Bad Habits

by OnlyJam

Summary

"It's just... I really never took you for a smoker."
"Well, it's not really something I tend to advertise..."

In which Ladybug drops in during Nathanael's chill time and learns about a particularly nasty habit the redhead picked up over the years.
The Alley and The Ladybug

The yelling immediately muffled as a certain redhead slammed the door of his apartment. With a white-knuckle grip on his messenger bag, Nathanaël made his way into the dark streets of a sleeping Paris. The cold air caused him to wrap his grey jacket around his lean form, walking a little faster towards his destination.

There wasn’t a single other person on the low lit street. Most people would walk a little faster, a pit of uneasiness forming in their stomach, but Nathanaël cherished the lack of other people. He often didn’t get a chance to be alone with his thoughts.

The redhead turned into the entrance of an alley, easy to miss and most likely just as void of people as the streets. He stopped, leaning against the wall of the mostly empty alley. A single crate along with a couple of broken boxes were the seventeen year old’s only company. He really wouldn’t have it any other way. He dug through his messenger bag until he finally found what he was looking for. The artist pulled a single carton of cigarettes from his bag. His other hand went to his back pocket, pulling out an old-fashion lighter. With a satisfied sigh, the redhead lit the cigarette.

A shadow loomed, unseen by the only person in the street, on the rooftop of an apartment building. Ladybug swung her legs from the edge of the building’s roof. Her eyes fell upon a head of red hair and a grey jacket.

“What’s Nathanaël doing out so late?” Marinette stood up from her perch and slowly followed her classmate. He walked down the abandoned street for a good five minutes before disappearing into an alley.

The shadow, clad in spots, silently followed the familiar figure into the alley, sitting on the edge of the brick building, just above the male’s head.

The hero couldn’t help but admire how well puberty had done its job with the blue-eyed teen. He had a nice lean figure and virtually no acne. His hair had grown even longer and he had put on a bit of muscle. Pretty attractive, she guessed. For someone who was into that.

She watched as he dug into his bag and pulled out a small box. Wait... Were those cigarettes? A lighter was then fished out of the back pocket of his skinny jeans. The alleyway was lit up by quick flashes of light as Nathanaël attempted to light the cigarette in his hand.

Ladybug decided to drop in at that moment.

“Holy Shit!” The redhead braced himself against the wall, almost losing the freshly lit cigarette in his hand. “Goddamn it, Ladybug! Are you trying to give me a fucking heart attack?!” Said hero stopped, she had never heard so many curses flow from Nathanaël’s mouth in her life, let alone all in one sentence. It really had been a long time since she had spoken to him.

“Sorry, sorry. I just saw you walking and decided to... uhh .. drop in?” She sheepishly rubbed the back of her head. The dark haired heroine at that moment realized just how tall the artist had gotten. He towered a good foot and a half over her.

“You don’t say?” The sarcasm in his voice was apparent. The spotted vigilante strutted over to the crate across from the other teen and taking a seat. The redhead sighed, taking a long drag of nicotine before releasing it with a sigh.
“....” Ladybug’s eyebrows knitted and stared as Nathanaël released the cloud of smoke into the crisp Parisian air.

“Is there a reason you’re staring?” His voice broke through the awkward silence that Marinette hadn’t initially noticed. She blushed brightly, realizing that she had, in fact, been staring.

“Oh.. Sorry!” She avoided eye contact with the other teen. “It’s just… I never really took you for a smoker.”

“Well, it’s not really something I tend to advertise.” The blue eyed male took another long drag before blowing it away from the hero. “It’s not exactly legal at my age, y’know?” He shrugged as the air fell into another awkward silence.

Ladybug’s expression fell into a concentrated frown. Nathanaël remembered drawing that exact expression when he was still working on his old Ladybug comic. It brought up the funny coincidence he had noticed while still in middle school. The similarities between Ladybug and his old classmate, Marinette, were uncanny.

A loud vibrating sound smoothly broke the silence. The young artist placed the cigarette between his lips and grabbed his phone out of the pocket that hadn’t held his lighter. A bright notification stood out on his screen. A message from Juleka.

“Me and Rose just stopped by your apartment and your old man said you weren’t there. You better not be out smoking again!”

Another sigh passed the redhead’s lips, drawing the attention of the heroine sitting across from him. He typed out a quick, vague response.

“Why?” The girl’s voice broke the older teen out of his stupor. He looked up, meeting her midnight gaze.

“Hmm?” Nathanaël pocketed his phone and took the cigarette from between his lips.

“Why do you smoke?” The question came from out of the blue, taking the blue eyed teen by surprise.

“Well, what makes you think there’s a reason?” Nathanaël didn’t really have a good reason as to why he had shot back such a snarky response. Usually the nicotine smoothed out the rough edges of his smart-ass attitude.

“The Nathanaël I met three years ago wouldn’t have just picked up a habit like this from a friend.” The hero’s response was straightforward as if she had the answer ready and was simply waiting to shoot. The taller teen’s phone buzzed again, but it was ignored.

“Observant…” Another drag and release before he continued. “My reason, huh…? Well it’d probably mainly be my parents. They’re constantly at each other’s fucking throats. Then my friends are always doting on me like I can’t fucking take care of myself. Which initially is really nice of them, but after a while it gets on my damn nerves. School’s just hell and this is my time. Nobody’s scolding at me. Nobody’s pressuring me to do shit and nobody’s fucking yelling.” The tone of his voice was bitter, exposing the fact that the kid had a lot on his mind to be angry about.

“Well… I guess that’s a pretty good reason.” Marinette attempted to respond correctly. How was she supposed to deal with this kind of thing?

“It’s a damn good reason.” The redhead took another drag before putting out the cigarette on the
brick wall behind him. He put the carton back in his bag and pulled out his phone.

“Well I better go before Rose bites my fucking head off.” Nathanaël gave the hero a nonchalant wave before disappearing around the corner of the building.

Ladybug stood, watching the redhead disappear around the side of the building into the chilly night. The hero vaulted away from the alley that still smelled faintly of nicotine.

Patrol had gone smoothly. The streets were as bare as they had been when she had followed her old classmate to an alleyway earlier that night. Marinette grunted as she sat on the edge of a building.

“Something on your mind, my Lady?” A leather clad figure plopped down next to the spotted heroine.

“Adrien, you remember Nathanaël, right?”
Nathanaël couldn’t help but shrink down as two shadows fell over his shorter form. He sighed, still flinching at the contact of a large hand on his shoulder. That same hand threw him into the concrete wall of a mansion seconds later. The bruises from yesterday stung worse than the newly forming ones. The redhead clenched his jaw, refusing to let himself cry in pain.

“Well good morning to you too!” One of the teens spat out. A laugh chorused between the two older boys as the first threw a punch into the artist’s ribs. The blue eyed teen doubled over, biting his lip to muffle the yelp that involuntarily left his throat.

He was socked across the face, the cracking sound from his nose promising a lot of future pain. Nathanaël threw a hand to his nose as blood started to trickle down to his lip. Another punch was partially blocked by his hand. His left hand, it was going to be hard to take notes in class later, let alone draw through another physics lesson.

“Can’t even fucking stand up straight… Fucking fag.” The second teen hit the first’s shoulder, drawing his attention to the gate of the mansion opening. The artist was vaguely aware of them running off in the other direction.

The first thing the famous model noticed were two juveniles running from his gate. Then his eyes settled on a form leaning on his wall in fetal position. A bright red head of hair stood out to him. He was holding a hand to his face. Was that blood?

“Nathanaël?” He rushed over to the boy. “Hey, you ok?” Without answering him, the artist turned away from Adrien and grabbed his bag. With a hand over his nose and blood leaking down to the collar of his shirt, he ran off towards school. The blonde stood to follow but his blue-eyed classmate was already gone.

“Hey bro!” A familiar voice piped up from behind him. The smiling face of Nino greeted him. How the DJ could be so awake in the morning was beyond him. “Was that Nathanaël?” He motioned towards the corner that the redhead had just disappeared around.

“Uhh yeah… I think?” Nino shrugged and started walking. Adrien followed him seconds later.

The smoke filling the section of the living room was a welcome comfort for a certain redhead’s nerves. The loud music and drunken people filling the house had no effect on the artist’s mood. A small smile graced his pale features as he took another hit. He had no idea whose house this was. He could vaguely recall a stuttering Chloe handing him a flyer for the party though, the fact that she was so scared of him only caused his smile to grow.

“Hey Nath, we’re heading out. You and Kim can find your own fucking way home, kay?” Juleka had a look of disgust on her face. He knew it wasn’t for him but rather the fact that he was stoned off his ass right now and probably a little drunk. He was certain that he couldn’t feel his legs though. Rose threw a reprimanding look towards her girlfriend, who rolled her eyes before walking over to the artist’s corner of the room. She slipped an arm around Nath’s waist before hoisting him up, allowing him to lean on her for support.

The world was a blur of neon colors and people as he was led to what assumed was the car. He was
sat down on the front porch of the house and left by the two girls in order to get the car. Nathanaël barely registered someone sitting down next to him.

“Damn… You look trashed.” He recognized that voice. Middle school…. That one model guy that Mari really liked. He reminded everyone of a cat…. And he uhhh he had that really rich dad that never showed his face anywhere. The name wasn’t coming to him.

“I guess…” Nath sighed looking over to the blond model whose name he couldn’t remember. For some reason the artist was drawn to the blond teen’s eyes. They were a really bright green. He wondered if it was some mutation because it almost didn’t seem natural.

“Do you… know who I am?” The redhead registered the tone as disbelief. He furrowed his brow before answering.

“Sort of… Like I remember your face and your eyes and shit but I can’t pin point a name.” Nathanaël’s voice was drawled out and seemed rather calm. He barely spoke above a whisper. Adrien cocked a brow at his stoned classmate.

“My eyes? Why my eyes?” The seventeen year old let his chin fall into the palm of his hand. He calmly waited for Nath to reply. The redhead stared off into space for two minutes before responding.

“They’re like a cat’s, really bright and really hard to ignore.” The blue eyed teen fished around in his pocket for something. Adrien looked up meeting the look of two unamused girls whose gaze then transferred to his redheaded friend.

“Oh no you don’t. You’ve had enough.” Rose swooped in, grabbing a small box from the jacket pocket of the redheaded male. “It’s a miracle that you can stand at all.” The reprimanding tone of the blond girl reminded Adrien of a mother rather than a friend.

“Rose… Give’em back.” Nathanaël made a weak attempt to get the carton back from the pink clad girl. “They’re expensive and my paycheck can only cover so much of my dad’s lazy ass.”

“No! You’re not getting them back! And you’re not going to get more!” Juleka’s voice was biting and cold. “I get that you’re working your ass off and you’re stressed but this is–..”

She paused before looking up to meet the artist’s eye. “This is just fucking pathetic! You’re pathetic!” Rose’s expression fell into shock and Adrien kind of wished he was somewhere else. “We’ve fucking dealt with you and your addictions for two years now! I’m done! If you’re so hell-bent on destroying yourself then be my fucking guest! I’m done trying to help you!” The blond model watched as Nathanaël visibly shrunk down from the dark haired girl’s words before rising back up slightly.

“I never asked you to help me! I can help myself!” There was no bite behind those words. Through the haze of alcohol and weed, all Adrien saw on the boy’s face was pure hurt.

“Come on, Rose. He can walk home.” The tall female walked away, leading the blond towards the waiting car. Nath collapsed back onto the step his head in his hands as he heard the car roar to life and speed off.

The porch fell into a silence that Adrien wasn’t sure he wanted to break. He simply scooted over and placed a hand on the redhead’s back, who in response, leaned against him. The artist’s breathing was coming out in uneven chokes. He was crying. From what Adrien had seen and heard of the teen recently, he wouldn’t have expected him to break down in front of, practically, a stranger. A few
minutes passed before Adrien realized his classmate had passed out. He sighed and pulled out his phone, sending a quick message to Natalie to send the car.

By the time the silver automobile finally pulled up, his shoulder was cramping and Nathanaël was starting to drool. He couldn’t have been happier to lug the redhead over to the backseat, the door graciously held open by Natalie, and prop him up in a seat. The green eyed male sighed and got in on the other side, shutting the door lightly before the car sped off.
A throbbing headache greeted Nathanaël as he awoke the next day. His memory was foggy but something seemed out of place. His surrounding had a distinct lack of the deep-rooted smell of cigarettes and old whiskey. Instead he was met with the scent of clean sheets and fresh air. He was definitely not at home. A realization hit him.

The redhead shot up out of bed, eyes meeting white walls, but not the kind he was expecting. The blood rushed to his head due to his sudden movement and dizziness hazed over his headache. A familiar bundle of nerves filled in his dry mouth and he threw himself out of bed towards a conveniently placed trashcan. At least he hoped it was a trashcan.

Last night’s dinner came rushing up along with a few too many wine coolers. Stomach acid burned his throat. A few dry heaves later, he was lying on his back on the cool wooden floor, trying to catch his breath. This was a cycle that he was horribly familiar with. His black shirt was coated in sweat and strands of hair stuck to his forehead. This was worse than he had been expecting.

Nathanaël didn’t miss the sound of the door to the room opening. “Hey... Uhhh... You’re awake.” Adrien. Holy shit he finally remembered the guy’s name.

“Kinda wish I wasn’t.” The redhead didn’t make any effort to try and get off the floor. He did raise his head and meet the blonde’s confused stare. “I feel like shit.”

“Well that answers my next question.” Adrien walked over and helped Nathanaël up. “Here. Alya told me water helps for hangovers.”

“Why’d you have to ask Alya? Haven’t you ever had a hangover?” The artist lightly sipped at the water, sitting cross-legged on the floor across from the blonde model. The glass was cool in his grasp and he could feel the uncomfortable cloudiness in his head clear up slightly.

“Uhh... I’m not allowed out very much.” Adrien rubbed the back of his head nervously. He fidgeted in front of the redhead, obviously uncomfortable.

“Apparently.” Nath finished the glass of water and set it down next to him. He ran a hand down his face, feeling a bit of stubble he’d have to shave before heading to school the next day. “I’m gonna go on a wild guess here and assume that this is your room.” The redhead looked around at the expansive cluttered room. He was surprised that he hadn’t tripped on his way to the trashcan.

“Yeah... Sorry for the mess. I don’t get much time to clean.” Adrien threw a dirty pair of boxers in the direction of an overflowing hamper. “I didn’t want to put you in a guest room and have you get lost.” The blue eyed teen shrugged and looked out the large window that accounted for at least half a wall of the room.

“Yeah... What time is it?” He patted down his jeans looking for his phone. Oh right. He had left it at home. “Damn... Rose’s gonna be pissed that I didn’t text her.” Nath watched as Adrien visibly flinched at that. What had he forgotten? Had something happened...? The memories came flooding back. Juleka... Rose... They had pretty much said they were done dealing with him. He really didn’t blame them. He would’ve probably been done with himself months ago.

“It’s about 3:30 a.m...” Adrien answered solemnly. “You’ve been asleep for a day or so.” Pure
terror coursed down the length of Nathanaël’s spine.

“What?!? I missed school?” The blonde model watched as his classmate’s breathing became erratic and panic seemed to flood his expression.

“Well uh... not really. I mean there was another akuma attack early this morning so it was cancelled.” The artist released a sigh and leaned back, using his arms for support.

“I didn’t know school meant so much to you. If I had known, I would’ve tried to wake you up.” Guilt was apparent in the other teen’s voice. Nath shook his head, silently waving it off. “Hey…” Adrien’s eyebrows furrowed in an indescribable expression, biting his lip in what seemed sort of like confusion.

“Yeah?” The response was short and sweet. It almost seemed like a normal conversation.

“Do you remember that one time those kids beat you up outside my house?” Freezing in his current fidgeting, Nathanaël looked up to meet the electric green eyes that tried to hold his gaze. He was rendered speechless. The redhead was sure that the model had just forgotten about that and moved on.

 “…Yeah. Why?” Curt, short, responses portrayed the nervousness that Adrien could tell was plaguing his classmate at the moment.

“Did that-?... Have you…?” The blonde teen took a deep breath before speaking again, trying to arrange his thoughts into some semblance of order. “Should I have tried to help you?” His voice dripped in long withheld guilt and self-hatred. “I mean... I could’ve done something but I didn’t. Do you blame me?”

Before the redhead could answer, he found himself barreling towards the trashcan. Another round of vomiting shook his thin frame. The other male in the room made his way over to where Nath was sprawled across the trashcan and sat beside him. He placed a comforting hand on his back and used the other to push the artist’s impractically long bangs out of the way of stomach acid, water and what was left of the cheap wine from last night.

It was a long five minutes and by the end of it, Nathanaël was practically gasping for air. Adrien got up and grabbed a towel, handing it to the artist. He took it and scrubbed his face.

“There’s a shower through that door if you want.” The thin blonde pointed towards the door at the far end of the room. The redhead shook his head and continued to lie on the floor.

“I... really don’t blame you.” Adrien turned to the redhead in confusion. “For not chasing after me. A ton of people have been ‘chasing after me’?” He raised his hands to air quote. “But nobody’s actually succeeded in helping. They all get sick of me and leave before they get a chance to.” He dropped his hands back down to the floor with an audible ‘thump’. “I mean even Rose got sick of me and my bullshit.” The room fell into silence.

“Do you want to stop?” Adrien’s voice was quiet and soft, very nice for the artist’s slamming headache. He practically felt those cat-like green eyes burning into his skin with their sharp stare. The artist threw an arm over his eyes.

“I don’t think you understand how much I hate that question.” The redhead sighed but reluctantly continued. “Like it would be great if I didn’t have to get stoned off my ass to deal with shit but I’m not sure I could cope without it. My coping method from three years ago was a hell of a lot worse. In my opinion this is an improvement.”
“An improvement from what?”

“The constant insatiable urge to embrace death due an unbridled hatred for my own existence.”

“Oh.” Adrien didn’t really know how to respond to that. He had just assumed that it was just the bullying that had pushed him to… Whatever this was.

“Maybe we should get some sleep.” Nath nodded in agreement before shakily standing. He made his way over to the bed, before passing out on contact.

Chapter End Notes

Mama Adrien to the rescue <3
The Call and The Surprising Offer

The next time Adrien saw Nathanaël was about two months later. For some unknown reason, the blonde couldn’t seem to locate the redhead at school no matter how much time he wasted looking. Both Ladybug and Chat Noir had scoured the city at night. Their usual patrols were scattered with small man hunts and stake-outs of the alley Ladybug had initially met the teen in. After school had gotten out at the end of the first month, he had given up hope of ever contacting the redhead again.

The model threw his bag down next to his desk before he collapsed onto his warm waiting bed. He had just started to drift off when his bag started to vibrate loudly. Shooting a glare at the offending item, the green eyed hero sat up and made his way over to his desk. With lethargic grace, Adrien fished the shiny cell phone out of the front pocket. The name displayed brightly on the sleek screen read ‘Nathanaël’. It had completely slipped the blonde’s mind that the two of them had exchanged numbers before he had allowed the other teen to leave. He scrambled to answer the call.

“H-hello?” Why the hell was he stuttering? A certain kind of happiness fluttered in chest knowing that the redhead had contacted him first.

“Adrien… You actually answered.” The voice on the other was scratchy and hoarse. Had he been crying? The fluttering in the blonde’s chest was crushed and a pit of worry took its place.

“Yeah… What’s up? Are you ok?” The green eyed male couldn’t help but fidget in worry. He may not be the most observant of people but something felt very, very off about the artist’s tone right now.

“I- uhh…” There seemed to be yelling or something going on in the background. “You-Never mind. This was-This was dumb. I’m… I’m fine. I shouldn’t’ve bothered you. Sorry.” The voice on the other line got more and more choked up, sounding almost scared.

“No! Nath, what’s going on? Do you need help?” More yelling filled the speakers. “Where are you?” Adrien heard the teal eyed teen’s voice hitch over the phone before there was loud clattering, probably the phone being thrown to the floor, and more screaming. Another male voice seemed to join in with a volume matching its opponent. There was more fumbling and a woman’s voice seeming to plead, before the sounds became crisp and clear. Had Nathan put the phone on speaker? The pit in the model’s stomach grew. He bit his lip anxiously.

The shattering of glass against some surface spurred Adrien into action. He threw on shoes and grabbed a jacket before stealing his car keys off the hook next to his bedroom door. The male didn’t even stop to tell Natalie where in the hell he was off to at three am.

By the time the blonde teenage model was in the car, the worry in his chest had grown into a full-out concoction of fear and adrenaline. The call was still going on as he laid his phone on the seat beside him. The gruff voice yelled out slurs, his verbal abuse only interrupted by what sounded like punching and a woman’s sobbing in the background.

As Adrien sped out of the garage, he was hit with a sudden realization. He had no idea where the redhead lived. The woman screamed and the punching and slurs stopped. The silence over the other end was then filled with the sound of heavy work boots on carpet.

The blonde hero felt his heart stop as the call dropped. No… Scratch that. The world stopped the second the line went dead. He stopped at the edge of his driveway. What should he do? At first, he didn’t want to admit it, but now it was too clear. Adrien was scared. Chat Noir, hero of Paris, was
terrified and he didn’t know what to do. His grip on the steering wheel turned his knuckles white.

A pleasant ding pulled the green eyed teen out of his thoughts. He scrambled for his phone for the second time that night. A single text stood out against the bright screen. ‘One new message from: Nathanaël’. He shakily opened it. An address was followed by one word; ‘Help’.

In Paris, there were two people you call when you’re in danger and he had them both on speed dial. Swiping out of that screen, he opened up the phone app and typed out the number for the police. The operator answered in a calm voice.

“Paris Police Department, what is your emergency?” Adrien hesitated before answering. In truth he didn’t know what the hell was going on.

“Uhh h-hi I’m here. I think a friend of mine is in- is in danger? I don’t really know what’s going on. He called me and there was yelling and glass shattering and what sounded like fighting.”

“Ok are you still on the line with him?” Other than the operator and the sound of his car engine running, the street was silent.

“N-no the call dropped.” The sound of his rapidly beating heart filled up the missing white noise.

“Do you have an address?” The green eyed hero of Paris pulled up the text message. The operator’s calm tone was no comfort to his rapidly increasing distress.

“Y-yes I do.” He read off the address to the operator.

“Sir, can you tell me your friend’s name?” Name… His name. He knew this. He took a deep breath and tried to sort out his thoughts.

“Nathanaël .”

“A last name?”

“I-I’m sorry. I don’t know one.”

“Don’t worry, we’ve dispatched some police. Your friend will be fine.”

“T-thanks.” The blond hesitantly hung up the phone. Before putting the device away to drive off, he shot one last text. Then, with an address and a vague sense of where he was going, Adrien sped off.

When he arrived at the address, no police had arrived yet. The apartment building was silent, almost too silent. The teen removed his seatbelt and took a deep breath, throwing open the door of his car.

The green eyed hero almost screamed when he noticed a figure in his driver-side mirror. The approached closer and came into the light and it revealed the comforting spotted pattern that he was all too familiar with.

“Ladybug!”

“Adrien? What’s up? Why did you text me to meet you at this apartment?” Just as she finished speaking, the door to an apartment burst open and two figures rather ungraceful fell out, mid fight. The blond watched as the expression on his lady’s face fell from worry into determination. She ran into the staircase of the apartment building. Still quite shell-shocked, it took Adrien only a second long to follow.

Moving quickly, Ladybug tore the large man off the smaller form. Adrien ran to the side of the
The blond model still had adrenaline rushing through his veins as he sat next to his redheaded friend at the police station. Nathanaël held an ice pack to his face. He hadn’t spoken since the fight outside the apartment.

The blonde’s thoughts were interrupted by his father bursting into the police station, worry etching the lines of his aging face. Adrien stood up, expecting a verbal lashing for leaving the house without telling him. He wasn’t expecting his father to embrace him tightly.

“Oh thank goodness you’re ok. I was so worried you had gone out and gotten yourself hurt!” The model’s taunt muscles visibly loosened at the contact. “You are so much like your mother. She was always rushing into situations for the sake of others.” His father released the hug and looked his son in the eyes. “Perhaps it’s time we got home?”

“I-I’m sorry dad I can’t. Nathanaël needs me.” Adrien shot a quick glance towards the red haired teen.

“He’s welcome to stay for a while.” Those were words he had never dreamed would ever come out of his father’s mouth and yet here they are.

Adrien only nodded in response.

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