**Make a Wish, My Dear**

by *Starshipranger97*

**Summary**

Someone has disappeared. And yet, no one notices. Lives go on as normal for everyone except four people - four people who are brought together, bound by this mysterious person, and they vow to find them.  
...Except they can't remember them. They only have the faintest, vaguest of feelings that something is wrong.  
Adrien, Chloe, Alya, and Nino join forces to find this missing person and restore their memories.
Adrien's eyes fluttered open, and he was immediately struck by the intense feeling that something was very wrong.

He couldn't figure out what exactly was wrong, because yesterday had been extraordinarily unremarkable… Or had it?

He couldn't really remember any details of the day before, but he got the sense that he was supposed to regard it as a day like any other.

Supposed to… Like someone told him to view it that way…

He shook his head slightly, trying to clear it. He was being silly. He was sure that nothing unusual had happened or was going to happen, because his life was predictable and mapped out already. He was going to be given a strict schedule that entailed lessons with his tutor, pre-approved extracurriculars, modeling jobs, and “free” time that was to be spent in his room. Just the same as every other day.

So why couldn't he shake this awful ache in his chest? He felt like there was a hole in his heart, like something was missing.

He rolled over to check the time, wrinkling his nose at the illuminated numbers. 5:45 in the morning. He had always been a morning person, but this was too early, even for him. Even this little alteration in his schedule added to the intense wrongness he felt, and he laid in his bed, thinking hard, trying to figure it out.

Shouldn't someone be there with him? Someone he regarded with exasperated fondness, someone… Missing.

That was crazy, though. He was an only child. Why would there be anyone else in his room?

At six o’clock on the dot, there was a gentle knock on his door. Without waiting for an answer, a beautiful blonde woman peeked inside. “Adrien? Oh, you’re already awake. I have your schedule for the day. Once you’re dressed, come downstairs for breakfast and I’ll give it to you.”

“Okay, mom,” Adrien said dully, trying to ignore the sharp ache in his chest. Why would seeing his own mother bring up such terrible emotions?

She gave him a small smile before closing the door, and Adrien covered his face with his hands, pressing his palms into his eyelids. This wasn’t right. There was supposed to be someone else on the other side of the door.

He instantly felt bad for wishing that this mystery person was there instead of his mother, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that this wasn’t right.

That was two people he was suddenly missing, two people he couldn’t remember but could feel their missing presence. Adrien sat up slowly; he had a feeling there was more he couldn’t remember, maybe even another person he was missing. He could feel the absence, and it made the pain in his heart increase ever so slightly.
Across the city, two twin girls were jumping up and down on their sister’s bed, giggling and squealing.

“Wake up, Alya!

“The Sapotis are going to eat your breakfast!”

Alya curled into a tight ball under the blanket, her eyes screwed firmly shut. She was used to her hyperactive sister's torture attempts, and normally she cycled between annoyance and resigned acceptance of their antics, but today…

The second she was conscious, misery swept through her. She was dreading getting up, dreading facing the day, dreading going to school. Finally opening her eyes, a few tears rolled down her cheeks.

Ella immediately stopped bouncing, nudging Etta to do the same. “Alya?” she asked in a scared voice.

“What’s wrong?” Etta asked, her lower lip trembling.

Alya just shook her head, wiping her eyes. “I don’t know,” she said honestly. “Don’t worry about me. I’m up, let me get ready, okay?”

The twins hesitated slightly before leaving the room; Alya made sure to close the door once they were gone, then sat on the floor and broke down in unexplainable tears.

Nino took his usual route to school, passing Tom and Sabine’s Boulangerie and Patisserie like always. He stopped suddenly, staring at the building, his chest tight. Through the window he could see a short Chinese woman opening up the store, her eyes red. Swallowing down the lump in his throat, he forced himself to keep moving, crossing the street to Francoise-Dupont.

Chloe Bourgeois liked to be in control. She liked commanding the room and everyone in it, even at the expense of others. But today…

Today, she felt like someone else was controlling her mind. Her thoughts were occupied by someone else, someone she couldn't quite remember.

Someone she had a lot of feelings toward; love, hatred, admiration, desire, disgust, protectiveness, annoyance, anger, jealousy, respect…

Needless to say, she felt very conflicted. How could she not remember a person that invoked such powerful emotions? She had felt uneasy all morning, but as soon as she entered the classroom, the flood of emotions crashed over her. Something about the classroom was bringing all of this up, and she didn’t like it.

“Chloe, are you okay?” Sabrina asked for the umpteenth time.

“I’m fine!” Chloe snapped. She knew she shouldn’t be taking this out on Sabrina, but she was annoyed. It’s like this mysterious person was taunting her, hovering right on the edge of her memories.
She caught a glimpse of Alya Cesaire, peeking at them from across the classroom. Her brow was furrowed, her eyes confused and a little sad as she stared. Eventually she turned her gaze back to the front of the room, but Chloe swore she saw tears sparkling in the corners of her eyes.

She had to get to the bottom of this. She wasn’t going to let some ghost haunt her, bringing up unexplainable emotions. She was in charge.

Alya found that she didn’t know where to go at lunch. What did she normally do? Who did she usually sit with?

She ended up sitting alone on a bench, her bagged lunch sitting unopened next to her. She had no appetite; the misery from that morning hadn’t faded. In fact, it had only intensified when she got to school, proving that she was right to dread the day when she woke up.

For some reason, seeing Chloe’s seat nearly brought her to tears. It was just a stupid seat, but something about it seemed really significant to her. Instead of keeping up with the notes, she filled her notebook with the same quote, over and over.

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing.”

She knew it was a quote from the Majestia comics; what she didn’t understand was why it was the only thing her brain was telling her, replaying the words on a loop.

“Cesaire.”

Alya glanced up, frowning at Chloe. Chloe had a habit of bullying people when she got bored; Alya wasn’t a target too often, but she lacked the energy to deal with Chloe today.

“What do you want?”

Chloe sat down nervously, surprising Alya. “I… Do you feel it too?”

“Feel what?” Alya asked uneasily.

“Like something is wrong. I can't really explain it, but I just feel like everything is messed up.”

Alya nodded slowly, staring down at her lap. “Yeah,” she said softly. “That’s a good way to describe it.”

“Well, what are you going to do?” Chloe pressed. “Fix this!”

“I don't even know what's wrong,” Alya sighed, leaning back. “I can't help you.”

“So you'd rather be miserable and confused?” Chloe retorted. “You are ridiculous, utterly ridiculous! I thought you were a journalist!”

At that, Alya’s eyes slowly filled with tears. Why did that hurt so much? “I'm not a journalist,” she said quietly. “And there's no story here, okay? Nothing to report on! So we both have a weird feeling, that doesn't mean anything! You're the class representative, so figure it out yourself and leave me alone!”

Chloe’s eyes darkened, and she stood up. “I thought you were a good person. But fine, I don't need your help. I don't know why I even bothered to talk to you.” She stalked away, and for the hundredth time that day, Alya held back tears.
Adrien's fingers danced across the piano, the familiar notes filling the room. The wrong feeling never left him, instead growing more and more as he interacted with his mother. He hated feeling this way. He loved his mother so much, but every time he saw her his heart ached.

Standing and stretching, he walked over to the big window, opening it slightly to allow the breeze in. He suddenly felt a powerful urge to leap out the window, and he lifted one leg.

He paused. What was he doing? He was going to get seriously injured if he did something that dumb. But a little part of his brain was telling him that he would be okay, that he would land on his feet.

Like a cat.

His entire torso was leaning out the window; two different voices in his brain were warring with each other, and his head spun. He didn't know what to do…

A loud ringtone sounded, and Adrien nearly fell out the window from shock. Taking a deep breath, he quickly closed the window and answered the phone, relieved at the interruption.

“Hello?”

“Adri-kins!” Chloe squealed on the other line. “I miss you! Can I come over?”

“Oh, Chloe,” Adrien mumbled. “Um, let me ask my father.”

Chloe’s voice was a tad too high-pitched. “Oh. Well, it’s okay if he says no. Um, I want to talk to you in person, but I guess it can wait…”

“Just let me ask,” Adrien said. “Don’t worry about it. He knows you. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

He hung up and walked downstairs, hesitating in front of his father’s office. He knew he didn’t like to be disturbed, but Chloe had sounded like something was wrong, and he wanted to be there for his friend…

Taking a deep breath, he knocked once.

“Come in.”

“Hello, father,” Adrien said cautiously as he entered. “I had a question.”

“What do you want, Adrien?” Gabriel asked coldly, without looking up from his desk.

“I was wondering if I could hang out with Chloe. Um, I can go to her place, or if you would prefer, she could come here…”

“You’re supposed to be practicing your piano,” Gabriel interrupted, squeezing his pen a little too tight.

“I know. It would just be for a short time. I think she needs a friend right now.”

“Adrien.” Gabriel finally lifted his gaze, silencing his son with one look. “I don’t think Ms. Bourgeois is a good influence on you if she is encouraging you to abandon your practice. I’ve come to the decision that she is not an acceptable friend for you any longer.”
“But father,” Adrien protested.

“Enough.” Gabriel glared coldly at his son. “I won’t allow any arguing. You’re not to speak to Ms. Bourgeois anymore. Now go back to your room and practice the piano. I expect perfection when you next play it.”

The light faded from Adrien’s eyes, and he dipped his head in surrender. “Yes, father,” he said dully before exiting. He trudged slowly up the staircase, feeling numb. His father had always been cold, demanding, and overprotective, but it seemed like he was reaching new levels. And yet, this behavior didn’t feel unfamiliar to him. Disappointing and painful, for sure, but not surprising.

“Adrien?”

He jumped slightly, lifting his eyes to see his mother waiting at the top of the staircase, her eyes worried.

“Is everything okay?”

“It’s nothing,” Adrien mumbled, lowering his gaze back to his feet. He couldn’t even bear to look at his mother right now. All he wanted to do was retreat back to his room and wallow. “Father won’t let me go see Chloe, that’s all.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Maybe if we plan something for later in the week so it’s on your schedule, it’ll be fine,” she said sympathetically.

“No, he doesn’t want me to see her ever again,” Adrien sighed, his eyes burning. Chloe was his only friend. Why was his father trying to deprive him of his only friend in the world?

“That’s weird,” Emilie frowned. “We can’t just cut Chloe out of your life; we’ve been friends with the Bourgeois’ for years. I’ll talk to him later, okay? Maybe he was just in a bad mood.”

Adrien nodded halfheartedly, then continued to his room.

“Adrien.”

“Yes, mother?”

“Go find the Gorilla. You can go to Chloe’s, but you have to be back in an hour. Okay?”

He raised his head quickly, his eyes wide. “Seriously?”

She smiled softly. “I’ll make sure he doesn’t go in your room. But be quick, okay?”

“Thank you, mother,” Adrien pulled her into a quick embrace, guilt gnawing at his gut. He still felt strange around her, but he had to get over it. He needed to be more grateful for his mother.

Adrien raced down the staircase, looking back up at his mother once he reached the bottom. She was leaving a recording of him playing the piano in his room, closing the door behind her. She shot him a wink and a grin, and Adrien gave her a quick nod before running out the door.

The Gorilla got Adrien to Le Grand Paris in record time, and he took a deep breath before knocking on Chloe’s door. She swung it open in a huff, dragging him in.

“Adrien! Finally! I’ve got to talk to you about something really important!” she hissed, seating him
in a chair and pushing the table of snacks toward him.

Adrien glanced at the display of food, and a lump rose in his throat as he stared at the offerings. Croissants, macarons, plenty of pastries... He turned his head away, his stomach in knots.

“Adrien, something really weird is going on,” Chloe started, sitting down. “I don’t know how to explain it. It’s just, no one at school will talk to me about it. I tried, and she completely blew me off. You probably won’t even understand anything I’m going to say, but I just need to talk about it to somebody.” Chloe groaned and buried her face in her hands. “I feel like I can’t talk to Sabrina about this. I don’t know why. Like I said, something really weird is going on!”

Adrien leaned forward. “Chloe, I… Something strange is definitely going on. I feel it too. I woke up and I immediately could sense that something was wrong.”

Chloe lifted her head, her eyes wide in shock. “Yeah,” she whispered. “And weird little things set you off. Things that should be normal, but…”

“But they’re not,” Adrien finished. “I’ve been feeling it all day. And the worst part is that I keep feeling like I’ve lost people.”

“Like there’s someone who’s supposed to be there!” Chloe jumped to her feet. “Yes! Oh my god, we have to talk to Cesaire. It’s not just me. Adri-kins!” She grabbed him and placed a quick kiss on his cheek.

Adrien rubbed his cheek, trying to remove her lip gloss. “Cesaire?” he repeated. “Who’s that?”

“Alya Cesaire,” Chloe spat, rolling her eyes. “Ugh. She’s got the same weird feeling that we do, except she was totally rude to me today when I tried to talk to her. But now that I have you, I have proof that this isn’t just a coincidence. This has to mean something. Something really crazy must be happening!”

Adrien glanced at his phone. “I better get back. I’m… I’m really glad I came to talk to you,” he said earnestly. “I kind of thought I was losing my mind. I mean, things were super weird. I almost jumped out a window, and seeing my own mother hurts… But I know that we’ll be able to figure this out.”

Chloe’s eyes crinkled, and she was surprisingly quiet. She merely dipped her head in a nod, and Adrien waved goodbye before racing out to his car.

He managed to sneak back inside and return to his room without being noticed, and when his father came to evaluate him later, he performed the piano piece perfectly.
Coming Together

The next morning, Alya sat at her desk, fighting a throbbing headache. She held her head in her hands, but jumped in surprise when a hand slammed down on her desk.

“Cesaire.”

“What do you want, Chloe?” Alya asked tiredly.

“You have to listen to me. Whatever weird thing is happening, it’s not just us. I talked to someone else yesterday, and he totally gets it!”

“So?” Alya mumbled. “I already told you, I don’t want to help you.”

“Why not?” Chloe snapped. “What’s wrong with you? I thought you were obsessed with superheroes! Aren’t they supposed to help people and to do the right thing and all that garbage?”

“Just shut up, Chloe,” Alya sighed, rubbing her temples. Her head ached, and the misery that plagued her yesterday had only increased.

“What?!” Chloe’s eyes bulged in anger, but Alya couldn’t bring herself to care.

The truth was, Alya was scared. Based on her own grief, she knew deep down that something really bad had happened. And while a part of her did want the truth, and absolutely wanted to right this injustice, another part was terrified of what she would find. Alya had never shied away from the truth before, but her instincts were telling her that the truth was too painful to bear. Whatever terrible thing that happened, she didn’t want to know; it would only break her.

Chloe was currently fuming, spitting nasty comments at Alya, who only shifted her head so that she was no longer looking at Chloe.

“Hey, what’s going on?” Nino interrupted, his eyes shifting back and forth between the two.

“None of your business,” Chloe snapped. “This is between me and Cesaire.”

“Well, if you’re going to scream at her in front of the entire class, I think I can get involved,” Nino frowned. “Maybe you should just leave her alone.”

“You don’t understand,” Chloe said, sounding almost desperate. “She won’t help me!”

Nino heaved a sigh. “What do you need help with? Homework? I’m sure Sabrina can help you.”

“It’s not homework! Something strange is happening!”

“What do you mean, strange?” Nino frowned. “Like, weird things? Like missing someone you can’t remember? Or bakeries making you sad?”

“Yes!” Chloe threw her hands in the air. “You too? You’ve noticed it too?”

Nino shifted slightly. “Well, a little. I was just thinking yesterday… I feel like there’s someone missing. I mean, I know that sounds weird, but I just feel like… There’s a chunk missing from my life. Crazy, right?”

“Utterly crazy,” Chloe nodded. “But I feel it too. And so does Cesaire, and my Adri-kins. I want to
Nino contemplated for a moment, then nodded. “Yeah, totally. I mean, if something bad happened to this missing dude, we should help, right? Plus, it’s kinda freaky that we all have this weird feeling.”

Alya stared down at her notebook, at the scribbled words from yesterday. *All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing …* She slammed her notebook shut angrily, looking up at the other two.

“What if we find out something terrible happened? Wouldn’t it be better to not know?”

Nino’s gaze softened, and for a moment Alya’s heart picked up speed. It was as if he was searching her soul, like he knew all of her already. “I think it’s better to have answers than to wonder,” he said gently.

Alya sighed, trying to push her fears down. “I know you’re right,” she said quietly. “But I…”

“It’s okay,” Nino said quickly. “Just try. If you feel like it’s too much, you can always back out.”

Chloe sniffed. “No you can’t,” she muttered under her breath.

Taking a deep breath, Alya forced a watery smile. “Alright. Fine. But if we’re going to do this, we have to do it right. We all need to meet and talk. You guys can come to my place, if you want.”

“Ugh, no way am I stepping foot in your home,” Chloe wrinkled her nose.

“Fine,” Alya groaned. “What about your place?”

“Ew, I don’t want you losers there,” Chloe sneered.

“We’re running out of options,” Nino shook his head in frustration.

“Ugh, fine!” Chloe rolled her eyes. “I guess you can come to my place. Today, after school?”

“I can’t, I’m babysitting,” Alya said. “Tomorrow?”

Chloe nodded, pulling out her phone. “Okay. I’ll let Adri-kins know.”

“Good. And, start keeping a list of everything that’s weird or out of the ordinary for you,” Alya instructed. “We’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

Adrien reread Chloe’s messages for the fifth time, unsure of what to do. She made it very clear that he was to show up at her place at three tomorrow, no excuses.

The problem was, that was the exact time his Chinese tutor was going to show up tomorrow. How in the world was he going to get out of that?

“Adrien, lunch is ready,” his mom poked her head in.

“Okay, I’ll be right down.”

Sitting at the table, Adrien noted that his father wasn’t joining them. “Is father busy with work?”
“Yes,” Emilie said cheerfully. “He’s working right now, but he promised me that he would take a walk through the garden with me later. I’m sure he’ll eat dinner with us, too.”

Adrien admired his mother’s optimism, but he had his doubts. Work seemed to be the most important thing to his father; he rarely had time for his son.

Gabriel had always been a workaholic, but for some reason Adrien felt like it had gotten worse lately, even though yesterday was really the only memory he could access.

“Oh, Adrien. I talked with your father last night, but he’s not budging on this Chloe thing,” Emilie frowned. “I’m not sure what the problem is, but it’ll probably blow over. He’s been friends with Audrey for years, it’s not like we can suddenly cut the Bourgeois’ out. Just be patient, I’m sure eventually you two will see each other again.”

“Mm,” Adrien hummed dismissively, playing with his fork.

“Oh, and your Chinese tutor called. He’s sick, so we’re going to postpone your lesson tomorrow. Is there something you’d like to do tomorrow instead?”

Adrien blinked, then sat up straight. “Yes, actually. Can you add in another fencing lesson? I want to work on my technique. Last time it was a bit sloppy.”

“Sure,” Emilie nodded. “I’ll call Mr. D’Argencourt after we eat.”

Smiling innocently, Adrien ate his meal quickly and rushed back upstairs, under the pretense of working on his studies.

“Hey, Chloe. Can you do me a favor?” Adrien whispered over the phone, trying not to alert anyone.

“Sure, what’s up?” Chloe asked lazily.

“I need you to make sure that Mr. D’Argencourt cancels his fencing lessons tomorrow. I don’t know how, but do you think you can do that?”

“Easily,” she laughed. “You want me to do it now?”

“No, it has to be sudden. I don’t want him to call my parents.”

“No problem. See you tomorrow, then?”

“Absolutely,” Adrien grinned.

“Well, thanks for the ride,” Adrien flashed a perfect smile at the Gorilla, who just grunted in response. “I’ll see you at five, then.”

He stepped out of the car and walked inside the school, pretending to go to the locker room. Once he felt confident that the Gorilla was gone, he turned back, planning to wait for Chloe out front. As he moved, he bumped into someone.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” he apologized, looking at her. She had short dark hair and a smattering of freckles.

“It’s fine,” she said dismissively.
“I’m really sorry,” Adrien said. “I wasn’t paying attention at all.”

“Don’t worry about it,” she said, already walking away. “Have a nice day.”

Adrien shrugged and started walking toward the exit, but he turned back to look at her. She seemed familiar, but he couldn’t place where he had seen her before. He was sure she wasn’t in his regular fencing classes. Ah, well. He had more important matters to attend to.

Chloe strutted out a few minutes later, two annoyed looking teens following her. Again, Adrien noted that they seemed really familiar to him, and he felt a warm, pleasant feeling in his heart.

“Chloe!”

“Adri-kins!” she squealed, jumping on him in a hug. “I honestly wasn’t sure if you were going to make it!”

“It’s all thanks to you,” he smiled. “Thank you for helping me.”

“Ahem,” the girl with auburn hair coughed, her eyes narrowed. “I take it you’re Chloe’s friend.”

“Yes. Nice to meet you, I’m Adrien,” he said, offering his hand. They both shook it quickly, as if they didn’t want to touch him.

“Get in the car,” Chloe snapped. “Hurry up.”

Everyone piled in, and the car ride was uncomfortable and awkward. Adrien cleared his throat.

“So, what were your names?”

“I’m Nino, and this is Alya,” the boy offered.

“So, you’re friends with Chloe?” Adrien asked.

Alya snorted. “Never in a million years. I have no desire to be ordered around and treated like a servant.”

“Watch your back,” Chloe snapped. “I do not treat Sabrina that way.”

“Yeah, she only does your homework for you and follows you around like a dog,” Alya shot back.

“That’s her choice,” Chloe hissed.

“Yeah, I’m sure she loves getting yelled at and bossed around.”

“Please, we both know that this has nothing to do with Sabrina. You’re seriously angry about what I said in class?”

“You told everyone that Nino and I were only coming over to look at janitor jobs, since that’s the only thing we’ll ever be able to do!” Alya shouted.

“Chloe,” Adrien sighed, sounding exasperated. “Really?”

Chloe sniffed. “Well, I had to come up with a reason for them coming over. Everyone would be suspicious otherwise. It’s not like we’re friends.”

“Got that right,” Alya said under her breath.
“Alya’s mom works at the hotel,” Nino said in a small voice. “It would have been fine if you just said we were visiting her.”

“Ugh, whatever,” Chloe rolled her eyes, angling her body away from them. “It doesn’t even matter.”

The rest of the ride was silent.

Inside Chloe’s room, they all sat around the table, waiting for someone to start speaking. Alya finally cleared her throat, and they all turned to look at her.

“Well, I guess we better talk about this. Something strange is happening, and for some reason we’re the only ones who have noticed. Which means we need to get to the bottom of it,” she said, pulling out her notebook. “So I guess I’ll start. I, uh… Well. I guess for me, I’ve just been feeling really sad the past few days. On Wednesday I woke up crying,” she whispered. “I don’t know what’s wrong, but I can feel it. I can feel that something horrible has happened.”

“What do you mean, horrible?” Chloe leaned forward. “What happened?”

“I don’t know,” Alya shook her head miserably. “It’s like… It like I lost someone, but I can’t remember who this person is or what happened to them. It’s depressing and infuriating.”

“Someone died,” Chloe said bluntly, and Alya flinched.

“Come on, dude,” Nino shook his head, but Chloe ignored him.

“No, that’s what happened. Someone died, and that’s why you’re all upset. And you knew this, that’s why you didn’t want to help me! You think it’s hopeless!” Chloe stood up, pointing her finger at Alya.

“I don’t think it’s hopeless,” Alya said quietly. “But what if I find out someone I loved died in a terrible way? It hurts enough right now, I don’t want to feel worse!”

Chloe’s nostrils flared, and she opened her mouth to keep yelling, but Adrien interrupted her.

“What if they aren’t dead?”

Everyone looked at him. “What do you mean?” Nino asked.

“Maybe they aren’t dead,” Adrien said hopefully. “Maybe they’re just missing. We could still find them.”

“That’s true,” Nino nodded, looking at Alya. “We really don’t know. We’ve got to figure things out before we jump to conclusions.”

Alya took a deep breath. “You’re right. Okay.”

“So what else do you have?” Nino asked gently, and Alya stared down at her notebook.

“Um… Just small things at school have been bothering me. Like where we sit in class. Mostly just me and Chloe. I suddenly started feeling like we weren’t supposed to be sitting there.”

“Me too!” Chloe burst out.
“You know, I’ve been feeling like there’s supposed to be someone next to me,” Nino admitted.

Alya nodded. “And at lunch, I get confused. I don’t know who I’m supposed to be hanging out with.”

Nino nodded in agreement, and Alya glanced at him, blushing a little.

“And uh… Well, this is embarrassing, but I don’t think I should leave anything out. Nino… I kind of feel like… I don’t know. Like maybe we used to be closer? I just feel really comfortable around you, like we know each other really well. Even though we don’t.”

Nino scooted a little closer to her. “Yeah, I get it. When Chloe was yelling at you in class, I felt like I should protect you, which is kind of… Weird.”

Adrien shot Chloe a look, and she shrugged.

“Is that all?” she asked, sounding a little disgusted.


“My turn, then,” Chloe announced. “I’ve also noticed the weirdness about the seats in class. Actually, I’ve noticed that the whole school seems… Different. This person that we’re missing must have gone to our school.”

Alya was scribbling in her notebook. “Well, that explains how the three of us know them. It kind of sounds like the school is important. It’s definitely the place I feel weirdest.”

Chloe nodded. “And when my butler brings me snacks, I can’t even look at the croissants!”

Alya rolled her eyes, but Adrien practically jumped out of his seat. “Yes! The pastries! They remind me of someone…”

“Exactly,” Chloe said. “The same person from school.”

“So, somehow pastries factor in…” Alya muttered, writing in her notebook.

“Well…” Nino started. “Okay, so you know that bakery right across from the school? I walk by it every day when I walk to school, and I definitely get some powerful feelings from it. I think it’s also connected to this.”

“See? Pastries!” Chloe said smugly.

“What’s that place called?” Alya asked. “Tom’s Boulangerie?”

“Tom and… Somebody’s Boulangerie and Patisserie,” Nino squinted, trying to remember.

“Well, we’ll find out when we go there,” Alya shrugged.

“Go there?” Adrien echoed.

“Yeah, we have to investigate,” Alya said. “And we’ll have to investigate the school more. We need to get more information, because what we have is basically nothing.”

Adrien looked down at his notebook. “Okay, I guess it’s my turn, then? Unless you guys had more…”
Chloe and Nino shook their heads, so Adrien took a deep breath.

“Okay. Well… I’m an only child, but when I woke up on Wednesday, I felt like someone was supposed to be there with me. Someone who’s always around me.”

“So this missing person could be your sibling?” Alya asked.

“No,” Adrien shook his head. “I… I think this is someone else. Not the same person from your school. Because when I look at the pastries, I’m definitely reminded of someone, just someone different.”

“Two missing people?” Nino looked worried.

“Actually, it might be three,” Adrien whispered. “When my mom came in to wake me up, it just felt wrong. There’s supposed to be someone else,” he squeezed his eyes shut. “And I feel horrible for even thinking it, but I want that person back. It’s not supposed to be my mom.”

There was a long silence, save for the sound of Alya’s pen scribbling in her notebook. Adrien took a deep, shuddering breath before continuing.

“When I opened my window, I wanted to jump out. Not that I wanted to hurt myself, but because I felt like I could escape and not get hurt at all. My room is on the second floor though, so that doesn’t make any sense,” he continued. “But I almost did it. It was like a reflex. The only reason I didn’t is because Chloe called.”

Chloe gave him a nervous smile.

“We already talked about the pastries, but I also get a weird feeling from cheese. Pretty much all cheeses, but I noticed it most with camembert. It reminds me of the… The one that might be a sibling or something.”

“So we have a missing classmate, a missing sibling, and a missing… mom replacement?” Alya clicked her pen.

Adrien shrugged. “There’s more. When I saw you guys, I felt like I already knew you. It was a really warm, familiar feeling, like we’re already friends. And, I got a similar feeling when I ran into a girl at your school.”

“What girl?” Alya asked.

“I didn’t get her name. But she was Asian, had short dark hair, and freckles.”

The other three thought for a moment, and then Chloe snapped her fingers. “Kagami Tsurugi? The Ice Queen?”

“She seemed perfectly friendly to me.”

“Ugh, she’s the worst!” Chloe sneered.

Adrien frowned slightly. “Chloe…”

“I’ve heard people call her the Ice Queen too,” Alya admitted. “But I’ve never actually spoken to her.”

“Why the Ice Queen?” Adrien asked.
“She’s supposedly really cold to people,” Nino said. “Not very friendly, you know. But it’s just a rumor.”

“Ahem! She was utterly rude to me!” Chloe yelled.

Alya rolled her eyes. “Chloe thinks anyone who doesn’t bow at her feet is rude. I wouldn’t put much stock in her story.”

“Excuse me! She was very rude at function we were at!” Chloe said, offended. “Adr-kins, her family is rich too. Not rich like us, of course, but they’re pretty well off. I’m surprised you haven’t met her before.”

“I don’t go to many functions,” Adrien pursed his lips. “Father doesn’t even let me go to events with the other models.”

“You’re a model?” Nino repeated. “Dude, that’s so cool.”

“Okay, we’re getting off topic,” Alya said tersely. “Anything else, Adrien?”

“Yeah, there’s one last thing. I keep getting on the computer to check a website, but completely forgetting what I’m searching for. I feel like it was something I used to check all the time, but now I can’t remember…”

Alya looked up, her eyes wide. “I completely forgot about that! Yeah, I’ve been doing that too! It’s a really important website, but suddenly I can’t remember it at all! It was something I really loved, though.”

Adrien nodded enthusiastically. “Yes! One last thing - my finger feels completely bare. I keep touching it because I think there’s supposed to be a ring there or something, but there’s nothing. It’s a weird detail, but I keep noticing it.”

Alya ripped the papers out her notebook and shuffled them. “Okay. I think this is great work. We’ve established that there are three missing people, and clearly they had a big effect on our lives if there’s this much weirdness. I say we go to the bakery tomorrow and see what we can figure out.”

“Wait,” Adrien said. “I think there’s something we need to consider. Why is this happening? Why are we the only ones who’ve noticed anything? You’d think if three people just up and vanished, the entire city would be buzzing. You know, searches, police activity, all kinds of things.”

“He’s right,” Nino said. “One of these people is our classmate, but no one else in class has said anything. Neither has Ms. Bustier.”

“Well…” Alya trailed off. “Maybe someone altered everyone’s memories.”

“How do you erase three people from everyone’s minds?” Chloe rolled her eyes.

“It could happen,” Alya said defensively. “Maybe with super technology. Like a ray gun that can blast the whole city.”

Chloe snorted.

Adrien’s brow furrowed, and the words bubbled up naturally. “Maybe it was magic.”

The other three looked at him like he was crazy.
“Dude, magic?” Nino said, trying not to laugh. “Come on.”

“Adri-kins, be serious,” Chloe shook her head.

“I am serious. Magic could explain all of this. How else could three people disappear without a trace and no one notices? Maybe the only reason we noticed at all is because we have some sort of magic too.”

“If I had magic, I’d want super strength,” Nino said.

“He could be right,” Alya chimed in. “There has to be a reason we’re the only ones who’ve noticed that something is wrong. It can’t be a coincidence that the four of us were brought together.”

There was another long silence as they contemplated that, then Adrien jumped to his feet.

“I have to get back to the school right now! It’s almost five!”

“Oh, I’ll have Jean-Luc drive you,” Chloe said. “Let me call him.”

“Why do you have to go back to school?” Nino wrinkled his nose.

“My parents think I’m at fencing practice,” Adrien said, grabbing his bag. “They would never let me out otherwise. By the way, I don’t think I’ll be able to make it to the bakery tomorrow.”

“Adr-kins, the car is waiting downstairs,” Chloe said.

“Okay. Thanks, Chloe. It was really great meeting you guys, I can’t wait to see you again. I know we’ll figure this out!” Adrien waved, darting out.

Alya exhaled. “He’s actually nice. I was so worried that he was going to be like Chloe.”

“Hey!”

“Dude’s pretty awesome,” Nino smiled. “Maybe we were all friends before. Except for Chloe.”

“Excuse me! I’m right here!”

“Well, maybe we can go to the bakery another day, when he can go.”

“Were you even listening?” Chloe huffed. “His parents never let him out, unless he’s going to a modeling shoot or some kind of weird lesson. He’s homeschooled, they have a home chef, and his parents made his room all crazy so he would never leave. He has pretty much anything money can buy at his house.”

Alya and Nino shared a distasteful look. “So, if we ask him to hang out, his parents won’t let him?”

Chloe nodded. “He’s never even had a birthday party. They’re crazy overprotective. I’m the only friend he’s ever had, and they don’t even let me see him that often.”

“That’s way sad,” Nino said softly.

“No wonder he wanted to jump out a window,” Alya said darkly.

After a weekend of non-stop photo shoots, Adrien was glad for Monday to roll around. He had
lessons with the tutor, an actual fencing lesson, and a Chinese lesson. His day was jam-packed, but he had a feeling he could squeeze one more activity in if he played his cards right.

Before his fencing class started, he noticed a familiar girl in the locker room.

“Hey. Kagami, right?”

She glanced over at him. “How do you know my name?”

“Oh, a friend told me. How are you?”

“I’m fine,” she said in a short voice. Her eyes searched him from top to bottom. “You must be feeling radiant, carefree, and dreamy.”

“I - What?”

“The ad,” she smirked, and Adrien felt his face flush.

“Oh, you saw that,” he winced.

“I believe all of Paris saw it,” she said, closing her locker. “You don’t go to this school, right? Why do I keep running into you here?”

“I take fencing classes on Mondays and Wednesdays.”

“Ah. Funny, I take fencing on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.”

“Too bad we don’t have any classes together,” Adrien said.

“It’s probably for the best. I’d easily defeat you,” Kagami replied.

Adrien laughed. He had no idea why Chloe had called her the Ice Queen; Kagami was totally nice and really funny.

“Well, I should be going,” Kagami swung her bag on her shoulder. “Perhaps I’ll see you around.”

“Hopefully,” Adrien smiled. She gave him a sort of half smile in return.

“Maybe you should join some more classes,” she said before leaving.

After his fencing class, Adrien checked his phone.

Chloe: We stayed late, like you asked. The nerds have been doing homework in the library.

Alya: And Chloe has been a super nuisance. We’re all being productive!

Nino: Please hurry, dude.

Chuckling, Adrien texted them back, then walked outside to find the Gorilla waiting for him. Opening the door but not getting in, Adrien flashed the Gorilla his most winning smile.

“Hello! I know we’re supposed to go straight home, but I wanted to ask a favor. There’s this really good bakery across the street, and I really wanted to try it out. Just one cookie, and I’ll eat it right away so my parents don’t find out. And I’ll eat it outside the car so no crumbs get inside! Please?”
In his peripheral vision, he could see Chloe, Nino, and Alya exiting the building and walking over to the bakery.

The Gorilla narrowed his eyes, glaring at Adrien, who simply batted his lashes in return. Giving in with a grunt, the Gorilla flicked the turn signal, and Adrien hopped in the car.

Inside the bakery, his friends were already waiting. Adrien took a deep breath, breathing in the sweet smells, noting the strong, familiar feeling building in his chest.

“Adri-kins!” Chloe waved.

“I don’t have long,” Adrien said. “I’m supposed to be buying a cookie.”

“Do you feel it?” Alya asked urgently. “Chloe doesn’t really, but Nino and I do.”

Adrien nodded. “I feel it,” he whispered. “Whoever it was, they were here all the time.”

“Can we help you kids?” a voice said, and they all jumped.

A short Chinese woman was smiling warmly at them, but her eyes held a touch of sadness.

“Uh, yes please,” Adrien said. “Can I...” He trailed off, looking at the array in front of him. Swallowing down the lump in his throat, he tried again. “Can I get one macaron? The... The pink one?”

“Sure thing,” she said, reaching into the case. Adrien took a small bite, the crumbly cookie exploding in flavor in his mouth.

“This is delicious,” he eked out.

“Thank you,” she said. “I know I should think about the flavor, not the color, but I can’t help but love the pink. There’s just something special about it.”

Adrien’s throat suddenly felt very dry, and he nodded, stepping back over to his friends.

“Pink,” he hissed. “Pink is important.”

The others looked confused, and Alya walked over to the counter.

“Can I help you?”

“Yes,” she said, flipping open a tiny notebook. “I was wondering, do you have any kids?”

The woman blinked rapidly, sadness creeping across her face. “No,” she said softly. “I always wanted a daughter, but I never had any kids.”

Alya stopped writing, lowering the notebook. “I’m sorry,” she whispered. “I’m sure you would have been a great mother.”

The woman cleared her throat. “Thank you. Can I ask why you’re inquiring?”

“No reason,” Alya shook her head. “I just thought this place would be perfect for a student. Right across the street from the school, I bet she’d never be late.”
Smiling softly, the woman said, “Somehow, I’m sure she’d find a way.”

Alya turned and scurried out, and the others followed, thoroughly confused.


“We have to go,” Alya said, even though they were already outside. “I have to go home. I’ll message you guys later.”

Adrien opened his mouth to speak, but the Gorilla got of the car, glaring at Adrien. Adrien quickly popped the rest of the macaron in his mouth instead, then walked over to the car.

“It was delicious,” he said, smiling brightly. “Just as good as I heard. Thank you so much for letting me have one.”

Sighing heavily, the Gorilla simply opened the door, and Adrien climbed in.

Drying off his hair, Adrien flopped down on the bed and unlocked his phone, finding the group chat buzzing.

*Chloe:* So, is anyone going to mention what a freak Cesaire is?

*Nino:* Knock it off, Chloe. I’m sure she had a reason. Just leave it alone.

*Chloe:* Whatever.

*Chloe:* What a waste of time. We stayed after school for hours, just for that?

*Alya:* How kind of you, Chloe. I was going to apologize for earlier, but now I’m thinking I might not.

*Chloe:* Ugh, you freak.

*Alya:* Charming as usual. Listen, I do have something to tell you guys. The feeling I got in there was way more powerful than any feeling I had at school. That bakery is really important.

*Chloe:* Then why did we just leave like that??

*Alya:* Because it’s not enough to just hang out in the bakery. We need to get inside their apartment.

*Nino:* Uh, Als, they said they don’t have any kids. Even if the missing person is from that bakery, as of right now, there’s nothing left there.

*Alya:* The missing person is a girl.

*Chloe:* How do you know that?

*Alya:* I just feel it. I know it’s crazy to just trust everything I’m saying just because I had a feeling, but that’s kind of what this whole thing has been about, right?

*Alya:* Look, I just know she lived in that bakery. Even if her room is gone, I think if we get in the apartment we might learn something.

*Chloe:* You’ve snapped.
Nino: Alya, I don’t know if I’m on board for breaking and entering. It’s kinda illegal.

Adrien: I’m in.

Alya: Thank you, voice of reason.

Nino: I’m sorry, the guy saying he wants to break into someone’s house with you is the voice of reason? Als, I don’t want to say you’ve lost it, but…

Chloe: Adri-kins, please don’t side with Cesaire.

Adrien: Guys, don’t we want answers? I trust Alya. I trust all of you. And I think the only way this is going to work is if we ALL trust each other.

Alya: Besides, we aren’t going to steal anything. We’re just gonna look around.

Alya: So, is it just me and Adrien? Cause I don’t think my plan will work with just the two of us.

Nino: Alright, you wore me down. Fine, I’m in.

Adrien: Chloe?

Chloe: I swear, if we get caught I’m selling all of you out.

Alya: That’s the spirit!

Adrien: So, what’s the plan?

Alya: Okay, first we need to make sure that both owners are downstairs and not in the apartment. Chloe, I need you to be a terrible customer so they both come out to deal with you. Just be yourself.

Chloe: Seriously?

Alya: All you have to do is cause a scene. Shout that you want to see the managers, complain about everything, all that. Just make sure that both Tom and Sabine are in the bakery.

Chloe: Sounds easy enough. I’m sure their food is terrible, so it won’t even be acting.

Alya: Yeah… Sure. Nino, I need you to be a lookout. Sabine will most likely recognize me and Adrien, since we spoke to her today. So you need to make sure that she’s fully distracted by Chloe so that we can sneak upstairs. Once we’re upstairs, stay by the staircase and monitor the situation. Alert us if someone tries to come upstairs.

Nino: Sounds cool.

Alya: So Adrien, you’re with me. We’re going upstairs to see what we can find.

Adrien: I can’t wait.

Alya: Little too eager there, champ. When are you free?

Adrien: I already talked to my mother and added Friday afternoon fencing to my schedule, which is a perfect opportunity to sneak away.

Alya: Friday it is, then. The rest of us can search the school in the meantime.

Chloe: What exactly are you hoping to find?
Alya: I don’t know. When we were in the bakery, it’s like there was almost a memory.

Alya: Like it was hovering right there, but I couldn’t reach it. If we get upstairs, maybe I’ll be able to reach the memory. Maybe we’ll learn something that can help her.

Nino: Did you remember a name?

Alya: No. I can’t remember a face, either.

Alya: I want her to be alive. Someone tried to erase her from my mind, but they can’t erase her from this world. She has to still be alive.

Adrien: I promise we’ll find her.
Alya was hopeful on Tuesday, even though their searches didn’t amount to anything, even though she was subjected to spending extra time with Chloe. Her confidence only wavered slightly on Wednesday when all the searches were for naught. But when Thursday rolled around, and they still didn’t have anything…

“This is stupid!” Chloe yelled. “This is the biggest waste of time! We aren’t going to find anything doing this!”

“God, Chloe, can you not scream in my ear?” Alya hissed, covering the side of her head. “Your suggestions have been noted, now shut up!”

Chloe’s eyes narrowed dangerously, and she took a step closer to Alya, getting close to her face. “Watch out, Cesaire,” she snarled. “You don’t know how bad I can make your life. Maybe your mommy is done working at my hotel? Maybe your family wants to be run out of Paris?”

“Are you seriously threatening me?” Alya stood her ground. “You’re all talk. You would never be able to get rid of me, even if you tried to act on those threats. I’m not going anywhere.”

“We’ll see about that,” Chloe whispered.

“I don’t care if you’re the mayor’s daughter,” Alya laughed. “You don’t scare me.”

“That’s enough!” Nino shouted, swiping his arm between them. “This stupid rivalry between you two has got to stop!”

Alya crossed her arms angrily, and Chloe lifted her nose into the air.

“Seriously, this is never going to work unless you two start getting along,” Nino continued. “If you guys don’t end this, now, I’m done. Adrien and I will work on our own. That dude’s plenty smart, and he’s rich and connected.”

Alya’s arms uncrossed. “So you won’t hang out with me anymore?”

Nino’s jaw dropped. “I- I mean, I didn’t- I wouldn’t- That has nothing to do with this!” he finally spluttered out, flustered.


Nino let out a deep breath. “Jeez. Will you two please apologize to each other?”

Alya held up her hands in surrender. “Chloe, I’m sorry I get irritated when you act annoying.”

“Well, I’m sorry that you can’t appreciate all the extraordinary qualities I possess,” Chloe shot back.

Nino just sighed. “Great work, guys.”

“Yeah, well, this doesn’t change the fact that we just wasted three days walking around the school,” Chloe grumbled. “This whole time I could have been getting sushi while Sabrina eats her pathetic sandwich.”

Nino groaned. “Chloe, please! Look, there’s still one place we haven’t checked. The stadium.”
Alya snapped her fingers. “You’re totally right! We’ll check it out after school, okay? Since lunch ends soon.”

“We have to stay late again?” Chloe whined.

“You don’t have to come,” Alya said, barely containing her irritation. “Nino and I will check it out. We’ll see you tomorrow when we check out the bakery.”

“Thank god,” Chloe muttered, just as the bell rang.

After school, Alya and Nino headed over to the empty stadium. “No one’s practicing anything,” she noted. “That’s good.”

They walked slowly onto the field, spinning around to see the entire stadium. “Feel anything?” Nino asked.

Alya nodded slowly. “Yes,” she breathed. “I… I can’t place an actual memory, but I know something big happened here. I was a part of it.”

“And our missing person?”

“She was definitely here;” Alya nodded. “It sucks not being able to remember anything. It’s like I’m making out the outline of someone’s presence.”

“You’re sensing way more than the rest of us,” Nino reassured her. “Without you, I don’t think we would have gotten this far.”

Alya gave him a crooked smile. “If you could get all of our memories back, would you want them? Even the bad stuff?”

“Absolutely,” Nino said with no hesitation. “I mean, we probably forgot a ton of bad stuff involving Chloe, but I even want those memories back.”

Alya laughed lightly, but sobered quickly. “I just mean… What if we figure out that we actually hated each other, or something? You’re really important to me, Nino. I don’t know what I’d do if we weren’t friends.”

“I don’t think we could have ever hated each other,” Nino said. “In all the infinite timelines and dimensions, there’s not a single one where we hate each other. I’m sure of it.”

Alya leaned her head against his shoulder. “For what it’s worth, I want my memories back too. Not just to solve this mystery, but because I don’t want to forget a single moment with you.”

Their hands slowly snaked together, hands clasped tightly.

Adrien waved goodbye to the Gorilla, then went inside the school to drop his bag in the locker room.

“Hey, Kagami,” he greeted her with a small wave.

She gave him a curt nod. “Adrien. I thought you didn’t have fencing on Fridays?”
“I added it to my schedule,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck nervously. “Um, except, well, today I’m not going.”

“Sneaking off again?” Kagami asked, raising an eyebrow. “Meeting someone special?”

“No, no. I’m meeting a group of friends,” Adrien explained. “It’s kind of an emergency. I don’t plan on skipping class all the time. Plus, Mr. D’Argencourt will call my parents if I miss several classes.”

“Strict parents?”

Adrien nodded fervently, and Kagami sighed and sat down. “Yeah, me too.”

“It’s a little restricting, but usually I don’t think it’s too bad…” Adrien sat next to her. “Well, except for lately. My friend is going through something really big, and I just want to be there to help.”

Kagami glanced over at him, then pushed herself up and grabbed her foil. “Here, let me help you this time. Take a picture of me as if I were fencing, so you have an alibi. Even if Mr. D’Argencourt does call, you can just say he made a mistake.”

“You’re a genius,” Adrien admired, and a tiny blush covered her freckles.

Adrien scrolled through the pictures, nodding. “This is perfect. Thank you so much, Kagami.”

“It’s not a problem,” she said. “I don’t mind helping out friends.”

Adrien gave her a delighted smile. “We’re friends?”

Taken slightly aback by his eagerness, she just nodded, but he seemed elated. She shook her head and smiled slightly at his goofy expression. What a dork.

“Oh, I should get going,” Adrien said, checking his phone. “Thanks again. You’re a wonderful friend!”

Adrien found the rest of his friends waiting outside, and they all trekked over to the bakery.

“Oh, Chloe, Nino, you guys go inside. We’ll wait out here for Nino’s signal,” Alya instructed.

They peered through the window, catching a glimpse of a gesticulating Chloe and an enormous mustachioed man.

“That must be Tom,” Alya murmured.

“So then where’s Sabine?” Adrien questioned.

Moments later, the short Chinese woman from the other day came from the kitchen in the back, clearly drawn out by the shouting. Not long after, a message from Nino came through.

“It’s go time,” Alya said.

“Don’t you mean it’s dough time?” Adrien grinned. Alya gave him a disgusted look before slipping inside.

Chloe’s shouting was so loud that Adrien was surprised they didn’t hear it outside, but at least it provided an excellent distraction. He followed Alya upstairs, shooting Nino a thumbs up as he
“Okay, what are we looking for?” Adrien whispered once they were standing in the living room.

“Maybe we can find her bedroom,” Alya said.

They searched the entire apartment, but nothing jumped out at them.

“How long has it been?” Adrien hissed.

Alya checked her phone. “It’s already been five minutes? How is Chloe still shrieking?”

“Where else is there to look? Even if they had a kid, there’s no other bedrooms,” Adrien groaned.

Alya walked into the kitchen, frustrated. “What do we do? Maybe Chloe was right. This is pointless.”

“It’s not pointless,” Adrien shook his head. “It’s not! We’re going to find her, somehow. We need to exhaust all leads.”

Their phones dinged with an incoming message from Nino.

_Nino: Dudes, hurry. Chloe’s really good at yelling, but she’s starting to wind down._

_Nino: Plus the adults really don’t care that her dad is the mayor! Hurry!_

Alya put her phone away. “We should just go.”

“No way. We aren’t leaving yet. We’ve come too far,” Adrien protested.

“We haven’t learned anything!” Alya shot back. “We haven’t come too far, because we’ve accomplished nothing!”

Ding!

_Nino: Dudes, they’re coming upstairs!!!!_

“Alya,” Adrien paled. “We have to hide!”

Alya’s eyes searched the room, finding a trapdoor on the ceiling. “Up there! Hoist me up on your shoulders so we can open it.”

Adrien found that he somehow effortlessly lifted Alya - when had he become so muscular? She reached up and pulled the handle, revealing a ladder.

Ding!

_Nino: Guys! Where are you???

Chloe: You better get out of there! I wasted a lot of effort on this!_

Alya pulled the ladder up, slamming the trapdoor shut just in time.

“What just happened?” Sabine’s voice drifted up.

“She stormed in, saying she got food poisoning from our food,” Tom sighed.
“I recognize her, though. She came in the other day, but she didn’t eat anything,” Sabine said.

“I don’t know, then,” Tom said. “She just must be a confused teenager.”

“Well, at least we got it all sorted out,” Sabine replied. “Take a breather, honey. It’s no fun being yelled at like that. I’ll watch the bakery.”

“Are you sure? You got yelled at too. I can stay down there.”

“It’s okay,” Sabine said in a sweet voice. There was a smooching sound, and then Sabine said, “Come back down when you’re ready. It’s been a rough couple of days.”

“Well, that’s not good,” Adrien mumbled. “How are we going to get out of here now?”

He glanced over at Alya, who’s eyes were round and wide, staring blankly at the empty attic.

“Alya?” he whispered, coming to her side. A single tear dropped down her cheek, and then she dropped to her knees with a thud.

“Alya!” Adrien hissed, grabbing her.

“What was that?” Tom mumbled underneath them.

“Alya, what’s wrong?” Adrien whispered. She shook her head rapidly, her shoulders shaking.

Ding!

“No messages,” Tom muttered. “That’s weird.”

“Dammit,” Adrien hissed, grabbing his phone and turning the volume off.

_Nino: _I’m really worried. Are you okay?

_Adrien: _We’re hiding in the attic. Tom is underneath us. Can you tell us when he goes back downstairs?

_Nino: _Chloe kinda got kicked out, and Sabine has been giving me some stink eye… I don’t know how long I can stay.

_Adrien: _Please try to stay as long as you can.

_Chloe: _I am so boycotting this bakery after today.

_Nino: _Not now, Chloe.

Adrien pocketed his phone and looked back at Alya, who seemed to be coming back to her senses. “Alya, are you okay?” he asked softly.

She nodded, pressing her lips together to hold back her tears. “I’m sorry,” she whispered. “I… I just had a memory.”

_Nino: _Tom just came back downstairs. He’s in the back, but Sabine is still in the front.

_Alya: _Ask her for something that’s not in the front case. Ask if they have more in the back.
Nino: On it.

Adrien and Alya scrambled out of the attic and rushed downstairs, hesitating on the staircase.

Nino: She’s in the back! Hurry!

Adrien and Alya ran down the last few steps and out the door.

“I’m sorry, we don’t have anymore passion fruit macarons,” Sabine apologized. “Can I get you anything else?”

“Yeah…” Nino scanned the selection. “A couple pistachio ones?”

“Sure thing.”

“Did you buy something?” Adrien asked.

Nino shrugged. “I felt bad. Chloe tortured them, and then I asked her to look in the back for no reason. Plus their macarons are really good.”

Adrien just shook his head, laughing a little. “We need to talk to Chloe, as soon as possible. Alya…”

Nino looked over at Alya, a little worried. “What happened? Are you okay?”

She looked up blankly. “I’m fine,” she said in a quiet voice. “Can we talk about this some other time?”

“Alya, we need to talk about this now,” Adrien insisted.

“I need time to process it,” she whispered. “And you have to get back to school before you get caught.”

“I have time,” Adrien glanced at his phone.

“No,” Alya inhaled. “I promise I will tell you all about it, but not now.”

“Alya, are you okay?” Nino grabbed her hand. She gave him a gentle smile.

“I’m fine, I swear,” she pulled away from him slowly. “I’m going home. I’ll talk to you guys later.”

Alya: I think I’m ready to talk about it.

Chloe: What the hell happened in there?

Alya: When can we all meet? I want this to be in person.

Nino: I’m free everyday. No babysitting this week.

Chloe: Ew. I also happen to be free, but I’m still cooler than you.
Adrien: I have modeling jobs all week. There’s no getting out of them. Plus, the Gorilla always parks nearby to keep a close eye on me.

Nino: What about your other lessons?

Adrien: My parents just reschedule them if I have a modeling job. I really don’t know how I’m going to get away.


Chloe: Why can’t you just tell us now?

Alya: I remembered something in that bakery. I need to be able to tell you about it in person.

Nino: You remembered her? A concrete, real memory?

Alya: Yes.

“Adrien, you’re very quiet tonight,” Emilie smiled at her son. “What did you do today?”

“Nothing,” Adrien mumbled. “Same as everyday.”

“You don’t do nothing,” Gabriel said sternly. “You have many extracurriculars to fill your time, broaden your skills, and round you as a person.”

“Right,” Adrien said sarcastically. He stabbed his fork into his food moodily.

“Are you not enjoying your lessons?” Emilie asked.

“They’re fine,” Adrien said in a monotone. “I’m just tired of having them all here.”

“Your fencing and basketball classes aren’t here,” Emilie tried.

“But I barely get to talk to anyone,” Adrien fought back. “I don’t get to socialize during the lessons, and I always have to leave immediately after. I want to go to a real school, so I can meet people and make friends!”

“No!” Gabriel slammed his hands down on the table. “We’ve talked about this before. It’s too dangerous for you.”

“What about all the other people who go to school? They’re just fine!”

“They aren’t you. I won’t discuss this any further,” Gabriel said in a short voice. “Eat your food and then go to your room.”

Adrien glared at his father. “I’m not hungry,” he mumbled, pushing his plate away and standing up.

Later, there was a knock on Adrien’s door, and Emilie poked her head in. “Hey, kiddo,” she said softly.

Adrien laid flat on his back, staring up at the ceiling. Emilie perched on the edge of his bed, smiling nervously. “Wanna tell me what that was all about?”
“It’s nothing,” Adrien sighed. “I’m just tired.”

“Adrien…”

“I made friends,” Adrien blurted. “I want to hang out with them and do regular things. I don’t want to be locked up anymore.”

Emilie sighed. “Oh, hon. I know it’s difficult, but we’re just trying to do what’s best for you. Your safety is our number one priority.”

“I’m not doing anything dangerous,” Adrien protested. “We just want to hang out. I want to actually see them and spend time with them. I… I don’t think I’m asking that much,” he finished in a small voice.

“You’re not,” Emilie whispered. “Of course you’re not. But we have to listen to your father.”

Adrien grabbed a pillow and covered his face. “I want to be normal,” he said, his voice muffled. “I want everything to be normal,” he added quietly, his heart hurting. He wanted his memories. He wanted what Alya had, even just a tiny memory. He wanted his old life back.

Emilie gently reached over to stroke his head. “Adrien, I know you didn’t ask for any of this. And I’m so sorry that-”

“Please just stop,” Adrien threw the pillow off. “I know nothing is going to change, so apologies don’t really mean anything.”

Emilie chewed on her lip, then stood up, smiling brightly. “How about this? Tomorrow, you and I will go to the club for some bonding time. After your shoot. We’ll play tennis. Does that sound fun?”

“I guess,” Adrien said tonelessly.

“Okay,” Emilie gave him a wobbly smile. “Good night, honey.”

Adrien was very silent during the car ride to the country club, and during the first tennis match. When they sat down to drink some water, Emilie turned to face her son.

“Adrien, I’ve been thinking a lot about your problem. I’ve tried talking to your father, but he is very… Stubborn. But I think there might be a solution.”

“What?” Adrien asked.

“Once a week, we plan a day for you and me to hang out. We come to the club, or the spa, or a movie… Something that might take a couple hours.”

“Fine,” Adrien mumbled, his shoulders slumping.

“And while I’m out doing this activity, you can go see your friends.”

Adrien blinked, processing her words. “Wait, are you serious?”

“I don’t like disobeying your father,” Emilie said softly. “But you’re right, he’s being too hard on you. You’re a teenage boy, you need to have some friends. But, I reserve the right to change this agreement whenever I see fit. And you have to inform me of who you’re with and where you are
“That’s fair,” Adrien nodded. “Thank you so much, mother!”

She opened her arms for a hug, and Adrien leaned in gratefully. “Let me know when you want to meet your friends next week, okay?”

“I’m sorry,” Adrien mumbled into her shoulder. “I’m sorry I said I wanted things to be normal.”

“Hey, it’s okay. I understand your frustrations,” Emilie said, but Adrien shook his head, fighting tears.

His mother cared so much, she did so much for him, and yet he wished for his old life back. A life he was sure she wasn’t a part of. Maybe...

Maybe this investigation wasn’t the right choice after all.

“Can we get on with it?” Chloe said impatiently.

They were seated around the table in Chloe’s room again, Chloe tapping her nails against the surface in annoyance. Alya was sitting hunched over, her hair covering her face, while across from her, Adrien was staring out the window with glassy eyes, his expression faraway. Nino cleared his throat, glancing at Alya.

“Just… Don’t rush her,” he said. “Give her a chance to explain.”

Alya lifted her head. “I’m sorry it took me so long to explain this,” she started. “I had a lot of feelings that I needed to process from this, and… Well, I’m just sorry.”

“What kind of feelings?” Nino asked softly.

Alya let out a humorless laugh. “Uh, well, Adrien saw. I cried. I got home and locked myself in my room, and I cried a lot more. I feel kind of bad for freaking my family out. I think... I think I’m just starting to realize what I lost.”

“Could you be anymore vague?” Chloe propped her elbow on the table and leaned her cheek against her hand.

“Okay, okay. It wasn’t anything major, and I still can’t picture her face or remember her name, but being up there... That attic was her room, and it felt so familiar. Like I used to spend so much time up there, just hanging out and goofing off. She was my best friend,” Alya said in a shaky voice.

“Tell us what happened,” Adrien insisted. Alya closed her eyes, putting herself back in the moment, trying to remember every last detail.

Alya was overcome with emotions, and her eyes filled with tears. Blinking them away, she found herself standing in the middle of the attic; but this time, the walls were painted pink, and the room was cluttered with furniture and half finished projects.

“Alya!” a girl giggled. “I have something else for you try on! I made a bunch of scarves in different colors!”
The words flowed from her naturally, as if she had played this part before.

“Let me see!”

She whipped out a stream of scarves, twirling around the room and creating a rainbow. Alya burst into laughter, spinning in the soft knit streamers.

“Get ready!” she shouted, climbing the ladder to her bed. Alya jumped up and down, laughing as the girl tossed handfuls of confetti down on Alya.

Her gut hurt from laughing too much, and Alya flopped down on the plush chaise, still giggling. “Girl, you’re a nutcase,” she teased.

“I was inspired by that magic show we saw on tv,” she flopped on her belly, peeking down from her bed. “Plus, scarves are easy to make. Having one in every color means I’ll always match.”

Alya stood up and meandered to the desk, picking up the pink sketchbook. “Didn’t you say you had more designs?”

“Yeah, but nothing good,” she sighed. “Everything is subpar, nothing is fleshed out. I’ve been kind of busy lately though. I want to work on them this weekend.”

“What have you been so busy doing?” Alya asked. “Stalking Adrien?”

She flushed, clearing her throat. “N-no! It’s not that at all! I just, uh, have been helping my parents in the bakery a lot lately. Dad is testing new recipes, and I’m the official taste tester…” She cleared her throat and adjusted the pillow on her bed, almost looking as if she was looking at something behind the pillow.

“Suurre,” Alya said, drawing out the syllable, clearly teasing. “Looking at some Adrien pictures back there?”

In response, she tossed the cat pillow from her bed down at Alya, who giggled and dodged. And then the girls were engaged in a full-on pillow fight.

As if the scene were a movie, it faded to black, and then Alya was kneeling in the dusty, empty attic with Adrien, a tear tracking down her cheek.

There was a heavy silence after Alya finished, and Adrien ran his fingers through his hair, resisting the urge to tug it out.

“I’m so sorry, Alya,” Nino whispered, rubbing her back.

Alya’s eyes were lifeless and drained. “I don’t know her name, I don’t know her face, but I know she was my best friend in the world. I loved her, and she’s gone.”

“We don’t know that she’s gone for sure,” Nino interjected. “Don’t give up hope, Alya.”

Chloe shook her head derisively. “Look, it’s a big deal that she had this memory and whatever, but it doesn’t help us. We have no more information about her, no more clues, nowhere let to look.”

“Chloe, can you stop being negative for once?” Nino glared at her. “We can figure this out. I’m sure Alya will figure something out.”
“No,” Alya shook her head. “I can’t keep doing this. It hurts too much.”

Nino looked back and forth between Alya and Chloe, his mouth open in surprise. “Come on,” he pleaded. “You can’t be serious.”

“Maybe they have a point,” Adrien said slowly. “I mean… Things aren’t so bad the way it is, right? No one else even knows about the missing people. We can just move on.”

“Dude,” Nino said angrily. “That’s just cowardly. We don’t know what happened to those people, and you just want to give up on them because it’s easier!”

Everyone else avoided Nino’s eyes, and he stood up, tipping his chair over.

“Nino, calm down,” Alya said quietly. “It’s not easier this way. We want to find her, but there’s nothing left to do. At least this way I’ll never have to face her true outcome.”

“I think closure is better than always wondering, even if the results aren’t what you want,” Nino said coldly. “And you know, the fact that you had this memory means there’s still hope. You might have more, or the rest of us might have one. We could still learn something that will help us.”

“Or we might not,” Chloe said harshly. “Face facts, Lahiffe. We don’t know anything. We might never learn anything else about this whole situation!”

Nino shook his head. “I’m not giving up. You guys can quit, but I’m not going to. I don’t give up on my friends. I’ll see you guys later,” he said disapprovingly, storming out.

Nino put his headphones on and paced through the streets, not paying attention to where he was going. He ignored his buzzing phone, the odd looks he received from strangers, and just kept moving, his feet pounding against the pavement.

How could they be so selfish?

Nino knew that everyone had a selfish streak in them, and that some people (Chloe), showed it more than others, but he also thought that most people (probably not Chloe), could override that selfish streak and do the right, good thing. He thought he surrounded himself with friends like that.

Maybe he was wrong.

The worst part was having Alya give up like that. He knew she was better than that. Of course, he also knew how much she had been struggling with all this… The bloodshot eyes should have been a giveaway of how much she was crying.

He kicked a stray pebble on the ground out of frustration. He wanted to help Alya, because he cared so much about her, but he didn’t know how.

He stopped suddenly, looking up at his surroundings. Somehow, he had wandered all the way to the zoo.

Well, he was already here. Might as well.
Nino wandered aimlessly around the zoo, not really paying attention. He had gone in for a
distraction, but he couldn’t take his mind off what his friends had said at Chloe’s.

He stopped to look at the Seychelles turtle, smiling softly. Something about them was comforting
and almost familiar to him. Heaving a sigh, he kept moving, finding himself in front of the panther
cage.

A splitting pain cracked through his skull, and he reached up, clutching his face in agony.
The pain faded away as quickly as it came, and suddenly Adrien was standing in front of him.

“Don’t worry, okay? You’re awesome, and it’s going to be great.”

“I’m nervous,” the words spilled from Nino. “I can’t even talk to her now.”

“Just do your best, and if you get stuck, I’m right here to help,” Adrien smiled, pointing to his ear.
Nino touched his own, feeling the small earpiece. “I’m going to go hide, she’ll be here any
second!”

Nino stood stiffly, waiting for her to show up. And then she rounded the corner, her bright pink
pants sticking out in the crowd.

For some reason, he couldn’t picture her face…

But she bounced over to him, peering around his shoulder. “Hi, Nino! Where’s, uh, where’s
Adrien?”

“Oh, he, uh, couldn’t make it,” Nino spluttered out.

“Oh,” she sounded disappointed. “Yeah, neither could Alya.”

They stood there awkwardly for a moment, before Nino said, “Well, do you want to look around?”
She nodded, and they meandered slowly, getting a little closer to the panther cage, where Kim was
being loud.

“Now’s your chance,” Adrien hissed. “Tell her!”

Nino shook his head a little. “I can’t!”

“Did you say something?” she asked.

“No! I mean, yes,” Nino gulped in some air.

“Repeat after me. I have…” Adrien said in his ear.


What on earth possessed him to say that?
She looked surprised, but then a big smile broke out on her face. “Really? That’s so cool! I can totally set you up!”

She winced a little, touching her ear briefly.

“Oh, yeah, that’s… Great…” Nino forced a smile.

She opened her mouth to respond, but suddenly Kim ran past them in a blur, shouting in fear.

She looked determined, her jaw setting. “Nino, run! There’s an akuma!”

“Wait, what about you?”

But she was already taking off. Nino pressed the earpiece closer, shouting, “Adrien, dude, run! There’s an akuma! Are you okay?”

He was met with silence on the other end, and he ripped the earpiece out in frustration. Sometimes he wondered what was wrong with his friends, but in the end all he hoped for was they were safe.

It would be nice if they stopped disappearing during akuma attacks, though.

A hand reached out and grabbed him, tugging him toward the empty cage. He twisted slightly, seeing… Nothing. Just a shapeless blob, a placeholder.

Wait. He knew this person, but he couldn’t remember who it was…

The mystery person tossed him in the cage, and he thudded down next to Alya, of all people.

“You two stay here,” the person ordered. “It’ll be safer. I promise I’ll come back and let you out once the akuma is dealt with.”

“Wait, no!” Alya rushed forward, but the cage was locked and they were stuck. “Ugh! I wanted to film it for my blog!”

Nino sighed and plopped down. “This is a bummer,” he mumbled. “I totally screwed everything up today.”

Alya gave him an uneasy look. “Uh, yeah, Nino… Can I just say that I really like you as a friend? You’re one of my best friends, Nino.”

Nino gave her a quizzical look. “Why are you telling me this?”

“I just want to make sure that you know that,” Alya chewed on the inside of her cheek.

“You were listening,” Nino shook his head, a small smile forming.

“On an earpiece,” Alya chuckled, sitting next to him.

“Well, you should be happy to know that I actually don’t have a crush on you. I was trying to confess to her, but I panicked.”

Alya snorted. “Aw, I’m so flattered.”

“Why did she have an earpiece in?”

“Oh, because she totally likes Adrien. She thought he was coming, and she was kind of freaking
out, so I offered to help.”

“Man, we all think alike,” Nino said. “I had my boy Adrien listening in on an earpiece to help me.”

Alya burst into laughter. “God, what a mess.”

Nino leaned back, looking at the released animals trotting in front of the cage. “So, what now? Who knows how long we’re gonna be stuck here.”

Alya pointed at his headphones. “Got any good music?”

“You bet!” Nino scooted closer to her. She leaned in close to him as he turned up the music, and his heart fluttered a little as he looked at her face. She tilted her face slightly toward his, smiling softly.

“This is my favorite song.”

Nino smiled shyly, looked down. “Me too.”

Alya gave him a searching look. “You know… We’re really good friends, but we don’t talk enough.”

Nino flashed a wide grin. “Well, we got lots of time to talk now.”

Nino sat up straight, his heart pounding. Was that…

That was a memory. A real memory!

He covered his face, trying to collect himself. No wonder Alya had cried so much after her memory; all those emotions were forced back to the surface, and yet he couldn’t remember enough to justify those feelings. It felt like someone was messing with his mind.

He took a deep breath, counted to ten, then removed his hands, finally looking at his surroundings. He was sitting on a cot somewhere…

“You’re in the medical tent,” a nearby worker answered his unasked question. “Do you remember what happened?”

Nino almost laughed at the question; instead, he just shook his head.

“You fainted. You hit your head pretty hard. Do you remember what happened right before you passed out? Feeling dizzy, or really warm, or anything?”

“I had a headache,” he mumbled. “It really hurt, like someone was stabbing my head.”

She nodded. “Do you have anyone you can call? Parents or a guardian?”

Nino jumped to his feet. “I’m feeling fine, actually. Can I go?”

“Actually, I’d really prefer if-”

“Bye!” Nino shouted, sprinting out of the medical tent and toward the exit. He knew where he needed to go.
Alya was locked in her room again, trying to fight the pain in her heart. Since that memory, the misery and agony had only increased.

She’d lost her best friend. Her other half, her partner in crime, her sister. Nothing hurt more than that. She had to carry all this pain, but she couldn’t even remember the person she was hurting for. It was like some sort of twisted punishment.

She hated worrying her parents, but she could never tell them what was happening, or they would think she was crazy and lock her up.

Maybe she was crazy.

She heard the doorbell, but made no effort to answer it. Nora was home, she could get it.

“Hey, kiddo,” she knocked, her voice surprisingly gentle. “Someone’s here to see you.”

Alya sat up slowly, opening her bedroom door. “Who?”

Nora gave her a sad, caring smile. “Come on in, Cappie.”

Nino skidded into her view, breathing heavily. “Alya!”

Alya’s face crumpled, and she turned her back. “Can you give us a minute, Nora?”

“Sure,” she said, glaring at Nino. “Listen up, tiny. You better not do anything to upset my sister, got it?” she hissed.

“Nora!” Alya snapped.

“Fine,” Nora raised her hands in defeat, walking out to the living room. Nino hesitantly walked into Alya’s room, and she closed the door behind him.

“What do you want?” she asked.

“Alya, I have something so important to tell you,” Nino said in a rush. “I was at the zoo, and I had a memory! Just like you!”

Alya sat down dejectedly. “Was it as useless as mine?”

“Your memory wasn’t useless,” Nino sat next to her. “Your memory was of a time you treasured with her. You loved her so much that you remembered something happy and perfect and pure. That was a good memory, and you should hold onto that.”


“I know,” he wrapped an arm around her, holding her close. “I know,” he repeated soothingly. “I want her back too. I don’t care what Adrien says, things aren’t right the way they are.”

Alya cried until no more tears came out, and Nino just held her, letting her get it out. Finally, she sucked in some air and sat up, looking him in the eyes. “What was the memory?”

The entire school was quaking in fear Wednesday morning, with students speaking in hushed
whispers, trying to find places out of the way.

On Wednesday morning, Chloe Bourgeois was furious. She stormed down the halls, raging at every person she passed, screaming obscenities and hurling insults left and right. Sabrina had already been reduced to a puddle of tears, and anyone who dared get too close was at risk of regretting every decision they had ever made in their life that brought them to that moment.

All of Ms. Bustier’s class were crowded around the desks in the last row, whispering to each other and fighting about seats. No one wanted to be in the danger zone; Chloe had already torn Kim and Juleka to pieces the moment she walked into the room.

Just before the bell rang, the door opened and the last two students entered, holding hands.

Chloe took one look at their entwined fingers, and she lost it. She jumped to her feet, screeching, exploding in white hot rage.

“Hey! That’s enough!” Ms. Bustier shouted, stepping between them. “What on earth is going on here?”

Chloe only crossed her arms, turning away, and Nino and Alya were at a loss for words.

“If no one is going to speak up, then all three of you, go to the principal’s office,” Ms. Bustier pointed to the door. “I’m very disappointed in all of you. This kind of behavior is not okay.”

They left the classroom and stood awkwardly in the hallway, unsure of what to say but unwilling to go to the principal’s office.

“Should have known you two losers would end up together,” Chloe finally said, turning up her nose.

“Chloe, did we do something wrong?” Alya asked, nonplussed.

Chloe’s face twitched, and she drew in a deep breath. “Everything you two do is wrong,” she sneered. “Frankly, I’m glad we stopped hanging out. It was stupid to think that working with you two was a good idea.”

Alya’s face softened. “Chloe, about yesterday…”

“Forget it! It doesn’t even matter!”

“I’m sorry I stormed out yesterday,” Nino offered. “I feel like this is all my fault.”

Chloe crossed her arms, turning away from them. “Whatever. I guess there are some people you hold onto, and other people you give up on.”

Nino placed a hesitant hand on her shoulder. “Chloe, I said that I don’t give up my friends. You’re my friend too, dude.”

“Don’t call me dude,” Chloe sniffed, refusing to turn around.

Alya joined them, leaning forward to look at Chloe’s face. “Hey, we’re friends too. We’re not giving up, Chloe. We’re going to find her, and you won’t be able to get rid of us.”

Chloe let out a tiny whimper, then turned to look at them, a few tears falling. “You guys completely and utterly suck.”
“Aww,” Alya smiled, drawing Chloe in for a hug, with Nino joining in a second later.

Nino: We need to meet up again. I had a memory, and there was a lot of information in it.

Alya: I’m in!

Chloe: Dial it back, Cesaire.

Adrien: I don’t know, guys. I’m having second thoughts about this.

Chloe: Adri-kins!

Adrien: It’s just that I don’t want to live in the past. We have a chance to move on from this. We’ll never know what we’re missing. Things aren’t so bad, right?

Alya: Honestly, that thought process is just gross. But I don’t want to fight, so just meet with us and hear what Nino has to say, okay? You don’t have to help us if you don’t want to after that.

Nino: Yeah dude, just listen. At least you’ll get some answers.

Adrien: Okay, fine. Just tell me when.

Chloe: Tomorrow at 3. Cool?

Adrien: Should be fine. See you guys tomorrow.

Alya had her pen poised above her notebook, ready for the discussion. Nino had just finished detailing his memory, and Alya had already written down every detail and an outline of topics to discuss. Chloe was filing her nails, a sign that she was only mildly interested, and Adrien was closed off, staring down at his lap. Only Nino looked ready to discuss. Alya took a deep breath; she was all in now, ready to figure this out. She was taking charge, and she was confident that they were going to solve this.

She was getting her best friend back.

She cleared her throat and looked down at her bullet points. “Okay, so that was a lot to unpack. You guys ready?”

Adrien played with a loose thread on his shirt. “I guess. Kind of brought up more questions than answers, though.”

“Okay,” Alya ignored him. “So, first: Apparently I used to run a blog. Did memory me ever say what it was about?”

Nino shrugged. “You said you wanted to film what was going on. The… akuma attack.”

“Well, that explains why I keep trying to go on some mystery website,” Alya noted. “Maybe Adrien was trying to check my blog too!”

Chloe rolled her eyes. “Why would anyone care what you write online?”

“Moving on….” Alya sighed. “I think the biggest question is, what is an akuma?”
“Akuma is Japanese for demon,” Adrien mumbled.

“Huh,” Alya scribbled. “A demon… Oh my god, a villain! Whoever put Nino and I in that cage was a superhero!” She jumped up, excited. “That’s why I kept remembering that Majestia quote!”

“Majestia?” Chloe raised eyebrow.

“It’s a superhero comic. She says, all that is necessary for the triumph of evil,” Alya began.

“…Is that good people do nothing,” everyone else finished. There was a brief silence, and then everyone began talking at once.

“Why did I know that? I would never even touch a comic!” Chloe shouted.

“That was really weird,” Adrien said, unnerved. “How would we all know that quote?”

“I knew it was important!” Alya said excitedly. “I knew it, I knew it! We knew a superhero!”

“Dudes, this is crazy!” Nino shouted.

After a few more minutes yelling, everyone calmed down. Alya flipped to a new page in her notebook.

“Okay, so if there was a villain and a hero, where are they now?” she began. “Their absence, and the missing people… That means the villain won,” she said, sobering. “The hero lost.”

“But things are totally normal. What did this villain win? Don’t they usually want to rule the world and stuff?” Nino asked.

“And why would they get rid of our classmate?” Chloe asked.

“Okay, hold on,” Adrien interjected. “We don’t know that’s what happened. Maybe her disappearance was unrelated!”

“Dude,” Nino gave him a sad look. “There’s no way it’s unrelated.”

Adrien sat silently for the rest of the discussion, internally panicking.

Deep down, Adrien knew his friends were right. Based on the information they had, it was the only thing that made sense.

But he was scared and worried. Because so far, the one big thing that stuck out to him as concerning was his mom. On that very first day, he felt that his mom had replaced someone else, and that she wasn’t supposed to be there.

Now that they knew there was a supervillain on the loose, Adrien couldn’t help but wonder...

But there was no way his mom was evil, right? Of course not. So he should just forget all this and go on as usual.

Adrien: I gave it a shot today, but I can’t help you guys anymore. I’m sorry.
Alya: Well, we had a deal. See you around, Agreste.

Chapter End Notes

I changed the events at the zoo a little to better fit this story, but I think it works fine. I actually wrote it this way, and then remembered to check the episode to see if I got it right, and then I didn't feel like changing it.

Anyway, thank you so much for reading! I really hope you're enjoying it so far, I have a lot of exciting stuff planned. All of your nice comments mean so much to me, I appreciate all of you :)}
“Adrien, you haven’t… Um, I mean we haven’t had one of our little hang out sessions in a while,” Emilie said tentatively, spearing a piece of asparagus.

Gabriel glanced up from his plate, his eyes shifting between his wife and son, an unreadable expression on his face.

“I’ve been busy with my studies,” Adrien mumbled. “I’m learning advanced calculus, a new song for the piano, and I really need to work on my Chinese.”

Emilie’s eyes were sad, but she forced a smile. “Well, I’m really proud of all the work you’ve been doing. Right, Gabriel?”

Gabriel didn’t even bother to look at Adrien. “Your piano pieces could be sharper, and your Chinese tutor tells me you need to work on your enunciation.”

Emilie’s mouth opened in affront, but Adrien just poked at his meal, not at all surprised.

Nino: Hey dude, just checking on you. We haven’t talked in a while. It’s been like a month, I think?
Adrien: I’m sorry. I really miss you guys, but I just can’t keep doing this investigation.
Nino: I understand. We wish you would reconsider, though. She was your friend too. And she really liked you.
Adrien: I feel really bad about this. It’s not that I don’t want her back.
Nino: Then why won’t you help us?
Adrien: It’s hard to explain. I just have a bad feeling about this. You might be in over your head.
Nino: I’m sure we are, dude. Alya’s been really excited about this whole superhero thing, even though we haven’t learned anything else since. I mean, we’ve been doing a ton of research, but it’s hard when we have homework.
Adrien: How’d your physics midterm go? I remember you guys talking about that.
Nino: Ugh, I totally bombed it. I barely studied because I was too busy with all this. And Ms. Mendeleiev is way harsh.
Adrien: I’m sorry. Wouldn’t it be better to stop and focus more on school?
Nino: Nah, I’m not gonna be a physicist anyway, so who cares. Besides, it’s more important to me that we get our friend back.
Adrien: I have to go.
Nino: Later, dude.
“You’ve been off your game,” Kagami said, taking a swig of water. “Your moves are sloppy and predictable. Something wrong?”

Adrien sighed heavily. “I just have a lot on my mind right now.”

She sat down on the bench next to him, offering one of her rare smiles. “If you want to talk, I’m a pretty good sounding board.”

“It’s just… My friends are working on a project,” Adrien began, trying to phrase it carefully. “A non-school related project, and they want my help. But I’m afraid that if I help them, I’ll learn something bad.”

Kagami was frowning at him. “They aren’t building a death ray, are they?”

“What? No!”

Kagami snorted. “Well, you’re being so vague about it. Look, you say that your afraid of learning something bad, but it sounds like you’re just afraid of facing the truth. This something bad, you already know it, right? You’re just in denial right now.”

Adrien looked down glumly. “It’s easier if it’s not true,” he whispered.

“Did your friends do something bad? Is this project hurting anyone?”

“No, not at all. It might help people, actually,” Adrien hugged his knees to his chest. “I guess I’m just afraid of the consequences.”

Kagami sighed and stood up. “Truthfully, I can’t give you proper advice unless you tell me more. As it is now, I think you should help your friends. They’re trying to help people, which is a noble thing. And you’re only resisting because of your own inner turmoil. Deep down, you know you should help them, because it’s the right thing to do.”

Adrien looked up at her, more vulnerable than she had seen before. “Do you think I’m a coward? Do I just take the easy way, even though it’s not the right thing to do?”

She touched his cheek softly, before taking a step away from him and picking up her foil. “I think you’re a bit sheltered, and can be afraid. But once you take the leap, you’re anything but a coward. You have a good heart, Adrien. You just need to follow it.”

Kagami left the room, leaving Adrien alone with her words.

**Adrien:** Hey, can I talk to you guys?

**Chloe:** Always, Adri-kins.

**Nino:** Yeah, what’s up, dude?

**Adrien:** Well, I have a shoot tomorrow at the Eiffel Tower, and I was wondering if you would like to meet up afterwards. I really want to talk to you guys.

**Nino:** Sure thing.
Chloe: I’ll be there, my Adri-kins!

Alya: What time?

Adrien: Six o’clock work?

Alya: See you then.

“Great work as always, Mr. Agreste,” the photographer shook Adrien’s hand.

“Please, just call me Adrien,” he winced; being called Mr. Agreste reminded him of his father.

He waved goodbye to the staff and trotted over to the agreed upon meeting place, checking his phone for messages. Nothing from his friends, but he was sure they were on their way.

“Bro!” Nino jumped on him, wrapping him in a bear hug. “It’s so good to see you!”

Adrien laughed, hugging him back. “I missed you guys. I’m sorry I’ve been so distant.”

After Nino let go, he pulled Chloe into a side hug, and she gave him one of her soft, genuine smiles that he so rarely got to see. “We missed you too, Adri-kins,” she cleared her throat. “You don’t know how hard it is to deal with them when you’re not there.”

Alya rolled her eyes good-naturedly. “Yes, because Nino and I are notoriously difficult.”

Adrien opened his arms to Alya. “Hey, Als.”

She narrowed her eyes at him, but a teasing smile played on her lips. “Hey, sunshine. Glad to have you back.”

Adrien grinned sheepishly. “So… I guess me announcing that I’m back and one hundred percent in is a little unnecessary?”

Alya tilted her head. “We knew as soon as you sent that message that you were back,” she snorted. Adrien chuckled softly. “Guess that makes this meeting redundant.”

“Nah, I’m really happy we’re all hanging out,” Nino said, wrapping one arm around Alya’s shoulders and the other around Adrien’s.

“Can we please stop with all the drama now?” Chloe sighed. “Let’s just focus on our goals.”

“For once, I agree with Chloe,” Alya nodded. “But hey, let’s just have a fun evening right now. We’re celebrating that the group is back together!”

Adrien looked up at the towering monument above them, a mysterious tug in his heart encouraging him. “Want to go up there?”

“Hang on,” Chloe sighed, digging in her purse. “Wear these,” she said, handing him her spare sunglasses. “You’re going to get mobbed by fans.”

“Hey, Chloe had a good idea,” Alya snarked, pulling an old scarf out of her bag. “Wrap up your whole head, Agreste. She’s right, we don’t need your stalkers bugging us.”
“We have an Adrien fan club at our school,” Nino smirked.

Adrien sighed, wrapping the scarf over his blond locks and putting the sunglasses on. “How do I look?”

“You look great, babushka ,” Alya held back a laugh. “Let’s go!”

They went up to the second floor of the tower, and while his friends joked and wandered near the gift shop, he drew close to the window, staring out at the city below. The view was magnificent, and seemed strangely familiar to him. He pressed his palm against the glass, his eyes on the metal lattice of the tower; there was a pressure building in his head, a great pain blossoming behind his eye.

“Adrien?”

His vision was swimming, blurry and fuzzy, shapes and colors blurring together.

“Adri-kins!”

He stumbled, and felt several hands reach out to catch him, his friends voices blending in his ear, trying and failing to reach him. He was falling, falling, falling…

His boots thumped on the metal as he landed, and he straightened up, placing the baton back into place on his lower back, just above his belt. The wind was vicious from this height, but the leather suit he wore protected him from the chill. The cat ears on top of his head shifted, listening and filtering the myriad of noises around him, listening for a specific sound.

She arrived almost silently; the only noise giving her away was the zip of her yoyo’s string, and he knew only his highly sensitive ears could hear it. He turned, grabbing hold of the metal structure and flipping toward her.

“Quit showing off,” she laughed, and he straightened up so he could see her face.

He was drawn immediately to the red and black mask covering most of her face, hiding her features from him. It was a defining characteristic of her face to him now, but he longed to see what was underneath. The only thing he was graced with was her enormous bluebell eyes, sparkling and stunning as she turned her gaze on him.

“Good evening, my lady,” he bowed slightly. “You look as beautiful as ever.”

She rolled her eyes at him, and he focused on her plump, pink lips, curled into an exasperated smile. “You’re ridiculous.”

“Ridiculously… Handsome? Lovable?” he prompted, grinning.

“Ridiculously persistent,” she pursed her lips. “You really never give up.”

“Yes, I am purr-sistent,” he agreed, his grin widening. She groaned, shaking her head.

“No! I take it back, not persistent. Just annoying,” she wrinkled her nose, flicking the bell on his neck.

He just smiled warmly, enjoying looking at her. She tucked a lock of hair behind her ear self-consciously. “What?”
He just gave her a fond look. “Nothing. You just make me happy. Being with you right now… Well, even though the wind is icy and it’s freezing out, it’s still warmer than my house.”

She took his hand, holding it in her tiny one. “I’ll always be there for you, chaton,” she whispered sadly. “If you ever need anything, just call for me.”

He squeezed her hand briefly, silently thanking her, before clearing his throat. “Well, we better get to patrolling.”

She pulled her yoyo out, giving him a sly smile. “Race you,” she challenged.

He knew she was trying to lighten the mood, and he appreciated it. He reached for his baton, pressing the green pawprint and lengthening it. “You’re going down.”

She hurled her yoyo, taking off and flying through the air, spinning and swooping across the city. He watched her in awe for a moment, left breathless by her strength and grace, before leaping into action, vaulting off the tower with his staff. The feeling of falling from unimaginable heights, the wind blowing his already tousled hair… It was so freeing. He bounced from rooftop to rooftop, using his staff to propel him high in the air, following close behind her.

He was usually careful; after all, he had been doing this for a long time now, and he knew to pay attention when doing something like this. He didn’t think of it as dangerous anymore, but his standards for danger had changed a lot over the past year. Even still, his next move was pretty stupid.

The moonlight was shining, illuminating her and making her appear even more angelic and perfect than usual, and he got caught up in watching her. Too late, he realized that he was rapidly plummeting into the next rooftop; even if he tried to vault with his staff now, he was going to stumble and fall. He tried to angle his fall in a way that would hurt as little as possible, knowing that the suit would protect him from the worst of the impact - but the impact never came. He heard the zip of a yoyo’s string, and then she caught him, and they were swinging to safety.

“I know cats have nine lives, but you still shouldn’t take risks like that,” she said wryly.

“At least I know you’re there to catch me,” he said cheekily, and she rolled her eyes as she set him down.

“You’re hopeless,” she said, her voice exasperated but her eyes full of fondness. Those gorgeous, breathtaking, bluebell eyes.

Someone was shaking his shoulders, and the world began spinning again.

“Dude, are you okay?”

He opened his mouth to answer, but instead a stream of bile spewed out instead.

“Agh! Disgusting!” Chloe squealed, jumping back. Adrien began coughing, his eyes filling with tears.

“I’m sorry,” he whimpered. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry!”

“It’s okay,” Alya said gently, kneeling next to him. “Nino, go get a worker. Chloe, make the crowd go away.”
“I’m sorry,” Adrien choked out shamefully.

“Hey, it’s not a big deal,” Alya said in a soothing voice. “We’re gonna get you out of here, okay? Don’t worry. Can you stand?”

He rose on shaking legs, and Alya allowed him to lean on her, supporting his weight. Nino returned with an employee, who dispatched someone else to get a mop.

“We’re leaving,” Chloe informed the employee. “My father is the mayor, so if you have a problem take it up with him,” she said, a hint of challenge in her voice. She strutted away, clearing a path for Alya, Adrien, and Nino.

“My place is right around the corner,” Alya said. “Come on, let’s get you cleaned up.”

Adrien sat in a chair in Alya’s room, his eyes dull as his friends whispered to each other in the hallway. They probably thought they were being discreet, but Adrien could hear them clearly.

“Do you think he had a memory?” Nino asked. “I passed out when I had mine.”

“It’s possible,” Alya said. “But we shouldn’t push him. Nino, can you help clean him up? Chloe, you can help my sister find some clothes for him. My dad’s stuff is way too big, but maybe Nora has something. I’m going to make him some soup.”

“Ew,” Chloe grumbled.

“Okay, break,” Alya hissed. A beat later, the door opened, and Nino came in.

“Hey man, you should get out of that shirt.”

Adrien glanced down at his white overshirt, which definitely had vomit on it. How had he not noticed that until now? It reeked. He suddenly felt very sick again, and he wrestled the shirt off, gagging.

“Come on,” Nino helped him into the bathroom, and he began rinsing off the white shirt. “Are the rest of your clothes clean?”

He registered that he still had the scarf and sunglasses on, and he peeled them off.

“That’s good. Maybe if we get most of the stain out now, you won’t have to explain it when you get home. You can just say you spilled on yourself.”

“Maybe,” Adrien croaked out, sitting on the edge of the bathtub.

“Alya’s making you some soup. You probably don’t want to eat yet, but you should try to get something down.”

“Okay.”

Nino turned the faucet off. “You don’t have to talk about it until you’re ready,” he said softly. “Alya took days to tell us what happened.”

“I think I was in love with her,” Adrien blurted.

Nino’s expression was indescribably sad. “I’m so sorry,” he whispered.
Chloe poked her head into the bathroom, covering her eyes. “Adri-kins, are you decent?”

“He’s fine, Chloe,” Nino replied.

She opened her eyes and held out an oversized shirt and a new toothbrush, still in the packaging. “Alya’s sister said to give you these. The shirt is probably way too big, but if you want to get out of those clothes, it’s all they have. If we were at my place, I could have the butler get you brand new clothes that actually fit, but whatever.”

“Thanks,” Adrien mumbled, taking the items.

“I’m going to see if Cesaire has anything other than soup to give you. Soup is disgusting!” Chloe turned on her heel and marched away.

Nino laughed a little. “I never thought I would be saying this about Chloe, but she means well. Emotions aren’t really her thing. Has she always been like that?”

Adrien changed shirts, then ripped open the toothbrush. “Kind of. It got worse after her mom left.”

Adrien brushed his teeth, glad to rid his mouth of the foul taste. After spitting, he and Nino returned to Alya’s room.

“You feeling better?” Nino asked.

Adrien stared at the floor. “I’m really embarrassed. I can’t believe I did that.”

“It’s not a big deal. I’m sure you’re not the first person to barf up there,” Nino shrugged. “I bet the height makes people dizzy all the time.”

“It wasn’t that,” Adrien closed his eyes. “That memory was crazy. Knowing that we had so much history, knowing how I felt about her... It just became too much.”

“I get it,” Nino replied softly. “After I remembered, I came straight here to talk to Alya about our feelings for each other. It’s insane, suddenly getting all those intense feelings back at once.”

Adrien sighed and leaned back in the chair. “I’m just glad I had that disguise on.”

“Don’t you have anything good to eat? Like sushi?” Chloe asked, rummaging through cabinets.

Alya sighed. “I don’t think raw fish will be good for him right now. He needs something light. I don’t want him barfing again.”

Chloe wrinkled her nose. “Poor Adri-kins. He was so upset.”

“I would be too, if I just puked in front of a bunch of tourists,” Alya said absent-mindedly, stirring the pot of soup.

“It wasn’t that,” Chloe suddenly looked angry. “His dad expected him to be perfect all the time, and would punish him if he wasn’t. When Adrien was a kid, they were at some lame party and he got sick all over some expensive rug in front of everyone. His dad was really embarrassed and flipped out on him. Every time Adrien did something that wasn’t perfect, he would be scolded and ignored. He’s so afraid of messing up now.”

Alya set the spoon down. “That’s why he kept apologizing.”
“He probably felt like a kid again, about to get yelled at over some stupid rug,” Chloe sneered. “Seriously, his dad has issues.”

Alya scooped some soup into a bowl and grabbed a box of crackers. “Come on, let’s go talk to him.”

“Everyone’s had a memory except me,” Chloe whined. “I demand one right away!”

“I don’t think it works like that,” Alya said dryly. They returned to the bedroom, handing Adrien the soup and crackers, then settling down on Alya’s bed.

Adrien sipped one spoonful of soup, then set it down. It was delicious, but his stomach was still in knots. “I guess I should tell you everything.”

“You were a superhero,” Alya said, dumbstruck.

Adrien shrugged uncomfortably. “I guess.”

“Dude,” Nino breathed. “That is so awesome!”

Alya scrambled over to her desk and grabbed her notebook, flipping it to a fresh page. “Adrien was a superhero! What was your name?”

Adrien scratched his head. “I can’t remember it. She called me Chat and chaton, though.”

“So… Cat themed,” Chloe rolled her eyes.

“What were your powers?”

“I seemed a lot stronger, more flexible, more athletic,” Adrien flexed his fingers. “I can remember exactly how it felt to be in that suit, and it felt so powerful.”

Alya scribbled at top speed, her glasses slipping. “Any other powers?”

“My hearing was a lot better,” he noted. “From the cat ears, I think. I had this magic baton…”

Alya underlined something in her notebook. “It always seems to come back to that, doesn’t it? Magic.”

“Does that mean Adrien has magic powers?” Nino asked.

“There are a lot of possible answers to that,” Alya ripped out a piece of paper. “One: he has powers but doesn’t currently know how to activate them, since his memory is gone. Two: his powers were stripped away somehow by the villain. Three: he doesn’t actually have the powers himself, but something gave it to him. Like maybe the suit he said he was wearing.”

“You are such a geek,” Chloe muttered.

“Well, maybe you should try using some of those powers,” Nino suggested. “Maybe if you say a phrase you’ll transform.”

“Okay, now we’re dangerously close to anime territory,” Chloe groaned.

“What kind of phrase?” Adrien wondered.
“Something to do with cats…” Alya mused. “Cat power?”

“Cat activation,” Nino snickered.

Chloe rolled her eyes. “This is stupid. We should try to find the suit.”

“The villain probably took it,” Alya flipped through her notes. “The problem is, we have no idea who the villain is or where they might be.”

“Okay, what about her,” Adrien said. “She had a mask on, but I feel like I could still pick her out if I saw her.”

“Can you draw her?” Alya asked. “Then we could see too.”

“I can’t draw,” Adrien lamented.

“What about Nathaniel?” Nino suggested. “We have Adrien describe her as best he can, and have Nath draw her. It might help to have something to look at.”

Alya nodded. “That could work. I have to ask the big question, though. Our classmate, my best friend… Do you think she’s the superhero?”

Chloe sighed. “That’s why she’s gone. That’s why she ran away from Lahiffe in his memory.”

“Why is Adrien still here then?” Alya asked, rubbing her eyes in frustration. “Why did this villain waste her but keep Adrien around, perfectly fine?”

Adrien’s lips parted, but the answer died on his tongue. What villain would have a motivation to keep a hero around if they could eliminate them?

Perhaps a villain whose enemy was their son? Just erase his memory, erase everything, and it’s as if it’s a fresh start.

Adrien’s phone began ringing loudly, and he answered it without thinking. “Hello?”

“Where are you?” Emilie said harshly on the other line. “You’ve been gone for hours without a word. I told you, this arrangement doesn’t work unless you keep me updated! I know you aren’t at the Eiffel Tower anymore, Adrien.”

“I’m at a friend’s house,” Adrien said. “I’ll leave right now.”

“Send the Gorilla the address. You and I are going to have a talk about this,” Emilie snapped before hanging up.

“You have to go?” Nino asked.

“Yeah. My mom’s really mad,” Adrien sighed. “I promise we’ll talk more about this soon.”

“I’m really disappointed in you,” Emilie began as soon as Adrien sat in the car. “How could you not tell me where you are?”

“Sorry,” was all Adrien said.

“I can’t go home without you, otherwise your father will know. I’ve been out for hours, trying to
find you and lying to your father.”

“Sorry to inconvenience you,” Adrien mumbled bitterly.

“Excuse me?” Emilie’s eyes widened. “Adrien, I’ve been trying to do something nice for you, and you’re abusing it!”

“Do you know anything about magic?” Adrien blurted.

Emilie’s brow’s crinkled. “Magic? What are you talking about?”

“Like… Powers and superheroes,” Adrien shrugged, instantly regretting bringing the topic up.

Emilie was an actress; she prided herself on her ability to portray any and every feeling and emotion, to be able to sell the words coming out of her mouth. So while she didn’t exactly feel good about lying to her son, she was confident that he would never know the difference.

Except for the fact that she had a tell.

“Honey, are you feeling alright? You know magic powers aren’t real,” Emilie said, concerned. “I truly don’t know what’s gotten into you.”

Her index finger twitched slightly.

Adrien stared her straight in the face, his gaze hard. “Right, mom,” he said through a clenched jaw.

“Look, I can’t let you see these friends anymore if this is how it’s going to be. Staying out late, not letting me know where you are, this attitude… It’s unacceptable, Adrien,” she said sternly.

Most people would say that Adrien is not one to rise to a challenge. In fact, he almost exclusively backs down from challenges. But for once, he felt strong enough, powerful enough, and brave enough to stand up for what was important.

So while what he said was, “Okay, mother,” he didn’t mean it in the slightest.

Unfortunately, he wasn’t quite the actor that Emilie was.

_Nino: How much trouble are you in this time?_

_Adrien: Uh… A lot. My mom isn’t happy. She hasn’t told my dad yet, at least._

_Nino: Yikes. We were going to ask Nathaniel to make the sketch on Monday._

_Adrien: Well, she might have calmed down by then, but I doubt it. Even still, I have fencing lessons I can ditch. I’m done caring what my parents say._

_Nino: Dude, they’ll ground you for life if you don’t listen._

_Adrien: It’s one fencing lesson._

_Nino: Haven’t they punished you for less?_

_Adrien: Don’t worry, Nino. I will be there on Monday. I’ll be waiting in the courtyard._

_Nino: Okay, if you’re sure…_
They're getting closer...
Truth and Lies

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Gabriel was overjoyed to have his family repaired and his wife back; everything had gone exactly according to plan.

Well. Almost.

He knew there had to be a trade of sorts, but the magnitude hadn’t really hit him until it actually happened. And once the trade was made, there was no going back, and there could be no regrets. It happened. It was over. He had to live with the decisions he had made.

And most of the time, looking at his wife, he was happy with those decisions. It was all worth it in the end.

Except for those long nights, when he was alone in his office, illuminated by a single desk lamp. Except when the urge to put the butterfly pin back on rose up. Except when he thought about what he had done.

He would have done anything to have Emilie back, and he did.

It would be easier for him if he wasn’t reminded of his actions every time he looked at Adrien.

Adrien, his only son, was Chat Noir. Not that he remembered that part of his life anymore, but it still boggled his mind that he was fighting his own son the entire time. That he came so close to hurting his son, that he did hurt his son, many times. He couldn’t even let himself think about the times the danger had nearly killed Chat Noir, of what he had nearly done to his son…

The wish was supposed to be all powerful, so there should be no risk of him remembering anything. And yet Gabriel was terrified that one day Adrien was going to wake up one day and remember it all, and then his little fantasy world would come crashing down.

In the meantime, it was better to tighten the reins. Adrien could never see anyone or anything that could spur any memories, like Chloe. Besides, Adrien and Emilie were making up for lost time, with their little adventures every week.

Really, everyone should be thanking him for what he did.

“Hey, Nathaniel,” Alya smiled politely.

Nathaniel looked up shyly, hiding behind his tomato hair. “Hey, Alya,” he said cautiously, covering his notebook.

“I was just wondering if you could help me out with something,” she asked.

“What?”

“My friend had this… vision, I guess, of a girl, and we were wondering if you would draw her for us.”
“What friend?” Nathaniel looked around the room.

“He doesn’t go here,” Alya said.

Nathaniel shifted in his seat. “This isn’t some kind of trick, is it? I know you’re friends with Chloe now, and I—”

“Hey, this isn’t a trick,” Alya sat down next to him. “I would never do that to you. I am kind of friends with Chloe, yeah, but I wouldn’t try to hurt you or let someone else do that. We’re friends, right?”

Nathaniel shrugged. “We aren’t really friends. We don’t talk or hang out.”

Alya looked down at the floor. She had the faintest inkling that maybe they had hung out before, that the whole class used to do things together… But the girl who brought them together was gone, and no one remembered her. “I guess you’re right,” she said softly. “But I really hope you’ll help us. Think about it, okay?”

Nathaniel nodded, and Alya returned to her seat. She shifted, still uncomfortable with the seating arrangement. Why was she in the front row?

“Hey, Chloe?” she looked over at her. “Wanna switch?”

Chloe pursed her lips. “Whatever,” she shrugged. She dragged Sabrina across the room to the seat in the front row, and Alya settled down behind Nino.

This felt right. This was how it used to be.

“Hey,” Nino twisted his head around and smiled warmly at her.

Alya beamed back at him; with some of the wrongness no longer clouding her head, she felt lighter and clearer than she had in weeks.

And soon, her best friend was going to be back in this seat, she was sure of it.

“So, what did Nathaniel say?” Nino asked Alya in between mouthfuls. Nino always ate like he hadn’t had a meal in days, but Alya was used to it by now.

“He wasn’t sure,” she sighed. “But he made some good points, so I get where he’s coming from.”

“What points?”

“He was afraid we might be trying to prank him or something. Chloe has a history of tormenting people, and Nathaniel has been a victim in the past,” Alya said thoughtfully. “I don’t blame him for being wary.”

“That’s too bad,” Nino shoveled another massive bite in his mouth. “Dude’s the best artist in the whole school. We could really use his help.”

“He doesn’t owe us anything,” Alya groaned. “What have we done for him? We’re not his friends.”

“Who exactly are his friends?” Nino shrugged. “He seems lonely.”
“I’m not lonely,” a small, indignant voice interjected. Both turned to see Nathaniel glowering at them, clutching his sketchbook to his chest.

“Dude!” Nino jumped. “Oh man, I’m sorry, Nath, I didn’t mean-”

“It’s fine,” Nathaniel mumbled. “I have friends. I just like spending time alone.”

“I get it,” Nino said, his face red with embarrassment. “I like being alone too!”

“Hush,” Alya hissed, placing a hand on his arm. “What’s up, Nathaniel?”

Nathaniel looked down. “You said your friend had a vision of a girl?”

“Yeah,” Alya nodded. “She, uh… She seemed really important. We were wondering if she was real, and if maybe we could find her,” she said. It was only kind of a lie, and it wasn’t like they could explain it all to Nathaniel anyway. He’d probably think they were all nuts.

Nathaniel looked slightly confused, but he didn’t question it. “I guess I can help you. If you guys come to the art room after school, I’ll be there. I’m not like a police sketch artist though, so it might not come out great.”

“Really?” Alya jumped up. “Oh, thank you so much! You’re the best!”

Nathaniel shrugged. “You’ve never done anything to me. You guys have always been nice, so I should give you the benefit of the doubt. At least, that’s what Alix said.”

“Remind me to thank Alix later,” Alya said to Nino as Nathaniel left.

“Thanks for the ride,” Adrien thanked the Gorilla before closing the door. He headed inside, dropping his fencing bag in the locker room before waiting in the courtyard.

“Adri-kins!” Chloe pounced on him. “I’m glad you’re here. Come on, I’ll take you up to the art room. Everyone is already waiting!”

They entered the room to see Nino and Alya crowded around a desk, while a redheaded boy opened his sketchbook.

“You made it!” Alya grinned.

“I said I’d be here,” Adrien smiled, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes.

“We were just worried, dude,” Nino said carefully. “Everything okay?”

“I’m great,” Adrien said before turning to Nathaniel. “I’m Adrien, nice to meet you.”

“Nathaniel,” he shook his hand slowly. “Aren’t you that model?”

Adrien grimaced. “Yes. Anyway, can you help me?”

“Sure,” Nathaniel picked up a pencil. “If you give me some details today, I can work on it and probably have it finished tomorrow or the day after.”

“Okay. Well, she was beautiful…” Adrien started, but Nathaniel shook his head.
“How tall was she?”

“Pretty short,” Adrien mused. “Shorter than all of us.”

“How old was she?”

“Our age,” Alya interjected.

“What about her build?”

“She was thin, but built,” Adrien thought hard. “Toned, I guess? Strong arms. Um, and you know… Curvy,” he blushed.

Nathaniel began a rough sketch of the body. “Curvy where?”

“Oh…” his face reddened even more, spreading to his ears and neck. “Um, I guess her hips?”

Some muffled laughter came from Nino, and Alya smacked his arm, although she was smirking too.

“He’s so embarrassed,” Nino wheezed.

“Shut up!” Alya retorted.

“Ignore them,” Nathaniel said, his pencil grazing the page. “Let’s get some more details. Tell me about her face and hair.”

“She had dark hair, and it was tied in two little pigtails,” Adrien held his fists up to his head, mimicking the placement. “They were tied up with red ribbons. And she had bangs that swooped like this,” he ran his hand across his forehead.

“Was her hair long or short?”

“Pretty short,” Adrien held his hand up to where the pigtails ended. “Uh, she had a mask covering most of her face, though.”

Nathaniel frowned as he took notes. “So you don’t know what her face looked like.”

“Not really… She had these big, beautiful blue eyes, and a gorgeous smile,” Adrien sighed dreamily. “And she had these light freckles that you could barely see unless you were close enough. She was strong and graceful, powerful and warm…”

“Okay,” Chloe rolled her eyes. “Move on, lover boy.”

“Um, and she wore a red, skintight outfit,” Adrien concluded. “It had black spots on it.”

“What kind of shoes?”

“No, like this outfit covered her entire body. Her hands, feet, everything. It was like a strong material that protected her.”

“That’s weird,” Nathaniel muttered. “Okay, well, I’ll work on this and bring it back tomorrow.”

“Thank you so much, Nathaniel,” Alya thanked him. “Seriously, this means so much to us.”

“Okay, well, I’m going home,” Chloe flipped her hair. “Later, losers.”
“I should go too,” Nino checked the time. “See you guys tomorrow.”

“Thanks again,” Adrien waved to Nathaniel as they all left the room. He returned to the locker room, changing into his fencing gear. He was late to class, but he would just tell Mr. D’Argencourt that he got held up at a modeling job.

Honestly, he didn’t care about fencing anymore. He only wanted to find this girl, the love of his life, and figure out what his mother was hiding. Nothing else mattered.

“Sorry I’m late, Mr. D’Argencourt…” he started, but trailed off. The classroom was empty, save for one person.

That person just happened to be his mother, perched on a foldout chair she had placed in the middle of the room. She gave him a penetrating gaze.

“Hello, Adrien. Let’s talk.”

Adrien walked slowly around the room, giving her a wide berth. “What’s going on?”

“I asked Mr. D’Argencourt to cancel class today so I can talk to you in a more private setting. Sit down,” she said, patting the chair next to her.

“What could you possibly want to talk about?” Adrien asked carefully, backing away instead of sitting.

“Well, for starters, why weren’t you in class?”

“I was talking to my friends, and lost track of time.”

“I know that you get dropped off right before class starts. That gives you enough time to change and put your stuff away, then you’re to head right to class. Try again,” Emilie said in a hard voice.

“I was talking to my friends, okay? I knew I would be late, but I wanted to talk to them.”

“How do you know that?” Adrien glared.

“I can access your phone records any time I want, Adrien. You can’t keep secrets from your parents,” Emilie replied.

“But it’s okay for you to keep secrets and lie to me?” Adrien snapped back.

Emilie cleared her throat. “Let’s stop dancing around the subject and talk for real. What do you think I’m lying about?”

“About magic!” Adrien said, frustrated. “I know it’s real, and I know you’re not telling me about it!”

Emilie let out a breath. “Magic is not a toy, Adrien. It’s serious and dangerous. You don’t know what you’re dealing with.”
Adrien finally sat down, avoiding his mother’s gaze. “I know that,” he whispered. “I don’t want to use magic for fun. I am taking this very seriously.”

“Adrien, tell me the truth.”

Adrien’s brow furrowed. “What about you? Why did you lie to me? We never used to lie or keep secrets. You were my best friend, mom.”

Emilie reached out to caress his cheek, but he pulled away. She lowered her head, her eyes brimming with tears. “My job is to protect you,” she said softly. “I’m your mother, and I will do whatever it takes to keep you safe. I’m sorry I lied to you, but I had to.”

“You know, I’m not going to stop. You should just tell me what I want to know.”

Emilie eyed him carefully. “Tell me why you even want magic in the first place, and I’ll answer a few questions.”

Adrien studied a dirty spot on the floor for a long moment, choosing his answer cautiously. “I… I don’t want to use magic selfishly. I think that there are people that I could help with magic.”

She studied his face; he wasn’t lying, but he was withholding something. Still, she couldn’t help the little bubble of pride in her chest, knowing that she had raised her son to have such a good heart. It was a shame she could never let him anywhere near magic. He had so much potential to use it properly.

“What do you want to know?”

“How do you use the magic? Can anyone use it?”

“Yes and no…” Emilie said. “There are small objects one has to wield to harness the magic, but not just anyone should be given that responsibility. In the wrong hands, that kind of power would be incredibly dangerous.”

“What kind of objects?”

“They’re all different,” Emilie said vaguely. “Small things that would be ordinary in everyday life.”

Adrien nodded slowly. “What kind of powers do they give?”

“Each Miraculous has a different power,” she said without thinking.

“Miraculous,” Adrien breathed, the word stirring something inside him, clicking in his brain.

“Anything else?” Emilie chewed her lower lip, wondering if she may have spilled too much information.

“Did you ever have one?”

“Yes,” Emilie said simply.

“Then you know where they are.”

“I’m afraid I don’t,” Emilie gave him a sad smile. “They’re not easily found.”

Adrien nodded, almost missing the way her index finger twitched ever so slightly.
“How many are there?”

“You know, I think that’s enough,” Emilie said, ignoring his question. “I hope that satisfied some of your curiosity, but now you need to stop this quest.”

“What?” Adrien frowned. “No, I can’t.”

“You have to. I’m not going to help you sneak away anymore, and I don’t want you going anywhere that’s not specifically on your schedule. If I catch you sneaking out again, I’m going to have to tell your father.”

“But-”

“No, Adrien. Like I said, the magic is dangerous and should not be taken lightly. I won’t let you do anything that could end in you getting hurt. This is over. Do you understand?” she said firmly.

Adrien lowered his head, his shoulders slumping in defeat. “Yes, mother,” he mumbled.

“Good. Let’s go home.”

Adrien returned to the locker room to change, his eyes glinting. He was not giving up that easily.

Adrien: So… I have some bad news.

Nino: What’s up?

Adrien: I kind of got in a lot of trouble yesterday. I won’t go into detail, but I’m basically under house arrest.

Alya: Well, that’s a bummer.

Chloe: My poor Adri-kins!

Adrien: It’s not the end of the world. I’m not going to let this stop me. I have a lot to tell you guys, but I don’t feel safe doing it over text.

Nino: Why?

Adrien: My parents might read it.

Alya: Are you serious? That’s a total invasion of privacy!

Adrien: Yeah, well, welcome to my life. I’m going to write everything down and leave it with Kagami for you guys.

Chloe: Uh, you really trust her? I totally don’t want to talk to that Ice Queen.

Alya: I’m sure she doesn’t want to talk to you either. Nino and I will do it.

Adrien: Thanks. Trust me, it’s a lot of important information. I’m not going to see her until Friday though.

Nino: No worries, dude.
Alya: Don’t fret, my sweet summer child. I have some good news for you!

Adrien: Your sweet summer child? Since when?

Alya: Do you want to hear the news or not?

Adrien: Shoot.

Alya: Nathaniel finished the drawing! He gave it to me today. Let me send you a picture, hang on.

Adrien studied the photo, awed by Nathaniel’s ability to capture all the details. He’d nailed the strength and grace she emulated, and it seemed as if she was truly in motion. His style did seem as if it belonged in a comic book, but it didn’t diminish from the drawing in the slightest. He zoomed in on the bluebell eyes and warm smile, amazed and comforted. It was almost like she was right there, smiling at him, reassuring him that everything would be fine as long as they were together.


Nino: We know you were the only one who really saw her in your memory, so do you think it looks like her?

Adrien: Yeah, that’s her. It’s amazing.

Alya: We were thinking of just calling her Ladybug. I know it’s simple, but look at that outfit. Unless you think she was called something else?

Adrien: That’s perfect. Ladybug…

Adrien lay awake at night, studying the photo Alya had sent. He couldn’t stop staring and replaying the memory over and over, memorizing every detail of his Ladybug.

He rolled over, his eyes landing on his desk. He had written out a detailed letter to his friends, explaining everything he had learned from his conversation with his mom. He was sure they were going to explode with excitement and questions and confusion, and as much as he didn’t want to vilify his mother in their eyes, they needed to know the truth.

He let out a breath, remembering the electricity that zipped through him when he heard the word Miraculous. He had to figure what her Miraculous was, and what his was. Maybe he could even find them and get his powers back.

The Miraculous are small, unidentifiable objects that don’t stand out…

He studied the drawing again, but couldn’t pick out anything that could be a Miraculous. Of course, Nathaniel only drew the details he told him, so this probably wasn’t the best way to figure it out.

What about his own Miraculous? Where did it go? He wondered if he still had it. Adrien shot out of bed, standing in the center of the room, eyeing his room critically.

What did he normally wear or carry on him every day? Jeans, a t-shirt, an overshirt, his phone, his
wallet…

Yeah, those were all ordinary and didn’t stand out. But none of them could possess magic powers. They were *too* ordinary, too useful, too easily replaceable. It had to be something extra, something that one didn’t have to wear but a passerby wouldn’t look twice at.

Like an accessory? He opened up his walk-in closet, rooting through all his hats, scarves, belts, gloves, watches…

Nothing stood out to him. He couldn’t help but feel like he’d know what it was as soon as he saw it, but maybe that was wishful thinking. After all, the entire point was that a Miraculous wouldn’t stand out. Maybe it really was here, so well hidden that he couldn’t identify it. Without his memories, how would he ever know?

Exhausted and drained, he flopped back onto his bed with a groan. What was he wearing in that memory? The funny cat ears, a mask, the leather suit, that strange belt, and…

A ring. A black ring with a green pawprint on it. That was it! Instinctively, he touched the finger where he expected the ring to be, feeling bare skin instead of cool metal.

He sat up again, tempted to rummage through his belongings, but he knew it wasn’t there.

He buried his face in his pillow, stifling a scream. He was so close to getting some answers, and yet he felt as if he were a million miles away.

Perhaps some sleep would help his strained brain.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
“So, what’s the plan?”

She stared around them for a moment, her eyes flitting around the stadium, back to him, then down at the rubber suit in her hands. “I’ve got it!”

He waited for her to explain, but she simply sprang into action, stuffing the end of a hose into the neck of the suit, taking her yoyo and wrapping the string around his ankles, and flinging him into the giant stone monster.

“You’re crazy!” he screamed as he was caught roughly in the giant’s fist. She started running, taking a huge leap toward them, forcing the behemoth to open his other fist and catch her, dropping something small on the ground. She hugged the rubber suit to her chest just before she was caught, ensuring that it was wedged in the monster’s fist.

“Alya! Turn on the hose!” she shouted across the stadium.

The auburn haired girl nodded quickly, reaching down to turn the faucet. Water gushed through the hose, filling the suit and inflating it enough for her to break free. She landed on the turf, spotting the tiny purple bundle, and raced over to it before the beast could react. She lifted her foot, stomping on it as hard as she could, crushing it and releasing a purple butterfly.

The stone monster suddenly turned back into a boy, and they both fell to the ground in a heap. He stared at her in awe, slack-jawed.

“She’s awesome. She’s incredible!”

“What happened?” the large boy on the ground groaned.

“You were amazing! You really did it!” he bounded over to her. She smiled bashfully.

“Thanks, but we both did it. I couldn’t have done it without you, partner,” she shot him a shy grin. She reached her fist out for him to bump, which he did excitedly.

“Pound it!” they both exclaimed. As he withdrew his hand, the ring beeped, and he noticed that several of the pawprints had faded away.

“You’re going to transform back,” she pointed. “You should go. Our identities must remain a secret.”

“You got it,” he saluted. “Farewell, my lady. Let’s do this again soon!”

Adrien shot up out of bed with a gasp, clutching his chest. What was that? Another memory? He grabbed his notebook, writing down every detail before it slipped away.

Nothing made sense. He still had no idea what their powers were or what her Miraculous was. Was that stone giant the supervillain they fought? It seemed like they beat him pretty easily. And when he turned back into a boy, he seemed confused, like he had no idea what was going on.
What was up with that purple butterfly? What was Alya doing there? Why did she say that their identities were to be a secret?

He wanted to slam his head into a wall. Every memory brought up more questions than answers.

Adrien tiptoed around the mansion, sneaking into his parent’s bedroom. He was supposed to be studying his history lessons, but he had a better idea…

He located his mother’s jewelry box and began sifting through the contents, looking carefully at each ring. Emilie had a lot of jewelry, but nothing that resembled the ring from his dream.

“What are you doing?”

Adrien whipped around to find Emilie standing in the doorway, her arms crossed.

“Uh…”

“Adrien.”

“I was just looking,” Adrien said defensively. “That’s not a crime, is it?”

“You’re certainly in trouble for snooping through other people’s belongings. You wouldn’t want me to go through your room, would you?”

“You already went through my messages,” he muttered.

Emilie exhaled loudly. “I didn’t read your messages, I just checked who you were messaging. Please go back to your room,” she sighed. “Don’t let me catch you doing something like this again.”

Adrien stalked back to his room, pacing the space, agitated.

Now what? He didn’t have any luck finding the ring, but maybe she hid it somewhere else…

Or maybe he was wrong. Maybe his mother was totally innocent. Just because she knew about magic didn’t mean she was evil or conniving. She told him some of the information he wanted, and in his dream, that boy was the monster.

Maybe he owed her a huge apology.

He grabbed the letter to his friends and tore it to a thousand tiny pieces, then began crafting a new, less incriminating note.

He didn’t have any proof against his mother… Yet. So he would continue to keep this to himself, at least for now.

“Hey, Kagami! Can you do me a favor?”

She glanced over at him, taking in his red, tired eyes. “Do I even want to know what’s going on with you?”

He let out a short laugh. “No, you really don’t. It’s like I’m living a nightmare. I was just
wondering if you could deliver a note for me.”

She sighed, but held out her hand. “Who is it for?”

“Alya Cesaire, Nino Lahiffe, and Chloe Bourgeois. It’s really important.”

Kagami tucked the paper in her bag, then looked back at him nervously. “Do you need any help? Besides this note, I mean. If you’re in some kind of trouble, or need anything, I can try to help.”

Adrien gave her a tired smile. “Thank you. I really appreciate that, but I’m okay. And hey, I promise I’ll be at the top of my game next week so we can have a proper match.”

“Good,” she gave him a hesitant smile. “Because I know you’re better than that pathetic performance you’ve had lately.”

“Hello,” Kagami announced her arrival, staring down at the seated Nino and Alya. “I have something for you.”

“Hi,” Alya waved meekly. “You’re Kagami?”

“Yes,” she said, pulling the note out of her bag. “Adrien asked me to deliver this to you. I’m sorry it’s kind of late, but he gave it to me Friday after school.”

“No worries,” Nino flashed a nervous smile. “We understand.”

“Thank you,” Alya accepted the note. “Did you— I mean, do you want to eat with us?”

“No thank you,” Kagami declined, already turning away. “I will be returning to my own home for lunch.”

“Brr,” Nino shuddered once she was gone. “She really is the Ice Queen.”

“Maybe she’s just like that with people she doesn’t know,” Alya said halfheartedly. “In any case, it doesn’t matter. We’ll meet up with Chloe after school and read this, okay?”

“Hurry up!” Chloe hissed, shoving her way into the library.

“Everybody ready?” Alya asked, placing the note on the table. She angled it so that they could all read it, and silence fell over them. Slowly, Alya’s eyes widened as she processed the words on the page.

“How did he find all this out?”

“Shh!” Chloe waved her arm, still reading.

Alya leaned back and waited for Nino and Chloe to finish reading, her arms crossed. Slowly, the other two lifted their heads to stare at her.

“He’s hiding something from us,” Alya announced.

“You don’t know that,” Chloe glared.
“How did he find out all this information? He doesn’t mention anywhere in this where or who he got this from. He’s very clear about what he saw in another memory, and this stuff, this Miraculous stuff, this was not in a memory!” Alya hissed.

“Als…” Nino attempted to calm her, but Alya was only just getting started.

“He had a Miraculous, he had powers, so maybe he was the one who did this to her! He could be working for the villain, or he could be the villain, and we wouldn’t know! Maybe everything has been a lie or a trick to throw us off the trail! Really, we don’t know him well, so who knows what kind of person he is!” Alya ranted, going off on one of her wild theories.

Chloe slammed her hands down on the table, silencing her. “Enough! Adrien is a good person! He’s better than any of us!”

“Then why is he hiding this stuff from us?” Alya countered.

“I don’t know,” Chloe snarled. “But I know he has to have his reasons. I trust him! And he’s trusted both of you through all this craziness!”

Alya still looked skeptical, and Nino shrugged hesitantly. “It… It just seems a little suspicious,” he said in a small voice.

“Forget it,” Chloe snapped, pushing her chair back. “I can’t deal with this. You two are ridiculous, utterly ridiculous.” She stormed out angrily, returning home.

“Would you like any snacks, ma-” her butler tried to speak.

“Go away, Jean-Dupard!” Chloe shrieked, slamming the door in his face.

She sat on her bed, quietly seething. How could they think that Adrien was the villain? Adrien was the best person she knew! He was practically perfect!

Well, deep down she knew he wasn’t perfect. He was kind of spineless, which she liked because it was easy to boss him around, but she also knew that wasn’t the most desirable trait.

But she also knew how kind and caring he was, and how he stood up for things that really mattered. He was a superhero, not a supervillain. Alya Cesaire and Nino Lahiffe were stupid if they thought otherwise.

She wrapped her blanket around her shoulders and stalked out onto the balcony, looking out at the city.

When she was a kid, she loved this view, because she was certain that everything was going to belong to her someday. Her father was the mayor, so naturally she would follow in his footsteps.

Of course, now she wasn’t quite as fond of it. She didn’t know what she wanted to do with her life, but she definitely wasn’t going to be mayor. Even if she ran, she probably wouldn’t win, given how disliked she was at school. She only got the job as class rep because no one else ran.

Now this view only reminded her of how small she truly was, how unremarkable. All she wanted was to be extraordinary, but really, she was useless.

“No one is useless.”

She spun around, her heart pounding. “Who’s there?” she asked in a shaky voice.
Of course, no one responded. She was alone out here. She squeezed her eyes shut, sinking to her knees. Now she was hearing things. How could this day suck more?

When she opened her eyes, Ladybug was crouched in front of her, her eyes sad and remorseful. “No one is useless. A friend told me that once.”

Tears were trickling down her cheeks, and she sniffed, wiping her eyes, probably smearing her makeup. “That’s easy for you to say. You’re Ladybug! You’re a superhero! You serve a purpose.”

Ladybug reached out and placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. “Yeah, I can fix all the messes. You said it yourself in your documentary.”

Chloe’s eyes widened. “You saw that? Oh my god, how embarrassing,” she groaned, shielding her face from Ladybug.

Ladybug reached out to take Chloe’s hand, helping her to her feet. “Don’t worry, Chloe. You can fix your own messes, if that’s what you want. You can serve a purpose too. But you have to really want to.”

“I do want to!” Chloe leaned forward, wiping the remaining tears from her face.

“Good,” Ladybug looked satisfied, and she reached behind her back. “Chloe Bourgeois, here is the bee Miraculous,” she stated holding a small box in front of her. Chloe’s jaw dropped, staring in shock at both the box and Ladybug. “This grants you the power to immobilize your opponent. You will use it for the greater good, then return it when the job is done.”

Chloe reached out hesitantly, her eyes asking Ladybug a silent question. Ladybug gave her a soft nod, and Chloe took the box, opening it to reveal a small haircomb. It began to shine bright gold, which overtook her vision, blinding her…

And then the gold faded, and she was kneeling alone on her balcony again.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Sorry this chapter is a little shorter, but I’ve been working a lot of overtime lately. I promise next chapter will be longer!
The Truth is Complicated

“Cesaire.”

Alya turned slightly to see Chloe approaching her, looking much calmer than yesterday. “How are you?” she asked cautiously.

Chloe raised an eyebrow, smirking slightly. “I had a memory yesterday.”

“Really? That’s great!” Alya gave her a relieved smile. “Do you want to talk about it at lunch?”

“Nope,” Chloe popped the ‘p’ sound. “I don’t want to work with people who don’t trust my Adrians. I know him better than anyone, and I know he’s a good person. I just thought I should tell you that your so-called best friend entrusted me with a Miraculous and made me a superhero.”

Chloe sauntered away, snapping her gum, leaving a stunned Alya in her wake.

“She has to be lying,” Alya raged, pacing back and forth in her bedroom. Nino sat on her bed, watching her.

“She could be,” he agreed. “Or she could be telling the truth. Our memories are so limited right now.”

“How could that be true? Who would make Chloe a hero?” Alya ran her hands through her hair. “She’s pure evil!”

“Why don’t we just apologize to her and find out for ourselves?” Nino sighed.

“No! I still don’t trust Adrien.”

“Maybe we’re jumping to conclusions,” Nino said. “We need to give Adrien a chance to explain.”

Alya sat down next to him, groaning. “I just want the truth. I don’t like all these secrets and lies.”

“Let’s just give him a chance, okay? We’ll write a note for him and give it to Kagami tomorrow. He has fencing on Wednesdays, right? Don’t worry, we’ll figure this out.”

Alya nodded slowly, leaning against him. “You’re right. This will all work out, and we’ll get her back.”

“Kagami Tsurugi,” Chloe said loudly.

Kagami barely spared her a glance. “Yes?”

“Can you… Can you give this to Adrien?” she asked, surprisingly nervous. She held out the note, which Kagami took.

“You know, the other two already gave me a note for him.”

Chloe snorted. “I’m sure they did. But mine is actually important.”
The tiniest of smiles formed on Kagami’s lips. “Well, I’ll make sure he gets this then.”

“Thanks,” Chloe nodded, then started walking away. “And… I guess I’m sorry I spilled that drink on you at that party.”

Kagami rolled her eyes. “Then I guess I accept your apology.”

“Tell me why I’ve become your messenger?” Kagami sighed, handing Adrien the two notes.

“Because your an amazing friend?” Adrien tried, giving Kagami a big smile. She crossed her arms and scowled at him. “Fine, it’s because my parents are insane. I’m sure they’re reading my messages.”

“Sure you’re not just paranoid?” Kagami opened her locker.

“I’m sure. It’s usually not like this, but things have been different lately.”

“Why are you hiding things from them?” Kagami asked. “Granted, I can’t say I’m very close with my family, but I don’t go out of my way to hide things.”

“It’s very complicated,” Adrien rubbed his eyes. “And impossible to explain.”

Kagami slammed her locker shut with a sigh. “Adrien, I want to help you, but it’s hard when you don’t tell me anything. Everything is a big secret with you. I don’t want to be a part of something potentially dangerous or harmful.”

“It’s not, I swear!” Adrien shook his head. “If I tell you, you can’t tell anyone else,” he said softly.

She sat down next to him. “Are you in some kind of trouble?”

“Uh, no? I mean, yes? I don’t know. Like I said, it’s impossible to explain.”

“Try me,” Kagami narrowed her eyes.

Adrien took a deep breath.

He waited with bated breath for her reaction once he was finished. She sat still for a long time, contemplating his words. Finally, she closed her eyes and stood up.

“Okay.”

“Okay…?” Adrien repeated. “What?”

“Okay, you’re right. That’s very complicated,” she nodded. “But I believe you. I haven’t noticed anything odd myself, but I’ll try my best to help you.”

“You will?”

“We’re friends,” she gave him a gentle smile. “I will be completely honest and say that I’m a little disappointed some other girl has won your heart, but I’m not a bitter person. I still want you to be happy. And you’ve very clearly not been happy lately.”
“Kagami, you’re the best!” Adrien jumped up and pulled her into a hug.

She flushed and cleared her throat. “So, then, you should read these notes.”

He opened up Nino and Alya’s first, his face falling. “They want me to explain how I learned about the Miraculous.”

Kagami peered over his shoulder. “Is that a problem?”

Adrien chewed on his lip. “Someone told me, but…”

“But you don’t want to say who.”

“Yeah,” Adrien looked down. “It would make things even more complicated.”

“You know you can’t keep secrets like that from your friends. Not if you expect to solve this.”

“I know. I just can’t tell them yet.”

Kagami sighed. “Well, let’s see what Chloe wants, then.”

He opened Chloe’s note, his eyes bulging. “Chloe had a memory. She had a Miraculous,” he breathed. “She was a hero too.”

“Chloe Bourgeois?” Kagami snorted. “Are you sure?”

“She got it personally from Ladybug,” Adrien read. He checked the time, then jumped to his feet. “I have to go, the Gorilla is waiting outside. I’ll see you on Friday?”

She nodded. “See you then.”

He’s at a party… Which is weird. He’s not usually allowed to go to parties. There’s a slow song playing, and he’s watching Chloe dance with a tall Asian boy. She looks grumpy, which isn’t unusual, but he gives her a grin and thumbs up, so she sighs and looks resigned instead.

Someone bumps into him from behind, and he spins around to see… A girl. Someone fond, someone he likes and cares about, but he still can’t see her face.

All he wants is to see her face, but it’s as if she’s still got the mask on, hiding her from him.

He knows it’s her though, his Ladybug, his missing girl.

“Hey! Want to dance?” he asks.

She stutters out some unintelligible response, and he laughs and pulls on her hand.

“Come on!”

They begin to sway on the dance floor, staring into each other’s eyes, smiling, and she’s blushing the tiniest bit. He can’t help but notice how cute she is, how her blue eyes shine.

Alya and Nino are dancing around them, and then suddenly Alya is twirling, moving their hands so his were around her waist and hers were around his neck, drawing them closer.

He could have sworn Alya gave her friend a wink before twirling back to Nino and dancing away.
He looked down at her; she seemed just as surprised as him, her face much redder than before. He shrugged and smiled warmly, leaning in closer, hugging her and closing his eyes. She relaxed and rested her head on his shoulder, letting out a soft sigh.

He was barely aware that they were supposed to be dancing, their feet shuffling, as he was simply lost in the moment. How wonderful, how warm, how soft, how pleasant…

And then there was a loud, buzzing sound, and he was back in his room, his alarm blaring.

“No, that’s terrible! Ugh, you are terrible!”

Adrien stifled a yawn as the photographer yelled. He barely got any sleep the night before, up all night reading and rereading his friends notes, writing responses, and coming up with theories. To top it off, he had another memory in his sleep, which significantly slowed his morning down.

“I can’t do this anymore! Everyone leave! I’m done!”

There was a lot of grumbling as people began cleaning up the set, and Adrien sat down tiredly. He pulled out his phone to call the Gorilla, sure that he was going to hear a lot of disappointment from his father for his performance today.

After a brief nap in the car ride home, Adrien trudged in the house.

“Hello?”

No answer. That was surprising. His father almost never left the house, and his mother… Who knows what she was up to.

The door to his father’s office was open slightly, and he peered in. There was a massive portrait of Emilie that swung away from the wall, revealing a safe. His father was standing in front of the safe, blocking its contents from view.

“Father?”

The safe slammed shut, and a furious Gabriel rounded on his son. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m sorry,” Adrien stammered. “I’m sorry, I just-”

“Go to your room!”

“Yes, sir,” Adrien lowered his head and scurried away. As soon his bedroom door closed, he dissolved into tears.

“Adrien’s eating in his room tonight,” Gabriel informed Emilie as they sat at the table.

“Oh, is he feeling alright?” she asked.

“He’s fine,” Gabriel said dismissively. He really didn’t want to think about Adrien at the moment.
Really, how could he have been so careless? Yes, no one had been home, but he still shouldn’t have opened the safe with the office door open.

What if Adrien saw what was inside? What if he remembered everything?

He couldn’t bear to lose it all again. He just got his family back. He was going to have to make sure that Adrien didn’t remember.

“What if he remembered everything?” he asked.

She smiled softly. “I already have everything I want, my love.”

“Make a wish, my dear, and I will grant it,” Gabriel urged. “I only want for you to be completely happy.”

Emilie tilted her head. “I am happy,” she said. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“What about a vacation?” Gabriel suggested. “We could all go somewhere.”

A delighted smile formed. “Wonderful! I think Adrien really needs a vacation,” she said. “I never thought our perfect son would be going through something of a rebellious phase, but…”

If only she knew, Gabriel thought. “Yes, a trip is just what he needs,” he agreed. “Something to clear his head. Where would you like to go?”

“Some place warm and beautiful,” she said. “Fiji?”

“I’ll start making preparations right away,” Gabriel assured her. “We could go for two weeks, perhaps even a month.”

“Oh, I’m so excited!” Emilie picked up her fork with a big grin. “This will be so much fun, and so relaxing. What a fantastic idea, dear.”

Alya scooted her chair back from her desk, pressing her palms to her eyes. It was so late, and she still had school the next day, but she was still searching online for answers. So far she couldn’t find anything about akumas other than the literal translation, and her searches for magic purple butterflies had yielded similarly empty results. She had found one website that talked about the Miraculous, but it was full of lots of crazy conspiracies, so she couldn’t put too much stock into it. Besides, all it said was that they could be found in Tibet, which was absolutely no help to her.

She picked up her phone to find a message from Nino.

Nino: Goodnight, Als. Don’t stay up too late.

Alya: Define too late.

Nino: The fact that you’re awake right now is too late.

Alya: What about you?

Nino: Fair enough. I couldn’t sleep, so I’ve been playing Ultimate Mecha Strike.

Alya: Aww, go to bed.
Nino: You too. You’re overworking yourself and getting too stressed.

Alya: I have to. I have to find all the answers and bring her back. It’s already been like two months since we started doing this, and what do we have? If she’s being held hostage somewhere…

Nino: Don’t think like that. We have to stay positive. I promise we’ll work this out. But you have to get some sleep. You’re no help to anyone if you don’t rest.


Nino: Night, Als. I’ll see you tomorrow.
She failed.

She had never failed like this before, and she truly thought she had seen it all. After all, when you’re a being that’s been alive since the dawn of creation, one would think she knew everything there was to know and had seen everything there is to see.

But this time, she had truly experienced failure, and it was agonizing. It was the worst thing she had ever felt, the greatest pain to ever pierce her heart.

She couldn’t protect her chosen. She failed.

Now she was stuck in the earrings, reliving that last painful memory over and over. She had no idea how long she was going to be stuck in the earrings this time, but no matter how much time passes, the pain will never go away. She might never see Master Fu again, might never get back to the Miracle Box, and she might never see Plagg again.

She was completely alone.

“Adrien, I have some good news!” Emilie sang.

Adrien looked at her warily from over his glass of orange juice. “What news?”

“We’re going on a vacation! We’ll be leaving on Monday, so you have the weekend to pack. Don’t worry though, I’ll have the maid help you. We’re going to Fiji for a month! Isn’t that fun? No schoolwork or modeling jobs, just rest and relaxation! Just what the family needs.”


“Because it will be fun,” Emilie said, her smile beginning to get a little strained. “Aren’t you excited?”

“No,” Adrien frowned. “I don’t want to go anywhere. I’m not going.”

“You can’t say no,” Gabriel walked in the room, his eyes narrowed. “You are going.”

Adrien’s face paled as he looked as his father, and he lowered his gaze. “I don’t want to go,” he whispered.

“Adrien, this will be nice,” Emilie tried. “Peaceful, relaxing, and fun. Why don’t you want to go?”

His eyes flickered to his father, and he flinched. “It won’t be any different than how it is here. You’ll still keep me locked up, I won’t get to go anywhere or meet anyone. Why go somewhere strange just to experience more of the same?”

“It’s too late,” Gabriel’s voice was laced with danger. “I booked the trip. It’s all set. We’re going. If you won’t pack, the maids will do it. In three days, you’ll be on the plane.”
Adrien stood up and ran upstairs without a word.

“So what do I do? I can’t go! My parents are hiding something from me, and now they’re trying to send me away so I don’t figure it out!” Adrien paced back and forth in the locker room, while Kagami sat on the bench.

“Adrien, calm down. Yes, a hidden safe is weird, but does it really mean your father is some kind of evil mastermind?” she asked.

“I’ve known that something is up with my parents since that first day I felt that something was wrong. I thought it was just my mother, but clearly my father is in on it too. I have to get into that safe! I have to get my memories back!” he grabbed his hair, pulling on it and groaning. “I only have this weekend to solve this. Monday morning, they’re going to put me on that plane.”

Kagami held the bundle of papers he had given her to deliver to the others. She wasn’t going to see them until Monday, but by then it would be too late.

“You need to see the others and tell them the truth,” Kagami set the papers down. “You have to tell them everything.”

“But how? My parents won’t let me out,” Adrien closed his eyes. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Well…” she bit her lip. “You’re sure you’re right about this? You’re sure that you’re parents are...evil?”

Adrien stopped moving and stared down at the floor. This was a serious accusation. That was why he had been hesitating for so long; if he was wrong, he would be causing a lot of unnecessary problems. But if he was right… What was going to happen to him? What was going to happen to his parents?

He needed time to think. But he was out of time, he had to make a decision now. Was he going to burn all bridges with his parents on a hunch? Or was he going to let them send him off to Fiji for a month, possibly longer?

“Adrien?”

He took a deep breath. “I’m sure. I know that they’re up to something.”

“Okay,” she stood up. “Then I have a plan. Go home, wait until tomorrow. Don’t do anything that will make your parents suspicious. Pack, as if you really are going with them.”

“But-”

“Don’t worry,” Kagami set her jaw. “I will help you.”

Chloe sat cross-legged on her balcony again, her eyes closed. At first glance she looked as if she was meditating, but really she was hoping for another memory.

She wanted to remember how it felt to be a hero, she wanted to remember how it must have been to be so awesome and extraordinary that even her mother would have to come back to Paris and admit how great she was.
But so far, she had absolutely nothing but a slight chill from the breeze.

“Chloe! Open up!”

One eye flickered open, annoyed. Who was disrupting her?

“Jean-Jacques! Get the door!”

“Hello, may I help you?”

“Where’s Chloe?”

“Miss Chloe is on the balcony, what can I help you with?”

“Step aside, please.”

Footsteps approached, and Chloe found herself staring at a plaid skirt. She lifted her gaze to see Kagami looking at her sternly.

“Ugh, what do you want?”

“Adrien is in trouble.”

Chloe stood up, glaring at Kagami. “What do you mean?”

“I know everything. All about the magic and the missing girl. Adrien believes that his parents know something too, and might even be behind all of this. They’re on to him, and they’re trying to send him off to Fiji before he figures it all out.”

“Wait, back up,” Chloe placed her hands on her hips. “You know? Have you been having weird feelings and memories too?”

“Not at all,” Kagami shook her head. “But Adrien told me all about it.”

“And Adrien’s parents are behind all this?”

“Possibly. I need you to call the other two here.”

Chloe blinked, still a little stunned. “I- I mean, what the-”

“We don’t have much time, Chloe. It’s best not to hesitate,” Kagami said grimly.

Alya and Nino could barely comprehend what they were hearing. “Okay, wait. Can we just make a list of what we do know? Because this is.. This is a lot,” Alya opened her notebook.

“Um, well, there was a girl in our class who was also a superhero named Ladybug,” Nino mumbled. “And she had a partner, Adrien, who had cat themed powers.”

“The powers come from objects called Miraculous,” Alya scribbled. “Chloe,” she shook her head, mildly annoyed, “apparently also had one.”

Chloe looked smug. “That’s right. I helped them fight the villain.”

“The villains are… Adrien’s parents?” Alya rubbed her head. “That’s insanity.”
“Why are we doing this exercise?” Kagami asked. “It seems pointless.”

“I just don’t understand how Adrien could be a superhero but his parents could be supervillains,” Alya frowned.

“Adrien is a good dude,” Nino said. “I mean, if everyone’s identity was a secret, it could happen. It’s crazy, but it’s possible.”

“Yes, Adrien is a good person,” Kagami said. “But we need to get to the heart of the issue. Adrien needs to see what’s in that safe.”

“How are we supposed to help with that?” Chloe asked.

“Chloe, your father needs to call his parents out of the house,” Kagami said. “Once they’re gone, we send someone in to help him break into the safe.”

Alya snapped her fingers. “Max and Alix. They can do it!”

“Is it wise to bring more people into this?” Kagami asked.

“Hey, no one agreed to bring you into this,” Alya shot back. There was a long silence as Nino cringed and Chloe looked mildly impressed.

“Fine,” Kagami stood up. “I can see I’m not wanted. I thought you would have liked the extra help. Plus I thought you wanted to help Adrien. But fine, I’ll go.”

“Wait,” Alya stopped her. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Kagami. I didn’t mean it like that. I’m just really stressed right now, and I should not have taken it out on you. You’re right, you’re just trying to help.”

“Please stay,” Nino said softly. “We do want your help.”

Kagami took a deep breath. “Fine. I know this is a difficult time for you all.”

Alya nodded. “I really am sorry, Kagami. It’s just, none of us know how to break into safes. I thought Max and Alix would be able to do it since Max is good with technology and Alix has a bit of a rebellious streak.”

Nino nodded. “She’s right, they’re the best options we have.”

“Fine,” Kagami nodded. “Once the safe is open, Adrien will have to decide what the best course of action is. We need to get him a phone his parents can’t track so we can contact him.”

“We’ll go buy him one of those prepaid phones,” Nino said.

“I’ll give it to Alix to pass on to him,” Alya added. “This can work. We can do this.”

“We’re going to have to,” Kagami stood. “He leaves Monday. The clock is ticking.”

They landed on top of the Arc de Triomphe, and she turned to face him. Her head tilted to the side, and she gestured her arm to the ledge of the monument. “How about a break?”

“Really? The ever-responsible Ladybug wants to take a moment of leisure?” he teased.
She rolled her eyes. “Fine, suit yourself. Let’s keep patrolling.”

“Wait,” he sat down, patting the spot next to him. “I’m kidding. Come on, there’s nothing going on. Let’s relax for a moment.”

She plopped down next to him, leaning back on her hands and throwing her head to the sky. “Ahh… I’m so tired. This has been a crazy week.”

“How many times can Hawkmoth akumatize poor Mr. Ramier?” he agreed.

“It’s not even that,” she yawned. “At least dealing with Mr. Pidgeon is easy. It’s all the stuff in my civilian life. Sometimes I have trouble balancing it all.”

“Want to talk about it?”

“I don’t think I should,” she said, suddenly clamming up. “Our identities have to be a secret. I don’t want to reveal too much. Let’s just say I bit off more than I can chew this week. Sometimes I have trouble saying no to people who ask for help.”

“Well, that’s typical of you,” he smiled fondly. “You’re Ladybug! You’re too nice to say no.”

“Yeah, I just wish I was better at balancing it all,” she sighed. “How do you do it? Surely you get overwhelmed by it all sometimes too.”

“I suppose,” he shrugged. “But honestly, the best part of my life is spending time with you. I just push myself to get through my civilian life, because I know I’m just waiting to see you.”

She flushed under the mask. “Wow, Chat…”

He smiled sincerely, kicking his legs. “What can I say? You’re the most important person in my life.”

“Chat,” she said a little more sternly, although there was a hint of sadness.

“I know,” he said in surrender. “Let’s just enjoy right now, shall we?”

“Okay,” she smiled warmly. She flopped backwards, laying down completely. “We should have brought snacks. What’s your favorite food?”

“I like sweets,” he admitted. “Although I don’t get to eat them much. Makes me appreciate them that much more when I get them.”

“Sweets, huh?” she said thoughtfully. “I know a really good bakery. Maybe I’ll bring some next time.”

“Oh, I know a great bakery too,” he said brightly. “Tom and Sabine’s is the best in all of Paris. Everything there is amazing.”

She blushed a little under the mask, which confused him. “That’s funny,” she chuckled. “That’s the place I was thinking of.”

He laughed and laid down next to her. “We’re more alike than you want to admit, my lady,” he teased.

“That’s what makes us such a great team,” she looked over at him, her bluebell eyes warm.
Adrien awoke on Saturday morning to a tear stained pillow. He had lost the most incredible, kind-hearted, caring person in the world.

All to some jackass who called himself *Hawkmoth*. What a stupid name.

Wait a second. Certain words stuck out to him, buzzing around in his brain. Hawkmoth, akumatized… The puzzle still wasn’t complete, but a picture was beginning to form.

“Adrien, are you awake?” Emilie knocked on the door.

“Yeah,” he called back, sitting up. “I’m going to take a shower.”

“Okay. Please come down for breakfast when you’re done.”

“What do you mean, there’s a problem with my passport?” Gabriel yelled into the phone. “This is ridiculous! You’re the mayor, fix it!”

“I’m very sorry, Mr. Agreste, I need you to come here and sign some things,” Mayor Bourgeois said timidly. “We can fix all of it today if you come down to my office. Everything will still be fine for your trip.”

“This is the height of incompetence,” Gabriel hissed. “I cannot believe the ways you think of to inconvenience me. I am truly considering not returning to this city at all after the embarrassing way you handled this.”

“Sir, this is really just a simple-”

The phone clicked, cutting Mayor Bourgeois off. Gabriel tossed his phone on his desk angrily, then took a deep breath. No matter. This will all be resolved, and they can still go on their trip as planned.

“Emilie, I’ll be going out for a short time,” Gabriel put on his jacket. “There’s some sort of issue with our passports, but I’ll fix it.”

“Okay,” she said cheerfully. “We’ll work on packing. See you later, dear!”

Adrien sat at the dining table, listening closely. This was definitely odd; he had to wonder if this was somehow part of Kagami’s plan. He had no idea what she was capable of, but he was just going to put all his faith in her and hope that whatever she had planned worked.

Chapter End Notes

Surprise! I'm posting this a little earlier than I would normally, since my schedule this week is jam-packed. I hope you enjoy this chapter!
“Um, Alya? We have kind of a problem,” Alix drawled into her phone.

“What’s wrong?”

“How do we get in? The whole thing is walled off like a castle, and there’s this huge gate with security cameras.”


“Okay, but we don’t have all day.”

“Just hold on, Alix,” Alya hung up, then turned to Nino, who was sipping coffee beside her. “So… They can’t get inside. Apparently there’s a ton of security, and they can’t just walk up and ring the doorbell.”

Nino drained his cup, then sighed. “Okay. I’m just going to call him. There’s gotta be a way for him to let them in.”

Adrien scrambled to answer his phone once it started ringing. “Hello?”

“Dude! You gotta turn off all the security and open the gate.”

“Uh, I can’t do that,” Adrien said. “I have no idea how. And my father will probably kill me.”

“Dude, Alix and Max are outside. They’re going to open the safe for you.”

Adrien’s eyes widened. “Wait, really? Uh, um, okay. Wait, I think I have an idea.”

He peered out into the hallway, and found the Gorilla waiting by the front door. Perfect.

“Hi,” he said softly, offering a half wave. “Um, my friends are outside. I was just wondering if you could let them in, just for a few minutes. I just want to say goodbye before we go on vacation. Please?”

The Gorilla was glaring at him, but he let out a huge breath and opened the front door, walking down to the main gate.

Adrien was honestly shocked that worked.

The Gorilla returned with a very short girl who had dyed her hair hot pink, and a skinny dark-skinned boy with glasses.

“Guys!” Adrien said, feigning excitement. “I’m so happy to see you! Come in, come in.”

They both plastered on big fake smiles and followed him into the foyer. Adrien watched the Gorilla out of the corner of his eye, leading the other two closer and closer to his father’s office, until the Gorilla finally turned his back, evidently uninterested in what teenagers had to talk about.
“In here,” Adrien hissed, shoving them inside and closing the door quickly.

“I can’t believe you live like this,” the pink haired girl marveled. “How the heck do you know Alya?”

“Uh, it’s complicated,” Adrien rubbed the back of his neck. “Um, I’m Adrien, by the way.”

“Oh yeah, I’m Alix,” she said, peering behind the portrait of Emilie.

“I’m Max,” the boy announced. “Are you saying you’re Adrien Agreste, the famous model?”

“That would be me,” Adrien winced.

“Interesting,” Max said. “Am I correct in assuming that you met Alya through Chloe? Due to Chloe’s high status as the mayor’s daughter, it seems most probable that she was the one who introduced you.”

“Yeah, that’s right,” Adrien said hurriedly. “So, you guys can open up the safe?”

“Alright, alright,” Alix pushed Max over to the safe. “Do your thing, buddy.”

Max began digging in his bag, pulling out a small robot. Alix muttered under her breath every now and then, pointing while Max and the robot worked.

“Ta-da!” Alix said as the safe swung open.

“Oh, you guys rock!” Adrien rejoiced.

“Don’t know why this mattered so much,” Alix shrugged. “It’s just some jewelry and books.”

“Jewelry?” Adrien paled. “Okay, thanks so much guys, but you have to go. Have the bodyguard see you out.”

“Fine, fine,” Alix raised her hands in defeat. “Here’s the phone Alya told me to give you. All the numbers are already in there. See ya!”

“Goodbye, Adrien,” Max waved. “Good luck, I suppose.”

Adrien watched them leave, then turned back to the safe. Just like Alix said, there was a pile of assorted jewelry, a travel book on Tibet, a picture of a dark haired woman, and a large old tome with no title. He grabbed the ring, holding it in his palm.

This was it. This was his Miraculous.

All the answers were here, contained in this little ring. He slipped it on his finger, and a green light shimmered. He held his hand away from him as the light grew, and a tiny black ball floated in front of his face.

“Adrien!” the creature shouted, flying toward his face and hugging him. “I don’t believe it!”

The name floated to his lips, forming without even thinking about it. “Plagg?”

He flew back, looking fully at Adrien’s face. “Do you remember me?”

Adrien bit his lip. “Uh… Sort of? I remember how you used to pester me for cheese, and how you always kept me company. I was never lonely with you around.”
Plagg’s eyes crinkled sadly. “Speaking of cheese, got any?”

“Sorry,” Adrien chuckled.

“It’s okay. We have to get out of here. Grab all of these,” Plagg flew over the pile of jewelry. “Hurry!”

Adrien scooped up the assorted jewelry in his arms and turned around to see Emilie standing in the doorway, her eyes wide.

“We haven’t heard from him,” Alya muttered into her phone. “I called Alix, and she said they already left, so I don’t know what’s going on.”

“Has anyone tried calling him?” Chloe barked.

“No, because we don’t want to interrupt if something’s going on,” Alya sighed. “What if he’s talking to his parents?”

“Or what if his parents have locked him up in his room and he needs help? Or they’re shipping him off to Fiji as we speak?” Chloe snapped.

“Well, we don’t know!” Alya said. “Just wait a little while longer, okay?”

“I don’t like this,” Chloe chewed on her lip. “I really don’t like this.”

“What are you doing?” Emilie breathed, her eyes traveling from the open safe to the pile of jewelry in Adrien’s arms to the ring on his finger.

“Nothing,” he said quickly.

“Adrien,” she shook her head. “You- you broke into your father’s safe.”

“I…” he trailed off, unable to say a word.

She walked over to him, plucking the top Miraculous off his pile, a peacock pin. “You don’t know what you’re doing,” she whispered. “These are so dangerous. You’re going to get hurt.”

“I know exactly what I’m doing,” Adrien replied. “I have to do this.”

She shook her head. “Adrien, you’re scaring me. You’re going down a bad path.”

“And what path is that?” he asked angrily. “At least I’m not like you and father!”

“What does that mean?” she asked, shocked.

“It means I know! I know what you are, I know what he is, I know what you did!” Adrien shouted. “I’m done here. I’m gone.”

“No, Adrien!” she cried out, following him as he ran out of the room and up the staircase. “What are you talking about? What did we do?”

Adrien squeezed his fist, the point of a pair of earrings stabbing his palm. He stopped at the top of
the staircase, staring down at his mother’s horrified face. “You made her disappear,” he said in a hoarse voice, before running into his room and slamming the door.

“Adrien,” Plagg said in his ear. “You have to go.”

Adrien stuffed the jewelry in his pockets, made sure the new phone was there, then stalked over to the window. “I know. How- how do I…?”

“Say ‘claws out.’”

“Plagg, claws out!”

A green light enveloped him, and he threw the window open, grabbed the baton on his back, then jumped.

“Adrien!” Emilie flung open the bedroom door in time to see a black tail slipping out.

“Wooo!” Adrien whooped as he leapt across rooftops. The feeling of immense power, the incredible strength, everything was exactly as he remembered it. This was what was missing from his life. The freedom, the wind blowing through his hair… All he needed was his partner back by his side, and this would be perfect.

He thudded down on Chloe’s balcony, knocking on the glass door. She locked eyes with him through the glass, and let out a shriek.

“What the hell?!”

“Chloe, it’s me!”

“There’s a freak on my balcony!”

“Chloe!”

Someone fast flung open the door and smacked him in the head with a broom. “En garde!”

“Ouch!” he fell to the ground, clutching his head.

Chloe peered outside. “Did you get him?”

Adrien winced, glancing up at his attacker. “Kagami?”

Her eyes narrowed. “Adrien?”

“Adri-kins!”

He groaned and stood up. “Claws in.”

The transformation faded away, and both girls helped him inside. “What’s going on?” Chloe asked. “We’ve been so worried about you!”

“Oh… Well, it’s a long story.”

“I’ll call the other two over,” Kagami said calmly.

“Hello, is anyone going to give me cheese?” Plagg shouted, hovering over their heads.
Chloe let out a little shriek, throwing a pillow at him.

“Don’t be bemused, it’s just the news! Nadja Chamack here, bringing you your afternoon report. Citizens of Paris were amazed as a man dressed entirely in black was spotted leaping across the city today. His stunts both shocked and awed Parisans, and many people tried to follow him, but ultimately his motives and final destination are unknown. Here’s some footage submitted by a citizen.”

Nadja’s face faded away to reveal grainy cell phone footage of a dark figure, flipping in the air and vaulting across rooftops. The footage shook as the cameraman ran into an alley, following the acrobat, but ended as the videographer mumbled, “Aww, I lost him.”

Nadja reappeared, grinning widely. “Police are urging people not to copy this man’s stunts, as it is highly dangerous. Any copycats will be apprehended. In the meantime, officials are asking that if anyone has any knowledge as to the identity of this man, or any information at all, to please call the non-emergency number. Now, onto our next story…”

“I’m home,” Gabriel called out. “Emilie?”

There was no response, so he walked further into the foyer. He was about to head upstairs when he noticed the office door ajar. Frowning, he walked over to close it, but instead was frozen by what he saw.

Emilie was sitting on the floor, her face tear-stained. She wasn’t crying anymore, her face empty of all emotion as she stared at the items placed around her.

“Emilie?”

“Why did you have all those Miraculous?” she asked in a hoarse whisper.

“What are you talking about?” Gabriel looked down at what she had spread around her, a chill sweeping through him. She had the peacock Miraculous in front of her, the picture of Nathalie to her left, and the grimoire open on her right.

“You know what I’m talking about,” she said quietly. “Where did you get all those?”

“I did what I had to do,” Gabriel said carefully, walking around her.

“And what did you do?”

“I healed you,” Gabriel snapped. “You aren’t sick anymore because of what I did.”

“What did you do, Gabriel?” she moaned, half whimpering as fresh tears formed in her eyes.

“Don’t ask questions you don’t want the answer to, Emilie,” he whispered.

She stood up, brandishing the picture. “Who is this? What happened to her?”

“She’s gone,” Gabriel said coldly.

Emilie let out a sob. “How could you?”
“Dearest, I did it for you,” he grabbed her hands, pulling her close. “I would do anything for you.”

“Don’t touch me,” she gasped, pulling out of his grip. “I don’t even know you anymore!”

“Emilie, calm down,” he pleaded. “Tell me what I can do, and I’ll do it. Anything!”

“Just leave me alone,” she cried, turning away.

Gabriel’s eyes swept the room, landing on the empty safe. “What did you do with the other Miraculouses?”

“They’re gone,” Emilie said in a hushed voice. “You won’t get them back.”

“What did you do with them?” Gabriel pressed, leaning toward her.

“I won’t tell you,” she said, shaking her head.

“Tell me!”

“No!”

“Emilie,” he growled.

She shook her head rapidly. “Get away from me, Gabriel!”

The tv in the corner began playing the opening notes of the afternoon news segment.

“Don’t be bemused, it’s just the news…”

Gabriel’s eye was drawn to the shoddy video, and he took in a sharp breath. “You didn’t.”

“Gabriel…” Emilie’s tone held a note of warning and panic.

Both of their gazes fell to the peacock pin, and they both made a dive for it at the same time. Gabriel came away victorious, panting heavily and holding the pin high in the air.

“He’s our son!” Emilie screamed.

“I know that,” Gabriel hissed. “I know very well who he is!”

“How could you even think about fighting him?” she shouted. “How could you?!”

“I will not lose everything I worked so hard for,” Gabriel said in a rough voice. “I will not lose.”

He strode out, brushing past Emilie, who ran after him.

“No! Gabriel!”

The front door slammed, and Emilie fell to the floor, weeping.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! This is one of my favorite chapters simply for the Gabriel and Emilie interaction at the end. I know people have been questioning where Emilie's
loyalties lie, so here's some answers!
I want to thank tumblr user my-miraculous-headcanons for giving me a shoutout! I never expected to see anyone praising my work like that, so it was a really pleasant surprise to stumble across their post. Thank you so much! You're amazing!
Reborn

Chapter Notes

WARNING:
This chapter contains some violence. I'm not exactly sure what qualifies as "graphic violence", but I just thought I'd be safe and let you know here. It's really not that bad, but hey, you never know how someone else might react.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“These are all Miraculous,” Adrien reached into his pockets, pulling out a tangle of jewelry and dropping it on the table.

Chloe reached out and picked up the bee haircomb. “This is mine,” she squealed. “This is my Miraculous!”

“All of these were in your father’s safe?” Alya marveled. “Why? What’s going on?”

“You need to talk to Tikki,” Plagg crossed his arms, his brow furrowed. “She’s in the earrings.”

Adrien looked down at the earrings. “Tikki?”

“She’s the Kwami of the ladybug Miraculous,” Plagg said. “She can explain it better than I can.”

Adrien reached out and picked up the earrings. “These belonged to Ladybug,” he said quietly.

“Someone needs to put them on,” Plagg said, floating over to the tray the butler had previously brought up. He tossed a piece of cheese in the air, swallowing it whole; Chloe wrinkled her nose in response.

Alya reached out, placing her hand over Adrien’s. “It’s okay,” she said softly. “We need answers.”

Adrien took a breath, then nodded and dropped the earrings in her palm. “Go on. It should be you.”

Alya slowly poked the studs in; there was a flash of pink light, and a red Kwami was floating above them, her eyes drifting open.

“Sugarcube!” Plagg rushed into her.


“Hello, Tikki,” Adrien smiled gently. “Can you help us?”

She locked eyes with him. “Adrien Agreste,” she said mournfully. “Of course I can help you. I have a long story to tell you.”

She flew high in the air, eyeballing each and every one of them. “It began about a year ago, when Adrien’s mother went missing.”

“Wait, what?” Adrien said, thoroughly confused.
“Quiet, kid,” Plagg mumbled.

“Gabriel Agreste, an already cold, reclusive man, withdrew even further after this happened. This left Adrien lonely, grieving, with no one to comfort him. In a fit of rebellion, he decided to enroll in public school without permission. That’s how he found himself running toward Francois-Dupont on the first day of classes. On the way, he found an old man on the ground, struggling to get up. He stopped to help him, and doing so meant that he got caught by his bodyguard and his father’s assistant, Nathalie Sancour.”

Adrien felt a pang go through his heart when he heard that name.

“Earlier that day, a girl named Marinette Dupain-Cheng helped the same old man cross the street on her way to school. Marinette attended school with Nino and Chloe for years, and this year was no different. After being kicked out of her seat by Chloe, Alya came to her rescue and the two became fast friends.”

Alya let out a strangled sort of noise.

“Later that day, both Marinette and Adrien found small black boxes in their rooms, opening them to find the ladybug and black cat Miraculouses, respectively. The city was being attacked by Hawkmoth, the holder of the butterfly Miraculous. He used the power of negative emotions to akumatize people, turning them into monsters. So Ladybug and Chat Noir set out to protect the city and vowed to stop Hawkmoth.”

A solemn silence filled the room; knowing what happened now made that statement incredibly dark.

Tikki landed on the table. “Over time, Ladybug recruited help, gaining allies in the form of Rena Rouge, the holder of the fox Miraculous, Carapace, the holder of the turtle Miraculous, and Queen Bee, the holder of the bee Miraculous.”

“That’s me!” Chloe blurted.

Alya and Nino looked at the jewelry displayed on the table. “Uh, then, Rena Rouge and Carapace…” Alya trailed off.

“Yes,” Tikki smiled gently. “You two were heroes too.”

Alya and Nino exchanged small, triumphant smiles.

“But Hawkmoth gained an ally as well,” Tikki exhaled. “He had Mayura, the holder of the peacock Miraculous, on his side.”

“But that’s five against two,” Alya leaned forward. “What happened? How did we lose?”

Everyone’s phones began buzzing, and Chloe frowned at the alert. “Uh, it says shelter in place. Everyone is to remain indoors.”

“Why?” Nino asked.

“Turn on the news,” Adrien gestured to the tv. Chloe turned it on, and Nadja Chamack’s face filled the screen.

“This is a special news bulletin. A giant monster is attacking the city! Police have issued a shelter in place alert to the entire city as the monster rampages. No one knows exactly where this monster
came from or who is behind this attack…”

“Sentimonster,” Tikki stated, her jaw clenched.

“What’s a sentimonster?” Adrien asked.

“It’s created from the peacock Miraculous,” she explained. “Someone is using it.”

“I think I know who,” Adrien said darkly. “How do we stop it?”

“You need Ladybug.”

In a cafe across the city, a girl sat down at a table, sipping her americano. A boy sat across from her, his smile strained.

“Hi!” she said cheerfully, finishing her drink. “What did you want to talk about?”

“Um, first, I just want to say thank you for coming to meet me,” he fidgeted.

She set her cup down. “What’s wrong?”

“We need to talk.”

Okay…” she said slowly. “About what?”

“I want to break up,” he said in a rush.

She blinked, once, twice, three times. “Oh.”

“It’s just not working out.”

“I get it,” she lowered her head. Her tongue suddenly felt heavy in her mouth, and she forced herself to swallow. “Okay.”

“Okay?” he jumped up. “Well, great! Okay! I guess I’ll see you around, then.”

He left the cafe, and she squeezed her eyes shut, trying to control herself. She did not want to be that girl who cried in a public cafe over a boy.

A stupid, stupid boy.

A few tears leaked out, and she covered her face, choking back a whimper.

“Oh, honey. Here, on the house,” the waitress clucked her tongue, dropping a cappuccino and a cookie on the table.

The poor girl simply made a keening sound, keeping her hands over her face.

She didn’t notice the dark feather floating down to her table, landing on her watch.

However, she did notice when a giant beast grew beside her, an angry, blue, three headed beast. The vicious heads snarled and roared, and patrons began screaming, fleeing the cafe.

The beast smashed through the walls of the cafe, jumped through the massive hole and began charging across the city. The girl stared, open-mouthed in horror, before running away.
“Can’t I stop it?” Adrien asked.

“Only Ladybug can purify the feather and repair damage,” Tikki explained. “You could smash the object that’s infected, but you won’t be able to cleanse it or fix the city.”

“Then someone’s going to have to transform into Ladybug,” Alya touched the earrings in her ear. “But not me.”

“It could be you,” Tikki smiled. “Marinette would have loved for you to be Ladybug.”

Alya shook her head. “I can’t do it. I’ll use the fox, I’ll be Rena Rouge. I can’t be Ladybug,” she whispered.

She removed the earrings, and Tikki vanished. She placed them on the table and grabbed the necklace, while Nino picked up the bracelet. Chloe placed the comb in her hair, and three Kwami’s materialized. Adrien turned to Kagami, who had been sitting silently this entire time.

“Kagami…”

She shook her head. “No. I can’t be Ladybug.”

“We need your help,” he insisted. “We need someone to do it.”

“Then you use the ladybug Miraculous.”

Adrien glanced over at Plagg. “I’m Chat Noir,” he said firmly. “Kagami, you can do this. You are brave, and smart, and tough. You destroy me in every fencing class! I know that you can do this.”

She lifted her hand, hesitating. “I am not Ladybug,” she said softly. “I’m not her.”

“You’re not replacing her,” Adrien placed the earrings in her hand, closing her fingers over them. “You’re helping her out. And I know that she wouldn’t want anyone else to do this.”

Kagami took a deep breath. “Okay. Okay, I’ll do it.” She pushed the studs in, and Tikki reappeared in a flash of light.

“Thank you, Kagami.”

“So, what do I do?”

“Ready?” Adrien asked, his eyes sweeping the group. Everyone nodded.

“Pollen, buzz on!”

“Trixx, let’s pounce!”

“Wayzz, shell on!”

“Plagg, claws out!”

Kagami swallowed nervously, looking at the other heroes before her. She shifted her gaze to Tikki, who smiled encouragingly.
“You can do this, Kagami. Just believe in yourself.”

She nodded, sucked in some air, and shouted, “Tikki, spots on!”

The pink light overtook her, and the red and black spotted suit spread over her; knee high black boots formed over her legs, and elbow length black gloves wrapped around her arms. A black ribbon wrapped around her hips, giving her a large black back bow, and a spotted sailor collar formed with its own black bow. Finishing off the outfit was the spotted mask concealing her face.

Chat Noir smiled warmly at her. “Thank you, uh…”

“Akai Mushi,” she lifted her head high. “Call me Akai Mushi.”

The group ran out on the balcony and jumped off; Chat Noir was in the lead, and behind him he heard a lot of whooping and squealing.

“Okay,” he landed, pointing at the beast. “We need to stop it from hurting anyone, and somehow find the object that possessed. Ready?”

Everyone nodded, and they sprang into action; Rena Rouge and Carapace were leaping around, dodging the many heads, while Queen Bee was attempting to tie the legs down with the string on her top.

Chat watched them, shaking his head. They weren’t coordinated, they weren’t communicating, and they weren’t thinking. They needed a proper plan, they couldn’t just attack without knowing what they were doing.

Akai Mushi hurled her yoyo, trying to help Queen Bee, but she missed and ended up with her string wrapped around a telephone pole instead.

“Crap,” she muttered, tugging on it, trying to detach it.

Queen Bee’s top slipped from her grip, and the beast roared, freeing itself and sprinting away.

“Oh no!” Rena shouted, racing after it, Carapace not far behind.

“Hurry!” Queen Bee followed, and Chat groaned.

“Uh, I think now would be a good time for that Lucky Charm,” he turned to Akai, who finally untangled her yoyo.

“Uh, yeah, right,” she mumbled, looking a little unsure. She tossed it in the air, calling out, “Lucky Charm!”

A bottle of hot sauce fell into her hands.

“Hmm,” Chat peered at the bottle. “Guess it’s getting a little hot out, huh?” he joked.

Akai Mushi gave him a disgusted look. “What am I supposed to do with this? This isn’t a weapon. Neither is this!” she held up the yoyo. “I need an actual weapon if you expect me to fight that thing! A sword, a saber, something!”

“Okay, relax,” Chat said calmly. “This will all work out. I’m sure there’s a reason for this hot sauce.”

She shook her head. “I’m just not cut out for using this Miraculous. I’m sorry, but a yoyo is not an
adequate fighting tool!"

“Akai,” he grabbed her shoulders. “Right now, this is what we have to work with. Okay? We have
to stop the sentimonster, and all you’ve got is a yoyo. We can’t do this without you. Can you help
me with this?”

She locked eyes with him, inhaling deeply. “Okay.”

“Good. Let’s wrap this up before you run out of time.”

The girl stared at her watch, which seemed to be pulsing with a dark energy. She had followed the
carnage left by the beast, feeling a little guilty and somewhat responsible for its sudden appearance,
when suddenly a group of people wearing weird rainbow outfits started fliting about. She trailed
behind as they followed the lumbering beast.

“How are we going to find the possessed object?” the yellow one snapped. “It could be anywhere
in this damn city!”

“Look, we can’t even think about that until we stop it,” the orange one with strange fox ears
retorted. “Someone is going to get seriously injured by that thing! What if it eats someone?”

The yellow one held up something pointy. “Why don’t I just sting it? That’ll stop it!”

“Because that will wear off once your timer runs out,” the orange one rolled her eyes.

“And that only gives us five minutes to find the possessed object,” the green one sighed.

“Well, I’ll just keep transforming back and re-stinging it,” the yellow one grumbled.

“That is a really dumb idea,” the orange one groaned.

“Well, do you have a better idea?” the yellow one shot back.

“Yeah, how about you stop talking and start moving!” the orange one jumped high, avoiding the
beast’s massive paw as it swiped at them.

The other two rolled out of the way, and the green one spotted her.

“Hey! You’ve got to get out of her, it’s way too dangerous!” he ran over to her, guiding her away.

“What do you mean by possessed object?” the girl blurted, holding out her wrist.

“Oh, you heard that?” he rubbed his head. “Uh, basically there’s an object that got, like, infected
with evilness, and that made this monster thing, I guess.”

She looked down at the watch. “I think it’s my fault,” she stammered. “I was at the coffee shop
when this thing just materialized right next to me, and my watch has been giving off this totally
weird vibe since then, and I-”

“Can I see it?” he asked, and she slipped it off, handing it over. He held it close to his face,
squinting, then shrugged and threw it on the ground.

“Hey!” she shouted, just as he lifted his foot and stomped on it.
The beast vanished as suddenly as it had appeared, and a dark feather floated out of the destroyed watch. He bent down and carefully cupped it in his hands, then straightened up and gave the girl an apologetic look.

“I’m sorry,” he started.

“Carapace!” the orange girl threw herself on him. “We did it! That thing is gone! Oh my god, we did it!”

“Let’s go back,” the yellow girl jerked her head, pointing back the way they came.

“Sorry about your watch!” he yelled behind him as they ran off.

The girl just blinked, dumbfounded.

From a nearby rooftop, a man watched the multi-colored heroes dart about, decidedly unamused. He created the sentimonster to lure the heroes out, but seeing them now brought back quite a few unpleasant memories.

As the sentimonster lumbered away and the three little annoying heroes chased after it, he turned his gaze on Chat Noir and the new ladybug. Now was the perfect time to get their Miraculouses back.

“Guys!” Rena Rouge waved her arms in the air. “We did it! The sentimonster is gone!”

“It was all thanks to me,” Queen Bee smirked.

“Uh, excuse me?” Carapace gave her a look, holding up his hands, which were still cupped together, containing the feather.

“Guys!” Rena squealed again. Chat Noir and Akai Mushi turned to look at her just in time to see her fall to the ground.

Behind her stood a man in a dark blue suit; the tails on his jacket resembling peacock feathers. Underneath the deep blue jacket, he wore a green shirt, a matching pocket square sitting in his jacket pocket. He wore black gloves and shoes, a shiny blue mask wrapped around his entire head. Pinned upon his jacket was a peacock brooch, glinting in the sunlight.

“Rena!” Carapace gasped, bending over to help her up, but the man kicked him in the side, sending him flying away. Queen Bee raised her fists, but he grabbed her by her ponytail and swung her to the ground; she cried out in agony as several hairs were ripped from her head.

Rena Rouge was climbing to her feet now, her eyes filled with fire. “You bastard,” she spat, lifting her leg in a kick, which was blocked. His face devoid of emotion, he reached out and wrapped his hands around her throat, making sure to squeeze tightly before throwing her across the street. She slammed into a wall, where she lay, unmoving.

“Rena!” Carapace stumbled over to her, nursing his injured side; he was sure he had a broken rib from being kicked, but at least he was still able to stand. He looked over at the man, filled with rage, and let out a primal scream, rushing toward him.
They sparred for a brief moment, all of Carapace’s attacks blocked, before the man in the suit grabbed Carapace’s arm and twisted it behind his back, pushing him to his knees and then all the way to the ground, where he then kicked him in the ribcage repeatedly.

Queen Bee’s arm shot out, grabbing his leg. “Stop it,” she hissed. He shook her hand off him, then stomped down on her face, hard; blood spurted out, staining the concrete. Straightening his jacket, he continued advancing toward Chat Noir and Akai Mushi.

Stunned by the scene before him, Chat Noir had been briefly frozen, but now he moved so that he was in front of Akai Mushi, holding his baton out in front of him. “Father,” he snarled.

“I am Le Paon,” he said coldly, stopping directly in front of him. “It’s time to end this once and for all, Adrien. Give me your Miraculous.”

“I’d rather die!” he screamed, and Le Paon’s eyes widened, just for a moment, as if he were remembering something. He recovered quickly though, and he let out an angry sigh.

“Why are you trying to destroy our happiness? I brought your mother back, I fixed our family! We can be happy again, and everything will be perfect!”

“Don’t you get it? I was never happy,” Chat Noir spat. “You imprisoned me in that house my entire life, and when mother disappeared you abandoned me when I needed you most! The only times I’ve ever been happy is when I’m Chat Noir and when I was with Ladybug, and you took all of that away from me!”

“And yet, I see it didn’t take you long to replace your precious Ladybug,” Le Paon sneered, his eyes flitting back to Akai Mushi.

Chat let out a roar and advanced with his baton, swinging it carelessly in his rage. Le Paon easily dodged his attacks, and he let out a small laugh.

“Pathetic. You’d think with all those fencing lessons you’d actually have some skill.”

Chat’s white hot fury was palpable, and Akai tensed. “You can’t beat him this way,” she whispered. Her eyes roamed over Le Paon, the baton, and down to the bottle of hot sauce she still clenched in her fist. Her earrings beeped another warning at her; she only had two minutes left. Chat was breathing hard, barely containing his rage, and Akai knew she had to be the one to finish this. She snatched the baton out of his hands, spinning it expertly.

“Let’s dance, you sack of shit,” she said, narrowing her eyes.

Le Paon barked out a humorless laugh. “You might as well just hand over your Miraculous. You can’t beat me in only two minutes.”

“Watch me,” she snarled, jabbing the baton forward; he just barely dodged in time, and his expression darkened.

She was fast and skilled, especially with her enhanced abilities, and she kept him on his toes. He was just barely able to dodge her attacks, and Chat watched, amazed at how smooth her movements were. She swung the baton, finally landing a hit, bashing him across the head. He held his skull, stunned, and she quickly opened up the hot sauce and splashed it into his face, burning his eyes.

He let out a terrible scream and fell to the ground, clutching his face in agony. Akai and Chat stood over him, and Queen Bee, Rena Rouge and Carapace limped over, surrounding him.
“It’s over, Le Pee-On,” Queen Bee taunted, spitting out blood.

“Hand over your Miraculous,” Chat said coldly.

Le Paon stood up, glaring through angry, red eyes. “Do you really think this is the end? You may have won the battle, but not the war.”

“Oh, it’s the end all right,” Chat’s nostrils flared. “I’m ending this, forever. I’m not letting you torment me anymore. Cataclysm!”

Le Paon’s eyes widened. “I’m your father,” he said, his voice catching in his throat.

“You’re not a real father,” Chat’s eyes burned with unshed tears. He raised his arm, but hesitated. He couldn’t do it, he could never hurt his own father, despite everything.

“I’m very disappointed in you, son,” Le Paon replied darkly, grabbing Chat’s arm and pulling him across the circle, touching the bubbling hand to Rena Rouge.

“No!” Chat recoiled as Rena faded away. Le Paon took advantage of the gap in the circle and took off running, leaping high in the air and disappearing in the skyline.

“Oh my god,” Chat fell to the ground. “Alya. I ki- I… Alya!”

“It’s okay,” a soft voice said in his ear, and he whipped his head around to see a bruised but smiling Rena Rouge.

“Ahya?”

“It was an illusion,” she said, holding up the flute. “I figured he would try to beat us up again or something, so I thought it would be safer…”

The Carapace and Queen Bee illusions faded away as well, and the real ones stood behind Rena.

“Oh thank god,” Chat grabbed her tearfully.

“Careful,” she mumbled. “Every part of me hurts.”

“I think I can fix that,” Akai looked down at the hot sauce bottle. “Miraculous Ladybug!” she shouted, hurling it up into the air. They watched, amazed, as millions of tiny ladybugs flew across the city, restoring everything to exactly the way it was before. The ladybugs finished their journey by swirling around the battered heroes, healing them completely.

“I’ve got this as well,” Carapace stepped forward, opening his fist to reveal the feather. Akai Mushi dragged her finger up the yoyo, opening it, and Carapace dopped the feather in. Akai closed her eyes, feeling the negative energy dissipate, then tapped the yoyo, setting the purified feather free. The harmless white feather floated away just as her Miraculous beeped for the final time, and her transformation faded away.

“Ugh,” Nino let out a groan as he sank into an armchair. “I can still feel the broken bones.”

“Phantom pains,” Alya mumbled, sitting down too. “I feel it too.”

Chloe was peering into a mirror, touching her nose. “Are you sure it doesn’t look different?”
They were back in Chloe’s room, waiting while the Kwami’s refueled on snacks. Adrien turned to look at Kagami, who was sitting quietly, her hands folded in her lap.

“You were amazing out there.”

“Thanks,” she said softly. “But I don’t think I’ll be doing that again anytime soon. At least, not with that Miraculous. I’d quite like to try yours. You have a much better weapon.”

Tikki floated over, nibbling on a cookie. “Actually, I believe the dragon Miraculous would be a great fit for you,” she smiled.

“Wow, that’s cool,” Adrien said, impressed. “It would be fun to try out another Miraculous.”

Plagg looked offended. “What?”

Adrien laughed and reached out to pat Plagg’s head. “Relax. I’m not going to replace you, I just got you back!”

“Listen,” Tikki said seriously. “Once we’re done recharging, we have to get out of here. Your father knows who you all are, and he might come looking for you. It’s not safe here.”

“But where can we go?” Alya overheard, coming over.

“There is a place,” Tikki said. “The Guardian’s home should be safe.”


“He protects the Miraculous,” Tikki explained. “He’s the one who gave you yours, Adrien.”

“Then that’s where we have to go,” Adrien declared.

Le Paon landed behind the gate of the Agreste estate, stumbling toward the front door. He dropped the transformation as he walked over the threshold, falling to his hands and knees, crawling forward. He coughed, pain coursing through his body. Every inch of him ached, his entire being in agony. Was this how Nathalie felt? How had she suffered for so long?

A pair of heels stopped in front of him, and he looked up to see Emilie glaring at him. Well, he could sort of see. He’d noticed that the Miraculous cure hadn’t healed his hot sauced eyes - that new Ladybug was vindictive.

“You deserve this,” Emilie said in a quiet, angry voice.

Talk about vindictive.

“I’m trying to fix this,” Gabriel coughed out.

“There’s nothing left to fix,” she whispered. “This is over.”

“It’s not over!” Gabriel tried to stand, but he was too weak. “I will get the Miraculous back, and we will be happy!”

“We won’t,” she closed her eyes, holding in tears. “We won’t ever be happy again. Not after what you’ve done.”
“Emilie,” he pleaded. “Emilie, don’t do this.”

“I’m sorry,” she crouched down, cupping his cheek. “I loved you so much,” she gasped, a tear trickling out, despite her best efforts. “But I can’t be with a man who would hurt his own son, who would hurt other people. You are not the man I thought you were, Gabriel.”

“I love you,” he croaked.

“Goodbye,” she whispered. In one smooth motion, she reached out and plucked the peacock brooch from his chest, then stood up and walked out the door.

Gabriel reached a hand out to stop her, but instead he collapsed on the floor, a broken shell of a man.

Chapter End Notes

OKAY, so I went for a major sailor moon vibe for Kagami’s outfit because I love sailor moon and I couldn't help myself. Also, I'm sorry if Le Paon's costume ended up being disappointing, but I'm terrible at coming up with costume ideas and at describing clothes, so I kinda just went with "it's Hawkmoth but blue.”

I wanted to call Kagami "Tentomushi" so badly, but apparently there’s already a past Miraculous holder called Tentomushi (according to the wiki), so I went with Akai Mushi, which (should) mean red bug/beetle. I don't speak Japanese though, and I looked for a long time to see if this had some improper meaning I'm not aware of, or if I'm translating it all wrong. If you do know Japanese and it does mean something weird/gross/doesn't make sense, please let me know so I can change it.

Anyway, I really hope you enjoyed this chapter! Thank you so much for reading!
The group of five traveled down the street, all of them wearing giant sunglasses. They couldn’t help but feel a little paranoid; the entire city was buzzing over the new superheroes, and despite the fact that the masks preserved their identities, they couldn’t help but feel as if everyone was staring at them.

All around them, people were chattering about the day’s events.

“Did you see the news?”

“The news? I was in the coffee shop when it happened!”

“What was with those outfits?”

“I heard that it was just filming for a movie, and none of it was real.”

“It was definitely a hoax. It didn’t happen! Look, everything is totally normal.”

“That cat guy was the same one from the first news report, right?”

“Oh, I really liked the fox girl.”

“This is so weird,” Nino mumbled. “They’re all talking about us, everywhere we go.”

“Let’s hurry up and get to this Guardian’s place,” Adrien muttered.

Arriving at a small, unassuming building, Adrien knocked tentatively on the door.

An old Chinese man answered the door, opening it only halfway. “Hello? Can I help you?”

“Master!” Wayzz shot out of Nino’s pocket and hugged the old man’s face.

“Wayzz?” he said in a hoarse whisper. “Is it really you?”

“Master,” Tikki rose in the air. Plagg, Trixx, and Pollen followed her, and the Kwami’s surrounded him, circling his head joyfully.

“I can’t believe it,” he smiled, happy tears welling up in the corners of his eyes. He turned to look at the group of teenagers, his gaze quizzical and a little frightened. “Who are you?”

“Can we come in and talk?” Adrien asked.

The man hesitated only briefly, then swung the door open wider to allow them in.

Everyone seated themselves around a small table while the old man poured tea. No one knew what to say, so they all sat around awkwardly, staring down at their mugs.
“Where did you get the Miraculouses?” the man finally asked.

Adrien cleared his throat. “Um, I took them. My father had them locked in his safe… But they weren’t his. They were ours first.”

The man frowned. “I am the Guardian of the Miraculouses. I never gave any of you a Miraculous. In fact, all of these Miraculouses have been missing.”


“I can explain,” Tikki floated above the table. “Master, your memories have been affected.”

He swallowed and looked down. “I suppose you should tell us everything, then.”

Tikki nodded. “The butterfly and the peacock Miraculouses have been missing for a long time, and when the villain Hawkmoth used them, Master Fu here handed out the ladybug and the black cat Miraculouses,” she explained again, mostly for Master Fu’s benefit. “When Ladybug needed help, she would hand out additional Miraculouses.”

Master Fu looked over at Kagami and Adrien. “So you two are the ones I chose.”

“No,” Kagami shook her head. “I’m not. We don’t know what happened to the real Ladybug.”

“Tikki was going to tell us once we were here,” Adrien said softly.

Master Fu nodded. “Go ahead, Tikki.”

Tikki drew in a shuddering breath. “Ladybug and Chat Noir fought against Hawkmoth for a long time without learning who he was. But once they learned that Gabriel Agreste was Hawkmoth, things rapidly spiralled out of control.”

“How did they find out?” Alya leaned forward.

Tikki locked eyes with Adrien. “It all started with Adrien…”

A few months ago...

Adrien snuck downstairs, heading for the kitchen. He had hardly had a bite to eat all day, and now, late at night, he was starving. He’d overslept, and surprisingly, Nathalie hadn’t woken him, so he ended up rushing to get to school on time and skipped breakfast. At lunch there had been an akuma attack, and after school he had a photo shoot that lasted so long that the cook was gone by the time he got home. Nathalie had served him some kind of cold, bland vegetable mush for dinner, and then he was sent to his room to do homework. The only other thing he’d eaten that day was a macaron; Marinette had brought a small box to school and shared them with him, Nino, and Alya.

In his desperation he’d even contemplated eating some of Plagg’s camembert, but he decided he’d never stoop that low. He’d rather risk his father’s wrath and just sneak into the kitchen for some food.

He was down the staircase and about to head over to the kitchen when he noticed his father’s office door ajar. Dim light streamed through the crack, and he heard low voices.

He was surprised his father was still awake this late, and even though he knew he shouldn’t, he tiptoed over and leaned against the wall, eavesdropping.
"I don’t know how much longer you can do this," Gabriel was saying. "Every day is just another failure, and the longer you use it the weaker you get."

"You need my help," Nathalie argued back. "You can’t defeat Ladybug and Chat Noir without me."

Adrien’s heart stopped. What did she just say?

"I can’t risk losing you too," Gabriel murmured. "It’s just too dangerous to keep using the peacock Miraculous. It hurts you, Nathalie. It eats away at you."

"I don’t care what happens to me," Nathalie said quietly. "I will do anything to help you. We are doing the right thing."

"I know." There was a long pause, and then Gabriel continued. "You should get some rest. Tomorrow is another day."

Nathalie’s heels clicked as she approached the door, and Adrien scrambled to get away. Just before she reached the door, she turned back to look at Gabriel. "Our victory is near, I can feel it. I have no doubt that you’ll get your wish soon."

Adrien ran back upstairs, his appetite gone. Plagg looked up from the tv when he returned.

"Hey! I hope you brought me more cheese."

"You have cheese," Adrien mumbled, collapsing on his bed. Plagg hovered above his head, staring.

"Yeah, but I bet there’s better cheese in the kitchen. Finely aged camemberts, oooh!"

Adrien covered his face with a pillow. "Please stop talking about cheese," he groaned.

"How can I?" Plagg said in a dreamy voice. "There’s nothing better than camembert!"

Adrien flipped over so he was face down, stifling a scream. What was he supposed to do? Tell Plagg? Tell Ladybug? Tell the police?

His entire world was falling apart, and he felt truly lost.

"Morning, dude," Nino yawned as he greeted Adrien. Adrien lifted one hand in a wave, trying to muster up a smile. Nino frowned, and Adrien winced inwardly; he was sure his smile came out as more of a grimace, and he knew that his red, watery eyes weren’t helping.

"Are you okay?" Nino asked in a low voice. "Did something happen at home?"

Adrien bit down on his lip, hard. There was no way he could tell Nino the truth. "Not really," he lied. "I’m just tired. I didn’t sleep well."

"Cheer up, dude," Nino clapped him on the back. "We have a free period today. We can relax, you can take a nap. Marinette said she’s bringing pain au chocolat."

"That’s nice," Adrien managed a tiny, real smile this time. He honestly had no clue what he was going to do, but at least he had one good thing to look forward to.
“Ah, I can’t wait for summer break,” Alya sighed. “Everyday will be like this!”

The four of them were sitting out in the courtyard, enjoying the sunshine. Most of the class was working in the library, but since they had food they decided to sit outside and eat their pastries.

Nino was playing music at a low volume, and Alya was leaning against him, her eyes closed. Marinette sat with her hands in her lap, fidgeting slightly.

“Speaking of summer, we should do something fun,” Nino said. “We could go to the pool and the ice rink.”

Marinette took a careful bite of her pastry. “We should go to the ferris wheel again, since Adrien didn’t get to go last time,” she suggested.

“Oh, and the zoo again,” Alya sat up. “I’d like to be able to do something without an akuma ruining everything, you know? Even though I love Ladybug and filming her amazing successes.”

Marinette smiled softly. “What do you want to do, Adrien?”

Adrien shrugged, picking at his pain au chocolat. “Dunno,” he mumbled. “It’s not like my father will let me go anyway.”

The atmosphere shifted, and the others looked down guiltily. Adrien hated himself for bringing their moods down; he normally was relatively cheerful and positive, but he just had too much on his mind today.

“Something bothering you, sunshine?” Alya asked.

“No,” Adrien looked away. He could sulk about this all he wanted, but it wasn’t going to change anything.

He’d made up his mind; he needed to tell Ladybug. He just needed to figure out how to do so without revealing his identity. As for what was going to happen after that…

Well, he couldn’t think about that. He knew the reality of the situation - he was going to be completely parentless. A missing mother, a criminal father, and an accomplice… Nathalie. His family was broken and shattered beyond repair.

“Adrien,” Marinette interrupted his thoughts. “If you need anything, we’re here for you,” she said warmly. “I don’t know what’s wrong, but if I can help in any way, I will.”

“Ditto,” Nino nodded, and Alya gave him a grin and thumbs up.

Adrien couldn’t help but smile at his friends. They were his family now, that was all that mattered. As long as they were by his side, he would be able to get through this. “Thanks, Marinette,” he said softly, locking eyes with her. She flushed slightly, but held his gaze. “You’re the nicest person I’ve ever met,” he continued, resting his forehead on her shoulder. “Seriously, thank you.”

She squeaked out an unintelligible response, her face overheating.

“Hey, what about us?” Alya joked, ripping off a piece of pastry and tossing it at them.

“You’re okay,” Adrien teased, while Marinette tossed a piece of her own pastry back.
Alya responded by throwing a crumpled napkin; Marinette pulled an old receipt out of her purse and hurled it, and soon all four of them were engaged in a garbage fight, laughing wildly.

Adrien left his fencing lesson, walking down the steps of the school, nearly crashing into a waiting Marinette.

“Marinette! I’m so sorry,” he apologized, holding out a hand to steady her.

She was pink in the face, shaking her head wildly. “It’s okay! I, um, I brought you this!” she held out her hand, which held a cup of coffee.

Adrien took the to go cup, touched. “Thank you. I… Wow. Thank you so much.”

She rocked back and forth on her heels. “You’re welcome. You just seemed so tired all day, so I just thought you might like some coffee,” she babbled. “I wanted to get it for you before your fencing class, because that’s when you’d need the energy boost the most, but there just wasn’t enough time, so I thought maybe you’d still like it after class, since you probably still have homework to do. I mean, I like to drink coffee sometimes when I have a lot of homework, so I thought maybe you would too. Or maybe you have a photo shoot, and coffee would be good for that too, I don’t know, or if you don’t want it I can take it back. Maybe I should have asked first. Oh god, I’m sorry, I should have asked-”

“Marinette!” Adrien stopped her. “Breathe!”

She let out a deep breath, and they both giggled. “Sorry,” she said.

Adrien smiled warmly. “Marinette, thank you so much. You’re so thoughtful.” He took a small sip of the coffee. “Everything you do is amazing. I don’t know how you do it.”

She was still very pink, and she looked down at her feet, tucking a lock of hair behind her ear. “I just want you to be happy. I don’t like seeing you down, like you were today.”

“How could I be upset when I’m around you?” Adrien touched her shoulder. “You always make my day better. Any second I’m with you is perfect.”

Her eyes widened, her face a brilliant scarlet. “Adrien… I…”

A car horn honked, and Adrien glanced over to see the Gorilla waiting. “I’m sorry, I have to go. Thanks again for the coffee, Marinette!” he waved, jogging away. She gave him a small wave goodbye, and he watched her in the mirror as they drove off.

Night fell, and he landed on the Eiffel Tower, pacing across the metal bars. How was he going to do this?

“Hey, Chat!” her cheerful voice announced her arrival.

“My lady,” he bowed, and she giggled. “You’re in a good mood,” he noted.

“I had a really nice day,” she grinned. “Even your puns can’t bring me down.”

He forced a smile. How was he supposed to tell her now? He never wanted to wipe that smile off her face.
“So, ready for patrol?” she asked, stretching her arms.

“I have to tell you something important,” he blurted.

She tilted her head to the side. “What’s up?”

He closed his eyes, his stomach roiling. He couldn’t back out now, he had already jumped without thinking. But how in the world could he tell her? How could he admit the truth to her, when he couldn’t face it himself?

“Chat? Is everything okay?” she touched his arm gently, her eyes filled with concern.

“I know who Hawkmoth is,” he whispered miserably.

“What?” she took a step back, her eyes huge. Whatever she expected to hear, it wasn’t that.

He nodded, sitting down and covering his face. “You were right,” he mumbled. “All this time, and you were right. I just didn’t want to believe it.”

“Right about what?” she asked cautiously, sitting next to him.

“About Hawkmoth being Gabriel Agreste,” he choked out, fighting back tears.

Her mouth fell open, but she was totally silent. “How?” she finally said.

“How what?”

“How did you find this out?” she whispered.

“It doesn’t matter now,” he shook his head.

“Chat, we have to be completely sure,” she started.

“I am completely sure,” he interrupted. “I know it’s him. And Mayura is his assistant, Nathalie Sancoeur.”

She was quiet for a long time, the wind rustling through their hair. “I trust you,” she said finally. They sat together in silence, listening to the bustling city streets below them. She took his hand, squeezing it. “I just can’t believe it,” she sighed. “I don’t want it to be true.”

“Yeah, me either,” Chat mumbled.

“How are we going to tell Adrien?” she whispered. “He doesn’t have any family left. What’s going to happen to him?”

Chat felt a warmth in his chest, listening to her worry about him. Well, civilian him. She was just so caring and kind. Sort of like Marinette…

He shook that thought from his head. “I don’t know,” he murmured. “But he’ll be safer once Hawkmoth is gone.”

“I know,” she sighed heavily. “But this is going to devastate him. He deserves to be happy, yet he’s suffered so much. Why can’t the world just cut him some slack for once?”

Chat looked over at her, trying not to cry. He didn’t need his father. He only needed people who actually cared about him.
Ladybug glanced at him. “What? Is there something on my face?”

He shook his head, too overcome with emotion to speak, and pulled her into a hug. She didn’t answer, just relaxing into the hug and burying her head in his shoulder.

When they parted ways later, she offered up that soft, beautiful smile he loved so much. “See you again tomorrow? We... We can start planning,” she said sadly.

He nodded and watched her swing away.

They met again every night for a week, planning and strategizing, trying to come up with some semblance of an idea. In the end though, they spent most of the time sitting in silence, shoulders touching, each lost in thought but taking comfort in the other’s presence.

“My lady?” Chat asked.

“Yeah?”

“What’s going to happen after all this?”

She sighed, staring out at the Seine. Tourists were riding in boats down the river, floating lazily on the water. “I don’t know,” she whispered. “I haven’t even told Master Fu about this yet.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m afraid,” she admitted. “When Hawkmoth is gone, is he going to ask for our Miraculouses back? Because I can’t lose you or my Kwami. You two are way too important to me.”

Chat tilted his head to look at her, giving her a sleepy smile. “Really?”

“Of course!” she nudged him. “You changed my life, you know. I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“Aww,” Chat wrapped his arm around her. “My lady, you took the words right out of my mouth. And hey, once this is over, maybe we could finally reveal ourselves.” He felt a little thrill at the thought of finally seeing the girl behind the mask, but also a hint of fear at her knowing he was Adrien.

“But what if we can’t?” she sighed. “Even if Hawkmoth is gone, another threat could pop up. We might never know who the other is.”

Chat’s shoulders slumped. “I don’t want that,” he whined.

She glanced at him, a little nervous. “I don’t want that either,” she said. She buried her face in her hands, groaning a little. “You must think I’m totally selfish. I know that Hawkmoth is terrorizing the city, I know that he’s evil and needs to be stopped, and all I can think about is myself!”

“I don’t think you’re selfish,” he said. “Bug, you give all of yourself to this city every single day. You’re the most selfless person I know. It’s okay for you to be a little scared about this. Everything is going to change.”

She took a deep breath. “Yeah, it is,” she said softly. “But we can’t keep putting it off. I’ll talk to Master Fu tomorrow.”
“It’s going to be okay,” he said soothingly. “I promise, no matter what, you won’t lose me.”

She smiled tenderly at him, leaning her head on his shoulder.

“So, you want to catch a movie after school?” Alya asked.

Marinette’s eyes drifted shut as Ms. Bustier droned on. She’d spent all week up late with Chat, and then when she got home she was up even later still talking to Tikki.

“Marinette!” Alya hissed.

She was dreading going to see Master Fu today. Normally she liked talking to him, but today she was going to have to tell him the truth about Hawkmoth, and try yet again to come up with some sort of plan. All she really knew was that she wanted to give Alya, Nino, and Chloe their Miraculous, since they needed all the help they could get.

Then again, she was hesitant to place her friends in danger…

“Marinette!”

She jumped, blinking, and looked over at Alya. “Yeah?”

“Girl, are you okay?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m just tired,” she mumbled.

“Girls, please focus on the lesson,” Ms. Bustier directed her attention on them. The rest of the class turned to look at them, including Adrien, who’s brow furrowed in concern as he looked at Marinette. She sunk down in her seat.

“Sorry Ms Bustier,” Alya smiled, and their teacher continued with the lesson, everyone else turning their attention back to the board. Adrien shot Marinette a small smile before facing the front again, and Marinette’s shoulders tensed.

Alya nudged Marinette in the side, passing her a note. Marinette unfolded it, her eyes scanning the slip of paper.

*Girl, are you okay? You’ve been acting kind of weird all week. Why are you so tired?*

Marinette picked up her pen, scribbling a response. She’d been too tired and too sad to put up a cheerful facade since she learned the news about Hawkmoth, and she should have suspected that Alya would have grown suspicious.

*I’m fine, I promise. I’ve just been up late, working on designs and doing homework. Plus I’ve been helping my parents a lot lately. I’ve just been doing a lot of stuff lately.*

Alya shook her head slightly as she read the note, then slid it back with her answer.

*If you say so. Go home and get some rest today, okay? You’re trying to do too much. I’m worried about you.*

Marinette gave Alya a small smile, then returned her attention to the lesson.
“Marinette!” Adrien called out after school. She stopped on the front steps, turning to look at him. She offered him a strained smile, rocking back and forth on her heels.

“Hi,” she said. “Um, what’s up?”

“I just wanted to talk to you,” he said, suddenly nervous. He rubbed the back of his neck, glancing down. “Um, are you okay? You seem… I don’t know, it just seemed like something might be wrong.”

She took a half step back. “I’m fine. Look, I have to go…”

Adrien frowned. A week ago, Marinette was happy and smiling, if a bit nervous around him. But now it almost seemed like she was avoiding him. “Did I do something to upset you?” he blurted. “Because if I did, I’m so sorry. You’re one of my closest friends, Marinette. I would never want to hurt you.”

He needed Marinette now more than ever. Knowing that soon his entire life was going to fall apart, he needed his friends, he absolutely depended on their love and kindness. He couldn’t lose Marinette now.

Her eyes widened at the desperation on his face, and she closed the distance between them, pulling him into a hug. “You didn’t do anything wrong,” she said in his ear. “I promise. You’re such an important friend to me too. I’ve just got a lot on my mind right now, but don’t worry about me.”

She took a step back, smiling gently at him. “I have to go,” she said in a soft voice. “Are we okay?”

He nodded, a lump in his throat. “I hope everything is okay.”

Her eyes were sad as she spoke. “I hope so too,” she said quietly before rushing off.

“Hello, Master,” Marinette said softly, entering his home. He looked up at her from his cup of tea, smiling.

“Hello, Marinette. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“I have something important to tell you,” she sat down, looking down.

“What is it?”

She wrung her hands while Tikki hovered near her head, waiting. “Go ahead and tell him, Marinette,” Tikki urged.

They had spent the past week discussing whether to tell Master Fu about all this; well, more like Tikki had been insisting that Marinette tell him, while Marinette groaned in frustration.

“I know who Hawkmoth is,” she mumbled.

Master Fu’s eyes widened, but otherwise he remained calm. “Who is it?”

“Gabriel Agreste.”

This time the shock and horror was evident on Master Fu’s wizened face. “How did you find out?”

“Chat found out, somehow,” Marinette closed her eyes. “He wouldn’t tell me how, but I trust him completely. I know he’s right. Besides, it makes sense. All the evidence from before is still there.”
Master Fu let out a soft breath, his expression incredibly sad. “I’m very sorry, Marinette.”

“And now, I don’t know what to do,” Marinette said mournfully. “Please, tell me what to do.”

Master Fu poured a cup of tea, sliding it across the table to her. “Marinette, you should always go with your instincts. They’ve never steered you wrong before.”

She swirled the cup around, staring at the tea sloshing around. “I don’t even know where to begin. I thought about getting the Miraculouses so we could have Rena Rouge, Carapace, and Queen Bee help us, but now I’m not sure. What if they get hurt? Then I’ll be responsible, and it would kill me.”

“You’ll need the help,” Master Fu said. “Hawkmoth isn’t alone, he has Mayura. And I know you will win, Marinette. You and Chat Noir will always prevail, because you fight for justice.”

“Don’t worry, Marinette,” Wayzz added. “With me around, there’s no chance anyone will get hurt, I promise you.”

She gave him a weak smile. “I know. I suppose I should be going, I have homework to do before I meet Chat later. Thanks for talking with me, Master Fu.”

He nodded. “Anytime, Marinette. Please take care.”

“We need a real plan,” Ladybug sighed.

Chat stared off in the distance, his eyes glassy. “I know.”

“We need to figure out a way to get Adrien out of there, first of all,” Ladybug threw her yoyo out, then reeled it back in, catching it in her palm. “He has to be safe before we do anything.”

“Don’t worry about Adrien,” Chat said hastily. “I’ll take care of him. I’ll take him somewhere where his father can’t find him.”

“Thanks, Chat,” she nodded. “Once Adrien is safe, we need to assemble the team. I’ll get the Miraculouses and hand them out. Then... Then I suppose we need to get in the house. He’s a recluse, he almost never leaves. Rena, Queen Bee, and Carapace should deal with Mayura while you and I take Hawkmoth. If we can sneak up on them before they transform, that would be best.”

Chat sighed, looking up at the sky. “When is all this going down?”

“Tomorrow night?”

“That soon, huh?”

“It.. It has to be done.”

Chat nodded, his eyes watery, smiling sadly. “Yeah. Yeah, it does. I’m going to go, then. I’ll see you tomorrow, my lady.”

“Oh. O-okay,” she said, surprised. “Um, bye, then. See you tomorrow.”

Chat returned home, detransforming back in his bedroom. “It’s all over. Tomorrow, it’s all going to be over,” he whispered.
“Kid…” Plagg looked at him sadly. “It’s going to be okay.”

Adrien walked over to the door, his hand on the doorknob. “Maybe. Plagg, you know that safe behind the portrait of mother… Do you think there’s something in there that could help us?”

“You know I love snooping, but maybe we should just wait for Ladybug,” Plagg grabbed his cheese.

“I think it would be good if we were prepared for tomorrow,” Adrien muttered. “I want this over with quickly.”

“Adrien…”

“Come on, Plagg. Let’s just check it out,” Adrien swung the door open, creeping downstairs.

“Don’t make me be the voice of reason!” Plagg whined, following him to the office door. Adrien jiggled the handle.

“It’s locked.”

“Hang on,” Plagg mumbled, phasing through the lock. The door creaked open, an annoyed Plagg on the other side.

“Thanks,” Adrien whispered, tiptoeing in. He walked over to the large portrait, and Plagg phased through again, opening up the safe.

“There’s nothing interesting in here,” Plagg stuck up his nose. “Boring books, dumb papers…”

Adrien skimmed through everything, letting out a huge sigh. “Yeah, you’re right. I just thought that maybe there would be some answers here. I still don’t understand why he’s doing this.”

Plagg swooped in the air, letting out a groan. “There’s no reason, kid. He’s a madman.”

“Actually, I do have a reason.”

Adrien spun around to see his father standing in the doorway, glaring at him. “F-father,” he stammered.

Gabriel took a step forward, his eyes on Plagg. “It seems Chat Noir has been under my roof this entire time,” he said quietly. “I guess I cast my suspicions aside foolishly.”

“I’m not Chat Noir!” Adrien said hastily.

“Don’t lie to me!” Gabriel roared, coming closer. “I know that you’re Chat Noir! I won’t allow this to continue!”

Adrien grabbed Plagg out of the air, holding him close to his chest. “You can’t stop me,” Adrien said angrily. “I know who you are too! I know you’re Hawkmoth!”

Gabriel’s face was slightly pained, but he regained composure and took another step toward Adrien. “Fine. Then give me your Miraculous now, and end this.”

Adrien squeezed Plagg a little, and he coughed, wiggling out of Adrien’s grip. “Never,” Adrien shook his head. “I’ll never give you my Miraculous. I don’t know what kind of horrible wish you’ll make with it.”
“You want to know the truth?” Gabriel’s eyes flashed. “Fine, then come with me.” He grabbed Adrien’s arm and pressed his fingertips into the portrait of Emilie. A hole opened up in the floor, and they were both brought down into an underground chamber.

Adrien wrenched himself out of Gabriel’s grip, his eyes filled with fire. “So this is your lair, huh? This is where you hide when you send those akumas out to do your dirty work?”

Gabriel ignored him, gesturing to the far end of the chamber, where a tree sat at the end of a long aisle. Adrien squinted, looking under the tree at the coffin shape…

“What is that?” he asked, horrified.

“That’s your mother,” Gabriel said softly. “That’s Emilie.”

Adrien ran over to the coffin, pressing his hands to the glass. “What did you do to her?”

“It was the peacock Miraculous,” Gabriel said. “She fell ill from using it. I’m keeping her safe here.”

“You told me she went missing,” Adrien started hyperventilating. “You lied to me for over a year! I thought… I thought she was gone forever! How could you!”

“Calm down,” Gabriel said coldly. “Once I have the Miraculouses, I’ll bring her back.”

Adrien covered his ring with the other hand, backing away from his father. “You don’t understand. The wish has consequences, it will hurt innocent people if you do that.”

“I don’t care,” Gabriel’s eyes flashed. “If you won’t be obedient, then I’ll have to force you to obey.”

He grabbed Adrien again, pulling his arms behind his back and tying his wrists together, then sliding the ring off his finger.

“No!” Adrien struggled. “No, stop this!”

Gabriel lightly pushed Adrien, just enough to send him to the ground but not enough to harm him. “You’ll stay here and wait while I get Ladybug’s Miraculous. Trust me, once your mother is back you’ll be thanking me.”

“No!” Adrien screamed at Gabriel’s retreating back. “Don’t hurt her! You can’t do this!”

Gabriel left the chamber, plunging Adrien into darkness, leaving him utterly alone.

Chapter End Notes

Finally, the flashback to what happened! Next chapter is the continuation. Sorry I split it up, but it was just getting way too long. This chapter is over 5,000 words, and next chapter is even longer, I think.

Gabriel just gets worse with every chapter, huh?

Anyway, thanks for reading!
“Have you guys heard from Adrien?” Nino asked.

Marinette and Alya shook their heads. “I thought he would have messaged you,” Marinette frowned.

Adrien had missed school that day, and he hadn’t reached out to contact anyone. It wasn’t unusual for him to miss school; occasionally his father would schedule him for photoshoots, but Adrien always made sure to let his friends and Ms. Bustier know in advance so that someone could write out the notes for him and deliver the assignments.

Nino shrugged. “If it’s a last minute shoot he might not be able to use his phone,” he reasoned.

“Or he could be sick,” Alya suggested. “Maybe he’s been sleeping all day.”

“Don’t worry, dude,” Nino grinned at Marinette. “I’m sure he’s fine. Adrien’s dad would never let anything happen to him.”

Hawkmoth stood in front of Adrien, who was still restrained with his arms behind his back.

“Nathalie will be down soon to feed you,” he said without emotion.

Adrien turned his head away angrily, ignoring him.

“I know you’re upset now, but once your mother is back you’ll be fine,” Hawkmoth said nonchalantly, as if Adrien was upset over something trivial. He turned to walk away, and Adrien glared at him.

“Do you think this is what she would want?”

Hawkmoth’s eyes narrowed. “She would appreciate all the work I’m doing to save her.”

“She would think you’re despicable!” Adrien spat.

“This is why you aren’t mature enough to wield the Miraculous,” Hawkmoth shook his head. “Tonight, you’ll see. I will get my hands on the ladybug Miraculous and make my wish!”

“Don’t touch her,” Adrien growled, struggling against the ties.
Hawkmoth scoffed. “I won’t hurt her, so long as she hands over the Miraculous.”

“She’ll beat you,” Adrien yelled at Hawkmoth as he began walking away. “You could never defeat her!”

“Sir, do you think it’s wise to keep Adrien restrained like that?” Nathalie asked as Hawkmoth returned to his office.

He heaved a sigh. “I’m so close, Nathalie. All I have to do is keep him safe and out of the way until this is over. He’ll forget this ever happened, so it doesn’t matter.”

Nathalie hesitated, wanting to speak her mind but knowing that he didn’t want to hear it. He detransformed, and she walked over to him impulsively, hugging him gingerly. “I’m happy for you,” she finally said.

Truly, she wasn’t quite sure what she was feeling, but she knew it was the right thing to say.

“Thank you,” he sighed, hugging her back tiredly.

Nathalie’s hand slid down his chest, helping him shrug out of his blazer, draping it over his chair. “Sit down,” she said, patting the chair. “You’re exhausted. Try to rest.”

He rubbed his eyes. “Have you been able to find anything that would give away Ladybug’s identity yet?”

“Not yet,” she said, swiping on her tablet. “However, the Ladyblog has reported that Ladybug and Chat Noir have been meeting at the Eiffel Tower every night for a week. I can go there tonight and bring Ladybug back here for you.”

“Excellent,” Gabriel nodded. “Thank you, Nathalie. I would never have been able to do this without you.”

Marinette sighed, dropping her pencil. She had been attempting to work on her homework, but she couldn’t focus at all.

“How’s it going, Marinette?” Tikki asked, floating over to peer at the paper.

“I’ll just work on it later,” she mumbled. “I can’t do math right now. I just keep thinking about tonight, how it’s all going to change.”

“Are you nervous?” Tikki asked, sitting down on the desk.

Marinette shook her head. “I thought I might be, but I know we can beat him. We have the advantage; there’s more of us, and we have the element of surprise. I’m… I guess I’m more worried about what comes after.”

“What do you mean?”

“Like… About Adrien,” she said hesitantly. “I can’t even imagine how hard this is going to be for him. And I want to make sure I’m there for him as a friend.”

“Just a friend?” Tikki asked slyly.
Marinette chuckled softly. “You know, yeah. I’m starting to realize that Adrien needs me more as a friend than anything else. This crush I’ve had on him is kind of silly, you know? He’ll never see me that way.”

“You shouldn’t give up,” Tikki encouraged. “You never know what might happen if you tell him how you feel!”

Marinette looked over at the pictures hanging on her wall; she’d switched some of the ones of Adrien out for group shots of her friends, and this past week she’d printed out a picture of Ladybug and Chat Noir from the Ladyblog and hung that up. “What if how I feel changed?” she said softly.

“How so?” Tikki flew closer, tilting her head to the side.

“Um, Tikki? Do you think Chat Noir and I will be able to reveal our identities once Hawkmoth is gone?” Marinette played with her pencil nervously.

“I don’t know,” Tikki said slowly. “Possibly. But there’s always a chance that there could be another threat after Hawkmoth, and then you two would be in danger. You’ll have to talk to Master Fu about this. Why are you asking? You’ve never wanted to know before.”

Marinette shrugged. “Um… Well…”

Tikki smiled patiently, waiting while Marinette hemmed and hawed.

“Okay,” she said finally. “Tikki… I think I’m falling in love with Chat Noir.”

Tikki’s eyes widened, and her smile grew. “Really? Oh, Marinette!”

Marinette covered her face. “I know, I know. It’s crazy! I know he’s ridiculous and goofy, but he’s also charming and sweet. And you’ll never catch me saying this to his face, but he’s actually funny, and he’s so brave. I know how silly and jokey he is, but he’s shown me that he can be serious too, and I just… I love him.”

“Marinette, relax,” Tikki settled down in Marinette’s outstretched hand. “It’s okay. I’m happy for you!”

“Really?”

“You’re not the first ladybug to fall for her cat,” Tikki said warmly. “It’s going to be okay. Trust me, these things have a way of working themselves out.”

“I hope you’re right,” Marinette sighed. “Because I think we could have something real. And the only way it could work is if we could be honest with each other and share our lives. I can’t date him while hiding who I am.”

“I know,” Tikki said reassuringly. “But this is something you’ll have to talk to Master Fu about after Hawkmoth is dealt with. Tonight, you have to focus.”

Marinette nodded. “You’re right. Speaking of, it’s almost time to meet the others. Tikki, spots on!”

Ladybug climbed up to the balcony, jumping off and swinging toward the Eiffel Tower. Earlier that day, she had retrieved the Miraculouses from Master Fu and handed them out to Chloe, Nino, and Alya. She informed them to meet her at the tower at eight o’clock, and not to transform until then. It was five minutes until eight now, and she wanted to be the first to arrive; but when she landed on the metal beam, she found Rena Rouge, Carapace, and Queen Bee already there. Rena
and Carapace were chatting, while Queen Bee had her arms crossed, rolling her eyes at them. She spotted Ladybug and let out a squeal.

“Ladybug! You’re here!”

“Hey guys,” Ladybug smiled weakly. “Wow, you’re all early.”

“Well, we couldn’t wait,” Rena said eagerly. “What’s this about?”

“Let’s just wait for Chat,” Ladybug said distantly, staring out at the skyline.

The other three exchanged nervous looks and waited patiently behind her.

At 8:05, Ladybug started to get a little worried. After all, Chat was never late for their meetings. At 8:15, that worry began to turn into full-blown panic; behind her, the others were whispering to each other.

“Um, Ladybug?” Rena Rouge stepped forward. “What’s going on? Where’s Chat?”

Ladybug glanced behind her, her eyes huge with worry. “I… I don’t know. Let’s just wait a little bit longer.”

At 8:30, Ladybug tensed, sensing that someone was nearby. She turned her head, spotting a figure standing on the metal beam across from them.

“Ladybug.”

“Mayura.”

Mayura’s eyes were strangely sad. “I take it you know who Hawkmoth and I are.”

“Yes.”

The heroes behind Ladybug inhaled sharply.

“Do you know Chat Noir’s identity as well?”

“What?” Ladybug snapped. “Of course not. What are you talking about?”

Mayura exhaled softly, her expression hard to read. “Come to the Agreste mansion. We have Chat Noir. Hand over your Miraculous, and no one gets hurt. We’ll be waiting.”

She jumped away quickly, and Ladybug was too stunned to move.

“What is she talking about?” Carapace asked.

“You know who Hawkmoth is?” Rena prodded.

“Ladybug, it has to be a trap!” Queen Bee exclaimed.

Ladybug held up a hand, silencing them. “Hawkmoth is Gabriel Agreste,” she said, clenching her jaw. “And yes, this probably is a trap. But they crossed a line by taking Chat. I won’t let anything happen to him. So we’re going to rescue him, and we aren’t giving up. Hawkmoth will never get my Miraculous. Tonight, we’ll be taking his! Are you ready?”

The only sound came from the whistling wind as they processed her words, and then, one by one,
they each nodded.

“We’re with you, Ladydude,” Carapace said.

“Let’s go save that mangy cat,” Queen Bee tossed her ponytail to the side.

Rena Rouge gave Ladybug a nod and a smile. “We won’t lose.”

Ladybug pulled the string on her yoyo, bending her knees. “Okay then. Let’s go, team!”

They took off, headed straight for Agreste manor.

They waited outside the massive gate; Queen Bee pulled the string on her top, preparing to jump, but Ladybug stopped her.

“Wait. We need to be smart about this.” She narrowed her eyes, glancing all around her, before nodding. “Okay, I’ve got it. Rena, use your Mirage. You’re going to make a copy of me.”

Rena Rouge lifted her flute to her lips, playing a few notes. “Mirage!”

A copy of Ladybug appeared before them, mirroring the real Ladybug’s serious expression. “Great. Send her in to talk to Mayura,” the real Ladybug ordered.

The Ladybug copy materialized on the other side of the gate, walking slowly up the steps.

“You came. Where are the others?” Mayura said, stepping out of the shadows.

“Of course I came,” the Ladybug copy said. “I’m here for Chat. The others don’t need to be here for this.”

“Fine,” Mayura shrugged. “Come on in.”

They walked through the front door, and as it closed behind them the real Ladybug hurled her yoyo, catching it in the gap just before the door slammed.

“Let’s go,” she nodded to the others, and they hopped the fence, running over to the door. She poked her head in warily, watching Mayura and fake Ladybug walk over to a room off to the side.

They tiptoed inside and walked over to the room, listening closely.

“Where’s Chat?” fake Ladybug demanded.

Mayura fanned herself slightly with her fan. “You know, despite what you think, Gabriel is a good man. His wish is not selfish.”

“Your opinion isn’t valid,” fake Ladybug snarled. “Any wish he makes is selfish.”

“Hm. I suppose that’s because of the consequences, right? Yes, I know all about that. There must be balance, so if a life is given, it has to be taken away from someone else.”

“If you know, then why would you help him?” fake Ladybug asked. “You’d be willing to sacrifice someone else’s life?”

Mayura smiled sadly. “I’m sorry, Ladybug. You may not understand this, but sometimes people do
irrational things for the ones they love.”

The real Ladybug’s eyes widened, and she tilted her head back, thinking of all the times Chat Noir sacrificed himself for her during battle.

“Now, I think it’s time you hand over the Miraculous. Don’t worry, we’ll give Chat Noir back once you do so.”

Mayura advanced toward fake Ladybug, reaching out to touch her; the second her fingertips grazed her, the Ladybug copy vanished, and the real Ladybug’s yoyo came spinning into the room, wrapping around Mayura.

“I’ll never give you my Miraculous,” Ladybug announced her arrival, walking over to Mayura. “Now, release Chat Noir!”

Mayura didn’t even look surprised, glancing at the heroes gathering in the room. “Ah, of course you’re all here. Let’s get started then, shall we?”

She rolled across the floor, dragging Ladybug with her. Rena grabbed hold of Ladybug, trying to stabilize her, while Carapace grabbed the string, engaging in a sort of tug-of-war. Queen Bee held her top in the air, rolling her eyes.

“Come on, seriously? Venom!”

“Queen Bee, don’t!” Ladybug shouted, losing her grip on the yoyo. Mayura tugged herself free triumphantly, then grabbed Queen Bee by her shoulders. She flipped herself over Queen Bee, and keeping a firm grip on her shoulders, completed the movement by flipping Queen Bee over her head and slamming her into the floor.

Queen Bee let out a pained cry as Mayura advanced toward Ladybug; Carapace and Rena Rouge rushed forward, taking up defensive positions.

Someone pushed Rena Rouge from behind, knocking her to her knees, and while Carapace was distracted, Mayura grabbed Carapace’s arm and pressed it into Queen Bee’s Venom hand.

“Excellent work, Mayura,” Hawkmoth said, placing his foot on Rena Rouge’s back, keeping her against the ground.

“It was easy, Hawkmoth,” Mayura said, looking at the scattered heroes. Ladybug stood in front of Gabriel’s desk, her fists raised.

“Hawkmoth,” she said darkly. “What have you done with Chat Noir?”

“Don’t worry, Ladybug,” Hawkmoth sneered. “You don’t have to worry about him anymore, because you’ll never see him again.”

He stepped off Rena, brandishing his cane. Ladybug spun her yoyo defensively, jumping over his desk to avoid him, but ended up tripping over his chair in her haste. The chair clattered to the floor, his jacket landing in a heap next to her. Peeking out of the pocket she caught the tiniest glimpse of a familiar ring…

Ladybug snatched it up quickly and began scooting away as Hawkmoth advanced toward her, his cane pointed right at her.

“Give up while you still can, Ladybug,” Hawkmoth sneered.
“I’ll never give in,” she said angrily, aware of how dire the situation truly was. She was backed into a corner, quite literally; she had ended up with her back pressed against the portrait of Emilie Agreste, with nowhere else to turn to, while Hawkmoth stood directly in front of her, the tip of his cane directed right at her nose. Behind him, Carapace was still immobilized, and Queen Bee and Rena Rouge were attempting to get to their feet, wincing in pain.

“Wrong answer,” Hawkmoth growled. He swiped his cane at her ankles, knocking her off her feet. She lay in a crumpled heap as he leaned forward, pressing his fingers into the hidden buttons on the painting, and the floor opened up behind her. He placed his foot on her side, his eyes hard.

“Last chance.”

“Never,” she hissed.

“Fine,” he replied, his eyes flashing. He kicked his foot, pushing her through the hole in the floor, and she fell, screaming, plummeting down into the chamber below. There was a sickening crunch, and the screaming stopped.

“No!” Rena Rouge let out an anguished cry, jumping to her feet. She swung her flute, attempting to fight, but Hawkmoth easily dodged her.

Queen Bee kneeled him in his back, fighting back tears. “You monster!”

Hawkmoth and Mayura went back to back, fighting the upset heroes. “Let’s finish this,” he said. “I’m tired of dealing with these children.”

The four of them attacked each other furiously before Hawkmoth broke away, moving over to the painting.

“Mayura, take care of this,” he ordered, pressing the buttons.

“Yes, sir,” Mayura replied, ducking a blow from Rena Rouge.

“Get back here!” Queen Bee shouted, throwing her top. The lift began moving down, and her top flew over the top of his head, missing him by centimeters.

“You two are almost out of time,” Mayura said, her eyes falling to Rena’s necklace.

Rena’s own gaze dropped down to the necklace, which was flashing and beeping rapidly. She covered it with her hand, panicking. She only had seconds left before-

There was a flash of light, and her transformation dropped. Alya cringed, suddenly feeling very small and pathetic.

“No,” Carapace mumbled weakly, desperately fighting against the immobilization.

“Cesaire?” Queen Bee said, shocked. “Oh my god!”

“Now what?” Mayura asked, amused. “How do you plan to defeat us now?”

“Ugh!” Queen Bee stomped her foot. “I’m so done with you! You are pure evil!” She ignored her own beeping Miraculous, throwing punches and kicking at Mayura, screeching.

Mayura struggled to block the blows, but all she had to do was wait out the clock, and soon enough Queen Bee turned back into Chloe.
“Maybe I should take these Miraculouses as a gift for Hawkmoth?” Mayura taunted, reaching out to rip off the haircomb.

“Shell-ter!” Carapace shouted, the forcefield surrounding him, Chloe, and Alya from Mayura. With Chloe’s transformation over, the paralyzation had ended, and he had immediately jumped into action.

Mayura took a half-step back, then shrugged. “Fine. I’ll go join him, then. In a moment, none of you will remember this anyway,” she said, pressing the buttons on the painting and slipping through the floor.

Chloe and Alya avoided each other’s eyes while Carapace lowered his shield. “We need to help Ladybug,” Alya said in a shaky voice. “She could be really hurt. And we have to find Chat Noir.”

Chloe reached into her purse, pulling out a small jar of honey for Pollen. “Hurry up, then,” she mumbled. “Lemme guess, you’re Lahiffe?” her eyes flitted to Carapace briefly before returning to Pollen.

Carapace cleared his throat. “Uh, about that…”

“Whatever. Just hurry up and feed your Kwami.”

Ladybug crashed to the floor, feeling as if every bone in her body shattered. She let out an agonized moan, rolling over slightly.

“Ladybug?” a hoarse whisper carried over to her, and she spotted Adrien, his arms bound behind his back, his legs tied together.

“Adrien?” she shifted slightly, stifling back a pained noise. “What are you doing here? Chat Noir was supposed to get you out… Where is he? Where’s Chat?”

“My lady…” Adrien shimmied slightly, trying to inch closer to her. “My lady, are you hurt? What did he do to you? I swear, I’m going to kill him-”

“What did you call me?” Ladybug’s eyes were practically popping out of her head. The only one to ever call her that...

Adrien flinched. “Oh god, I’m sorry. I just-”

“Chaton?” she whimpered. “My kitty… I’m so sorry,” she cried.

“No, I’m sorry,” he shook his head. “This is all my fault. I’m so stupid for never realizing it. How could I not notice that my own father was…” his voice broke, and he looked down. “I’m so sorry, Ladybug.”

“It’s not your fault,” she said fiercely. “No matter what he’s done, it will never be your fault. We can still end this, chaton. We can still defeat him.”

“He took the ring,” Adrien sniffed, attempting to wipe his nose on his shoulder, his eyes wet. “I lost Plagg.”

“No you didn’t,” Ladybug said softly, looking down at her clenched fist. She slowly opened it, staring at the ring, then rolled it across the floor toward Adrien.
His eyes widened, and he flopped over onto his belly, catching the ring under his stomach. After a bit of struggling, he managed to turn over onto his back, fumbling with the ring, trying to slide it onto his finger.

“We can win this,” Ladybug said, trying to crawl toward him, wincing in pain with every movement. “We can stop him. We are Ladybug and Chat Noir!”

Adrien clutched the ring in his hand, trying his hardest to slide across the floor toward her, despite his bound limbs. “You’re right, my lady. We’re an unbeatable duo!”

They inched closer and closer, Ladybug stretching her hand out to him…

And then there was a loud mechanical whirring, and the lift came to a halt in the chamber. Hawkmoth stepped out and strode over to them, kicking Ladybug’s hand aside.

“Pathetic,” he sneered. “You haven’t given up yet?”

Ladybug glared at him, adrenaline pumping through her veins, numbing the pain. She climbed to her feet, and realized that one of her arms was dangling uselessly at her side. The suit had protected her from breaking her spine, but it hadn’t stopped her shoulder from dislocating. Adrien cringed, wanting to look away, but unable to tear his gaze from the scene before him.

“I will never give up,” Ladybug retorted. “I will never stop until we defeat you!”

“I already have the ring,” he said, reaching into his jacket pocket. “You will not defeat me.”

Ladybug smirked slightly as he fumbled around, patting his pockets. “You have the ring, huh?”

Meanwhile, Adrien finally managed the slip the ring onto his finger. Plagg materialized in a burst of light. “Adrien!”

Adrien nodded at Plagg, shouting, “Plagg, claws out!”

Hawkmoth turned around, horrified, as Adrien transformed into Chat Noir. He touched a finger to the ropes binding his wrists, yelling, “Cataclysm!”

“No!” Hawkmoth ran toward Chat Noir, but the bonds holding his wrists disintegrated, and he quickly broke free of the ropes binding his ankles, bounding away. He spun his staff, pointing it Hawkmoth.

“You can’t beat us,” Chat said, glaring. “Ladybug and I are unstoppable.”

The lift clattered to life again, and Mayura stepped out, her eyes bulging at the scene before her. She locked eyes with Hawkmoth, sharing a nod of understanding, and they both sprang into action.

One last time, the lift stopped in the chamber, and the newly recharged Queen Bee, Rena Rouge, and Carapace stepped out, stunned by the battle before them.

Chat Noir and Hawkmoth were engaged in combat, Chat swinging his baton and Hawkmoth fighting with his cane.

“Shouldn’t have given me those fencing lessons,” Chat snarled, jabbing his staff.

Mayura and Ladybug were fighting, although Ladybug was mostly just spinning her yoyo as a shield, trying her best to dodge her blows. Every movement brought greater pain, and she stumbled, gasping for breath.
“It’s over, Ladybug,” Mayura said seriously, reaching for the earrings.

“You don’t have to do this,” Ladybug panted. “You can still return the Miraculous and fix this.”

“I’m sorry,” Mayura said, almost sounding truly apologetic. “But I do have to do this.”

“No!” Carapace jumped between them, holding his shield up.

Rena Rouge came to Ladybug’s side, helping her up. “I’m getting you out of here,” she said, while Queen Bee launched herself at Mayura. Carapace and Queen Bee began clashing with her, and Rena helped a stumbling Ladybug walk away.

“I’m not leaving,” Ladybug shook her head. “I have to help Chat Noir.” She began pulling Rena toward Chat and Hawkmoth.

“No way!” Rena said firmly. “You’re way too injured. Look at you!”

Ladybug looked down at her lame arm, then locked eyes with Rena Rouge. “Just pop it back in. I can do this, just pop my arm back in.”

“Are you serious?” Rena gasped. “I can’t do that! I’m not a doctor!”

“Rena, I need you to do this,” Ladybug said in a serious, hard voice. “I trust you. There’s no one else. I need you to step up.”

Rena Rouge screwed her eyes shut, gripping Ladybug’s arm. She shook slightly, terrified, then jerked Ladybug’s arm.

Ladybug let out a terrible scream, and Rena backed away, letting out a sob. “I’m so sorry!”

“Ladybug!” Chat shouted, his attention diverted.

Ladybug gasped for breath, flexing her arm, rolling her shoulder around. “Thank you,” she breathed.

Hawkmoth took advantage of Chat’s distraction, swinging his cane down to strike Chat.

Ladybug hurled her yoyo with all her might, wrapping the string around his arm, pulling it taut and holding his arm in place. “Don’t touch him,” she snarled.

Hawkmoth tugged his arm back, trying to regain control, but Carapace flung his shield across the room, nailing him in the face.

“If I knew who you were on heroes day, I would have thrown you off the tower,” Carapace yelled angrily, catching his shield.

“Tell me about it,” Queen Bee agreed, kicking Mayura in the chest, sending her flying across the room. “You two are evil, utterly evil.”

Chat sprinted over to Ladybug, where she was struggling to hold on to Hawkmoth, Rena helping hold her steady. “My lady, please, you need to go to the hospital,” he pleaded.

“I won’t leave you,” she said stubbornly. “I will never leave you, any of you!”

“We can handle this!” he tried. “I can’t stand seeing you in so much pain.”
Her eyes softened. “It’s worth it,” she replied. “This will all be over soon, so trust me, it’s worth it.”

Hawkmoth let out a sharp laugh, yanking on the yoyo as hard as he could, finally breaking free. “You’re right, this will be over soon,” he barked.

Chat jumped in front of Ladybug, holding his staff out. “Why won’t you just give up?” Chat asked, his eyes shining with unshed tears. “Mother wouldn’t want this.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!”

Rena’s eyes traveled to the coffin and then back to Hawkmoth, her eyes huge. She twirled her flute, bringing it to her lips, playing a few notes. “Mirage!”

A healthy, conscious Emilie Agreste materialized in front of them, opening her arms. “Gabriel.”

Hawkmoth inhaled sharply, staring at the illusion. He knew it wasn’t real, he knew it, but… It was Emilie. She was perfect, and beautiful, and alive, and he only wanted to hold her. He took a step toward the illusion, his cane clattering to the floor.

“Sir, it’s not real,” Mayura said weakly, getting to her feet.

“Shut it, you evil witch lady,” Carapace whacked her with his shield, sending her back to the floor.

Hawkmoth’s gaze was fixed on the mirage, walking slowly toward her. “My Emilie,” he breathed.

“Gabriel, please, stop this,” fake Emilie begged. “I don’t want this.”

“I have to do this,” Hawkmoth said, reaching out to her. “I have to bring you back. I can’t live without you-”

His hands touched her shoulders, and the illusion vanished. Hawkmoth’s hands shook, and then he let out a rage-filled roar, turning back to face Rena Rouge. Fear crossed her features, but she took up a defensive stance, not one to back down.

Everything happened very quickly from that point on. Hawkmoth reached down to grab the gardening shears, which were lying next to Emilie’s coffin, and lunged toward Rena Rouge. Carapace was running toward her, diving over to push her out of the way, but he didn’t get there in time. Queen Bee’s eyes were wide with horror, her hands pressed over her mouth, and Chat swung his staff at Hawkmoth, missing him by inches.

Ladybug jumped in front of Rena Rouge, her arms thrown out to the sides, protecting her, just as Hawkmoth plunged the shears down. Her mouth fell open as they pierced her stomach, pain radiating through her.

“No!” Chat howled, swinging his baton back and forth, his vision blurred with tears. Hawkmoth brought his arms up over his head, trying to fend off the attacks.

Ladybug fell into Rena’s arms, breathing heavily. “Oh god, Ladybug, no,” Rena whimpered, tears splashing down.

Carapace fell to his knees beside them, clutching Ladybug’s hand. “No,” he gasped. “No, I was supposed to protect you!”

Ladybug gave him a pained smile. “It’s not your fault,” she said. “I couldn’t let Rena get hurt. I can’t let any of you get hurt. I love you guys too much.”
Rena lowered her head, burying her face in Ladybug’s hair. “Ladybug, I’m so sorry,” she cried. “Please, let me take you to the hospital now!”

Ladybug reached up, placing a hand on Rena’s arm. “It’s okay, Alya,” she said in a soft whisper, so no one else could hear. “Please don’t cry. I’m going to be okay.”

Rena’s face crumpled as Ladybug pushed herself up. She collapsed into Carapace’s arms, weeping.

Chat fell to the floor with a thud, and Hawkmoth stood over him, breathing heavily.

“Hawkmoth,” Ladybug wheezed, trying to stand tall. “It’s not too late to give up your Miraculous. You can make this right.”

Hawkmoth let out a groan, rounding on her. “Don’t you get tired of this?” he asked, striding up to her and grabbing her by her pigtail, lifting her up.

She whimpered in pain, from both her terrible wound and the hairs being ripped out of her head.

“Just give me your Miraculous,” he hissed.

Ladybug’s eyes searched the room, finding her broken and battered team. Chat was on the ground, gasping for breath, and Queen Bee was fighting Mayura again, pushing her away from the others. Rena was still sobbing, with Carapace trying to comfort her. Her gaze returned to Hawkmoth, her eyes hard.

“I’d rather die,” she said fiercely.

“That can be arranged,” he threatened. He reached out and ripped one of the earrings out of her lobe, then the other, blood dripping from her ears.

Her transformation fell away, and he dropped her on the ground. The gasps echoed around the room as every person stared at Marinette, bleeding and curled into the fetal position on the hard floor.

Hawkmoth stabbed the earrings into his own ears, ignoring the drops of blood that fell on his shoulder. Tikki appeared before him, her eyes big and horrified.

“No,” she shook her head. “No! Take the earrings off!”

“Silence,” he said coldly, waving his hand, causing her voice to disappear. “I will have no more resistance!”

The other four heroes were running over to Marinette, but Hawkmoth picked the pruning shears up off the floor, forcing them down into her chest. Marinette coughed and spluttered, blood dribbling from her mouth.

“No!” the screams echoed around the chamber, and Queen Bee held up her top.

“Venom!” she shrieked, lunging toward Hawkmoth.

Mayura jumped in front of him at the last second, taking the hit.

“Dammit!” Queen Bee screeched, kicking Mayura’s paralyzed body out of the way before falling to her knees next to Marinette, angry tears slipping out.

Rena and Carapace kneeled next to her, Rena stroking Marinette’s hair. “No, no, no,” she cried,
“Marinette,” he whimpered. “Marinette, please.”

Her eyes felt heavy, barely able to hold them open. “My chaton,” she breathed. “Oh, Chat.”

“Marinette,” he held her hand up to his cheek. “I love you. You can’t- I can’t- God, Marinette, I need you!”

She smiled softly, her fingers stroking his cheek gently. “I love you too,” she murmured. “I can’t believe I fell for you twice.”

Tears rolled down his cheeks as he began to sob heavily. “Please don’t go,” he begged.

“I’m sorry,” her eyes drifted shut. “I love you so much, Adrien.”

“Marinette?” Rena lifted her head, placing it in her lap. “We’re going to get you some help, okay?”

“I don’t think there’s time,” Marinette glanced down at her blood soaked torso. “But Als, I love you too. I’m sorry I put you in so much danger.”

Rena choked back a sob, cradling Marinette’s head. “I love you too,” she whispered.

Carapace reached out to take her other hand, squeezing gently. “You’re amazing, Marinette,” he said softly. “I’m so proud to call you my friend.”

She squeezed back weakly. “You’re one of my oldest friends, and I’m so glad,” she coughed, more blood coming out. “Thank you for always being there for me.”

“Dupain-Cheng?” Queen Bee finally said in a high-pitched voice. “Is it really you?”

Marinette managed to muster up a smile. “Yeah, Chloe. Thank you for all your help. I always knew there was a hero in you.”

Queen Bee’s face crumpled, and messy tears dripped down her cheeks. “I’m sorry,” was all she managed to say before she was overcome by them.

Tikki flew over, hovering directly over Marinette’s face. She was still silenced, but she peppered Marinette’s face with tiny kisses, giving her chosen a wordless but heartfelt goodbye.

“I love you all,” Marinette mumbled weakly, her eyes shut, her breathing ragged. Her grip went limp, and Rena’s wail filled the room.

Near them, Hawkmoth bent down to touch Mayura’s immobilized body. “Thank you,” he murmured. “Thank you for helping me.”

He straightened, walking over to them. A cacophony of beeping was coming from their huddle; Chat Noir couldn’t bring himself to care anymore, and there was one last beep before he turned back into Adrien. Plagg shot out of the ring, his mouth open in horror, but for once, no words coming out. He flew over to Tikki, hugging her gently while she cried. Rena’s necklace gave her a warning, only two minutes left, and Queen Bee’s haircomb lost its first stripe.

“Dude,” Carapace gasped, looking over at Adrien.

“It’s over, son,” Hawkmoth placed a hand on Adrien’s shoulder. “Give me the ring.”
“Get away from him!” Plagg flew over to Hawkmoth, shaking with rage. Hawkmoth waved Plagg out of his face as if he were an annoying fly.

Carapace stood up, holding his shield and protecting the others behind him. “How could you?” he shouted, rage and grief filling him. “You are sick, an evil devil. You’re the worst human being to ever live!”

“Silence,” Hawkmoth said coldly.

“I won’t let you get near Adrien ever again,” Carapace snapped. “You’ve ruined his entire life. You’re the worst father!”

“I’m an excellent father,” Hawkmoth took the bait, beginning to punch the shield. “Everything I’ve done has been for this family! You’re just a child, how could you understand?”

Carapace grunted, fighting furiously with Hawkmoth, pushing him away from the others, who still surrounded Marinette’s body.

Rena Rouge was still weeping uncontrollably, holding Marinette close to her, while Adrien sat completely still, his eyes empty and dull.

“I can’t believe she was Ladybug this whole time,” Queen Bee whispered, her own tears still falling.

“Of course she was!” Rena wailed, barely understandable through her tears. “She was perfect in every way!” She dissolved into fresh sobs, lowering her head and soaking Marinette’s hair.

Adrien stood up, looking at Hawkmoth and Carapace, then the still paralyzed Mayura, before his eyes settled on Emilie in the glass coffin. She would never have wanted this. And as much as he loved his mother, as great a blessing it would be to have her back, he couldn’t allow it. Every moment and memory with her would be forever tainted by this, by the loss of Marinette.

“Come on, Plagg.”

Plagg gave Adrien a wary look, but followed the boy over the coffin. “Adrien…”

“You have to use Cataclysm on her.”

Plagg blanched. “Adrien, no. I can’t do that.”

“You have to. She has to really disappear, so my father will stop!” Adrien yelled, pounding a fist on the glass. “It’s the only way!”

“Kid, that’s not going to change anything,” Plagg said, his eyes falling to the ground. “He’s still going to try to make the wish and bring her back.”

“Then use Cataclysm on him!” Adrien screamed. “I just want this to end! I can’t take it anymore!”

Adrien fell to his knees, his eyes burning with tears. He gasped for air, clutching his chest. She was really gone. The love of his life, the hero of Paris, the most perfect, incredible girl to ever grace the earth… She was dead.

There was a loud crash as Hawkmoth shoved Carapace to the ground, and Hawkmoth, breathing heavily, made his way over to Adrien, grabbing his arm.

“Let go!” Plagg growled, his paw flexing. He truly was tempted to use Cataclysm on this man, and
was seconds away from saying the words…

But even with Adrien’s struggles and resistance, Hawkmoth slid the ring of his finger, placing it on his instead. He dropped Adrien’s arm, his eyes manic.

“I’ve done it,” he breathed. “I have the ladybug and black cat Miraculouses.”

Plagg flew back to Tikki, holding her. “We won’t listen to you,” he glared. “We won’t do it!”

“You don’t have a choice,” Hawkmoth said, a slow smile spreading over his face. “Forces of creation and destruction, I have a wish.”

Tikki began to glow a vibrant pink, while Plagg glowed electric green. Tikki closed her eyes, taking a shuddering breath.

“Sugarcube, I love you,” Plagg whispered, holding her tight.

Tikki only nodded, still unable to speak. She could feel how terrified Plagg was, she knew how much he hated this.

The Miraculous wish had only been used a few times throughout history, but each time haunted them, Plagg more so. Each time, Plagg was forced to erase something or someone, torturing him for eternity. He was cursed with the powers of destruction, and no matter what Tikki created or brought back, in order to restore balance, he was always made to destroy.

Plagg rarely showed emotion, but she knew that these wishes killed him, and that killed her.

Their glow was brightening, filling the entire room. Carapace was on his hands and knees, his face bruised and his glasses cracked, shaking his head. “No!”

Rena’s Miraculous beeped one last time before her transformation fell away, and then Trixx was there, her lower lip trembling as she watched Tikki and Plagg.

Adrien was on his feet, his vision blurred with tears, throwing tired, weak punches that Hawkmoth only had to step back to dodge.

“I’ll never stop fighting,” Adrien whispered. “Even if you erase my memories, I’ll never stop. I’ll always be trying to fix this.”

Tikki and Plagg could hear Hawkmoth’s wish now, without him having to speak. They could hear his deepest desires, and Tikki tried to repel the thoughts, desperately fighting an already lost battle.

Queen Bee’s Miraculous gave its final warning, releasing Pollen, who joined Trixx. Mayura stood up shakily, grabbing the Miraculouses from the three exhausted, battered heroes, placing them in Hawkmoth’s hand.

“Thank you, Nathalie,” he said quietly. “I couldn’t have done this without you.”

Mayura detransformed, and as Nathalie she gave him a sad smile. “Congratulations, sir.”

The pink glow spread to Emilie in the coffin, while the green glow surrounded Nathalie. She looked down at herself, nodding. She had expected this, and she had already accepted her fate.

“Nathalie?” Hawkmoth’s eyes widened.

“Your sacrifice must be of equal value,” Plagg spat venomously. “You want your wife back, you
have to lose someone you care about just as much.”

Nathalie looked down at her hands, which were beginning to fade away. “It’s okay,” she said softly. “You don’t need me anymore.”

He reached out, pulling her into a final hug. “I’ll never forget you.”

Nathalie closed her eyes, relishing the hug and her final moments. Hawkmoth’s grip tightened, but he was only holding air.

The pink light was now surrounding Tikki and Plagg, but the green glow was spreading across the room and all of Paris, focusing on certain people and places. Marinette’s body was beginning to disappear, and Alya’s grip tightened.

“No!” she screamed. “No, you can’t!”

Tikki whimpered as she heard the wish in her head again.

Give Emilie Agreste her life back. Erase all memories of Ladybug, Chat Noir, Hawkmoth, and all the other Miraculous holders. Erase all traces of Marinette Dupain-Cheng’s existence.

Marinette’s body was fading away, and Alya, Adrien, Nino, and Chloe surrounded her, hugging her and each other for the last time.

“I love you all!” Nino shouted. “I will always love you dudes, no matter what!”

“This isn’t the end!” Alya screamed. “We’ll get the Miraculouses back and wish for Marinette back!”

“We’ll fix this!” Chloe added. “We’re heroes!”

Adrien looked each of his friends fully in the face, taking in their terrified expressions, knowing that they didn’t truly believe their proclamations. He could already sense that some of his memories were vanishing, that his entire life was crumbling around him. Those horrible lights were overtaking his vision, and he knew that the end was moments away.

“I’m sorry.”

Silence filled the room when Tikki finished speaking, and then Adrien began to weep.

Chapter End Notes

This was the chapter that spawned this whole story. I knew how I wanted the final fight to go down, and thought it would be interesting to have Adrien and co retrace their steps back to this point. I did try to leave some hints, and I'm curious if anyone picked up on that in the previous chapters. Did anyone guess correctly what happened to Marinette? Let me know!

I did play around a little with the design of Gabriel's lair and how to access it, because it doesn't make a ton of sense in the show anyway. You'll just have to suspend your
disbelief there.

As for the wish, I interpreted it in a way so that his deepest desires came true, rather than one specific wish like the Genie from Aladdin. Using both Miraculouses is supposed to give him ultimate power anyway, so why can't it work that way? (The reason why he wanted to erase Marinette's existence was more for cleanup than anything. If she doesn't exist anymore, then her murder can't be traced back to him. No mess.)

I'm actually a little afraid of how people are going to react - thus far, people have been pretty angry/upset with Gabriel's actions (rightly so), but now... I'm anticipating a lot of yelling. This Gabriel is truly deranged, desperate, with nothing left to lose. He will go to any lengths to achieve his goals, which is why he's much more violent than in the show.

Anyway, that was lengthy. This chapter is almost 7,000 words! Thank you guys so much for reading and sticking with me this long. I'm really touched that so many people are so invested in this story. You guys are the best! THANK YOU!
For a long time, everyone in the room just cried. No one had anything to say, they were too overtaken with grief. Master Fu left at one point, returning with a fresh box of tissues; no one else had noticed that they had run out.

Finally, once everyone had cried themselves out, Master Fu placed a box of pizza on the center of the table.

“You need to eat,” he said softly. “It’s important to keep your strength up.”

Adrien couldn’t even fathom eating, but slowly, Nino, Chloe, and Kagami began to move, grabbing slices and placing them on plates. Nino left a slice in front of Alya, but she didn’t reach for it.

“She’s dead,” Adrien said, and everyone looked over at him.

“I’m sorry, Adrien,” Tikki said softly. “I know it’s hard to hear.”

“We spent all this time, trying to find answers, hoping that she was still out there, and she’s just… Dead,” Adrien ignored Tikki.

“Adrien,” Master Fu placed his hand on his back. “Come with me, please.”

Adrien followed Master Fu out of the room, into the hallway.

“I know that you’re hurting,” Master Fu began. “I know how painful this is for you.”

Adrien shook his head. “I loved her. She was everything to me, and now… What do I have? I have nothing! I failed her!”

“It’s not your fault,” Master Fu said gently. “You can’t blame yourself.”

“Weren’t you listening? It’s absolutely my fault! I got caught, and she came to rescue me!” Adrien yelled. “If I wasn’t so stupid, maybe she’d still be here, maybe we could have stopped him!”

“Hey!” Plagg shouted, phasing through the wall. “Don’t do that. Look, I know I make a lot of excuses for my past actions, but I know when someone’s guilty. You are not at fault for this. Your father may be literal human trash, but you are not.”

Adrien rubbed his eyes, pushing back even more tears. “I- I can’t-”

“You’re better than camembert, Adrien,” Plagg said, floating close to his face. “You’re my favorite Chat Noir, ever, and I’ve missed you so much over these past few months. Believe me, because you’ll never hear me say any of this again.”

Adrien let out a sob and pulled Plagg into a hug. Plagg struggled for a moment, then relaxed and hugged him back, letting out a soft sigh.

Master Fu smiled softly, returning to the room where the teens were. They looked up when he entered, and Kagami cleared her throat.
“Um, sir? I have a question.”

“Yes, Kagami?”

“Why is it that they all kind of remembered this, but I have no recollection? I know I probably wasn’t as close to Marinette, but…”

Master Fu sat down, contemplating. “I don’t have a definitive answer, but I will say that the heart is an interesting thing. You can erase memories, you can mess with a person’s brain, but if the heart is filled with powerful, deep emotions, even magic can’t erase that.”

Alya sniffled. “Is there really nothing we can do?” she asked in a small voice. “It doesn’t seem right. Her own parents don’t remember her. It’s not fair that the world can’t even mourn her.”

“I’m sorry, Alya,” Master Fu sighed. “There’s no way to restore everyone’s memories of her, at least as far as I know.”

Adrien slipped back in, clearing his throat. “We have all the Miraculouses back,” he said. “Can’t we… Can’t we use them to make our own wish and bring her back?”

“No,” Master Fu said firmly. The others looked at each other uneasily, clearly contemplating the idea, and Master Fu placed his cup of tea down a little harder than necessary. “The wish is too dangerous. It has far too many consequences and it’s mentally and emotionally taxing to not just us, but to Tikki and Plagg. I will not allow it.”

Everyone’s gaze returned to their pizza except Adrien, who was frowning deeply. They ate in silence for awhile, the mood somber and gloomy.

“I suggest that you all stay here tonight,” Master Fu said a little later, carrying a pile of blankets. “Now that Gabriel knows who all of you are, he’s bound to be looking for you. It’s safer to be here.”

“I better call my parents,” Alya muttered, pulling out her phone. Adrien watched as they all began contacting their parents, a twinge in his chest.

God, how incredible it must be to have parents who actually love and care about you. He wished he knew what that was like.

They laid down in a row, starting with Adrien, followed by Nino, Alya, Chloe, and ending with Kagami. Master Fu turned the lights out, leaving them alone. Nino and Alya immediately curled up together, spooning, while Chloe made a disgusted noise and turned on her side so she didn’t have to look at them. She then pulled out her phone, scrolling through her social media. Kagami laid completely still, and Adrien had to assume that she had fallen asleep right away, although in truth she was just uncomfortable.

Adrien stared at the ceiling as the others drifted off, far too wired to sleep. He sat up, sure that everyone was passed out by this point, but then saw Alya’s shoulders shaking. He leaned closer, concerned, and realized that she was crying again, her face buried in Nino’s chest.

“Alya?”

She sniffled, lifting her head to look at him. “Yeah?”

He didn’t know what to say. He was hurting too, but telling her that wasn’t going to make her feel better. He reached a hand out over Nino, and she took it, giving him a watery smile. They didn’t
“Thank you,” she said in a soft voice.

“Come here,” Nino said sleepily.

Adrien blinked, and Alya nodded to him. He scooted a little closer, and Nino sighed and rolled over, cuddling him.

“Okay, that’s it,” Chloe snapped. “I will not be left out.”

She jumped on them, joining the pile with a tiny giggle. Kagami glanced over at them shyly, and Adrien gave her an encouraging smile. She rolled her eyes, but scooted closer, letting out a soft sigh.

Nino, still half-asleep, mumbled, “How many arms do you have, dude?”

Adrien, surrounded by his friends, was filled with love and warmth. He closed his eyes, finally able to fall asleep.

Adrien was the first to rise in the morning, and he untangled himself from his friends, wandering to the kitchen. He knew he probably shouldn’t be snooping around Master Fu’s home, but he was feeling restless.

However, when he entered the kitchen, Master Fu was already there, pouring himself tea and speaking with Tikki, Plagg, and Wayzz.

“I’m sorry we gave you false memories,” Tikki was saying. “I know that losing the butterfly and peacock Miraculouses was hard enough, but making you think that you lost all the others was very harsh.”

“Do not worry, Tikki,” he said quietly, pouring drops of tea in miniature teacups. “I know that you didn’t have a choice.”

“Master, please tell me you have camembert,” Plagg whined, phasing through the fridge door. “I haven’t had any since yesterday!”

“Plagg!” Tikki scolded, but Plagg just did a loop in the air.

“I’m sorry, Plagg,” Master Fu said. “But there is leftover pizza.”

Plagg groaned, but he grabbed a slice anyway, taking a huge bite.

“Master?” Adrien interrupted stepping carefully into the kitchen.

“Hello, Adrien,” Master Fu said, taking a sip of his tea. “Would you like some tea? I’m afraid I don’t have any coffee.”

“Um, thank you, sir,” Adrien sat down, accepting the warm cup. He held it between both hands, letting the heat seep into his skin. “Thank you for letting us all stay here last night. I know we took up a lot of space.”

“It’s not a problem at all,” Master Fu said. “My main priority is keeping the Miraculouses safe… And of course, all of you. I… I hope you know that I never wanted to put you in any danger.”
“I know,” Adrien mumbled. “No one expected this.”

Master Fu looked down forlornly. “Tikki was telling me more of our past, more about Marinette,” he said quietly. “She was a wonderful girl.”

Adrien stared down into his cup, his sorrowful eyes reflected back at him. “She was amazing. She was so brave. I just… I know she saved me and the whole city all the time, and the one time it truly mattered, I couldn’t protect her. I failed her.”

Master Fu shook his head, his eyes wet. “No, Adrien. If anyone failed her, it was me.”

“Master, no,” Wayzz protested.

“It’s true,” Master Fu’s hand shook as he reached for his cup. “I know that the Kwamis have their own rules regarding secrecy, but I am the one who insisted that you two never reveal yourselves. I kept you two apart, I hid things from both of you. If it hadn’t been for my rules, things could have turned out differently.”

“Don’t say that,” Adrien said softly.

“You two worked very well as a team, and it was clear as day that you were meant for each other. I can’t imagine how even more in sync you would have been if you knew the truth about each other,” Master Fu said regretfully.

“They weren’t ready,” Tikki interjected. “Please don’t blame yourself, Master. They weren’t ready to know the truth. It’s not your fault.”

Master Fu held up a hand, silencing the Kwamis. “Please. I just… I want to apologize. I have made many mistakes in my life, and they have plagued me for years, following me around the world. But nothing will ever haunt me more than Marinette’s fate.” He took a shaky breath, lowering his head into his hands. “I’m so sorry, Adrien.”

“Don’t be sorry, sir,” Adrien said softly. “We all feel guilty. We all feel like we should have done things differently.”

“I loved her like a granddaughter,” Master Fu whispered into his hands. “I was training her to be the next Guardian. I can’t believe it all went so wrong.”

Adrien finally took a sip of his now-cold tea, unsure of what to say. They sat in silence for a long time, before Master Fu cleared his throat.

“You are all welcome to stay here as long as you need, while we figure out our next steps. We’ll work this out, don’t worry.”

Adrien nodded. “I… I forgot I can’t go home. Not that I had much of a home to go back to… But what about the others? It doesn’t seem right. They have families that will worry about them.”

Master Fu nodded. “I know. We’ll all discuss this today and try to come up with a solution. You’re right, they will have to return home. I am just concerned for their safety. I don’t… I don’t want…”

“I know,” Adrien said simply. He didn’t want anyone to end up like Marinette.

He cleared his throat and stood. “I have a carton of eggs in the fridge for breakfast. I’ll go pick up a baguette from the bakery down the street, and when the others wake up we can all eat.”
Wayzz went with Master Fu, leaving Adrien alone with Tikki and Plagg. He swirled his cup around, looking at them. They were huddled together, sitting on the table, relaxed but still with an aura of melancholy.

“Can I ask you guys something?” Adrien asked hesitantly.

“Of course,” Tikki said.

“Does… Does making a wish really hurt you guys?”

They looked at each other uneasily. “It’s exhausting,” Tikki said slowly. “It uses a lot of energy. We’re essentially altering reality.”

“I hate it,” Plagg said vehemently. “It’s always terrible. I hate it!”

Adrien looked down, avoiding their gaze. “Oh. How… How many times have you had to do it?”

“Not many, but even once is still wrong,” Tikki said gently. “The repercussions are always far too great.”

“You don’t think it can be used for good?” Adrien asked hopefully.

Tikki’s eyes closed in sorrow, and Plagg looked away, his expression pained. Neither Kwami appeared to want to speak, and Adrien looked down in defeat; their silence was as good as an answer.

“Adrien,” Tikki finally said in a soft, gentle voice. “I know you want to bring her back. But think about the risks involved, the sacrifices. What if one of your friends is traded in exchange for Marinette? You would never be able to forgive yourself. And Marinette wouldn’t want that either.”

“She’s right,” Plagg nodded, uncharacteristically serious. “But let me tell you something, kid. If there’s anyone who could ever figure out how to use the wish for good, I bet you could.”

Adrien managed a weak smile, reaching out and scratching behind Plagg’s ear. “Thank you,” he whispered.

Nino stumbled into the kitchen, his hair sticking up crazily, his glasses crooked. “Hey,” he said, his voice scratchy with sleep. “Uh, there’s something you need to see.”

Curious, Adrien followed Nino back into the sitting room, where Alya was sitting with her phone out. Chloe and Kagami were peering over her shoulder, but they looked up when Adrien and Nino reentered the room.

“Come see this,” Chloe urged, beckoning them over. They sat down beside Alya, staring at the tiny screen.

“We interrupt your broadcast to bring you this alert,” the newscaster was saying. “Paris is still reeling from yesterday’s events, and all six suspects spotted at the scene are wanted for questioning.”

Slightly blurry pictures taken from yesterday’s battle were displayed on screen briefly, before returning to the newscaster.

“If anyone has any knowledge about yesterday’s events or about these individuals, police are asking that you come forward. Today, a new individual has appeared, standing atop the Arc de
Triomphe. Police have already cleared and blocked off the area. Officials are asking that no one tries to approach the barricade in case destruction similar to yesterday occurs. Here’s live footage of the suspect.”

The video shifted to shaky helicopter footage of a woman, standing completely still on the Arc de Triomphe. She was blonde, her hair pulled into a simple braid, tied off with a long deep blue ribbon. A blue mask covered her face; a small green dot decorated the mask under each eye. Her top was azure, long sleeved and high-necked, her skirt short in front but with a long train that looked like peacock feathers. She wore dark tights and short, heeled boots the same color as her top, and she stood posed, still, and calm. Her eyes were closed, her skirt blowing in the wind, and she appeared to just be waiting. The cameras, the helicopters, the police surrounding her below… Nothing fazed her.

Adrien swallowed down the lump in his throat. The last person to use the peacock Miraculous was his father, so this person had to be…

“So far all attempts to make contact with the woman have failed. Her motives at this time are unclear, and she has made no demands, but as a precaution officials want to alert the city of her presence to avoid the area. We’ll be sure to send out more alerts as more information becomes available.”

Alya turned off her phone, looking up at the group. “What should we do?”

“It has to be a trap,” Kagami said at once. “We should do nothing.”

“What if she tries to hurt someone?” Nino frowned. “If we do nothing, things could get real bad.”

“We should all go, and pin her down!” Chloe said, punching her palm.

“No,” Adrien said loudly, shaking his head. “It has to just be me. I need to talk to her.”

“Dude,” Nino looked uncomfortable. “Maybe we should go as backup. Just in case.”

“What if she tries to drag you back home?” Chloe asked.

“I need to get some more answers,” Adrien said desperately. “I have to know how much of this she knew about. I need to know what she was in on all along. I… I accused her, right before I left. I can’t have that be the last time I talk to her.”

There was an uncomfortable silence, and then Alya looked him in the eyes. “Go.”

There was an explosion of noise as everyone began talking at once, arguing about the best course of action. Above it all, Nino could be heard shouting, “Let’s just wait for Master Fu to come back!”

But Adrien couldn’t wait. He took a half-step back, and Alya locked eyes with him, nodding. “Go,” she mouthed.

Adrien turned and ran, not looking back.

Plagg flew alongside Adrien, watching him critically. “What are you doing?”

Adrien ran down the strangely empty streets, headed for the Arc de Triomphe. “I have to talk to her
again.”

“Master Fu’s not going to like this.”

“Since when has that bothered you?” Adrien asked, his mouth quirked up in a tiny smile. Plagg chuckled.

“Fair enough. Although, maybe being Adrien isn’t the best approach.”

They ducked into an alleyway, and Adrien peered out into the street. Only a couple blocks down, the area was swarming with police activity. “Guess you’re right. Plagg, claws out!”

Chat Noir jumped up to the rooftops, running and leaping over to the Arc de Triomphe, where she waited. Her eyes opened when he landed, and she gave him the smallest of smiles.

“You came.”

“I want answers.”

“I know,” she whispered. “Let’s go somewhere more private, and I’ll tell you everything.”

The officers below them were shouting at them as they jumped away, the helicopter flying after them. They took winding routes, bounding through the city, ducking behind buildings until finally they lost all their followers and they were completely alone.

“Mother,” Adrien planted his feet and squared his shoulders, trying to display more confidence than he felt. “Tell me everything.”

She closed her eyes, swaying slightly. “I lied to you. When you were young, and your father and I took that trip to Tibet…”

“You said it was for business.”

“We were looking for the Miraculouses.”

Adrien nodded. “And you obviously found them.”

“Yes,” she said in a soft voice. “We found the butterfly and the peacock Miraculouses. We used them, but the peacock is… It’s damaged. It hurts the user, it sucks away their life. And I just kept using it, and falling more and more ill.”

Adrien remembered that his mother had good days and bad days, and her bad days certainly seemed to increase in number before she disappeared. He never questioned that anything was really wrong with her though, just that she had a weaker immune system.

“I could sense that my time was drawing near, I was getting weaker with every passing day. I thought that if we could decipher the book on Miraculouses we had, we’d find a cure.”

“Why didn’t you just tell me the truth?” Adrien asked hoarsely. His heart hurt, hearing this. He had always thought of his mother as his best friend, his most trusted confidant, and she had been lying to him his entire life.

“I didn’t want to scare you,” she said. “I was foolish, and I really thought there was a cure. I remember falling asleep, and then waking up one day as if nothing had happened. Your father assured me that he had healed me using the book, and that things were good as new. We could move on with our lives, as if we had never touched magic.”
“He lied,” Adrien said flatly.

“I know,” her voice broke. “He used the ladybug and black cat Miraculouses to make a wish, didn’t he?” Adrien nodded, his voice stuck in his throat, and she lowered her head, tears filling her eyes. “I’m sorry,” she whimpered.

“It’s not your fault,” Adrien said numbly. As much as he despised his father and what he did, he did recognize that none of this was his mother’s fault. In the end, she truly was innocent. He was wrong about her.

“I made him do this,” she cried. “He did this to save my life.”

“He’s not a good person,” Adrien closed his eyes, shivering. “Don’t try to rationalize it or make him sound like he did a good thing. He’s a monster.”

Emilie sniffled. “That picture… Um, that woman… Is she the one who’s… Gone?”

He swallowed hard, feeling as if all the air had left his lungs. “Yes,” he whispered. “But she’s not the one I was talking about before.”

She pressed her hand over her mouth, stifling a whimper. “What… I…”

“Ladybug,” was all he managed to say. “She’s gone because of him.”

Emilie pulled him into a hug, and they sank to the ground, hugging and sobbing. In the distance, they could hear the helicopter, still searching for them.

After a long while, they broke apart, and Emilie wiped his face, cupping his cheeks. “I’m so proud of the man you’ve become,” she said, giving him a watery smile.

He leaned into her touch, feeling not at all like a man, and more like a little boy. “I’m sorry,” he cried out. “I should have known that it was him, not you.”

“Don’t be sorry,” she shook her head. “Oh, Adrien. You’ve suffered so much. I should have been a better mother.”

“You’re a good mother,” he reassured her.

“No, I’m not,” her lower lip trembled. “I let your father isolate you and demean you and treat you coldly, and I did nothing to stop it. Oh, my baby. You deserve so much more.”

Adrien closed his eyes, fat tears leaking out. “I only want one thing…”

“I know,” she whispered, using her thumb to wipe his tears away. “I know, sweetheart.”

There was a long silence as they sat together, Adrien attempting to get his emotions under control. Emilie rubbed his back gently, trying to soothe him.

“You have the Miraculouses… You could…” she started hesitantly.

“I can’t,” he shook his head. “I can’t let someone else be sacrificed.”

She took his hands, her gaze somber. “It wouldn’t be just anyone,” she said slowly and softly. “It would be someone you really love.”

Adrien’s eyes widened as he realized what she meant. He did care a great deal for his friends,
maybe he even loved them, but was there anyone in the world he loved as much as his mother?
“No,” he whispered, jumping to his feet, taking a step away. “It’s not fair.”

“It’s the right thing to do,” she said, standing and giving him an accepting smile. “I’m not supposed to be here. What your father did was unnatural. You’d just be fixing things.”

“It wouldn’t even fix things,” Adrien said. “Nathalie would still be gone. Things wouldn’t be right.”

Emilie just gave him a sad smile. “It would be more right than now.”

New tears welled up in Adrien’s eyes, and he covered his face. “Why does it have to be this way? Why do I have to lose you?”

“It’s okay,” she murmured softly. “It’s going to be okay. You don’t have to do it right away. I’m just telling you… I understand. If you choose to do this, then I accept it. And I will always love you, no matter what.”

“You’d really forgive me? It’s a horrible thing to do. It’s a horrible thing to even think,” Adrien’s lower lip trembled.

“But it’s what you want,” Emilie said in a hushed tone. “Your entire life, you’ve done what others have wanted you do. This time, I’m giving you the chance to do what you want.”

Adrien’s entire face crumpled, and he let out a pathetic whimper, whispering, “Claws in,” as he rushed forward, falling into his mother’s arms.

Emilie let her own transformation drop, and they held each other tightly, mother and son, saying goodbye.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

I just want to say that I wrote this before Ikari Gozen came out, so at the time Marinette and Kagami weren’t on the best of terms. If only this show could keep to a consistent schedule so I can keep things canon compliant...
Plagg watched them silently, for once holding his tongue. He’d had a feeling that the wish was going to be used again soon, and while he had tried to dissuade Adrien at first, watching him now… Well, what choice did he have? How could he let the kid spend the rest of his life filled with regret and guilt and misery, withholding the one thing that could possibly make him happy? Plagg was what many would call selfish, but he wasn’t heartless.

It was going to hurt like hell to destroy another person, especially when that person was Adrien’s mother, but Plagg would do anything to make Adrien happy. He loved him dearly, although getting him to admit that was impossible.

Emilie’s eyes found Plagg’s, and she gave him a grateful smile. “Thank you for taking care of my son,” she said.

Plagg shrugged. “He doesn’t listen to me anyway,” he grumbled, crossing his arms and looking away.

Adrien let out a soft chuckle. “Just ignore him. He’s just grumpy because he wants cheese.”

Plagg made a slightly affronted noise and rose higher in the air.

Emilie took Adrien’s hands, pressing a small framed photo into them. He looked down, frowning. “Why are you giving this to me?”

“Someone should remember her,” Emilie looked down, her eyes filled with sorrow. “Her life was given up for me. She was clearly an important person.”

Adrien scoffed. “She was just as bad as father.”

"Don't say that,” Emilie frowned. "She may have made mistakes, but she was loved and her sacrifice mattered. Don't forget her or scorn her. Please, Adrien.”

He looked down at the photo of the stern-faced woman, a painful twinge in his chest. He couldn’t remember anything about her, besides what Tikki had just told him yesterday, and that story didn’t paint a nice picture. His brain was telling him to hate her for what she did, yet his heart still longed to have her back. What was wrong with him? She was partially responsible for how messed up things were now, so why did he still care about her? Why did he miss her?

“I won’t forget her,” he said quietly, tucking the photo away.

"Good," Emilie looked satisfied, and she plucked the peacock pin from her chest, dropping it into Adrien's palm. "Take this too. You must keep them safe. Don't let them fall into the wrong hands again. Keep magic safe, Adrien. I know you can do it. You're such a good person. I've never been prouder of you," she smiled, her eyes crinkling kindly as she held his hands.

"I won't let you down," Adrien murmured.

"You could never let me down," Emilie said emphatically, squeezing his hands.
Adrien closed his eyes to prevent more tears from leaking out. What a stark contrast between his loving mother and a father who was consistently disappointed in him. He was giving up so much, and a tiny part of him wondered if he was making the right choice.

But then her face flashed before him, those enormous, warm bluebell eyes that enchanted him, that sweet smile that made him weak, the way the apples of her cheeks flushed a rosy pink. He heard her twinkling, musical laugh in his ear, as if she were right next to him. He could finally see all of her, his memory no longer obscuring her face from him.

She was everything.

Emilie gave his hands another squeeze. "It's okay," she said softly. "Sweetheart, it's okay. Follow your heart."

"I love you, mom," he choked out.

"I love you too," she said fiercely, pulling him into one last hug. When they split apart, she held him by his shoulders, giving him one final, sad smile. "Now go. We'll end up here forever otherwise."

He nodded, wiping his eyes and taking a step back. "Plagg, claws out."

He transformed back into Chat Noir, grabbing the baton and walking backwards away from his mother. "Goodbye," he whispered, the wind carrying his voice to her.

"Goodbye, son," she whispered back, as he jumped away.

Adrien walked into Master Fu’s building nervously, cringing as he imagined the yelling about to be directed his way. But when he walked in, and all eyes fell on him, no one said a word.

“Um…” Adrien looked at the floor. “Hi. I’m… I’m back.”

“That was very dangerous,” Master Fu said with a frown. “You shouldn’t have run off like that.”

“I know,” Adrien’s shoulders bunched up, his head pointed down, his eyes screwed shut.

“But I’m glad you’re safe,” Master Fu said softly, placing a hand on Adrien’s tense shoulder. He looked up, surprised, his shoulders loosening.

“Really?”

“Of course,” Master Fu managed a smile. “I was so worried. We all were.”

Adrien’s eyes swept over the group, and he finally saw the relief evident on everyone’s faces. “I’m sorry,” he apologized. “I know I shouldn’t have left the way I did. But it was my mom… And I just had to see her. She… She wasn’t a part of this at all,” he said, holding out his hand and slowly opening it to reveal the peacock Miraculous.

Master Fu slowly took the Miraculous, his eyes crinkling in a small smile. “Thank you,” he murmured.

Adrien sat down next to his friends, and they crowded around him. “What happened?” Alya asked.

Adrien looked down at the ring on his finger, then glanced over at Plagg, who had flown over to
Tikki. They were whispering quietly to each other, stealing glances over at Wayzz and Master Fu, then looking over at Adrien.

“Now that Adrien’s back, I believe it’s time for breakfast,” Master Fu said, not noticing the Kwami’s strange looks. “I’ll go make it. How would you all like your eggs?”

“Anything is fine,” Adrien said quickly.

Chloe made a face. “Ew, eggs?”

Kagami elbowed her in the side. “Yes, sir, anything you make will be fine for us. Thank you.”

“Yeah, thanks dude - I mean, sir!” Nino nodded.

Master Fu smiled kindly before going into the kitchen. As soon as he was gone, Alya rounded on Adrien again, her eyes narrowed. “What happened?” she demanded.

Tikki and Plagg flew over, landing in Adrien’s hair. “We said goodbye,” Adrien said softly.

”What does that mean?” Nino asked, his brow furrowed.

Adrien twisted the ring around his finger. "It means that I've made my choice," he said carefully. "I know what I want and what I have to do. And she understood."

Alya suddenly reached out, gripping his arm tightly. "You're going to do it," she hissed. "Oh my god, you're going to bring her back!"

"I have to," Adrien closed his eyes. "I just… I have to."

Kagami reached up to remove the earrings, but dropped her hand when Master Fu walked back in, carrying a tray with bread and various jams.

"Help yourself," he said, placing the tray on the table, then returning to the kitchen.

"We can't do this here," Alya exhaled. "We have to go somewhere else and do it. He'll never approve."

"Where can we go? It's not like we can just do it out in the open," Nino reasoned.

As if in response, everyone’s phones beeped, and they checked the new alert. “It’s an alerte-enlèvement,” Kagami mumbled. “For… For Adrien.”

Adrien scrambled closer to Nino, peering down at his friend’s phone. “It says I’ve been kidnapped,” he said blankly. “But… What?”

“Your father reported it,” Alya said, scrolling through an article. “Look, here’s a video.”

She pressed play, and Gabriel Agreste’s face filled the screen. He wore large sunglasses to hide his red, burning face, an unusually goofy look for someone so perpetually serious.

“My only son, heir to the Agreste fortune, has been kidnapped. I went upstairs to his bedroom to find him being dragged out the window by those people from yesterday, the ones who attacked the city.”

“What?” Chloe exclaimed. “We saved the city from him!”
“Shh!” Alya hissed.

“The leader appeared to be the man dressed in black. He threatened me, saying that I will only get my son back if I pay a large ransom. However, I refuse to negotiate with criminals of such nature. I am making this statement now to inform these people that I will never pay the ransom, and that every available resource is hunting for my son now. Return him at once, or there will be hell to pay.”

Adrien felt his stomach twist into a thousand knots, a chill rolling through him. He was trapped. He couldn’t go out as Chat Noir, a wanted kidnapper, or as Adrien, a helpless victim. He couldn’t make the wish here, with Master Fu watching his every move, he couldn’t leave this stifling apartment, he couldn’t go anywhere.

He was imprisoned.

He began breathing erratically, clutching his head and rocking back and forth. He hated being trapped, he hated the helplessness, he hated all of this. His good-for-nothing father had doomed him once again.

He could feel his friends crowding around him, he could hear their concerned voices, but it was all background noise to the pounding in his head. Hands were reaching out to him, but he shook them off, scooting away.

Plagg flew out of his hair and hovered in front of his face, the Kwami’s tiny face wrinkled in concern. And somehow, seeing Plagg, seeing that tiny, cheese-loving, black ball of fun, helped. His breathing slowly returned to normal, his heart rate slowing, and he stopped rocking, keeping his eyes trained on Plagg.

“Are you okay?” Chloe asked fearfully. He looked up and realized his friends were giving him a wide berth, their eyes uncertain.

He nodded, slowly at first, and then more quickly. “Yes. I’m fine now.”

He wasn’t going to be beaten. He was more than just Adrien Agreste. He was Chat Noir, hero of Paris (whether the city remembered him or not). He could still make this right and fix everything.

All he needed was a plan.

Chapter End Notes

Alerte-enlèvement is like the French equivalent of an Amber alert.

I’m so sorry for the long absence! I like to write many chapters in advance so I can read through it and make sure it flows well and all makes sense, and I just haven't had the time lately. Life has been crazy! I won't be posting as often as I did before, but I promise I'm not abandoning this story.

Thank you guys so much for reading and sticking with me! Seriously, you guys are the best!
Adrien strolled down the street, whistling cheerfully. At first, no one seemed to notice the blond teen, but then people began doing double-takes, whipping out their phones to take pictures or call the police.

“Adrien Agreste?” a middle-aged woman stopped him, her eyes huge and worried. “Sweetheart, are you… Is everything okay? Are you hurt?”

“I feel great!” he said cheerfully. He stepped around her, continuing his walk.

High up on the rooftops, a girl dressed in an orange suit twirled her flute, watching carefully.

Gabriel slammed down the phone, his eye twitching. He couldn’t comprehend what was happening; he had reported Adrien missing as a trap, a way to easily locate the boy once he eventually came out of hiding. But somehow it completely backfired, and now he was fielding calls left and right from people who had seen Adrien walking down the street without a care in the world.

Outside the gate to the estate, reporters were piled up, all trying to get a glimpse, a quote, a photo, anything to write a story on. Now Gabriel was the one who was trapped, unable to leave and verify these claims himself, with no Miraculous to help him. He had severely miscalculated, and was paying the price.

“Ugh, how did I get stuck with you?” Chloe snapped at Nino, who sighed heavily.

“Because you’re incapable of being polite?” Nino suggested.

"How rude!” Chloe crossed her arms, shooting him a nasty look. Nino just rolled his eyes.

“Look, just focus, okay? We gotta help Adrien.”

Master Fu reentered the room, carrying a load of plates. He blinked, eyes narrowing and frown forming as he realized only Nino and Chloe were left. He dropped the plates on the table, wiping his hands on his pants. “Where is everyone?” he asked, his voice frighteningly calm.

Nino offered up a big, nervous smile. “Adrien went to the bathroom, and Alya is calling her mom. Uh, not sure where Kagami went. I think maybe she went home? She’s the only one not at risk, and her mom kept calling…”

Chloe rolled her eyes, biting her lip to refrain from calling Nino out on his terrible lying.

Master Fu sat down calmly, folding his hands on the table. “Ms. Bourgeois, Mr. Lahiffe. Would you two care to tell me the truth about what’s going on?”

“Everything is fine,” Chloe studied her nails. “Don’t worry about it. We’re just here to slow you down.”
“Chloe!” Nino groaned, slapping his hands over his face in frustration.

“Well, it’s true. He already knows you’re lying.”

“Slow me down?” Master Fu tilted his head to the side. “Please elaborate.”

“Look, I know you have your own issues with the wish or whatever,” Chloe raised an eyebrow, pursing her lips. “But you’re wrong about this. We’re doing it. We’re fixing everything.”

“Sorry,” Nino said meekly.

“So Adrien left,” Master Fu said. “And he left you here to stall me.”

Chloe shrugged. “We’re not going to tell you where he is. And I’ve already taken your phone and the tv remote, so you can’t check the news or anything.”

Master Fu stood with a sigh, linking his arms behind his back. “Wayzz, go find them,” he murmured.

Wayzz hesitated, looking at Nino and then back at Master Fu. “Master…”

“Please, Wayzz.”

“Tikki and Plagg want to do this,” Nino blurted. “They want Marinette back too. We’re not like Adrien’s old man. We’re not forcing them to do this.”

Master Fu turned away from the teens, looking at the old gramophone in the corner. “I could stop you,” he said quietly. “You realize that I have many more Miraculouses in my possession. I could very easily stop you.”

Chloe stood, her fists clenched. “We still have our Miraculouses. I’m not afraid to use mine.”

Pollen floated above Chloe’s head, her eyes afraid.

“I know,” Master Fu chuckled softly. “I know that’s why he left you two here. Don’t worry, Chloe. There’s no need for violence.” He turned back to face them, his eyes watery. “I want Marinette back as well. I won’t get in your way.”

“Really?” Nino jumped up excitedly, while Chloe narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

“Why should we trust you?” Chloe asked. “Yeah, you’re the guardian or whatever, but we don’t really know you.”

Master Fu nodded, closing his eyes. “I chose to give Adrien his Miraculous, I am the one who chose him to be Chat Noir. I trust that he will make the right choices. You don’t have to trust me, but I trust him.”

Chat Noir and Akai Mushi stood high up on the Eiffel Tower, watching the world go by underneath them. “It seems like it worked,” Akai said. “Everyone was so distracted by Adrien that no one noticed us.”

“People are going to notice soon enough,” Chat said grimly.

“By then it’ll be too late to do anything about it,” Akai smiled. “Oh, look. That’s quite a lot.”
Several police cars were zooming through the streets below them, lights on and alarms blaring. The Adrien illusion had attracted a lot of attention, drawing much of the police force to the spots where he was last sighted and to the Agreste estate. Gabriel was sure to be very busy dealing with that mess.

Akai detransformed, removing the earrings and handing them to Chat Noir. “Good luck,” she whispered.

A loud thump announced the arrival of Rena Rouge, who straightened up. “Hey. I’m here to help you down.”

“How’d the illusion go?” Kagami asked.

“Great. I felt kind of bad messing with people like that, though. People are really worried about Adrien,” she leaned against a metal beam. “Celebrity cases are a big deal, you know. But I had one illusion walk all the way over to the park, way over there,” she pointed out in the distance. “Another one was going back to his house, but I had to end that one kind of early. There’s a ton of reporters in front of your house,” she glanced over at Chat Noir. “I had a couple other ones too. I wanted to make sure he was seen all over, so a lot of police got drawn out.”

“Smart,” Kagami nodded. Her gaze flickered to Chat Noir, who hadn’t responded, and was just staring out at the skyline. “Well, maybe we should go. Hopefully the next time we see you, things… Things will be different.”

Rena nodded. “Yeah. Um, good luck, Adrien.”

Rena took Kagami, holding her tight and leaping down the tower, leaving Chat Noir alone.

“Claws in,” he muttered, releasing Plagg. Plagg did a loop in the air, sighing.

“Please tell me you have camembert,” he whined. “It’s going to take a looot of energy to make the wish you know, and it would really help to have some delicious gooey cheese…”

“Why did I care so much about Nathalie?” Adrien asked, taking the photo out of his pocket and glaring at it. “I remember wanting her to be here instead of my mother. My own mother, who actually cares about me and isn’t evil. I don’t understand why I cared so much about a woman who was in league with my father.”

Plagg went still, watching as Adrien’s grip on the photo tightened, his knuckles turning white.

“You know, when I have to erase a person, I get their memories,” Plagg said quietly. “And everyone who had their memories wiped during the last wish, I get those too. Some sort of cosmic punishment, I guess.”

Adrien’s eyes crinkled. “You don’t need to be punished,” he said.

“Kid, I’m the Kwami of destruction. You don’t need to know everything, but I’m not… I’m not like Tikki. I only break and destroy and ruin. I haven’t done a lot of good for the world.”

“You’re good for me,” Adrien said quietly.

Plagg cleared his throat, his eyes misty. “Look, the point was that I know why you loved Nathalie. I can tell you, if you want. You should know who she was and why she did what she did.”

“It doesn’t matter now,” Adrien said dully. “She’s gone, she’s never coming back. There’s no
excuse for her actions.”

“It does matter!” Plagg said forcefully. “Listen up, kid. Nathalie Sancoeur was more than just your father’s assistant. She loved you like a son, and you loved her like a mother. She may have appeared cold, emotionless, maybe a little like a robot, but she really cared about you and never wanted to hurt you.”

Adrien lowered his gaze, the flashing police lights overtaking his vision. “But she…”

“Listen to me, Adrien. She did whatever your father asked, because it was her job, and she went above and beyond because she loved him. She was severely flawed, but she wasn’t a demon.”

Adrien scoffed slightly, the red and blue lights blurring.

“She let you bring friends places when you weren’t supposed to, she placed flowers on your breakfast tray just to brighten your mornings, she tried to convince your father to stop being Hawkmoth to protect you. She let that horrible liar girl in the house because she thought she was going to help you study.”

Adrien couldn’t see the lights at all anymore, his tears blinding him and wetting his face, the wind bringing an icy chill to his damp cheeks.

“She stood with you when you ate your meals so you didn’t have to be alone. She’s the one who convinced your father to let you go to school. She loved you, Adrien. And you loved her. You know, when you were scared, you called for her. When that liar girl got Nathalie in trouble, you told her off.”

Adrien was completely bawling now, and Plagg flew close, pressing a paw to his cheek. “I’m sorry,” Plagg whispered. “But for you to just hate her and write her off… It’s wrong.”

Adrien nodded, unable to speak through his tears. He took a few minutes to get himself under control, before clearing his throat and holding up the earrings.

“Are you ready for this?” Plagg asked.

Adrien nodded slowly. “Yes. It’s time.”

Taking a deep breath, he pushed the earrings in; Tikki reappeared in a burst of light, peering at his red eyes and tear-stained face.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

Adrien nodded, looking at the two Kwamis before him. “I will be. Are you two ready?”

They exchanged one last look before nodding. Adrien closed his eyes, his heart thumping.

“F-forces of creation and destruction… I have a wish.”

Master Fu closed his eyes as the swirling pink and green glow surrounded him, feeling at peace for the first time since he lost the butterfly and peacock Miraculouses.

Alya and Kagami stood at the bottom of the Eiffel Tower, watching in awe as the radiant glow spread across Paris, restoring what was lost. Alya’s eyes filled with joyous tears, and she closed them, gentle drops leaking out.
Nino and Chloe exchanged triumphant grins as the glow swept them up, knowing that they had finally won.

Gabriel Agreste fell to his knees, screaming, horrified, scaring the many reporters and police officers surrounding him.

Emilie Agreste stood in front of an old church, the place where so many years ago, she got married. The place that started it all.

She closed her eyes as the green glow began surrounding her; despite everything, she had no regrets. No matter what kind of man Gabriel turned out to be, no matter what became of her marriage and her life, she was grateful for it all.

Because it brought her Adrien.

“Goodbye, son,” she whispered as she faded away.

Adrien’s eyes were screwed shut, beads of sweat making their way down his face, mingling with stray tears. Behind his closed lids, he could still see those green and pink lights, but they didn’t fill him with dread like before. Now, they symbolized something else.

Hope.

He could hear his wish one final time as he drifted away, a gentle smile forming on his lips.

*Bring back Marinette Dupain-Cheng. (I’m sorry, mom.)*

*Restore everyone’s memories of Ladybug, Chat Noir, Hawkmoth, and the other Miraculous holders.*

*But make sure that Nino, Chloe, Alya, Kagami, Master Fu, the Kwamis, Marinette, and I are the only ones who actually remember what really happened.*

*And thank you.*

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**Chapter End Notes**

Hi guys! I'm so sorry it's been so long since the last update. My life has been incredibly busy - I've started working two jobs, I broke up with my long-time boyfriend, and I've had to adjust to living alone for the first time. I honestly haven't been in the right headspace to write, even though I don't want to leave you guys waiting forever.

So here is the conclusion to the first arc of this story! I actually think this could be a good ending to the entire fic, but I have a whole second story arc planned out for you. So don't worry if you still have burning questions or wish that there was more Marinette in the story - more is coming! I just don't know when. I really hope that you at least enjoy this update. I want to thank all of you for sticking around this long and for putting up with my haphazard updating. You guys motivate me to keep going; I might have given up on this fic a long time ago if it weren't for all of you.

Happy Thanksgiving!
Guess who's back! This is a super super short chapter, working as both a wrap up of the first arc and a prologue for the second arc. I considered tacking this on at the beginning of the next chapter, but I think it works better as its own separate piece. I'm sorry it's so short, but I promise the next chapter will be a regular length!

Tikki and Plagg were perfectly capable of granting Adrien’s wish, although they didn’t fully comprehend everything they were doing, or how exactly they were doing it. Somehow, things just came to be, falling into place the way they were meant to.

And in the meantime, while they worked, it was as if the universe was in stasis.

“So, sugarcube, shall we enjoy this time together?” Plagg asked in an overly sweet voice.

Tikki wrinkled her nose. “Focus, you. We’ve got work to do.”

“What, it’s not like anyone is going anywhere,” Plagg scoffed. They were surrounded by complete darkness, with no sense of direction or space. A soft green glow bathed his body, while Tikki was awash in a gentle pink light. The two kwamis were the only light illuminating the darkness, the only shine in a world of blackness. Plagg performed a small loop, zooming around Tikki, leaving a glittering chartreuse trail in his wake.

Tikki offered a tiny smile. Moments like these were rare, and reminded her of the very brief time they were the only beings in the universe. She’ll forever deny it, but she really did love spending time with Plagg… Not that he ever needed to know that. His ego was big enough.

But as Plagg swooped around her, she couldn’t help but giggle, flying around him, twirling around each other. At first they moved fast, racing around each other in twists and loops, before slowing, locking eyes and spinning leisurely, never breaking eye contact until finally they slowed to a halt.

“I’m getting kind of dizzy,” Plagg laughed.

“It’s from all the spinning,” Tikki said softly. “Maybe we should stop spinning.”

“We have stopped spinning.” Plagg murmured. Tikki blinked and cleared her throat, finally breaking eye contact. If she wasn’t already bright red, she would have flushed; instead, she scooted backwards, holding her arms out, cupping the air in front of her.

“We should get to work,” she said, almost managing to keep her voice steady.

Plagg just grinned triumphantly, silently mimicking her motions. After a moment, flickering orbs of light appeared in their paws. Tikki’s was a dull gray, while Plagg’s was a shimmering ocean blue - the essence of two lives.

“Are you ready?” Tikki asked. Plagg nodded and closed his eyes, focusing. Slowly, the orb Plagg held drained of color, fading to gray, while the one Tikki cupped burst into color, a bright rosy
pink. “Marinette,” Tikki breathed, staring down at the pink sphere of light.

“You missed her, huh?” Plagg asked.

Tikki nodded, smiling gently. “It always hurts to lose a holder, but Marinette was special to me. Losing her hurt more than any other holder before. And she had so much life ahead of her, so much potential wasted… I’m really happy that she gets a second chance.”

Plagg looked down at Emilie Agreste’s darkened essence, drained of life; the familiar feelings of sorrow, regret, and guilt were still there, bubbling deep inside him as they always did when he had to take away someone’s life, but they were… muted, in a way. Perhaps it was because Emilie had sacrificed herself willingly, or because it was Adrien who made the wish (and he had a serious soft spot for the kid), but he didn’t feel as bad as he normally would under these circumstances. And it didn’t hurt that he was pretty happy to have Marinette back too.

“Plagg?” Tikki asked, a little worried. “Are you okay? I know this isn’t easy for you…”

Plagg locked eyes with Tikki, his misfortunes melting away. Tikki always managed to make his world right, even with just one look. He gave her a toothy grin. “I’m okay, sugarcube. Really. Let’s do this, so you can get your bug back!”

Tikki beamed brightly, and soon enough reality was restored, the universe finally back in balance. As if a switch was turned, the blackness dissipated and Paris returned, the sun slowly rising over the Eiffel Tower.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, guys! All your support in the comments on the last chapter were so kind and heartwarming, I really appreciated it! I'm definitely in a better place now, and I feel like I can start writing/editing again. I just want to thank you all again, you've all been so patient and understanding and so so nice! I can't express my thanks enough, I never thought that I would share my writing with the world and that people would actually enjoy reading it.

Did you catch the Anastasia reference? If you did, you're awesome! Such an amazing movie!
Also fun fact, originally I was inspired by the scene in Wall-E when they're in space with the fire hydrant, and then somehow it morphed into the Anastasia reference. Can you tell I like animated movies?

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!