki said, her voice full of distrust, while Félix walked through a deserted alley.

“My brother hath a Miwaculous in case you have forgotten. And you need help, so stop being stubborn.”

Tikki didn’t reply.

“Think about it: The longer you stay like this, the longer Marinette is in danger. We have a common interest here.”

“Fine,” Tikki hissed and let out a cough. “But only because Chat Noir got hit and I’m worried she’ll go after him.”

That particular piece of information was news to Félix.

“That idiot,” he muttered, now even more eager to get Tikki back to Marinette as soon as possible. So much for not getting hit.

“Turn right,” Tikki suddenly said and Félix tore himself away from imagining just how much hell he’d have to give his brother later for his stupidity. Instead, he followed Tikki’s directions and with worry noted that her voice became weaker with every word and that the coughs became more violent.

The place they ended up at was not very impressive with how ordinary it looked, but that was good. The more it stood out, the more attention it would garner. And if Tikki’s utmost reluctance to tell him of it was any indication, then there were secrets inside that the fae Courts were under no circumstances supposed to know about.
He walked into the alley beside the building, set Tikki down and shifted. When he picked the kwami back up, he did so with an apologetic smile.

“I’m sorry that you had to reveal this to me under these circumstances. In any case, I promise to not tell anyone about who- and whatever is inside here. Well, except for Plagg, I guess.”

“Not even Adrien?” Tikki asked in disbelief. Félix shook his head.

“If he’s reckless enough to get hit during an Akuma attack after I warned him about it, then he isn’t ready to be trusted with such a secret.”

He knocked on the door and kept Tikki hidden from view by cupping one palm over the other. It only took a few seconds until it was opened.

Félix wasn’t sure what he had expected—perhaps a mysterious hooded figure, or someone similar to Mélusine where you had to doubt if you could really lay your trust in them—but a friendly smile and a polite greeting from a small, elderly Asian man had not really been it.

“Hello, young man. Please, come in.”

Félix closed the door behind him and followed the man through a short hallway and up a set of stairs.

“I don’t think you have an appointment, but that’s where you’re in luck, as I’m free this afternoon.”

“Appointment?”

The old man turned around to him. “Are you not here for a massage?”

Félix blinked. Perhaps Tikki had mistaken the place, which left him in a thoroughly awkward situation.

“Oh, my apologies. I think there has been a mistake. I was looking for a healer, not a masseur,” he said, hoping to get the polite pleasantries out of the way fast so he could go looking for his actual destination. The old man chuckled and there was something in his eyes that Félix didn’t like. It almost seemed as if he was making fun of him.

“I am a healer as well. Follow me, please,” he said and led Félix into a room with a mattress on the ground—probably for the aforementioned massages. A small table with a steaming cup of tea sat in the corner and the decorations were thoroughly Chinese.

“Please, have a seat. Do you want some tea? I have Oolong, it will help calm your spirit.”

Calm his spirit? If he meant his soul then Félix wasn’t sure if he even had one—probably not. Besides, they were in the middle of a crisis, so this definitely wasn’t the time for tea! …Coffee, maybe.

“That’s not necessary,” Félix said and frowned at his hands from where Tikki was tapping his fingers. She had been quite sure that this was the right person to go to and it wasn’t like he was gonna doubt a eons-old being. Well, except for her irrational stubbornness when it came to Marinette and therefore initially not bringing him here in the first place. He was sure, however, that her distrust towards him wouldn’t go as far as to put herself and with that also Marinette at risk, by leading Félix to the wrong person.

While he refused the tea, he still sat down.
“Now,” the old man said and sat down on the other side of the mattress across from Félix. “Will you show me my patient?”

Tikki’s tapping became more insistent and he knew that he should just go ahead and give her to this mysterious person, but something in him refused. She was a secret. A pretty important and also dangerous secret and a part of him said that he should keep it that way. But he also knew that he couldn’t heal her.

“Nearby water does not put out a distant fire,” the old man said and somehow managed to keep his calm demeanour and still lay insistence into his expression.

Félix sighed. “Alright, but please heal her as quickly as you can. We’re in a crisis,” he said and gentle lay Tikki’s small form down on the mattress.

“A crisis is an opportunity riding the dangerous wind.”

Chinese proverbs were no help either, but Félix forced himself to swallow a comment and just sit still while the old man performed what looked like a ritual. A gong and hand gestures were involved and it might have looked ridiculous to an ordinary person, but Félix knew better.

Tikki’s sickness stemmed from magic, so in order for her to get better, the magic in her needed strengthening. What the old man did was to redirect the flow of natural energies all around them and let them flow into the kwami.

The method wasn’t what baffled Félix, but rather the fact that a human was performing it. He had not been aware that this was possible. It was not an easy task to control magic that wasn’t one’s own. While he and Adrien used outside magic for shifting, it wasn’t like they met a resistance when they did so. Shifting for them was natural and the universe gladly allowed the things that were meant to be. It was entirely different from taking this outside magic and bending it to one’s will for something unnatural like drawing strength from it.

Then again, the universe might allow it for the goddess of creation. She was an exception to lots of things after all.

The old man used the gong a few more times and eventually ceased his hand gestures that redirected the energies.

“Her health has been restored,” he said in the same moment as Tikki opened her eyes. Her complexion wasn’t pale anymore and her eyes brimmed with life, much different from how she had trouble keeping them open just mere minutes before.

“How did you do that?” Félix asked and couldn’t help to let a bit of awe slip into his voice.

“Old Chinese secret.”

Félix frowned.

“I suggest you stay here until the attack is over,” Tikki then said as she lifted herself into the air, now with no effort at all.

“I won’t stay anywhere while my brother is running around out there like a lunatic with midsummer madness!”

“There’s nothing you can do about that. And don’t underestimate Plagg. Now that he knows what he’s dealing with, he’ll probably be able to intervene.”
Félix grit his teeth in frustration and was very glad that the glamour prevented his tail from being corporeal in this reality, otherwise it would have knocked over several things on the shelf beside him with its lashing. He knew Tikki was right, but this just set him back to ground zero of being a helpless bystander. They had already established that it was his task to keep the fair folk away from Akuma attacks. If he couldn’t do even that, he had nothing.

Tikki seemed to guess his thoughts as her expression changed to a sympathetic smile.

“I know you want to help, but the risk isn’t worth it this time. If you get hit, then you won’t have a Miraculous to protect your sanity and we won’t know what you’ll do then. Don’t worry, Ladybug can handle herself and I’m sure your brother will be fine as well.” She glanced to the window and then bowed. “Thank you, Master. See you later, Félix.”

Tikki left behind an awkward silence after phasing through the window and Félix slowly turned around to the supposed ‘Master’.

“This outcome really is quite fascinating,” the old man said and stood up to walk over to the tea table. Félix followed him and watched how he poured another cup of tea, offering it to him.

“How so?” He couldn’t help but be wary in the same way he was wary whenever he was mingling with the Court. The ability to lie or not was irrelevant when you could just as easily deceive with the truth. The easiest way to go about it was to trust no one. This old man might be a trusted ally of the kwamis, but that didn’t mean that Félix could trust him.

“Well,” the old man said and sat down, taking a sip of his tea. “It’s been quite a while since I last got to speak with a fair one, and I can’t really say that that encounter has been a pleasant one.”

Félix narrowed his eyes at the man and then hesitantly sat down. “Affability is a thing for humans.”

“Yes, I suppose that’s true. And waywardness is not always easy to deal with for us.”

Don’t I know it.

“Though tell me,” the man said, “would you consider what you did affable?”

Well, did he? His ulterior motive had been to keep Marinette safe and the best way to do that was to return Tikki to her in a healthy state. Then again, another fae or even halfling probably would only have helped in return for a favour from Danu. It was a tempting thing to consider, he admitted. However, that the thought hadn’t even crossed his mind before now made him knit his brow.

“I won’t answer this,” Félix said.

“Pity,” the man said and took another sip of his tea. When his eyes met Félix’s again, he recognized the emotion behind them: curiosity. He didn’t like how it made him feel like a rare probe under a microscope. “In any case, introductions are in order. You may call me Monsieur Chan for now.”

His familiarity with the fair folk’s customs was showing in the way he worded his introduction. No ‘my name is’ or ‘I am’, which meant he could call himself whatever he wanted without lying and therefore without offending a fae.

“I’m going to guess that’s not your real name, but considering the situation, that’s only appropriate. Thanks to a certain goddess you already know my name, I suppose.”
M. Chan nodded. “It’s a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance, Félix.”

“Is it really? Usually people who know what I am would prefer to keep their distance.”

“You mean the fair folk do,” M. Chan said calmly. “Their opinion on Cat Sidhe is somewhat biased and riddled with jealousy.”

“Jealousy?”

Félix hadn’t heard something this absurd in ages. And he lived in Akuma-infested Paris!

“The fair folk are Tikki’s and Plagg’s creation, but Cat Sidhe are solely Plagg’s fault, if you can call it that. Instead of being the result of a wish, your kind is the result of the concentrated magic of a god. If you so wanted, you could wield more magic than any Court chief. It’s all a question of practice and opportunities.”

There were several things that went through Félix mind that that moment. First and foremost: Was this true? And if it was, then why hadn’t he known about it?! Secondly: the fair folk were Tikki’s and Plagg’s creation? Sure, Plagg had dropped comments here and there about being responsible for this and that, concerning the fae, mostly in regards to the Unseelie and curses, but he had never thought that this meant that Plagg had created those things.

“What do you mean with the fair folk being the result of a wish?”

M. Chan chuckled. “Interesting, so Plagg didn’t tell you.”

“Obviously he didn’t,” Félix muttered and mentally made a note that his familiarity with the god of destruction was no surprise to the old man.

“Very well then. You see, the Miraculous are very old tools, made by the kwamis themselves ten-thousands of years ago. All kwamis exist ever since their concept first showed up. Tikki, therefore, is the oldest of them all, with Plagg having come into existence soon after her. When those concepts, and with that their gods, were bound to the Miraculous, it was done so humans could use them to protect themselves from dangers that threatened their existence. They could drive off floods, dig out entire villages that were buried by a landslide and put out forest fires. Their purpose was to do good and to help humanity whenever their help was most needed.

“But humans are greedy. Around two thousand years ago, when a village chief of settlers wielded both the Ladybug and the Black Cat, she decided that the safety of her people wasn’t enough. They had successfully fought off attackers with the Miraculous and could have looked forward to a life in peace. A guardian, such as myself, was sent to retrieve the magic jewels and keep them safe until they were needed once more.

“Now, you need to know of the power the Ladybug and the Black Cat possess when put together. Tikki has the power to create a universe and Plagg has the power to destroy one. When put together, both of those powers are on equal par with each other. You know magic, so can you guess where this is going?”

Félix actually had trouble to comprehend such an immense power. It was beyond anything he could ever imagine. But, theoretically, he knew what would happen. “The magic would be able to bend the universe. This is the wish part, isn’t it?”

M. Chan nodded and gave him a smile not unlike a teacher who was happy with a student’s answer.
“Exactly. The village chief had seen the power a kwami possessed and instead of being awed by it, she wanted such power for herself and her people. She wished for them all to become gods and to live in a paradise so beautiful that others, upon arriving there, would never want to leave.

“A wish voiced with the Ladybug and the Black Cat miraculous is a dangerous thing though. Balance has to be maintained, so as Tikki’s power gives the wisher what they want, Plagg’s power takes something of equal value from them. Those people might have gotten magic powers and their paradise, but they lost their humanity and their world in return. The utopia they wanted to live in is what your folk calls Tír na nÓg, or the Otherworld.

“In any case, the Tuatha Dé Danann, or the folk of the goddess Danu, as they called themselves, never found a way to escape the Otherworld. They did find a way to create flawed and twisted creatures in their own image, though. These beings found a way out of the Otherworld and into this world on certain days of the year. That’s how the fair folk came to be.”

Félix was rendered speechless, which was a rare feat to accomplish. He’d have to verify this story with Plagg and maybe even Tikki later, but at least it sounded true.

“That…would make sense,” Félix eventually admitted. “It also explains why Cat Sidhe rank among the royal fae, when our magic can be as powerful as you suggested.” He would absolutely grill Plagg about this later. How dare that little gremlin keep something crucial like this from him and Adrien?!

“I heard that the most powerful Cat Sidhe were also the wickedest of fae. Remember: the more magic you possess, the less human you become,” the old man said, the smile on his face gone. Instead, he looked at Félix with a somewhat grim expression.

Félix closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. In and out. How could he have forgotten? Well, not forgotten. He would never forget his most damning mistake, but he still preferred to shove it to the very back of his mind to prevent the images of a flickering will-o’-the-wisp from coming back. At least that explained why Plagg never said anything.

Rule number one of magic was that it always came with a price. There were no exceptions, shortcuts or loopholes. Just like M. Chan had said: balance needed to be maintained.

“I know,” Félix said, his voice quieter than before. Feeling his incoming panic grip him, he thought it wise to take the offered tea after all. The hot beverage was a welcome comfort and it didn’t even taste half as bad. A comfortable silence followed in which Félix collected his thoughts.

“You mentioned that you are a guardian that keeps the Miraculous safe when they are not needed. Am I right in the assumption that you gave out the active Miraculous this time as well?”

M. Chan smiled. “You are very attentive,” he commented. “And while I do admit to giving out the Ladybug and the Black Cat this time, the Butterfly was out of my control. It got lost a long time ago and I tracked its trail down to Paris. I hoped to find it before it would get into the wrong hands, but as you can see, I was too late.”

“And then you thought that giving the Miraculous of the two oldest gods to children would be a good idea?!” Calming Oolong tea or not, Félix couldn’t help getting angry at that. How utterly irresponsible!

“A kwami sensed the Butterfly’s aura on the morning before the first attack happened. I wasn’t sure when and how this dark wielder would attack, so I couldn’t go through the luxury of carefully weighing my options. I set out tests that would bring forth the qualities of a Ladybug wielder and a
Félix’s eyes widened and then narrowed when a specific memory replayed before his mind’s eye.

“You were the old man that my brother helped up so we missed our first day of school.”

M. Chan nodded. “Yes, that is true. Adrien was willing to sacrifice something dear to him in order to help someone else.”

“So, let me get this straight: You chose my brother for the Miraculous of the god of destruction. The god who claims to have founded the Unseelie Court and the one responsible for Adrien’s and my entire existence. You chose a halfling that you fully know is connected to the Unseelie Court and entrusted him with the power of ultimate destruction?!” Plagg’s exact words of their first encounter ran through his mind. “Plagg was right, you really must have lost your marbles.”

M. Chan chuckled. “Is that what he said? I admit to have taken a gamble there, but I’m more than glad to see how it has worked out.”

“You are indeed very lucky,” Félix sneered. “But have you ever thought about Marinette in all of this?! The Unseelie Court thinks she is Danu and she knows nothing of all of this! You are putting her life at danger just because you took a stupid gamble!”

For the first time, something akin to surprise flashed across M. Chan’s face. “I should have guessed that you knew her identity as you’ve brought Tikki to me.”

Félix snorted dismissively. “Well, you took a gamble and here’s how it fails. The Miraculous doesn’t quite work on Adrien so he could see through the glamour since the beginning. To say that Tikki wasn’t happy about it would be an understatement.”

M. Chan stroked his beard in thought. “Interesting. I expected Tikki not to tell her chosen about the fair folk, so to have someone who was in the know as Ladybug’s other half seemed like the best course of action. I didn’t predict this outcome though. Now she is the only one completely out of the loop.”

“And she is not happy about it. Do you have any idea how hard it is to keep her away from the fair folk all the time? Especially when the entire Court worships her as their goddess?!”

“I can imagine the struggle, yes,” M. Chan said and looked down in thought. Félix decided to let the old man brood for a bit and instead took another sip of tea.

“Perhaps,” he eventually said, “it would be best for you all to leave Paris for a bit. Summer vacation is starting tomorrow if I’m not mistaken, so it would be a good chance for you all to catch a break and occupy your minds with other things. Get some distance from the Court.”

“You say that as if it would be easy. Ladybug and Chat Noir are needed if there’s another Akuma attack. They can’t just take a break whenever they feel like it,” Félix threw in.

“There won’t be another Akuma attack for a few weeks at least, so you have time.”

Wait what?

“How can you know that for sure?”
“You said your brother has been hit by the Akuma in this attack, right?”

Félix nodded. “And Chloé probably too. Danu knows what that will result in.”

“Even better.”

Félix failed to see how two out of control halflings could possibly improve this situation.

“The Miraculous are made for humans, the Butterfly most especially. If they are hit with resistance
due to magic other than their own, Nooro will be immensely drained from it.”

“Nooro?”

“The kwami of the Butterfly Miraculous. Remember how there weren’t any Akumas for three
weeks after the Akuma on Valentine’s Day where Chat Noir has been hit?”

Félix did, indeed, remember. If it wouldn’t have been for his brother’s lamenting, those would
have been quite relaxing three weeks of peace.

“And there also was a break of almost a month after Sabrina has been akumatised.”

M. Chan nodded. “Not only is Nooro’s magic indirectly connected to two rather strong halflings,
but this is also the second Akuma of the day. He will be very worn out after this and unable to
transform Hawkmoth for a little while. I suggest you make the most of that time as long as it lasts.”

Chapter End Notes

I actually drew concept art of that scene where Félix carries Tikki. I know I can't draw
cats perfectly, don't judge me please! ;W;
Summer Getaway

Chapter Summary

vacation time! ✨

Chapter Notes

Hello and welcome back to this madness! Prepare for over 7k words of vacation shenanigans! ;D

Also, my beta informed me that my memory in fact didn't serve me correctly! I thought Alya was from Marseille while she's actually from Martinique which makes literally half the world of a difference. At this point it's too late to change it though, so you'll just have to accept this as yet another universe alteration. I really didn't mean to rob Alya of her canon origins, I'm sorry! D:

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Alright, now tell me how you made Nathalie go along with this and where the hell you hid this car until now,” Marinette said while in one of the very back seats of a seven-seater. Around her were backpacks, travel bags and other things that didn’t fit into the trunk. Adrien beside her didn’t fare any better with his own travel bag and backpack in this lap. Alya and Nino were in a similar situation in the seats in front of them and even Félix had to share his legroom in the front seat with a couple of bags. A seven-seat car always sounded like a cool thing, but it wasn’t very good if you needed it to go on vacation. The trunk really wasn’t made to fit the number of suitcases this warranted. Luckily Félix, Nino and Nathalie had packed light. The same couldn’t be said for Adrien, Alya and her though. Marinette just hoped that Tikki had enough room in the extra extra bag.

“Oh, that was easy!” Adrien said. “She was in desperate need of a break and she had some vacation days left over. Félix and I just needed to give her an excuse to actually use them, so here we are.”

Marinette smiled. “That’s great. Now she can get away from all those nightmare schedules.” If Adrien’s and Félix’s schedules were anything to go by, then Nathalie had to lead an excessively hectic life. If anyone deserved a vacation, then her.

“Well, she still has to keep an eye on us,” Adrien said, a grin growing on his face. “And father legally isn’t allowed to refuse her any vacation, so he can’t do anything about it.”

“You’re suspiciously quiet about where you hid the car,” Marinette remarked with a grin, wanting to stray from the topic of Gabriel Agreste.

Adrien chuckled. “In the underground garage like all our cars?”

“Dude, how many cars do you have?” Nino asked from in front of them. To their surprise, the answer came from the front.
“There are seven in total. Four city cars, one limo for red carpet events, one Ferrari and this car that is often used for when photoshoots are held outside of Paris,” Nathalie said. Marinette had already noticed that the woman liked to rattle off facts and numbers, probably a habit from her job.

Adrien chuckled. “Yeah, what Nathalie said. We even once went to a photoshoot in the Camargue with this one!”

“I know,” Marinette said. It had already been two years at this point, but she still remembered the small notes Adrien had written for her at the very beginning of their friendship. They had hung on her pinboard long enough to learn each of them by heart, and one of them had been about a photoshoot in the Camargue and about how beautiful it had been there. “I thought that was why we were going there?”

“No, that’s a coincidence,” Félix said.

“Didn’t you say we were going to stay at the house of a family friend of yours?” Alya asked, looking back between Félix and Adrien.

“Yeah, Mel has a house there and she offered it to us! Nathalie has been there too with mum when they were still in school!” Adrien said and threw Marinette an excited grin.

“It’s a quite peaceful area,” Nathalie threw in. “Or at least it has been when I was there.”

“Peaceful sounds good,” Félix said and Marinette noticed the pointed look he threw back at Alya.

“Ugh, finally,” Alya groaned as she slowly got out of the car and grimaced. Marinette could relate as she followed her friend and stretched her stiff limbs. The car ride had started turning into an exhausting affair from hour four onward when Félix had decided to be more grumpy than usual and forbade everyone to speak because he wanted to take a nap. Even Adrien had turned restless and grumpy eventually, forcing them to take several breaks in which he would run all around the respective gas stations.

In the end, the eight-hour journey ended up taking ten hours because of it and they were all exhausted. Especially Nathalie, since she had been driving the entire time.

“I’m going to see what’s in the kitchen and then cook us dinner,” Alya declared.

“That’s nice and all, babe, but could you help us unpack first?” Nino said while trying to pull Alya’s suitcase out of the trunk. It probably weighed a ton, judging by how much he was struggling with it. Marinette walked over to help him.

“Gee, Als, what did you pack?” She asked. That thing was easily as heavy as two sacks of flour.

“Only the essentials,” Alya said and then fixed Marinette with a judgmental stare. “And don’t pretend like you’re not in the same boat Miss I-need-every-possible-outfit.”

Marinette averted her eyes and felt her cheeks flush in embarrassment.

“Well…at least I’m hefting my own suitcase,” she said and then turned around to the trunk. The almost empty trunk. “Where is it?”

“Oh, Adrien already pulled your stuff out of the trunk,” Nino said and pointed to where said blond
stood, surrounded by several suitcases, two out of three of them his. He looked at them contemplatively, as if he couldn’t decide which one to take inside first. Or, more likely, he was looking for a way to get them all inside at once. Marinette decided to take pity on him.

“Thanks for almost breaking your back while getting my suitcase out. You know I could have done it myself though, right?” She asked with a smile.

“I know, but you’re tired. And it wasn’t that heavy,” Adrien said with a grin of his own.

“You’re tired too, Monsieur,” she said with an eye-roll and took the handle of her suitcase. “At least you didn’t try to lift Alya’s.”

“Hypocrite!” Alya threw in loudly from where she was half-hanging in the car in an attempt to get out her additional bags.

Marinette then started to pull her luggage towards the house where Nathalie and Félix had already disappeared into. Adrien followed her with his two suitcases and some effort. After struggling for half a minute, he probably realised that the small path was really only suitable for one suitcase at a time, so the other one was left behind to be picked up later.

When they entered the house, Marinette couldn’t help but gasp. While it had already looked idyllic from the outside, the inside severely trumped that. It didn’t look like a lived-in place and more like the setting for a photoshoot. Everything was in a neat condition, decorations carefully picked and placed to create an overall aesthetically pleasing atmosphere. And that was only the entrance hall.

“Our rooms are upstairs,” Félix informed them from a doorway and pointed behind him. Marinette assumed that that was where the stairs would be.

“Nice!” Adrien said and rolled his suitcase past her. “Come on, Princess!” He called, a giddy grin on his face, ignorant of the fact that Marinette’s heart almost leapt out of her chest at the sight. He was most beautiful when he was happy.

She remembered her resolve to finally confess to him and perhaps an opportunity would arise on this vacation.

Vacation.

It hadn’t fully settled in yet that she could actually take one. After becoming Ladybug, she had slowly resigned herself to the reality of a chaotic life. Things like concrete plans and vacations had been banished to the back of her mind as a dream for after Hawkmoth was defeated. So, when Tikki had, after a thorough discussion, agreed that now would be the opportune time to spend a few days away from Paris, Marinette had been eager to take that chance.

The ones who had been the hardest to convince had been each of their parents. They were all still minors after all, so she could understand their concerns. Only the reassurance that Nathalie would accompany them and be with them at all times had calmed them down.

After a very lengthy discussion about what to have for dinner—during which Adrien managed to mortally offend Alya with the suggestion to just shove some frozen pizzas into the oven—they agreed on fish sticks with mashed potatoes.

“Man, I’m glad the fridge even has stuff in it. Was your family friend here recently?” Nino asked in between bites. The five of them sat at a table outside in the garden. Only Nathalie had insisted to
eat at a proper table inside.

“Nah, but she probably asked someone to stock up when she suggested we could stay here. The neighbours probably,” Adrien said with a shrug.

“Well, I’m glad they did,” Alya said. Her plans of an extravagant meal had fallen short in favour of simplicity. It had taken quite a bit for her to admit that she was too tired to cook much more than scrambled eggs. “Because Mari and I will make lunch tomorrow.”

“Why am I being dragged into this? Use Nino as an assistant for a change,” Marinette said with a grin.

“And rob us of the chance to eat your dumplings? No way, girl!”

“What are we gonna do tomorrow? Just chill here?” Nino asked.

“We could go to the beach!” Adrien suggested.

“Or just take a walk,” Félix said.

“We could do both. First, we go to the beach and afterwards we can take a walk if we’re up for it,” Marinette said, a suggestion that was met with approval.

“It’s so beautiful!” Marinette said for probably the hundredth time already while taking another picture. At this point, she had probably taken more pictures and videos than Alya, which was an impressive feat since her friend seemed determined to document everything.

“I know, right? This is making me all nostalgic,” Alya said with a sigh while pointing her phone at the landscape, taking another video.

“Why nostalgic?” Adrien asked. “I thought you were from Marseille?”

“Yeah,” Alya agreed. “But we used to make tours to the Camargue since my parents love it here. We’d still do it, but as you noticed, Paris isn’t all that close, while from Marseille it’s only a two-hour trip.”

“So, you know the area then?” Félix asked.

“Yes and no. I’ve never been to this part. We always drove to Arles and went from there. But don’t worry, we’ll find our way back eventually.”

“Eventually?! That’s not very reassuring,” Nino said, which earned him a glare from his girlfriend.

“Don’t worry, we have a map, don’t we?” Marinette said.

“And we have Nathalie,” Adrien said and pointed to where said woman was hanging back almost twenty metres from them.

His confident statement of her capability to find their way back stood in stark contrast to her uncharacteristically frazzled appearance. Nathalie threw frantic glances at landmarks and then the map in her hands. She had taken out her phone several times already only to almost immediately let it slide back into her pocket when she realised once again that there was no reception out in the wilds of the Camargue.
“Are you alright there, Mlle Sancoeur?” Nino asked loudly.

Nathalie quickly raised her head like a startled deer, but her composure settled back only a moment afterwards.

“Yes, I am quite alright. Thank you for your concern,” she replied.

“She’s very much out of her element,” Félix said, quiet enough so that Nathalie wouldn’t hear.

“Yeah, I figured as much. Maybe we shouldn’t have dragged her into this hike. It’s her vacation too, after all,” Marinette said and bit her lip, suddenly feeling guilty.

“She really liked seeing the wild flamingos earlier, so it’s worth it!” Adrien argued.

“If you say so, dude,” Nino said and promptly ran into Alya who had suddenly stopped. Marinette followed her gaze and almost gasped in delight. There, just about one hundred metres in front of them, grazed a white horse. She had hoped to see one of the famous wild Camargue horses ever since they started the hike and now that moment had come. She unlocked her phone and immediately started taking pictures.

“It looks kinda thin, don’t ya think?” Nino said concerned, but Alya waved it off.

“It’s probably a court.”

Marinette couldn’t help but startle at the word that had been spoken of with such fear from both Chat Noir and Tikki. The “A what?” slipped out before she really thought of it.

“A yearling. The locals here call them court. It’s a horse that’s at least a year old but younger than two. They usually look like an odd mixture of a grown horse and a foal.”

Alya’s explanation drew a sigh of relief out of Marinette. This was probably just a coincidence. The same word used for two different things.

“Some Camargue horses are only half-feral,” Alya whispered. “If we approach quietly, we might be able to get closer without it running away.”

“Don’t.”

Only then did Marinette tear her eyes away from the wild horse and turned around. What she saw was an absolutely frozen Félix and an immensely worried Adrien beside him. Memories from their visit at the zoo last November flashed through her mind and she felt her own worry rise.

The “Don’t” had come from Félix, but it had been spoken in the same weak and desperate tone that he had also had back then. It was unsettling.

“Fé, it’s okay,” Adrien tried, but his brother didn’t even seem to hear him.

“Go back. Don’t touch it.”

Marinette couldn’t make sense of what he was saying, but she knew that Félix was panicking.

“Fé, it’s just a horse. A normal horse. It won’t do anything,” Adrien said, but then abruptly changed tactic. “Nathalie, don’t move. I’ll calm Fé down and then we’ll come back.”

While his voice still was clearly worried, there was also a viciousness and seriousness to it that she rarely heard from him. She could only remember a couple of occasions where he had used it, one
of them being the day where Chloé had cut her hair and he had, for just a moment, sounded like he was ready to tear the blonde’s head off.

“What…just happened?” Alya asked, though no one, not even Nathalie, could give her an answer.

One day passed and there seemed to be a silent agreement to not speak about what had happened at the hike. They all talked about the landscape and all the birds and other animals they saw. But no one mentioned the horse or Félix’s reaction to it. Marinette could almost see Alya bursting with curiosity, but whenever it looked like she was going to broach the topic it was either Adrien or Marinette who started talking about something else.

When Félix excused himself to go read a book somewhere in peace while the four of them wanted to try out the swimming pool Mel’s house came with, there was no stopping the questions anymore. Adrien seemed to notice Alya’s curious glance before she could say anything because he sighed and sat down on a chair.

“I know you all want to know what happened but I really can’t tell you. It’s personal,” Adrien said nervously.

“Come on, just a little bit?” Alya asked which earned her jabs from both Marinette and Nino.

“Okay, I’ll tell you this much: Fé was triggered and had a flashback. Are you happy now?”

Marinette was taken aback by the glare he sent Alya, but his expression softened after another moment.

He sighed. “Sorry, it’s just a very sore topic. Please don’t bug him about it.”

“I…I had no idea,” Alya said meekly.

“As you can probably imagine, Fé doesn’t want people to know. So please don’t mention it around him at all.”

They all nodded.

Marinette would have expected her attention to be on Adrien’s exposed torso when they started a game of water polo, but that wasn’t the case. She only absentmindedly hit the ball when it came her way, while her mind was far away.

“So, how’s Félix doing?”

“He’s…going through something right now.”

“Is it something bad?”

“I don’t know…He doesn’t talk about it.”

Bits and pieces from that conversation from long ago swirled through her head. About the time where Félix had disappeared. The time where something had happened. Something that had caused him to stop smiling and to bury himself in silence.
“I-I just wanted to see if you need anything. I could get some water or…”

“No water,” Félix whimpered.

Marinette frowned. Was that the reason why he had excused himself instead of joining them at the pool? Maybe. Or he just needed a moment to himself, which was likely too.

“Fé, it’s just a horse. A normal horse. It won’t do anything.”

So, Félix was apparently triggered by water and by horses. Marinette mentally made a note to do her best to help him avoid those things in the future.

“Alya, stop cheating!” Marinette said.

“It’s ‘spin the bottle’. How could I possibly cheat?” her supposed friend said with an air of complete innocence to her.

“By stopping the bottle mid-spin,” Félix pointed out soberly.

“There was a mosquito,” Alya said with an unapologetic shrug and a mischievous grin. “Besides, it’s not like anything scandalous is going to happen with you wusses.”

The latter comment referred to any activities that went further than a cheek kiss being majorly outvoted with Alya as the only one in favour of them. Besides, Adrien had argued that Nathalie would murder them if she found out that they even played this game. Their supervisor had gone to bed early with the strict instruction for them to not leave the house, not break anything and absolutely not to do anything inappropriate.

“Thank heavens for that,” Félix muttered with an almost indistinguishable shudder.

“Could you still please stop targeting Adrien and me? It’s starting to get old,” Marinette said. She knew Alya only tried to help in the most obvious way she knew how to. Though there were only so many cheek kisses she was able to take without spontaneously combusting. Adrien wasn’t any better off either, as he seemed to have taken on a permanent shade of red.

“Okay, okay. Let’s change it to ‘truth or dare’ with the same limitations. Will you stop whining then?”

“Yes, that sounds better. At least we’ll be able to choose our fate then,” Adrien said while he seemed to purposefully avoid eye contact with her. Great, now Alya had gone and made it awkward. Another year would pass at this point until Marinette would be able to confess. Not that she was planning to confess during a game of truth or dare—and she very much hoped that Alya knew that—but she very much hoped that Alya would manage it before the vacation was over. The moment never seemed quite right though, as the two of them were never alone for long. And since Félix’s flashback on the hike yesterday it also seemed like an inappropriate time to confess to Adrien. She just needed to be patient.

“You’re as naïve as ever if you think that you’ll have that luxury while Alya is involved,” Félix pointed out, to which Alya just snickered evilly.

“Babe,” Nino said warningly.
“No worries, I won’t prod anything too personal,” she said. One look around told Marinette that she wasn’t the only one whose worries had just doubled.

Before anyone could react, Alya took the bottle and spun it. It landed on Adrien.

“Allright, Sunshine. Truth or dare?”

“Truth,” Adrien said.

“What do you truly think about…” Alya made a pause for dramatic effect and Marinette sent her a warning look. “Ladybug?” Alya ended and a collective sigh of relief went through the rest of them. What was technically a harmless question was still a quite personal one for Marinette. She just hoped she could keep a good-enough poker face.

“I…I admire her. She’s very clever and much braver than anyone I know. I mean…I guess you have to be to fight Akumas, but it’s still very admirable.” Adrien had gotten quieter with his last sentence and rubbed the back of his neck. He was embarrassed, though Marinette couldn’t tell why. If anyone had reason to be embarrassed, it would be her. Just in case, she tried to subtly hide her face behind her hands to mask any blush that was possibly visible.

The game continued in a harmless fashion. Nino was dared by Adrien to walk through the room without his glasses and not trip over anything; Félix got asked by Nino what he’d bring on a deserted island with him—the Tardis; and Marinette was dared by Félix to steal Alya’s phone without her noticing—she managed it after seven minutes when Alya reached over to the snacks on the side table.

Everything went well until Alya spun the bottle and it landed on Marinette. Truth and dare were equally dangerous in that instance, but seeing as she had already done a myriad of dares before, she picked truth.

“What do all the charms on your bracelet mean?”

Marinette looked down at said bracelet with its ten charms. All of them represented important moments of her friendship with Adrien and even though they were technically nothing bad, it still felt odd to talk about them. They were very personal and precious to her. She threw Adrien a look as if silently asking for permission and he gave her a smile and shrugged.

Okay, then.

“Well, the leaf is how we met,” Marinette began. All of them already knew that story after all. “The Eiffel Tower stands for Paris because we made the most memories there. The moon with the stars is…” There, she paused for a moment. “It’s from when we went on vacation and watched the stars at night.”

Judging by Alya’s grin, she interpreted it in a completely different way. The topic had never come up, which was why she had never told her friend about it. She’d no doubt get to hear something about it when going to bed later.

“The Chinese fan is a good luck charm because red is a lucky colour in China.” That it was also linked to her heritage went without saying.

“The crown is linked to fashion,” Marinette said, but kept the second meaning it had gained for her to herself.

Because I’m your Princess.
“The black cat is a running joke,” she said and then moved to the three new additions she had gotten for her bracelet ever since.

“The scissors,” she said, as she turned the bracelet so that the charm she had gotten for her birthday last year was on top, “are because we crafted that dollhouse for so damn long that it apparently needed a memento.”

“Like I said, you already had a crown, otherwise I would have chosen that, Princess,” Adrien said. *Stop killing me with that nickname, you idiot!*

“The ladybug is because superheroes showing up apparently trumped finally getting into school,” Marinette said. In truth, she had almost gotten a heart attack when Adrien had gifted her that charm for Christmas, thinking he had figured her out. But his explanation that she already had a black cat otherwise he would have gotten that for her as well had managed to erase that fear. She had ended up placing the ladybug charm directly next to the black cat.

“And the rose is because of the flowers on my balcony.” At least that’s what Adrien had said mere weeks ago on her birthday while blushing profusely.

*Right,* Alya said, as she had witnessed said thing. “I’m sure that’s the reason Sunshine gave you a *red rose* as a charm.”

“She likes the red roses on her balcony the most,” Adrien muttered almost inaudibly in a weak attempt to defend himself.

Alya, meanwhile, looked like she had just won the lottery. Before she could say anything else, Marinette took the bottle.

“Alright, my turn,” she said, determined to end the awkwardness Adrien and her had been subjected to.

“I’m sorry that you still have to hide the whole time, even though we’re on vacation,” Marinette said while sitting on a rock by a marsh pond and working on a new design. Tikki meanwhile flitted around the area, obviously glad to finally be able to roam freely. It was the main reason why they had gone that far outside, but the landscape was inspiring enough to as well be a reason of its own.

“Don’t worry about it. As long as I stay close enough, I can sneak out of your purse and explore on my own for a bit. Especially when you’re busy playing in the pool or other things in or around the house. I only really had to hide on the hike.”

“I still hope you can enjoy the vacation somehow. Have you been to the Camargue before?”

“Only once, but that was many centuries ago. Things have changed around here, though not as much as in the rest of the world.”

Marinette nodded. “I can imagine. It must have been even wilder back when you were here last.”

Tikki nodded. “Wilder and much more dangerous. People disappeared in the marshes all the time back then, much more than was common. Only the Ladybug and the Fox were active back then, so they were sent to investigate.”
“The Fox?” Marinette asked and set her pencil down.

Tikki nodded again. “Yes, the fox Miraculous. It specialises in illusions and glamour, so it was often called in these kinds of situations to see what others couldn’t see. My wielder back then was tutored by the Fox, which is why they came along on this mission.”

“And? Did they find out why people kept disappearing?”

Tikki hesitated. “Yes, they did,” she eventually said but didn’t elaborate.

“What was it?”

The kwami shook her head. “Let’s just say that I’m glad we got rid of the threat back then, otherwise I wouldn’t have agreed to come here.”

And there it was again, an ominous and mysterious reply instead of a straightforward answer. Marinette hated to be purposefully kept in the dark, especially since the only explanation as to why so far had been “it’s dangerous”. Fighting Akumas was also dangerous but neither Tikki nor Chat Noir seemed to have a problem with that. She just didn’t get it.

“So, that’s where you’ve been hiding these past few hours.”

Marinette startled so bad that she almost fell off the rock.

“A-Adrien! What are you doing here?” She said and hectically looked around for Tikki. A tapping by her side told her that her kwami had already phased back into the purse.

“Looking for you so I can tell you that dinner will be ready in—” he looked at his phone. “—probably five minutes at this point. Wanna head back?”

“Sure,” she said and closed her sketchbook. “So, what have you been doing while I was gone for apparently hours.”

Adrien snorted. “Not apparently. It’s seven.”

“Already?!” Marinette quickly pulled out her phone to check. “But it was just three.”

“You and sketching, seriously,” he said fondly and shook his head. “Remember when we met at the Jardins du Trocadero and you were late to get home as well?”

“How could I forget? I almost ran over a supermodel and was so mortified I wanted the ground to swallow me whole,” Marinette said with a grin.

“Well, I for one am glad that the universe doesn’t seem to listen to your wishes. Or at least not the bad ones,” Adrien said with a grin of his own.

“And the lovebirds decided to show up as well. Hallelujah,” Alya said when Marinette and Adrien walked through the kitchen door.

“We didn’t—”

“We’re not—”

They both started at the same time but then decided to not feed the fire.
The dinner—Hungarian goulash—was one of Alya’s mother’s recipes and it was delicious. Unsurprisingly, Adrien even asked for seconds.

They sat at the table for what seemed like hours, just talking and joking. Only when it was dark enough for the solar lights to turn on in the garden all around them, did they tidy up the dinner table. Which meant that Alya, Nino, Félix and Nathalie carried the dishes and the leftovers inside while Marinette and Adrien were left behind. She couldn’t help but notice how it seemed purposeful. Well, at least judging by the way Alya and Félix had torn their plates out of their hands.

Marinette decided to stand up from the wicker chair and walk around a little. Mel’s garden really was pretty, especially now that the solar lights blinked from the sides of the path and the lower branches of the trees. Even the pool was lit, its water laying still.

She walked over, crouched in front of it and put her hand in the water. It was still warm, maybe thirty degrees and a small longing smile stretched on her face when she thought of how she’d miss it once she was back in Paris. A pool, as she had come to find out, really made an enormous difference between enduring the summer and enjoying the summer.

When she drew her hand back out it sent ripples through the entire pool and the small waves danced in a beautiful light show on the wall right next to it. It was so pretty; she could watch that for hours.

This time she heard it when Adrien came up behind her as the pebbles the garden path was made out of weren’t exactly suitable for sneaky approaches.

“Dreaming again?” he asked and Marinette turned around to him with a smile.

“A little,” she said. “The light is just very pretty.”

He crouched down next to her and repeated her motions of splashing around the water with his hand to create waves.

“You’re right, it is pretty,” he said as he stood up again.

Suddenly her heart started beating faster. With how close he stood, their size difference of almost one head suddenly became very obvious.

“Very pretty,” he added with a soft smile but only looked at her as he said it.

Was this it? Could this be her chance? It was just the two of them, he was looking at her with such fondness that she was close to fainting and the setting was beautiful.

Without even thinking about it, her hands found their place on his chest while she tried her best to ignore her internal panic. Forget butterflies in her stomach—she didn’t trust butterflies to be anywhere near her body anyway—those were birds at least. Birds that desperately wanted to fly.

Their faces slowly moved closer and she closed her eyes, only the sound of her pounding heartbeat remaining.

“Hey dudes, is there anything left on the table?”

Marinette’s eyes flew open and her body went to its usual reaction when startled: flailing. Unfortunately, that was a bad idea when her hands were on Adrien’s chest and they stood at the very edge of the pool.
Instead of an answer to Nino’s quite interruptive question, there was a loud splash and a horrified squeak, the latter from Marinette.

“Adrien! I’m so sorry! Are you okay?!” She was full-on panicking at this point, even when Adrien re-emerged and climbed out of the pool seconds later.

“It’s okay, don’t worry about it,” Adrien said with an awkward smile. “But could someone get me a towel please?”

The latter question was regarded to the small crowd that had formed in the kitchen door that served as one entrance to the garden. Alya was glaring daggers at Nino, Félix was shaking his head in exasperation and Nathalie looked like she had just solved a big mystery.

“On it!” Nino volunteered immediately, probably to escape his girlfriend that was out for blood.

Marinette, meanwhile, seemed rooted to the spot. This was the second time she had almost kissed Adrien and the first time she had also really meant to kiss him. It was a terrifying but also exhilarating thought. She immediately thought about what could have happened if Nino hadn’t interrupted them.

“Hey girl, you alright?” Alya asked and Marinette jumped. Where had she suddenly come from and where was Adrien?!

“W-what?” She stammered.

“You zoned out there for a bit,” her friend informed her with a grin. “Finally, you’re making a move on him,” she then added in a quiet voice.

“Oh my god, that really happened, didn’t it?” Marinette whispered back, reality catching up to her once more.

“Well, it almost did. I’ll kill Nino for this.”

Marinette chuckled and then looked to the lit windows in the house. She didn’t feel like going inside yet. Instead, she needed some peace and quiet for a bit and especially some time to think.

Marinette sat outside on the veranda, surrounded by fairy lights and comfortably cuddled between various decorative pillows. She had to hand it to Mel: Interior and Outdoor design really were her forte! She herself had always strived to achieve such levels of comfort with her balcony, but now she saw that she was still miles away from that. It was like sitting within a dream, or having teleported into a Pinterest aesthetic mood board.

There she was, refining the designs that she had sketched during the day and letting her mind wander a bit. She was so immersed that she didn’t notice Adrien until he sat down next to her.

“Will you make that one? It’s beautiful,” he said, effectively startling her. Luckily, she had been contemplating colour choices at that moment instead of directly drawing, otherwise there might have been a line over the entire page now.

“Sorry, should have realised you were in the zone,” Adrien chuckled.

“It’s okay, and I don’t know yet. I don’t have that much time lately, so I might just see what other
designs I come up with on this trip before deciding on just one to make.”

Yes, acting like they hadn’t almost kissed earlier certainly seemed like a good idea. That way she could keep her cool.

“Aww, but I want to see all of them!” Adrien whined with his head on her shoulder.

And there went her cool demeanour.

“W-we’ll see. You can help me decide which one to make later,” she said and set the sketch book down on the coffee table. There was no chance she could keep concentrating on her designs when Adrien was almost cuddling with her.

“It’s pretty out here,” she eventually said, a sentence for which she had scratched together all her composure to not accidentally stutter. It also helped that she leaned back to look at the starry sky.

“Why do you think I fled the house?” Adrien said. She could hear the grin in his voice.

“Well, I thought it was because you didn’t want to witness Nino’s murder.”

Adrien shrugged. “That’s also part of the reason. But you know me: always seeking beauty.”

Marinette raised an eyebrow in amusement. “Really now?”

“Yes, really! Beautiful landscapes, beautiful places,” he made a sweeping gesture with his hand towards the entire veranda before looking back at her. “And beautiful company.”

She was very sure she was blushing at this point. He couldn’t just say those things in a setting like this! Therefore, Marinette did the only thing she could think of in that situation. She snorted and gave him a playful shove.

“Charmer.”

“What? You’re calling me a liar?”

“No, but you’re still a model, Monsieur,” she said and tousled his still damp hair in an attempt to make him look less…perfect. It didn’t work.

“I don’t see why that should influence my judgement of your beauty, Princess.”

When he leaned in and kissed her hair, Marinette was close to death. She already saw the obituary: Marinette Dupain-Cheng, killed by her just-a-friend Adrien Agreste through having to deal with his oblivious cuteness.

Suddenly Adrien froze as his actions caught up to him, making him blush a bright red that could rival Mel’s cherry-scented candles. Apparently, he wasn’t that oblivious after all.

“I’m sorry! That…just…I…I don’t know what’s wrong with me today.”

Well, whatever was wrong with him, he should please keep it up!

“Oh, so calling me beautiful is wrong now?”

Seeing him embarrassed gave her the strength she needed to form entire sentences and apparently it was even enough to tease him. Marinette was immensely proud of herself.
Adrien paled. “No! Of course not! You’re the most beautiful person in the world!”

Marinette should have been worried about how fast Adrien could blush, pale and then blush again, but her brain had short-circuited. The only thing that filled her head were Adrien’s words, set to repeat mode.

“You’re the most beautiful person in the world.”

“I-I just meant the k-k-kissing your hair thing. A-a-and that by the pool earlier. I don’t know why I did that! It just happened!” Adrien rambled on.

Marinette’s only reply was an inquisitive “mhmm” as the ability to form words had somehow eluded her for the moment.

“I really should have asked…or not done it at all! I’m so sorry! I’ll never do it again!”

Right then her brain finished rebooting and processed just what Adrien was rambling about. Sorry? Never doing it again? God, no! To her own horror, her way of interrupting that nonsense was rather blunt.

“Adrien, shut up.”

Even though the line was delivered with a smile, she could see that she had now succeeded in freaking him out even more.

“There’s nothing to apologize for,” she therefore hastily added.

Only then did she realise that this could be it! ...Again! The setting was even more perfect than before at the pool and if she could loop the conversation back to the part where it hadn’t been awkward yet, she could probably finally bring up the courage to confess. And maybe even to kiss him, if her soul hadn’t left her body at that point. She swallowed as the birds started fluttering up a storm in her stomach again.

“I liked it actually,” she shyly admitted before Adrien could open his mouth again. She mentally patted herself on the shoulder for not only having gotten that sentence out but for also not jumbling up the words. Now she just had to deal with the fallout of that sentence, but she had already gone too far to back out anyway.

“W-what?” Adrien seemed stumped, so Marinette gave him a sweet smile.

“Calling me beautiful and kissing my hair. It’s nice, you know?”

She mentally thanked Tikki to heaven and back for letting her be Ladybug for the past year and build up her courage that way. Otherwise she wouldn’t have dared to say that sentence, nor been able to deliver it so smoothly.

“N-nice?”

Marinette seemed to have reduced him to one-word answers. Considering that she was usually the stuttering mess, it was quite funny to have their roles reversed. She scraped together all the courage she had left and giggled.

“This reminds me of our beach vacation two years ago.”

She gave a content sigh and looked beyond the fairy lights into the dark garden. The small lights
that illuminated the path and those that hung in the trees were still pretty, but her view turned to the stars above.

“We were outside almost all night as you showed me all the constellations and planets. Then we fell asleep almost immediately on the car ride back the next day, remember?”

Adrien threw her a smile and took her left hand.

“Yeah, I remember,” he said quietly as he turned her bracelet until the charm with the moon and the stars was on top. He carefully traced it with his thumb.

Marinette smiled. “I never told you this, but that night was when we’ve really become friends. It was such a smooth transition that I barely noticed it. You know how I noticed?”

Adrien’s eyes were glimmering curiously. “How?”

“You let your guard down and so did I. I loved hearing you talk for hours about something you’ve so obviously been dying to share with someone.” Marinette shifted closer to him. “And it just got better from there.”

They were both quiet for a minute. Marinette’s heart threatened to burst out of her chest while she attempted a running start to the words ‘I love you’. It was absolutely terrifying since she didn’t know for sure what the answer to it would be. All reassurances from Félix, Alya and Nino didn’t help now, as her brain automatically jumped to worst-case scenarios of a rejection. And those thoughts locked her tongue in place.

When Marinette dared to look at him again, she almost had a heart attack. Because, there Adrien sat and looked at her so softly and lovingly that her worries were instantly forgotten. His expression changed to a slightly embarrassed smile a second later and a giggle slipped out of her before she could stop it.

Suddenly it seemed easy. Just a few words, right?

“It took me a while to realise yet another thing though,” she said, continuing what she had started before.

“And that would be?” Adrien asked, his smile turning soft again as he leaned even closer to her.

“Do you remember the day when you dressed up as a girl and we were in the Ferris Wheel?”

His smiled deepened as he took her hand and placed a kiss on the back of it. Just like he had done back then. “How could I ever forget that, Princess?”

She smiled. “That’s when I realised it. When you kissed my hand, I saw how happy that day made you. I wanted to make you smile like that again, to hear you laugh like that again, because that’s what makes me happy.”

Her heart almost burst with joy from how happy he already looked at that moment. The lights from all around them danced in his eyes, wrinkles all around them from how wide he was smiling.

“So,” she said, “before I’m being selfish and admit something I should have told you a long time ago already, I gotta ask: What would make you the happiest right now?”

“If you’d stop calling yourself selfish,” he said. “After all, I’m the selfish one here.”
He had inched even closer to her so that their faces were only centimetres apart.

“Why would you be selfish?” She asked quietly, the smile refusing to leave her face.

“Because, Marinette Dupain-Cheng, I’m in love with you.”

For a moment she thought that she had hallucinated those words, but then Adrien tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. She was, in fact, not hallucinating the entire thing. This was reality and not one of her hyper-realistic daydreams!

“I fail to see how that’s selfish,” she said, a smile in her voice.

“It’s not, but asking you to be my girlfriend is.”

Marinette hadn’t known she was able to smile that widely.

Without even thinking about it, she wrapped her arms around Adrien’s neck and pulled him even closer so that their noses touched. She could feel his breath on her lips, just one tiny nudge away from touching.

“Well, aren’t you lucky?” She whispered. “Because I love you too.”

And then their lips met.

Chapter End Notes

One year, five months and over 240k words later and I'm finally at the part I've been waiting to write since starting this fanfiction! Gotta say, it still feels kinda surreal that this is happening and I'm probably the one most excited about this from all of us. I mean, you can try to trump me with your own enthusiasm if you like. >:)c

And? Is this everything you hoped and dreamed of?
Marinette snickered again as she looked at him, though her hand stayed firmly clasped in his.

“It doesn’t look *that* bad,” Adrien said with a grin, though he couldn’t stop a snicker of his own.

“Yes, it absolutely does,” Marinette said, a laugh in her voice. “I get the disguise part but couldn’t you let *me* handle this? After all, we established early on that you suck at fashion.”

Adrien dramatically clutched his free hand to his chest and gasped. “How cruel, Princess.”

To be fair, she was not *wrong*. The most effective disguise he had ever worn outside was the girl outfit Marinette had made for him a year ago, but he hadn’t wanted to dress up as a girl for their *first date*. And a more casual disguise for summer had always been tricky. In lack of a better alternative he had just opted for sunglasses and a *sunhat*. It was the latter that had thrown his girlfriend—he still couldn’t quite believe that he could actually call her that now—into hysterics.

Marinette laughed, a sound sweeter than summer rain and birdsong that always managed to brighten his day.

“You look like a tourist with no fashion sense,” she said.

He grinned. While she clearly didn’t approve of the sunhat as a fashionable accessory—probably because she herself wore a sunhat too, though that one looked absolutely adorable and perfectly fashionable—she also didn’t say that it was inappropriate or something along the lines of ‘I can’t
believe you wore this to our first date’. He had actually feared the latter, but that seemed like a silly thought now. Marinette knew very well that he had no fashion sense whatsoever and this wasn’t the first time she had seen him in an absolutely disastrous outfit. And still she loved him all the same.

Adrien pecked her on the cheek just because he could and it made her giggle.

“Well, only one of those things is true,” he said. “Though I’m not doing much to disprove the tourist part so far.”

“Nope, you’re really not,” Marinette said and he imagined she gave the close Eiffel tower a look, though he couldn’t be sure as her own sunglasses hid her beautiful eyes.

“No worries, we’re not going up there today. Unless you want to of course,” he said with a grin. No, he had something else planned. It was a little cheesy but he was sure she’d appreciate it.

“Oh, care to finally fill me in then?” She asked but Adrien just shook his head.

“It’s not far. I’m sure you’ll guess it within the next two hundred metres or so.”

Marinette’s face took on a thoughtful frown as she suddenly started to inspect their surroundings more closely. It was the exact same face she made when she tried to figure out a Lucky Charm and Adrien suddenly felt himself—probably for the tenth or so time that day—falling a little more for her. He still couldn’t believe that such an incredibly smart, talented, brave and beautiful girl had not only become his best friend, but now also his girlfriend.

Adrien felt like singing and dancing and wanted to shout his love to the world! He had always loved Marinette in a way, so he hadn’t thought that much would change when he asked her to be his girlfriend—well, apart from the kissing and similar activities of course. To have her confess her love to him over and over again, in words as well as in gestures, was something incredible beyond belief though. To love and to be loved in return. It was the most wonderful thing in the world and he would never trade it for anything else. Love songs had been true after all, and more. Even the otherworldly songs of Faerie had nothing on the songs of his heart—that, by the way, constantly felt like bursting from an overload of sheer happiness. He could wax poetically about the feeling of love for hours! In fact, he had done so. When they had arrived home from their trip, he had said goodbye to her with a shy kiss and a pink post-it note. She had beamed and kissed him again after she had read it.

I’ve found love…

It’s as the leaves in Autumn

So colourful and kind

It’s as the sunshine

So warm and bright

It’s as the first snow in December

It’s more than words can say…

Especially the last part was true. He could use every lovely word in existence and it would still not be enough to describe what he was feeling. Like floating. It was pure joy and pure happiness, two things he had never thought he’d be allowed to experience.
He didn’t dare to jinx his luck it by thinking or saying something along the lines of ‘I never thought a black cat could be this lucky’. Instead, he simply reflected on his past from before he met Marinette—which honestly was a little depressing—and compared it to the present. Was this really what pure luck and happiness felt like? He felt blessed.

“The Trocadéro?” Marinette suddenly asked, drawing him out of his thoughts. Without him even noticing, they had gotten closer to the famous landmark and Adrien couldn’t hold back a grin.

“Told you you’d guess it,” he said.

“And why the Trocadéro of all places?” Marinette asked expectantly, though he could tell from the tone of her voice that she already knew the answer.

“It’s where we first met over two years ago. Time flies, doesn’t it?”

“It rather feels like an eternity,” Marinette said. “I almost don’t remember what it was like before you started bursting into my house at, at least, a weekly basis.”

Well, he, in turn, remembered only too well the cold loneliness he had suffered before he started sneaking out of his house. It wasn’t a life he ever wanted to go back to.

“Come on!” Marinette suddenly said and tugged him forward with a smile. They walked around, dodging tourist groups and eventually descended the stairs on the other side that led to the gardens.

“By the way, what was the photoshoot about?” She suddenly asked, making Adrien tilt his head.

“Which one?”

“The one you had when we first met. Your photographer sent me away, remember?”

Ah, right. The photoshoot where he had been so terribly distracted by thoughts of a certain noirette beauty that Vincent had eventually given up and declared all pictures unusable. Or at least all the ones that included Adrien. His father had not been happy with him.

Adrien grinned. “It was just regular Autumn wear but it ended up being a catastrophe. After all, I could only think of a certain beauty in a pink summer dress,” he said and pulled her closer to him.

Marinette rolled her eyes.

“No, you didn’t. You’ve only seen me this once at that point.”

It wasn’t true, but he wasn’t going to correct her.

“You know, I’m not planning to start this relationship with false flattery,” he said and shortly mourned the fact that her own huge sunhat was in the way, otherwise he would have kissed her hair.

“I can’t possibly have made that big of an impression,” Marinette said.

“Don’t underestimate your charms, Princess. I was smitten from the first moment I saw you, even though I didn’t realise that for quite a long while.”

It wasn’t a lie at all. There had always been something different about his feelings towards Marinette when compared to his feelings to literally anyone else. It had only been upon intensive reflection in the last few months that he had figured out why. He hadn’t known what it was like to be in love back then, so it was no wonder that he hadn’t realised it until much later when his
appreciation for his best friend had grown immensely.

His mother had once told him that fae fell in love easily, basically had crushes all the time, but that they were fickle. Adrien wasn’t fickle though. Perhaps that was a small blessing of his human side blending through.

“That’s so…cheesy,” she said with a groan but still a wide smile as she hid her face under the brim of her sunhat.

“Are you starting to have regrets?”

To his horror, Marinette actually hesitated for a second before replying. “You know,” she started but Adrien could hear the teasing lilt in her voice. “I just might.”

“Too late now. You’re stuck with me, cheesiness and all.”

“Oh no, how will I survive?” Marinette said dramatically. “I’m now stuck with a gorgeous boy who’ll wear cat pun shirts to every one of our dates.”

“Puns are a form of art,” Adrien stated. “And this shirt is cute.”

His current shirt was green and had a cat with clovers as eyes on it. The text said ‘I’m So Lucky Right Meow. No Kitten Around!’ and he thought that was quite appropriate for the occasion.

“If you say so.”

“Hey! No hating on the symbolic cat pun shirt!”

Marinette laughed. “Okay, I give up. It is kind of cute.”

“Only kind of?”

He directed the cutest puppy eyes he could muster at her.

“Look, I’m not gonna give you a pat on the head just because you chose one of your less cringeworthy pun shirts.”

“But you’ll give me one for something else?” Adrien asked with a grin.

Marinette hummed thoughtfully, as if she really needed to think that question over thoroughly before replying. “Maybe,” she then said with a teasing smirk.

This girl was going to be the death of him. Getting used to her friendly teasing didn’t mean that his heart was immune to it in any way. She giggled, which probably meant that no, his sunhat hadn’t suddenly stopped working and he had gotten a sunburn from it, and yes, he was blushing.

“My ridiculous Kitkat,” she said fondly and stretched on her tiptoes to give him a peck on the cheek. When he looked down at her, properly flustered, he saw that her cheeks were also a little redder than they should be. It was good to know that he wasn’t the only one who still had to get used to their new relationship status. Their new secret relationship status.

Both the press and the Court would have a field day if they knew about it—one much more dramatic than the other. Going to such a public place for their first date wasn’t ideal, but the significance of the place where they allegedly first met was worth the risk in his eyes.

Adrien remembered what Félix had said back then after Marinette had stormed off. That she was a
person and not a possession. He’d been right of course, but back then neither of them had really understood that there was also another kind of ownership. A mutual ownership instead of the one-sided one the fair folk practised. He was hers and she was his. It was as simple as that.

“My beautiful Princess,” he said after what was at least a minute of flustered silence and returned the peck to her cheek. He grinned when her blush intensified and she muttered something under her breath that sounded like ‘flatterer’.

Adrien didn’t think anything by it when Marinette let go of his hand shortly after and instead roamed freely, looking at the trees or some flowers or just the people around them. That was the Marinette he knew. The one that always sought inspiration from her surroundings. When she returned to his side shortly after though with a way too innocent grin, he started to get suspicious.

“So, what was that all about?” He therefore asked.

Marinette’s innocent grin grew even more falsely innocent. “Oh nothing,” she said coyly.

His mind went over what in heavens she could have achieved in those three minutes she had roamed not four metres away from him. Surely, he would have noticed something, but nothing out of the ordinary came to mind. Did she have a plan? Danu help him if she had a plan. Her ideas could be on par with some of his feyer thoughts sometimes.

When her grin turned mischievous and she withdrew her hand from behind her back, he almost had to laugh out loud.

“I just found something that compares to your beauty and wanted to give it to you,” she said, the grin never leaving her face, as she handed him a chestnut leaf.

Adrien couldn’t help but laugh at the undoubtedly intentional irony then. “Oh, who’s the ridiculous one now, chérie?”

“Ch-chérie?” Marinette squeaked, her face suddenly fire-red. Adrien could feel his face turn into a similar shade and he rubbed the back of his neck in embarrassment.

“S-sorry. I…I…uh…just wanted to try out how it sounded?” And he had clearly gone too far too soon, as he realised with a cringe. “S-so yeah, n-not gonna call you that again. Nope. Sorry again.”

“I-it’s okay,” Marinette said while she pressed her face to his shirt like she was trying to hide. That didn’t help his flustered state at all. “It just surprised me, that’s all,” she mumbled into the fabric.

Finally, Adrien spotted what could be his saving grace: an ice cream vendor.

“H-hey do you want an ice cream? My treat.”

Marinette raised her head from his shirt. Her sunglasses had slid down a little so he could see part of her bluebell eyes when she threw him an indignant look.

“Why won’t you ever let me pay?” She whined.

“Because I’m a gentleman,” Adrien almost automatically replied with a grin, trying to hide his previous embarrassment. “And because it means that I’m wasting my father’s money.”

Marinette’s indignant look morphed into a sly grin. “In that case, go ahead.”
Adrien was very thankful that it was summer and that it also wasn’t raining. Because, as it turned out, the smell of incense was a very persistent one that required constantly open windows to have any chance of dissipating. Luckily, it had just been a cinnamon-scented one and not one of the many herbs that did him harm. Otherwise it wouldn’t have stayed at just walking backwards down the stairs and stubbornly staying in the kitchen unless Marinette would open all of the windows in her room.

And while he had caught her muttering something about him being ‘oversensitive’ under her breath a couple of times, he wasn’t mad at her. He hated as much as she did that his stupidly good sense of smell was once again making something commonplace into an exceptional situation.

He tried not to make a big deal of it while he lay with his head in Marinette’s lap, both of them on the chaise lounge. She had been drawing earlier as he had half-napped, half-watched her while she worked. When motivation had left her eventually, she had moved over to the chaise lounge where he had already lain sprawled, which brought them to their current predicament.

Only with immense difficulty was he able to swallow the purr that threatened to rise up in his throat when Marinette lazily let her fingers glide through his hair. He loved it when she did that. It was a sweet torture to have to concentrate on keeping his cat side in check while he at the same time wanted to do nothing more but melt into her touch.

Ever since he had gone a tiny bit too far by calling her ‘chérie’ on their first date, the two of them had decided to just ease into this new relationship, starting with the things they already knew they liked before trying out more. Cuddles were a big part of that, as were their already familiar nicknames and the occasional pecks on the cheek. Both of them were still very shy about actually kissing, unless they were guaranteed to not be disturbed.

What they hadn’t known back when they had both confessed to each other and shared their first kiss—undoubtedly the very best moment of Adrien’s entire life—was that kissing was much more complicated that it always looked like. Alya, who even had secretly filmed the whole thing—Adrien still wasn’t sure if he should thank her or curse her for that—had later on rather unhelpfully pointed out that practice made perfect. Well, he just hoped that it would also make it less awkward.

When he had brought Marinette home after their first date, he had kissed her once they were upstairs in the living room. Since both her parents had been downstairs, neither he nor Marinette had expected an interruption.

The sentence ‘I’m starting to have regrets’ had therefore properly startled them. Marinette had even let out a small scream while Adrien had just frozen for a moment and probably blushed to oblivion. It wasn’t like they had done anything inappropriate but neither of them had been able to look Félix straight in the eye for several days, especially not Marinette.

After that…incident, they had always double and triple-checked if they really were alone before trying to kiss the other. Unfortunately, the moments where the coast really was clear were rarer than Adrien had expected. Tom and Sabine had developed an overly large interest in Marinette’s and his relationship and randomly popped into the room at any given time. Much to especially Marinette’s annoyance, they weren’t even allowed to close the hatch. Apparently, that was a regular rule, since Nino had told him about something similar about his door always having to be open whenever Alya visited.

Therefore, playing it safe by simply cuddling seemed like the safest bet for the moment. He loved to be able to be so close to her and he could feel that she loved it too. She was calm like this. At peace in a way that she wasn’t otherwise. And he definitely was too.
To be able to say ‘you are mine and I am yours’ without meaning it in a fey way was wonderful as well. Before, he had often been afraid to call her ‘his’ in fear that it would awake some primal fae instinct of ownership in him. Yes, she did belong to him, but it wasn’t in the same way as a fae would ever put it. Marinette wasn’t an object or some price. She was his other half and he was proud to be able to say that he belonged to her just as much as she belonged to him.

“So, even though I did all that as a precaution, nothing happened while we were on vacation!” Alya ranted. For five minutes already she was lamenting about the lack of Akuma attacks or generally about the non-appearances of Ladybug and Chat Noir during the previous three weeks. That she, Nino, Marinette and him were at a restaurant at a double-date, didn’t seem to faze her in the slightest. Neither did the stares some other patrons sent her while she was lost in her dramatic bemoaning. Nino and Marinette at least tried to return those with apologetic smiles.

“All I can do is post old pictures from patrols and theorize about how many spots Ladybug’s costume has!”

Adrien couldn’t help but snort at the last one, which earned him a soft glare from Alya.

It wasn’t the first time she had mentioned it, so he had once, driven by sheer curiosity, brought it up on patrol. The result was one hundred and twenty-four spots. For the Ladyblogger, however, it seemed to be the bottom of a barrel topic. The fact that she was even considering it, spoke of immense desperation. The last time it had been brought up was during the three Akuma-free weeks after Valentine’s day.

“What about the last Akuma attack?” Nino suggested, but Alya waved it off.

“There barely is any footage since everyone who got too close fell under the Akuma’s spell. I only have zoomed-in grainy shots and some few pictures to work with.”

Adrien was actually quite happy about that. The last thing he wanted was for Alya to find out that Chat Noir had been hit during the attack and draw a connection to the Akuma break when he has also got hit by Dark Cupid.

It hadn’t been one of his prouder moments, when the horrible smell Chloé had been temporarily cursed with had made him open one of the car’s windows. It had been pure instinct and it had almost been his downfall. Félix had been right to give him hell for his stupidity afterwards.

But, in contrary to the Dark Cupid incident, the power had not been based on emotions but rather on control. And to attempt to control a fae was a very grave mistake. While Princess Fragrance had managed to control his human mind, Plagg had given just the right suggestions—or rather incentives—to let him be able to work with his fae side and not let a repeat of the last time happen.

“Trick her,” Plagg had said. “Pretend to be enchanted and then strike when her back is turned.”

While that plan had worked, especially as Ladybug had shown up later, it still had been a close call and very risky.

“Maybe write something about all the Lucky Charms Ladybug has ever used so far,” Adrien said, if only to get Alya away from the mildly dangerous topic. To his relief, her eyes lit up at the suggestion.

“That would be one idea,” she said though her grin betrayed her thoughtful tone, as if she was still
pondering about it.

“So, can we change the topic now?” Marinette asked.

“Oh, we sure can,” Alya said with a smirk while she looked at both him and Marinette. “For instance, I haven’t heard anything about yesterday yet. Do tell what happened.”

Ah, right. Yesterday. Adrien still wasn’t quite sure how much of it had been a dream. Honestly, that wasn’t very surprising, as Lughnasadh was only four days away, but he had still been able to manage just fine.

“It was amazing!” Marinette enthusiastically said and a look to his side revealed the excited gleam in her eyes. It was hard to not let his face morph into a lovesick expression, and he hoped he managed. They were on a double-date for a reason after all. Without disguises, they were prone to be recognized sooner or later and he still really wanted to avoid the tabloids getting wind of his relationship with Marinette. If it had been safer, then he would have gladly proclaimed his love for her to the world, but safe was just a feeble concept for the moment being.

“We went to picnic at Jardin des Tuileries and it has such beautiful flowers at this time of year!”

Memories of the previous day flirted through his mind.

“Look! They’re so pretty! I wish I could have some in this colour,” Marinette said, a smile of pure joy on her face as she motioned to yet another batch of flowers. Adrien watched her, the fond smile never leaving his face.

“Not as beautiful as you, Princess.”

She had rolled her eyes but blushed anyways.

“And then, since we were on our way to Montmartre anyway, we went to a few haberdasheries since I needed new buttons and wanted to look for some interesting thread colours,” Marinette continued and then giggled. “This dork here kept suggesting various shades of pink.”

“It’s your favourite colour!” Adrien defended himself.

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean that I’ll use it in every project. I ended up with a super pretty copper-coloured thread though. I’ll definitely make something for autumn with it.”

He could see the glee in her eyes at the thought just the way he had the previous day when she had discovered the thread in the shop. In truth, she had even let out a small scream because, apparently, she had looked for a thread like it for months already. Of course, he had paid for it.

“And then?” Alya prodded curiously.

“Fabric shopping and strolling through the neighbourhoods,” Adrien said with a shrug, intentionally wording it in a way that didn’t sound like it had been a date—in case someone was listening in. And because they couldn’t go too much into detail on this part of their day while Alya was present.

“Oh, Alya, is gonna love this,” Marinette gushed excitedly as she held up the bolt of red viscose fabric. “Since her birthday is coming up next month, I thought I could make her a Ladybug-themed shirt. I was thinking about making her a dress, but summer is almost over at that point so she wouldn’t be able to wear it much. What do you think?”
Adrien could only grin in return.

“I think it’s purfect.”

There was a short moment of silence.

“That’s it, we’re breaking up,” Marinette said with an eyeroll and a grin. “Just to get me out of this mewsery of overused puns.”

Adrien laughed. “Okay, you win,” he said and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Deets, guys!” Alya urged, but luckily that’s when their food arrived and the topic was dropped.

“This was fun and all, but I don’t like that we’re excluding Fé in all of this,” Adrien said when they were on the way home from the restaurant.

“Yeah, that really sucks. But honestly, dragging him along to be a fifth wheel isn’t very nice either,” Nino pointed out.

“We can still all hang out as friends,” Marinette said. “Besides, Félix isn’t the extroverted type. Missing out on a few outings isn’t gonna kill him. We’ll just have to try to balance it out so that we do both this and normal friend-hangouts equally often.”

Like so often, Marinette raised a good point. But still.

“I’m just afraid that he’s secretly jealous or feels left out. What if he’ll hate me?!” Adrien exclaimed, now starting to panic.

“Alright, Sunshine, calm down. And don’t steal Mari’s tendency to draw the worst conclusions,” Alya said.

“Hey!” His girlfriend threw in.

“I dunno. What if he’s mad?”

“Where did you get the ludicrous idea from that I was mad?”

Adrien blinked while Plagg cackled silently before going back to eating the last bits of his daily wheel of Camembert.

“I… I just thought—”

“Ah, you thought. Now that explains everything,” Félix said with a roll of his eyes. “Just for your information: I was perfectly fine on my own, thank you very much. I studied some spells, read half a book and took a well-deserved and very needed nap. Your day, on the other hand, sounds like it was entirely exhausting. I very much prefer my version.”

“B-but, don’t you feel left out?” Adrien asked, a little bit confused. Yes, he was very much aware that his brother wasn’t the outgoing type, but he also knew that Félix treasured Marinette, Nino and Alya very much. There must be some emotion in play that he wasn’t telling him about.
“No, I honestly don’t. The way I see it, I have the choice between being a third or fifth wheel, or spending a peaceful day on my own. The ideal choice for me is obvious.”

“But—”

“Adrien,” Félix said, raising his voice a little as he interrupted him harshly but not unkindly. “I seriously am fine. You’re worrying about the wrong things.” He then picked up his book again and searched for the page he had stopped reading at, probably having memorized the page number instead of using a bookmark like he always did. “It’s nice that things seem to be working out between you and Marinette, but I really don’t want to be present when you’re—”

“I get it! I get it!” Adrien quickly said, most likely blushing scarlet.

Plagg, from behind them, made a disgusted noise. “I wish I had that option, kitten. With all the mushy, disgusting things I have been forced to listen to in these last few weeks it’s a miracle I haven’t thrown up in his pocket yet.”

Adrien sent him a glare. “I’d appreciate it if you’d keep that up.”

Plagg just grinned. “No promises.”

Chapter End Notes

I am now starting to recommend fanfics that I personally like very very much and that deserve much more attention that they have, therefore, without further ado, let me give you my first recommendation:

IRON KISSED by MiniMinou

Once upon a time
an aspiring king sold his firstborn son to fae,
a cat donned a prince’s skin to infiltrate the human world,
and an ordinary girl answered a butterfly’s call to save her kingdom from the man she loved.

It’s a story about fae as well, though Minou does a much better job at portraying the fae nature than I ever could! If you like fae and medieval AU then please go ahead and read this story! It’s very much worth it! ♥ Also check out Minou's other works please! She's an amazing writer! 😊

Next up on Spellbound: Lila Rossi messes with the wrong cat.
Chapter Summary

don't lie to the fae

Chapter Notes

There is a very good reason why I'm late with the update this week: I had yet another doctor's appointment, this time an emergency one. So yeah, this was just a bitch on top of everything else, sorry. I also read through this chapter one more time to make sure everything was okay, so that took a bit longer over an hour.

Anyway, 10k chapter! Hope you like it ;w;

PS: I have not seen any ML episode beyond Kwami Buster, so please no spoilers!

Researching and learning magic was a much more tedious task than Félix had expected it to be. Even as a halfling with intricate knowledge of the subject it was hard to find tomes that were in any way useful to him. Yes, Mélusine’s book helped and so did the ones his mother had left behind, but he needed more. Plagg, as helpful as he was when it came to magic knowledge, always had to stay at Adrien’s side in case Chat Noir was needed. And since his brother wasn’t home most of the time to go on dates or other outings, Plagg was out of the house too. That left Félix with only his books as a resource.

There was only so much he could learn from re-reading those for the fifth time though, so he had set out to find more books. Unfortunately, the libraries of Paris were…barely accommodating to his subject of research. There was no hope to find anything in the newer ones and the older ones were mostly filled with rotting books rather than anything else.

It was somewhat humiliating to have to go around on the search for more magic as a proud Cat Sidhe and a member of the Unseelie Court. The last thing he wanted to do though, was to ask someone of the fair folk, as their advice wouldn’t come without a price. He also didn’t trust Mélusine to be very obliging, at least not without a thorough explanation.

His research became even more difficult once school recommenced. Félix started getting up much earlier than needed to spend the time before class in the school’s library. It was mostly deserted at that hour, so it gave him the opportunity to read in peace.

On Wednesday of that same first week, Adrien had an early morning fencing class which made him accompany Félix. His brother yawned as the two of them descended the stairs to the entrance hall. Neither Nathalie nor their bodyguard were there yet, which left them with two options: Either they walked to school and risked reprimands for it later or they waited until they were driven. It was too early in the morning for a spiteful rebellion, so Félix decided to just sit down and wait. Adrien, probably having come to the same conclusion, sat down on the stairs next to him.
From the office, they could hear their father ranting on the phone about an unmatching sample garment. Félix rolled his eyes. Of course, their father would already be awake and yell at people at six in the morning. Who even had the nerve to call him this early? This poor person had brought this upon themselves.

Félix then watched with a raised eyebrow as Adrien suddenly stood up and walked over to the office’s door. With a lack of something better to do for the moment, Félix sighed silently and followed him.

And so, the two of them watched with interest as their father put a heavy, leather-bound tome into a safe behind the painting of their mother. Félix stared in disbelief for a second, as that had certainly not looked like a book about fashion. Adrien suddenly pulled him away from the door and behind one of the pillars just in time to be hidden when their father exited his office.

“He hides stuff behind the painting of Mom?” Adrien asked quietly while Plagg zipped out of the bag to hover over his shoulder.

“Oh, dirty secrets!” The kwami exclaimed in glee and flew ahead.

Félix followed them into the office and to the painting. Behind it was a safe and one touch painfully informed him that it was made out of iron. He hissed quietly in displeasure.

“Just let me handle it,” Plagg said as he phased through the door and started making impressed noises from inside the safe. Only a moment later, the metal swung open, revealing several things that Félix at first couldn’t make much sense from. A picture of their mother for example, a book on Tibet, or a brooch that resembled a fan.

Plagg rambled about the uselessness of all the items before throwing the red book at Adrien who just barely caught it. Félix, meanwhile, focused on the scrolls and the much more plain-looking book in the lower shelf of the safe. Neither of those looked like anything his father should be involved in, as all of it looked and felt magical. He silently growled. The last thing they needed was for their father to get a hold of magic items.

Forget it being too early for a spiteful rebellion. This was personal now!

With a simple wave of his hand, Félix shoved all the items of the safe into a pocket dimension, just as he always did with his clothes whenever he shifted. He would look through them later. For now, it would be enough to have robbed their father of his magical goods.

“I’ve seen this book somewhere before,” Plagg suddenly said from behind them, which made Félix tense. If Plagg had seen it, then it meant that it definitely was magical as well. And a book about magic was just what he needed!

When he looked over at the page Adrien had flipped to, he froze. The page depicted the Black Cat Miraculous and what must have been one of its past chosen.

“Why does he keep this locked in a safe?” Adrien asked while flipping through more pages.

“Why does he have it at all should be the question,” Félix muttered.

Just then, there were distant footsteps that were steadily approaching. Félix quickly shut the safe’s door with his elbow and put the painting back into place while Adrien stuffed the book into his bag. They just made it to the office’s door when Nathalie and their bodyguard both stepped out from the hallway on the other side of the entrance hall. That had been a close one.
Félix had felt the dread deep in his bones already when Adrien and him had exited the car and walked up the stairs to the school. Something had been off and now he knew what it had been.

“It’s just, I have missed the last two days, so could you help me catch up? I’m especially having trouble with history,” a girl said and dragged Adrien into the library. To Félix, her voice was like nails on chalkboard and he could tell by Adrien’s stiff posture that it was pretty much the same for him.

Something with this girl rubbed him the completely wrong way. Not only because she was invading his brother’s personal space, but also because she just seemed *fake*. Both of them had experience when it came to people who sought their association for personal gain. This level of selfishness wasn’t something his fae side could just ignore easily. His mind automatically quoted one of the books he had read so very often in the last few weeks about the nature and cultures of the fair folk:

*The Good People dislike boasters, braggarts, and babblers. Meanness, rudeness, dishonesty, and selfishness are unpopular with them, as is slovenliness, sluttishness, ill-temper, and bad manners. Gloominess is shunned, and to thank them for a gift is a breach of etiquette. However, the worst crime of all is to infringe on their privacy. They hate anyone who betrays their secrets, and they also hate inquisitive people who spy on them.*

Yes, that pretty much hit the nail on the head. He could tell with just a glance that this girl was several of these things. Adrien was just too polite to say ‘no’.

Félix decided to watch them closely from behind a bookshelf to see if he needed to step in. However, he turned his head when the door opened. He almost breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that it was Marinette. She had probably seen Adrien getting dragged into the library against his will and was here so save him. He silently waved her over to him.

“Where is she?” She silently asked him. Félix pointed in the direction of some other shelves. Marinette seemed torn on whether to walk up to Adrien or not.

“Here to intervene and save him?” Félix asked and Marinette nodded. From his vantage point, he kept watching how his brother got increasingly jumpy. He knew that Adrien could hear them and he knew that he was pretending that he couldn’t.

Twin gasps from Félix and Tikki—though he hoped the goddess would stay hidden in the purse—occurred when Adrien suddenly pulled out the leather-bound book he had shoved into his bag earlier. Had his brother *lost his mind*?! He couldn’t just pull out a magic book while he was aware that Marinette was close *and* while this other girl was bound to return soon. Félix was about to walk over and tear that book away from him, but exactly at this moment, the other girl returned. Adrien’s only way of hiding it quickly meanwhile was to just shove his history book on top of it.

Félix ran a hand down his face in exasperation. There was the catastrophe he had felt coming. Just their luck.

“Now we can get going on my history homework. It’s so much more fun doing it together, don’t you think?”

He could see Marinette’s hands grab the side of the shelf tighter so that her knuckles turned white.

“Either you save him from this vixen or I will,” Félix muttered and he instantly saw the glint of
determination in her eyes.

“What’s that?” The girl asked and dragged the magic book towards herself. Félix wasn’t sure if he should freeze on the spot and panic or if he should just curse her for this invasion of privacy and total lack of manners. It was rare that a simple human could seriously get on his nerves. Especially this much, this quickly.

“Nothing. Just stories about…superheroes,” Adrien said and for some reason didn’t take the book back. Félix could just look on helplessly as this girl flipped over another page. Sure, he could intervene, but that would just bring unnecessary emphasis to the book. And to have both the girl’s and Marinette’s attention—and that in a suspicious sense—on a book about magic, and about Miraculous of all things, wouldn’t be good at all.

Why wasn’t Adrien taking the book back from her?!

Marinette, meanwhile, made use of the book cart next to them to sneak around the shelf and closer to the table Adrien and the girl were sitting at.

“Ladybug?” The girl suddenly exclaimed and Félix tensed. Adrien tried to play it off.

“Yes, it’s an…alternative costume idea. I mean, not that her current one isn’t good already. Ladybug is amazing as she is!”

Félix almost facepalmed.

“A girl doesn’t need to wear a costume to be amazing, you know?” The girl said and meanwhile took her chair to sit much too close to Adrien. Félix wasn’t so sure anymore if his brother was still set on not cursing anyone, considering how he tried desperately to get his personal space back by scooting to the furthest end of his chair and leaning away.

“Oh…I don’t know. I mean, I—,” he stammered, his thoughts obviously racing.

“So, you’ve got a soft spot for the bug, huh?”

“Me? Oh, no, not at all.”

“You know, I happen to be close friends with Ladybug.”

And there went yet another catastrophe. Telling lies to impress Adrien? Félix was quite sure that at this point, his brother was at least considering to curse that girl.

“Oh?” Adrien said, obviously searching for an excuse in his head to leave the situation completely or to call her out on the lie.

“We can chat about it if you want. Not here though. Why don’t you meet me at the park after school and I’ll tell you everything?”

It was in this moment that the book cart raced across the aisle and hit the far wall with a resounding crash, making Adrien jump up and look for the cause of the commotion. Félix, from his vantage point, could see that Marinette had managed to hide under the table just in the nick of time and therefore stayed hidden.

The universe seemed to mean it well with them after all, as Adrien’s phone vibrated with an alarm in just this moment.
“I gotta go. I have fencing class in fifty-eight seconds,” he said, shoving both the leather-bound book and the history book into his bag.

“So,” the girl said, being much closer than his brother probably expected as he startled and let his bag fall to the ground. “The park?”

Félix watched with seething anger as she shoved the magic book aside with her foot. Marinette, from her position under the table, probably saw it too.

“Uh, sure,” Adrien said as she handed him his bag and then he bolted.

It was when the girl picked up the book that Félix has had enough. Trying to seduce his brother was already deserving of a curse in his eyes, and theft on top of it was something he would under no circumstances tolerate.

“A vixen superheroeine?” He heard her mutter but was quick to interrupt.

“That isn’t yours,” he said coldly as he stepped out from behind the bookshelf. The girl seemed startled for a moment, but then adapted a smile so sweet that it sickened him how obviously fake it was.

“Oh, I was just picking it up since it had fallen down. I wanted to return it to Adrien.”

“Likely story,” Félix said, sarcasm thick in his voice. He stretched out his hand, palm up, in a demanding gesture. “Give it to me, I’ll return it to him.”

The girl’s eyes narrowed. “Everyone can just claim that.”

“True, yet you claim the same. Even though you’ve spoken to my brother just this once, attempting to woo him and now have one of his personal possessions. That seems even more suspicious if you ask me.” Félix said and roughly tore the book out of the girl’s hands before putting it into his own bag.

“Y-your brother?” The girl seemed startled but then her eyes took on a glimmer of faked excitement. “Then you must be Félix Agreste! It’s so rare to see pictures of you in magazines!” She walked over to him and looked like she was attempting to grab his arm. He almost hissed at her. Instead, he decided to take a step back and fix her with the coldest glare he could muster so that even the densest person in existence would get the hint.

Félix huffed. “Don’t even try this false flattery on me. It’s revolting. And your attempted theft will have consequences.”

The girl’s smile fell in an instant and her entire posture changed. Suddenly she didn’t look fake anymore but rather like a poisonous snake ready to strike. A very naïve poisonous snake that had set her eyes on a kill much too challenging for her.

“Well, then maybe you’d rather want the class to know that you threatened me,” the girl said, all pretence of friendliness gone.

“Your lies will be your downfall. Better stop now while you still can.”

“We’ll see,” the girl said and sauntered past him. “I have my ways.” She sounded confident of victory already, which irked Félix even more.

He frowned after her. In a regular school with regular students, that might work for her, but in a
school that was attended by several fae who hated liars with every fibre of their being, she would
-crash and burn. In that case, it was just a matter of being patient and waiting for the inevitable.
Once she pulled anything of this sort on Chloé, she’d be done for and he wouldn’t have to get his
hands dirty. If not, then…well, there were a few curses he has been dying to try out on someone
deserving of them for a while now.

“I’m glad you stayed hidden,” Félix said once the girl had left the library and Marinette climbed
out from under the table.

“Oh, trust me, I was this close to ripping her head off but Ti—uh, I mean, I thought it’d be better
not to get involved. And explaining why I hid under the table in the first place would be…uh…
awkward.”

“Yes, I very much agree. It also would be bad if she’d suspect you to be Adrien’s girlfriend if she
herself is interested in him. From my experience with his fangirls it would end…ferociously.” And
not to mention the absolute hell Adrien would break loose if someone would try to make him break
up with Marinette. As human as he had become in the past two years, there was still a lot of
impulsive fae nature inside of him. Félix knew that he’d rate any danger to Marinette as a personal
attack. It would be like a hound being let loose to chase after its prey and tear it to bloody shreds
and he really wasn’t sure how much that metaphor really was just a metaphor. After all, he knew
that restraint could be difficult when blinded by emotions and the emotions of a fae could
be...intense.

Marinette winced. “Yeah, not really wanna find out how that could end,” she admitted. Then her
gaze cooled significantly. “But I won’t just let Lila treat Adrien that way either.”

“Lila? So, you know her?”

Marinette shrugged and sat down at the table. “Knowing is an exaggeration here,” she said while
Félix sat down next to her. “The moment I stepped into school earlier, Alya started talking about a
girl named Lila who had done this and that and apparently was a personal friend of Ladybug.”

Marinette frowned deeply.

Now Félix understood why Marinette was profoundly out for blood. She hated liars and not only
had this Lila girl spread around various grand lies, but she had also caused Alya to post
misinformation on her blog, which could potentially damage her journalistic career. Taken, that
was entirely Alya’s fault for not fact-checking, but it still wasn’t something Marinette would just
easily drop. And then, of course, she had seen how Adrien had been dragged somewhere against
his will.

The quote ‘Beware the anger of a patient man’ flitted through his head. Adrien was certainly not
the only one who became fierce when provoked. That was something Marinette and his brother had
in common.

“I see,” Félix said.

“And I just had a bad feeling about all of this. So, when I saw her drag Adrien into the library even
though he should already be at fencing, I knew something was up. And here we are.” She shrugged
again.

“Well, disproving the lies to the others shouldn’t be so hard. At least when it comes to Nino and
Alya,” Félix said, already thinking up several different ways in which he could approach the topic
without angering the Ladyblogger.
“Anyway, what was that about Ladybug in a book?” Marinette asked and Félix tensed slightly. Yes, she was Ladybug, but that still didn’t mean that he could show her the book. Not without the permission of Tikki or the guardian. In fact, he had already planned to bring the book to the old man later after school to let him have a look at it and prove its validity.

“Long story short: Adrien accidentally stole it from father.” There had been nothing accidental about the action but a little white lie wouldn’t hurt in this case. “I suppose he was trying out designs based on the heroes but as it always is with his future lines, those things are top secret. So, you probably understand why I can’t show the book around.”

Marinette nodded in complete understanding. “Got it.”

Both of their phones chimed at the same time and Marinette was the first to get hers out. The smirk that grew on her face made him curious and he also went to read the message.

**Adrien**: Lila Rossi just made a grave mistake

“In any case, I suppose we now have somewhere to be after school, don’t we?” Félix said. “Do you happen to have popcorn at home that we could get beforehand?”

A smile stretched across Marinette’s face. “I’ll have a look.”

Marinette and Félix sat on a bench on the far end of the park, armed with the zoom of Marinette’s phone serving as makeshift binoculars and an open call on Félix’s phone towards Adrien that would tell them everything that was said. Additionally, Sabine had urged them to take some slices of her freshly baked quiche instead of making microwave popcorn. Well, food was food.

“I’m almost there,” Adrien said through the phone just when they saw him enter through the park’s gate and wander towards where Lila already sat. Félix had seen her take out a necklace identical to the one in the book out of a boutique bag. A Gabriel boutique bag. It was like she was begging for a massive failure to occur.

They watched how Adrien approached Lila with a friendly wave, to which the girl jumped up and dragged him to sit down next to her on the bench. Félix noticed how Marinette’s hands clenched around her phone and her eyes narrowed into a glare.

“So, you know Ladybug then?” They heard Adrien say through the other phone, his voice muffled a bit as his phone was hidden in the breast pocket of his shirt.

“Not only did Ladybug save my life, we’ve become close friends as well! We’ve something in common, you see. It’s what I wanted to talk to you about. I’m the descendant of a vixen superheroine. Volpina.”

Félix tapped Marinette on the shoulder, indicating her to relax. “No worries, she’s just digging her own grave,” he said.

“Volpina?” Adrien said. “I think I’ve read about her in my book.”

“Of course she’s in it! She’s one of the most important superheroes, and more powerful than Ladybug. Ladybug doesn’t even make the top ten.”

Very well, it was official then: Lila Rossi was going to go down, in one way or another.
“My grandma gave me this necklace.”

That was when Félix could see, even from this distance and without the zoom of a phone’s camera as aid, how his brother reached the end of his patience. It was obvious in the way his posture stiffened and his shoulders drew back. And even though it was just minuscule, the way his head lowered somewhat dangerously—even though they were hidden with a glamour, Félix could imagine the flattened ears only too well—was also a dead-giveaway.

“Really?” Adrien asked, his voice dripping with scepticism as he took the necklace out of Lila’s hands and turned it around before his eyes. “Yeah, no. This is a necklace from my father’s brand and it only looks like the one in the book because the book belongs to my father and he used it as inspiration. In fact, this one is missing the divided sections that the one in the book had, making it nothing more than a pretty accessory.” He threw the necklace back at Lila who fumbled to catch it.

Félix looked at Marinette, whose tense posture had relaxed and who was now wearing a sneaky grin.

“If you wanted to impress me, then you should have shown up as your superhero self rather than trying to spin a fantastical story of grandeur without any proof.”

Then Félix watched how his brother’s sweet smile morphed into a grin not unlike a predator that was preparing for the killing strike. It was a very fey grin that, Félix noted with rising horror, Marinette had seen before on Chat Noir. He was now considering taking the phone away from Marinette so that she’d stop watching. Then again, her camera’s focus wasn’t the best on the closest zoom point and Félix might have only recognized it because he could predict his brother’s moods better than anyone else.

“And, if you were planning to get into my good graces, then that chance was gone the moment you started insulting Ladybug. Your supposed best friend.”

Following his intuition, Félix accidentally hit the button on his phone that would end the call. “Ah, sorry,” he said and it sounded honest at least to his ears.

It turned out to be a saving grace because in the next moment he could hear Adrien chuckle eerily—bless and curse his good hearing.

“Most wouldn’t be as gracious as to give you a warning. But I will do just that, your first and last one. Tell another lie or try to invade someone’s personal space without their consent again and you’ll regret it for life. Did I make myself clear?” Adrien’s tone had taken on a purr, weaved through with the tendrils of sadistic joy about seeing someone he despised in distress. Félix knew from own experience that this was the equivalent of verbal hissing and clawing and considering the circumstances—Ladybug and Marinette being insulted, his personal pace being invaded, being maliciously lied to—he really shouldn’t be surprised. It was just that Adrien hadn’t reacted to anything like this without being heavily influenced by magic since Chloé cut off Marinette’s hair. It wasn’t quite as extreme as he had been during Dark Cupid, his voice still more human than taking on the unsettling otherworldliness of a fae, but the intention, spurred by fae thoughts, was the very same.

Speaking of Marinette, Félix chanced a glance at her beside him, but without the phone’s help of carrying over his brother’s and Lila’s voice, she was blissfully ignorant of what was really going on at the other side of the park. She keptintently staring at her phone, squinting her eyes as if that would let the camera focus better.

“Are you threatening me too?” Lila said, her voice suddenly cold. “Because you’ll regret that,
Agreste. Both of you will.”

She jumped up from the park bench, her fists clenched beside her, but Adrien’s voice stopped her once more.

“I warned you. Just remember that whatever follows are the consequences of your own foul decisions. One last chance to heed my warning or ignore it.”

It wasn’t very clear through the phone’s zoomed-in camera, but it looked like Lila snarled at him before stalking off.

“Alright, it seems like the show is over,” Félix said and salvaged the last bite of his quiche that he had saved up for exactly this moment. He then pocketed his phone and shouldered his bag when he saw that Adrien made his way over to them. “Now, I suppose I’ll leave you two to your study time, or however you want to call it today.”

The cover names for their dates or just comfortable one-on-one hangouts were starting to lose their creativity so that everyone who was in the know about their relationship was able to guess the true meaning almost instantly. And despite them being a couple for two months already at this point, they still always flushed like they had been caught doing something extremely inappropriate when it was mentioned. Even now, Marinette instantly became beet-red.

“Oh my god, just go,” she said, voice high with embarrassment and gave him a light shove.

Félix’s bag hit his thigh as he stood up, reminding him of the bulky book inside. “I still have something to do anyways. See you later or tomorrow.”

“I’ll let Adrien take the rest of the quiche with him so you two can share it,” Marinette said and then gave a small wave as Félix nodded in gratitude and went to walk away. “See you!”

Neither Plagg nor Tikki had been consulted before Félix had made his decision, but he supposed that wasn’t necessary anyway. The book was magic—he could feel it—and it contained pictures of Miraculous holders. If it belonged anywhere, then in the guardian’s hands.

When he rounded the corner, he was greeted with the unpleasant sight of Lila Rossi.

“My chances with Adrien, gone!” She ranted, practically fuming with anger. For some reason, she said it to a poster of Ladybug, as if the heroine would be responsible for that train wreck of a failure.

“You didn’t have a chance to begin with,” Félix almost automatically said, making Lila turn around and focus her glare on him.

“You said something to him, didn’t you?” She hissed furiously, her voice dripping with poison.

“It doesn’t matter if I did. Adrien pointed out your lies to you all by himself, didn’t he? A little common sense is all that was needed for that. Now, if you excuse me, I don’t want people to think I am associated with you.”

With that, he turned around and decided to take a different route. Lila could count herself lucky that Adrien was not maliciously inclined, otherwise she would be thoroughly cursed now.

The sound of screams a few minutes later drew his attention skywards. Was that a meteor? He was quite sure that if a catastrophic event like this was happening, ESA would have informed the public about it. No, this was certainly Akuma-related. Upon closer inspection he noticed what was
off about it: there was no heat, no pressure, nothing. His instincts—that in an event of apocalyptic catastrophe would have no doubt rang alarm—told him that there was nothing to worry about. Even a magically conjured meteor would have triggered some kind of reaction. Yet, there was nothing out of the ordinary.

With cold indifference Félix narrowed his eyes as this reasoning left him with only a couple of options. One of those options—that the meteor was a projection of the past, like the ghostly apparitions he saw when liminality was making his life a living hell—was already disproven. If it was a fae apparition, then he would have felt an eerie tingle and no human around him would have seen it.

That left him with only one option: an illusion.

“It’s a comet!” Some idiot nearby shouted. Félix could only roll his eyes at the asininity. A comet was made out of ice and dust, while this was clearly a flaming rock. Or it at least looked like one. He had half a mind to point that out aloud, but then thought better of it. He had more important things to do than to educate people that were fearing impending doom.

Félix was about to resume walking, when suddenly gasps and then cheers erupted from the crowd. He glanced back up to see a small orange speck that had stopped the meteor and then threw it back into the sky.

First off, that was not how deflecting a meteor worked, even with supposed superpowers—the gravity would just eventually pull it back to earth. Secondly, he was very sure Plagg would have said something if there was a third Miraculous holder to show up. Eliminating the option of a fae—no one was stupid enough to be this public, not even with an illusion—it only left the conclusion of an Akuma.

“I am Volpina! The only superhero Paris needs!”

For a moment, Félix just looked up at the building Volpina perched on in speechless silence.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” he then muttered and hurried on his way. Why was it that he only went to visit the old man when there was an Akuma attack going on?

Well, to be fair, he had been on his way before this one had started, but still.

As urgent as this matter was, Félix decided that he deserved a coffee the moment a Starbucks came into view.

“Welcome back Félix. I expected you.”

“Really? Because I surely didn’t expect this to be a reoccurrence. I was actually hoping not to return for quite a while,” Félix said as he sat down across from Monsieur Chan.

“Don’t miss opportunities: time doesn’t come round again.”

Ah, there we went again with his Chinese proverbs. Félix suppressed the urge to roll his eyes and instead took the book out of his bag. In contrary to Plagg’s quizzical ‘I’ve seen this book before’, M. Chan actually gasped and carefully reached his hands out for it. Félix gave it to him.

“Where did you get this?” He asked, voice thick with awe and wonder.
Félix was torn. On the one hand, he really didn’t like his father and had no trouble spilling his secrets. On the other hand, this old man, while a confidante of the kwamis, was someone he had met only once before. He knew neither of his motivations, nor if he could really trust him. And, horrible father and all be damned, he just wasn’t the type of person to freely divulge family secrets to strangers.

“Let’s just say that I have my secrets and you have yours and leave it at that. Plagg recognized the book so I thought you should have a look at it.”

He watched as M. Chan flipped through a few pages thoughtfully.

“This is a very old spell book,” he eventually said. “I had thought it to be lost, but if the Butterfly Miraculous made it to Paris, then it makes sense that this would have as well. I’m glad you brought it to me, as it could be very dangerous in the wrong hands.”

Félix had no doubt about that.

“Since it’s a spell book, does it have anything in it that can help my brother and Marinette to find and defeat Hawkmoth?”

M. Chan seemed thoughtful. “Perhaps. I myself have never been allowed to study it, but I will be able to decipher the code with time.”

Félix nodded. “That’s at least something. So, once you know what it says, those spells will be able to help them, yes?”

“It is not the knowing that is difficult, but the doing,” M. Chan eventually said, reciting yet another proverb.

“That’s quite common with spells,” Félix said, his mind involuntarily flashing through the many failed attempts and misfires he had done in just the past year.

“I would imagine so, yes.”

The old man was obviously already engrossed in the book, only paying half attention to what Félix said.

“In any case, I have somewhere to be. There is an Akuma out there right now and she specializes in illusions and deceit. That is bound to draw out some of the folk.”

Félix sighed. This would be quite a tiresome afternoon.

“This was half a disaster!” Adrien ranted while pacing back and forth in the room. Félix had only just arrived back and had not caught a break since. His brother regarded it as a thing of utmost importance to retell the battle in every detail he could remember. Several Times.

“So, Ladybug and I were both sceptical. One because we had both seen what has happened and it fit too perfectly not to be Lila. Two, because I just blurted out that the meteor was an illusion and then had to somehow explain to Ladybug how I knew that for sure.” Adrien retold while dramatically waving his arms around like a madman.

“I couldn’t just describe to her how I can tell if something is an illusion or not because that ties into
fae things again. So, I told her that it was a cat thing but she didn’t accept that. Then I had to explain to her how glamours work. *Glamours, Fé!*

“You didn’t tell her how to see through them though, did you?” Félix asked. He had followed Plagg’s example and facepalmed. For the entirety of the rant. It was like listening to the retelling of a car crash, just a particularly stupid one that could have been avoided.

“Are you kidding, I don’t have a death wish! No, I didn’t tell her about four-leafed clovers, adder stones, thyme and enchanted glamour-breakers, if that’s what you meant. She just thinks I was talking about Miraculous glamour…I hope.”

“Yeah, keep hoping, kid. At this rate your girlfriend will figure you both out by the end of the year,” Plagg threw in. Adrien ignored him.

“Anyway,” he said, “Ladybug and I pretended to go along with her plan but actually planned to ambush her. That didn’t really work since Volpina changed tactics and wanted to kidnap me. Well, *Adrien*. That didn’t work for obvious reasons, but she made an illusion of me. Ladybug totally freaked out then and I couldn’t convince her that Adrien was fine. I actually had to throw my baton at my doppelgänger. Do you know how *weird* that is? To just see yourself disappear into thin air?”

“Adrien, if there’s anyone who should be used to seeing themselves, then it would be you.”

His brother rolled his eyes. “We eventually defeated her and Ladybug cleansed the Akuma. Then she was *adamant* about making sure Adrien was safe and I swear that was the *closest* call yet. I had to manage to get into her room through a side window and *detransform* while she went in from downstairs *one second* after I arrived.”

“Then explain why you’re here now and not at her place?”

Adrien shrugged. “Nathalie called. Something about an emergency, but I’m yet to hear about *what exactly* that is.”

As if summoned by her name, there was a knock on the door and only a second later, Nathalie entered the room, followed by their father. Plagg quickly phased through the cat playground on the ceiling.

“You stole from me,” their father said coldly. Félix could see Adrien tense, but he himself remained as cold as his father.

“That is incredibly specific,” he said.

Instead of an answer, he just motioned to Nathalie, who turned her tablet around and flipped through several pictures of the security cameras that showed how Félix and Adrien opened the safe —Plagg didn’t show up on camera for some reason—and took out the book. From the angle it wasn’t visible how Félix also took the rest of the safe’s contents.

“And?” Adrien asked defiantly, fear and frustration manifesting in a fae-like behaviour just like earlier, judging by his slight grin. “Don’t tell me you forgot *again*.”

Gabriel Agreste didn’t get angry. Instead, he only got frostier and frostier. His current icy stare could easily rival a freezer.

“Forgot *what*?” He asked in an equally cold tone.

“Fae can take whatever they want,” Félix supplied. “The *magic* book in your *hidden safe* intrigued
us, so we took it. That’s all there is to it.”

“Stop that nonsense. You will return the book to me and until you do, you will not be allowed to go back to school.”

Adrien’s grin disappeared from his face and an expression of unease settled there instead.

“You’re threatening us? Really?” Félix gave a cold laugh. “If that’s how you wanna play, then how about this: We’ll tell the Court that you have been committing several crimes against us in the last two years. In their eyes, this house belongs to us, not to you. In human law we can’t kick you out, but fae laws are different. I suppose you wouldn’t enjoy the end result.”

Their father scoffed. “Then who would take care of this house, the finances, the company and anything else? It would all fall apart around you and you’d lose everything.”

“We have Nathalie,” Adrien cut in and Félix nodded in agreement.

“It doesn’t have to escalate like this. If you take back your threat, we take back ours. As easy as that.”

Gabriel visibly ground his teeth in frustration and glared at Adrien and him. It seemed they had arrived at a stalemate.

“Fine,” he eventually ground out through clenched teeth and shortly after marched out of the room, followed closely by Nathalie. She sent them a worried look before disappearing into the hallway as well.

Félix only allowed himself to breathe a sigh of relief after the door audibly closed. “That was a close one.”

“I’m sure he can find loopholes if he just thinks about it long enough,” Adrien worried.

“Or he doesn’t and we’re safe.”

“That was quite a serious threat, kittens. You basically said you’d get him killed if he wouldn’t agree,” Plagg said as he floated back down to them.

Félix shrugged. “It worked, didn’t it?”

“Hey, why didn’t you show up on the camera footage, Plagg?” Adrien suddenly asked.

Plagg puffed out his chest proudly. “My glamour is just that good.”

“Can you teach me how to do that?”

“Nah, it’s a high-ranking glamour spell. I suppose you could do it if you’d have more magic like a full fae, but...”

Plagg trailed off and threw Félix a brief look.

“Okay, I get it,” Adrien said with a disappointed sigh. “Would have been super cool though. Imagine the pranks I could pull on people!”

“That would be a reckless endeavour and you know it,” Félix said.

“Now, let’s talk about your behaviour from earlier, kitten,” Plagg said and fixed Adrien with a
disapproving stare. “You can't just act like that in front of humans, no matter how infuriating they are.”

“Hey, I just gave her a warning!”

“And she got akumatised for it, well done.” The sarcasm was thick in the kwami’s voice.

Suddenly there was a commotion from...out in the hallway? No, in another room. That was odd. Usually the only disruptions of the deafening silence were caused by them or Plagg.

Growing curious, Félix followed Adrien on his venture to the door. There was nothing in the hallway and when they got downstairs into the entrance hall, Nathalie stood in front of the door to their father's office. The commotion came from inside. She held a hand out to stop them from venturing further.

“Your father is very busy,” she said.

“Doing what? Throwing a tantrum?” Félix asked.

“Adrien, shouldn't you be practicing piano right now?”

Félix knew a desperate excuse when he heard one, but since it was Nathalie, he decided not to dwell too much on it. And if their very adult father wanted to behave like a child that had been denied a trip to Disneyland, then that wasn't their problem either.

The two of them went to the music room where the piano stood. After their mother's disappearance, there had been a debate about moving the piano to the twins' room to use the music room's space for something else. They had disputed that the acoustics were much better in this room than in theirs and after a lot of arguing, their father had eventually decided that it was less of a hassle to keep things as they were. It was one of the only arguments they have ever won against him.

While both of them knew how to play the piano, it was only Adrien who still practiced it regularly. Félix, meanwhile, was content just playing the occasional piece once in a while when he felt like it.

“You think he'll be fine?”

“You are worrying about him?” Félix asked incredulously as he sat down on the cushioned window sill. It had once been his favourite place to sit and read, but the memories he connected with the place—this mother reading to him and Adrien while they sat in her lap, or them just sitting there and listening to her play the piano—kept him from visiting the room too often. And while some peaceful time alone would be exactly what he needed at the moment, he didn't want to risk leaving Adrien alone. Not that he was worried that his brother would take drastic actions or anything or the sort, no, he was merely worried about what their father would do.

Well, he was also worried about Adrien. His brother was still clearly irritated and to provoke an irritated cat was never a good idea. Better to be there and prevent the worst if one of the household members was moronic enough to enter the room.

“A little. I mean, he must have kept that book for a reason, right? And now it's gone. By the way, what did you do with it?”

Félix shrugged. “I brought it to someone to who it can be of use,” he said. Adrien narrowed his eyes at first, but then let the topic drop as he started playing a few notes. The melody seemed familiar, but Félix couldn't immediately place it. Probably a soundtrack from one of the many
shows or movies he had seen.

It was much more comfortable to sprawl on the window sill as a cat, so Félix decided to shift and to just take a well-deserved nap in the afternoon sunlight while his brother practiced.

“So, do you think we're grounded?” Adrien asked at the end of the first song while he automatically started the next one. This one was an upbeat piece that sounded like it could be from a musical.

“Not if father practices some common sense for once,” Félix replied with a yawn and stretched. His claws briefly caught in the pillows before he retracted them again. “Though that really can't be guaranteed.”

Another crash, this time louder, made Adrien pause in his playing. The lingering notes echoed through the room while a clattering, hurried footsteps and distressed noises could be heard from beyond the closed door. Félix, now officially concerned about the extent this was taking, jumped down from the sill and prodded over to the door. He didn't need to put an ear to it like a human would have to do, to be able to hear exactly what was going on outside. Simply standing close to it was enough.

“I am, the Collector!” he heard his father say which...was easily the most ridiculous thing he had ever heard the man say. A distressed scream from Nathalie that was suddenly cut off prevented him from wondering further.

“Iron bells!” he cursed and dashed to the windows. Adrien, having heard the same thing he did, was already in the process of opening one, but jumped back with a hiss.

“Since when is the handle made out of iron?!”

“I got this,” Plagg said and for the second time that day phased through an iron object that would have otherwise been a dead end for them.

Félix jumped outside the second the window opened, closely followed by Adrien who had also shifted. Not a second too soon, as the door to the music room splintered open and a voice that sounded like their father let out an irritated growl upon finding an empty room.

Smelt it! One look outside and he'd see them. Invisibility would really be useful now but he hadn't mastered such an advanced glamour yet. There was only one thing he could do.

With carefully practiced precision, Félix drew on his magic to cast a familiar spell. A spell that had gone horribly wrong a couple of times, yes, but now he needed it in its full intensity. They didn't need to be invisible. They just needed to appear invisible.

He froze the second the Akuma looked out the window. It didn't look anything like their father anymore, but rather like a character from Star Trek mixed with badly done hot couture.

They weren't noticed.

The spell was as strong as the spell he had accidentally cast on them on that one fateful school day where everyone had overlooked them. He would later on reverse it, but for now it was crucial for getting as far away from their father as possible. There was no doubt in Félix's mind that he was after them first and foremost after all.

“Good one, kitten,” Plagg praised him once they were far enough away. The kwami had hidden in the long fur of Félix's tail and now hovered in front of the two brothers. Adrien's fur stood on end
and his pupils were thin in clear irritation.

“We haven't had two Akumas on one day since Princess Fragrance!” he hissed and, after a thorough look around to check if the coast was clear, shifted. “Plagg, Claws Out.”

“Here we go again,” Félix said with a sigh. “I'll keep the deviation spell on for now and see if any fae are out to approach. It's already late afternoon, so I wouldn't be surprised if some are awake already.”

Chat Noir nodded. “You do that and I'll try to wrap this up quickly.”

It turned out that the fair folk was not amused by this particular Akuma attack. It didn't have anything to do with the fact that it was the second one of the day, but rather with the Akuma's powers. The ability to collect different things, national treasures and even people displeased them immensely. None of them could claim the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, or other similarly important places, but they were still locations where the fae liked to gather. Mostly because it was humans who gathered there.

Either way, having important landmarks removed from their city and being claimed by someone else infuriated them. It didn't matter that the perpetrator was a possessed human. It didn't even matter who the real perpetrator was. All that mattered was that the fae were furious and that they let out their anger on anyone and anything that happened to cross their path.

Félix had already dispelled endless many prank loops—paths that made the one trapped in them to go in circles and never find the exit—and was currently in an argument with a Korrigan, who had stolen the child of a young mother just because she could.

“This is not your business, Cat Sidhe,” she insisted, her large black eyes narrowed into a disapproving frown and her sharp teeth showing in a snarl.

“Maybe not, but it will be the Court's business once the attack ends and this child isn't returned safe and sound. Even if your actions coincide with the Akuma's powers, you can't take it permanently without it being noticed.”

The child in question was, meanwhile, screaming for its mother, though the Korrigan didn't seem to care in the slightest. Her frown just deepened.

“I will keep it for that long then. Children are such droll creatures,” she eventually said, glee shining in her eyes.

Félix sighed. That was all he could do.

The Akumas that had similar powers to the fair folk's common practices were the most annoying ones for him to deal with. And this was the second time that day he had to deal with it. He was almost envious of his past-self from a few hours ago where all he had to do had been to dispel illusions. Actually interacting with the folk and arguing with them even, was on a whole other level. It was risky, yes, but if he didn't do it, then no one would.

Félix climbed on a nearby tree to have a better lookout for more fae-related trouble he needed to attend to. The saving grace came in the form of a swarm of ladybugs that restored the Eiffel Tower close to them and most certainly also the rest of the city and its people that had previously disappeared.
“Finally,” he whispered to himself and climbed down the tree. His first impulse was to go home, but when he thought about what would await him there, he shuddered and stayed where he was. No, he certainly didn't want to face his father's anger right now. Again. Not after having to put up with several fae and their peculiar concepts of right and wrong.

_Fae are twilight creatures_, his mind supplied when he looked to the sunset sky. _And cats are crepuscular_, he silently added.

He supposed he could allow himself to indulge in his nature for one evening and take an extensive walk through Paris. Just to get a bit of a break.

Félix took in the colours of the sky, ignored the songs, and simply climbed, prowled and jumped through the city as he pleased. No one noticed him—the deviation spell was still in place—and even if they did, no one would pay much mind to a cat.

It was something he hadn’t been aware he had been missing. Perhaps he should wander around the roofs at night more often and not just when there was an Akuma attack. Yes, that idea sparked joy inside him. It would certainly fulfil this strange longing and might even make him less irritated. He just needed to be careful not to go out on a night where Ladybug was patrolling. Running into her would be a disaster beyond comparison.

Félix eventually ended up at the same park close to the Eiffel Tower he had been at earlier before his stroll. The fair folk gathered there, some playing small pranks on humans, others just talking and planning future mischief. They were where people didn't look and what they didn't notice: a dragonfly by the pond, sitting on the empty park benches no one even glanced at, the young tree—a glamour that hid yet another of the folk—and so on.

He has had enough of them for that day, so he considered finally going home. An unnaturally insouciant voice stopped him dead in his tracks though and made him turn around. There was a clearing and in the middle of it stood Lila Rossi as well as the owner of the voice Félix had heard. Chat Noir leaned against a tree arching an eyebrow and was clearly not impressed with the extensive story the liar was spinning in front of him.

At the same time, unnoticed by the duplicitous human girl, the clearing was surrounded by all kinds of fae. And the more she talked, the more indignant their expressions became.

“You see, Adrien must have told Ladybug all these mean things about me and she believed him!”

Now Félix understood why his brother was so uncharacteristically expressionless. Just one wrong twitch would give him away. It wasn’t just Lila who was surrounded, it was also him. And even though the fae had their sights on Lila, they were also closely watching Chat Noir. Very closely.

They didn’t practice propensity like humans might have done when faced with what they believed to be a deity. Instead, they looked for weaknesses. The Courts were especially one thing: a play for power. _Everyone_ wanted power and they were even willing to attempt deceit towards a Court chief or another kind of fae ruler with a tricky bargain or a curse in order to get it. It was no different here. The fair folk looked for weaknesses to exploit, to gain power over a god.

Félix wanted to do nothing more than to grab his brother and drag him out of there. He couldn’t do that though. Instead, he stayed on his tree branch and simply watched how the disaster would unfold.

“Is that so?” Chat Noir asked, his voice cold and foreign. It was the voice of a fae in all its otherworldly glory. Félix himself had a voice like it, a fae voice. It wasn’t the kind of voice used to
charm people, but the kind that would frighten them. After all, the scariest thing of all wasn’t the obvious kind of monster, but the kind that cloaked itself with human looks but was just… wrong. At least that’s what he had always heard.

Lila, however, didn’t seem to have the self-preservation instincts needed for this kind of situation.

“Yes! You see, he confessed his love to me but I had to reject him. He was very angry at me and called me a lot of horrible things. It’s why I got akumatised,” Lila said with a fake sob.

None of the listeners were convinced. Fae couldn’t lie and they didn’t always notice lies when they were told to them by humans. But Lila’s lies weren’t good enough to deceive these silver-tongued creatures. A few hisses and sneers could be heard from all around when they heard what this human girl was saying about not only their goddess Danu but also about a royal fae of their Court. It was no secret that Adrien and Félix were both well-known, in the Court and to humans. Cat Sidhe were rarities and fae liked to keep track of such valuables.

A Caoineag in the nearby pond had noticed Félix and now grinned in his direction. Perhaps she was curious about his reaction, so he also adopted an expressionless face. The water spirit let out a wail that made his fur stand on end, but he tried to ignore it. He knew what it meant and Adrien knew it too. As a Cat Sidhe, he didn’t need a Caoineag’s wail to foretell a disaster though. He could feel it in a sensation similar to a persistent and annoying itch. And in this situation, a disaster was more than obvious.

“**His love confession?**” Chat Noir repeated, a coldness creeping into his gaze and his voice. The fae around them grinned, hoping that the god of destruction would strike down the lying girl. In other words, they hoped for entertainment.

“Yes he—” Lila started, but Chat Noir cut her off with a hiss that even chilled Félix.

“I’ve heard quite enough from you,” he said and pushed himself off the tree to prowl closer to her. His gaze was murderous, not unlike it had been earlier when he had warned her as Adrien. This time he also had to put on an act for the Court though, so he couldn’t offer mercy or a simple warning like he had last time.

Félix knew what was going to happen. Letting the folk question Chat Noir or find a possible weakness by having him act un-fae-like was a risk he couldn’t allow himself to take. They had both known that this would be a risky game. What they never had considered were the sacrifices they would have to make on the way. And they would do everything to keep their loved ones safe.

“**Your castle falls when you build it on sand, Lila Rossi,**” Chat Noir said, purposefully using her full name. It drew a few excited cheers from the surrounding folk. He had moved to stand between Lila and most of the vindictive fae.

The wind suddenly seemed to pick up, a few yellow leaves floating down from the trees. All sounds apart from the whispering of the foliage around them seemed to be drowned. It was eerie, chilling and too natural. A single dead leaf brushed Félix’s fur across the side of his face. A brief touch that reminded him that this specific horror was real and that it was happening right in the heart of Paris. He was aware. His brother was aware. Neither of them could prevent it. It was even questionable if they cared. As much as they were human, they were also fae. And on this evening, surrounded by the folk and caught in a scene like from out of the stories humans liked to tell to scare small children, they couldn’t help but feel like they belonged to the non-human side of the story.

“**Your lies are your downfall. Even I can’t help you anymore,**” Chat Noir said before his expression
morphed into the most mischievous grin Félix had ever seen on him. “Too bad no one warned you. Otherwise you might have had a chance.”

Félix wasn’t sure what he knew for certain anymore. Just this morning he would have sworn up and down that his brother would never purposefully doom a human. Or at least, he would have sworn that his brother would never enjoy something of this sort. But then again, Adrien hadn’t seen the horrors of a sidhe and heard the desperate screams. He had never seen a human die and he had never been faced with the fair folk’s games. He only knew from his tellings what cruelties the fair folk was capable of. Stories of yore told the same thing.

The fae thought themselves facetious. Other’s suffering and humiliation was the greatest entertainment for them. So, when one of their gods offered a human girl to them on a silver platter, then who were they to hold back with their fun?

Félix absconded the park, not willing to see what would become of Lila Rossi. Not even the sounds of what was happening to her carried over to his ears. Like she just disappeared.

Félix had seen Plagg in various moods before. Suspicious, impatient, bored, overjoyed, angry, mischievous and on rare occasions even proud. Never had the kwami been disappointed in his and Adrien’s presence. Until now.

“This is exactly why I never had a fae as a chosen before. That, and because of the problem with magic. Your kind enjoys the concept of doom way too much. And I am the bringer of doom! If I’m saying that it means something!”

Adrien looked like he wanted the ground to swallow him whole and also Félix was appropriately ashamed.

“You just left a girl to whatever fate these monsters saw fit for her and didn’t do anything!”

Your kind. Monsters. Plagg really was trying his utmost best to make them feel horrible.

“You know, in the past there were chosen who specifically fought this and you. Just. Let. It. Happen!”

Now Plagg wasn't just disappointed. He was angry as well.

“Be glad that Tikki doesn't know about it and she won't hear as much as a peep from me either. If word travels and reaches her though, then you're on your own.”

After a long silence, it was Félix who spoke up first.

“We can't always act human, especially not when surrounded by other fae.”

Plagg narrowed his eyes. “I accept a lot of non-human weirdness from you two. I get that you have to shift and run around as cats. I also get that you sometimes can't sympathize with human ways of thinking. But I cannot and won't accept that you would let a human, no matter how infuriating and insulting they have been to you, get taken without batting an eye!”

Félix shrunk back and so did Adrien.

Plagg sighed. “I agree that in this situation she really had it coming and yes, you did warn her. But
heck, kittens, humans *don't know* the kind of lethal danger they can find themselves in.” He looked at Adrien specifically then. “And as a Miraculous holder it’s your *responsibility* to protect *everyone* from that kind of fate. This one goes fully on you, kid.”

Adrien curled his tail around himself in shame. “I'm sorry,” he said silently and didn't manage to look Plagg in the eyes.

“I'm sorry too,” Félix said. “But the same would have happened if we hadn't been there. Lila would have lied about Ladybug and the fae would have been insulted.”

“You *were* there though. If anything, you could have attempted to reach a different outcome. Especially Monsieur “too bad no one warned you” here.”

Adrien shrunk back even more. “D-do you...want me to give you the Miraculous back?”

Plagg let out a heavy sigh. “*No*, kid. I'm just trying to hammer it in that you just *can't* act like this ever again. Next time you find yourself in such a situation: intervene. As Danu's other half, they're bound to listen to you. Especially after this stunt today. I hate to say it, but faeries enjoy twisted irony like that.”

Another heavy silence fell upon the room for a few minutes. A time in which neither of them moved from their positions. Adrien, curled into a ball of black fur, cowered on the floor by their bed. Félix, beside him, had merely lowered his head to the floor, tail wrapped around him and ears pinned flat to his head. Plagg hovered above them, a dark deity blacker than the night sky with piercing green eyes that were fixed on the two of them.

“Seriously, kittens. I get that everyone learns from their mistakes, but do you always have to make such *titanic* ones?!”

He floated down and petted their heads. Plagg hadn't forgiven them. He probably would never forgive them for this, but it seemed like he was ready to help them move forward from the disaster.

Chapter End Notes

The return of Faedrien! This time intentional! >:D
Happy Halloween

Chapter Summary

Samhain take 3

Chapter Notes

Happy Halloween!
Guys, you have no idea how excited I was when I made the update schedule back in May and realised that the Halloween chapter was gonna go up on Halloween! I did everything I could to keep regular updates up to make it to this point, and guess what? I DID IT!
Sadly, it didn't turn out quite as spooky as I would have liked, but hey, it's Marinette's perspective so what can I do?¯\_(ツ)_/¯

PS: There's a comment in this chapter about how Halloween is celebrated in America and I wanted to point out that it's not meant as offensive! I have nothing against the way you guys over the pond celebrate Halloween (or celebrate it at all for that matter), but here in Europe it's not regarded as as important as it is in the United States. The comment therefore only points out that it's fortunate that Halloween isn't as big a celebration in France (because a lot of costumed people going outside on Samhain would be even more than a disaster than it already is). That said, enjoy your Halloween, in whichever way you plan to celebrate or not celebrate it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

September passed relatively quickly and before Marinette knew it, she could flip over another page of her calendar. October was the time of blooming chrysanthemum and golden leaves, of thicker jackets and of walks in the parks whenever it wasn’t raining.

It was also the time in which Adrien seemed to become more scatterbrained. He trailed off in the middle of sentences, forgetting the point he was trying to make and stopped quite often to shake his head, as if to rid himself of a very intrusive thought.

Whenever she asked him about it, he said that it was nothing and that she shouldn’t worry. But when sluggishness could be added to the list of changes, she couldn’t help it anymore.

“I’m officially worried,” she said one afternoon when they were walking around the city, shielded from the rain by an umbrella Marinette was carrying. Adrien had just run into the third person already even though people automatically left room around them to not be hit by the umbrella.

“There really is no need to worry, Princess,” he said with a tired smile. “I’m just a little distracted lately, that’s all.”

“Distracted by what?” She prodded.

He shrugged. “This and that. It’s October, you know, so…well, I’m worried.”
Marinette was about to ask what he was worried about but then paused. Right, she had almost forgotten. Last October Adrien and Félix had been weird too and the October before that as well. That time Félix had even disappeared after something that had happened on Halloween. Something that had left him traumatized. Neither of them had ever confirmed that, but it was her conclusion and she would stick to it until proven otherwise.

“It’s about Halloween, isn’t it?” She asked and felt Adrien tense beside her. Their weird behaviour around certain times was something she usually never pointed out to them directly. But to heck with that! Her boyfriend was worrying so much that he didn’t even seem to get enough sleep. The least she should do was to ask if she could help him!

“How do you…nevermind.”

Marinette sighed. “Okay, I get it,” she said and didn’t fully manage to get the irritation out of her voice. She hated being left out of the loop and yet everyone seemed to be adamant to keep things from her lately. There were Chat Noir and Tikki with their stupid Court, there was Alya who had made some sort of shocking discovery she had only told Nino of and there was Nino who didn’t want to tell her about Alya’s discovery either. Well, and now there were Adrien and Félix with their usual replies of ‘I can’t tell you about this’. From all of those, the latter offended her the least as it had always been like this with the two of them. But now that she and Adrien were dating, she felt like she deserved to know at least a little bit?

“It’s not like I don’t want to tell you, it’s just…not my secret to tell,” Adrien said with a wince.

Marinette nodded, assuming that this was a reference to whatever traumatic event had taken place two years prior. They had arrived at her home, so she unlocked the backdoor while Adrien held the umbrella over her.

“Well, what do you plan to do about it?” She asked once they were inside with the door falling shut behind them.

“What do you mean?”

“How do you usually spend Halloween and where?”

Adrien stared at her for a second as if he wasn’t sure if he could tell her, but then he shook his head.

“Usually locked at home,” he said.

“Locked?! Marinette exclaimed.

“Oh gods, that sounded wrong. Let me rephrase it: we lock ourselves in our room and usually binge-watch a TV show or some movies.”

“Is that really it? You were at Chloé’s last year.”

For a second, Adrien looked like he had seen a ghost.

“How do you know about that?”

“I listen,” Marinette said with a shrug. “And you happened to talk about it with Chloé the other day in the hallway. Everyone could have heard that.”

He paled and opened his mouth several times only to close it again and bite his lip.
“Is that the face of shame?” She asked half-jokingly to ease the tension a little. After all, she had no problem with him spending Halloween at Chloé’s place if he wanted to.

“There really is nothing for you to be jealous about!” Adrien suddenly blurted out and Marinette raised her eyebrows in surprise.

“I’m not jealous,” she stated matter-of-factly. “I’m just worried because when you talked to her it sounded like the apocalypse was approaching.”

“Something like that,” Adrien muttered and then shook his head again. “What else did you hear? I just don’t want there to be any misunderstandings.”

Well, there were bound to be some, since Marinette couldn’t make sense of half the things she had overheard.

On the last day of school before Toussaint, Marinette was glad to be done with class tests and the like. Two full weeks she could dedicate to her designs and her boyfriend now lay ahead of her and she planned to enjoy them as much as she possibly could. Well, the unavoidable occasional Akuma would spoil the fun a little, but it was nothing she couldn’t handle.

She stuffed the English book and tablet into her school bag and left the classroom to go on a search for Adrien. While she had English, he had Physics, so she was on her way to the other side of the building where the science wing was.

Her venture was disrupted by someone who pulled her behind a pillar and slapped a hand over her mouth. She tore her attacker’s hand away and was about to twist their arm on their back in a move that had become instinctual to her as Ladybug, but then she realised that it was only Alya. A now thoroughly startled Alya.

Her friend quickly collected herself again and then insistently pointed around the pillar towards the entrance of a hallway. There stood Adrien, talking to Chloé. Even though the two of them weren’t getting along as well as they seemingly once did anymore, it was still not odd to see them having a conversation.

Marinette raised an eyebrow at Alya as if to silently ask her what was going on, but she only motioned her to keep quiet and watch. And that’s what she did.

“Are you serious?” She heard Adrien ask in disbelief. He stood with his back to them so she couldn’t see his face, but even without it she could perfectly tell that he was distressed about something.

“No, I’m joking,” Chloé said sarcastically. “I got the invitation at the beginning of the month. No idea what they want. Judging by your reaction you didn’t get one.”

An invitation? To what?

“Oh, trust me, you’d know if we’d have been invited,” Adrien said, a visible shudder going through him. “After what happened to Fé two years ago we’d rather risk being impolite by not showing up than going there again.”

Two years ago? That’s when Félix had disappeared for a month. Was this the traumatic event they were talking about?
Chloé rolled her eyes. “Anyway, I just came to tell you that I consider your debt for our bargain paid. You showed up last year and that should be good enough.”

“Why the sudden change of heart?”

“Please, you have a brain. Use it for a change. With only you as the chipper one there, it would be absolutely unbearable. Besides, as I already said, I’m invited.”

Adrien sighed. “Be careful, okay? You know how much it messed up Fé when he went.”

“I’ve been to one when I was six. I know what to expect. The question rather is if you will be careful. Maybe try to celebrate for once and cause some disasters like you’re supposed to.”

“I’m not celebrating Halloween, I’m enduring it.”

“Shame. Not everyone has the stomach for it I suppose,” Chloé said with a shrug and then sauntered away.

It had been a truly strange conversation and when she had talked to Tikki about it later on, her kwami had advised her to just not think too much about it. It probably was some high society family quarrel or something of the like. While that seemed like the logical conclusion, it still didn’t explain everything.

“Well, I heard that Chloé has been invited to something and you weren’t. And something about not celebrating Halloween.”

Adrien bit his lip. “Okay, so the thing Chloé got invited to is an event her family takes part in every year and mum got invited to it too when she was still around. It’s not exactly a nice…uh…festivity. Anyway, Félix and I usually don’t get invited to those. We did two years ago because Chloé’s mother wanted to talk to us about mum’s disappearance. Only Félix went while I stayed here. Actually, we’re too young to get invited, so Chloé must have been invited because someone has business with her and that’s not really a good thing. I can’t really say more about it.”

Well, that at least explained it a little. Tikki had been right after all: it was a family thing.

“And what was that about not celebrating Halloween?”

“Oh, uh, I just don’t like it very much, that’s all. I mean, thank god it's not celebrated here like it is in America.”

There was more to it. Usually Marinette wouldn’t have prodded more, but, like established earlier, she was worried. And maybe Alya’s mannerisms had rubbed off on her a little too much.

“That’s not all there is to it though, right?”

Her question was met with silence. A silence in which Adrien’s face went through a myriad of expressions. Shock, panic, betrayal and at last, anger.

“Why do you need to know!?”

She jumped at the intensity of his voice. Gone was all the sweetness she loved so much, leaving only something foreign and strange in its place. It wasn’t the first time he was angry at her, though it was usually short-lived. Whenever it happened though, there was a strange feeling in her gut that
told her something was wrong. Not the regular kind of wrong that was obviously a circumstance too since usually Adrien wasn’t yelling at people. No, it was the kind she sometimes felt as Ladybug when Chat Noir was a bit too ferocious, a bit too…too everything. The word she had found fit it best was desultory. Like a lack of order. For her partner that made sense, since they were supposed to be polar opposites. Where she was organised, he was chaotic.

For Adrien, though, she had no such explanation. All she knew was that those bursts of emotions could come out of nowhere and at any time. As someone who liked predictability, it could scare her quite a bit. As it also did at that moment.

Marinette knew it was her own fault. She had crossed an invisible line and broken an unspoken rule.

“Because I’m worried about you and want to help,” she heard herself say without really thinking the words over. All she wanted was to explain herself. To make him understand. To calm him down. “And I can’t help when I don’t know what’s going on.”

“Oh, so you can have secrets all you want but when I have them it’s suddenly unacceptable!?” His voice was poisonous with how angry he was. “Or do you want to tell me where you suddenly ran off to last week? Don’t you think I’m worried when you just disappear like that?!”

Marinette flinched like she had been slapped in the face. She was such a hypocrite! Of course, being Ladybug was a very important secret, but that didn’t make other secrets less important. Without really noticing, she had started to subconsciously see it this way, as if other secrets wouldn’t be as valuable or as dangerous. She thought back to Chat Noir and Tikki and this big secret they both kept from her. Dangerous, is what they called it.

Suddenly, Adrien’s anger dissipated as quickly as it had arisen and he looked at the ground guiltily.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “It’s just…”

“You don’t have to explain yourself,” Marinette hastened to say. “It’s my fault for asking when I know I shouldn’t.”

And that was the real bummer, wasn’t it? She couldn’t tell him her biggest secret and he couldn’t tell her whatever he kept secret from her. The way to live with it was to ignore the issue and when Marinette hated one thing, then it was to ignore a problem. But she also knew when to not prod further and give things time.

She sighed and finally took the umbrella from his hands to put it into the stand next to the door. Taking his hand, she silently led him upstairs.

“You don’t have to tell me what’s wrong,” she said, her eyes locked on the stairs ahead. “But if there’s something I can do to help you, then all you have to do is say so.”

The silence that followed lasted until they arrived in the living room that was filled with the smell of pumpkin soup—probably today’s late lunch.

“There is one thing you could do,” he said and when she turned around, there was a shy smile on his face. “It’s something like a favour though.”

Marinette grinned, glad to have him back to normal. “It’s not one when I’m offering.”
“You can stay up as late as you want as long as you keep it down. Félix, you’re in charge.”

“Yes, sir,” Félix said at the same time as Marinette let out an appalled noise and groaned “Papa!”

With a grin and a playful “Happy Halloween!” he disappeared down the steps and closed the hatch behind him. What he left behind was a cake that looked like a pumpkin that they were supposed to share. Marinette didn’t know what flavour it was, but she had no doubt it would be delicious.

What Adrien had called a favour the other day was the simple question if Félix and he could spend Halloween at her place and have a sleepover. She had not hesitated to agree, but what she hadn’t known back then was exactly what that all entailed.

Adrien had brought flowers, which had been very sweet of him until the point where she realised that rather than giving her a bouquet, he had planned to make flower crowns out of them. It was St. John’s wort, as far as she could tell, which was a little odd. They were more herbs than they were flowers and she had no idea where to even get some at this time of year.

So, instead of wearing something Halloween-themed, all three of them now wore yellow flower crowns on their heads. It was certainly not what Marinette had expected.

“Okay, so, before we cut the cake and start watching whatever you guys picked, will you finally explain the flower crowns to me?” Marinette asked.

“It’s a superstition.” Félix said. “They keep evil at bay or something. Our mother used to make us wear them on Halloween every year and it therefore became a tradition.”

Seeing how both of them had been clearly distressed about this day, she could see why they’d want to keep evil at bay.

“Does that mean we can eat the cake now?” Adrien begged while looking back between her and the cake with pleading eyes.

“Yes,” she said with a grin.

They ended up watching ‘Over the Garden Wall’ with Adrien cuddled up to her. She had to admit that the show was intriguing, especially on an artistic level, but it was also a little unsettling. Adrien and Félix seemed to thoroughly enjoy it though. The episodes were short—only eleven minutes each—so that they completely went through it in just two hours.

At that point, they had all eaten their fair share of cake and Marinette left them alone for a few minutes to bring the rest of it downstairs and put it in the fridge. When she came back up, she was tackled to the ground by a shivering Adrien.

“What—?” She started to ask and sat up, but was almost immediately also hugged from the other side. A short silence passed that she perceived as awkward but wasn’t sure if Adrien and Félix perceived it at all.

“Guys, I was gone for like one minute. Two minutes at most,” she eventually said, just to say anything.

“Missed you,” Adrien mumbled into her hoodie. Félix gave no reply. At a loss of what to do, she started petting Adrien’s hair, knowing it usually calmed him down, and did the same with Félix’s upper back.
Her boyfriend gave off a low rumble that sounded similar to the purr she sometimes managed to draw out of Chat Noir when the two of them were taking a break from patrol or sparring. It cut off as fast as it had begun, so she wrote it off as just a general noise of contentment.

“So, what do you say? Do you wanna watch another movie or already go to bed?”

It was Félix who answered this time and to her relief he also stopped hugging her—not that she disliked his hugs, but it had become thoroughly awkward.

“If it would be alright with you, then I’d rather go to bed than watch another movie.”

Marinette nodded and looked down at Adrien who was still wrapped around her middle. He looked tired. Exhausted, even.

“Yeah, that seems like a good idea,” she said and tried her best to drag Adrien up to his feet.

To her relief, he started to snap out of his tired spell or trance or just general silliness—she wasn’t sure which of those it had been—and walked up the stairs to Marinette’s bed.

Earlier, he had shyly asked, while blushing fire-red, if he was allowed to sleep in her bed with her. She had blushed in a similar intensity at the suggestion, but had agreed. Sure, it would be something new, but she wasn’t opposed to it. Of course, her parents had then spoken up and made it awkward by insisting that Félix would stay in the room with them.

Adrien and she had both talked over each other in their hasty assurances that they didn’t mean it like that and that yes, Félix would of course stay in the room with them. They weren’t quite that far in their relationship yet and the sheer thought of it had made them avoid eye contact for about an hour afterwards.

As the conversation from earlier now came back to her, she felt herself blush a little again. And seeing how her disappearance for one minute had sent both of them into distress…somehow, she decided to forego proper pyjamas and just sleep in hoodie and sweatpants instead.

Félix’s bed for the night was the mattress on the floor they had lounged on for the entire evening. With a quick goodnight, she vacated it and climbed up to her own bed.

There, she found that Adrien had already curled up in the extra blanket they had thrown up there earlier, and was lying as close to the wall as possible. She couldn’t help but smile a little when she saw him like that. It was adorable. He had also hung the flower crown on a spare nail on the pinboard by her bed and she hurried to do the same with hers—she had totally forgotten that she was wearing one too.

When she settled into bed, the first thing she did was to drag Adrien closer to her. While she had to admit that she tended to take up lots of space in bed, it didn’t mean that she wanted to push her boyfriend into the corner. Cuddling him for the entire night seemed much more appealing. He seemed to think so too as he let out a content sigh, not opening his eyes and wrapped his arms around her.

She giggled and gave him a kiss on the nose.

“Good night, Kitkat,” she said.

“Good night, Princess,” he murmured back with a smile and then buried his head in the crook of her neck.
The hatch to her room burst open and Marinette was startled awake by Adrien who immediately sat up in bed and hissed at the intruder. With a groan she started rubbing her eyes and sleepily blinked into the early morning sky that was visible through the skylight.

“Girl, you’ve got to—” Alya yelled, only to be cut off.

“What the hell, Alya?!” Adrien exclaimed.

“Shush Kitkat, this is important!”

“Important enough to be woken up at seven in the morning?” Félix asked from his own bed.

“Yes, very much!” The Ladyblogger declared and didn’t care for any protests. “You know how I was keeping something secret for the last few weeks?”

Marinette groaned and let herself fall back in the bed. “Al, it’s too early for conspiracy theories. Try again in five hours.”

Alya continued as if she hadn’t heard her. “It was a submission I got on the day where Volpina and the Collector attacked. Sorry for bringing that up you two.”

“No offense taken, our father is merely a sore loser. Do continue,” Félix said and Marinette had no idea how he was able to not only pay attention but to also understand what Alya was saying. Her brain definitely wasn’t awake enough for that yet.

“At first I thought it was just a fake. Someone putting on a cosplay and pulling a mean prank,” Alya said. “But then Lila disappeared and she hasn’t been found yet. I’m sure the one who submitted the video already brought it to the police as evidence, so I won’t. Anyway, I posted a question on the Ladyblog yesterday asking for how long people usually saw Ladybug and Chat Noir directly after Akuma attacks and if they had pictures. And someone sent me pictures of Chat Noir near the Jardins du Trocadéro from the day of that Akuma attack.”

Marinette, after taking a few moments to process what Alya was talking about, thought back to that day. Both she and Chat Noir had been pretty exhausted after the fight with the Collector since it had been the second one that day already. She had immediately gone home afterwards but her partner had said that he had wanted to go on a quick run before he’d go home. So, all things considered, it was possible that Chat Noir had been at the park near the Eiffel Tower at that time.

“What does that have to do with Lila’s disappearance?” Marinette asked, as that was the only thing that was still not adding up in her mind.

At that, Alya just climbed the stairs up to her bed and practically threw her phone at her. Adrien caught it before it could hit her in the face and she could see that there was a paused video on the unlocked screen.

“Al, listen, I don’t think this is something you should get involved in. Like you said, it’s crime evidence,” Adrien said and without noticing pressed play on the video with his thumb.

“I’ve heard quite enough from you,” Chat Noir’s voice came out of the phone’s speakers and it sent a shiver down Marinette’s spine. There, her partner stood, facing the missing liar and wearing the same look he usually saved up for the worst of Akumas.
“Your castle falls when you build it on sand, Lila Rossi.” He continued just as the noise of wind distorted the audio a bit. Meanwhile, he grinned a grin that involuntarily made Marinette remember what had happened earlier that year at the Dark Cupid attack. It was unsettling to see it again.

“Your lies are your downfall. Even I can’t help you anymore. Too bad no one warned you. Otherwise you might have had a chance.”

Then Chat Noir vaulted away, the one filming the video followed him as he rose above the treetops. Then the camera turned back to where Lila Rossi had stood just a moment before. Now she was gone.

Beside her, Adrien made a whimpering noise akin to that of a kitten that just had its tail stepped on.

Chapter End Notes

I totally forgot last week’s recommendation and by the time I noticed, it was already too late! 🎃 Since today is Halloween, let me recommend something spooky to you! 😊

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Jaws that Bite and Claws that Snatch by ZiriO

It began with a shiver. A ripple down the spine; all gooseflesh and raised hackles and a rumble deep within his bones. So small and fleeting, it was so easy to shrug off. A funny feeling that came and went, and everything seemed normal after that.

Funny how it doesn’t last.

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It’s a body horror, cat tendencies one shot that is just downright beautiful! If you enjoy Adrien acting like a kitty cat and some body horror on the side, then this is definitely something for you! ❤

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Next up on Spellbound: An exhausted kitten who really needs a break and some cuddles.
Something Brewing

Chapter Summary

An exhausted kitten who really needs a break and some cuddles.

Chapter Notes

Well, well, well, if it isn't Lila sneakily posting a chapter at past 10 PM on a MONDAY. The only explanation I can really give you is that I love you all a lot and want to give you the best quality content I possible can at this moment in time. For this chapter (and also the following chapters), I had to get a little creative though. You see, from this point onwards, things start to become tricky from a story-telling perspective and in order to make sure to keep up the continuity I had to REWRITE THE ENTIRETY OF SPELLBOUND out of Chloé's perspective. I'm at almost 35k words with it right now and it has come to the point where I look at what the kittens do and automatically go "they're such idiots!" (help, Chloé has turned me!). It's super interesting what an alternate POV can do to you in that sense.

Anyway, I originally planned to have that be an entire chapter since there are points that will be important for the climax but...I can't just drop a 40k chapter. I'm not Aimee! :'D Therefore I'll only give you the important parts and upload the entire rest of it as an outtake seperately. That way you can read it if you want but it won't be mandatory. I think that's fair. c:

Anyway, the parts here that overlap with that freakishly long monster of a chapter turned out to be fitting after all, but I wanted to be 100% sure before I posted it. I broke my previous daily word count record with 6346 words today to be able to get to that part and finally upload this chapter! yay for a new highscore! :'D

The next chapter will come out on Thursday like it's supposed to, so look forward to that! ❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Adrien had originally thought that Alya’s video and Tikki’s ensuing rage would be the biggest problem yet. He had forgotten that he was a Cat Sidhe and that things therefore could always get worse.

It turned out that from all the people he should have kept an eye out on, Chloé turned out to be the most dangerous one yet. Whatever she had experienced at the revel, it seemed to have the exact opposite effect on her than it had had on Félix. Instead of teaching her some humility, it made her even nastier.

At first, he thought that his bad luck was just making a name for itself by landing him in close-call situations, but after he caught her hiding a four-leaved clover in Marinette’s school bag, he knew that coincidence and bad luck had nothing to do with it.
“Have you lost your mind?!” he hissed, making Chloé freeze mid-motion and look at him. He was glad that the two of them were alone in the classroom for the moment, the others already gone while the Akuma alarm blared in the background. Adrien knew he had to go, but this was important as well!

“I’m doing you a favour. Not the indebting kind,” she said with a roll of her eyes and let the shamrock fall into Marinette’s bag. Adrien growled and was at her side in two large steps to immediately fish the dooming weed out of it again.

“Is that what you’re calling it now?” He sneered.

Chloé shrugged. “It’s not my fault that you don’t appreciate my help.”

“You’re calling this helping?!” Adrien growled and held the shamrock up close to Chloé’s face. She wasn’t fazed at all.

“Believe it or not, but I’m not as oblivious as you think. Neither is your—girlfriend, pet, bride, or whatever you want to call her. She’ll figure you out eventually, so better let it happen sooner rather than later.”

Adrien was struck silent for a moment. The only noise was the still ongoing Akuma alarm. He had no time for this, he had to help his lady!

“She’s not figuring it out at all and that’s final. Stop trying to help,” Adrien hissed.

“Fine, be that way. Then don’t tell her until it’s too late.”

Adrien couldn’t dwell on what she meant by that as there was a loud crash from outside. He walked out of the classroom with a glare in the Court princess’ direction and then started running once he was in the hallway.

Chloé’s warning didn’t want to leave his mind, though, for the rest of the week.

Ever since the morning of Samhain where Alya had burst into Marinette’s room and scared him half to death, he had feared Tikki’s reaction. She would demand his Miraculous back at least and might even send him to Tír na nÓg if worse came to worst. Therefore, Adrien had done his utmost best to avoid the goddess by staying close to Marinette. After all, Tikki couldn’t show herself and tear him a new one as long as her chosen was around.

It took two weeks for his luck to run out. There had been a late-night Akuma and in contrary to Marinette, he hadn’t been able to use the following Saturday morning to sleep in and get his energy back. An early morning photoshoot had thoroughly ruined those plans, so he had taken up Marinette’s offer to take a nap in her room—he probably looked like a vampire with the bags under his eyes—while she helped her parents in the bakery. Adrien had been too tired to argue.

He regretted it ten minutes later when he was woken up by insistent poking. Though when he had been about to open his eyes or to tell whoever it was to leave him alone, a surge of magic threw him out of bed.

Now he was awake, alright.

“What—” he started, but was cut off by the sight of Tikki hovering in front of him. Her face held a
similar disapproving frown like the one his father wore as his default expression. There was also silent anger in the goddess’ eyes, which was the *real* fright of the display. Plagg also hovered into his field of vision, his expression sheepish.

“Sorry kid, I tried to wake you but you slept like a rock.”

Ah, so the poking had been Plagg. Then the magic that had thrown him out of bed must have been Tikki. Adrien didn’t reply and just swallowed nervously.

“You willingly doomed a person,” Tikki said, her voice carefully controlled and cold as ice. Adrien crawled backwards towards the wall. The room between the floor and the banister to his right wasn’t much and he had half a mind to shift and crawl under Marinette’s bed, but he didn’t dare to do so while Tikki had her sole focus on him. He threw a look at Plagg, but his kwami just shrugged.

Right, he had said that if Tikki ever found out, he was on his own. Seeing how no one would come to his rescue, his only way to survive was to try and defend himself.

“M-may I explain?” He stammered meekly and Tikki’s gaze hardened in return.

“Yes,” she said coldly.

“I was on a run in the park and then Lila stopped me. She instantly started telling a few new lies and I would have let her get away with a warning again, but a dozen fae suddenly started crowding around us. When she started telling lies about Ladybug and me—well, Adrien-me—there really wasn’t much I could do without falling out of character. I had the choice between making the Court suspicious or gaining their trust.”

Tikki didn’t react at all. “You *acted* pretty convincingly,” she said and Adrien flinched.

“I gotta admit that I *might* have let out some frustration I had with Lila to make it seem more convincing, but that’s really all it was!”

Adrien didn’t know what he should be more afraid of: the neutral mask Tikki wore while she took in his explanation, or the contemplations that were no doubt going through her head.

“While your actions were not reckless, they still are unacceptable. A Miraculous wearer is supposed to *prevent* these types of things from happening. Not *cause* them!”

Adrien shrunk back even more. “I know. Trust me, I *know*! It’s just...I—”

Tikki held up a paw to stop him. “It was an exceptional situation, I get that. While it could have been handled better, there is no reason to dwell on the what-ifs. Now you know to be more careful in the future.”

Adrien stared at her in disbelief, his jaw probably hitting the floor. “Y-you're gonna drop it *just like that*?”

The goddess fixed him with a glare. “Don’t misunderstand this: I won’t ever forget what you have done.” Adrien flinched. “But the situation has changed. You are Marinette’s biggest support and protector. There really is no way for me to punish you in a way I see fit without taking you away from her. For now, just remember that you’re on very thin ice. And while there won't be any punishment from me, you'll still have to atone for your actions. You can start by keeping Marinette away from the glamour-breakers Chloé keeps sneaking into her pockets.”
Adrien slowly started to stand up, guessing that the worst was over. “I'm doing my best there already. Unfortunately making Chloé stop is a task all on its own. And if I make a scene it'll catch the attention of others and that would be even more dangerous.”

Tikki nodded.

“Remember your goal. Then you'll be able to properly concentrate on it.”

Adrien couldn't help but roll his eyes. He was practically doing nothing else!

“No worries, I'm on it,” he said. “But for now I just wanna sleep a bit. An exhausted Cat Sidhe is no use to anyone.”

Tikki tilted her head. “You're exhausted? Fae usually don't get tired easily.”

“Fae usually don't wield a Miraculous either. Especially not at two in the morning when they have a photoshoot four hours later at six.” Just thinking about it drew a yawn out of him.

“I see,” she said thoughtfully, but Adrien was too exhausted to care about what she could be thoughtful about.

“If you don't mind, then I'm gonna resume my nap now.”

Tikki nodded and then probably flew off to find Plagg and talk to him in their odd language of chirps. Adrien must have fallen asleep immediately because there was no way that the gentle pat on his head from a tiny paw wasn't a dream.

“Despite everything, you're a good kitten.”

Yeah, as if the goddess would ever say something like that. Dreaming was nice.

“Ugh, this maths test is gonna be a [nightmare]!” Marinette whined, her head on her desk while Adrien couldn't help but chuckle at her antics from where he sat beside her. “Don't laugh at my misery,” she added and turned her head to pout at him.

“You're cute,” he said with what was no doubt a lovesick grin. It was amazing that after over four months of dating, he still managed to make her blush. He loved his blushy Princess.

“Stop changing the subject,” she mumbled and sat back up. The way she stared at the ceiling, it looked like she was hoping for it to offer her a solution to the equation. It didn't.

“Sorry, I just couldn't resist reminding you since you seem to forget sometimes.”

A quick kiss on her cheek made her smile and look at him.

“And you're so cheesy sometimes,” Marinette said, but judging by her wide smile and soft eyes she didn't mind in the slightest. He grinned.

“What can I say? I'm in love.”

“Stoooop it, Adrien,” she said with a wide grin and yet another blush as she buried her head in the crook of his neck. “We're never gonna get anything done at this rate.”
“Speak for yourself. I already solved this equation.”

Marinette groaned, frustrated, but didn't move her head. “Then help me, you jerk.”

“Fine,” Adrien said and took her notes. With how neatly she wrote down equation formulas with added explanations, it was a wonder she had any trouble with them to begin with. But he knew from experience that it usually was just one tiny detail she would overlook and then fall into despair. Once that detail was found, things started to become easy for her again.

“We solved a similar equation in class on Monday. Did you note that down?” he asked while still flipping through the pages, looking at the scribbled dates in the top right corners.

“Yeah, I think I did,” Marinette said and lifted her head again.

When Adrien flipped another page, something green fell out of it. If he hadn't been on high alert already, he wouldn't have managed to snatch up the weed before Marinette could.

“Is that a four-leaved clover?” She asked but Adrien stubbornly held it out of reach.

“Yeah,” was all he could say while frantically looking for a way to dispose of it.

“Aren't those supposed to bring good luck?”

He chuckled humourlessly. “And other things,” he muttered and then let the clover disappear in his own bag. If Plagg was in there, then destroying it would be an easy feat for him.

“How did that even get in there?”

*That* was a very good question. He might not know how, but at least he knew *who*.

During the rest of their study session he tensed up in fear every time Marinette flipped a page of her notes, her books or just her notebook.

“Good evening, my lady,” Chat Noir said as he landed on the rooftop behind Ladybug. The previous few weeks had exhausted him. Not only was Chloé’s quest of exposing him more than nerve-wracking, but also Alya was causing quite some trouble. She luckily hadn't published the video, but she was investigating. And that was risky for both her and him. Luckily, Félix had volunteered to keep an eye on her so Adrien could keep his concentration on protecting Marinette.

His exhaustion must have been blatantly obvious because instead of a ‘good evening’ Ladybug said “Are you alright? You look awful.”

“Gee, thanks.”

“Is it about the video again?”

*Here we go again.*

“Partly, yes,” he replied and only barely suppressed a yawn. “I slip up *one time* and I already have an investigation on my tail. As if I wouldn't have to be careful enough already.”

“You call a girl disappearing a *slip up*?”
“Uh-oh, kid. Better think fast.”

“No, I meant...” Chat Noir started and then sighed. “Nevermind. We’ve been over this dozens of times now anyway, so can we please just start patrol and forget about it for the moment?”

Ladybug let out a frustrated noise. “Just what is it with you and Tikki?! You just want me to drop a crime my partner was involved in! Is this about the—”

“For god’s sake, stop mentioning it!” Chat Noir said more loudly than anticipated. His own frustration had been more than evident in his voice so he closed his eyes for a few seconds and took a deep breath. Yelling at his girlfriend was not the way to go about this... again. It was bad enough that he had done that already a month ago.

“Sorry,” he said, “It's just a very sore topic.”

“You mean 'dangerous','” she said, making finger quotes before crossing her arms with an unimpressed frown.

“I mean that if you value your safety and that of the people you love, then you better stop digging. So, yes, my lady, it is dangerous, and apparently the disappearance of a girl is not enough to convince you just how much.”

“Smooth,” Plagg commented dryly.

“I'm tired, okay?!” Chat Noir silently muttered back.

Ladybug, meanwhile, seemed speechless. She opened her mouth several times, like she was about to ask a question but then shook her head.

“You're right, let's just start patrol,” she eventually said. “I'll take the east route, you the west and we'll meet back up here.”

Then she swung away without giving him an opportunity to answer.

“She's mad,” he winced.

“Tikki’s chosen are natural problem-solvers, so they're easily frustrated when someone is withholding information from them. Don't take it too personally, kid.”

“You went too far this time,” Adrien growled at Chloé. It was lunch break, they were hidden in a secluded corner of the library and he was furious.

“I really didn't,” Chloé said and raised both eyebrows.

“Well, then explain how you would rate a rowan wand that suddenly appeared in Marinette's bag?!”

He waved said object—a rowan twig with carved symbols on it—in front of her face. For just a moment, she seemed to be taken aback.

“While it is flattering that you think I would waste that much effort on your unfortunate situation, I'll have to disappoint you. Do you really think I'd go through the effort to find a rowan tree and carve a branch, especially with spell-runes? Don't be ridiculous. I did put another four-leafed
clover in Marinette's bag though. It's bound to work one of these days.”

Adrien wanted to *strangle* her when she gave a nonchalant shrug. He had, in fact, found the shamrock as well, but it almost wasn't noteworthy anymore. Those stupid things started to appear everywhere. Weren't they supposed to be rare?!

“I didn't say that you *made* it. Just that you *put it in her bag!*”

“That's quite an accusation.”

“Oh, bite iron! Just admit that it was you before I lose my patience.”

The rowan twig was an unusual choice and Adrien had almost not caught it—Plagg had actually been the one who noticed it first. Usually, rowan was a protection against magic, especially when bound in bundles. With magic runes carved on it and a spell soaking through the wood, it was just as potent as an enchanted gemstone was. What a cruel irony that an object that was intended for protection had been misused this way.

Chloé crossed her arms and threw him a look not unlike that one would use to talk to a small child that had trouble understanding the most simple of concepts.

“You're rather making me lose my patience with your idiocy, so listen here: I have been around humans for much longer than you have and I've also known Dupain-Cheng for more than twice as long as you. She's been fae-marked for a while now, as I'm sure you have noticed, so she already has the Court's potential attention. Add to that, that she has second sight and she is a ticking time bomb. That she's been blind for as long as she has is pretty much a miracle. So, again, I am *doing you a favour.*”

*As soon as she can see, she can never forget again.*

“Even if that's true, all of this is *my* business, not *yours*.”

“Oh, Adrikins,” Chloé said with a pitying sigh and shook her head. “I'd only be your business if she'd be *yours*. And unless you plan to charm her to forget the instance, you will have to let her know. Until then all of this is fair game.”

Fair game.

The word repeated in his mind several times, mocking him. Because, that was the horrible thing: Chloé was right. Being able to call Marinette *his girlfriend* was in no way equal to *his property* in neither his nor the Court's eyes. And it was only *property* that wasn't allowed to be touched, messed with or stolen.

The worst part though was that this was his fault. Just because he had been selfish once upon a time and approached a human girl, like Icarus who flew too close to the sun. There was no way to leave now and even if he would find the strength to do so, he just couldn’t. Not when the Court already had their eyes on her. All he could do now was to reap what he sowed all those years ago and to hope that for just once in his life, his infamous bad luck would lurk in small inconveniences rather than in enormous catastrophes.

Adrien hadn't been at Mélusine's shop for a *long* while. But with things going out of hand and Tikki and Plagg lacking the needed insight on the members of the Court, he had practically no choice but
to pay their legendary halfling acquaintance a visit.

It was the middle of the night, cold and raining, so this endeavour really wasn't off to a good start.

The wind chimes above the door let out a melodious jingle like they always did when Adrien entered the antique shop and was glad when he found no other customers present. The blonde halfling behind the counter raised her head and threw him a joyful smile.

“Good night, Adrien! What brings you here?” she asked and walked up to hug him. "You know, kitten, if you want to visit me, then the time before dusk is the best."

“I'm here on business,” Adrien said shortly. The irritation had by now taken a permanent residence in his voice. It wasn't the best of conditions when talking to a fae, as politeness was important, but it'd just have to do.

Mélusine raised a quizzical eyebrow. “Not even a greeting? You must be desperate. Come, come!”

She took his hand and tugged him to a tea table with two armchairs.

“So, what’s the problem?” She asked with a knowing grin once both of them sat down. Instead of a reply, Adrien took the rowan wand out of his pocket and pretty much slammed it on the table. Mélusine regarded it curiously.

“That's not your spellcraft,” she said thoughtfully as she picked it up and studied the carvings. “But doubtless that of someone well-practiced with enchantments and glamour-breakers. Who gave it to you?”

“Chloé. Well, she didn't give it to me. She hid it in Marinette's bag and I noticed before it could do any damage. I don't think Chloé is the one who made it though.”

Mélusine nodded. “Yes, that's what I'd say too. The fae rarely use rowan, even though the wood is sacred to us. This could be a human craft that has been enchanted after the fact, or...no, it's unlikely that a changeling would risk angering a Cat Sidhe.”

Adrien paled. “A changeling?!” Regardless of what Félix had said about the one he had met in the sídhe, a changeling out in the mortal realm was bad news.

“Well, it doesn't have to be one that is physically here right now. They could have given this trinket to Chloé at a revel. Or she just saw one there and got inspired to try a more exotic approach. Either way, this little piece of wood is very dangerous in the wrong hands. We better burn it,” Mélusine said and without any hesitation threw it into the burning fireplace on the other side of the room.

The wand let out a wail, as if it was in pain and turned the flames ruby-red. Only a moment later, things returned to normal and the piece of rowan burned like all the other wood, ordinary orange flames licking around it.

“Is something like this easy to recreate?”

“For fae it's a little bit of a challenge since it requires handcraft and not just spellcraft. So, no, I'd say it's not. The possibility that Marinette will find another rowan wand in her bag is relatively low.”

“She keeps finding shamrocks though,” Adrien muttered. While it was still as dangerous as it had ever been, the four-leafed clovers had caused him more annoyance than real trouble in the past
“Yes, those are very efficient to see through glamour,” Mélusine said with a pondering expression. “Have you considered a protective charm?”

“Marinette already has a lot of protective charms. She doesn't even know about most of them.”

“Oh, I didn't mean from kidnapping or magic. I meant against four-leafed clovers, thyme and adder stones. In other words: natural glamour breakers.”

“There's a protection against that?!” Adrien exclaimed in disbelief. “I thought they were blocking magic.”

Mélusine shook her head. “They're simply a means to see through magic and only for a moment. When a human has a shamrock on them, they can take one single glance through a fae's glamour. After that, it’s useless. The same thing applies for thyme sprigs. And looking through an adder stone only allows the visibility through a tiny hole. The goal is therefore simple: keep her senses blocked even when confronted with one of these three things.”

“So, you mean I should enchant something with a spell that does the exact opposite of a glamour-breaker?”

Mélusine nodded. “It will be a very difficult spell though and Marinette has to carry the item with her at all times. Is there something she always wears that you can enchant or something you can convince her to wear?”

Adrien grinned. “There is! She has a bracelet with several charms and I always gift her a new one for her birthday and for Christmas. I can just enchant the charm I want to give her for Christmas. Do you think three weeks is enough time to manage an enchantment spell like that?”

“Splendid! And yes, that should be possible. If you need any help, you can always come to me,” Mélusine said with a smile that was just a little too wide. Her help wouldn't come for free.

Adrien smiled back in the same manner. “We'll see.”

“This is a bad idea and it's cold,” Félix complained with a displeased hiss. The two of them were taking a walk over the Parisian rooftops, purposefully straying away from the familiar and shortest path to their destination.

“It's not a bad idea. Stop complaining already,” Adrien said back as he stopped for a moment. His paws had started to slide on the frozen roof and he quickly adjusted his stance. Falling off a five-story building would be a bother now and might attract unwanted attention.

“I should've stayed home,” Félix muttered and hissed silently when he slipped on a frozen roof tile.

“Hey, you're the one with the fluffy winter coat!” Adrien argued. If anyone was cold, then it was him with his shorter fur.

He abruptly made a turn on the next roof and dodged a couple of steaming chimneys. Trying an essential and difficult spell like the one Mélusine had suggested would just end in a disaster if they tried it themselves. Félix had been adamant about at least attempting to cast it, but Adrien was having none of it. The last thing they needed was for it to have the opposite effect and end up being
a glamour-breaker. Apparently having Plagg side with Adrien was all that was needed to convince Félix though. Which was why they were on their way to Marinette's to ask Tikki for help. If anyone would be able to cast such a spell with no fail, it would be her.

“That is still no substitute for a real coat, as in a piece of clothing,” Félix argued

“Since when have you become such a complainer, kitten?” Plagg asked from where he floated next to them.

“Ever since I had to start babysitting Alya so she doesn't run head-first into her demise.”

While Adrien was thankful that the two of them were able to each tackle one disaster at a time, it still didn't mean that those tasks were easy. Adrien was busy keeping glamour-breakers away from Marinette and Félix was busy keeping a very curious Alya away from investigating on a fae kidnapping.

“What did she do this time?” Adrien asked and Félix rolled his eyes.

“I'll tell you later. Let's just say that a bell tower at noon was involved.”

Adrien grimaced at the thought alone. "Yikes! You deserve several caramel latte macchiatos for that alone." He had once been close to Notre Dame with Marinette and the ringing bells at just one o'clock had been painful enough for him. Twelve o'clock though? Ouch! “At least that explains the migraine from yesterday.”

He started running and then leapt over the street that separated one row of buildings from another. Meanwhile he prayed that no one happened to look up, since a regular cat would never be able to make that jump. Then again, he was a ball of black fur against a dark night sky. People would probably think it was a pigeon that was out late at night.

Félix landed beside him and shook himself. “I still think it's a bad idea. What if we're being watched? Or what if Marinette is awake?”

“We're not watched,” Plagg said and waved a paw. “I'd know if that was the case.”

“Her windows are dark. Let's just have a look and see if the coast is clear,” Adrien added and jumped on the dividing wall, dodging the chimneys.

He silently landed on the balcony with Félix following only shortly behind. Their plan to see if Marinette was asleep proved to be unnecessary as only a moment later Tikki phased through the hatch and glowered at them both.

Before an apology for waking her up could slip from Adrien's lips, Plagg spoke up.

“Hey sugarcube! I'm taking my kittens for a walk right now and we thought to stop by your place on the way back.”

“Excuse you?!?” Félix said.

“Is it safe to talk?” Adrien meanwhile asked timidly and nervously looked around. Fae or not, the balcony could be seen from the street below and from several surrounding buildings.

Tikki nodded. "My magic keeps the fae and curious stares away from this place.”

A sigh of relief left him. "Good," he said and sat down on the cold balcony floor, his tail curling
around him. "We came here to ask for a favour."

“It's more of a service towards your chosen than a favour for us, honestly,” Félix added.

“I'm listening,” Tikki said, still hovering in front of them with a stoic expression.

“We need you to enchant the charm I want to gift Marinette for Christmas. It needs to be able to block glamour-blockers. As much as I hate to admit it, Chloé is right. One day I will overlook a shamrock by accident and then there'll be no way to fix it...”

His tail and ears drooped at the thought.

“If the kittens would try it, it could end up badly and you're the charm master of us two,” Plagg said with a shrug. Tikki sighed.

“It's a good idea in theory, but it can backfire. The more magic she carries, the more the Court will notice her. And an anti-glamour-breaking enchantment doesn't protect her from them.”

“That's what she has us for,” Adrien said with pleading eyes. “Please, Tikki. It's just one additional protection. You can literally keep up a forcefield that keeps fae, apart from Félix and me, out. There shouldn't be any danger of her getting taken while you're with her.”

The kwami bit her lip. “I don't want her to carry too much magic, but I have to agree that it'd be relatively safer like this. But this is the only time I am doing this favour for you. Everything else is your responsibility, Adrien.”

“I know. It has been even before you chose her. I'll keep her safe even if it's the last thing I do.”

“At this rate, it might well be,” Tikki said quietly, though not quiet enough to let it escape his ears.

Chapter End Notes

Today I have a very special and very dear recommendation for you!

La Coccinelle the Vigilante by Bluetreeleaves

France, 1889. A time of laced corsets, top hats, and high-class aristocracy. As a threat emerges from the shadows, it'll take a Ladybug vigilante and a heroic black cat to protect Paris. If only she can figure out her handsome partner’s real identity - and get free pastries from the friendly baker boy.

This is the story of Coccinelle the Vigilante.

Alright, first of all: this story is AMAZING! I know the general consensus and even stigma about OC-stories here in the fandom but I PROMISE you that you will absolutely not regret THIS one! ♥ It's wonderfully written, historically accurate and the characters portrayed are a former Ladybug and Chat Noir of the past! Also, I have fallen in love with Gaspard and would 100% adopt him if he wouldn't have the best family ever already! 😊 And please someone save Solene! That girl needs to get out of her neat mansion and have some fun! GO! READ! IT! NOW!!!
Next up on Spellbound: Félix babysits Alya and she is none the wiser.
Evading Disaster

Chapter Summary

the grumpy cat plays babysitter

Chapter Notes

And here we go already with the next chapter! Writing about Christmas time now certainly was better than writing about it back in March. Sadly this is the closest we get to a Christmas-themed chapter ;n;

Little heads up: next chapter is where my frustration with composition and quality really starts, so if there's a late update again, you'll know why! ;D

Just 6 chapters left in this book!

Alya was robbing Félix of his last nerve. No matter what he did, she didn't even consider dropping the investigation of Lila's disappearance. Then again, he was already well-acquainted with her irrational stubbornness when it came to discovering a story.

“Alya, don't you think you're taking this a little too…personal?” Félix tried while he watched her list off prime suspects. “Lila was a manipulative witch, so there's really no reason to so stubbornly work on her case.”

Alya glared at him. “She's missing!”

People disappeared all the time. The old man that just went into the garden and suddenly couldn’t be found anywhere in it. The little girl who happily chirped that she’d be in her room, just for the room to be empty when someone came to look for her. The mother who went out for shopping and never returned. All of these were people who disappeared, never to be seen again. They were searched for over weeks, months and even years until eventually they were given up on.

Stories like these existed in a common human understanding, yet people were not as afraid of them as they were of the obvious dangers. Probably because they simply didn’t expect the unexpected. The disappearances were caused by fae who collected their prices for bargains or played their pranks on a whim. Human life was there for them to toy with, not to treasure.

He could understand how such a mystery could intrigue humans, especially Alya, but to go digging was a bad idea.

“That doesn't suddenly turn her into a saint,” Félix said with a roll of his eyes.

“What are you even doing here when you're not going to help me anyway?”

The two of them were at Alya's place after school. A highly uncommon situation. Usually he would prefer to spend the afternoon on his own when Adrien and Marinette were on a date, but
things had turned out differently. His wanna-be-journalist friend had set it as her mission to investigate a fae kidnapping so he was there to run damage control.

Félix hadn't ever imagined a kind of scenario where he would willingly, one-on-one, discuss anything with Alya. Her habit of jumping to conclusions made it a rather irritating activity. But, as annoying as it was no doubt going to be, it also offered him a chance to sabotage her progress. That was what he was at least attempting so far.

“I am simply offering rational thought as an addition to your project,” Félix said

“Rational, huh?”

He raised an eyebrow.

“It's disrespectful to talk bad about a crime victim!” Alya lectured him.

“Oh, really? So, everyone who has been severely hurt in some way has to be treated like some sort of deity now? I wonder where my fair treatment is in that case.”

That actually managed to make Alya shut up for a minute and adapt a somewhat guilty expression. It wasn't a method he would usually use, but, as already stated, this was an unusual situation. Everything that managed to prolong Alya's investigation or even make her want to drop the entire thing, was a win in his book.

“I'm sorry, Félix,” she eventually said. “It's just so frustrating! I don't know what the police have found and what little bit I've uncovered leads nowhere!”

“Maybe that's for the best. You want to become a journalist, Alya, not a detective.”

“Those two are really similar,” Alya argued. “They're both about research based on facts and evidence!”

“The difference is that detectives actually get in life-threatening situations and journalists, if they have a sense of self-preservation, usually don't.” Well, the latter was clearly lacking in Alya's case if the Akuma attacks were anything to go by. Maybe she would make a good detective after all. If only it wouldn't be for one thing: “There's yet another difference between the two. Detectives usually keep the resolution of a crime to themselves. It's noted down in the files, the family is told and that's often it. A journalist shares such a story with the world.”

“Yes, and that's exactly why I want to be a journalist!”

“You want to be a disrespectful asshole that causes families and friends of the victim pain by dragging out a story—fact-checked and correct or not—over several weeks and rubbing it in their faces?”

Alya seemed stunned again. “That's not what journalists do! At least not good ones,” she argued, even though a little weakly.

“Really now? It's exactly what they did when my mother disappeared.”

He hadn't wanted to mention it, but cold, hard facts might probably be the only thing that would drag Alya away from her mission when rationality utterly failed to do so.

“That's it!” She said, much to Félix's surprise. "Your mother disappeared without a trace as well! Maybe those two are connected!"
By Danu, no! He hated it when Alya found a lead.

“People disappear all the time, Alya.”

“Not without a trace!”

“I swear to god, I will delete all your investigation files from your computer if you dig around my mother’s case,” Félix threatened.

“But what if we can find your mother this way?!”

_Unlikely, as she's currently in an entirely different realm._

“Alya, just _drop it_,” Félix hissed. He had no patience for this sort of thing.

There was another silence that stretched between them, though this one was much more uncomfortable than the last. Alya was eyeing him weirdly, as if he had said something that didn’t quite make sense to her. Then, eventually, she narrowed her eyes.

“You _know_ something, don’t you?”

“I know a lot of things, but none of it would help you.”

That was technically true at least.

“You’re evading.”

“And you’re prodding. Quite rudely if I might add.”

“Adrien and you have been very insistent on making me stop investigating ever since you found out what this was about. A little odd, don’t you think?”

Félix fixed Alya with the most unimpressed stare he could muster.

“Have you ever thought that _maybe_ we don’t want to be reminded of our mother’s disappearance and the similarities this case has? Or the approach of _common sense_ that you keep rejecting? You know, the one where someone who hasn’t even finished school yet shouldn’t be concerning herself with a missing person case that has nothing to do with her?”

“Or you’re just scared of what I could find!”

_Precisely._

“Alya, let me put it this way: There are things that are better left untouched. The sooner you learn that, the better. You’re letting your journalistic curiosity get the better of you without thinking about the consequences.”

Alya crossed her arms in a clear gesture of defiance.

“Why would it have consequences? Finding missing people is something _good_!”

“Well, let’s take a more obvious example from your journalistic… _career_ then, shall we?” Félix said. In reality he was just trying to avoid Alya’s direct line of questioning.

“The Ladyblog,” he said, which was enough to make Alya glare at him again. He knew very well that insulting her heart’s work wasn’t going to win him any sympathy points, but it was a necessity.
“You created it to give people news about the local superheroes and that’s all fine and well. But you also created it to find out Ladybug’s identity. Now, how would you say that is a good thing?”

Alya visibly bristled at the accusation. “The city deserves to know who’s saving them all the time so we can show her our admiration!”

Félix sighed heavily. “A naïve viewpoint, but alright, I’ll take it. I know you don’t like to hear this, especially not from me, but the consequences of such a thing are actually quite severe. For one, Hawkmoth would then know Ladybug’s identity as well. It would make it easy for him to track her down in her civilian life and steal her earrings, maybe even kill her if he is so inclined.”

The thought of such a scene made an involuntary shudder run down his spine. Alya, in front of him, meanwhile paled.

“Furthermore, she would be swarmed with attention that she has made very clear several times is not something she wants. Her hero life is hectic enough already, so she at least deserves to find some peace and quiet in her downtime. Outing her identity would destroy that, and a stressed Ladybug is an inattentive Ladybug.

“So, you see, outing her secret identity, no matter how intriguing the mystery is, would have severe consequences. Have you considered any of them?”

A tense silence seemed to become the norm of the day by now, so Félix decided to fill it.

“And this is in a situation where we have a clear overview of the possible consequences. Now, for instance, take a mysterious case like my mother’s or Lila’s disappearance. We don’t know who the kidnappers are, what they want or what they are capable of. Unmasking them could easily make you or someone in your family or friend cycle their next victim. Do you really want to risk that just for the short-lived fame an article on it would give you?”

Alya buried her head in her hands.

“God, I’m so stupid!” She sobbed.

Oh no, he had made her cry. Félix had no idea how to deal with tears. He cringed awkwardly and looked frantically around the room before getting a tissue out of his bag and giving it to Alya. She accepted it thankfully, took off her glasses and dabbed at her eyes.

“What am I supposed to do now?” She asked, her voice throaty and weak.

At least that was a question Félix could answer.

“The same you have done before, just more carefully and with regards to the consequences,” he said. “For starters, I suggest to remove the section of the Ladyblog that is about finding out Ladybug’s identity.”

Without another word, Alya put her glasses back on and turned around to her computer. She closed the investigation file and switched over to the Ladyblog, diving into full admin mode.

“I really suck at this, don’t I?” Alya asked while she expertly edited the code.

“No, you’re impulsive and easily excitable, that’s all. It would do you good to remember to take a step back once in a while to consider if what you’re doing is really for the greater good or worth the risk.”
She nodded. “I don’t know if I can just do that. I mean, I have just always hunted for the newest scoop.”

“Maybe listen to Nino then. He’s very reasonable most of the time,” Félix suggested.

“Yes, but…I dunno. You’re better at this whole rationality-thing.”

“Oh, I know. But the last thing I’m planning to do is to run after you in an Akuma attack. I’ll gladly leave that honour to your boyfriend.”

Alya was quiet for a moment as she seemed to struggle with a bit of code.

“I just thought that maybe you could come with me on my next interview run? I wanted to go around Paris and ask a few people stuff about Ladybug and Chat Noir. So, if I’d go overboard there, you’d be able to tell and I could better tell what to look out for. Besides, it’s been a while since we’ve really hung out. Mari said that the dating shouldn’t get in the way of our friendship but it still kind of has and I’m sorry about that.”

That was…actually quite considerate of her. Not that he needed that kind of consideration, as he was honestly fine on his own, but it was still nice to be thought about.

“Very well, I suppose I could do that,” Félix therefore said with a small smile.

The two of them sat in a coffee shop and went over Alya’s notes from yet another interview run. It was close to Christmas, so everything around them was decorated with an oversaturation of the colours green, red and gold. The rudest assault to Félix’s eyes, however, were the fairy lights. Not the ones that behaved in a constant steady glow, but rather those that had been set to what Adrien always called “rave mode”. He had nothing against Christmas, but he could really do without that particular development in festive decorations.

“I think you should leave out this answer here,” Félix commented and pointed with his pen to one particular section of the paper.

Alya held up a finger as she finished reading through something on her half of the notes before leaning forward to see what Félix meant. She read through it and then furrowed her eyebrows in confusion.

“Why? It’s not that different from all the other answers, is it?”

The two of them were going through all the interviews, neatly typed up by Alya in hours of work from what she had recorded with her phone and printed out to go over manually. At this point, it was just quality control.

“No, but their way of wording it is quite…crude.”

“Yeah, I see what you mean now,” she said thoughtfully. “Cross it out.”

Félix did as instructed.

He had no idea when it had stopped being weird to help Alya with her blog and started to become something he even somewhat enjoyed. While, yes, it did reduce quite some stress to be able to monitor Alya’s knowledge of certain things, it also had become enjoyable to have serious
discussions with her.

Ever since he had pointed out her lack of consideration towards consequences about a month ago, she had strived to better herself. What he had said must have deeply impacted her to make such drastic changes, and he was happy to have caused a positive development for once. Especially since that development meant that the two of them could hold a decent and educated conversation. Sure, she still sometimes fell into her old habits of jumping to conclusions and being excessively emotional and protective of some topics, but that was only to be expected.

The more time he spent with her, the more he also noticed the little bit of bad luck her curse was attracting. It wasn’t something obvious like tripping and falling, but rather subtle annoyances. She missed Metros, spoke to the exactly wrong people who would refuse to answer her when she ran around and interviewed the population of Paris, and she got stuck with babysitting more often than she liked.

Those were excusable misfortunes though and he was glad to not have caused anything major. More than once during the last few weeks, did he think about perhaps lifting the curse from her. It would make her less fae-marked and therefore less noticeable. But the reasoning that it would still be a disaster if she happened to find out Ladybug’s identity on accident always kept him from it.

“So, is Adrien giving Marinette anything special for Christmas?” Alya asked after a few minutes with a grin on her face.

“Well, he has a charm enchanted by the goddess of creation that will keep Marinette from finding out that this planet is also populated by magical creatures that can doom her.”

“A charm for her bracelet, I think,” Félix said with a shrug.

“Ohhh, what is it this time?” Alya asked excitedly and leaned forward in her chair.

Félix raised his eyebrows. “Since Marinette has gotten a charm for her bracelet on every birthday of hers and on every Christmas, she probably already suspects this gift. I will not risk spoiling the little bit of surprise it is by telling you what kind of charm it will be this time. After all, you could accidentally let it slip towards Marinette.”

Alya gave an offended gasp.

“I would never!”

“You’ll just have to wait another week to find out,” Félix said and took a sip of his coffee.

Just another week until Christmas. He really wished he could stop dreading that time of year. Not because of the celebration itself, but because of what happened before it. In just three days it would be Midwinter and he loathed it even more than Midsummer. This year it would be three years since their mother disappeared. Three years on their own. He was honestly surprised that they had made it this far, which was in no small amounts thanks to Mélusine’s and also Marinette’s help.

It would never stop being risky or become easy to handle. Plagg was a huge help, but he wouldn’t be there with them forever. Eventually Hawkmoth would be defeated and the Miraculous would have to be returned.

Félix set his coffee down and got back to his half of the notes.

“What are you doing for the holidays?” he asked, if only to distract himself from his ponderings.
“We’re staying here since it’d be hell to travel with the twins. And since I know that Adrien and you aren’t going anywhere and that Nino and Marinette aren’t either, we should totally meet up after Christmas.”

“You’ll see at least Adrien on Christmas Eve when he follows Marinette around on her present run.”

“Oh, that’s a tradition?” Alya inquired.

Félix shrugged. “Apparently. She said that it was more a thing between her and Nino before and now it extended to you as well.”

“So, she doesn’t come by your house?”

“No real need for that when we’re spending Christmas at her place anyway. She will try to personally pick us up before the present run though, so fingers crossed for that,” Félix said.

“You think your dad won’t let her in?” Alya asked and even without looking up, the incredulity in her voice was more than enough to imagine what her face looked like.

“My father doesn’t even let the mailman in. That said, I’m sure Adrien will be more than ready to personally open the door for her. Father can say whatever he wants about that.”

“How come your father lets you spend Christmas at her place anyway?”

Félix gave a wry smile. “Let’s just say that we have come to an agreement a few months back.”

That was, if you could call an ultimatum an agreement. Their father was very much not in agreement of it, if his akumatisation directly following it had been any indication. Still, it would only be a matter of time until he found their disobedience infuriating enough that he would actually look into loopholes on the deal. As a businessman, he was bound to find some. Félix just held out hope that it would still be a while until it’d become relevant.

“What kind of agreement?”

The fae kind.

“Oh, just something about us going to the authorities about his mistreatment of us if he keeps up with his nonsense,” Félix said vaguely. The twisted truth was still the best kind of lie.

“Wow, really?!” Alya asked, looking equal parts excited and impressed by that revelation. Félix just nodded and took another sip of his coffee.

“No word of that to anyone though, especially not Marinette. She’d just worry unnecessarily,” he said.

Alya nodded eagerly and mimed zipping her lips and throwing away the key.

The two of them resumed their work in silence then. Félix was half paying attention to what he was reading while he kept his other ear out for any incriminating talk nearby. While he wasn’t as popularly known as Adrien was, it still wasn’t unlikely for him to get recognised. If that were the case, he would prefer to catch any gossip from mean tongues and personally put an end to it before it could make the rounds.

Today, like on most days, the surrounding conversations seemed of mundane topics. People
worried over their own lives, retold anecdotes and joked about common acquaintances.

“Hey, if you made a deal with daddy dearest, does that mean you don’t have to go to galas and other events anymore?” Alya suddenly asked.

“I’m not certain. So far, we haven’t heard anything about having to attend an event. That could change though,” Félix replied absentmindedly.

“What’s next Wednesday?” Félix was instantly attentive. “Next Wednesday?” He repeated and tried his best to not let his voice waver. That’s when Midwinter was.

Alya nodded. “Yeah, Mari complained to me about it all week since she wanted to steal you guys—or at least Adrien I guess—away right at the beginning of the holidays. Apparently, your brother was quite adamant about that being impossible because of some fashion gala event. And now you say that there is no event. Suspicious, suspicious.”

Félix had been among many crowds ever since he was small. He knew how to move around in a room full of celebrity patrons that were eager to get the occasional company secret out of a naïve child like him. Therefore, he was a master at playing dumb, at evading or at downright calling out people on their actions.

He considered which of those approaches might be best with Alya. Playing dumb definitely wasn’t it since she had already called him out on a mismatching story and evading would just make her more suspicious. That left him with only one option.

“Alya, remember our conversation about not prodding too much? This is an excellent example,” Félix said.

“I just don’t get it, okay?! If it’s some family stuff then why didn’t Adrien just say so? It’s always family stuff with you two anyway.”

Félix set down his pen and fixed Alya with a serious stare.

“Listen, I don’t know why Adrien lied, perhaps because unexplained family stuff is slowly becoming a touchy subject between him and...all of you actually. The point is that if anyone should be confronted about it, then it would be him. I, however, don’t recommend you to do that, as he probably didn’t want to admit it out loud.”

“Admit what out loud?” Alya asked, though her tone had softened. She was still obviously curious, but at least she was giving Félix the option not to reply.

“If you really must know,” he said. “It’s the day our mother disappeared. Not a particularly happy occasion, so I would appreciate it if you wouldn’t bring it up again.”

Alya simply nodded and then went back to her notes in silence. Félix did too, but all kinds of different thoughts flitted through his head. First and foremost: When had Adrien stopped using the “family matters” excuse?

Chapter End Notes
whose woods these are (I think I know.) by Reiaji

Four years after his future turns to cinders, Adrien is a servant in the house he was meant to inherit. Disowned by his father and abused by his stepmother, his days are filled with drudgery until he meets a masked huntress in the forest behind his father's chateau.

As his friendship with Ladybug turns to first love, he dreams of a future spent at her side.

Then, on the eve of the Princess's masquerade, he meets his guardian—and is granted a wish.

This fanfiction is the reason I fell even deeper in love with Ladrien as a ship and this 50% to blame for making me start to write my own Ladrien fic (which will come out next year). Seriously, if you love Adrien, our sweet little sunshine child, and badass Ladybug then this is for you. Scratch that, it even is for you if you're not a big fan of the Ladrien ship because it's just that sweet (and there will also be MariChat eventually). So, brought to you by the author who also wrote masterpieces like best (fake) smile and its continuation looking like [this], is now a Cinderella AU with everything you could ever love and wish for! There is fluff, there is angst, there is joy, there are tears, characters you'd usually hate are likable, others you want to see burn in hell and then there's sweet Adrien who tries so hard and stays positive throughout it all. Sweet sunshine child Adrien, who doesn't deserve any of the crap he has to put up with! ;A; You will cry for this poor child, I tell you! Now what are you waiting for? READ IT!!!

Next up on Spellbound: Adrien and Marinette celebrate their first Valentine's Day as a couple❤
The Sweetest Valentine

Chapter Summary

A Valentine's Day date! ❤️

Chapter Notes

You know how you plan some chapters for so long that it feels super unreal when you actually upload them? That's definitely the case for this chapter! Well, this and next chapter, as they were originally meant to be one chapter, but I split them into two. I wasn't going to do it at first, but I just...couldn't resist. It ended up working much better this way anyway! ❤️

Gonna give you a break from all the serious fae shenanigans with Marinette's POV and some Adrinette cuteness! Or am I? >:3c

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Eiffel Tower was as beautiful as ever. With how much time she actually spent on top of it—both at Akuma fights and on patrols—Marinette only rarely got to see it from down below anymore. In fact, she was sure that this was the first time this year she actually stood at the foot of the famous landmark for longer than a minute. Much longer than a minute. Adrien and she definitely weren't the only ones who had gotten the idea to visit it on Valentine's Day.

Well, technically it had been Adrien's idea. While Marinette was in no way short on ideas for romantic outings, seeing how excited Adrien had been with the prospect of surprising her with something on their first Valentine's Day as a couple, she had let him go ahead with whatever he was planning. As the hopeless romantic that he was, it wasn't that much of a surprise when he had given her a huge bouquet of all her favourite flowers—most of them simply chosen on the specific colours she liked the most and others with a special meaning in mind. They stood in a vase back home and most likely filled her room with a lovely smell.

Adrien also had praised her to heaven and back for her outfit of choice and given her a few pecks and kisses while she hadn't been able to stop blushing and grinning like a lovesick fool. The blue dress she had chosen was fancy, but not too fancy and coupled with a bun—her hair was finally long enough for one again—and a silver necklace she looked perfectly suitable for whatever place he was planning to take her to. “My beautiful winter princess,” he had said when he had first seen her, and the memory drew a quiet giggle out of her again.

“Something funny?” Adrien asked from right next to her.

“It's nothing,” she said with a grin and then looked up. “No matter how often I see it, it just never stops being amazing how huge the tower is.”

“You really only realise it from up close, don't you?”

Marinette nodded. “Especially from ground level.” Then she couldn't help but giggle again. “We
Adrien grinned mischievously. “Even better. That way we blend into the crowd.”

The queue in front of the ticket booth moved slowly and the middle of winter—even though it was a mostly sunny day with a few scattered clouds in the sky—made the wait seem even longer than it probably was. Having a boyfriend she could cuddle up to was quite practical, especially since the cold made her quite sluggish as of recently. At first, she had blamed it on her general exhaustion with class tests, Akuma attacks and even commissions she needed to get done. Tikki had, however, pointed out that it was possible that she had adopted a little bit of a ladybug's traits through extensive exposure to the Miraculous' powers. And, apparently, ladybugs hibernated. Now that gave a rosy outlook into her future. If they wouldn't defeat Hawkmoth before next winter, she was dreading how much her state would worsen.

She had also talked to Chat Noir about it who had ashamedly admitted to have caught and eaten a mouse just the other week. While she was glad that she wasn't alone in this boat, she was also in equal amounts horrified by how much worse her partner had it. She fought down a shudder as she thought about that specific incident. Hopefully it didn't mean that she'd eventually start eating aphids off of her balcony plants.

To bring her thoughts back to a more pleasant topic, she pulled down the edge of her glove a little to have a look at her bracelet. Three new charms had found their place there recently. A four-leafed clover, which she had gotten for Christmas; a flamingo, which Adrien had gifted her for their six months anniversary in January and which symbolized the vacation in the Camargue on which they had become a couple; and a heart, given to her less than an hour ago. She smiled as she ran a thumb over the latter. It was beautiful with a silver base and red and pink stones—she very much hoped they weren't real but merely made out of glass—encrusted in it. She turned it around, reading the tiny words that had been engraved there in elegant, sweeping letters: Je t'aime.

Marinette smiled and snuggled a little closer to Adrien who had his arm around her. She didn't know if it was to keep her warm or if he did so protectively, but she loved it either way.

“It's probably not much of a surprise anymore at this point since I have the smartest girlfriend in the world, but could you at least act surprised once we get up there?” Adrien asked with unfairly potent puppy eyes.

“Flattery will get you everywhere,” Marinette giggled.

In reality she was still freaking out. Internally.

Le. Jules! Verne!

Adrien was taking her to one of the fanciest and most expensive restaurants in the city! He probably had reserved a table there months ago already and the only thing that softened the shock a bit was that it was lunch time. If he would have taken her out to dinner there, she probably would have…spontaneously combusted or something. It just proved that he knew her well and therefore had arranged the reservations this way.

If she hadn't known him as well as she did, she might have voiced concerns about his money spending habits. But even when he was paying with his own money and not his father's, she couldn't possibly be mad at him for it. Fact was that he was rich and that he loved seeing her happy. If he wanted to spend his money on her happiness, then that was his choice. Just as it was her choice to spend her money on wool and fabric to make him gifts. It was rare that she gave him something store-bought and to see his happiness, in turn, made her happy.
And even though it clashed horribly with his current outfit—though that wasn't visible under his black winter coat at the moment—he had insisted on wearing the scarf she had given him as a Valentine's Day present. She had protested, saying that it wasn't fancy at all and that it therefore wasn't appropriate for wherever he was planning to take her. Adrien hadn't taken 'no' for an answer though.

Marinette regarded her finely-knitted masterpiece as it peeked out from under his coat. It was held in various shades of blue and black, with brighter patches strewn all over and sometimes even a shimmering sequin. She had tried to capture a night sky like it was visible in places beyond Paris. It had turned out beautiful in her humble opinion, but it still wasn't suited for a place such as Le Jules Verne.

Eventually they got their tickets and before they knew it, they were stuffed into one of the elevators. The ride was suffocating and loud and Marinette decided then and there that her preferred method of getting up the tower was by means of a magical yo-yo.

When they got off on the second level, the first thing she did was taking a deep breath of fresh air. And then she saw the restaurant, a sight she should be used to with how often she was on this very tower. The reality of the situation was, though, that she suddenly felt quite…insecure.

Le Jules Verne was one of these places one heard about when growing up, but in her head, it had always been reserved for Paris' Elite or for tourists who liked to spend a lot of money on fancy food accompanied by an amazing panorama view of the city. Never in her life had she thought she'd ever enter the place, much less on a date.

She immediately started to pluck at her coat self-consciously, stroking flat invisible creases. When she was about to get a handheld mirror out of her bag, Adrien's hand stopped her.

"Hey, don't worry. You look as beautiful as always, Princess," he said with the kind of soft smile that always made her legs go weak.

She tried to return the smile, but some of her internal nervousness must have shone through because Adrien didn't just take her hand, but offered his arm for her to hook hers into. Yes, some further physical stability was very welcome right now. Expensive or not, this was like a dream come true. A dream she had never known that she had.

When they entered, Marinette wasn't surprised that they had to wait in yet another line. Just this time, luckily, they were inside. Even at the less popular hour, the restaurant was completely full. There really would be no way to get a table here without a reservation. A fact that seemed to be true for a couple of tourists in front of them. Marinette followed them with her eyes when they exited the restaurant again. To her relief, they didn't seem to be that upset. The last thing she needed right now was an Akuma attack. All she wanted was to spend one Valentine's Day in peace with her wonderful boyfriend. She hoped Hawkmoth had better things to do today than to terrorize the City of Love.

As it turned out, their reservation was not only met with a smile, but the name Agreste also seemed to have a certain weight to it. At least she didn't think that regular guests would get a secluded table away from prying eyes per request.

"Look at you, using your name to get places," Marinette said with a grin as they sat down.

"Finally it's good for something," Adrien said with a similar expression. Neither of them had time to say more, as a waiter already approached them with menus and the question of what they wanted to drink.
“You know, I said that you should pretend to act surprised, but I didn't expect you to hyperventilate there earlier,” Adrien said.

As she glanced over her menu, she could see that he was still grinning.

“Oh, that reaction was one hundred percent genuine. This place is just...very out of my price league so I never really thought I'd be able to go here.”

“And that's a reason to almost faint?”

“Hey, it wasn't *that* bad! I just had to convince my brain that this was real, that's all. *And* that, on top of all of this, I'm here on a date with you. It seemed more like a dream than reality for a bit there, that's all.”

A smile crept back on her boyfriend's face. “So, I picked well after all?”

“You picked perfectly,” she assured him with a soft smile of her own. “Though next time maybe choose something less ostentatious. I think I need to be eased into all those high society hot spots.”

“Don't worry, I will. But seeing how this is our first Valentine's Day as a couple,” he took her hand and placed a kiss on the back of it, “I wanted it to be something extra special.”

Marinette smiled, probably lovestruck. He was just the sweetest.

The food was as extravagant and delicious as one expected it to be of a restaurant of this sort. She was quite glad that she hadn't eaten a lot earlier that day so that she had room for the entire five course menu. To be fair, she mostly hadn't eaten much because she had been too busy picking out the perfect outfit and *not* messing up her subtle yet precise eye makeup.

“So,” Marinette said with a grin. “You said something about a 'next time' when it comes to going out, but now it's *my* turn to pick a location, Kitkat.”

“Oh, I wasn't trying to steal your turn, Princess. But *my* ‘next time’ will come eventually.”

She giggled when Adrien winked at her.

“So, what will it be then? Some lesser known five-star restaurant perhaps?” she teased.

“You're welcome to keep guessing but I'm not gonna tell you. It's nicer to surprise you, especially when I can actually surprise you with it upon arriving.”

“I *was* surprised when you dragged me to the Eiffel Tower and I put two and two together.”

“Yeah, but waiting in line kinda ruined it. That won't be the trouble next time.”

“I'll take your word for it.”

“Now,” Adrien said and raised his glass of water. “Let's enjoy *this* date before thinking about any future ones, shall we?”

Marinette raised her own glass and clinked it with his. “To a wonderful Valentine's Day,” she said.

They spent hours at the restaurant and Marinette lost track of time. More than once had she paused
eating to just look outside the window to the structure of the Tower and down to the city beyond. This was Paris, the city under Chat Noir's and her protection. People had even started to call it their city, which was crazy. Paris was unique and to have her name associated with it in a sense of ownership made her both proud and willing to object the notion. It was her home, and that was really all she could claim. Still, she loved looking down at it and thinking about all the people that could feel safer because she and her partner were there. That was nice too.

When she and Adrien were at the foot of the Eiffel Tower again and the city stretched over and beyond them once more, Marinette was in high spirits. Paris was safe, her boyfriend loved her and she was on one of the most amazing dates with him. Life was good.

“Any more plans for today?” She asked as she once again snuggled closer to him while they walked to the Metro.

“Nothing in particular. I thought that Le Jules Verne should be the highlight so I didn't want to overshadow it with anything else. If there's still something you want to do today then you can take the lead, Princess.”

The last comment was accompanied with a peck on her cheek.

“You know, I actually just want to get out of the cold again,” she said without much hesitation. Not for the first time did she wish for Valentine's Day to be at a warmer time of year.

“Then how about we go back to your place, change into something more comfortable and then get all the snuggly blankets we can find.”

Marinette smiled. “Sounds perfect,” she said.

The thought alone of wrapping herself up in a pile of blankets and cuddling with Adrien made her that much more eager to get home.

“Found another one,” Adrien said as he stood behind her and pulled a hair pin out of her bun. Black pins on black hair were generally a good idea for securing a look, as they were practically invisible. They proved to be a problem when it came to getting them out though.

“Thanks,” she said as she took it from him and put it down with the others on her dresser. She had already changed into a much more comfortable sweater and sweatpants shortly after they got home. As beautiful as her dress and the leggings below it had been, neither of them was made for comfortably lounging around. Adrien's clothes, too, had been exchanged for more comfortable ones.

At some point during their relationship he had just started hoarding his clothes at her place. Not many, if pictures of his entire wardrobe were anything to go by, but enough to have a change of clothes in case of emergencies. Usually those included snuggle emergencies like this one.

“Why did I think it was a good idea to use that many hair pins?” Marinette lamented as she fumbled around her head to find more of the invisible culprits.

“Because you didn't want your bun to fall apart,” Adrien said as he found yet another one and pulled it out. “Let me tell you, those things are a nightmare during runway shows. Father once fired a stylist because she didn't put enough hair pins into a model's hair and it fell apart halfway through the show.”
“Yikes, that's harsh,” Marinette said and let out a small victorious noise as she found two hair pins at once.

“That's the fashion business for you,” Adrien said and his mirror image shrugged.

“I think I just went paranoid because I haven't worn my hair this way in a while and I wasn't sure if it was long enough to hold.”

“It's about as long as it was when I met you now, maybe even longer.”

A pleasant shiver ran down her spine when Adrien suddenly kissed the back of her neck. It wasn't the first time he had done it since they had started their mission of finding all hidden hair pins and every time he did it, the more she wanted to kiss him back. Only the knowledge that being poked by yet undiscovered hair pins would be quite uncomfortable held her back from turning around that instant and pressing her lips to his.

Judging by the teasing smirk his mirror image threw her, he was very well aware of what effect he was having on her. And he seemed especially aware of the fact that tenfold payback was approaching with every new hair pin that was found, at least if his efficiency at finding them was anything to go by.

When half of her bun fell apart, she let out a sigh of relief. Now it was only a matter of maybe five more hair pins until she was free of them once more. Adrien was unsurprisingly efficient at finding those last few culprits and once the very last one was pulled out and her hair fell freely around her shoulders, she instantly whirled around to him.

Marinette didn't waste time with going through her hair one more time to find a possible stray pin or even brushing it after it had been held in one position for so long, like she usually would have done. Instead, she threw her arms around Adrien's neck and kissed him. A kiss he returned without a moment of hesitation.

“You're evil,” she said as she took a breath before kissing him again. “How dare you—” kiss “—kiss me—” kiss “—when I can't—” kiss “—kiss you back.”

Adrien's grin broke the kiss and he laughed. “Well, in that case,” he said and she let out a squeak when he picked her up. “you're an evil temptress.”

Marinette was absolutely lost in the kiss that followed. She only vaguely registered that she was carefully laid down on the chaise lounge. Her hands were in his hair and she gasped as his lips found her neck. Well, at least scarves weren't an unusual accessory for this time of year.

There was a sudden discomfort at the back of her head, but Marinette decided to ignore it. A stray hair pin wasn't worth her attention at this moment.

“I love you,” he whispered in her ear.

She knew he loved her. He showed her just how much he did every day, in every gesture, in every smile, in every kiss. Yet the words themselves were used sparingly, so whenever he did say them, it was like a gift. And even though ‘I love you too’ sounded like much less of a declaration, she was sure he knew that she meant it just as much as he did when she said it.

Marinette didn't have the opportunity to return those words though as his lips were on hers again. Her brain had a blissful silent period in which not much came through except for oh and ah and more. If love was said to make stupid, then kissing apparently made her braindead.
Despite what other people—Alya—might believe, Adrien was always the more tender and careful one of the two of them. Especially when it came to things like kissing and making out, it was usually Marinette who was more...aggressive. She was the one who bit his lip and sometimes even left scratch marks on his back. Hickeys were usually a clear ‘no’ because of his photoshoots and she definitely wasn't brave enough to leave some in places where no one would see. They both weren't quite that far yet. In turn, Adrien loved to leave hickeys all over her neck, except for when she specifically told him not to.

What Adrien didn't like was to have his hair pulled but he never objected to her running her fingers through it. In fact, he loved it. And she loved it too, as his hair was usually so very soft. Besides, he was adorable when his hair was all messed up. Thus, she did just that.

Marinette giggled as he let out a pleased noise when she scratched his scalp exactly where she knew he loved it. Their kiss deepened and she absently continued letting her hands wander, running on autopilot. The sensation of something velvety and warm filled her senses and she was briefly reminded of the times when she was petting Chat Noir's ears. They always felt like they were real.

She was about to chastise herself internally for letting her mind wander to thoughts of her partner while she was kissing her boyfriend, since that was just inappropriate, if it wouldn't have been for one thing. A thing that briefly pulled her out of the blissful mist of thoughtlessness and maybe even stupidity. A thing that made her break the kiss and open her eyes.

The thing was that the sensation wasn't just a flitting memory...it was real.

Marinette stared and tried to make sense of what she was seeing. Like in a bizarre dream though, nothing wanted to make sense.

“Princess?” Adrien asked, probably noticing her more than obvious hesitation.

She, however, couldn't tear her eyes away from the top of his head, where she could clearly see two black-furred cat ears that definitely hadn't been there a minute ago. The sensation of the soft fur on her fingers was real as much as she could tell. Warm and velvety, just like Chat's ears.

Finally, Marinette managed to tear her gaze away from the foreign and yet so familiar appendages to look into Adrien's worried eyes instead. His worried, very cat-like eyes.

To be fair, Akuma-weirdness was a common thing in her life at this point. If she wouldn't be used to those kinds of things by now, she might have reacted differently. Maybe she would have screamed, or worse, shoved Adrien away. She was used to these kinds of things though, so her voice stayed concerningly calm when her brain spat out one excessively stupid question that didn't think of passing any logical departments before it made its way to her tongue.

“Why do you have cat ears?”

Chapter End Notes

Well, well, well, what do we have here? A cliffhanger? Why, yes indeed! From the moment I first crafted this chapter in my head to when I was writing it, I thought this would be the perfect way to end it, hence me splitting the chapter into two to make it possible! c:<
Recommendation Of The Week

Shellter Chat by Bridgetinerabbit

A peek inside Adrien's school bag gives Nino some very unexpected insight as to what makes his good friend tick, but leaves him in a very delicate position. He never expected to strike a deal with the Kwami of Destruction, but now he and Plagg are working together to relieve some of Adrien's (and Chat Noir's) burdens for his own good. But being Adrien's guardian angel isn't as easy as it seems; other secret identities start falling apart, and there's no telling where the falling dominoes will stop.

Alright, if you like a good, wholesome bromance then this one is an absolute gem! It's rare to see a reveal fic not focus on Adrien and Marinette and it's perfectly executed here! Nino is amazing, his interactions with Plagg most especially are to die for and it's adorable to watch him be a total mother hen around Adrien! ❤ Furthermore, Bridgetinerabbit is the one who inspired me to bring Faedrien into Spellbound, so give her a big hug and a lot of appreciation! Her writing is amazing and I'm enjoying it very very much! 😊

Next up on Spellbound: an extremely emotional kitten 😢

PS: The next chapter is, as you can probably imagine, very important, but with the way it is right now, I'm not sure if I want it to be published that way. There are still things to fix, parts to add, etc. and with how overworked I am lately I don't know if I will make it for next week's update. I mean, you'll get it eventually, don't worry, but it might be two weeks instead of one week this time. I know it's crappy of me to leave you sitting on a cliffhanger, but as I already said once: I want to give you guys quality rather than quantity! I hope that's okay. ;w;
Forget Me (Not)

Chapter Summary

MUCH SADNESS

Chapter Notes

And here it is, actually almost on time! o.o
Honestly, the brain weasels really did a number on me for this one, partly because I’m nervous and partly because I’m generally unwell. I edited, re-edited and re-re-edited this so many times that I lost count and now here we are. I eventually realised though that this is the way I want it to be written and that it therefore is okay to not fulfill everyone’s expectations. I hope you’ll like this chapter. ;w;

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were a million reasons why Marinette could have broken the kiss and proceeded to stare at him oddly. Maybe he had made a weird noise and she was seconds away from bursting into laughter about it like she sometimes did. Maybe he had unconsciously gone too far and she was looking for the most tactful words to tell him what he had done wrong. From all those ‘maybe’s and ‘what if’s, she picked the absolute worst thing to say.

“Why do you have cat ears?”

Adrien went very still and saw her view drift to the aforementioned cat ears on his head when they flattened in fear.

She saw them. She saw him. She saw…what she shouldn’t be able to see. He had made sure that she wouldn’t—she was wearing the charm Tikki had enchanted to prevent exactly this situation! Why? Why? WHY?!

Why her? Why now? Why everything?

Adrien almost didn't register that he had started shivering and slowly backing away.

My fault. It’s all my fault!

Never before had her gaze inflicted such deep and complete fear in him. He wanted to yell at her not to look at him, but he couldn't bring out a word. All he managed was to stare back at her in utter horror.

This wasn't supposed to happen. This wasn't supposed to be possible. This wasn't…

His eyes fell on an object on Marinette's side of the chaise lounge when she sat up. A very familiar object of absolute doom.

Instinctively his pupils narrowed into angry slits at the sight of it and he swiftly snatched the small
thing up.

The runes were identical to those he had seen all those months ago even though the piece of rowan was different. He should have expected it. Chloé had gone to yet another a revel on Imbolc, just barely two weeks ago. If she had returned from the Samhain revel with an enchanted piece of rowan wood, it should have been obvious that she was likely to do the same thing this time. She must have just waited for the perfect moment to place it in Marinette’s room. How she had done it, he didn't know. It also wasn't important right now.

His hands shook, fear and anger mixing into one frightening emotion that he tried to quell. It didn't work. Instead, panic overwhelmed him once more.

“I…” Adrien said and his voice gave out. He couldn't explain it, didn't want to explain it. Marinette wasn't supposed to know. Seeing her eyes follow the movement of his anxiously lashing tail wasn't a thing that should be. It was too late though. She knew. She knew and she couldn't just un-know… or could she?

Everything in him rebelled as a horrible thought struck him.

No, he couldn't do that! Not to her! Not to his Princess, his love, his everything. He couldn't…

But there was no other way.

“Adrien, what's going on? What is that?”

Her voice was full of confusion with an additional hint of fear. At least he wasn't the only one who was afraid…

Only at her latter question did he realise that he was still glaring at the rowan wand, the root of all his troubles. He threw the offending thing to the ground as if it had stung him.

“Princess…I'm so sorry,” he said and there was a weird, foreign quality to his voice. Foreign in a way that was utterly human and drenched with endless sorrow.

“You can't know about this. About any of this. It's too dangerous,” he said and for some reason it was physically challenging to get the words out, like his throat was refusing to let him speak. Not surprising, since everything in him fought against what he was about to do.

He took her left hand, ignoring the way she stared at his claws, and took the bracelet off. One of the charms, the ladybug one, was just as protective as rowan berries were. As long as she wore it, no fae could charm her.

A sob involuntarily tore itself out of him when he looked into her eyes and found understanding there. His smart and beautiful lady had connected the dots already. He had expected nothing less. Then again, ‘It's too dangerous’ was basically Chat Noir’s catchphrase at this point, so that every idiot who knew that could have guessed his identity correctly. Heck, minus the suit, mask and green sclera he even had all of Chat Noir’s signature features right now!

Adrien had to look away to brace himself for what he was about to do. To do what the fair folk did all the time without a second thought. He wasn't like them though. Not anymore. He hadn't been like that for a very long time now. Maybe not ever, even, when he thought about it. And Marinette wasn't just anyone.

There was no way around it though.
He had to charm her.

To make her forget what she had seen and let things go back to... normal. And he had to hurry too. The more time passed, the more she realised, the harder it would be to make her forget and keep those things forgotten.

Tikki would kill him for this, but that was okay. Marinette's safety was worth everything to him.

Yet... Adrien found himself hesitating. To him, this felt like abuse, no matter how pure his intentions were. If he had to do this to her then he could at least explain himself before he did so. She would forget it of course, but it still felt like the right thing to do. Well, at least as right as anything could be in this situation.

“Adrien—” Marinette started, her voice and expression still full of confusion but now also mixed with immense concern, the previous hint of fear gone.

*My brave Princess.*

She didn't get to finish, though, as Adrien wrapped her in a hug and buried his head into the crook of her neck in a pitiful search for comfort.

“Listen, they will *kill* you or worse if they know you know,” he said and even though his voice was throaty, he managed to get it out without any stammering. He could feel his girlfriend freeze in his arms, fear finally taking hold of her as well. “I told you it's dangerous. I tried to make you understand but you're just so terribly stubborn.” He let out a laugh that quickly turned into another sob. “It's safer for you not to know about any of this,” he continued and his voice took on a weird whiny quality. “I...I'll have to make you forget. It's like nothing of this will have ever happened. It'll be like...like you never saw anything.”

His sobs were trying to take over at this point, making it hard for him to speak. There was also a distressed purr rumbling through him as if he had been mortally wounded.

A soft, tingly sensation on his cheek caught his attention, though he quickly wrote it off as probably a strand of her hair.

“I don't want to,” he sobbed silently.

Suddenly there was the feeling of her fingers in his hair. She petted him softly and soothingly, like she often did when he was upset. He was too distressed to question why.

“I...I really don't understand what's going on,” Marinette said. “But if you're sure that it's safer for me not to know about it...then I trust you, *Chaton.*”

He buried his head deeper into her neck as sorrow threatened to overtake him. He knew she had figured him out, but to hear her use the nickname she only ever used for Chat Noir...it made it more real.

“I'm sorry,” he whimpered. “I'm so, *so* sorry.”

“Shh, it’s okay, Adrien,” she said quietly.

She was comforting him as if *he* was the one who was about to have his memory magically tampered with. Just how could she stay this calm? How could she be this strong?! Then he noticed her tears and they told another story.
“It’s really not okay at all,” he croaked and was instantly reminded of the conversation they had almost a year ago about what happened last year on Valentine’s Day.

Disgust of himself went through him in a shudder when he thought about it. Thinking about it just solidified his decision. Like a coward, he wanted to make her forget about the dots she had connected. Make her forget that the horrible monster back then hadn’t just been her partner, but also her now-boyfriend. He didn’t want to make her live with that gruesome knowledge.

Adrien allowed himself a few more moments in her safe embrace before he backed away once more. The moment he looked into her tear-filled eyes, he wanted to hug her again. To tell her that everything would be alright…but that’d be a lie, and he didn’t want to lie to her. Least of all now.

“Please,” he said and his voice sounded broken even to his ears. “Forgive me.”

It wasn’t much more than a whisper and he closed his eyes right afterwards. More to not fall into temptation and go back into her arms where the world couldn’t hurt him and things would be safe, than for concentration. In fact, there was not much concentration needed. That was the scary part, because charming was easy. It was like second nature to him…or technically, first nature. Just a few words and this nightmare would look like it was over. In reality, it was just beginning.

When he opened his eyes again, he scratched together all the broken bravery that was left in him to look at her. Making someone forget had never been this soul-wrenching before. It felt like he was about to commit a crime.

Adrien took a deep breath, gathered all the small specks of courage left in him and instead of breathing out, started speaking with a voice that was alluring without him trying to, that was convincing without him striving to, that was inhuman without him wanting to.

“Marinette Dupain-Cheng.”

He despised how her name sounded in this voice. Like it had been sullied. What he despised even more though was how her eyes—usually so full of life—took on a glassy quality. He almost stopped right there and then, but he knew it was better to continue. She couldn’t know, no matter what Chloé said. Tikki of all creatures agreed with him to keep her chosen in the dark, and who was he to argue with the goddess of creation?

“You will forget everything that happened after we got out your hair pins. Under no circumstances shall you remember what you saw, nor the things that you learned. You will keep thinking that I’m human and that after getting the hair pins out, we just fell asleep here. It’ll be like this never happened.”

It was probably the hardest thing he had ever done in his entire life, but he managed to keep his voice steady and clear. He just hoped he hadn’t forgotten anything.

“I’ll kiss you awake and you’ll have forgotten all the things I just told you to forget. Now…sleep.”

Marinette’s eyes instantly fell closed and she limply fell forward right into his arms. He hugged her sleeping form close to him, as if to keep her safe this way, as if to make things better.

Nothing would make it better though.

Adrien had done something horrible. Something unforgivable even. He had done the one thing he had sworn never to do: Taking away her will.

And even though she had agreed and wouldn’t remember anything, it didn’t make it any less
horrible.

He was a despicable creature.

“I’m sorry,” he quietly sobbed into her hair even though she couldn’t hear him right now. “I’m so sorry! I didn’t want to do this.”

When something touched him, he raised his head with a start. At first, he had thought that he might have accidentally woken up Marinette, but she was still fast asleep in his arms. His eyes then wandered upwards and met the blue-purplish irises of his certain doom.

“I broke my vow,” he whispered and shrunk back, still not really believing the horror of the situation. Tikki would doubtlessly offer no mercy whatsoever when her fury from their first ever meeting was anything to go by. Back then, he hadn’t even charmed Marinette and she had wanted to banish him to Tír na nÓg. He would never see Marinette and everyone else he loved ever again.

To his distress, Tikki didn’t reply. She just looked at him like she was trying to solve a riddle.

“I… I’m sorry, Tikki. I didn’t know what else to do! S-she found out and—”

Her floating approach silenced him. She would no doubt inflict horrors beyond his imagination on him now. Adrien shut his eyes and hugged Marinette closer, shivering in fearful anticipation of what unknown thing was to befall him.

The goddess, though, only touched his cheek and then withdrew. When nothing seemed to happen after a few moments, he dared to open his eyes again. He hadn’t felt any magic and he was still where he had been before. Tikki was still floating in front of him and now looked at her wet paw.

Why was it wet?

“Cat Sidhe can’t cry,” she eventually said quietly and then looked up at him. “But humans can.”

Well, that was true, but he didn’t see how…

The sensation of something warm and wet rolling down his cheeks made him pause in his thoughts. He touched a shaking hand to his face and then could do nothing but stare at the wetness on it.

This wasn’t possible. He had never cried in his life!

“But I can’t cry. I’m not…”

“A real fae would have been selfish and let her live with the consequences. After all, it would have made a lot of things easier for you if you wouldn’t have to hide half your life from her anymore. A human, though, would have protected his loved one, even at great costs. Such selflessness isn’t something the fae can ever understand,” Tikki said and then floated closer to pet his head. “I honestly would have done this myself if you hadn’t. You’re more human than you give yourself credit for and… much more than I first thought you were. I’m sorry for misjudging you, Adrien. You’re anything but malicious.

“And as for your vow, you promised to not cause my chosen any harm, and I don’t consider this kind of protection as harmful.”

For a short moment, Adrien considered that he had passed out from the shock and was dreaming all of this up. But then a small purring presence pressed itself to his neck. Plagg.
“You did good, kid,” he said. “And while you made your impression of an indoor fountain, I already dispelled the lingering effects of the glamour-breaker. Nasty little stick. Definitely changeling craft.”

Adrien took a shaky breath. Now that the tears had started to flow, they didn’t want to stop, as if they were trying to make up for the sixteen years they have been absent. It was a weird and foreign sensation, but the knowledge that they were a fully human thing grounded and comforted him. Only for a few minutes though.

“The universe is mocking me, isn’t it?” he eventually sobbed, meanwhile not letting go of Marinette’s sleeping form. “I’m not human. What I just did proves that. So…why can I cry? It should be impossible.”

Plagg floated down to his shoulder and started purring again.

“Kid, you of all people should know that the world isn’t just black and white.”

Adrien gave a disbelieving snort. It wasn’t? Well, the Court seemed to be quite certain about that worldview. A world he was part of.

“Plagg is right,” Tikki chimed in and floated closer. “There are opposing forces in the universe, but in-between those forces are grey areas, some wider than others. Halflings aren’t either fae or human, but they’re in between. Where in-between, depends on everyone individually. Most choose to get closer to their fae side, but they’ll never fully achieve it. The same happens when you try to reach out to the human side.” Tikki wiped away a few fresh tears from his face before continuing. “You will never be either one or the other, but always something in-between. What matters is not what you are though, Adrien, but who you are. It’s your decisions that matter most. You decided to become as human as possible and you’ll earn respect from whoever values the traits that come with it.”

Adrien was silent for a moment, thinking that over. “Even you?” He eventually asked silently.

Tikki smiled. “Especially me.”

The smile he returned turned out wobbly and faint, but that was about all he would be able to manage at this moment. He softly stroked Marinette’s hair out of her face and eventually let go of her in favour of laying her down with her head resting on one of the decorative pillows.

“This will have consequences,” Tikki suddenly said gravely and Adrien flinched heavily. Hadn’t she just agreed with his actions and even told him that she would have done the same thing?! Was she about to punish him after all?!

He was about to beg for her forgiveness once more when she turned to him and waved her arms in a soothing motion.

“Adrien, calm down,” she said in a soft voice. “You’re fine, really. I just meant that charming has its limits. The moment Marinette comes into a similar situation, it could trigger her to remember again.”

Adrien paled. He hadn’t known that.

“B-but,” he stammered, not really knowing what he even wanted to say.

“It’s a conundrum, that’s for sure,” Plagg said with a sigh. “Your Princess is a ticking clock now, kid.”
“A…a ticking clock?” Adrien repeated. He knew what those words meant, but he didn’t want to believe them.

“It’s impossible to erase memories. All you can do is block them,” Tikki added and sat down on the back of the chaise lounge. “They’ll stay blocked for now, but we can’t know for how long that will hold. She’ll remember eventually and when that happens, you’ll have to tell her.”

As it turned out, breaking down in tears was easy. So easy, in fact, that it made him wonder why he hadn’t been able to do it these past sixteen years. Stopping the endless flow of sorrow and misery was an entirely other thing though. He thought that he had saved her. That she would remain in blissful ignorance.

Never ever had he wanted to drag her down to his world of horrors. She…she was strong, but he had heard that the ways of the fae were incomprehensible to humans. Would it break her? He couldn’t think about that now, otherwise it would break him.

This wasn’t right. Nothing of this was right. And it was all his fault. He had been a selfish fae once upon a time who had wanted someone to be with so that he wouldn’t be as alone anymore. Even on that fateful Midsummer night he had known that he should have stayed away. He had known that he would bring bad luck and danger to her. He had known and yet…here he was.

“Oh no, I know this face,” Plagg suddenly said. “Stop shouldering the blame. It’s not your fault that the Court is a wicked bunch.”

Adrien shook his head. “If it wouldn’t be for me, we wouldn’t even be in this situation right now. She would be safe and would forever be ignorant towards the fae. Who else could be to blame?”

“Well, there would be Chloé, for one,” Tikki said. “She’s the one who is going to extensive lengths to make Marinette aware of the fair folk. This is in no way your fault and I’m willing to bet that she would have done it even if you weren’t as close to Marinette as you are.”

He wasn’t sure if he should believe that.

“Moreover, Marinette is a Chime’s Child, so eventually it was bound to happen.”

At that, Tikki floated up from her perch and over to Marinette to stroke her hair.

“Chime’s Child?” Adrien asked. He wasn’t familiar with the term.

She nodded. “A child born after a Friday midnight but before dawn on a Saturday. They are blessed with second sight and healing abilities.” The goddess smiled wryly. “In the past, when the Courts were younger than they are today, I had a chosen like that. She was very promising and her healing powers were the most incredible I have seen until that point in time. But she was overeager and held the transformations for too long. When some of my magic lingered inside of her, the fae started to notice her and she, in turn, started to notice them. It seemed harmless at first, since we were in the lands of a Seelie Court, but…something eventually happened.”

Tikki shook her head as if to rid herself of the memory. “I lost her to the fae back then, so I swore to myself to never let something like this happen again.” She sighed. “And Marinette is so much like her. I’m scared of what will happen once she finds out.”

Adrien was stunned. Not only was this the longest conversation he had ever held with Tikki, but she was also offering insights on the so far only briefly mentioned incident where she had lost one of her chosen to the fair folk. Based on that, he could now understand why she had reacted the way she did when they had first met.
“Br—My past chosen didn’t have anyone to protect her from the fae though,” Tikki said and a small smile crawled back on her face as she looked at him. “Marinette has you, and I’ll have to hope that this’ll be enough to make a difference this time.”

“I’m not sure how much I’m really helping,” Adrien said quietly while his eyes fell on Marinette again.

“I swear to the cheese gods, if you start your ‘this is my fault’ tirade again I will turn that bell on your suit into a real one,” Plagg said and only the thought alone made Adrien flinch.

Meanwhile, Tikki floated over to where he was sitting and picked up Marinette’s bracelet from the chaise lounge.

“You are helping, Adrien,” she said as she held it up for him to take. “And when the time comes, you’re the best person to tell her the truth.”

Adrien was silent for some time and just stared at the bracelet in his hand. So many charms, so many spells on them, so many memories. He certainly had built himself a twisted web over these past years and he wasn’t sure how he’d safely get out of it again. The thought alone of telling Marinette the whole truth and let her remember it, spiked fear in him. She hated liars after all and he had done basically nothing else but lie to her ever since their very first meeting—whichever one counted, all of them were riddled with lies.

Another tear ran down his cheek and fell on the heart charm he had gifted her just earlier that day. Was he even worth loving at this point? He very much doubted it. Regardless of how her feelings towards him would turn out though, he’d always be there to protect her. That was the one thing he could do that felt right. Or so he had thought…

Was he protecting her by blocking her memories or had he just been a coward afraid of heartbreak? Maybe a little of both.

It took Adrien some more minutes to regain his composure and make the tears stop flowing. Just to be sure, he threw an even thicker glamour over himself to hide tear tracks and red eyes. There was no way to explain them, especially not since it was Valentine’s Day and he should be the happiest person on earth. Yeah, wasn’t that the real irony of this whole situation? He had been exactly that, but just like every other good thing that had ever happened to him, it had been torn away from him.

Adrien lay down next to Marinette with as much distance as the chaise lounge allowed. Even though he wanted to do nothing more than to cuddle her, it felt strangely wrong at this moment. He didn’t deserve something that nice after what he had just done to her and the thought alone seemed downright criminal. She didn’t remember, but he did and he’d do anything to atone for his sins. It still felt like the biggest betrayal, so that his mere presence felt like a lie. After all, he would have to pretend that everything was fine, that nothing out of the ordinary had happened. He had to pretend to be that cheerful and utterly in love Adrien he had been previously. While he was still very much in love, it now had an awful, bitter taste to it. A small inner voice even told him that he wasn’t any better than all those other fae who manipulated those around them in their favour.

Despite all that, he had to do what would keep her safe. It was time to swallow his misery once more and to do what he always has done around her: play make-belief.

“I promise to always keep you safe,” Adrien whispered and leaned forward to kiss Marinette’s hair. Time for his sleeping beauty to wake up.
No recommendations this week, sorry. I don't really feel up for it. 😑
It's been a rough week so far (had a job interview that went badly, caught a nasty cold that made me lose my voice, fretting over this chapter, etc.) so I'd really appreciate some cheering up right now

anyway, I wish you Americans a happy turkey day!
“You know, if you didn’t want to tag along you could have just said so, Nette.”

Marinette was startled out of her thoughts and blinked at Nino. “What?”

“You were frowning as if someone just murdered one of your plants.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, it doesn’t have anything to do with you. God, I’m so…it’s your birthday and here I am, being gloomy.”

Marinette let out a deep sigh of frustration, hoping it would be enough to disperse the maelstrom of thoughts in her head. It wasn’t. The thoughts persistently stayed where they were.

“Hey, don’t worry about it. Sadly, the awesomeness of my birthday doesn’t keep away bad thoughts. Though that would be pretty neat!”

She smiled. Nino always knew just what to say to cheer her up.

The two of them were on their way to a supermarket to get some last-minute party snacks. While Marinette had provided a cake and some macarons, everyone had for some reason forgotten to get the salty snacks as well. Alya, who had already been at Nino’s, had agreed to watch Noël while
Nino and Marinette were going on a quick shopping run.

“You wanna talk about it?” Nino asked and Marinette bit her lip.

“I’m just…worried, I guess,” she eventually said, contemplating how to exactly express the mess of emotions inside her in words. “Adrien’s been distant since Valentine’s Day and I don’t know why.”

“Distant?” Nino snorted. “He’s practically glued to your side, dude. Did something happen?”

“No, and that’s just it! Adrien and I went to Le Jules Verne, ate there, went to my place and then we just fell asleep for a few hours. He seemed strange afterwards, like something had happened.”

“Maybe you said something in your sleep.”

Marinette shook her head. “I asked about that but apparently I didn’t.”

Technically, she had asked Tikki about that since Adrien had been way too quick to deny. But even her kwami had said that she hadn’t said anything while asleep. It was weird.

“And I don’t mean that he’s physically distant,” she said, because Adrien really wasn’t. He was paranoid to a level where it was almost smothering. “But…emotionally. I don’t know how to describe it. Like…”

She snapped her fingers impatiently while looking for the right words. It wasn’t like Adrien had stopped loving her, that wasn’t it. It was more like he was scared of something and therefore kept himself at a distance.

“Like he’s keeping a secret from you,” Nino finished.

“Yes, exactly!” Marinette exclaimed. “Which, honestly, isn’t something new.”

“But it bothers you.”

She nodded. “Whatever it is, he’s very distressed about it and I just want to help.”

“I feel like we had this conversation already a few months ago,” Nino sighed and Marinette could only bite her lip in shame. She had talked to Nino when things had started to get weird last October and the conclusion had been to not snoop under any circumstances.

“It’s not like I’m digging this time,” Marinette amended. “But I have a right to be worried about my boyfriend, don’t I?”

It sounded probably a tad too defensive, because Nino arched an eyebrow.

“Is there something different this time to how it was last time?”

And that’s where Nino had hit the nail on the head.

“Yeah,” Marinette said silently. “He sometimes looks at me like…like he’s scared of me and I just don’t get how that would have anything to do with ‘family stuff’, you know?”

Those short few looks were always highly distressing, as was the lack of a reply from Adrien when she asked him what was wrong at those times. Sometimes, it looked like he was waiting for something horrible to happen. One time, she had caught him off-guard when he had looked at the pictures of them on her wall with a defeated expression like he had accepted a gruesome fate. It
didn’t make sense.

“Okay, I get how that’d be concerning,” Nino said thoughtfully. “Have you asked him about it?”

Marinette nodded. “Several times, but he keeps saying that everything is fine or he doesn’t reply at all.”

They were both silent for a moment, Nino because he was thinking and Marinette because she was anxiously awaiting his reply.

“You know, if we were talking about anyone else here, I’d say that he’s about to break up with you,”—Marinette paled at that revelation, but Nino was quick to continue and ease her worries —“but that wouldn’t fit Adrien at all. When we hung out last week, the only thing he talked about was you. For hours. I think something might have happened at home that could involve you. Maybe his douchebag of a father told him he has to fake-date a model for publicity or something.”

“No, he would have told me about something like that,” Marinette immediately said.

“Or something else with his dad that he doesn’t want to tell you that could involve you in some other way. You know how he and Félix always keep home-things from us.”

Nino shrugged. Marinette, meanwhile, wasn’t convinced.

“But what would make him look at me like someone is going to die?”

What Nino had said suddenly grabbed onto an especially nasty thought in her head.

“Oh god, what if he thinks that I’m going to break up with him? It would make sense for him not to tell me and of course that would make him distressed. But why would he think that?!”

They had arrived at the store. The myriad of voices and bustling activity made Marinette hesitate to keep the conversation up, but she really wanted answers and apart from Félix and her, Nino was the one who knew Adrien best.

“No way, dude. He doesn’t trust anyone more than you and knows there’s no reason you’d break up with him,” Nino said when they walked towards the snack aisle.

“Maybe…maybe he thinks that there is something about him that would make me break up with him and he’s afraid to tell me about that.”

“Could be. With how much he keeps secret, I honestly wouldn’t be surprised if those secrets turned out to be something nasty. And it would be just like Adrien to be overly afraid about the worst-case scenario. You rubbed off on him.”

Marinette wanted to protest at first, but then had to admit that Nino had a point.

“But if that’s the case, I can’t just tell him that. Or what if we’re wrong and it’s something else completely?!?” Marinette clacked her tongue in frustration. “I just want to fix this.”

“Well, I don’t know what you want to hear from me, Nette. It’s not like I can read Adrien’s mind and he didn’t talk to me about any of this. If he’s worried about something and doesn’t tell you what it is, then I’d say just try to continue like you usually do and wait for him to tell you. After all, you can’t help when you don’t know what would help, so don’t beat yourself up about it,” Nino said while he skimmed the options of crackers.
“But—”

“I know you want to help,” Nino interrupted her. “But you know there are times where you can’t do anything but sit by and wait. This seems to be one of those times. Just be patient. Maybe he’ll tell you eventually and then you can have a long conversation about it. Until then, just try to do what you know makes him happy and don’t stress yourself out about it.”

Marinette nodded mutely and took a bag of chips out of the shelf to throw it in the shopping basket.

“I’m tempted to dig out the crystal ball from your attic and ask it for advice,” she half-joked—she really was that desperate.

“Nah, that thing is defective and you know it. Try the magic 8-ball instead since that is actually going to answer you.”

“You mean that thing that denied that you would get DJ equipment for Christmas and then you got it after all?”

“Hey, all you gotta do is accept the absolute opposite of the answer it gives you,” Nino said with a grin and then looked into the shopping basket. “You think that’s enough?”

Marinette stared at the basket contemplatively and then threw another bag of chips into it.

“Adrien stress-eats and seeing how he’s been lately; he’ll probably get through one bag of chips in minutes.”

“I thought he preferred sweet snacks?”

Marinette shrugged. “He’s been craving salty things recently. No idea why.”

They fell into silence when they went over to the check-out point, but Marinette couldn’t help nervously tapping her foot while they waited in line. She could feel Tikki giving her soothing pats through the purse at her side, but it didn’t help much. Once they got back, Adrien and Félix would probably have arrived already and she couldn’t help but be nervous. Would today go flawlessly or would she receive one of those looks from her boyfriend again?

Nino—bless him—just nudged her encouragingly but didn’t say anything until they left the supermarket again.

“Oh, enough worrying now,” he said, snapping Marinette out of her thoughts. “It’s my birthday and we’re going to have an awesome party. I know it’s a lot to ask but maybe you could pretend that all of those issues don’t exist for a few hours and enjoy yourself? And I’ll tell Adrien that too if he starts to be gloomy.”

Marinette gave a small grin. “You’re right,” she said and to her surprise she even meant it. Perhaps she should just forget her worries for a few hours and relax a little. God knows there was plenty of time for worrying afterwards.

“Maybe you should think of a way to talk Alya out of making us all play spin the bottle again,” she said to change the topic, which drew a laugh out of Nino.

“Yeah, as if anyone could do that,” he said, which resulted in them recounting all the ridiculous things Alya had gotten them into since they knew her. It worked on distracting Marinette from her original line of thought for the rest of the way back and the party did the rest. They all had fun, did more ridiculous things to tell anecdotes about in the future and ended up going home with smiles
on their faces.

Only when she lay in bed that night did she remember what Nino and she had talked about earlier. The smile left her face. Patience was key, but could she be that patient?

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It had taken a lot of convincing to get Adrien to climb up to her bed and take a nap, and Marinette couldn’t help but throw the occasional worried glance upwards. He had been tired lately, she saw it in his eyes and sluggish movements, but he had still insisted on staying to help her with homework that he had already finished. Ten minutes of arguing and bribing him with cake had eventually been persuasion enough to use the time in which she’d do her homework to catch up on some of his lost sleep.

She was worried about him. When asked, he said that he just didn’t sleep well or that Félix woke him up in the middle of the night. It made it hard for her to concentrate on her reading assignment when she knew that Adrien might be suffering from nightmares.

A sleepy noise of distress from her loft bed was all the incentive she needed to put the book down and climb up the stairs. What she saw almost broke her heart. Adrien was still asleep, but he was crying.

Speaking of nightmares…

She didn’t hesitate to gently shake him awake though he still startled and started breathing heavily. Adrien looked around in a panic, taking in his surroundings and then his eyes fell on her. Before she knew it, she was pulled down to the bed and wrapped in a tight hug. At least now she didn’t need to ask about the nature of the nightmare anymore.

“Shh, it’s okay. We’re safe,” she said quietly and petted his hair, knowing it would calm him down.

He stayed silent for a concerning amount of time until he softened the hug and let his head fall back on her pillow. She kept lying on his chest with her hands in his hair.

“Nightmare?” she eventually asked carefully.

He nodded.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

He nodded again, but then shook his head.

“Just scary nonsense,” he said in a weak voice.

Whatever it was, he didn’t want to talk about it and that was…fine. Honestly, it was the norm by now. She was curious, but she also knew that this wasn’t the kind of situation where prodding was appropriate. Like so often as of lately, patience was the key.

“Do you want to try and sleep again?” she therefore asked.

Adrien shook his head. “Can you stay?”

“Of course,” she said softly and kissed the back of his hand that had absentmindedly been playing with her hair.
Marinette didn’t move from her position and instead laid her head down to listen to his heartbeat. It was faster than it should be, but he was still slowly calming down.

They spent a few minutes like that in comfortable silence while she kept listening to the calming *ba-dum ba-dum* of his heart. She almost fell asleep herself, but then Adrien started speaking again.

“I love you,” he said quietly and kissed her forehead.

She smiled and leaned forward to give him a soft peck on the lips, knowing that anything further would be out of the question until he initiated it. Just another small thing that counted to the ‘emotionally distant’ problem but she would never force anything on him that he was uncomfortable with.

“I love you too,” she said and was shocked to see his eyes shimmering with tears. Apart from when she had woken him up earlier, she wasn’t sure if she had ever seen him cry. Something in her told her she had, but she couldn’t recall when that had been.

“I’m sorry that I’m such a disaster.”

“Oh no, you’re not going there. No one is allowed to say that about my boyfriend and *mean* it, not even you,” she said, a half-teasing smile on her lips.

“But—”

“Nope, no self-deprecating allowed here. This is a safe place of love and affection!”

Adrien gave her a weak smile, which made her beam in return and give that smile a short kiss.

“I love you, disaster and all,” she said.

His smile was still weak and then it died as he turned his eyes to her ceiling.

“Can I rant for a little?”

“Sure,” she said, her tone soft and serious once more.

Adrien opened his mouth a couple of times and closed it again as he contemplated his words. He did that a lot lately.

“It’s just not fair that the things are the way they are. I don’t… I don’t want this life. I think I never wanted it. Why couldn’t I just be born in a normal family with normal problems and live a *normal* life where I don’t have a spotlight on me?” A tear ran down the side of his face. “I just want a *safe* life where I don’t have to worry about putting everyone in danger all the time.”

Was that it? Had this been the reason he had been losing sleep and worrying so much over the past months? He was worried that his reputation and fame could put people around him in danger. A founded worry, she realised.

Marinette’s first instinct was to tell him not to worry, but that would be cruel and inappropriate. What else could she say though? This was something she couldn’t just fix with a Miraculous Cure. Adrien would probably *always* be haunted by his upbringing, even if he would decide to stop modelling in the future. This wasn’t something she could help with.

“I’m here,” she eventually said, not knowing if it would be much comfort at all. “And I won’t leave, okay?”
Adrien hugged her tightly again and didn’t say anything. He just cried.

Marinette pushed open the door to the café and deposited her umbrella in the stand next to it. Usually she would have used a rainy day like this to brainstorm ideas for designs or to study ahead a little in case Akumas would cut more into her schedule than she currently predicted. However, neither of those things were as important as the reason why she was at this random café in the seventh Arrondissement. She looked around for a bit before her eyes settled on the table in the corner.

As she walked over, she noticed a strand of hair had come loose from her braid and she tucked it behind her ear. Lately, she just didn’t feel like her pigtails were an appropriate look. That, and her hair was growing longer and having it weigh down on both sides of her skull was easily giving her headaches. She was glad Tikki automatically styled it every time she became Ladybug, so she didn’t have to lose time with rearranging her hair before a transformation. She made a mental note to ask her kwami how that worked later.

“Sorry I’m late. Must’ve been the weather,” she said as she took off her coat and hung it over the back of the chair before sitting down.

“It’s alright,” Félix said, a half-empty cup of coffee already in front of him. “So, what is this about? You said you wanted to talk.”

Marinette nodded and bit her lip. Talking to Félix about Adrien would be risky since he wouldn’t give her any information Adrien himself wouldn’t give her. But she still held out hope that she’d walk away knowing a little more than she did right now.

“I already talked to Nino about this but I want to get a second opinion on it,” she said and took a deep breath. “It’s about Adrien.”

Félix sighed. “I was afraid you’d say that.”

When a waiter came over, Marinette ordered a hot chocolate. She looked back at Félix afterwards and he motioned for her to continue.

“He’s been tired and sad and emotionally distant lately. I understand that he doesn’t want to talk about whatever is going on and I’m really trying not to push it, but I just feel so helpless. Obviously, something is wrong and I want to be there for him, but I just don’t know how if I don’t know what it is. So, I gotta ask: is it me?”

Félix wore a thoughtful expression while regarding her. She could pretty much see the gears running in his head while he contemplated how much he should tell her.

“I can’t say anything specific, but it’s several things at once rather than just one sole reason. Every single one of those problems ties together, yes, but I wouldn’t go as far as to say that someone specific is to blame for them,” Félix eventually said and took a sip of his coffee.

“So, you’re saying that part of it is my fault?”

She felt horrible. It wasn’t just one thing, but several and she hadn’t noticed either of those things while caught up in thinking that it was all about her. How self-centred could she be?!

“No, you’re not to blame for any of it. However, you are included in the list of worries.”
“But what can I do, Félix? There must be something!”

“Trust me, if there was a way to resolve this without risking…casualties, then we’d have done it years ago already. Right now, we just have to accept that we’re naïve kids with only a fraction of an idea of what is going on out there. Mistakes will be made, feelings will be hurt and losses are to be had. Just because we want things to go right doesn’t mean that they will.”

Marinette was struck silent. She still had no idea what exactly it was that had Adrien and Félix so immensely worried, but it sounded like it was more than just their celebrity status. Maybe Félix was right about them just being naïve kids.

With all the time she spent as a superheroine that could literally rebuild destroyed buildings and even the Eiffel Tower, she sometimes forgot that not everything was fixable. There wasn’t a Lucky Charm that could help her figure out the best way to victory for these kinds of problems. Perhaps there wasn’t even a victory in sight. Accepting that, after not losing to life-threatening dangers ever, was frustrating and it made her feel powerless.

She thanked the waiter when her hot chocolate was placed in front of her and took a sip. The warmth was heavenly after walking through the cold April rain for half an hour.

“You’re right,” she said silently and mindlessly stirred her drink with a spoon. “But…but what if one of those stupid decisions is really stupid?”

“Elaborate please.”

Marinette bit her lip and kept staring at the hot chocolate. “Adrien has been very evasive lately and I’ve thought about why he would be and Nino made a comment and…well, I guess my mind spiralled a little. The thing is…does he think I’m gonna break up with him?”

She couldn’t help the tears that sprung to her eyes. Because, what if Félix would say yes? Or if he would say nothing and just look at her in pity? That could as well be a ‘yes’. She wouldn’t be able to bear the thought that Adrien wouldn’t want to be her boyfriend anymore. They might stay friends, but it would hurt like nothing had ever hurt her before.

“No.”

Marinette raised her head. Félix looked at her as if she had lost her mind. Never before had that expression been such a relief to her. She wiped away a stray tear that had escaped her eye after all and smiled.

“Good. That’s good,” she said and picked up her hot chocolate again to get rid of the raspiness her voice had involuntarily taken on.

“How did you…gods, Marinette, sometimes you draw even worse conclusions than Adrien does,” Félix said, and she almost had to laugh with how bewildered he still looked.

Now that her doubts had been lifted and her world was almost safe and sound again, it was starting to be funny. But then she came crashing down to reality once more when she remembered that just because that wasn’t true, the other troubles weren’t just going to go away. There was still something worrying Adrien and Félix enough to make them lose sleep. It was very clear at this point that she wasn’t going to figure out what exactly that thing was from either of them and they also wouldn’t tell her how she could help, but maybe she could find out something else anyway.

“Please don’t tell him I asked about that. I wanted to ask him, but I was afraid that if I was wrong then it would have stressed him out even more. And he’s already worried enough as it is.”
“You’re right with that, so I promise to not bring it up. Though I’ve got to ask: How did you come to that conclusion?”

Marinette thought about how to put her observations into words without thoroughly embarrassing herself in the process. Then again, this was Félix. He wouldn’t judge her…probably. No, he would most definitely judge her, though he’d do so silently.

“Like I said, Adrien has been evasive lately. For example, he has been avoiding my room, always finding a reason not to go up there. I don’t know why. And the few times he has been up in my room since Valentine’s Day we’ve just been sitting at my desk to do homework. Sometimes I even manage to convince him to take a nap, though that worked only twice so far.” Marinette blushed because now came the embarrassing part. “And he…well…he kisses me differently than before.”

Félix raised an eyebrow.

“Let’s not go into detail about that and just say that he’s…holding back, okay?” She quickly said to spare both of them some awkwardness. The last thing she wanted to do was to complain about the lack of hickeys to Félix of all people. He would never let her live it down. That didn’t prevent the heat from rising to her cheeks though, and it definitely wasn’t the hot chocolate that warmed her this time.

“It just looked to me like he was purposefully avoiding the romantic part of our relationship and I thought he was preparing himself for a worst-case scenario,” she clarified.

“Well, I can certainly see how it would look like that to you,” Félix said. “I’m sorry that I can’t tell you the reason for those things, but Adrien will tell you eventually. It’s a very sore topic for him though, so please don’t bring it up before he does.”

Marinette smiled. Finally, a confirmation that she wouldn’t be kept in the dark forever.

“I’ll wait then. No matter how long it takes.”

“If you’re unlucky, it will be soon,” Félix muttered.

Chapter End Notes

Recommendation Of The Week

Brave the Waters by Lady_Bryght
The rules are simple: obey, and keep the secret. After 100 years of service, each siren is given a second chance at a human life. Marinette has done her part and her time is almost up, but a green-eyed boy might convince her to risk everything.

This is one of the most underrated fanfictions I have ever come across! I always make a giddy happy dance whenever it updates and Bryght's writing is a gift! Please read it! It's based on a very unique take on siren mythology and while I don't know the work it's based on, I can say with 100% certainty that what has been written here already is absolutely AMAZING! 😊😊😊
Next up on Spellbound: Don't jinx fate when you're a Cat Sidhe.
Ventures and Misadventures

Chapter Summary

worry is a wicked weakness

Chapter Notes

Happy Midwinter! ❄️...I think? This year's Midwinter is apparently on the 22nd at 5am in my time zone and I'm still a little thrown off by it, but it's 2017 in Spellbound right now and there Midwinter is on the 21st so we're going to ignore it now! And in case I confused anyone here, it's the 28th of April 2017 in Spellbound right now. Nowhere close to December, but very close to Beltane (May 1st). c:<
I originally wanted to name this chapter "Everlasting Nightmare" but then decided that it didn't fit that well after all. Might make this the title of a future chapter though. We'll see. c:
Oh, and if I don't manage to upload the next chapter before Christmas, I wish everyone who celebrates it a Merry Christmas! ❤️
not gonna wish you a happy new year yet, because you'll definitely get the next two chapters before the year ends! ;D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With inquietude as the norm for months now, it was surreal how idyllic the scene was. Sunshine, cherry blossoms, picnics and buzzing bees in the air. Then again, no one who didn't know would suspect anything apprehensive about a Friday—the day of the week where fae magic was the strongest. To make things worse, Beltane was only in two days and the universe was already rehearsing for its main concert of temptations and doom. To hold a picnic in these perilous times was lunacy in Félix’s humble opinion, which made it unsurprising that the idea for it had neither been his nor Adrien’s. Marinette had originally meant it as a date for herself and Adrien, but his brother had understandably panicked. Though instead of cancelling the whole thing, he had invited everyone else. Everyone being Félix, Nino and Alya.

At this point, it had been more than two months since the disastrous Valentine’s Day. Details that Adrien hadn’t divulged to Félix himself had been supplied by Plagg, so he was in the full picture of what had transpired. While he hadn’t been there, it had still been quite a shock to hear about it and the entire occurrence was way too close to a reveal scenario than Félix liked to admit.

His resulting restlessness stood in stark contrast to what was expected from him on this picnic. Instead of enjoying sandwiches and cake like everyone else did, Félix kept a sharp look out for trouble. With the situation getting worse by the day, especially right now, someone had to. Chloé had become such an increasingly persistent problem that it was likely for her to show up randomly and try to doom them. That he felt watched further supported that theory, though he couldn’t be sure who exactly it was. Truth be told, he wasn’t even sure if this mysterious watcher was fae or not, where exactly they were or if they had an ill intent. Félix felt personally offended by all of that.

It was distressing, to say the least, to have his senses fail him on a day where he should arguably be
better at perceiving such things. Then again, if the mysterious watcher was a fae, then the same thing applied to them. Magic was offered to them for free use by the universe and it just so happened that it was more than usual these days. While that made him more capable at finding people, other fae could also hide from him more easily. A quite annoying circumstance that put him at a stalemate.

At least he didn’t have to bother with answering suspicious questioning from the others, since keeping a look out for paparazzi was an easily accepted excuse. A small blessing, since he was sick of questions. Especially from Alya. Just why did humans have to be so persistently curious? Why couldn’t they let things rest?

Apparently, his wannabe-reporter friend didn’t know where to draw the line as soon as Marinette was involved. Alya’s resurfaced mentality of ‘screw the risks and any possible consequences’ was highly infuriating and he therefore had the work cut out for him. He could partially understand her line of thinking since, after all, she thought that the biggest threat in their situation was their father. A not completely ludicrous conclusion. Unfortunately, if Alya was always ready for one thing, then it was for punching Gabriel Agreste in the face.

An endeavour that had almost been crowned with success the previous week when Félix had let her into the mansion. They were about to go on another Ladyblog-related excursion and he hadn’t seen any sense in making her wait outside the house while he had made the very short trip to get his bag. Letting Alya wait in the entrance hall had included a low factor of risks in his head. What he had not accounted for was for his father to step out of his office in precisely the short span of minutes in which his friend was present. Needless to say, Félix had gotten the shock of the day when he had gotten out of his room. Some level difficulty had been involved in restraining Alya from committing to physical assault.

A small fleeting smile appeared on his face when he thought about it. It would no doubt have been a quite satisfying spectacle to watch, but he couldn’t have his father press charges against Alya. The less troubles piled up on his already large heap of emergencies, the better.

“Don’t you think you’re being a little too paranoid, dude? It’s not like someone is going to jump out of the bushes with a knife,” Nino said.

“Oh, I wouldn’t be so sure about that.

“One never knows,” Félix replied before going back to trying to pinpoint the spy.

“You’d be surprised by the crazy things that have already happened to us in public,” Adrien said behind him, probably trying to deviate the attention from Félix’s unusual behaviour. “Like, one time someone tried to climb into our car with us and our bodyguard had to get out and drag them away.”

“The woes of a top model,” Alya joked.

“Oh, there are also stories from before I started modelling. Like, when Fé and I were eight, we went shopping with mum and someone tried to kidnap us. Mum went absolutely ballistic on the guy.”

What Adrien meant was that their mother had cursed the wanna-be kidnapper to the netherworld and back. Not literally. He probably still led a very unfortunate existence though.

“Wow, that’s intense,” Nino said.
Félix only listened with one ear as he concentrated most of his senses on their surroundings. Whoever their watcher was, they needed to be close, as the trees and bushes otherwise obscured the view of their group. He tasted the sickeningly sweet magic in the air and ignored its silent urging for him to not be out during the daytime. Wasn’t the magic in one direction thinner than in the others? A sign that it was being pulled towards someone who used it. Definitely north of them, over by the trees where hiding was easy.

*Almost got you.*

He was sure to have seen a brief shimmer of black hair when his concentration was broken once more. This time, by a soft touch on his arm.

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

Marinette had separated herself from the others and was now sitting next to him, looking worried.

“It’s nothing. Just…a bad feeling, that’s all,” Félix said truthfully.

She nodded and looked over to Adrien who, despite telling yet another story of persistent fans, was throwing glances her way every few seconds. His brother honestly couldn’t be more obvious about worrying if he tried. She was sitting two metres away from him for Danu’s sake!

“He still hasn’t told me,” she said so quietly that Nino and Alya didn’t hear, yet not quiet enough to escape a cat’s range of hearing.

Félix nodded, unsurprised by that bit of information. “I know. Don’t be too eager though, since what you’re looking for is rather unpleasant.”

Marinette let out a frustrated snort.

“It’s frustrating,” Félix agreed with her non-verbal statement. “All we can do is hope that things will eventually become easier and not completely fall apart.”

“Fall apart?” She asked.

Had that been too much? At least it was vague enough to not lead her closer to the truth.

“It’s a precarious situation, that’s all I’m going to say.”

Judging by the badly concealed glare Adrien was throwing him, he had already said more than enough anyway.

The picnic continued in a somewhat tense fashion from that point onward, or at least that was how Félix perceived it. He didn’t catch sight of the mysterious watcher again.

Every fae had their own way to deal with liminality. Most embraced it, some went into *sídhes* to escape it and others just locked themselves in a warded place. To avoid the pull, distraction was key when there was no anchor, but it was also a question of being comfortable in one’s own skin. For Félix that meant taking on a feline form and reading a book. He was minding entirely his own business, curled up on the middle of the sofa with his tail giving the occasional intrigued lash as he was reading yet another magic book and wordlessly mouthed its spells. Therefore, the attack from above came out of nowhere.
He hissed furiously when Adrien bit him in the neck—not enough to draw blood, but enough for it to hurt. Before he even knew it, claws were scratching, fur was flying and both of them were hissing and yowling angrily while rolling around on the ground.

“What the everloving hell has gotten into you, kid?!”

Plagg’s sudden exclamation made Adrien pause for a fraction of a moment, so Félix pushed him off him with his hind paws and scurried away with bristled fur and flattened ears.

Adrien’s posture was still aggressive—dilated pupils, a thrashing tail, flattened ears, arched back, fur standing erect—when he got back up to his paws.

“You almost said too much to her!” he hissed.

It took a moment for Félix to put the words into context.

“I was being careful,” he amended and purposefully cowered down into a non-threatening posture.

His brother wasn’t so easily pacified. When he attacked this time, Félix was ready to dodge. However, what Adrien lacked in magical abilities, he very much made up for in physical capability. He bit and scratched and hissed, angry out of his mind with some underlying fear. The more Félix tried to dodge and escape, the more aggressive Adrien became. There was no escape from the enraged Cat Sidhe, it seemed.

At least not until they were both thrown to opposite sides of the room by an invisible force.

“You are wound up more tightly than a spring, kid,” Plagg said to Adrien like a scolding parent. His brother actually growled at the kwami for the comment. “Don’t you dare come at me with an attitude now! Being scared is no reason to attack your brother.”

Then Plagg turned around and looked at Félix who had been busy licking his wounds. Literally. “And you, kitten, really have to get your head out of your books and stop driving yourself crazy with paranoia. Catastrophe will strike eventually, and I’ll help you when the time comes.”

The god rubbed his temples. “I didn’t sign up for parenting you two, yet here we are.” He sighed. “You both need a time out, and not figuratively. Go outside and be fae or whatever. Get the overflowing energy and emotions out of your systems. Cool your heads.” Plagg then fixed both of them with a glare. “And don’t you dare fight again! The last thing we need right now is to fight each other.”

Adrien’s posture had shifted from aggressive to defiant to submissive and guilty during the course of the lecture. He now lay flat on the ground with his tail anxiously wrapped around his body.

Félix, meanwhile, stood up and shook himself, dislodging some further pieces of loose fur. There was no sense in arguing with a god and even though Beltane was close, it wasn’t quite that bad yet. They’d be able to resist the calls for a brisk half hour walk.

“It does seem like an adequate idea,” Félix agreed while he stretched.

“What about Beltane then?” Adrien asked, his voice still provocative, but now noticeably less than before.

“We’ll manage,” Félix said with an irritated flick of his tail. “Now come on before it gets too late.”

His brother hesitated for a moment, looked at Plagg who had already gone back to his cheese, and
The air outside was neither chilly nor warm. As usual for late April, the weather did whatever it wanted and they were lucky to be graced with no rain for this night and not the worst of temperatures.

When Félix walked along the mansion’s wall, he stopped for a moment to take a deep breath. The flowers from down in their garden and the white-blooming rowan tree carried over their floral scents in a breeze and he instantly felt more at peace. He liked spring. There was no telling if that was a personal trait or if it was just his fae nature guiding his preferences. Either way, everything that managed to calm him down but not make him fall into Faerie was welcome.

Adrien didn’t seem to share the sentiment.

“Let’s get out of here before this becomes too overwhelming,” he said as he walked past Félix, his posture tense and fearful.

On the rooftops it wasn’t much better, as scents and petals were carried over in the breeze. Some were even lightly glowing, having been enchanted by some fae to be even more beautiful. Félix didn’t mind the eeriness, but he could see how Adrien was getting progressively more nervous.

“Relax. Nothing bad will happen.”

For some reason, that made Adrien turn around with a lowered tail and flattened ears.

“Don’t. Jinx. It!”

“I wasn’t talking about…nevermind,” Félix said with a sigh and shook his head.

It would probably be best to not say anything and just hope that the brisk walk would actually help Adrien instead of making him even more restless. The two of them fell into silence for a few blocks. A not entirely comfortable silence, Félix thought, but he wasn’t about to break it either. He wasn’t sure how many minutes passed—ten maybe—but eventually his brother spoke up again.

“Sorry about earlier,” Adrien admitted. “I overreacted.”

“Happens to the best of us,” Félix replied, fully sympathising. After all, both of them were running themselves ragged on nerves lately.

Adrien scoffed. “Yeah, right. As if we’re anything good.”

Félix sent him an insulted glare. “Hey, talk for yourself, will you?”

“Sorry, I just…I’ve been thinking lately. What if everyone’s right and we really are bad luck? Sure looks like it right now…”

“Don’t think like that.”

“Easier said than done when everything goes wrong.”

“Not everything is going wrong.”

Adrien swatted at him and hissed. “Don’t. Jinx. It! You can jinx anything else but not this!”
Félix guiltily flattened his ears. If Adrien hadn’t said anything, he wouldn’t even have noticed. “Guess you’re not the only one who has become too human lately.”

“Not human enough,” Adrien muttered quietly, though there was no telling if he meant himself or Félix.

An uncomfortable silence befell them again. Once more, Félix didn’t feel compelled to break it and therefore just silently trudged on. It was better like this anyway. The more cat-like they acted, the less likely it was for a human to catch them doing something way too…well…human—like talking for example.

After a few more minutes, Félix noticed that Adrien wasn’t following him anymore. He stopped and turned around to see his brother pausing on the other end of the roof they stood on, one paw still in the air as if he had been frozen mid-step. By the way his eyes became a little glassy, Félix could tell that it was the songs of Faerie he heard. With a sigh he trotted back and nudged him to snap him out of it.

“I know that song,” Adrien said quietly and tilted his head with closed eyes and a thoughtful expression on his face.

Félix didn’t care and insistently nudged him again.

“It kinda sounds like…Shelter, doesn’t it? You know, that AMV with the bittersweet story, remember?” His speech was slow, quiet and dreamlike, sounding like he was in a trance.

Félix sighed deeply. The universe seemed to be testing his patience tonight. “How could I possibly forget?” he grumbled. “You listened to that song for weeks on end after it came out. No wonder the songs sound similar to you if you still like it that much.”

His brother smiled somewhat sheepishly. “Yeah, I…the personal part of the temptations slipped my mind, I guess.”

Félix decided to just shake his head in exasperation. If he didn't know better, he'd say that his brother was suffering from some sort of early dementia lately with the way certain fae things just inconveniently slipped his mind. But that wasn't it. Adrien was just blessed with the ability to be able to ignore the otherness. How he did it, Félix had no idea, but he highly suspected that his brother’s efforts of being human played a part in it. Perhaps it therefore was something he himself would never be able to do. Eating a soul had closed that path for him. Just another regret to put on his long list.

“Let’s stop talking,” Félix said. “The last thing we need is for people to hear us.”

“I don’t know if you noticed, but people usually don’t make a habit of walking on rooftops around eleven at night.”

“What happened to mother’s mantra of ‘cats don’t make human noises’?”

“You started talking!”

“Actually, you did. But that isn’t of much consequence as long as—”

Félix was suddenly tackled by Adrien who let out a hiss that suspiciously sounded like ‘shh’. Not a moment too late because only a few seconds later, there was the sound of feet touching down on the roof.
Jinxed, indeed, Félix thought and suddenly had the strong urge to tell Adrien ‘I told you so.’

Unfortunately, tangled up from the tackle as the two of them were, neither Adrien nor him were swift enough to dodge when she, blind as she was without night vision, headed straight towards them.

“Ack!” she exclaimed as she tripped over them and started flailing wildly to regain her balance.

Félix, meanwhile, let out an offended hiss, which earned him a paw to the face from his brother. He growled. Ladybug—and thus Adrien’s girlfriend and Félix’s best friend—or not, he was very much allowed to be offended by bodily harm!

Only then did the superheroine turn around to inspect what she had tripped over. Félix untangled himself from Adrien and let out another demonstrative hiss. Just a second later did it occur to him that it might have been smarter to just ignore her and run away. Out of sight, out of mind, after all.

Well, too late now.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Ladybug said as if she was aware that she was talking to two sentient beings instead of the regular cats she most likely thought they were.

Adrien let out a happy chirp and now it was Félix who gave him a paw to the face. The stupid liminality was apparently getting to his brother much more than it did to him. It caused him to act like a lovesick kitten and they couldn't have that. Not while the folk could be watching.

As if to confirm his greatest fears, a childish giggle sounded from nearby. A giggle Ladybug did not turn to and thus didn't hear. Félix turned around to the fae that sat on a chimney and swung her legs back and forth with a shark-toothed grin on her childlike face. She watched the scene with immense interest and an even wider grin when she noticed that she had caught his attention.

It was probably a spriggan who was out to cause small mischief by stealing butter or tripping an unfortunate passerby. Perhaps she was also standing guard for a gathering nearby and had gotten interested in Ladybug’s—or rather Danu’s—presence in the general area.

To find one on a rooftop, this close to Beltane most of all, therefore didn't come as much of a surprise. It didn't make it any less of a disaster though.

In Félix’s moment of inattentiveness, Adrien had gotten up and approached Ladybug. He only noticed it once he turned around and his brother was winding himself around her legs with a purr.

He growled in a clear warning, hoping it would snap those two dorks out of their bonding moment, or whatever else it was. Ladybug either didn't hear though, or she ignored him as she instead crouched down to pet Adrien. His brother, infuriatingly, didn't react either. It was like someone had given him catnip, which, when it came to Faerie’s songs, wasn't the most unfitting of comparisons.

“You don't happen to be my kitty, do you?” Ladybug asked and Adrien gave another happy chirp and a meow.

Félix had enough. He jumped forward and bit down hard on Adrien's tail, making his brother whirl around with a pained hiss. He didn't let go though and instead pulled, hoping Adrien would get the now much more obvious hint and get away before even more incriminating details would slip from her oblivious lips.

Ladybug, who had pulled her hand back at the hiss, watched the scene in front of her with
confusion.

Don’t speak. Don’t say more. Just go away, Félix begged internally.

The spriggan laughed, seemingly amused by what she was seeing. “Silly kitty,” she said with a voice that sounded like that of a child but held an eerie ancientness to it. Félix also didn’t know which of them the comment was referring to. To the fae, it must have no doubt sounded like Danu was trying to claim Adrien as hers, so the comment could very much be meant for him.

At least now Adrien seemed to become aware of the fae’s presence. His fur stood up in what was way too obviously fear. How would the spriggan interpret it? Hopefully not in the right way…

“You really do look like my kitty,” Ladybug said thoughtfully. She had not moved from her crouched position and watched the two of them, most especially Adrien, with calculating eyes. “You even have a white spot on the chest,” she continued.

Adrien’s fur bristled even more in response. There was little left until he’d show even more obvious signs of fear, so Félix swatted at him with a paw as a sign to quit it.

“Then again, if it’s even you, it’s been almost two years since you last visited my balcony. You probably don’t remember me.”

When the spriggan laughed this time, it sounded like twisted childish delight. “Danu has a balcony!” She exclaimed, as if it would be the funniest thing in the world. Though from one moment to the next, her lips twisted from an innocent smile into a downright nasty grin. “And the Cat Sidhe knows where.”

Rotten-mouthed, wicked beast!

Adrien audibly gulped and started shaking.

“Oh, I wonder,” the spriggan purred slipping into the eerie fae twang. "Does the Court know?"

The lack of a reply from the two of them was answer enough. She fell into hysterical laughter.

“Delicious!” she exclaimed. “Halfling kittens keeping secrets. Now, we can’t have that, can we?”

Ladybug sighed and got up from her crouch once more, still oblivious to the enormous danger she was suddenly in. “See you, kitty,” she said, probably to Adrien, and threw out her yo-yo.

“Hmm, I heard you two have been mingling with the mortals lately,” the spriggan said at the same time and purposefully looked in the direction Ladybug disappeared into. “Surely this is a coincidence?”

By the way she grinned and licked her lips, she knew that it indeed wasn’t.

Félix didn’t know how much worse things could get after this. A fae had figured out Ladybug’s identity and if they wouldn’t do anything, then soon the entire Court would know. He had to do something!

The moment Adrien took off into the direction Ladybug was going, Félix jumped at the spriggan with bared fangs and sharp claws. The fae dodged with a giggle, but didn't account for his tail that could still reach her. Just like all the times he had done it before, one touch was enough. The only difference was that this was a fae and not a human.
“You dare to curse me?!” The spriggan screeched and suddenly didn’t sound like a child at all anymore. Instead, her voice was shrill like that of an old hag.

From his perch on the top of a chimney, Félix glared murderously at her. It seemed like she had momentarily forgotten why the Court usually avoided Cat Sidhe, even halflings like them. Well, lucky him, he guessed. Cursing an Unseelie with bad luck, while the universe already inflicted misfortune upon them, would turn out so much worse than for a human. Sadly, it wouldn’t be enough for her to drop dead on the spot and erase their problem.

“You won’t say a word,” Félix hissed. It was worth a try.

The spriggan broke out into laughter once more. “Oh, by Danu! You truly believe that, don’t you? A droll little halfling and keeping me silent?” More hysterical laughter tore out of her.

He growled and hoped it sounded dangerous.

“You can surely try, little cat. We shall see if the magic will be in your favour,” the spriggan said with a much too wide grin and then unfurled black-feathered wings Félix was only noticing now. He leapt after her but it was no use. He couldn’t fly and chasing her by running over the rooftops was a lost cause.

“I’m a contemptible creature!”

Félix looked from his lamenting brother over to Plagg before jumping down from where he had perched on the window sill.

“How long has this been going on?” He silently asked the kwami while letting Adrien be for now. A worked-up Adrien could very quickly turn into an aggressive Adrien and Félix didn’t want to risk a repeat of earlier.


“No kidding. Did he tell you what happened?”

“Jumbled bits and pieces. Something about a fae and Ladybug.”

Félix nodded. That sounded about right.

At the latter word, Adrien’s ears perked up and he swivelled around to them…tears in his eyes. It was a mildly distressing sight for Félix, like something unnatural. It was odd how human Adrien had become in the past years but that he still was the much more emotional one out of the two of them—a trait arguably belonging to a fae nature.

“Fé…do I have to tell her?”

The question was more shocking than it should have been at this point. They had both known for a long time that this moment would eventually come, but it had still blindsided them. Félix looked at Plagg who gave a grim nod, having seemingly already thoroughly contemplated what Félix and Adrien were still struggling with.

He didn’t want to reply. Saying ‘yes’ would make it real. Still, he found himself nod, which made the situation neither less scary nor less existent.
Recommandation Of The Week

The Devil and the Cat by Djaeka
Deciding her friend needs a new pet, Alya drags Marinette to an animal shelter. Marinette opposes the idea until a certain black cat worms his way into her heart. When she accepts Chat into her life, Marinette finally begins to overcome the many difficulties in her life. And all signs point to the new addition to her home being responsible. But there's no such thing as magical cats, is there?

Cat!Adrien, magic, slice of life, mysteries and a refreshing new AU that just makes you want to buy a cat if you don't have one already! A perfect fanfiction for sitting down on a quiet afternoon with a hot beverage.

Next up on Spellbound: Marinette is trying to cope with two messes at once.
Nothing Personal

Chapter Summary

one mess, two messes, ...

Chapter Notes

MERRY CHRISTMAS!!! ❤️

I hope you guys are having a wonderful holiday right now, and if you don't celebrate it, that you're having a great regular time! c:
My upload schedule has been useless ever since December started, so I'm not trying to let it make sense now of all times. In a utopian world, this chapter would have been out last Thursday and tomorrow chapter 60 would have come out. Alas, the world is not perfect and neither were these chapters at that time. You guys deserve the best, and a few days/weeks delay is hopefully an alright price to pay for as much quality as I can give you! ;D
And no, chapter 60 won't come out tomorrow. I'm still not sure when it'll come out, but it will definitely be before the end of the year. So good news: you'll have to wait less than a week for it! ❤️
Enjoy this chapter! Some of your wishes might come true in it 😊

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The weather was starting to get warmer, but just slightly. It was like spring was teasing them with small tastes of the slowly approaching summer, only to take it away again and remind everyone that winter still wasn’t completely over yet. While the day had been pleasant, once night fell, the temperatures crawled back to chilly one-digit numbers. This night the temperatures behaved themselves though by staying closer to ten degrees Celsius than to the freezing point, so Marinette decided to go out for a run as Ladybug. A comparably pleasant temperate wasn’t the only thing that drove her outside though. The picnic that day had not gone like she had planned it to and she needed to run off all that pent-up energy before going to bed.

Tikki had been surprisingly uncaring about the whole thing and had even sided with Adrien. Not that Marinette was honestly angry at her boyfriend, but just a little…peeved, that was all. She would probably be less annoyed if that had been the first time something she had suggested as a date had turned into a group outing. Nothing she really could complain about, but she missed spending time alone with Adrien in more places than just her home.

The conclusions she had come to with Nino had at first persistently gnawed at her mind for almost a month. If Adrien honestly thought that she was going to break up with him, then his actions would make sense. It would be just like him to want to create a slow transition back to friendship to make things easier for everyone involved. Luckily, the talk with Félix about a week ago had perished those thoughts back into the nasty hole they had spawned from.

Her inability to do anything frustrated her to no ends though and despite Nino’s and Félix’s advice,
it was still bothering her. She needed yet another opinion on the topic and while she loved Alya, she knew that her friend might accidentally let something slip—or worse, storm into the Agreste mansion again and try to murder Gabriel Agreste. No, if she was going to ask someone for advice, then it would be someone who wouldn’t go to extremes but who she also trusted completely. Her best bet there would of course be Chat Noir.

While she wouldn’t be able to tell him any details, a vague description would have to be enough. Her partner was always there to help her with her troubles, major and minor, so she highly valued his input.

Neither of them had patrol that night, but maybe if he’d see her out—personally or through posts on the Ladyblog—he might join her. Then again, she couldn’t completely count on that. Maybe she should give him a call and if he didn’t pick up, then his kwami could rely that she had tried to contact him.

Ladybug jumped over a gap between buildings, having long since lost her fear about possibly falling down. Still, she always had her yo-yo at the ready just in case. She flipped open that very same magical tool with the intention of calling Chat Noir, when she suddenly tripped over something. Something that hissed. She regained her balance with a sigh of relief and turned around.

It was a little hard to see, but there was a small, moving black mass on the roof that blended perfectly with the night.

A cat? No, two cats, she realised, when one of them detangled itself from the other and hissed at her again.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she said automatically and a little wary. She knew from experience that an angered cat should be met with caution.

A happy chirp drew her attention to the second cat. It was a little hard to see in the dark, especially with its equally dark fur, but she caught the reflection of its eyes. They looked green. The cat that had hissed—a fluffier but equally black one—swatted at it with a paw.

It then turned around to a noise it had heard—something Ladybug couldn’t even dream of having perceived. She might be stronger transformed, but her eyesight and hearing were pretty much the same as they were out of the suit. The heightened senses were something she envied her partner for a lot.

While the fluffier cat continued to listen to whatever it had heard, the other cat approached her and headbutted her legs in a gesture she knew was friendly. It might have been a while since her black kitty had visited her, but she still knew her way around friendly felines. The cat even purred.

There was a growl from the other cat, but seeing how she was not close to it, the noise was probably not directed at her. Without a second thought, Ladybug bent down to pet the purring shorthair and while doing so, noticed the white spot on its chest. Just like the cat that had always visited her. While it really had been a while, she still believed to be able to recognize the cat whenever she’d see him and this one held a striking resemblance.

“You don’t happen to be my kitty, do you?” She therefore asked, and giggled when she got another happy chirp and a meow as a reply.

*Cute.*

What was less cute was the other cat that suddenly attacked and drew a hiss out of her previously content kitty. She pulled her hand back, hoping that it wouldn’t be aggressive towards her as well,
and confused as to what had caused the sudden assault. Then again, cats were unpredictable.

“You really do look like my kitty. You even have a white spot on the chest,” Ladybug said thoughtfully to herself the longer she looked at the cat she had petted. It—he?—now stood there with an arched back and erect fur. She wasn’t sure what it meant, but it didn’t look like anything positive. “Then again, if it’s even you, it’s been almost two years since you last visited my balcony. You probably don’t remember me.”

Ladybug stared at the cats for a few moments longer, curious what they’d do. When they continued to look anxious though, she straightened up again with a sigh. No reason to accidentally provoke irritated felines tonight.

“See you, kitty,” she said and looked at the shorthair cat, in case it really was her kitty. Then she grabbed her yo-yo again and swung away.

After a few rooftops she stopped to try finally to call Chat Noir, but she was once again interrupted. This time not by tripping over something, but by the silent sound of something small landing behind her. She was about to turn around to see what it was, when a voice stopped her.

“Don’t turn around.”

Ladybug halted mid-turn. She knew that voice!

Suddenly there were steps behind her and two hands suddenly covered her eyes and mouth. Her body instinctively twisted to fling the assaulter over her shoulder, but once again, his voice stopped her.

“Shh, it’s just me, my lady. And I know you trust me, so please listen. We’re being watched and you should neither see me nor say anything for both of our wellbeings. I’ll let go now and trust you to not turn around, but listen.”

The hands, bare skin, drew back from her face and Ladybug let out a shaky breath and nodded. Whatever the hell Chat Noir was doing detransformed on a rooftop at night was his business, but she trusted that what he had to say to her was important. With his face close to her ear he started speaking in a quiet whisper so only she would be able to hear him.

“Someone saw you talking to that cat just now and she suspects whose balcony he visited. They might not know yet, but they will soon, so please trust no one. Go straight home, don’t leave the house, don’t let anyone in that you usually don’t associate with and…if someone you trust shows up and tries to tell you something confusing, hear them out.”

His voice dropped to an even quieter whisper. “The Court is capricious, insidious and bloodthirsty, dearest. They will come for you, so listen to your kwami. She can protect you.”

A shuddering breath left him and she both heard and felt it.

“Your Chaton might not be coming back to you, my lady, so take this as a farewell until I see you again with another name. Thank you for everything.”

There was the faintest touch of his lips on her neck right below her ear. It was barely even a peck, but Ladybug felt herself start to shiver. Though, maybe, it was more because of the things he had said rather than the things he had done. Bloodthirsty? Farewell? She was about to protest, but then remembered that he had said that they were being watched and that he trusted her not to speak.

“Now go home and don’t turn around. Things will make sense…eventually.”
Chat Noir drew away and Ladybug did her best to blink away the tears that threatened to fall.

Farewell?

It had…come out of nowhere, been thoroughly unexpected and yet, here it was. Something had gone horribly wrong and she wasn’t even sure what.

Without a second thought, she closed her eyes, turned around and wrapped her arms around Chat in a tight hug. He smelled different, but still familiar and safe. At first, he tensed up but then he returned the hug carefully, as if he was afraid to break her.

She blindly ruffled his hair, a fond gesture she had done hundreds of times already, and was surprised to find cat ears there even though he wasn’t transformed. Something in the back of her mind nudged a cloudy memory and with it, feelings of fear, sorrow and confusion. She banished it back where it had come from. Whatever it had been, it could wait.

“Take care and be careful,” she whispered as quietly as she could, knowing he could hear her.

He kept warning her of dangers, but was he safe? Because, when he was protecting her, who was protecting him? He laughed quietly, a sound full of regret and sorrow.

“I’ll try my best,” he whispered back and ended the hug. “Get to safety now.”

She nodded, turned around, opened her eyes again, unsurprised to find them wet with tears. Then, she took her yo-yo and swung home.

Marinette tidied up her room. Originally, she had planned to do it the next day, but her racing thoughts wouldn't let her sleep and she needed to do something now. Meanwhile, she silently rambled random things to Tikki in a desperate attempt to let them make sense.

“I mean, I have told a few people about the cat, but that can't be the only black cat with green eyes and a white patch of fur in all of Paris! But the way he said it made it sound like whoever this person is knows the cat personally, but that still doesn't explain how whoever that is knows where the cat went!”

Tikki sighed. “Marinette, please calm down. It's all a very big—"

“Misunderstanding?” Marinette huffed, maybe a tad too belligerent.

“I was about to say 'mess'.”

“Sorry Tikki. It’s just so frustrating! Why can't you just explain it to me? Apparently, my identity has been compromised because I pet a cat, so I think I have the right to find out just what I did wrong!”

“It's not my place to tell you this. Not now at least.”

Marinette paused sorting her sewing needles to throw the kwami an exasperated look.

“You will know. For now, I am waiting.”

“For what?”
“Someone else has been dreading this for much longer than I have. They should be the one to tell you and explain themselves.”

“Can you at least tell me who it is?” Marinette asked.

Tikki shook her head. “You should go to bed now. Those who are out to get you cannot get through my wards, so you're safe here.”

“...Since when are there wards around my house?”

“Ever since the day you got my earrings. One needs a strong anchor, my permission or a human aura to pass through them.”

Marinette was halfway up the stairs to her bed when she stopped and looked at Tikki in disbelief.

“Wait, whatever is trying to get me isn't human?!”

The kwami shrugged. “I won't say more. Three days; that’s the time I’ll grant this other person to tell you. If they haven't done so after that, I'll tell you everything. How does that sound?”

Marinette sighed. “So, I will at most have to wait three days to get answers then. Seeing how I've been waiting for answers for over a year already, I think I can do that.”

“And remember that you're not allowed to leave the house in that time.”

“Then let's hope that Hawkmoth takes a vacation for the next three days.”

Since she was pretty much grounded, Marinette spent the next day designing, though her heart wasn't in it. Her thoughts kept drifting to what Tikki had said about those that were after her. That they weren't human. Chat Noir had said that it was the Court that was after her and that they were all bloodthirsty and some other things. Did that mean that the Court was a bunch of...monsters? Different from Akumas because otherwise people would have noticed something, right? ...Right?

That Tikki knew about something supernatural didn't surprise her, but Chat knew about it too. Chat Noir, who Tikki had always been sceptical about and only ever agreed with one thing he never got tired of repeating: “Stay away from the Court. It's too dangerous.”

If people didn't know about it, or at least didn't advocate it, did that mean that the mere knowledge of it was enough to paint a target on her back?

“Forget it. Just forget about it all!” Her partner's words echoed in her head, now sounding much more sinister than before.

But if the knowledge was hypothetically dangerous, then why wasn't he ever in any danger? He had told her more than once to just let him deal with it, that it was fine as long as it wasn't her. Either that was his self-sacrificial nature coming into play, or...

She didn't want to finish the thought.

Tikki's scepticism, especially from the beginning, jumped out at her. Most specifically on the first day when she had asked the kwami about the qualifications for the Black Cat Miraculous.

“I was probably just confused about something when I felt his aura earlier. I'm sure he has been
Something had been different about Chat Noir than about other people. Marinette had sensed it and Tikki had confirmed it. On top of everything, he knew about the Court and didn't seem at risk of harm when faced with it.

Not human.

The words echoed in her head like they were mocking her. She thought back to last night on the rooftop when she had hugged him. While she hadn't seen him, she had felt him. No transformation, but still cat ears.

The foreign feelings she had also felt back then rose back up inside her at the thought. Like there was something that she should know. Something crucial.

“That’s not all there is to me. But I gotta be careful. If they find out, they might steal you away from me and we can’t have that.”

Not human…

“Forgive m—”

“Marinette, you're burning your omelette!”

Tikki’s voice tore her out of her thoughts and made her quickly focus back on her now slightly too-dark-roasted lunch. She carefully flipped it in the pan, noting the charred spots with dismay.

“What were you thinking about?” Tikki asked.

“Just this whole mess, as you put it.”

She had to admit that ‘mess’ was quite the fitting word after all. It had let small seeds of doubt slowly sprout roots and leaves and made her reconsider everything she thought she knew about her partner. He was someone who had saved her life countless times and cheered her up when no one else had been able to. And now…now she wasn’t sure what she could believe to be true anymore. She felt betrayed, sad, afraid, confused and overall very conflicted. A small part of her was glad to finally have an explanation—when also an incomplete one—to all the oddness surrounding Chat Noir. It was a small speck of a positive thought that was easily drowned by all the negative ones.

Wait, negative thoughts?

Get a grip, Marinette! You’re Ladybug! You’re not supposed to have negative thoughts!

The very last thing she needed right now was to attract an Akuma.

“Marinette.”

She blinked and realised that she had zoned out again and was now in the process of also burning the other side of her omelette. With practised ease, she let it slide on a plate and then washed the pan.

The tears she had cried the previous night threatened to come back when she once again thought about that what Chat Noir had said was a farewell. She couldn’t just say farewell to him. There…there were still things they needed to do!
Like play one more game of tag to determine if he really was the undefeated champion or if she could catch him at least *once* after all. They still needed to try out at least one more horrible ice cream flavour combination from André’s and judge who had gotten it worse. She…she wanted to pet him behind the ears one more time and tell him that things were gonna be okay when he had a bad day, maybe even draw this adorable purr out of him. She wanted to talk to him for hours about the ridiculousness that was their lives. And, most importantly, she wanted to defeat an Akuma with him by her side one more time and give him a victory fist bump afterwards.

Sure, all these things *had* happened, but they had happened without her knowing that it would be the very last time she’d do them with him. It wasn’t fair. If she was never going to see him again, she wanted a proper farewell and not just a hasty hug!

Marinette wiped away the tears that had breached the threshold after all and then walked up the stairs with her omelette. She closed the hatch behind her with a foot, flinching at the loud bang it made when it fell shut, and then sat down at the part of her desk that wasn’t littered with sketches from that morning.

Mindlessly, while eating, she started watching another anime from her *long* to-watch list. She had actually planned to watch it with Adrien, but…well, she just needed the distraction *now*! He could catch up eventually.

About ten minutes into the first episode, her omelette already devoured, there was a hesitant knock on her trap door. Marinette paused the episode and turned around with a confused “yes?” since she knew that her parents would knock louder and then usually wouldn’t wait for a reply before entering.

The trap door opened to show her boyfriend. She paled when she saw him, though that was probably still a healthier skin colour than what he was currently sporting. He was *sickly* pale with dark shadows under his eyes and looked so defeated as if someone had died.

Marinette didn’t hesitate to jump up from her chair and rushed over to him.

“What happened?!”

He closed and locked the trap door—something they usually weren’t allowed to do when it was just the two of them up in her room, but she decided this was an exception—and then turned to her with a wince.

“That obvious?”

“You couldn’t be more obvious if you tried,” she said and ushered him to sit down on the chaise lounge while she sat down next to him.

“I…I asked Sabine if it’s okay to lock the trap door this time because I wanted to talk to you about something important and she said it’s okay,” he said in a small voice, not meeting her eyes.

Alarm bells immediately went off in her head. What if Nino and Félix had been wrong? What if he was going to break up with her?! If that was the case, then he couldn’t have chosen a worse time!

Shoving her laments about her loss of Chat Noir aside, she instead fixed Adrien with a serious expression. Exchanging one worry for another.

“Okay, then…what did you want to talk about?” she asked hesitantly.

Marinette watched how Adrien’s hands balled into fists in his lap and that he started shivering.
One look into his eyes told her that he was scared. Very scared. She wanted to hug him, but didn’t know if that wouldn’t make things worse.

"D-do you t-think that it’s bad to keep secrets?" He eventually asked so quietly that she almost didn’t catch it.

Ah, so it was about the secrets after all! Maybe she had assumed the worst again and he was actually going to tell her what was wrong. Finally! But, judging by his current state, whatever it was, distressed him deeply. She had to brace herself for all and any possible outcomes to not accidentally hurt his feelings by reacting badly to whatever was coming.

“No. Everyone needs secrets,” she said, hoping that it was the right answer.

“T-then what about secrets that…t-that make you lie to the people you care about? Is…is it betrayal to keep those things?”

Marinette thought over how to word her answer, making Adrien visibly grow more anxious as a result. “I think it depends on what the secret is.”

“W-what would…” Adrien started and then searched for words, clearly frustrated by his lack of eloquence.

“What would be a bad kind of secret?” Marinette helpfully asked. Adrien nodded. “Well, cheating on your significant other for example, or fraud.”

“Fraud?” Adrien asked, growing even more anxious. “What kind of fraud?”

Marinette raised her eyebrows. “The damaging kind, I guess? Like money fraud, or playing with someone’s feelings.”

She saw that they weren’t going to get anywhere like this, so she shook her head.

“Alright, what kind of secret are you talking about? Maybe that can help.”

Adrien shrunk in on himself a little and was quiet for a concerning amount of time.

“Y-you know how there are secrets that are dangerous?” He eventually asked. “And by not telling anyone, you protect your loved ones from it with sheer ignorance?”

That hit close to home and Marinette immediately grew anxious what kind of secret Adrien had that was so dangerous. The only secrets of that nature that came to mind were her and Chat Noir’s secret identities and the Court, which she still knew nothing about, but whatever Adrien had must be something else because he couldn’t be...

“If someone you trust shows up and tries to tell you something confusing, hear them out.”

“This as a farewell until I see you again with another name.”

…No. He couldn’t be! That must be a coincidence!

She was simply imagining things. Like the phantom sensation of a fluffy cat tail curling around her leg while there was nothing there.

Stop it! This is not fair to Adrien!

Marinette nodded.
“I hate it. I hate it so much,” Adrien said and there were tears in his eyes.

The sight nudged at her mind, though all she could remember was the one time after he had woken up from a nightmare a few weeks ago. Yet, it still was like there was something else. Her memory was probably playing tricks on her, showing her glimpses of her boyfriend crying his heart out while in her arms on this very chaise lounge. She would remember something like that!

“I have to lie to everyone and I hate it. I hate lying, I hate feeling like I’m just…just pretending. It feels like betrayal and I hate it. I can’t do this anymore!” He said, the tears running down his cheeks now.

If the picture of her holding a crying Adrien on her chaise lounge had been a vision, then that very picture solidified now.

“It’s alright. I get it,” she said quietly and let her fingers glide through his hair in a way she knew was soothing to him.

Her mind was playing cruel tricks on her again when it made her think that she was actually feeling cat ears while there was nothing there. Maybe she was too stressed about both of these situations so that her brain had just decided to somehow mesh them together and solve them all at once. Sadly, that wasn’t how it worked.

“I’m sorry,” Adrien whimpered and somehow that sounded eerily familiar. She dismissed the thought.

“Shh, it’s okay. I love you and you’re safe,” she said, repeating what had already calmed him down the last time she had seen him cry and kissed his forehead.

That only seemed to make Adrien cry even more though and he buried his head in the crook of her neck. He seemed heavier than usual, which meant that he was slumping his entire form onto her. Like he was lacking strength to keep himself properly upright.

“I’m sorry,” he said again, over and over.

For a while, she just held him like this and let him cry and apologize. It was no less frustrating than it had ever been to be in the dark about what was tearing him up inside. He might hate not being able to tell her, but she hated not being able to help him.

“Would it be that bad to tell me?” She asked eventually and Adrien suddenly grew very still. Then he nodded.

“I—” His voice was hoarse and quiet, so he coughed and tried again. “I thought about what to say all night but this is very important and I can’t just…”

Adrien ended the hug and sighed. He had stopped crying and was now looking at her desperately.

“I know what to say, but it’s a delicate topic where every word has to be measured on a golden scale, otherwise there can be horrible misunderstandings. And…if I have to tell you this, I want to tell you in the best way I can, so that it won’t be as much of a shock.”

He bit his lip and looked to the ground.

“The thing is that I know what to say, but it’s also how I say it that’s important…and I don’t know if I can do the ‘how’ right now. I’m just—this is such a mess.”
He buried his head in his hands.

*That would make two messes in one day.*

“Can’t you write it down?” Marinette asked and it made Adrien raise his head again.

“Write it down? Like in a letter?” He asked.

Marinette nodded. “I heard that they do that in court cases sometimes when a witness has emotional issues with making a statement. They and the lawyer will then record a statement beforehand and it will be played at a hearing. Not that this is like a court case, but if you’re being too emotional about it and don’t know if you can tell me properly in person, then you could write it down or even record it and show me afterwards. Would that make it easier?”

Adrien kissed her forehead. “You’re the best!” He said, though quietly and somewhat shyly.

“What kind of kiss was that?” Marinette therefore asked jokingly, not expecting him to become even more shy as a result.

“I don’t think I deserve a real kiss right now.”

“Well, think again,” Marinette said, grabbed his face and kissed him on the lips.

Adrien seemed surprised at first, but then returned the kiss hesitantly.

“As much as I’d love to kiss you all day long,” he said and gave her another short kiss. “I now have a letter to write.”

Marinette smiled at him. “See? There you go.”

Adrien stood up and slowly walked back to the trap door. She followed him.

“I promise to come back as soon as I finish the letter. Even if that’ll be the middle of the night.”

Marinette snorted. “What do you plan to do then? Break into the bakery?”

Adrien threw her a smile that looked a little dangerous—seriousness, defeat, determination, and desperation all in one.

“If I must.”

“Tikki, am I going crazy? I *am* going crazy, right?” Marinette asked.

No watching anime, drawing, sewing or even working ahead for school helped her to distract herself from Adrien’s short but very impactful visit. After he had gone home, she had reflected on the weird phantom sensations and the connections her brain had been trying to force her to make. Well, her theory that two disasters at once were a little too much for her to handle at the same time was still very much her go-to explanation.

“No, you’re not,” Tikki said soothingly and patted her head. “It’s just a lot to deal with at once, that’s all.”

When even an eons-old being said so, then her theory was pretty much proven.
“Do you think I should go to bed? I mean, I don’t have to get up early tomorrow and Adrien said that he’d come by even if it’s the middle of the night. I could easily pull an all-nighter.”

Tikki shook her head and then looked at her sternly just like her mother sometimes would. “You already lost enough sleep last night when agonizing about the thing with Chat Noir. I think you’re just tired and need a full night’s rest to process everything properly.”

Marinette sighed. Tikki was right, her being tired was no use to anyone. Besides, she doubted that Adrien would actually break into her house in the middle of the night. He’d just come by the next morning.

“You’re right,” she said. “To forcefully keep myself awake for something that might not even happen is silly. Besides, whatever Adrien wants to tell me is important and I want to have a functioning brain when reading his letter.”

Her decision made, Marinette went over to her desk and wrote in her diary, just to recap the day and maybe look back on it in the future. Then she changed into one of her warmer pyjamas—having a window to the cold outside right above her bed while she had the habit of throwing the blanket away in the middle of the night wasn’t the most ideal combination—and eventually climbed up to her loft.

She took off the bracelet with all the charms Adrien had given her and looked at it for a moment. He had been very torn up about telling her the truth—whatever that ended up being—and her heart went out to him. She tried to put herself in his shoes and shuddered when she imagined trying to tell him that she was Ladybug. Yeah, telling someone that you lied to them constantly for a very long time seemed horrible. But at least she was able to understand and relate to that. Other people in this position might be less…accepting.

Marinette put the bracelet on the shelf above her bed next to the cushioned box Tikki slept in and then bid her kwami goodnight.

Worrying about it before she even knew what was happening wouldn’t get her anywhere, so she decided to cut the thread of thought. If she wanted to have a clear head tomorrow, then she needed to stop spiralling and finally get some sleep, like Tikki had suggested.

Marinette closed her eyes and listened to the familiar noises of Paris. Cars, sirens, airplanes and annoyingly loud people, even at close to midnight. It was what she knew. It was home. Slowly she felt herself drifting away to the realms of sleep.

There was a thump above her.

Instantly awake, Marinette turned on her bedside light just when the trap door opened. Hadn’t Tikki said that no one could get in?! If this was Adrien, making good on his promise to break into her house in the middle of the night, then she was going to pummel him with her pillow for scaring her half to death!

It wasn’t Adrien.

In fact, Marinette had trouble to process just what, or rather who she was seeing. That was herself who climbed through the trap door and landed on her bed. Wait, no, it wasn’t. This version of her had four arms, two of them insectoid, antennae on her head and what looked like ladybug wings on her back.

_A Akuma?!_
Before she knew what was happening, the girl’s arms reached forward and plucked both earrings out of her lobes. She smiled at her sadly.

“I’m sorry, this really is nothing personal,” she said and held Marinette back when she made a grab for her earrings.

“Sleep,” the girl whispered. “Everything will be over soon.”

Marinette could feel her eyelids close without her permission and the noises, feelings and other sensations slowly numbed and faded. Nothingness greeted her.

Chapter End Notes

**Recommendation Of The Week**

**Well Suited** by HariWrites

*Life is routine for Marinette until the handsome CEO of Black Cat Innovations hires her as his personal stylist. Meanwhile, their best friends try to play Cupid.*

*But, what is Marinette hiding?*

Hari is a brilliant writer, especially when it comes to aged-up AUs! They are all portrayed very realistically and maturely, which certainly a treat in and of itself. But not just the writing style and world building, but also the stories themselves are amazing! *Well Suited* in particular is one of those where you just have to immediately click on "next chapter" because you are dying to find out what happens next! It's an emotional rollercoaster and the villain concept here is one I don't see often. Not just that, but it has been executed extremely well! Go ahead and give it a read! You won't regret it! ❤

Next up on Spellbound: go ahead and guess 😊

PS: Your wishes have been heard loud and clear!

Kitty cuddles were demanded and some of you have also been asking me about
Bridgette's return lately. I hope you're happy! 😊
Loss

Chapter Summary

angst, drama and tears

Chapter Notes

I did it! I made it to the end of this book before the end of the year and even managed to maintain my upload schedule for the most part! Yes, November and December were a little wonky, but every other Thursday from the beginning of May onward the upload have been on time and I'm immensely proud of myself for achieving that! 😊 It also taught me how absolutely exhausting a schedule is, so I'm gonna take it more light-hearted next year! c:

Happy New Year!
Wow, this didn't work out like I planned it at all! I originally wanted to update on Sunday, but the chapter still wasn't ready then. Since this is probably the most important chapter so far, there was a lot of rereading that went into it to the point where I went "nuuu, not again!" every time I had to start proof-reading anew. The result should be as good as I can possibly make it though, so I hope to fulfill the expectations you're no doubt going to have. 😊
This is one of those chapters I have been planning for a long time and actually writing it was exciting and scary. Scary because I needed to get everything perfectly right. I didn't manage a "perfect", I think, but close enough anyway. ;w;

That said, I still gotta warn you: If you're uncomfortable with or even triggered by graphic descriptions of violence and/or mangling, then skip the first long paragraph after the words "Kill. Kill. Kill."

**Trigger Warning:** Graphic descriptions of violence, mangling and injury. (it's just one semi-long paragraph that starts after "kill kill kill" and is easily skippable)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Adrien poked the food on his plate with a fork. At first, he had sluggishly tried to eat, chewing each bite for an eternity before managing to swallow it, but giving up on it altogether was easier than using force. It was such a small and insignificant thing and being able to give up on something without letting the consequences eventually—potentially—kill someone had become a luxury.

“Come on, you need to eat something,” Félix said with a worried side-glance.

It prompted Adrien to take another hesitant fork full, but once he finally swallowed the bite, he felt like throwing up. The food wasn’t bad and he hadn’t eaten too much of it. To the contrary, even. This reaction was...strange, but then again, what wasn’t these days?
He felt a little bad for the leftovers on his plate that would be thrown away now, but overall it was a tolerable sacrifice.

Back in Félix’s and his room, he lay awake in bed for hours. Sleep didn’t find him easily these days, or sometimes not at all. He felt that tonight was the latter kind of night, so he silently got up, shifted and climbed out of the bathroom window.

Thinking and overthinking was the only thing he could really do, so he sat down on the roof and indulged in his worries. There were a lot of them.

Not even the chilly breeze and the smell of impending rainfall could chase him away from that spot for hours, but if his pondering gave him a useful idea, it’d be worth it. Félix would be angry with him the next morning and Marinette would notice his fatigue and worry, but those too were sacrifices he was willing to make.

“Worrying yourself to madness isn’t gonna help anyone, you know?”

Adrien startled a little at the sudden voice. He was used to being alone up here.

“Plagg? Why are you awake?”

The kwami rolled his eyes and floated over to sit beside him.

“Cats are nocturnal and I happen to be a cat.”

Adrien just nodded and licked his paw to groom his whiskers.

“Depends. I’m more crepuscular myself,” Adrien said when he was done.

“Yet here you are. At night.”

He shrugged as best as he could in his feline body. “Insomnia is a bitch.”

Plagg snickered and a comfortable silence befell them. As it was with the god of destruction though, such things never lasted for very long.

“So, what where you breaking your head about this time?”

Adrien wrapped his tail around himself anxiously, almost hitting Plagg with it by accident.

“What to do if everything else fails. Call it plan Z if you want.”

Instead of reprimanding him for having so little confidence in his precautions and in Tikki, like Adrien had expected, Plagg just nodded.

“Yeah, backup plans are always a good idea. What do you have so far?”

“Nothing,” Adrien said quietly. “I was just thinking that...if we get to the absolute worst-case scenario and they manage to take Marinette, then I have to get her back somehow. But I can’t stand up to an entire Court. And even if I manage to get her back, how will I be able to keep her safe afterwards? I’m just a halfling. There’s no way I can do something they can’t.”

Plagg nodded. “I’d say there’s no solution without a sacrifice for this. At least I can’t think of one.”

Adrien sighed. If even a god said that it was a lost cause then...
“Wait, sacrifices…” Adrien mumbled as an idea slowly formed in his head and he turned to Plagg. “What I need is more magic, and to get that—”

“If you want to eat souls then that’s on you, but you know your brother would never forgive you for it.”

Adrien vehemently shook his head. “No, Plagg. I don’t mean souls. I mean your magic! You said that Cat Sidhe exist because you gave a human too much magic. Humans can’t use magic, so it didn’t bring him much but I can use magic, so if you—”

“I’m gonna stop you right there, kid,” Plagg said and held up a paw. “My magic isn’t some endless well of neutral power, like the magic around us is. It’s pure destruction and I don’t even want to think about what would happen if I’d give it to someone who can actually use it.”

Adrien tilted his head. “But don’t you do that already? I’m using your Miraculous.”

Plagg sighed. “You’re sleep-deprived, so I forgive you for letting it slip your mind, but the Miraculous is merely a vessel. It allows the use of controlled magic, instead of letting destruction run rogue. If I’d use a Cataclysm as myself right now, I could take down the entirety of Paris with one touch of my paw. It’s an enormous power and the thought of a fae being possessed by destruction really doesn’t sit well with me.”

Adrien hung his head. “Well, it was an idea anyway.”

“Don’t take this the wrong way, kid. If it really came down to it, then you’d be the most likely one I’d ever give that power to willingly. But you’re a good kitten, and I don’t want to risk that being rotted away. Destruction is not a joke and to subjugate it like you would any other foreign magic inside you wouldn’t be a walk in the park.”

Adrien was quiet for a bit. “Plagg, I don’t want to be insensitive, but…what is the worst thing your magic has ever done?”

Plagg sighed. “The largest scale of destruction was probably the extinction of the dinosaurs—”

“You caused that?!”

“—but personally, the worst thing my magic has ever done was to kill loved ones.” He shook his head. “Let’s speak hypothetically here, kid, since I know why you’re asking this:

“If I gave you some of my magic—just enough to beat a Court Chief, so just a fraction of my power—you’d have to bring destruction itself under your control. It will tell you to kill and given how emotional you tend to be, especially in situations where your girl is in danger, you’d probably be inclined to listen to that urge and give in to it. You’d have to fight it, not only to avoid becoming a killer, but also to avoid destroying what you want to protect. It might sound easy, but there’s no guarantee that you can do it. Carefully think about if you want to take that high of a risk.”

That really was a high gamble to take. While an inner voice told him that of course he’d do anything to keep Marinette safe, he also knew that he was subjective to magic’s emotional influence. His trouble with liminality was proof of that.

“Besides, the more magic you possess, the less human you’ll become. And the less human you are, the less effectively you could use my Miraculous. You’d have to give up the ring and the little bit of humanity you’ve achieved. Is that really worth it to you?”

Adrien nodded without hesitation. If it would be to save Marinette, he’d give up everything. He
gave out a small, humourless laugh.

“It’s selfish, isn’t it? Paris needs Chat Noir, yet I’m willing to throw that all away in a heartbeat if it’d save her.”

“Being selfish isn’t always a bad thing. Besides, you wouldn’t be doing it for power, but to save your lover. That’s noble, not selfish, in my opinion.”

Adrien smiled weakly. “Thanks, Plagg. At least you’d probably get a human chosen afterwards, so it’s practically a win-win.”

Plagg laughed quietly. “First impressions really aren’t your strong suit, kitten, but no matter what I first thought, I’d never trade you for anyone else. Even if that’d mean that I could get a human chosen instead.”

Adrien gave a quiet purr and nudged Plagg with his head as a sign of gratitude. The kwami returned the gesture and a comfortable silence settled on them once more, only interrupted by the howl of the wind and the city noise.

“Is this our backup plan then?” Adrien eventually asked while he kept staring at the city. His city.

“Do you not get the meaning of hypothetical?”

“Then give me a less risky alternative.”

Plagg stayed silent.

Adrien sat at his desk, crumpled paper all around him. He knew that writing on a computer would have probably been the better choice for composing a letter that had to be perfect in every way, but he didn’t trust it. What if Nathalie or his father had access to his files and read the whole thing? No, that was way too risky. Therefore, he went through several stationery sets that finally had a use and tried his best to concentrate. Félix lounged nearby, equally on edge—he kept pushing stuff off the desk with his paws—and always there to help read over a phrasing Adrien was unsure about.

After many agonising hours of trial and error, Adrien finally signed a letter—the 21st one—and leaned back with a sigh to reread it. Eventually, he nodded grimly to himself—he couldn’t word it more carefully if he tried. It ended up in a nondescript white envelope and he stared at it. Such a small thing, not even magical in any way, and yet so very dangerous…

“Maybe she’s still awake. If I hurry I could–” Adrien said and stood up, only to be interrupted by Plagg.

“Wait! Something’s wrong,” the kwami said and for the first time in a long while, looked panicked.

“What is it?” Félix asked and jumped on Adrien’s shoulder from the desk.

If Plagg, the god of destruction who had supposedly seen everything already, was panicking, then something was very wrong.
“Tikki just went dormant,” Plagg said. “Which only happens if she is intentionally renounced or…”

“If someone steals the Miraculous,” Adrien finished quietly, his face probably back to its unnatural paleness from earlier.

It took no genius to figure out what had happened.

Without a second thought, Adrien threw the letter on the desk, shifted and was out the window. Everything was a blur and the voices of Plagg and his brother barely managed to drift into his awareness as he leapt over rooftops straight towards the bakery. He didn’t care that Beltane was in twenty-four hours or that the songs already tried to tempt him. Nothing in this moment could catch his attention more than Marinette possibly being in enormous danger.

When he arrived at the balcony, his claws skidding on the ground for purchase, he found an open skylight and an empty bed.

He swore heavily and immediately leapt back up to the roof and into a different direction: Le Grand Paris Hotel. Whoever had taken her had tried to mask her scent, but Adrien would have found her even if there was no trace at all. Especially on days with heavy liminality, like right now, he felt pulled towards her. She was his anchor after all, forever and always and he would not lose her.

“Kid!”

Whatever Plagg did, it efficiently stopped Adrien from making another leap. His fur bristled angrily.

Félix hissed at him. “You can’t just storm in there like this! They’ll make mincemeat out of you!” He declared, though Adrien could clearly see that he had to hold himself back from storming ahead as well.

“He’s right. You’re too weak to fight against a Court full of fae, kid,” Plagg added.

Adrien hissed in frustration. He couldn’t go in there as Chat Noir either because Chat Noir was an impartial party and an act like that could expose his identity. And then all of them would die. Except for Plagg; he’d be enslaved.

Adrien paced back and forth on the roof, his eyes fixated on the hotel that shone brightly only a city block away. He was only a young Cat Sidhe, just a halfling at that! His chances of success in a fight were terribly slim and he didn’t have time to come up with some sort of brilliant plan either!

A plan…

He suddenly stopped and whipped his head around to look at Plagg.

“Plan Z it is then.”

“Kid, no! I never agreed to this madness!”

“You never disagreed either!” Adrien argued. There wasn’t any time for this!

“I have no idea what this is about, but it sounds like something stupid,” Félix said warily and looked at Plagg.
“I can give him the magic he needs to get past even a Court chief if he has to, but that much magic is dangerous, especially when it comes from me. It can take control of your mind and trust me, kitten, you don’t want destruction to dictate your thoughts.”

“There has to be another way! Making foreign magic yours is hell. And what if you won’t really need it? What if the situation is better than we expect?” Félix threw in.

Adrien didn’t care.

“Even if, then what about afterwards? Do you think the Court will leave us alone?! I can’t continue like this, Fé! I hate feeling helpless and having to endure fate.”

He shifted back to his human form and looked at the silver ring on his finger one last time. His hands were shaking. It had been one year, seven months and twenty-nine days since he first put on the Miraculous and he had worn it almost continuously ever since. Not only had he become friends with Plagg, but he had also learned to love being himself while people could see him and not having to hide his otherness. The Miraculous had given him this more than unique opportunity and he would forever be thankful for it.

“It’s been a fun ride, Plagg,” he said and tried his best not to cry. While he was more than willing to do this for Marinette, it didn’t mean that it was any less of a sacrifice. And sacrifices hurt. Carefully he took the ring off, noting how odd the now empty space on his ring finger felt, and handed it to the kwami. “I hope you’ll find someone more worthy than me.”

Plagg surged forward to nuzzle his cheek. “You’re the best, worthiest kitten I ever had. Don’t you forget it!”

When he floated back to look at Adrien again, his expression was serious.

“I don’t know how this will affect you, kid, but I do know that your cat form stems from my magic and is therefore a better vessel, so go ahead and shift. That way you’ll still have your human form intact and might be able to return to it eventually.”

Might?

Adrien nodded and, taking a second to memorize in detail how his human features felt, shifted back into a cat. Depending on how things went, this could very well have been his last moment as a human-like creature. But if it was for Marinette, then he’d even give up his so dearly treasured and painstakingly achieved humanity.

“Don’t let destruction define you, kid. It’ll tell you to kill, but what you want to do is to protect, so cling to that thought.”

He nodded again.

Plagg floated closer and put his small paws on Adrien’s forehead.

“Go save your girl, Adrien.”

The world exploded into darkness that was filled with a myriad of swirling galaxies and stardust. It also turned cold, but at the same time he could feel the flickering lightning-like energy he was already familiar with from the Miraculous. Instinctively he recognised them as death and destruction, combining together as twin forces when something needed to come to an end. They were beautiful and terrifying at the same time, wondrous but not to be longed for. To see a cosmic power this clearly though was beyond anything Adrien had ever experienced, and as a halfling he
has seen a lot. He knew that this wasn’t something he should desire and that this much power wasn’t meant for him.

A part of the energy thickened and formed into a feline body of dark smoke. Unlike Adrien, it looked huge and powerful and had, even as merely a fraction of this cosmic power, enough strength to invoke fear upon many—most especially him. The shadowy being was crouched down in front of Adrien while the cosmos was still swirling behind it in millions of stars and black holes. Only one word came to mind to describe it: **mighty**.

“Remember this sight, Adrien,” the being of smoke said with Plagg’s voice. “This is what the power of a real god looks like, so teach those faerie chiefs and queens a lesson in humility for me by showing them that they cannot just take everything they please. Least of all Creation’s Chosen.”

The last part was said with a growl and a flash of huge teeth from the shadowy cat’s mouth.

Any reply Adrien could have given to that was cut off by the beast of death and destruction. While its main body still swirled all around him, stretching farther than he could see, the part that had separated itself from the cloud and materialized into an almost solid form jumped towards him. In one moment Adrien had ducked from the attack and in the next he felt the shadow seeping into him. It was like taking a long breath that never wanted to end and he felt stronger with every passing second.

The crackling lightning-like quality it had was something he had already been familiar with, but that’s where all familiarity ended. The rest of it was terrifyingly new and felt…very dangerous. Death, loss, cold and the wish to destroy. The urge to **kill**.

There was a snap of magic when the connection to Plagg suddenly broke and it felt like Adrien was falling. The stars and swirling galaxies were gone, now replaced by the City of Lights in its night-time glory. He stumbled slightly and then shook himself, disoriented. He was still standing on four paws, had a tail and ears atop his head, but he felt bigger, stronger and scarier. When he looked around, the night-time world looked even brighter and more saturated than it had been before, similar to how it was when he had been Chat Noir.

And not just his eyesight had improved. All his senses were sharper now, including eerie sixth and seventh senses that he didn’t yet know the use for. For example, the air wasn’t just chilly and fresh anymore, but now held a myriad of different sensations to it. Emotions, he realised. Not that the wind itself had any feelings, but those it passed by had. Simple impressions being carried away by it and supplied to those like him who could read them.

Hundreds of those scents, feelings and noises reached him at once and he shook his head to tune out the unimportant ones until only the one most connected and therefore clearest to him stood out.

Fear and a scream.

Adrien crouched for a jump and realised that it hadn’t been just his imagination and that he really **was** bigger. As big as the shadowy cat he had seen in this other place—another realm? A dream? A grin stretched across his face, exposing the dagger-like fangs he had already seen a glimpse at earlier, just that they were now **his**. He’d show these monsters what a **real** monster looked like!

He bounded forwards into the direction his anchor pulled him. One leap without a running start and he was already on the roof of the building across the street. With every leap he built up momentum, testing these new strengths in him and urging them to get him to his destination even faster. All his senses were zeroed in on one single thought and nothing else mattered. Not the shouts behind him from familiar voices, nor the mad cackles he heard nearby. Only Marinette and
her sounds of distress!

They’d pay for what they had done. How *dare* they take what was his and *only his!* No one else was allowed to touch her or get near her!

*Mine, mine, MINE, MINE!* 

Her anchoring pull might have played a big part in directing him over the rooftops, but that wasn’t all. He *heard* her. Not the sweet melody of her voice, but another bloodcurdling scream that made his teeth ache with the desire to dig into whoever was responsible.

It had come from Chloé’s balcony.

He landed on the tiles with such force that they cracked underneath his paws and he growled. Marinette wasn’t there though and neither was Chloé. Instead he found the spriggan from the previous night and right until the moment he had landed, she had been grinning devilishly at whoever was in the room.

“No escaping when you can’t run, little mortal,” she giggled with mad glee.

*She did it, Adrien realised. Whatever had made Marinette scream and now cry—she was in the room; he could hear her—the fae would pay bitterly for it!*

You’ve just made the gravest mistake of your life.

Adrien growled viciously. Before the fae could even fully turn around to him, he had leapt and buried his teeth in her arm, ripping it clean off. The scream he earned from her as a result was like music to his ears.

Kill, kill, kill!

Yes, make her suffer a million times more than Marinette had!

His grin grew as his claws—now longer and sharper—tore into her flesh, as did his teeth. Her wings were the next to go. Black feathers in his face threatened to make him sneeze, but his teeth connected with the bone below the flesh with a satisfying crack, biting through it. He tore at it, having to turn his head away to sneeze briefly and then clamped down on it again to tear once more until it would separate itself from the wicked creature’s back. Meanwhile, he held her down with his paws, claws digging into her flesh to discourage any flailing movements. She was probably in too much pain to move anyway.

Not everything in him was good, that was a simple fact of nature. With the addition of pure destructive magic, that was truer than ever. Not addressing the urge to bite, tear, mangle and kill would be a grave mistake; Adrien knew that almost instinctively. Indulging it *just a little,* however, took the edge off it and made it bearable instead of overwhelming. Besides, the spriggan had it coming anyway.

A fearful whimper made him raise his head and forcefully tore him out of the rush he only now realised he had fallen into. His eyes searched for the source of the frightened and very familiar noise and then met hers. It was thoroughly grounding in the most horrible of ways.

There was Marinette and she looked at him like…like he was about to eat her, or at the very least *hurt* her. He would *never,* so why—

Oh, right.
He had forgotten.

Adrien took a step back from the bleeding spriggan. She was alive—fae were not so easily slain—but badly hurt. After this, she’d recover and someday inflict retaliation of some sort.

*Just kill her. It'll be one worry less.*

He caught himself just in time to forcefully set his paw—extended sharp claws and all—back on the ground.

Why had he—

*You know why.*

He brought more distance between himself and the bleeding fae to avoid tempting this new foreign thing in him. Yes, he might be a monster, but if there was one thing he’d never be, then it was a killer. Destruction and temptation be damned. Ha! He had lived his entire life with the sweetest temptations right under his nose. If he hadn’t given in to *them*, then he wouldn’t give in to something that was so contradictory to what he wanted.

If only it was that easy. Logic was no way to approach fey things though, not even magic. If he wanted to win this battle—both internal and external—then he had to stop rationalising and start *feeling*. He had an anchor, so all he needed to do was to concentrate on Marinette in order to keep his sanity.

Anger and thirst for revenge both still plucked at his heartstrings that had so far played a sad and hopeless song. It was so easy for anger to override other, quieter feelings the same way that timpani overshadowed a quiet flute.

Adrien allowed the growl to run up his throat and down his tongue, tasting the sound. Clicking noises echoed around the space and the wide open room in front of him when he stepped forward with his claws hitting the balcony tiles and soon the wooden floor of Chloé’s room. There the halfling stood and held Marinette in a bridal style. How *dare* she! His head lowered dangerously and he willed his eyes into a murderous expression. He would make her suffer for taking Marinette away from him and causing her to be in horrible pain.

Once again it was a single glance from Marinette that calmed the raging storm inside of him. And just like before, it broke his heart. She shouldn’t look at him this way. He wanted it to stop!

The symphony inside him was a confused mess of disharmonies. He was trying to get a hold of this jumbled composition of his and force it to behave. Only then did he realise that it wasn’t just one, but rather two orchestras that were playing. His own and a foreign one, and that it was just a matter of staying on top of each other. All he had to do was to be louder.

“What did you do?” Chloé asked, her voice horrified.

Adrien growled again. With the power Plagg had given him, it would be easy for him to make her regret everything she had done. Destruction was easy, he knew that. But just as other easy things, the price he’d have to pay for it would be too high. Everything inside him—foreign and familiar alike—rebeld against a peaceful route though, so he eventually decided on the in-between.

While he was trying to decide whether biting one of Chloé’s legs would endanger Marinette, he noticed that her eyes, still fixed on him in fear, slowly fluttered shut. Not just that, but her complexion was pale. She was hurt, but where? A quick panicked glance over her entire form quickly answered that question. It also answered the question why Chloé was carrying her in the
Both of Marinette’s legs bent unnaturally below the knees and in places they shouldn’t be able to bend at all. They were broken. Adrien suspected the spriggan, but since he had already dealt with her, something else needed to be the subject of his anger. He chose the nearby sofa and gave it a mighty swipe with his claws—they went through the fabric and the stuffing like a hot knife through butter.

A sudden noise behind him from the balcony alerted him to another possible threat so he growled out a warning. Whoever was approaching should better beware. Chloé might be his main target, but he wouldn’t forgive anyone for coming too close to Marinette.

“Chloé, better do the smart thing,” a familiar voice said and some of the tension left Adrien’s body.

*Just Félix. No danger.*

“I was *trying* to—,” Chloé said but it quickly turned into a pained scream.

Adrien’s teeth sank deep into one of her legs with every intention to hurt her. Now that Félix was here, he could just take Marinette and bring her to safety while he was dealing with retaliation.

“Damn it, you stupid cat!” Chloé hissed at him while Félix tore a by now unconscious Marinette from her arms. Adrien let go and positioned himself between Félix who was now holding Marinette and Chloé, who had crumbled to the ground and was holding her bleeding leg while muttering curses.

He was considering whether to let that be enough for now and to follow Félix who was already hurrying back outside to bring Marinette to safety. As always, though, fate despised him.

The door opened and in strode none other than Audrey Bourgeois. Adrien immediately slipped into an aggressive posture once more and growled. Both wisdoms from karate lessons and an ancient instinct told him that he should leave Chloé be and attack her mother instead. Neutralising the most dangerous threat was crucial after all. On any other day he would have hesitated to go through with such a reckless impulse, but he had some of Plagg’s power now, enough to beat a Court chief. If he couldn’t show her that he wasn’t to be messed with, then the Court would never leave him and Marinette alone. Besides, he needed to buy Félix some time to get away.

There stood Audrey, in a black Beltane gown with white flowers. The fabrics shimmered in a way no fabric should be allowed to shine, which meant they weren’t from this world.

Everything told him to fight, but a small voice in him still said that it would be unwise to anger the Court chief.

“Chloé, my darling, what have you done now?” Audrey said, sounding both annoyed and threatening.

*Rip her to shreds for the audacity of not acknowledging your presence!*

Adrien had already leapt forward when he realised that this thought, while similar, wasn’t his own. He stopped abruptly, less than a meter away from Audrey, a vicious growl still twisting his face into a grimace he hoped to be threatening and straightened himself up to his full height. Never before had he been able to look someone in the eye while he was a cat.

At least now, with his teeth in clear biting distance of her neck, he had Audrey’s undivided
attention.

And that’s when the sheer wrongness of the situation dawned on him. Showing aggression and threats towards the Court chief? Was he insane?! Protectiveness was a powerful emotion, but fear was as well. Adrien had been afraid from the start, but if there was one thing he has always been afraid of, for as long as he could remember, then it was crossing Audrey.

Out of pure habit and instinct, he took a step back, immediately feeling the roaring appalment of the destructive magic inside him. He was Chat Noir, bringer of destruction and saviour of people. Someone like him shouldn’t back down, yet that’s exactly what he did. At first. Then he came to his senses.

He had a Court chief to fight. Ha! What a ridiculous thought that was for a halfling like him. Did he have a death wish?! But no, he was stronger now. He could do this.

Adrien adjusted his posture to look even taller and more dangerous as he stared at Audrey in challenge. Despite his magic, he was at a great disadvantage with his barely sixteen and a half years of age. There was no telling how old Audrey was, but he was sure that it was at least a three-digit number. He might be more powerful, but she had experience on her side.

Audrey made the first step forward and Adrien immediately snapped at her. He couldn’t allow her to advance any further!

A spell was thrown at him that would have otherwise probably made him writhe in agony. Instead, it was like an unpleasant itch as the destructive magic ate away at it rapidly, making it void. He didn’t dare to unleash this enormous power just yet, so instead he went on the physical offensive. Plagg hadn’t just given him magic but also enhanced his natural weapons. Adrien had never been very good at spells to begin with, that was Félix’s forte, but if there was something he was confident in, then it was his ability to slash at something with his claws and rip flesh with his teeth.

He sliced and tore, while enduring every spell Audrey threw at him. While one spell hadn’t made much of an impact, several spells were starting to have some effect. It hurt, he was disorientated and his movements momentarily grew sluggish.

“Chloé! Get this beast off me!” Audrey yelled, her tone something he had never heard from her before—screechy and in pain.

So what he did had some impact after all!

Thank you Plagg.

Adrien chanced a short glance back to the balcony doors, seeing that Chloé was stumbling in his direction.

The urge in him to get out of this fight and follow Félix and Marinette grew and he swiped a paw at Chloé when she drew too close. He only saw four bleeding rips on her side before something immensely painful hit his left front leg. He growled viciously at Audrey who had hit him with a nearby piece of furniture. Spells? No problem. A piece of interior décor? A huge problem apparently.

Destruction was destruction, just as it always had been. Healing was the opposite of its properties and it also didn’t do anything to eat away the pain that shot through him. Was his leg broken? Maybe. With how much it hurt, it might as well be.

“You’ll regret this night,” Adrien growled and knew that he meant every word of it.
Without any warning he used Audrey’s momentary distraction to give her some ugly scratches across the face with his still fully functional right paw. Then he turned tail. Not only had he been injured, but the magic inside him was also too dangerous to keep this up. Already it was urging him to keep going and to kill both Court chief and princess. It wasn’t what he wanted though. He’d get this under control and then come back someday and make his point.

The only thing that mattered now was Marinette and her safety, not the feral magic that had grown more vicious the more he had been injured and pushed into a corner. He couldn’t risk it getting out of hand and instead hoped that it had been enough.

Fair folk followed him as he jumped over Parisian rooftops, but none of them made any move to attack. They were simply curious to see an interesting story in action and wanted to know how it continued. He growled at them. Somehow, he had to get to Mélusine’s undetected, but with his size, he couldn’t just hide in alleyways and pretend to be a regular cat. The fair folk would know anyway. If only there was a way for him to be invisible…

Adrien let out a short laugh when he realised that there was. He was powerful right now. He could do this, even though it was rather Félix’s specialty.

He concentrated on his own magic instead of the raging maelstrom of destruction inside him, but realised that it wasn’t enough. He needed more magic, but couldn’t risk using this untamed power. Slowly chipping away at a fraction of the foreignness, he made small parts of it his, taming destruction to follow his lead with the promise of protection. It was similar to the sensation of Cataclysm; albeit also in a much smaller scale.

Like a hesitantly half-tamed wild animal, he used the small bit of Plagg’s magic to strengthen his own. It didn’t want to mingle perfectly well with it yet, but that was alright. All he needed was to make it behave while he mentally crafted the spell, rune for rune, feeling for feeling, circle for circle.

When he saw the fae stop their pursuit and look around in confusion, he knew he had succeeded. The thrill of fooling even the fair folk and not just humans, as it had been the case before, didn’t last for long. A jolt of pain ran through his left leg when he miscalculated a jump and had to use both of his forelegs to not stumble and fall—he was much stronger and bigger than he had ever been before and still needed to adjust to it.

The pain was a good wakeup call.

*Serves me right,* he thought.

After all, Marinette had both of her legs broken. If only he had been more careful. If only he had been able to open his mouth earlier, words on a golden scale be damned! If she had known, then she could have protected herself from exactly this!

But he had been a coward and procrastinated. Now he saw what hesitating had brought him. It had taken everything from him, just like he had always feared it would. Not for the first time he desperately wished to wake up from this terrifying nightmare, but the pain in his leg and the feeling of shingles beneath his paws eliminated that small hope. This was as real as it was going to get. No illusions, apparitions or Beltane-induced fever dreams. Reality was so very cruel, just like it always had been.

*I lost her,* his thoughts reminded him. *No matter what happens now, she will never look at me the*
same. She’ll hate me.

Adrien shook his head and tried to ignore the stinging of his eyes. He couldn’t think about that now. Not when he didn’t know if she was even safe. Not when he didn’t know if she’d get better. Marinette had been hurt very badly tonight, not only physically. Would she be able to heal?

Well, he sure as hell wouldn’t be able to improve the situation. Even Audrey, the Court chief and therefore a horror among horrors had called him a beast. A monster. If he was terrifying even to other monsters, then there was no chance that Marinette wouldn’t be scared of him.

She would heal and be safe, he just had to believe in that. But there was one thing he was absolutely sure about:

He had lost her for good.

She wouldn’t be coming back to him.

The letter he had written just an hour before had been a naïve dream. A small hope that she could still love him. At this point, it would be his final farewell.

Your Chaton, your kitty and your love all have let you down. I’m sorry my lady, my Princess, my everything.

Chapter End Notes

Recommendation Of The Week

A Ghost From the Past by Tempomental

School’s out, Master Fu is dying, and the responsibility of the Miracle Box falls fully on Marinette’s shoulders. Ever the multi-tasker, she is sure she can balance being the Guardian with the rest of her life, but a new menace arrives and tests her resolve. With the fate of the world in her hands, it’s a wonder she has time for the attentions of two certain boys who seem determined to make her blush.

Okay, let me introduce you to a severely underrated fanfiction! Now, I personally am not a Lukanette shipper, mostly because I hate Luka with a fiery passion, but this fanfiction manages to portray Lukanette in a way that I didn’t want to burn the world simply because the ship existed. If you know me, then you know that this is a huge achievement! The Love Square is endgame, so absolutely no worries! 😊

Now, enough chit chat about the ships! The lore is canon divergence and very well made! It’s serious while still managing to keep a light-hearted tone and without letting those teenager disasters look more mature than they should be. They’re just the right amount of mature while still being helpless disasters and I am very impressed how that balance managed to be maintained for the entire story! I try it often and let me tell you: that balance act is hard!

Please read it if you’re looking for some action, Miraculous Lore and dating shenanigans! 😊

Alright, this was the last chapter of this year (obviously) but also the last one for quitie
some time. One month at least, maybe two. I have exams next month and I also need to secure most of the outline for the last arc that starts after this chapter! It's tricky to puzzle it out and I'm only 5 chapters out of maybe 40 in planning right now. No idea how many chapters Spellbound will end up having, but I know that this arc is not gonna be short at all. I'm also planning to write at least 10 chapters ahead before starting to upload them. When I took my last hiatus in April I wrote 8 chapters ahead, which ended up not being enough, so I wanna make sure to have enough of a buffer this time. I might also change the upload schedule to every two weeks. We'll see. I hope to be back with this story in March or maybe even late February. See you in spring! ❤

Happy New Year 2020!

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The Third Book of Faeries
Out of Reach

Chapter Summary

Previously on Spellbound
Marinette has been kidnapped by the fair folk. In a desperate try to get her back, Adrien made a deal with Plagg that forced him to give up his ring and in turn gave him some of Plagg's destructive powers. After literally ripping the fae that hurt Marinette to shreds, he snapped out of the destructive spell enough to get Marinette back with the help of Félix. He had to fight the Court chief and to some extent even Chloé to buy his brother time to get away. In the end, he had to flee with a fractured left foreleg and the certainty that Marinette would never be able to love him again.

Chapter Notes

I live!
Phew, this was the longest hiatus I ever took from the story and I would say I'm sorry for not uploading for over 2 months, but that would be a lie. I needed that time to figure out how to put the puzzle pieces together and while I'm still not finished with the outline, I decided that the beginning of book 3 is at least solid enough to throw out this chapter for now. It's the shortest chapter of the story yet and you'll see more of those super short ones in the future, if everythign goes according to plan with the outline. It's an attempt to not write super long chapters anymore, so let's see if that works (probably not). Anyway, enjoy this short little introduction chapter to book 3 of Spellbound! ❤️

The song in this chapter is "Song of the Sea" by Nolwenn Leroy and if you don't want to listen to it then just keep in mind that it's a lullaby-like, slow and peaceful song. c:

Definitions

mo stóirín [Irish] = my darling

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Marinette didn’t know where she was. It was a dark place. Scary and painful. Was she sleeping? Was she dreaming? Fragments of conversations reached her ears but she could no more tell dream apart from reality than she could walk on water.

“…both broken…weeks…away from here.”

As soon as she tried to make sense of what she heard, the words slipped away from her again. They made no sense anyway.

“…will be fine…safe.”

Her mind held on to that last word. Safe. Safe was good. Safe meant she would stop hurting, right? Safe meant things would get better.
“I’m trying to save you, damn it!”

She knew that one was a dream, since it was way too clear and way too loud to be reality. The sentence pretty much echoed through her, and she still wasn’t sure if she should believe it. Those words didn’t fit Chloé. But she’d heard it. She had seen her tormentor speak those words with desperate eyes, sharp teeth hiding behind her lips.

Marinette was confused. Something else had happened after that. Something that had deeply unsettled her, but what…

Tikki.

She remembered now. It was like she was back in Chloé’s room, tearing herself away from the blonde and running towards the terrace. All she needed was to transform and swing away from that nightmare. Tikki would…but her kwami hadn’t been there. She heard herself saying her name over and over again in a desperate attempt to find her, but it was no use. A touch to her empty lobes revealed the true horror of the situation. She was defenceless.

Before she could really consider a way of escape, a new voice had spoken up behind her.

“**How adorable.**”

Her first thought had been “**Akuma!**” but she wasn’t sure anymore. Akumas were twisted but this…this creature…it was unlike anything she had ever encountered. Tikki’s words had briefly flashed through her mind.

**Not human.**

She desperately gasped for air, but it was like everything was suddenly a void that didn’t want to allow her to live. Everything was out to kill her.

The winged creature’s smile made it worse.

Marinette knew what was going to happen. The moment she turned around to run back to Chloé—because if she had to decide between Chloé and this creature, the choice was obvious—there was pain unlike anything she ever felt shooting through her legs. She screamed so loud that it made her ears ring and she almost fell unconscious from the pain.

It hurt. It hurt so bad.

*Hush now, mo stoirin*

*Close your eyes and sleep*

*Waltzing the waves*

*Diving in the deep*

The voice was silent and sad and it only slowly tickled its way into her mind. It wasn’t part of what had happened, which meant that this was in the past and the song was the present, right? Marinette
still couldn’t tell. She knew though that the voice that sang it was familiar.

Stars are shining bright
The wind is on the rise
Whispering words
Of long-lost lullabies

She trusted that voice and it brought breath back into her lungs as the nightmare slowly faded and she slipped into a realm between sleep and wakefulness. Not wanting to wake up completely, because she knew there would be pain, she decided to listen and let it lull her back to peacefulness.

Oh, won’t you come with me
Where the moon is made of gold
And in the morning sun
We'll be sailing

Oh, won’t you come with me
Where the ocean meets the sky
And as the clouds roll by
We'll sing the song of the sea

Pictures of gentle ocean waves, beaches and moonlight replaced her nightmare. It was like laying on the patio at night next to Adrien, listening to the sea and looking at the stars.

Adrien.

Now that she thought of him, she knew it for certain: The voice that sang her to a peaceful sleep was his. He was singing and it was beautiful. Which meant he was there with her and that she didn’t need to be afraid.

I had a dream last night
And heard the sweetest sound
I saw a great white light
And dancers in the round

Castles in the sand
Cradles in the trees
Don't cry, I'll see you by and by

Oh, won't you come with me
Where the moon is made of gold
And in the morning sun
We'll be sailing

Oh, won't you come with me
Where the ocean meets the sky
And as the clouds roll by
We'll sing the song of the sea

The soft hum of a melody replaced words and Marinette felt herself drifting asleep further. When she heard the chorus again after that, sung more beautifully than all the times before, she was almost fully asleep again. If she dreamed after that, then of beaches, of stars and of beautiful, sparkling green eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Welcome to book 3!
and happy birthday to this 24 year old child here
I won't spoil what's going to happen in this new arc of course (unless you're Zai and already know what's going to happen) but I can already tell you that it'll be more quiet and emotion-heavy than the last two books. So prepare yourselves for emotional struggles and everyone to tell Félix to take a freaking nap!
no fanfic recommendations this week, sorry ;w;

PS: I got told that this chapter doesn't make much sense without chapter 62 so I'll upload chapter 62 in a few days so you'll get more context and a reason to cry. Until then I'm curious to hear your theories! 😊
Numb

Chapter Summary

he just wants to see her smile one more time...

Chapter Notes

And here you have your context and angst! You're welcome! ❤️

Adrien's feelings in this chapter are 99% based on my own experiences and 70% of it was written while I was in a similar state of mind at the beginning of the year.

Listen to "Song of the Sea" by Nolwenn Leroy if you want to know what the song in this chapter sounds like.

Definitions

mo stoirin [Irish] = my darling
grá go deo [Irish] = love forever

⚠️ TRIGGER WARNING ⚠️

dissociation

There are descriptions of dissociation throughout the chapter, including body-numbing dissociation at the end. If you're in an easily triggered state, then I recommend to read this chapter once you feel more secure.

I actually triggered myself while beta-reading this and had to deal with dissociation for the rest of the day.

Not fun.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Numb. He was utterly and completely numb. Félix had said something about shock earlier but Adrien didn’t care. All he could do was lie on the floor in this unfamiliar house and stare at nothing in particular. His brother had fetched some blankets for him and laid them down on the floor in a sort of nest, but Adrien couldn’t muster up the energy to move.

His entire world had been torn apart from one moment to the next. Why should anything still matter?

Not far from him stood a double bed, one side of it empty while on the other side lay Marinette, her legs in splints and her breathing stable, when also weak. What mattered now was that she was alive and that she eventually would recover.

If what Félix had said about shock was true, then it still needed to wear off, because he felt absolutely nothing. Not even relief. He was shaken to his core and he didn’t even have the strength to argue with his mind to feel better. The thought only briefly crossed him to be honest, before it floated back into the void he didn’t care to address.

Numb.
Like someone had dumped a bucket full of ice-cold water over him. He wasn’t drenched, but there was a constant chill as well as a stiffness and numb feeling he couldn’t shake. He had also shivered earlier, but wasn’t sure if that had been a symptom of shock as well, or just because he had a broken arm...foreleg that had been righted and treated with him fully conscious.

He hadn’t cared. He still didn’t care.

With great effort, Adrien raised and turned his head to a noise he had heard from the hallway. It was more due to the instinct to protect Marinette than any interest in what was going on around him whatsoever. The very faint flicker of relief at seeing Félix eased him momentarily before he returned to his numb state and turned his head away.

It was like his mother had disappeared all over again. Just like back then, the crippling feeling of loss had settled down on his bones like freshly fallen snow and he didn’t feel like shaking it off.

Adrien mourned silently and with no emotion whatsoever. Tears wouldn’t come, no matter how heart-rending the pain became. All he could dwell on was the past, both close and distant and he couldn’t for the life of him turn it off. His mind jumped from one happy memory of Marinette to the next, while repeating over and over again that everything had been fine not so long ago.

He didn’t know if it was how his idiotic brain was trying to reassure itself that everything was fine and disaster hadn’t just struck, but it wouldn’t change what happened. Marinette had been hurt and almost had been killed! That fact still held true and whenever he forced his train of thought back to that reality, the pain came back with a vengeance. It just didn’t want to stop.

Félix sat down beside him and petted his fur. Adrien knew he meant well and that it was probably meant to be calming, but he barely felt it. A flick of his tail to lightly bat Félix’s hand away was enough for his brother to stop. He knew him. He also knew that neither of them had any idea what to do.

For a moment, Adrien felt guilty for not allowing Félix to pet him, as he was most definitely in a similar pain, but then dismissed the feeling. Guilt was an emotion meant for something else at the moment.

Guilt and regret.

Such deep and endless regret that Adrien didn’t know where to put it all.

This had happened only because of him.

It was his fault.

How stupid and naïve of him to think that it could have ended any other way. Now he hadn’t just destroyed Marinette’s life but also his own. She would never be able to go back to simple ignorance after this and probably live the rest of her life in a state of constant fear and paranoia, just like he had done for the past couple of years. That she would never forgive him and would likely hate him forever went without saying.

He should have told her ‘I love you’ so much more than he had done. The words had been so very precious and he hadn’t wanted to wear them out by using them too often. He had seen in the glimmer in her eyes that showed how happy it always made her to hear them and how much she appreciated their rarity.

He should have tried to go on dates with her more and do things he knew she loved. A memory of her twirling happily in a flower garden just a few weeks ago came to mind.
He should have known how much he would ruin her life by coming into it, back when he had first introduced himself to her. What if he would have let her keep it at that bad first impression? Would she have hated him enough to keep her distance and not put herself into danger?

Thoughts of ‘what if’ now flitted through his mind, making it clear that all of this was truly his fault.

Suddenly the numbness lifted, making room for sorrow to fill him and open the floodgates. He was surprised he still could cry as the inhuman scum that he was.

Félix’s presence was suddenly very welcome as Adrien pressed himself closer to his brother and just cried. A tight hug and more soothing pets made him feel safe enough to completely fall apart, even purring in distress. Neither of them spoke a word.

Adrien hadn’t slept, even though crying for Danu knows how long had exhausted him. Pure stubbornness and fear of what would happen if someone tried to attack Marinette again kept him awake. He had been a procrastinating coward and his self-imposed punishment for it was to keep her safe at all times. Therefore, he was awake and alert. Ridiculous photoshoot schedules coupled with late-night Akumas had forced him to be awake for longer than twenty-four hours at a time before, so he could do it again. He just ignored the fact that he had barely slept the night before as well and that, powerful magic or not, the exhaustion would catch up to him eventually.

Plagg seemed to think something along those lines too.

“You’ve got to sleep, kid,” he said from where he sat on a dresser.

Félix, meanwhile, had shifted and curled up on the blankets for a nap. How his brother had managed to fall asleep with Adrien’s constant sniffles was a mystery to him.

Adrien shook his head. He hadn’t spoken a word since he had arrived at this house—one of Mélusine’s homes, far away from Paris. He didn’t know where exactly they were, but he also didn’t care. All that mattered was that it was safe and that Marinette was safe.

Plagg sighed deeply.

“Adrien,” he said and Adrien raised his head. The kwami only rarely used his name. “I know how you must be feeling right now, but forcefully keeping yourself awake isn’t gonna change anything. I’m here to keep a watch on things, so everyone will stay safe. Trust me, you need sleep, especially with that broken leg of yours.”

He understood Plagg’s logic but...he still couldn’t. Once he closed his eyes, all the images, dark thoughts and torturous memories would assault him once more. He had tried. Many times. Eventually he had given up and that’s where he was now.

“You’re avoiding, aren’t you?”

Adrien shouldn’t be surprised that the god knew exactly what was going on in his head.

“It’s not gonna get better this way, you know?”

He averted his eyes and instead watched the little bit of brightening sky that was visible through a gap in the curtains.
“Well, I know. I’ve been through this before and my past kittens have been too. Thoughts like ‘everything was fine just a few hours ago, if only I could turn back time’ are normal. Heck, especially when it comes to my kittens this was often the final push to turn them to the dark side, so to speak.”

Plagg paused, probably expecting a reaction of some kind. Adrien didn’t have any.

“You’re still here, kid. She’s still here. Both of you are the worse for wear, but alive. This is far better than the alternative. It means that you’ll still get to tell her things and that you can try to make things right.”

As so often, Plagg was right. But there was still one thing…

“She’ll hate me.”

It was the first thing Adrien said and the words hurt his still hoarse throat. Far worse though, they hurt his heart. Because it was true. Would be true.

“That’s up for her to decide,” Plagg said.

Adrien snorted. As if that would require much thought! He was to blame for all of this horror, so of course she would hate him.

“You saved her, kid, remember that. If it wasn’t for you, then she would probably be dead right now. And this isn’t the first time you saved her either. She doesn’t know it yet, but she’s a smart bug and will realise it sooner or later. I can’t guarantee anything or make promises, but from what I’ve seen of her I don’t think she has it in her to hate anyone. She’s too kind for that.”

Adrien curled his tail around himself anxiously.

“There are first times for everything.”

Adrien didn't know what to do. He wanted to help, wanted to make the situation better... save the whole thing. He wanted Marinette to wake up, wanted her to smile, wanted her to forget what had happened. He wanted things to go back to how they have been before.

Nostalgia, usually a bittersweet embrace of the past, now choked him, making him cry until he thought he had no tears left and then cry some more. It hurt. Being helpless hurt, crying hurt, being forced to just sit by and wait hurt.

It was an endless cycle of pain.

In the past, he would have sung. He was a creature of another realm, made from songs and twilight. Now though, he couldn't do it. He couldn't do the thing that had been as easy as breathing to him for as long as he could remember. Because, what would it be good for?

There were no words in the world that would make him feel better. Only her smile could do that.

Besides, did a song exist that could express what he felt right at this moment? There were songs about everything, from sadness to anger to loss, helplessness and desperation. None of them came close to what he was feeling. His entire world had broken down, fallen apart and then the broken pieces had shattered even further. The only thing able to save him now was for her to open her eyes.
again and to get better.

Selfish thoughts of what she would think of him once she saw him flitted through his mind, but he banished those. It wasn’t important what she thought of him. Even if she’d hate him—she most certainly would—he would still love her to the ends of the universe and protect her from all harm. All that was important was for her to recover. To be able to smile again...eventually...hopefully.

So, Adrien lay on the floor and watched her. He was close enough to maul anyone who would be so foolish to attack her, but still far enough away to give her space once she would wake up. Far enough away to retreat from the room without getting too close to her. Far enough away to spare her of his inhuman appearance.

He wasn't human enough to deserve her. No matter how hard he tried, he would never be enough to be deserving of her love. He was ashamed to not be human while she thought he was. Once she woke up, she would no doubt see a disgusting creature and send him away. This wasn't a fairy tale after all. He wasn't lucky enough to get a happy ending, the universe had made sure of that. A cursed creature like him wasn't made for happiness, just for misery and misfortune.

It had taken a lot of convincing and the threat of a sleep spell from Mélusine, but Adrien had eventually agreed to take a nap. He had no idea how long he had been out, but he was woken up by his instincts telling him that something was amiss. He raised his head, instantly alert, and looked around the room to pinpoint what was wrong. He didn’t have to search for very long.

Adrien might feel numb and void of all happiness, but he still had a high sensitivity towards the emotions of others that surrounded him. So, when he heard distressed noises from the bed and felt, tasted and smelt Marinette’s fear, he couldn't help but push himself up from his stiff position on the floor to approach her. She was asleep still, but it was more than clear that she had a nightmare. He pushed past his own devastation and sorrow to climb up the empty side of the double bed and lay down carefully next to her. Unsurprisingly, his presence alone didn't help. He knew what would help, but could he do it?

She didn’t wear her charm bracelet and no additional wards like rowan berries had been added to protect her from the fair folk. It wasn’t necessary in this house that was safe in and of itself and had not only a powerful Cat Sidhe but also the god of destruction itself in it. The lack of charms, however, meant that a small song could tug her away from the nightmares and into a calmer mindset. It wasn’t necessarily charming her, since there were no orders or anything of the sort involved, but it would still manipulate her emotions slightly to feel happy instead of afraid.

When he thought about it, it wasn’t much different than if a human would sing a song to her to calm her down, just that with this Adrien had the guarantee that it would work. Either way, he couldn’t sink much lower than he already had, so at the very least, it was worth a shot.

He took a deep breath and let the first words roll over his tongue, rusty and full of sorrow.

*Hush now, mo stoirin*

Adrien almost gave up again right away when he realised that he couldn't give her what she needed. He just didn't have the strength to sing a lullaby-like song with the calmness and peace it deserved. As it was, he would just turn it into a dirge. When he saw her stir less though, he decided to continue, hoping it would have some effect.
Close your eyes and sleep
Waltzing the waves
Diving in the deep

Stars are shining bright
The wind is on the rise
Whispering words
Of long-lost lullabies

Oh, won't you come with me
Where the moon is made of gold
And in the morning sun
We'll be sailing

Oh, won't you come with me
Where the ocean meets the sky
And as the clouds roll by
We'll sing the song of the sea

After the first chorus, his voice had gained some strength and it no longer sounded like he was trying to raise the dead instead of calming down his Princess. He continued.

I had a dream last night
And heard the sweetest sound
I saw a great white light
And dancers in the round

Castles in the sand
Cradles in the trees
Don't cry, I'll see you by and by
Oh, won’t you come with me
Where the moon is made of gold
And in the morning sun
We'll be sailing

Oh, won’t you come with me
Where the ocean meets the sky
And as the clouds roll by
We'll sing the song of the sea
Rolling, rolling
Rolling, rolling

He hummed the melody that followed, trying his best to just immerse himself into the song and feel the music. It worked a little, making the last chorus come out clearer and more beautiful than those before.

Oh, won’t you come with me
Where the moon is made of gold
And in the morning sun
We'll be sailing free

Oh, won’t you come with me
Where the ocean meets the sky
And as the clouds roll by
We'll sing the song of the sea
Grá go deo

Adrien felt better after the last words—love forever—were sung and he smiled faintly when he saw that Marinette’s breathing had evened out. The improvement was only short-lived as reality pushed itself back into his awareness. He wasn’t at a sunset-bathed beach by the sea like the song had painted into his mind, but on the bed next to his lost love.

The reminder made him tear up and he shuffled until he could carefully climb down from the bed again and sluggishly walk over to the blanket pile Félix had vacated earlier. Every step took forever and he was afraid he'd lose balance and fall the more he walked.

The world was numbing around him to the point where even sorrow was unable to touch him. It was like he was wrapped in cotton, his mind disturbingly blank.
So, I can sing after all, he noted, neither happy nor sad nor anything. It was a fact. An unimportant titbit of information that was discarded again almost immediately. Keeping a thought was hard. Why bother?

Because it was scary. The world was numb and cold and lonely. It scared him, but even the fear was numbed. He felt trapped, unable to move his mouth and tongue to form words. Even if someone would ask, he wouldn't be able to tell them what was wrong. He couldn't communicate and that made him feel all the more helpless. There was a word for this state of mind, but he couldn't remember it at the moment. All he knew was that this was far from the first time he had felt like this, but it had been a long while since he had experienced it last. Years ago, in fact.

More thoughts slipped from him until nothing but numbness and fear were left.

Chapter End Notes

This is just the beginning of the angst. You'll have to plough through several more chapters of this kind of pain before we'll finally get to fluffy territories again. Trauma recovery is horribly painful and I'm immensely sorry that I broke the kids. :’c

By the way, concerning updates I don't have a schedule yet and I'm still heavily editing the few chapters I already did write. I don't know when the next update will be, but I promise that it won't be longer than 2 weeks of a wait. There will be several chapters as short or even shorter than last chapter and with those I'll generally try to make two updates a week to make up for the small word count. :3
Félix was pacing back and forth in the hallway while Mélusine stood in the kitchen with inexplicable giddiness and prepared a meal.

While his home was relatively safe from the Court, he had no idea how to heal broken bones. Bringing Marinette to Mélusine had therefore been his only option. He also wasn’t sure that there wasn’t a loophole in his mother’s bargains that would allow the Court entry after all in this situation.

Going to their halfling acquaintance, who had several safe places within easy reach and who also had experience in the medical field (among other things) had been the best thing he could have done. That, however, didn’t mean that he trusted Mélusine. The entire time he was wary of her questioning, especially after Adrien had stumbled into her shop, looking much different than the last time she had seen him, and sporting a broken foreleg. There was no doubt in Félix’s mind that she would demand an explanation for all this sooner or later and he didn’t trust in his glibness enough to lie to her.

Then there was everything else to worry about, namely the ring on his finger and the kwami upstairs in the bedroom who would return to his pocket eventually. This was an issue for another day though.

According to Plagg, the only one who would have been able to get through Tikki’s wards, take the earrings and steal Marinette was a changeling. Therefore, the likelihood that they were replacing Marinette as well was high. Unfortunately, that meant that he’d have to interact with them in a friendly manner to not blow their cover, and by Danu, that would be a challenge.

That didn’t even touch upon the people in Marinette’s life who were unusually perceptive, especially Sabine and Nino. They’d no doubt become suspicious sooner or later and Félix would have to deal with that on top of Alya’s persistent naggings. And for how long? There wasn’t really any telling if Marinette’s legs would heal at a normal person’s pace or if her nature as a chime’s child would help her out and speed up the process. Either way, Félix was looking at a good month or two of fighting off any and all suspicions from the people around him and Adrien company as often as he was able to manage.

“A penny for your thoughts?” Mélusine asked.
She suddenly stood in the doorway of the kitchen and was grinning at him. He was tempted to shake his head, but she might be able to answer a few of his questions. The less he had to worry about, the better.

“Why this house in the middle of nowhere?”

Mélusine snorted.

“Rude. It’s only ten minutes by car to the nearest city, so it’s not *that* far out. However, it’s secluded enough that you’d not attract unwanted attention.”

Félix frowned as he gave himself a moment to think about that logic, but couldn’t for the life of him find what laws of logic Mélusine was working from.

“I’m afraid you’ll need to explain that to me in a little more detail.”

A grin crossed her face. “This village is populated mostly by elderly people, which means they’re unlikely to recognize the model of a famous Parisian fashion line. If that happens here at all. I mean, we *are* in the north of Germany and from my experience fashion experts up here are a much smaller niche than they are in Paris. And even *if* you get recognized, I doubt that they’d be interested enough to take a paparazzi picture and share it on the internet, thus you’re safer here than in a bigger city.”

Alright, he had to admit that that added up.

“Besides, the air up here is perfectly fresh and healthy, very good for healing.”

“And what about the fae in the area? Won’t they tell the Parisian Court?”

Mélusine shook her head. “I made a bargain with them two centuries ago that forbids them from bringing harm and a few other gruesome things to those I claim as my children. And by the terms of that bargain, you three count as my children and letting even the smallest piece of information about your whereabouts slip into Court gossip would break that bargain. They don’t have any halflings in their Court, which means they can’t lie and are bound to keep those promises they made. Even if they wanted to, they’re unable to sell you out to the Parisian Court.”

That was a *huge* relief and proved once more that Mélusine hadn’t picked the door randomly after all. It seemed perfect, which made his suspicion grow.

“Alright, then what’s the catch?”

“You offend me, kitten,” Mélusine said and sent him a reprehensive look. She then motioned him to follow her back into the kitchen so she could keep tending to the food on the stove.

“Can you blame me for asking?” Félix asked as he sat down on one of the chairs.

“No, I really cannot. You’ve been through too much these past few days to take kindness for granted, I suppose. Either way, you don’t have to worry about repaying me. After all, what kind of mother would treat her children’s injuries and then expect *payment* from them? Just…no. The thought alone is revolting! I might be a lot of things, but a bad mother isn’t one of them.”

“I wasn’t aware you adopted us,” Félix deadpanned and leaned his head on the backrest of the chair.

Mélusine giggled. “I thought I made that quite clear in the past years? Then again, you’re kittens
and sometimes a little oblivious to my ways. Your mother told me to take care of you if something would ever happen to her and while I could find my way out of that, I’m not someone who weasels out of a bargain, especially not when helpless children are involved.”

Félix muttered helpless children under his breath, not sure what to think about that description. They weren’t completely helpless, were they?

“Either way, that is that. You still have something else you wanted to ask me, so go ahead, kitten.”

He needed a moment to re-collect his previous thoughts before he remembered his other pressing question.

“I have to go back to Paris and sort things out there and you have your shop to run, so who’s going to take care of them?”

He nodded upstairs, though there was no doubt in his mind that Mélusine already knew who he was talking about. She smiled.

“I was thinking about asking Sabrina. She’s acquainted with all of you and has a human father, which gives her an understanding of Marinette’s fragile state. It wouldn’t be much of a bother for her I imagine.”

Félix nodded. It was a reasonable idea.

“As for my shop, I was planning to close it this week around Beltane anyways—too many annoying customers asking for rowan sprigs—so you’re in luck, kitten. The first few days are often the hardest when it comes to injuries, especially broken bones, so I’m glad I can keep an eye on those two personally. I won’t be able to do anything afterwards without arousing suspicion though, so you’ll have to sort it out yourself.”

Mélusine flipped the steak in the pan and then turned to look at him with an expectant grin. She did that often, as if she already knew what he’d ask next, and it never stopped to be disconcerting.

“If you don’t want to be involved further than this week, then how am I going to visit them? I’m sure the Court would notice if I’d go to your shop every day, especially now when they’re probably keeping an eye on me.”

Her grin widened.

“How would you like a portal to this place in your house then? I could set one up later this week in one of those guest rooms you never use.”

He honestly was surprised that he hadn’t thought of that himself. Then again, he was sleep-deprived and had about a hundred other very urgent worries. But then he was reminded of just who he was talking to and sighed. Bringing Marinette and Adrien here and healing them was one thing, but offering a portal built into his house—a challenging and never cheap task—was probably not part of that kindness. It was a thing of practicality that would spare him of the struggle to go to her shop undetected and decrease the risk of the Court finding out where Marinette and Adrien were.

“What do you want for it?”

“Well,” she said, a cheerful tone in her voice as she turned around to the stove once more. “I owe your mother a few favours and she told me to use them for you in her absence. There are five left and if I use one of them as repayment for a portal it would be four. You can pay me, of course, and keep those five favours for dire situations in the future, or you could use one of them now. Your
choice, kitten.”

“I’ll take a favour,” he said without hesitation.

With everything that was on his shoulders now, he couldn’t worry about repaying his debt for such a thing on top of things, thus the favour was like a heavenly gift. As selfish as it might be, he knew that they all needed each other. Adrien needed him, he needed Adrien, and Marinette needed both of them once she woke up. How much she’d need or even want them close would show, but she at the very least would need news from home and affirmations that her friends and family were alright and well. She wasn’t like them after all. She couldn’t just be cut off from her parents for months without batting an eye.

“Splendid!” Mélusine exclaimed, bringing Félix out of his thoughts. “I’ll set it up for you once I bring Sabrina here to look after things.”

Félix was about to thank her, but then bit his tongue before the words could slip out. No thanking a fair one, not even Mélusine. It was alarming just how out of practice he seemed to be when it came to fey manners.

The last time he had actively cultivated them came to mind and he couldn’t suppress a shudder. Though if unrooting himself again was what would keep him and everyone else safe in these dire times, then that was what he was going to do.

Chapter End Notes

And here you have some more information on where they are and what is going on! :3
So, yes, we're in the north of Germany! c: If I have to take a secluded place for the kids to hide out in, I can just as well use one I'm familiar with right? ;D
For those of you who aren't familiar with Europe's geography: the north of Germany mostly consists of flat land with a lot of rural areas and small farming villages and thus a lot of fields, cows, horses and sheep. It's between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, which means that it's very windy all the time. Sunny weather is rare and it's colder than the rest of Germany (definitely colder than it is in Paris) but it's still very pretty despite it.

Next chapter will come out next week! :D
And it'll introduce a new POV, so look forward to that! ^w^
Chapter Summary

Bri is trying her best ;w;

Chapter Notes

I am very excited to finally publish this chapter! One of the reasons I've been looking forward to this arc so much is Bridgette! Now, I know a lot of you were worried about Tikki, but worry not, this chapter will explain most of it, I hope. And what it doesn't yet explain, the rest of the arc will. ^w^

Anyway, NEW POINT OF VIEW! ❤ nothing against Marinette, Adrien and Félix, but this is very refreshing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A weirdly shrill melody startled her awake and frantically twisting her head for signs of danger. There was no dagger under her pillow however and her clothes were meant for sleeping, not fighting. Morning light—an unusual thing to be awake for since the Folk went to sleep at that time and it had long since proven wise to mimic their nocturnality—shone into the room she resided in from a window above. She let herself be perplexed for a moment before remembering that she wasn’t in Faerie anymore—neither a sídhe nor Tír na nÓg.

Turning to the source of the noise on the shelf above her, she identified it as a strange rectangular object that on top of everything was vibrating. Modern technology, she presumed.

With little idea what to do with it, she tapped on it a few times and breathed a sigh of relief when it eventually shut up. She stared at the small thing for a bit, curious to its function but couldn’t find anything remarkable about it. It certainly was no weapon, unless she’d throw it at someone with enough force, and the only thing it had done so far was startling her awake. Deciding that this was enough reason to dislike whatever it was, she put it back on the shelf where she had found it. It now lay next to the pair of red earrings with their characteristic black spots.

She sighed.

Their rim had changed from a silver to a golden colour when she had taken them from Marinette, just how they had looked like back when she had worn them so many centuries ago.

What would Tikki say if she saw her now?

She started shaking when she thought about it. Chloë’s fear of attracting Danu’s wrath for the theft wasn’t an exaggeration in the slightest and, old acquaintance and even friend or not, she rather wanted to wait a little bit before she’d find out what exactly the kwami’s fury entailed. She knew of a fae’s wrath only too well—being held under the sea for a human century had taught her much in that regard—and witnessing a god’s wrath instead of that of a Fae Queen wasn’t something she
wanted to do first thing in the morning.

Turning away from the shelf and thus the sight of the Miraculous, she took in her full surroundings for the first time. The previous night she hadn’t had much time to look around before casting a temporary sleep spell on Marinette, carrying her to Chloé—she could feel how sore her wings were from that flight still—and flying back. For simplicity’s sake she had picked clothes similar to those Marinette had worn from her closet. The soft fabric felt comfortable, but it also made her feel utterly defenceless, which brought its own anxious edge with it.

Now, in the light of day, Marinette’s room looked much friendlier. The closet was still open from her nightly raid, but she could also see various other things she had not paid attention to before. Curiously she walked down the steps from the bed and looked around the clean and oddly expensive-looking furniture. She knew that it had been a few centuries since she had last been in the human realm, but either wealth had changed dramatically since then, or she had been lucky to land in a wealthy family’s home. Either way, she liked it.

Deciding that the clothes she currently wore—probably a modern nightgown—just wouldn’t do, she looked at miniature paintings on the wall. They were oddly clear, so she prayed for their accuracy when she copied Marinette’s choice of clothes from one of them. A pair of pink pants—odd to wear some without being anything close to a huntress or a knight—a white shirt with a cherry blossom and a black jacket later, she looked at her reflection.

*Perfect!*

Tying her hair into twin tails was the easiest part and she was even a little disappointed at the lack of creativity. On revels she had gotten used to wearing the most extravagant and regal of hair styles and it was always a small pleasure to braid her hair in complicated ways to marvel at the end results. Authenticity came first though.

Maybe she’d be able to experiment with her now shorter hair a little later but for the moment, she had research to do. Chloé had told her a lot about this girl, a whole winded tale of kindness and escaping death’s jaws countless many times without knowing. She sure was lucky, so no wonder she had ended up with Tikki. What she needed was a role though. A script she could act out and play the perfect part of Marinette Dupain-Cheng.

With a giddy grin she let herself fall back in a chair and gave out a startled laugh when it started spinning. If she could act her way around the Folk and survive, then playing the role of an ordinary girl would be a piece of cake. Then again, Marinette wasn’t an ordinary girl. Her gaze flicked back to the bed where the earrings were. If there was one being in this world who’d know Marinette’s mannerisms and everyday life inside out, then it would be Tikki who had been by her side for over a year.

She tore her eyes away from it again.

*No, it has to work without her for now. I can do this!*

With that conviction, she eventually opened the hatch and walked downstairs. She was greeted by what looked to be a kitchen and a salon all in one. It radiated cosiness in a way she had seen many times before in the overly luxurious houses of the Folk. Just that here this comfort meant no danger. It was odd to think about how she could just throw herself on the couch with its soft-looking pillows and lay there without having to be afraid of the couch swallowing her whole, or of an assassin to jump out from behind it. This kind of naïve safety had become such an utterly foreign concept to her that she still couldn’t help but eye the room a little sceptically.
“Good morning, sweetie. You’re up already?” An Asian woman, probably Marinette’s mother, asked from where she stood in the small kitchen, busy with making breakfast.

“Yeah, I was woken up by that annoying thing on my shelf,” she said, hoping it wouldn’t sound too odd. She really needed a vocabulary list for this century.

Marinette’s mother chuckled. “I should have known you’d forget to turn off your phone’s alarm. I’m surprised that it managed to wake you up though.”

She shrugged with a grin, mentally cataloguing the word ‘phone’ and assuming it was the rectangular thing’s name.

“Lots on my mind.”

It wasn’t even a lie.

The woman nodded sympathetically.

“I know you said you didn’t want to talk about it, but just know whatever is going on between you and Adrien that you can always talk to me about it. Relationships are difficult at your age and when he left, he looked pretty torn up about whatever it was yesterday.”

She had to think fast. Was Adrien the Cat Sidhe Chloé had mentioned? If yes, then he would be at Marinette’s side right now and not return for a while. The only excuse that came to mind was the thing Chloé has suggested she should say.

“I…we’re taking a break. Something serious came up,” she said and did her best to look broken-hearted about it.

Marinette’s mother immediately stopped her breakfast preparations to rush over and hug her tightly. She froze for a second before easing into it and hugging the woman back. It had been centuries since she had last been hugged in such a way—death’s literal embrace didn’t count—and it felt warm and safe. It was something she hadn’t known she missed until that moment.

“Oh honey,” Marinette’s mother said and rubbed her back. “It’ll be alright, don’t worry. He’s a good boy and is hurting right now too. I’m sure you’ll find a solution.”

She nodded and even let a few fake tears escape her eyes to complete the act. When she drew back from the hug, she quickly looked around the kitchen in search of food. To get anything to eat in Faerie that wasn’t poisoned, enchanted or otherwise tainted had been a real challenge. She was glad to not encounter that complication here and to have a full palette of food available for once. Bread and butter seemed like a good and familiar solution for now, even though Marinette’s mother sent her a quizzical look when she turned down a sweet pastry. She’d had enough of sweetness for a lifetime. Salty things kept her safe and dangerously sweet things had been all she had been able to find in the Otherworld.

“I’ll just be up in my room today and…think about all this. Is that all right?”

“Of course, sweetie. I’ll bring you up some lunch later, okay?”

She smiled. “Thank you.”

It was nice to be able to say that again.
Diaries were an amazing invention and she was very thankful that Marinette had loyally been keeping one. Even the conversation from the previous day with Adrien had been written down in it. From what she had gathered, he had tried to tell her about the Folk and that he was one of them, but he hadn’t managed to do it and instead cried. An unusual thing for a Cat Sidhe to do, unheard of even. Then again, his brother had been a special case as well. Very human for a halfling.

Speaking of his brother, she finally knew his name: Félix. His mother must have had a particularly cruel sense of humour to have named her Unseelie Cat Sidhe kitten the Latin word for lucky. If at all possible, she looked forward to reconciling with him and hopefully even have him help her play her act.

Going through the diary had taken a few hours, but eventually she had read through its entirety that spanned over the course of over a year and even included Marinette’s experiences as Ladybug. Very useful indeed! While reading, she had written down unfamiliar words on a piece of paper and added explanations to them once she realised what they probably meant. As such, she had found out that she had been right and the rectangular object that had woke her up that morning was really called a phone. It apparently was a very frequently used apparatus with many functions.

Unlocking it had revealed a gold mine of photos and so-called videos. Most of them were of Marinette and a blond boy that looked similar but still very different to Félix. Adrien. She had to give it to him and Marinette: they were adorable together and she found herself curious what would become of them now. The Folk was the very definition of wicked and she very much hoped that Marinette would be able to realise how utterly human this halfling was and that he deserved at least a chance.

One hour of videos later she found herself immensely rooting for her counterpart. Now she felt bad to have told her mother that she and Adrien were on a break of their relationship. But then again, it wasn’t like Adrien was going to show up any time soon, so it was at least a logical reasoning for the moment.

Marinette’s mother—who she had found out was named Sabine—brought up a plate with something warm around noon like promised. Whatever it was, it smelled absolutely delicious. She thanked her and then devoured everything. It had been a long while since she had eaten something this good.

In the afternoon, she had discovered the texting feature. It had been a coincidence as she had tapped on the colourful little pictures on the phone and what it offered her was another goldmine of information. Conversations with several people were now accessible to her and she immediately started going through the ones she deemed most relevant. Especially those with a person called Alya who was Marinette’s closest female friend.

Her list of notes had long-since extended to profiles of important people in Marinette’s life and she very much hoped that no one would ever find those lists. While she felt like she was only scratching the surface, it still was a huge improvement from that morning.

The day ended with not much happening apart from her extensive studies of Marinette Dupain-Cheng’s life.
As it turned out, there was another free day following that Sunday. It was May 1st and while she had forgotten the name of the holiday that France was celebrating, she knew of another important celebration that took place simultaneously: Beltane. It would be safer to awake Tikki on this day to create a protective ward around the house, but she stubbornly dismissed it. Whoever had gifted Marinette witch glasses, a faery triad and other things to keep the Folk away was a godsend! She very much suspected Adrien and Félix and made a mental note to thank at least the latter of the two for them. They would do the trick for now and some of her own enchantments would do the rest.

Research, masked as mourning, was her main task for the day once more. Once dusk rolled in, she felt pretty secure about all the information she had gathered. While it hadn’t been like sneaking through the hidden hallways of palaces and finding out not only names, but also important bargains—she really couldn’t refer to her life in Faerie as boring—it had still given her a similar feeling of accomplishment. Dirty secrets and using them to her advantage had become her specialty, having made her a master of remembering even the most insignificant detail. In a world full of immortals that looked down on her, it had been her only protection for a while. It was a relief that those skills were still useful to her in this realm to a certain extent.

There would be school the next day and she had a timetable, an idea where her seat was and all she needed to do was find the classroom. Marinette apparently overslept and was late to school most of the time, so she’d try to mimic that to the best of her ability. She wouldn’t be too late though and therefore still catch someone from her class outside to follow them to what would be her classroom. She’d recognize those people from pictures she had seen on Marinette’s phone.

It was laughable how easy this was in comparison to freeing a fair one’s bride or outrunning a blood-thirsty kelpie!

This was not easy at all!

Apparently Alya, who she had recognised immediately, had a different class than her in the first period and had asked her where she was going when she had just blindly followed the hazel-eyed girl. She had tried to talk her way out of it by saying that the free day had made her all confused so that she was mixing things up. Alya had accepted that explanation, but then she had been left to find the room on her own. Asking someone would be suspicious, so she had just compared the room numbers to those of her time table.

She had been late to class, but at least that was normal for Marinette, so no skin off her back.

The things that were taught were another thing she struggled with. She could read and speak French, but to have someone explain mathematical equations, chemical reactions or even the way humans evolved from apes—interesting—to her was a little difficult. She managed, but had to opt out of answering any questions the teachers had thrown her way.

She didn’t even need to fake to look like death warmed over when she exited her last class before lunch.

The thing with faking was that lies had started to fall as easy from her tongue as did the truth. When surrounded by silver-tongued tricksters who thought they could glamour her, she had just pretended like she was under their spell, agreed with their suggestions, done what they asked, until
she had gathered enough information and moved on.

Fae couldn’t lie. It was only too easy to make them believe that she had been glamoured to tell the truth so that nothing she said was questioned. Or at least it only rarely was. She had mostly been overlooked anyway, as a lowly human servant, a changeling without a master. A disgrace not to be noticed, but, as many of them had found out too late, also someone to not be underestimated or overlooked.

Humans were similar to the fae in some ways, or rather the fae were similar to humans. The distinct differences after living with one and not the other for so long was throwing her off her game though, especially the part about lying. She was no expert on this world and while fae overlooked her awkward blunders, here every other mistake was immediately placed under scrutiny. It was unnerving.

“Hey Nette, you alright?” Nino asked.

She had found out through her research that he was Marinette’s childhood friend and therefore had known for her since they were small children. To fool him into thinking that she really was Marinette was one of the biggest challenges so far.

“Yeah, just…I’m worried about Adrien,” she said, sticking to the story she had read about in the diary. Apparently, Marinette had divulged those worries to Nino multiple times over the last months and therefore it wouldn’t be too odd to bring it up as a reasoning.

“Me too. He doesn’t pick up his phone and Félix doesn’t either. Did he say anything to you?”

She shrugged. “He came by on Saturday to talk and was very torn up about telling me something, but he never got to the point and said that he’d write it down instead. That’s the last I heard from him.”

When in doubt, stick to the truth.

“Man, I know these two have problems, but that’s just…not right.”

“I still vote that we storm Gabriel’s mansion and bust them out of there!”

She jumped when Alya suddenly appeared at her other side. That girl, as it turned out, was the one she needed to be the most careful around. Alya was too curious for her own good and had already prodded her for information in the class they had shared earlier about the talk with Adrien. She had lost count how many times she had told her that it was private and that she didn’t want to talk about it. Dissuading her had been a real piece of work and that had been about only one piece of information. She didn’t want to know how much of this treatment she’d have to endure looking forward. Probably a lot, when Marinette’s exasperation over exactly that trait of her friend was anything to go by.

“Nah dude. He already threw us out once and it might get the two into even more trouble,” Nino reasoned.

She could only nod in agreement, glad that at least one person here thought of thinking things through strategically. Impulsiveness in a delicate situation was never a good solution, especially not when fae were involved.

“Urgh, I know! It’s just so frustrating that we can’t do anything!”

“I hear ya, Al,” Nino said and pulled her into a one-armed hug, which she answered with a peck on
his cheek.

She smiled. The two of them were a cute couple. She hoped they’d never find out about the Folk and would live blissfully ignorant ever after.

“Hey, are you really okay Mari? I mean, the thing with Adrien…”

“I’m fine,” she interrupted Alya before it would escalate into another prodding session.

Besides, the less discussion they had about Adrien the better. Deciding that it was probably best to give them at least a small piece of information to satisfy them, she repeated the excuse she had also given Sabine. Best to keep that story straight.

“We’re just…taking a break right now, that’s all.”

To her horror, that stopped both Nino and Alya in their tracks and made them stare at her with slack jaws. She cringed internally.

Damn it, another mistake!

“Why?!” Alya exclaimed and threw her hands up. She looked genuinely shocked.

“Just…to sort ourselves out. It’s a bit of a mess right now,” she said, getting as close to the truth as she could.

“Nette, you’ve been in this mess since October! I don’t think it’s a good idea to take a break now when he clearly needs you as more than a friend.”

“I’m sorry that you don’t agree with my very personal decision.”

Always polite, never raising her voice to not offend a fae. The wording stayed, but being surrounded by humans had made her daring and her voice snappy. Something completely out of character for Marinette in this type of situation as it seemed.

“Girl, you know we didn’t mean it like that!” Alya said.

She shook her head. This was no good, she had to fix it.

“Sorry. It’s just all so new and I’m not sure how to handle it.”

*How true!*

Before she knew it, she was wrapped in a hug by both Nino and Alya.

“It’s okay, we gotcha.”

She nodded mutely.

Her mistake of declaring her relationship break with Adrien had not been her first one. It was the subtle things: a different choice of words, a gesticulation Marinette usually never did, the lack of things Marinette usually *did* do but never bothered to write down in her diary—like squeaking when poked in the side or raising her hand in class a certain way. Then there was her absolute lack of knowledge about this time period. The last time she had been in the human realm, France had
still been ruled by a monarchy after all! There were a lot of everyday things that were natural to the people here that Marinette therefore didn’t write down, that she still needed to learn.

It was no use. She needed help if she wanted to perfect her performance and not draw further suspicion. At least she would be able to chalk those irregularities up to her supposed bad mood about the trouble with Adrien and Félix, but that excuse would get old eventually.

There was no help to be had. No one who knew every little detail about Marinette’s life she needed to desperately know about. Not even Chloé.

No one except for Tikki.

She swallowed. It wasn’t something she was looking forward to at all but she very desperately needed guidance. This wasn’t like the jobs she had taken before where a human had been kidnapped to never be seen again and where she’d just have to wing it until she was discovered and chased out. This time Marinette’s reputation stood on the line as both herself and as Ladybug. The eyes of the entirety of Paris were on her and, as it turned out, of the entire Unseelie Court that resided in that very same city as well. If she messed this up, she wouldn’t just ruin a random person’s life that was lost anyway. She would ruin the reputation of someone extremely important and the consequences could be fatal. No one she had ever replaced had come back. Marinette, though, would.

A heavy sigh tore itself out of her as she climbed up to the loft bed and took the earrings into her hand. She stared at them for about a minute and then braced herself for the inevitable wrath of the goddess of creation.

“Here goes nothing,” she muttered, putting in one earring and then hesitating with the second one. Closing her eyes and shooing away her useless nerves she finished securing it. The effect was immediate as she felt the jewellery in her lobes warm.

Familiarity and distant memories washed over her when a ball of light materialised in front of her and then became Tikki. Only now did she realise how much she had missed her kwami and tears started to prick at her eyes.

“I should have listened to you,” was the first thing that came out of her mouth. She had wanted to tell Tikki that for so very long already, even though this didn’t seem like the appropriate moment to bring up the past.

Tikki’s expression went from anger, to confusion, to recognition in the span of a moment. It quickly settled on anger again.

“Where is Marinette?”

What could she say but the truth? One didn’t simply lie to the goddess of creation after all.

“I don’t know.”

“Where is Marinette?!”

She shrunk back at the fury that radiated off the small being. In her time with the fae she had adapted to them, even grew unnatural appendages of her own, stemming from the magic Tikki had left behind in her. It was like further mockery, or at least the Folk found it hilarious. The mighty Lady in Red, reduced to simple servitude and wearing a gross twisted image of the creature she had once represented so proudly. She knew what fae magic felt like and what her own magic even felt like. A cheap imitation of Tikki’s magic, but still so very similar. To feel just how powerful Tikki
was, even after knowing it theoretically, was very much a shock.

“I honestly don’t know! Chloé took her and if she succeeded, she’s at a safe place. If not, then she said something about Cat Sidhe and I actually met one of them at a revel which must have been some two and a half years ago in this realm’s time. Félix, right? And Adrien. They might have taken her to safety instead,” she said and bowed her head all the while. “Please, Tikki, I really don’t know about the whereabouts of your chosen, but I very much hope she is well.”

“You…don’t plan to stay.”

It was a statement that was spoken with such confusion that it could as well count as a question.

“There are first times for everything,” she said and couldn’t help the grin that spread on her face. She even dared to look up. “I know this is unconventional and that you’re distressed about Marinette, but if there’s even the slightest chance that she’s well and on the way to recovery, then you need to help me now. I’m a quick learner, you know that, and I’ll have to make the best impersonation I can possibly manage to not let anyone suspect a thing. That way, no one in her life will worry about her, things will go on as normal, and when she eventually returns, she can have a nearly seamless transition. Wouldn’t you want that for her?”

Tikki stayed silent and stared at her for a long while.

“Please! I’ve tried my best for the last three days but even with researching her diary and her phone I made one mistake after another. I need someone who knows Marinette to teach me how to act like her and you’re the only one who can do that!”

The kwami nodded.

“I will help you, Bri—”

Bubbles came out of her mouth and she stared at her in absolute disbelief. Complete and utter silence took over the room and then Tikki flew closer and put her paws on her forehead. Almost instantly, she recoiled.

“You don’t know your name,” Tikki whispered in shock.

She shrugged. “No, I don’t. A fae took it from me and forced me into servitude, but he died and my name with him. I’m a free changeling and don’t serve anyone but myself. That I managed to get out of Faerie and back into this realm is a miracle of its own.”

With the centuries, she had gotten used to not having a name. The only name she could remember that had ever applied to her was Lady in Red, but that had been with Tikki, when she had wielded the Ladybug Miraculous. Without it, the name had seemed like a false title, so she had never used it. Even now that she wielded it again, it seemed wrong to use it while she looked like someone else.

Then what Tikki had said sunk in.

“Wait, you said Bri. Is that the beginning of my name?”

There was no recognition inside her whatsoever, but it still sounded right for some reason.

Tikki sighed and nodded.

An excited grin crossed her face. If Tikki still knew her name, then she could just give it back to
her. She would finally be truly free once more!

“What’s the rest? Please tell me my name! It would free me.”

“I can’t.”

Her hopes crashed to the ground and shattered into a million shards.

“What? Why?!?”

“I can’t tell anyone the name of a Miraculous holder, past or present. Not mine, nor anyone else’s. At least not to those who don’t know those names to begin with. You don’t know your name, so the magic of the earrings binds me from telling it to you.”

Right, when had things ever been easy?

“Well, at least I got Bri out of you. You can call me that, right?”

Tikki nodded and then looked away.

“Marinette is so much like you. A chime’s child, creative, strategic and a fast learner. It’s… somewhat distressing to see you again while you look exactly like her.”

Bri smiled. “Another chime’s child, hmm? Looks like my stay here will be shorter than I expected then. No one heals better and quicker than a natural healer after all.”

Tikki threw her a faint smile. “I guess you’re right with that.”

“And I saw neither of the Cat Sidhe at school today which probably means they’re with her. She’ll be fine.”

Tikki floated forward and hugged her cheek.

“Thank you for helping her.”

“No problem. But seriously, I need help with figuring out how a computer works and what exactly the Ladyblog is if I want to keep Alya oblivious.”

Tikki smiled. “I can help you with that.”

Chapter End Notes

I still don't have a consistent upload schedule and will continue to upload somewhat infrequently. Be assured though that I'm trying my best to not let this wait ever exceed 2 weeks! c:

Please tell me what you think about Bri so far! I'm very curious! ❤
Waking Up

Chapter Summary

Marinette finally wakes up

Chapter Notes

Here is the full chapter at last! Sorry for the delay, there were some things that didn't sit quite right with me that I wanted to fix and for the longest time I couldn't figure out how.

Also, I would like to say that from this point onward there will be mentions and symptoms of trauma, as well as trauma recovery. While I myself do not hold any trauma, I know people who do and asked them. I have also done my own research and even asked my therapist about a few things. Everything described in this fanfiction is my attempt to portray trauma as realistic and respectful as I possibly can, though it is in no way meant to be seen as an example or even a guide. I simply lack the experience to get everything right and while I know trauma can be very subjective, I'm sure that there are also things that I got wrong. If you have trauma or experience with trauma patients and see something I got tremendously wrong, then please tell me so in the comments so I can correct it! I really strive to portray it as realistically as I can, as this is the least I can do to be respectful to trauma patients. Please feel hugged!

I also never broke a bone, so if I did get stuff wrong there please tell me too!

The song at the end is "My Land" by Celtic Woman

⚠ TRIGGER WARNING ⚠

trauma flashback

If you hold trauma and are easily triggered by seeing someone else get triggered, then be careful at the beginning of this chapter. The text in italics is the flashback itself while the single words are the trigger/dissociation. Please proceed with caution!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Light flooded into Marinette's eyes, dazzling her as she blinked her heavy eyelids open. Even before she tried to adjust her sight to her bright surroundings, she knew something was wrong. The constant background hum of traffic and the honks, sirens and other noises that came with it were mysteriously absent. Instead, she was surrounded by silence, except for the chirps and cries of what sounded like small birds—swallows maybe?

She rubbed her eyes and forced herself to sit up, despite it taking more effort than she thought it would, exhaustion heavy on her limbs. The room she was in was a foreign one she had never seen before with a mixture of old and modern furniture. Her gaze went over it and to the window through which the morning sun was shining, casting warm beams over the laminate floor. Outside that window, Marinette could see a tree with young leaves, a shed behind it and the roofs of houses
that \textit{definitely} weren’t a kind of architecture she recognised. They looked rural, but also not like anything she had ever seen in France. Then again, she had never seen much of the countryside before, so it hopefully wasn’t too far from Paris.

A movement, like that of a shadow, caught her eye and she turned her head to where the sunbeam was interrupted. What she at first had thought to be a massive pile of dark blankets or a fuzzy piece of furniture, actually turned out to be \textit{breathing}. It laid there in peace, occasionally flicking an ear in its sleep, while dust particles flew around it.

Marinette grabbed her blankets tighter in fear and must have made some kind of noise, because both ears suddenly perked in her direction. Ever so slowly the creature sat up, its fur so black that it shimmered blue in the morning sunlight, and then turned its head in her direction.

It was like someone had stopped time and poured a bucket of ice water over her head when she stared into its green eyes. Cat eyes.

Green cat eyes.

Green…

…Cat…

…Eyes.

Pain.

Fear.

Pain.

\textit{Everything hurt, but her legs were taking the worst of it. It was hard to concentrate on whatever else was happening around her when she just felt like sobbing and crying out for help or for her mother and father. A hospital would help, but she couldn’t form words to yell at someone to call an ambulance when she already had trouble forming simple thoughts like that.}

\textit{It was then that her eyes drifted to someone else screaming in pain. The first thing she noticed was red. Blood was everywhere and a puddle slowly spread on the terrace floor. Then she saw the arm. An arm that wasn’t attached to a body. Her breathing accelerated. Who had done this? What had done this? Would it do this to her too? Where was it? Would it kill her? When would it kill her?.}

\textit{Begging, screaming, cursing and a chilling growl tore her eyes away from the limb on the floor.}

\textit{The flash of huge sharp teeth glinting from darkness like a shadow were her first clue. The green eyes that fixed on her when she made an involuntary noise were the second.}


\textit{She couldn’t run. Chloé still held her and her legs were still broken. All she could do was panic while her eyes stubbornly stayed locked with the creature that would be her certain death.}

Overcast skies, exhaustion despite sleep, and pain. Those were the first things Marinette felt when she woke up for a second time in that room she didn’t know, in a still unknown place somewhere in the country—she presumed. The silence apart from the ever-present chirping was still unsettling.
“Good afternoon, dearie,” a feminine voice from beside her said.

Even after Marinette turned her head, it still took her some time to recognize the speaker.

“Mel?”

The woman smiled and put the book she had been reading down on the nightstand next to her.

“Yes, I know you’re a little disoriented right now, but I need to wash your wounds and change the bandages,” Mel said softly and then ran a hand through Marinette’s hair while wearing a contemplative frown. “Actually, you generally could go with a washing, sweetheart. I can try to answer your questions during that, all right?”

Marinette tried to sit up. Her brain was hazy, like a fog had settled down over her thoughts, as it so often felt directly after waking up. This time, though, the fog didn’t want to lift.

“Wait, wounds? Bandages?”

Mel’s smile turned sad. “You have leg fractures, sweetling. Both your fibula and tibia in both legs. That’ll take some time to heal and you’ll need help getting around in the next few months. I already have a wheelchair for you.”

At the last part, joy and even excitement sparked back into her expression, but Marinette couldn’t share it. Her legs were broken? No, that couldn’t be. She needed to be able to run and jump across rooftops as Ladybug! She couldn’t be bound to a wheelchair for months!

Mel, seemingly sensing her panic, gently shushed her.

“It is how it is and worrying won’t change it.”

She was right of course, but…

“How did I break my legs?”

Her mind was too hazy to grab a thought. She knew her legs had been broken and she knew that it had been painful and she had been afraid, but she couldn’t recall the event itself. Everything was fuzzy.

Mel’s smile instantly died.

“If you can’t remember it right now then that’s for the best. It’ll come back to you little by little, though it won’t be pleasant. Physical and emotional trauma never is. Now, then!” She clapped her hands, a smile back on her face as she stood up. “Let’s get you cleaned up and then get a meal into you. Are you allergic to anything?”

Marinette shook her head.

“That’s good, because I know this old recipe that’s specifically good for healing bones!”

Mel pulled back the blanket and Marinette couldn’t help but stare at her own legs. They were in splints and, fixated everywhere they could, were opalescent-shimmering gemstones. It was the latter that puzzled her most.

“Bornite. They’re good for healing and positivity and I further enchanted them,” Mel said, probably having followed her gaze. “They help keep the bones in place so that you won’t need nails and metal plates in them. As good as I am in the medical field, I don’t have as much
experience as I’d like with surgeries of that kind.”

“E-enchanted?”

Mel nodded. “I’ll explain later. It’s a little bit of a can of worms, dear.”

As it turned out, Marinette couldn’t even use the bathroom without help, which was utterly embarrassing. Mel, despite her humorous tone, respected her privacy as best as possible though, showing her how to go about transferring herself from the wheelchair to the toilet seat and later also the shower seat on her own. It was difficult and she needed Mel’s help for both tasks, but she was assured that she’d be able to do all these things on her own very soon when her strength returned. And while being washed was awkward, Mel was being thoroughly professional and nonchalant about it all, which calmed Marinette’s nerves as well.

At one point she had asked Mel if she had once been a nurse, to which the reply had been a laugh, followed by: “You wouldn’t believe how many children I have raised in my days, sweetheart. And practice makes perfect, doesn’t it?”

After a thorough shower, they were back in the bedroom Marinette had woken up in—it was at the end of the hallway and the bathroom was the first door on the right from it. A glass door that led out to a barren balcony had been opened, making silky white curtains fly in a seemingly ever-present breeze.

“Is there a storm coming?” Marinette asked while Mel stood behind her wheelchair and brushed her hair. She could see her in the mirror in front of her, just as she could see herself with her legs fixed into a straight position by the knees. Mel had said that even though the break was in the middle of the bones, it was best to fix the knees as well since the tibia most especially was directly connected to it. She had promised to switch to a bendable splint in a week’s time if things healed to her satisfaction, which was a small shimmer of hope at least. Albeit Marinette didn’t consider herself an idiot in biology, she still had to admit that she knew fairly little about the specific bones inside the human body. Maybe she could ask Mel to fetch her an anatomy book or lend her a phone or laptop so she could look it up.

“No, it’s always windy like that up here,” Mel said with a laugh in her voice.

“Where exactly is ‘up here’?” Marinette couldn’t help but ask.

It was one of the questions she had been dying to ask ever since waking up and she hoped to finally get an answer to it now. Mel paused in her task of brushing her hair and sighed.

“Sweetheart, this is part of the can of worms I was talking about earlier. Are you sure you want to know right now? I’d rather you recover for a few days first because this might shock you.”

Marinette thought about it and then nodded her head. “I want to know where I am, that’s enough for now.”

Even though she would no doubt be morbidly curious about the rest, she needed at least that peace of mind.

“Oh, if it’s just that and not the ‘how’, Mel said with a smile. “We’re currently in a small village near Schleswig by the Schlei in the north of Germany. The wind you asked about comes from its
location in between two seas and the nearby inlet. It’s slightly closer to the Baltic sea than the North Sea though and about one hour of a journey to either if you want to go to a beach once your legs are healed. They’re not the warm kinds of seas you’re used to though.”

Marinette’s brain had tuned out after hearing ‘north of Germany.’ That wasn’t anywhere close to Paris! In fact, it was probably even further away than the Camargue and thus the furthest she had been from her home city ever since she took that trip to China with her parents when she had been eight.

“W-why? And how did you get me here with broken legs?! That must be a...a ten-hour journey or something by car!”

“It’s closer to eleven hours actually,” Mel said. “And we agreed not to talk about the ‘how’ for now, so let me explain the ‘why’ instead. As much as I safely can say at least.”

At that, she walked around and got a chair so she could sit in front of Marinette. After a brief silence, she started talking again.

“You didn’t break your legs yourself, Marinette. They were broken by someone else. Once you’ll clearly remember the incident, you’ll understand fully, but for now I can just say that it’s not safe for you to stay in Paris while you’re this vulnerable. They won’t look for you here though, and the fresh country air is healthy, so you can stay and heal in peace.”

Dread settled down in her stomach as an unpleasant weight and suddenly Marinette understood what Mel meant with the can of worms she kept talking about. For the moment, she really didn’t want to know. Something inside her recalled a distant feeling and an odd sense of knowing what had happened. It wasn’t like a memory, but rather like she had been told what had happened. Technically Mel had just told her, but it didn’t sound completely new to her for some reason. Like she had heard it before. In any case, she knew it was the truth.

She didn’t like the feeling one bit and her thoughts became fuzzier when she concentrated on it, which made her quickly change the topic.

“What about my parents? And Adrien? And my friends? They’ll be worried and think I was kidnapped and...was I kidnapped?”

Mel shook her head. “No, your parents are not worried. Yes, Adrien is worried and no, your friends aren’t concerned about your wellbeing either. Well, except for Félix, I suppose. As luck would have it, an excuse has been set in place to keep everyone from noticing your absence. The latter question is trickier. Originally you were kidnapped, but you were saved from that place and brought here. If it really counts as saving is up for you to judge, though I can assure you that no malicious intent was involved at all when you were brought here.”

That, too, didn’t sound completely like news and neither was it very calming. For the moment, she’d take it though. Then something Mel had said occurred to her.

“Wait, so no one knows I’m gone except for Adrien and Félix? Did they have something to do with this?” Marinette made a sweeping gesture around the room.

Mel nodded. “Again, not saying too much here is crucial, but Félix came to me for help and he consented bringing you here. I hope that eases your mind.”

It honestly did. At least, if it was true. Mel could just as well be lying.

“And I can go back to Paris once my legs are healed?”
Mel nodded.

“How long will it take?”

“That’s hard to say, sweetling. About twelve weeks regularly, though with enchantments and in your unique situation it might be faster. You still won’t be able to run then quite yet, but rather walk slowly with crutches. Maybe six weeks? Let’s be generous and say five, at the very least.”

Marinette’s hope died. She had never been away from her parents for that long. Or from her friends. She couldn’t help the tears welling up in her eyes.

“And I’ll be here for that entire time just with you?”

“Oh no, sweetie. Not with me. I still have my shop to run after all, but I’ll ask an old acquaintance of yours to help. Do you remember Sabrina? Such a sweet girl.”

Sabrina? Marinette hadn’t heard from her for over a year. After the Akuma attack she had just disappeared without a trace, never to be seen again. Chloé didn’t talk, Adrien and Félix were suspiciously quiet too and no one else had really been close enough to her to know anything about her whereabouts. Seeing how she might have been involved in that whole Court-thing, Marinette wasn’t sure if she should be happy that Sabrina was fine or if she should dread seeing her again.

“And you weren’t the only one that was hurt in what happened,” Mel continued. “Which means that you’ll have the company of my other patient. Though he’s…in an exceptional condition, so it might be a few days until you see him.”

That sounded ominous.

“Alright, enough chit-chat!” Mel said with a giddy grin once again on her face. “I’ll put you back to bed now to let your legs rest. There’s soup downstairs that just needs reheating, so I’ll get you a bowl afterwards. Do you have any wishes for dinner today, sweetling? I can get you just about anything, so don’t be shy.”

Marinette couldn’t help the small smile despite the grim situation. She still didn’t know what to think about being around a thousand kilometres from home and her only company being a woman which she knew loosely through tea parties at best. But considering her situation, there really were worse things.

Marinette managed to finish a bowl of soup but fell asleep immediately afterwards. She really was exhausted, even though she hadn’t moved around much. Though, she supposed, it was also mental exhaustion.

Unsurprisingly, sleep didn’t come to her peacefully. Nightmares, both memories of what had occurred and twisted images her mind conjured up, tortured her. She wasn’t sure what was real or not, flitting from one horrible nightmare to the next, wishing for them to just be dreams and for her to wake up.

*How green are your valleys, how blue your great skies*

*Your mountains stand tall in their glory*
Your rivers run free the bright stars are your eyes,

Your beauty is endless before me.

Endless relief and instant peace befell her once she registered the singing. It was so beautiful.

Oh, you are the song ever singing in me

And you are the heart ever true

For you are my land and you always will be

The voice ever calling me...home to you.

Had she heard this before? The scenario seemed very distantly familiar. Or at least the voice was. Yet, her tired, tortured mind couldn’t draw the connection. Instead, she decided to just listen and to let the singer paint a picture of a paradise and sunshine into her mind.

When to your green valleys someday I return

When you lay your mantle around me

At rest I will be where the heart will not yearn

With my land to ever...surround me.

For you are the song ever singing in me

And you are the heart ever true

For you are my land and you always will be

The voice ever calling me...home to you.

You are the song ever singing in me

And you are the heart ever true

For you are my land and you always will be

The voice ever calling me...home to you.

The voice ever calling me...home to you.
Also, thanks to the people who were gushing about Spellbound and especially Félix on a discord server yesterday! 😊 A friend sent me screenshots and it chased away the brain weasels! ❤️
Chapter Summary

Adrien has an existential crisis

Chapter Notes

In case the update-thing didn't work last week, please check if you read chapter 65 (the previous chapter) already before reading this one as there would be spoilers otherwise!

And here we go, not even a week later! Finally I'm catching up to missing out on those updates before. Sorry about that by the way, I'm just quite perfectionistic ;w;

Finally you get to see Adrien's reaction to what happened last chapter where he accidentally triggered Marinette D:

SOMEONE HUG THE POOR KITTEN! At least Félix and Plagg are there for him ;A;

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Adrien was curled up in the darkest corner of the room he had fled to, silent sniffles sometimes escaping him. After that horrible scream Marinette had let out, the sun had taken its course over the sky, set and made room for the stars and moon. During the night he had gained the courage to go back to the bedroom under Plagg’s and Félix’s careful guidance, and calm his Princess down from a nightmare by singing to her again. It was the only thing he could do right now and if he hated something almost as much as hurting her, then it was to not be able to help her.

Eventually the sun had risen again and with it Marinette, which banished him back to the room on the other end of the hallway. Since it was Beltane of all days, it had been especially hard not to lose himself in his emotions. The quiet countryside didn’t help much in terms of distractions either, making Tír na nÓg’s tempting calls louder and clearer, almost as bad as on Midsummer. It was hell. Guilt and deep sadness had taken the forefront and nothing Félix or Plagg said had been able to take those gnawing feelings away from him.

After years of learning how to deal with Félix’s—at this point rare—flashbacks, Adrien knew what a flashback looked like from an outsider’s perspective. To see Marinette of all people get triggered and experience this agony because of seeing him...guilt didn’t even begin to describe the feeling. All the while his brother had done his best to tell him that it wasn’t his fault, speaking both from his own experience and the things he had read up on over the years concerning trauma recovery. Adrien knew that. His logical mind knew that…but emotions weren’t logical. He couldn’t simply choose how he felt or how he reacted to something. If he could, he wouldn’t have spent the most part of the last twenty-four hours curled up in a corner and crying his eyes out.

“Kid,” Plagg said.
It was the first spoken word after many hours of silence, so Adrien reluctantly raised his head. The kwami looked worried as he floated in front of his face.

“You haven’t eaten anything in days.”

Really? He hadn’t noticed. All other things apart from Marinette’s wellbeing had become secondary—that sometimes even included breathing. How many days had it been since he had last eaten something? Well, it didn’t matter anyway. Humans might need food to survive, but Adrien could run on magic, especially with as much magic as he had now.

“Kid.”

Plagg’s voice had become more insistent and he floated so close that Adrien had to cross his eyes to keep him in focus.

“Stop being a moron and eat something for cheesecake’s sake!”

Adrien couldn’t help but smile a little at the exclamation, as if cheesecake was something holy. Well, depending on who baked it, it very much could be. He remembered that one time when Marinette had baked an absolutely delicious strawberry-cinnamon-cheesecake just for him and…

And he was back with his sorrow, drenching the memory in sadness and making it something so bittersweet that it was painful. At the same time, his stomach grumbled at the mention of cheesecake.

“I’ll get us something,” Félix suddenly said from beside him and stretched his now comparatively small feline body.

Adrien still hadn’t gotten over how freakish he felt for being as large as he now was. While Plagg had promised him that he would be able to reduce his size eventually when he got used to the magic—just as he had always significantly reduced his body size when he had shifted from a human form to a cat form—that was still just a small reassurance.

Félix nuzzled him affectionately in a sign of silent comfort before trotting out of the room, his fluffy tail waving through the air. While following him with his eyes, Adrien noticed a mirror next to the door. It stood there, half behind a couch and looked like it had just been put there for storage purposes. It probably wasn’t needed in its previous location anymore. Fitting, as the room he had randomly claimed as his sanctuary for the time, seemed to be a storage room of sorts, though it wasn’t cluttered enough to really count as one in the traditional sense. Boxes with seasonal decorative articles and other such things had been pushed into one corner, leaving the rest of the room open for a couch, a carpet and a coffee table. There even were tea lights on the window sill.

Adrien got up and carefully put his weight on his right foreleg, as his left one was still very much broken and in splints. He limped over to the mirror and was careful not to bump into the coffee table again—good thing Félix had taken the leftover Easter decorations off it after that first incident.

Ever since Plagg had given him some of his magic, Adrien hadn’t actually seen his reflection, so naturally he was curious how much different he now looked. It wouldn’t be the reflection of a typical black house cat he was so used to and he wasn’t sure if that should excite or scare him. Judging by Marinette’s reaction the day prior, it was something he rather didn’t want to know. Torn on what to do, he hesitated for a moment and just regarded the mirror without reflecting in it from this angle.
It was a big mirror, probably having hung on a wall once upon a time to give the illusion of a room that looked bigger than it actually was. There was a crack going through half of it, which explained why it lay abandoned here.

“It’s just a reflection, kid,” Plagg said, probably in an attempt to give him courage to take two more steps forward.

He was wrong of course. It wouldn’t be just a reflection. What he’d see in the mirror would be the image of Marinette’s nightmares. He wasn’t sure he was ready to deal with that fact yet.

Adrien closed his eyes, counted from seven backwards and took two wobbly steps. He then sat down, facing the mirror and counted down from seven once more before he reluctantly opened his eyes.

A familiar yet strange feline greeted him and for a moment he was jarred by how much he still recognized himself. The same velvety black fur that shimmered in bluish tones in sunlight instead of the brown a regular black cat’s coat usually took on. The same green eyes, just like his mother’s, and the same white spot on the chest that looked like a melting heart. And while much bigger than ever before, he was still a shorthair cat.

His attention stayed on his eyes though. They were so much like his mother’s while everything else in his appearance was…well, him. There was nothing in this form that he could have gotten from his father, so he often wondered why he looked so different from his mother and Félix. Both of them had longer fur—not quite longhair but also clearly surpassing what would be recognized as a shorthair coat—held themselves much more elegantly and had a tear-shaped white spot on the chest. The only thing that kept Félix and their mother apart in appearance was his eye colour—a greyish green that sometimes even looked blue. Teal was the word they had settled on, but it might also be hazel. No one was sure, but it definitely wasn’t the spring-meadow-green of Adrien’s or their mother’s eyes.

He wrapped his tail around himself anxiously. It wasn’t overly fluffy but it moved with as much elegance as he could put into it. Then again, cats generally were graceful creatures, so was it even a remarkable feat? Why did he try to compare himself to his brother and mother in the first place? In this state, he was definitely not comparable to either of them or any other Cat Sidhe. Even while sitting, he was more than a metre tall, his facial features sharpened into a lynx-like appearance to make it undoubtedly clear to everyone just how dangerous a predator he was. There was nothing soft or cuddly about that huge cat in the mirror at first glance.

Adrien cocked his head, watching how his mirror image imitated the movement. He looked so similar to himself, but it was still hard to grasp that this was really him. Claws and teeth that had before been just mere tools to scare others off, were now deadly weapons. No wonder people were scared of big cats.

…No wonder Marinette was scared of him.

“Am I a monster?” he asked silently, not sure who the question was meant for.

Plagg? Himself? The godforsaken universe?

“No, kid,” Plagg said and rubbed his tiny head against Adrien’s with a purr. “You’re not.”

“How are you sure?”

“Do you know why you got my Miraculous?”
“No. I always thought it was a mistake.”

Plagg shook his head. “It rarely is and this time it certainly wasn’t one. The reason why you got my Miraculous is because you make for a good Chat Noir.”

Adrien tilted his head in confusion. “That was only proven after-the-fact though.”

“No, kid. The transformation didn’t make you Chat Noir. To be a good wielder of my ring, one has to recognise destruction within themselves and know when not to use it. Especially when emotional, it’s a rarer skill than you might think.

“You did that but even went much further,” Plagg said and floated in front of him, staring him in the eyes with one of the most serious expressions he had ever seen on the kwami’s face, “I gave you the power of destruction itself, equal to probably a million souls, and here you are, still yourself and as human as ever. Well, maybe a tiny bit less than before. The point is, you spared a life you didn’t need to spare and saved the life you wanted to save. I don’t know if you’re aware of just how remarkable of a feat that is! You. Controlled. Destruction! And even now you’re here lamenting day in day out about your very valid sorrows instead of cataclysming this entire house out of sheer madness. You’re surpassing my expectations immensely and I’m very proud of you.”

Adrien didn’t know what to say to that, so he just closed his eyes for a second. Plagg slow-blinked back.

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the abrupt end, I just didn't find a good ending point and this worked as well as any "_(으)_"/
I think I finally figured out a loose update schedule. I make no promises, but I very much hope that updates every 5 days will work out! c:

End Notes

Tell me what you think! Comments always make my day! ❤

For news about updates or even the occasional sneak-peek, you can follow me on twitter under @Lilaflyy

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