### Chasing the Sky

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#### Summary

[Previously Titled 'Dying for You']

Adrien Agreste had grown up with his best friend and childhood crush, Marinette Dupain-Cheng, until she had moved away to China at the age of 9. The two never lost contact, writing letters until they had been gifted cellphones and access to the internet. At the age of 12, Adrien’s mother was suddenly taken from her family, leaving behind a distraught son to learn to fight for himself and a husband who grew cold as time passed. At the age of 15, he had been gifted the Ladybug Miraculous and became the superhero that stands between Paris...
and Le Papillon. At the age of 17, his best friend and childhood crush returned him, leaving him in a state of nervousness, panic and guilt. He fears she may become a victim of Le Papillon’s if she continues to stay in Paris.

It seems fate may be laughing at him, because the same day the woman he thought he would never see again arrives, so does another person he’d been waiting two years for.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
This story is 100% self indulgent and I have no regrets. Kwami Swap, Crush Swap and Childhood AU all mixed together was bound to happen sooner or later. A lot of this fic is inspired by the song "Dying For You" by Otto Knows (feat. Lindsey Stirling and Alex Aris). I hope you all enjoy the fic as much as I am enjoying writing it!

That was the text that caused Adrien to trip up the stairs of his mansion, something he hadn’t thought possible even with how clumsy he was. He was glad for once that no one was around to witness this miraculous fuck up; well, save for his kwami. Tikki zoomed out of his bag before he fell and hovered over his charge with worried eyes. His phone clattered down a few steps, adding another crack to his nearly shattered screen.

“I’m fine, Tikki.” Adrien coughed, groaning as he pushed himself up off the marble stairs. He patted down his pants and shirt, rubbing the back of his neck as he frowned down at his scattered belongings. Good news is, no blood on the marble; bad news, his phone officially needed to be replaced and his recently replaced tablet received its first crack.

>Welcome to the family, Adrien thought with a cringe as he started to gather his things. The portrait of him and his father over the grand staircase loomed behind him, his father’s frozen gaze staring down, indifferently, at his klutz of a son as he gathered his school materials. Adrien never hated a painting more. He misses the one with his mother; everyone was smiling, everyone was full of love and happiness, even his father had a small smile, his eyes gazing lovingly at his wife as Adrien stood in-between the two with his gap-tooth six-year-old smile. His mother’s hand rested on his left shoulder, his fathers on his right, and he knew that their own hands were intertwined behind his back.

They were going to finally update the family portrait when she…

“Are you sure?” His kwami chirped, hovering in the air near his shattered phone. He shoved the last of his school items in his bag, eyes trailing over to his phone before meeting Tikki’s gaze.

He forced himself to grin, “I’ve survived worse.”

His phone played Marinette’s notification tone. Its pitch was off and the sound died before the tone ended; Tikki having flown into Adrien’s over shirt chest pocket, clutching the side of her head in the process.

“Sorry, Tikki.” He murmured to his kwami, pulling the opening of the shirt to the side to peer down at Tikki. Tikki’s hearing was sensitive with certain noises. “You alright?”

She nodded, her hands slowly removing themselves from where they rested and her antennas moving back into place. She gave him a small smile before hovering back out and looking towards the phone. They both continued to stare down at the device, unsure of it. Tikki could sense his uneasiness, therefor her reaction to this situation (even if not fully understanding what it was, other than it involving Marinette) was the same as Adrien’s. And Adrien’s mind was racing.
Marinette was moving back to France.

Marinette was moving back to Paris.

Marinette was coming home—

He hadn’t seen Marinette since his mother’s funeral.

She had surprised him, knocking on his door the day before his mother had been put to rest. She was jet lagged and irritated, but the second she saw him she pulled him into a much needed, bone crushing bear hug. He hadn’t felt comfortable enough to cry about the loss of his mother until that point. She stayed at the mansion during her visit, sleeping in Adrien’s bed because the guest rooms were filled. They stayed up late the first night, even though he knew Marinette wanted nothing more than to sleep. She stayed up with him because he couldn’t sleep, anxious and depressed and ready to crawl into a hole and never come out. She sat with him on the couch and held his hand, watching crappy shows at 2 am and eating popcorn. Neither had slept that night.

One of her hands held a black umbrella over them as the other held onto his tightly during the service. They stood under the umbrella as everyone left, she stayed by his side as he forced down tears and swallowed his sobs. She watched him as he walked over to the casket, allowed him to walk in the rain even though he was wearing an Agreste brand suit. She watched him as he stood next to his mother’s casket for hours, watched him break down and scream and cry until his throat was hoarse and his eyes burned.

“You don’t need to hide yourself from me, Adrien,” She had mumbled into his hair later that night after watching him put up the ‘Agreste’ front for his family, “I won’t judge you for being you.”

But that was four years ago. He hadn’t seen her since.

They had facetimed or skyped only when Alya had her on the other line, maybe twice on their own. The connection was always shit, the call dropped more often than not, it would be day here and night there. Marinette would be in her room, talking to them as she sketched or sewed, huddled under a blanket or wearing baggy clothes with her hair in a messy bun or ponytail. He was usually too tired to add into the conversation, usually his head was in a pillow and he would grunt or pick his head up to say hello or goodbye. Marinette never paid attention to the screen anyway, always focused on something else; but she was always equally as focused on the conversation as she was with whatever she was doing. She knew how to multitask.

Over the past couple of months, the texts between them became less frequent. His extracurricular activities were taking up more and more of his time as the school year came to an end, his father pressing him for upcoming fashion shows, possible summer internships and charity events. Marinette, he assumed, was busy with her own studies. She had decided on being home schooled after her first year of Senior High School in China — she never gave him a reason, just said that it was nothing like home and she hadn’t liked the dynamic of it all. She said she was taking a few martial arts classes as well, maybe that had finally picked up. She was doing more art commissions as well since being homeschool, but she hadn’t been streaming her art as much either.

“You should answer her.” Tikki’s soft voice broke him from his thoughts, looking up at him from her perch on his knee. He slowly nodded, looking back towards the phone but not making the motion to grab the device.

“She’s moving, Tikki.” Adrien said aloud, making it real and causing his gut to twist and his face to pale. “She’s moving back to Paris.”
He could feel Tikki buzz with giddiness on his knee, her blue eyes shining up at him in the dull atmosphere. She gasped, buzzing to his face and cradling his cheek while spewing out congratulations left and right. His left eye shut from the sudden contact from his kwami, other eye still trained on the phone before him. He should be as happy as Tikki — happier than Tikki. He should feel ecstatic relief from knowing that his best friend since childhood would be coming back home, coming back to him, but something in the pit of his stomach didn’t want her anywhere close to Paris, close to him… closer to Le Papillon, closer to becoming akumatized, closer to him having to hurt her.

Marinette stared down at her phone, the ‘seen at 10:52 PM’ notification burning into her soul after ten minutes of no reply. She understood if he was mad, she hadn’t texted him back in a couple weeks, having been working on convincing her parents to move back to Paris. She’d been dropping hints for the past two years, ever since the first akuma in Paris showed up, ever since she’d been chosen as the Black Cat Miraculous’ holder, ever since this feeling plopped into her heart and grew heavier every time she read a new article on the Ladyblog about the newest akuma. It wasn’t until The Screamer appeared nearly a year ago and physically wounded Ladybug had she started pressing harder on moving back home.

She had a duty as Ladybug’s counterpart to be there, but it was impossible if she couldn’t convince her parents.

She hung her head in defeat, shoulders sagging as her palms laid flat against the floor between her outstretched legs. She let out a small sigh, her phone light timing out and leaving her in near-darkness. She could hear the soft snores from her kwami from her bed, huddled into the silk throw blanket she crafted him last month. Pitch black with a neon green cat paw at each corner. It was big enough to use on the plane ride back home and small enough to stuff in her carryon.

Her eyes lit up in the darkness, a smile forcing its way back onto her pouting lips as she thought of Paris — her home. China would always be dear to her heart, but Paris meant everything to her. She still had friends in Paris, still had a life there even if she hadn’t set foot in the country in four years. She couldn’t wait to transform and introduce herself to Ladybug. Marinette's cheeks lightly flushed at the thought of meeting Ladybug for the first time. She’d dreamt of how to introduce herself for the past year, all of them ending with her falling flat on her face and him laughing at her.

She rather that not happen and, knowing her, she wouldn’t remember how to say ‘hello’ in French the moment she stood face-to-face with the superhero.

She hadn’t had any real social interaction with someone else, besides the occasional tournament, in months. It was one thing to be constantly surrounded by people, another thing to socialize with said people. Her mother, father, uncle and a few other family members had been the only people to socialize with once she decided to be homeschooled. The friends she had made during school had been quick to cease contact with her once she was no longer attending school. She prioritized convincing her parents to move back to parents more than attending Senior High School. It wasn’t mandatory for her to attend anyways, but she wanted to continue schooling. She knew once she convinced her parents to move back, she’d be attending school once again.

Better to remember some things then forget everything and be placed in a lower class than her friends.

Marinette’s eyes moved back to her phone once it lit up, vibrating against the wood desk and illuminating her small nook.

[Adrien | 11:06 PM: skype]
Marinette sent a quick ‘k’ before locking her phone and opening the laptop set in front of her. She signed into her computer before opening the skype application and signing in. She pulled her hair from the messy bun that sat atop her head and shook her head, letting her wavy tresses cascade around her before she pulled her hair over her shoulder. Not a second later, a video chat request from Adrien Agreste popped up on her screen. She reached for her Bluetooth headphones at the end of the table, quickly linking them to her laptop before accepting the call.

“Hey there.” Marinette smiled as Adrien’s stream continued to load. She could hear movement, his webcam loading every few seconds with his black Agreste brand shirt clouding most of the view as he struggled with the USB port.

She couldn’t help but roll her eyes, a fond smiling pulling at the corners of her lips. With all the money this boy had, he had yet to invest in a monitor, desktop or laptop with a built-in webcam.

“Hey.” he grumbled, rustling around with his webcam before the video finally loaded. Marinette’s face fell the second she laid eyes on him, seeing his apprehensive expression as he fidgeted in his chair.

“What’s wrong?” She asked, shifting forward.

“N— nothing… Well, I— I mean…” Adrien cleared his throat, “Are you… are you positive about moving back?”

She sat straighter, turning her head to the side to hide her frown. She hadn’t expected that reaction. She thought he’d be happy she was returning. They’d be able to spend their last year of school together before heading off to University. That’s what they’d always pictured growing up, even talking about the possibility of it happening when she was over there last. She swallowed thickly, opening her mouth to speak. Adrien beat her to it.

“I— It isn’t because I— or Alya or Nino don’t want you here… Paris is… is dangerous now.”

Adrien sighed, leaning forward on the desk to pushing his hands through his hair. “I don’t want you in danger, Mari.”

“Ladybug is doing pretty well; from what I’m hearing.” Marinette commented back offhandedly, crossing her arms with a sneer. Adrien stayed silent on her screen. She looked from the corner of her eyes to see he was turned slightly in his chair, watching the view of the yellowing Parisian sky.

“I can’t wait to see that view again.” Marinette breathed out, the irritation leaving her body as she watched the clouds roll in the background. Adrien turned back to her with a raised brow. She smiled, “Don’t get me wrong, China’s sunset is definitely beautiful… but I don’t live near anywhere close enough to climb to just… watch it without something in the way.”

Her eyes moved back towards the view behind her friend, “I can’t wait to climb the Eiffel Tower.”

“I’ll take you.” He turned back to her, biting his lip. “A— a welcome home gift… of sorts. Wh— when are you moving back?”

“Two weeks.” She said, fingers gripping the hem of her shirt on her lap. “My parents sold the house this morning. We won’t be bringing everything, thankfully. We’re picking what we’re gonna sell and what we’re gonna send ahead of us tomorrow.”

“Just in time for summer break.” Adrien leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms with a playful smirk. “Someone was planning this.”
She stuck her tongue out at him, “It’s what’s kept me busy the past couple months. I’m… I’m sorry about the lack of communication, Adrien.”

“I understand.” His smirk only grew, sitting up completely in his chair and starting to flex his nonexistent muscles, “Honestly, Mari, I’m amazed you were able to stay away from me for so long.”

Marinette snorted, rolling her eyes. “Yes, like I could totally keep away from those limp noodles.”

He gasped, appalled, a hand resting over his chest while the other clamped around the edge of his desk, “Mari, you wound me.”

“You wanna see muscle, Agreste?” Marinette smirked, pulling her sleeve over her shoulder before flexing the muscles she’s worked hard for the past year. Training at her cousins Wu Kwan to get in shape for fighting crime was possibly the best decision she’d ever made. She was toned and ready for battle.

“What the fuck.” Adrien whispered, leaning forward to get a clearer look at Marinette’s muscular arm. “What the actual fuck.”

“I’m a badass.” Her smirk turned shit-eating as she rolled her sleeve back down.

“You could kiss my ass.” Adrien froze, Marinette watching Adrien’s tan skin turn a lovely shade of tomato red in amusement, “I— I meant— kick— not— not kiss— you could kick my ass— I... ahaaaaaa...” Adrien’s head fell into his open palms, sinking down off his chair and onto the ground. Marinette watched the chair slowly twirl as Adrien completely hid from her. She rolled her eyes, giggling.

He still got so flustered and tongue-tied around her. It was adorable and endearing, something that only started happening over phone calls the past couple years. She thought it was puberty, but maybe it was just Adrien being the dork he is.

“God,” Marinette laughed again, hiding her smile behind the back of her hand, “I’ve missed you, Adrien.”

Adrien’s eyes peered over the desk, looking up at the webcam. His green eyes kept switching between the screen and the webcam, the tips of his ears she could see were still tainted red. He went back under the desk before pushing himself back up in the chair and pulling himself to the desk.

“I can’t wait to hang out with everyone again.” Marinette continued, her smile only growing as she ran a hand through her hair, pushing it over to one side. Adrien gave Marinette a grin that reminded her of their childhood together, innocent, toothy and full of love. Except now he didn’t have any missing baby teeth, didn’t have a mud-covered face and a cookie in his outstretched hand. This smile was accompanied by a more mature, longer face, dimpled cheeks and acid green eyes that couldn’t mask pain as well as he thought he could. It made her heart swell with love and break with nostalgia at the same time. It was a feeling she couldn’t wait to be rid of. She’d be seeing him soon, be standing next to him and seeing the real Adrien Agreste once again.

They continued speaking for the next hour about what they could do during summer break, Adrien adamant on taking her to the top of the Eiffel Tower (multiple times if possible) to see the Parisian sunset she had missed so much. No matter how much she said she just needed to see it once, he insisted that they’d have a lot of sunsets to catch up on. Accompanied by hours of talking about their lives the past couple of years, telling him about China and her family, and him doing the same in-turn (he’d be speaking about Milan and America instead of China though).
Marinette added Alya and Nino to the call after Alya messaged her. She had to quickly pull her headphones off her ears when Alya screamed in delight after Marinette told them both the good news. Nino already sending Marinette links to the concerts he was going to be taking the others to this summer, demanding she’d come along too even if she didn’t like the bands or DJ’s.

“It’s been years since all of us have been together!” Nino exclaimed as she tried to remember the last time she had been invited to something. “You’re coming! I won’t take no for an answer and I’m positive neither will Alya.”

“Nope!” Alya chirped from her box on the screen, her hazel eyes already swimming with mischief. “Girl, we haven’t hung out since we were thirteen. We have so much catching up to do!”

“We do.” Adrien agreed, a small smile on his lips. “I won’t take no for an answer either, Marinette. If the tickets are sold out, I’ll use the Agreste name to get us one more.”

“I have amazing friends.” She declared with a wistful smile.

“Hell, yeah you do.” Alya said with a smirk. Alya and Nino left the conversation soon after. Alya having to help her mom with her younger siblings and Nino having homework to finish. Adrien and herself talked for a few more minutes before the weight of tiredness slowly set it. As much as Marinette wanted to continue to speak to her friend, her bed was calling to her. It was nearing 2 AM and she had to figure out what things she’s going to be selling in a couple hours.

She yawned, letting her head fall back as she covered her mouth.

“Sorry.” She mumbled tiredly, rubbing her eyes. “’ts gettin’ late.”

“Yeah.” Adrien agreed with a nod, looking over his shoulder at the dark sky. He returned his attention to her, “We’ll talk later?”

“Of course.” Marinette chirped, tiredly smiling at her computer screen like a complete dork. “We’ll be talking a lot more now, Adrien. I can’t wait to come home.”

“Me— me too. I… I can’t wait…” He rubbed the back of his neck, cheeks lightly tinted pink as he looked away bashfully. “I— I really can’t wait to see you again, Marinette. It’s been… too long.”

“It has, Adrien.” She sighed, leaning an elbow against the desk, resting her cheek in her palm while the other lightly feathered over Adrien on her screen. Memories of her last visit, though mostly filled with bad memories, brought a smile on her face. The way Adrien’s eyes lit up as he opened the door, the way he crushed her against him and swung her around, the way he pouted and had a small tantrum when she would refuse his offer to move in with his family so she didn’t have to go back to China. He hadn’t wanted her to leave him, and she didn’t want to either. Being home, even for just a week, had been enough to make her realize how much she missed everyone, missed Paris. Even if she hadn’t been chosen as a miraculous holder, even if she didn’t need to go back to Paris, she would have convinced her parents somehow to move back. Paris was her home, no matter what evil plagued the streets.

And it was because Paris was her home that she only felt more inclined to go and protect it. It made her physically ill whenever she read on the Ladyblog about what the akuma had done to Paris and what had been destroyed in the crossfire (even if it had been restored once Ladybug succeeded). Reading that Ladybug had been hurt, whether it be a wound that wouldn’t exist anymore once he concluded his miraculous cure or one that could show up in his civilian life, put her in a state of panic and pain and sheer terror.
Her mind always raced to the possible worst conclusions when he wasn’t spotted on his usually patrol the next night. Internal bleeding could have killed him, Le Papillon could have figured out his secret identity and taken his miraculous away.

What if his miraculous was taken away or he died because she was stuck here?

Plagg told her once that that was just how the miraculous’ worked sometimes. She could feel intense emotions such as pain, anger, even anxiety through the miraculous’ connection to each other. He never seemed to be interested, or willing, in expressing anything about her or Ladybug’s miraculous’. He only like expressing his love for camembert cheese and sleep, and he really loves expressing when he needed that stinky cheese. Marinette was lucky she found the perfect combination of soaps, perfumes and deodorant that kept the stink masked well enough on herself. At least living in a bakery again will help with the smell.

Marinette couldn’t wait to get back to her friends, the food, the fashion, the life, the beauty… She couldn’t wait to be back home.

Marinette’s eyes stared directly at the webcam — *directly at him* — as she spoke, “It really has.”

Two weeks had gone by slowly, but not slow enough for Adrien. He didn’t want the end of the two weeks to arrive, didn’t want Marinette to set foot back in Paris until it was safe. It broke his heart every time she spoke about how much she missed her home; little did she understand how much it has changed since Le Papillon arrived.

The two weeks were full of early morning conversations, texting during (and in-between) classes and (the usual for Ladybug) saving Paris from Le Papillon’s newest akuma’s. He struggled during these two weeks with the akuma’s; every akuma reminding him of Marinette and the possibly of her becoming one of Le Papillon’s victims. He’s fought against friends; he’s fought against enemies. He’s fought against people he’ll never meet and people he shouldn’t have ever met. But he doesn’t think he could fight against Marinette. Not if he knew it was her.

He would really love it if his counterpart would show up already — *wherever they were*. He already knew he wouldn’t be able to fight against Le Papillon without them. If he was being honestly, he was a bit cross with whoever owned the Black Cat Miraculous. The entire world knew about Ladybug, and Master Fu had assured him that the Black Cat Miraculous had an owner, but where the hell were they?

It’s been two years since he became Ladybug (a name he hadn’t a choice in picking, sadly). There was no possible way they hadn’t heard about him by now, right? That their kwami — Plagg, Tikki had mentioned — wouldn’t at least be pushing for them to get their ass to Paris? From Tikki’s description about Plagg’s personality, he doubted the kwami would be doing much to get his charge’s ass out into the fight.

The sudden annoying blare of a car horn threw him from his thoughts and being pulled back onto the sidewalk by his friend made him realize that spacing out in Paris in the middle of the day was a bad idea.

“Dude,” Nino let go of Adrien’s shoulder and looked his friend over, “you alright?”

“Hm? O— oh, yeah, totally! Just… just thinking.” Adrien sighed, running a hand through his hair before adjusting his bag on his shoulder.

“I bet.” Nino said with a playful smirk, looking across the street at the bakery/apartment building
Marinette was moving back into, “Marinette’s only an arm’s length away. Can’t imagine how nervous you are.”

“Y— yeah.” Adrien let out a breath, shifting from foot to foot as he stared at the bakery across the street. The bakery door was open, boxes sitting around the front with a moving truck tucked away in the small alley way between this building and the next. He could see two figures blurred, hidden behind dusty, grimy windows, moving around the front of the bakery and disappearing every so often to retrieve more boxes.

“Nervous.” He spoke through gritted teeth.

Nervous was an understatement.

He was petrified and anxious and he was pretty sure he was ready to have the biggest panic attack of his life yet. Marinette was going to see him and realize he was still a whiny rich boy who had been handed the gift of being in the fashion industry on a golden platter, that he had practically been given everything he ever wanted, and more, and hadn’t even had to lift a finger. She’d see shallowness and anxiety; she’d see the same twelve-year-old she cradled in her arms as he cried about his dead mom.

He stopped that train of thought with a hard pinch against his wrist, focusing his gaze on the bakery and the towering apartment above it. He still couldn’t believe how Marinette’s parents had lucked out on getting the same place Marinette grew up in—and the same place the bakery had been—, right across the street from his school.

Their school.

Marinette would be attending next year with him, Alya and Nino. She would be sitting with him in class. They would be sharing notes and textbooks, eating lunch together, be working together in group projects, be asking for help with Physics because she still doesn’t understand E=mc^2.

He remembered receiving a picture of her when she started being homeschooled, face planted into the physics book her private tutor had her working from with the words ‘what’s the equation for me not caring anymore?’

They had spent a solid hour on how the formula worked before Marinette realized she was using the wrong formula for the equation. He remembered doubling over in laughter and receiving a pouty-face emoji with Marinette telling him not to laugh. It only made him laugh more. Even with all the years apart from each other, they still knew each other. It was something Adrien hadn’t thought possible with them. He remembered holding onto Marinette at the age of nine, refusing to let go and pouting up at Mrs. Cheng and Mr. Dupain and demanding that they let him keep Marinette.

I think they took pictures, he thought with a slight blush, or was it a video?

“Dude!” Nino hand waved in the models face, pulling him — once again — from his thoughts. He friend motioned across the street, the pedestrian walk sign having turned green. Adrien mumbled a quick apology, face heating as his eyes flickered across the street, back at the bakery. He caught sight of Alya, going across the other crosswalk from the school, and waving towards them. Nino snorted, moving behind Adrien and giving him the push he needed to move forward.

“Dude, I know you’ve been crushing on Marinette since we were kids, but come on,” Nino grunted, pushing his friend one last time, causing them both to stagger into the street, “You’re almost seventeen dude, and so is she. You’re both sophisticated teenagers—”

“Nino—”
“Just ask her out, man.” Nino said, patting his shoulder, “What’s the worst that could happen?”

_Rejection_, Adrien thought bitterly, looking back towards the bakery as they made their way across the street.

Even though he said the words out loud multiple times, they didn’t seem real.

Marinette Dupain-Cheng was moving back to Paris.

Marinette Dupain-Cheng has moved back to Paris.

Marinette Dupain-Cheng was only fifty feet away, at most.

Marinette Dupain-Cheng was here.

Marinette Dupain-Cheng was home.

Marinette Dupain-Cheng.

He thought her name too much, it wasn’t even a word anymore, just a feeling. It was dread and anxiety and happiness and nostalgia. It was pistachio macarons, cookie dough ice cream and eclairs, hushed secrets, lava floors and blanket forts. It was passwords that changed constantly to keep the adults out and homemade Mac and Cheese. It was games where the rules always changed in his favor, it was comparing drawing in the middle of the night when they should have been sleeping, it was joint birthday parties and food fights.

It was her. It was home.

It was what he had wanted, what he had _craved_ for years.

He was just too afraid to tell her.

Alya gave him a soft, reassuring smile before grabbing his wrist and leading him towards the moving truck. He felt Tikki stir in his chest pocket, saw a small red blur zoom from his pocket to into his bag in a flash. He would have been worried that either Nino or Alya spotted her if not for the way his heart, mind and soul seemed to still be on the other side of the street. He couldn’t breathe, he couldn’t walk straight, what were words at this point.

He was a very unlucky man — the _unluckiest_ in the world.

The second Alya pulled him around the corner and into the alleyway, there Marinette was, a few boxes scattered around the alleyway as she piled them together. She stood, her back to them, before running the back of her hand over her forehead and letting out a long sigh, her shoulders sagging.

“I haven’t missed the heat.” Marinette mumbled to herself, turning towards them. She froze when she realized who stood across the alleyway, her eyes moving between the three before resting on Adrien. Very, very unlucky…

She was taller—oh dear _God_, so, _so_ tall; her legs went on for days. She was only a few inches shorter than himself, but taller than both Alya and Nino. Thighs thick and toned with muscle from her training, calves that would make even Hercules stare in awe, creamy skin peppered with the most beautiful constellation of freckles he’s ever seen. They grew darker and there were _so many more_ as his eyes trailed up further. The freckles against the pale skin on her arms were almost completely faded, a few darker freckles sat on her bare shoulders — her muscles looked even more intimidating.
I want her to kick my ass, Adrien thought and immediately regretted it, feeling his face heating up at the thought of Marinette straddling him as she gripped his shirt collar and smirked down at him. *It would be an honor to get my ass kicked by this woman.*

Marinette wore a fitted eggshell low-cut shirt that fell off her shoulders tucked into her dark magenta jean shorts, the hem of each short leg folded over and resting comfortably mid-thigh. Her shoes were a worn down pair of low-top sneakers, the laces a faded pink while the shoes were a scuffed up white.

Freckles dusted from one cheek to the other, darker on the bridge of her nose before fading under her blue-bell eyes. Her bangs cascaded over her left brow, a few strands out of place, and she had her hair in thick fishtail braid pigtails that rested over each shoulder. Her hair was the perfect mix of jet back and midnight blue, the reflection of the afternoon sun made the blue stand out against her lightly flushed skin.

“H… hi.” She meekly waved, a small, nervous smile on her face as she anxiously shifted from foot to foot. Her left hand hooked between her right upper arm and forearm, her right hand held up and fingers wiggling as Adrien continued to stare at her like she just grew three heads, a pair of horns and a tail. He hadn’t realized while his gaze was fixated on her that her parents had stepped out from the bakery and stood behind her with warm smiles.

*She is a mess.*

He took in her appearance once more, quicker and with a lot less staring in certain places before meeting her eyes. Her eyes were the bluest of blue he’d ever seen—and Tikki had some shining blue eyes as well. Her eyes shifted in blues, closer to the pupil he could see a nearly stormy blue, pastel and contrasted perfectly against her pupils; the next shade was a tantalizing shade of ocean blue, captivating him and pulling him in just like an ocean current; lastly was a brilliant shade of teal, fighting against the ocean of her eyes to mix perfectly around her iris.

*She is a Goddess.*

“Mari!” Alya couldn’t wait anymore, Adrien taking too long with his awkward gaze, screeching her best friend's name and tackling her to the ground. Marinette’s parents, thankfully, stepped off to each side as the girls fell to the ground.

*She is not the prepubescent teenage girl who he cuddled with all those years ago.*

Adrien blinked, looking down at the hugging friends before Nino suddenly jumped atop them both.

“Attack hug!” He watched as they all laughed, Nino wrestling under Alya to actually receive a hug from Marinette. He watched the three laughed and squeal, wrestle and play, and he just stood there.

Frozen, confused and tense, all he could think was: *What the hell happened? When the hell did this happen?*

“Adrien!” Marinette cried with laughter, the pile of teens having moved closer to him during their struggling to claim Marinette for themselves. She reached her hand out to him from under the pile of bodies, her eyes shining with playfulness as she wiggled her fingers towards him. “Save me!”

He ignored how the way she said his name caused his entire body to flush in favor of saving his friend. He grasped her hand, his entire body seeming to finally be put back together, but not in time...
to realize her actual plan. She pulled him down into the flurry of teenagers, having him crash atop of Alya and Nino, effectively knocking the wind out of all four teens.

“Totally… worth it…” Marinette said winded, coughing as the others moved off her, regaining their breath on their own little patching of concrete.

“Come you, you guys,” Sabine laughed at the teenagers as she stepped over Alya’s leg towards the moving truck, “help us bring in boxes and you’ll receive the best baked good in Paris!”

All four teens scrambled around, grabbing anything within reach — Adrien grabbing his messenger bag that had fallen from his shoulder in the scuffle — in hope of receiving the delicious treats Paris has been without for far too long.

Marinette huffed as she set the last box down in her room, falling to her knees to rest her head against the heated cardboard to catch her breath. She could hear the others downstairs helping her parents unpack the kitchen utensils and, thankfully, leaving her alone so she could catch a much needed breath. She figured that coming back home would be full of excitement and some much needed hugging, but she hadn’t had this much social interaction in months and she felt tired and anxious. Her mind raced and she itched to just get out of here, but she couldn’t. She hadn’t seen her friends for years and, as much as she wanted to leave, it would be rude and she wouldn’t be able to forgive herself. Plus, she kinda lived here now.

Marinette picked her head up, twisting her body to the side to sit next to the boxes before pushing herself against the wall. She pulled her knees to her chest, wrapping her arms around them and letting her head rest back against the wall. She took deep long breaths, eyes shut as she tried to control her emotions and racing thoughts. She needed to stay cool, at least until tonight. Tonight, she’d transform for the first time. It was something to look forward to. She didn’t know what she’d transform into, or who, and thinking about it and the possibility of meeting Ladybug only made the anxiety tightening in her chest worsen and her breathing become more labored.

“You alright, kid?” Plagg appeared before her, resting on her knee with his worried gaze stuck on his charge’s panicked face.

“N— no,” she hiccuped before taking a sharp breath, “yes. Maybe?”

Okay, okay,” the kwami rose from his perch, eyes scanning the room for an out, as Marinette covered her mouth to cover a small sob, “then let’s just—”

“Mari?”

Plagg quickly zoomed into the box resting at Marinette’s side. Marinette quickly wiped away the oncoming tears and forced a smile on her face before Adrien’s head popped up through the open trap door.

“A— Adrien,” she choked out, cringing at the sound of her voice, “uh, w— what’s up?”

She felt transparent under his gaze, like he could see exactly what she had been thinking. Including the guilt that decided to weigh down on her when she saw Adrien frown. She bit her lip, turning her head away from Adrien when he looked away, down the stairs. Her finger anxiously twisted her miraculous around her finger, her eyes screwing shut to keep the tears from falling.

The trap door shut a moment later, Marinette expecting Adrien to be on the other side of it, leaving with Alya and Nino and never coming back because who wanted a friend that got an anxiety attack when they’re supposed to be happy about seeing everyone again.
Instead, she felt Adrien poke her leg as he sat in front of her. She looked at him through her lashes, the edges of her eyes holding unshed tears. Adrien looked away with flushed cheeks before hardening his gaze and turning back to her, his tone soft and genuine.

“Let’s get out of here.”

She couldn’t seem to do anything but nod her head and allow Adrien pull her to her feet. She reached into the box to retrieve Plagg and a purse after Adrien left to tell the others they were going to go for a small walk. Plagg shot a look towards the trap door, hovering in the air as Marinette searched through a few boxes for a purse. She knew she had placed one in one of the boxes labeled *Mari’s clothes*, she hadn’t realized until now how many boxes had that label scribbled over the cardboard sides.

Plagg’s ears flattening against his head as he crossed his arms, eyes narrowing at the trap door as Marinette found her purse.

“Come on, Plagg.” She whispered, opening the flap of the small bag for her kwami. Plagg turned to her, opening his mouth to speak but she cut him off.

“I’ll buy you a wheel of camembert on our way back but please, Plagg,” she shut her eyes when she heard her voice crack, “I… I need to get out of here.”

Plagg flew into her purse, curling up against the soft material, “Lemme know if you need me to scare him off, kid.”

Marinette couldn’t help but giggled, “I will. Thank you, Plagg.”

“Let’s *not* make a habit of this.” Plagg mumbled as Marinette shut her purse. Adrien appeared a moment later with a smile and a single key.

“Your parents wanted me to give you this, for when we get back.” Adrien handed the key to her before moving back towards the trap down.

“W— wait!” Marinette squeaked, raising her arm. “Where are we even going?”

“That’s a surprise.” He said with a teasing smile over his shoulder.

“**Wow.**” Marinette breathed next to Adrien as they watched the sun set from the top platform of the Eiffel Tower. Adrien leaned his shoulder against the cage around the top floor, crossing his arms and watching the sky change colors around them as the sun fell. Marinette still held the medium cup of ice cream in her palm, even though the ice cream had long since melted.

On their way to the Eiffel Tower, Adrien pulled them into an ice cream shop his mother used to treat them to. They even ordered the same thing and used to dino-kiddy spoons. They sat for a while and ate, Adrien asked a few questions about China and her training, her asking about his father and a few of the bands they were going to be seeing during the summer. It had been an hour before the two left the parlor, with Marinette going back for seconds just before leaving.

She had turned back towards the bakery and expressed confusion when Adrien hadn’t followed. He just smirked and grabbed her hand, pulling her the other way and towards the Eiffel Tower. He wouldn’t be able to express the way he felt when as he watched Marinette's eyes widen and shine with happiness when the Eiffel Tower came into view.

“This is just…” Marinette smiled around the dino-spoon sticking out between her lips. “**Wow.**”
Cliché after cliché swam through Adrien’s head as he stared at Marinette taking in the scenery. As long as he didn’t say any of them out loud, he embraced them.

**Truly beautiful.**

And he agreed as he continued to stare at Marinette, that everything about this scene was truly beautiful and perfect. Purple dinosaur spoon sticking out between her plump cherry colored lips, ocean blue eyes reflecting perfectly against the setting sun. Her skin glowed and her freckles seemed to glitter as she scrunched her eyes when she stared directly at the sun.

He couldn’t help but laugh, “You aren’t supposed to look directly at it, Mari.” She pulled the spoon out of her mouth to stuck her tongue out at him, stretching her arm to set down her melted cup of ice cream on the little platform between her and the cage. She set her spoon in the cup before turning to him with a small smile.

“Thank you for this,” she placed her hands behind her back, turning her head to look back towards the sunset, “I… I felt like I was suffocating back there. I haven’t been around anyone else but my family really since I decided to be home schooled. The friends I had made were quick to forget me and, well…” She turned her body towards the sunset and bit her lip, her eyes glued to the ground. Adrien caught a glimpse of the silver ring on her right ring finger, he watched as she twirled it around her finger nervously. His own hand came up to lightly fidget with one of his earrings, his own nervous habit.

“I’m sorry.” She finished with a bow of her head. He understood Marinette’s situation all too well; which might be a good thing. He could help her when she need to run. Whether it be to distract the others or to be the one to help her escape, he’d be there for her. He wished someone had been able to be there when he had his own attacks. His hand fell from his earring before he pushed himself off the cage.

“Mari, you… you shouldn’t apologize for something like that.” Adrien stepped towards her, a hand coming up to rub the back of his neck.

She tilted her head to look up at him with a confused expression. “But I shouldn’t be anxious or nervous about being with you guys again. Y—you’re my friends—”

“And as your friend, I’m telling you this,” he removed his hand from his neck to place on her shoulder, “You don’t need to hide yourself from me, Marinette. I won’t judge you for being you.”

She stared up at him in awe, and for a second he thought she might not have remember her telling him the same exact words when he was younger, but that feeling quickly vanished the second her lips formed into a bright, glowing smile that made him forget to breathe. The smile seemed to reach further than her eyes, her entire body radiating relief and happiness as she wrapped her arms around his waist and nuzzled her forehead against his neck.

“Thank you, Adrien.” Her voice was muffled against his shirt, but he heard it. Loud and clear he heard the small hiccup and heard the small, humorless laugh that escaped her lips before he felt the wetness of her tears against his neck. She only held on tighter after he wrapped his own arms around her.

He watched the area around them cautiously, watching as the few others on this level were also in their own world, oblivious to what was going on around them. Adrien continued to scan the area, a sense of dread sitting in the pit of his stomach. He was waiting for that little black butterfly that liked to ruin everything.
He felt Marinette sniffle against his chest and his stomach sank.

He knew— he just... he knew Marinette was going to be akumatized. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but she was.

*Everyone was.*

He held onto her tighter, resting his chin against the top of her head as he shut his eyes.

He needed to protect her but he really didn’t want to think about that right now, not when it was all he obsessed about for the past two weeks. Right now, Marinette was in his arms and she was herself. She was scared and relieved, anxious and calm, but she was herself; she would stay that way if he had his way.

“I’m sorry,” Marinette said, pulling back from Adrien to wipe her eyes. She frowned at the small wet spot she’d caused to appear on his teal shirt. “I don’t think this is what you had in mind when we’d meet again.”

“I— I— It's o— okay.” Adrien swallowed, feeling the nervousness set in as Marinette continued to stare up at him with worried eyes. “I— I’m just glad y— you— you’re okay, Mari.”

*Smooth, Agreste, Adrien thought with a cringe, so smooth.*

Marinette smiled, pressing her forehead against his neck again.

“Thank you.” She mumbled, turning her head to stare back out at the setting sun, “Thank you for this.”

“A— anytime, Mari.” He mumbled, pressing his lips against her hair before looking out at the sunset with her. “Anytime.”

Marinette sat in her furniture bare room atop the little cot she made in her loft out of a couple of fluffy blankets and pillows her family had packed away for the move. She stared down at her miraculous, twisting it around her finger nervously as Plagg sat on her knee with an amused expression.

She had recently received an update from the Ladyblog that Ladybug had been spotted a few minutes ago, starting his usual patrol around Paris. She hadn’t realized how close his patrol start was near the bakery until now. It was safe to at least wait three minutes before transforming. He would be arriving on her street once her alarm went off, and by time she transformed he's be only a few rooftops away.

Her parents had fallen asleep hours ago, before she had even returned back home with Adrien. Alya and Nino having left an hour after they had with a basket of sugar cookies from her parents for their hard work. She had offered for him to come in, but he politely declined, saying she should be going to sleep as well. She had a lot to do tomorrow after all.

Her phone alarm went off, pulling her from her thoughts and signaling that the three minutes were up. Ladybug wasn't far. Marinette's gut twisted in both nervousness and excitement at the thought.

*Soon.*

Marinette took a shaky breath, Plagg pushing himself off her knee and slowly ascending as his charge stood. She met her kwami’s acid green eyes in the darkened room, her lips breaking into a large, excited and playful grin as she spoke the magic words she's been waiting to say aloud for two
years.
“Plagg… Claws out!”

Adrien glanced down at Marinette's window, wondering if he should stop in and say 'hello' as Ladybug, maybe welcome her to the neighborhood. But as soon as that thought came up he threw it away. Who knows if Le Papillon was watching him at this very moment. Besides, Marinette should be sleeping not talking to men wearing spotted spandex in the middle of the night.

He shook his head, taking another running start to jump over to the next building.

Adrien stumbled as he made his landing on the next roof, clutching his head as a powerful force of something send a bolt of electricity through his system. He pressed his head to the cold surface of a nearby chimney as he ground his teeth together, hissing as the electricity left his body and left him breathless. He felt Tikki stir in his earrings, could hear something in the back of his mind speaking.

They're here, Adrien!

His eyes widened, pushing himself off the chimney and climbing to the top as Tikki’s voice echoed in his mind again.

The Black Cat Miraculous has been activated!

He stood at the top of the chimney, scanning the darkened rooftops and streets before his gaze fell on a darkened figure that stood on the roof he had just jumped off of. He saw the glowing blue eyes of the Cat Miraculous holder and he felt a chill run down his spine.

“It’s… it’s them…”
Chapter Notes

I am 100% sure there are A LOT of typo's and grammatical errors in this chapter, but I need to get ready for my final in a couple hours. I wanted to get this up because from tonight to Thursday night I am going to be swamped with finals. I will be editing it during that time, fixing the mistakes and such. I hope you all enjoy :3 Oh! And there is fanart! (by me - i suck) Fanart of Marinette and Plagg :3

Marinette awoke in the morning to the same feeling she had fallen asleep last night to: humiliation. Plagg hadn’t helped much at keeping that feeling away either. Smirking at her over his wheel of cheese and making puns about her ‘high-tailing’ it back to her room after spotting the spotted superhero. Marinette moaned, pulling the pillow Plagg was lying on out from under him to smother him with. Not like it even did anything, stupid kwami could phase through anything. She felt Plagg rest in-between her shoulder blades and could smell that damn **disgusting** cheese even through the pillow she had her face stuffed on top of.

“You aren’t the first cowardly kitten I’ve had that ran away with their tail between their legs when meeting their lady luck, ya know.”

“So you’ve said.” The pillow muffled Marinette’s voice. She cried out dramatically, the pillow she had been using to smother Plagg being thrown over the back of her head. “I can’t show my face to him again.”

“Ladybug’s don’t see well in the dark,” Plagg chuckled fondly, “doubt he saw much.”

“Ughn…”

“You’re gonna have to see him, kitten. He needs you, you need him.” Plagg said gulping down the last of the Camembert Marinette brought up for him. “Yin and Yang and all that bologna.”

Marinette grumbled at Plagg through the pillow, her kwami ignoring her grumbling to lightly pat against the bare patch of skin sticking out between her shirt and the pillow. “Kid: it’s **alright.** I’m sure Tikki is telling Manbug the same thing. This has happened before; we’re used to it.”

Marinette turned her head, peeking out from under the pillow. “It’s… it’s **okay**?”

“Yeah, to-ta-llly.” He nodded with a shrug. “**Extremely** embarrassing, but okay.” He looked over at Marinette, her face contorted mid-grimace as she stared at Plagg. She looked nervous and scared and mortified, something Plagg has seen all too much on his charge’s (past and present) face. He sighed, pushing himself off her back to float over to her face. Setting himself down on the part of the pillow that Marinette hadn’t smothered herself against, he swatted her nose.

“We’ll try again tonight.” He crossed one arm over his torso, leaning his elbow on his arm before resting his cheek against his paw. “We’ll leave early, be out there before he is and you’ll be waiting for him all dramatically with your hair and tail blowing in the wind, baton at the ready and a smile that’ll **finally** make a bug fall for a cat.”
“I didn’t take you for a romantic, Plagg.” Marinette eyed Plagg through her bangs and giggled, the kwami quickly cleared his throat and pushing himself off the pillow.

“Yo— you can do this, kitten,” he said crossing his arms with a small wink towards his charge before his face fell back to seriousness, “but only if you bring me more Camembert.”

She couldn’t help but snort at her kwami, kicking the sheets off her body she laughed, “Okay. Let’s get you more Camembert.”

Adrien stood in front of the windows in his room, clad in dark blue PJ pants and a too-large white tank top. His glowing emerald eyes stared tiredly out at the blue morning sky. Tikki silently munched on the sugar cookies Marinette had thrown at him as he left the bakery last night on his bed behind him, watching her charge with worried eyes. Adrien could feel the tiny God’s gaze on him. With a frown he crossed his arms, shoulders sagging with tiredness.

After spending the rest of the night searching for this mysterious Black Cat and coming up empty handed, the spotted superhero had returned home. He was too tired, too frustrated, too damn irritated to listen to Tikki’s reasoning behind Ladybug’s counterpart running away from him. She said it was normal as he threw himself in the shower, said it’s happened before as he dressed and brushed his teeth, told five stories of how her own holders ran away from Black Cat when they met for the first time.

“She hasn’t transformed before, Adrien. You both were awakened at extremely different times; you awakened two years ago, she just last night! That hasn’t happened with any previous Ladybug or Black Cat miraculous holders before.” The kwami had floated around his head an hour before, trying for the last time to get her charge to understand how Black Cat could be feeling. “She’s overwhelmed. Ladybug’s been around for two years, taking care of akuma’s and protecting Paris while Black Cat’s been trying to get here. You’re both out of sync. She’s probably terrified that you’re going to yell at her or tell her that you don’t need her—”

“I do need her.” He shot a look at Tikki that made the kwami flinch back. “I wasn’t going to yell or tell her to leave. I may be cross that she chose to appear now instead of two years ago when I needed her, but she’s here now and… and she ran.”

He turned back to the window. “…I don’t want another person in my life like that.”

“Maybe… maybe she’s like Marinette.” The kwami said softly, and with hesitation, as she floated towards Adrien’s bed. That struck a cord with the model, hardening his gaze at the sky and refusing to acknowledge the comparison aloud.

“Marinette left for years—”

“Not because she wanted to, Tikki.” Adrien hissed, shooting a glance over his shoulder towards his kwami. The god fell silent, frowning towards Adrien as she grabbed her first cookie.

From what he remembered of Marinette when they were younger was that she stood up for herself, didn’t back down from a challenge and didn’t run. She’s stared down bullies and eaten mud on dares; she was someone who refused to swallow her pride unless it put someone else in danger.

But that was 9-year-old Marinette.

What was 17-year-old Marinette like?

She still held the same qualities, from what little he knew. She was still headstrong and stubborn,
kind and compassionate. Still prideful and strong, selfless and funny, but she was older. She had been out in the world and learned what being frightened meant. She had anxiety attacks and meltdowns, she doubted herself and, some days, had little to no self-confidence in herself and her art; she was a teenager that, much like him, was just trying to get by.

And yesterday, Marinette’s anxiety had caused her to run. He had run away like that before because of his own anxiety; many, many times he’s ran away.

But never as Ladybug.

When he transformed for the first time he felt free, rejuvenated and renewed. He felt like he had just been reborn into another life; he felt unstoppable! He wasn’t scared for a change, wasn’t a nervous wreck when staring down an akuma. He won and he won and he punched and kicked; he fought like he had been made for this.

Every time he transformed, he was better.

He could do better.

He did better.

Ladybug gave him the courage to do more than Adrien ever could.

Shouldn’t the Black Cat Miraculous do the same to its wearer?

Adrien sighed, his shoulders slumping in defeat. “I don’t get it, Tikki. I’m sorry. I just…” He heard a small, disappointed sigh escape past his kwami’s lips, and that was it.

Marinette struggled to keep her eyes open as she stared down at her food. Her cheek resting in her palm as she poked and prodded at her food with her fork. Her parents chatted between themselves, looking down at a catalogue between their own plates of food. Marinette stole a glance at her purse resting on her lap, smiling as a small wrapper poked out of her bag and pressed against her stomach. She could hear her kwami’s voice in her head as she quickly picked up the few pieces of cheese left on her plate and dropped them on her lap. Her kwami hauled them into her purse just as Marinette’s parents decided on their own furniture set.

The family had been going from store-to-store since 9 AM. Marinette having already picked out her own set of furniture and bathroom set while her parents continued to find something wrong with every single set they came across. It was now 4 PM, the family sitting down for a late lunch/early dinner at a small café near Le Grand Paris. Marinette wasn’t hungry, but humored her parents by ordering at least a salad covered with a different assortment of cheeses for her hidden companion. She nibbled at the lettuce as her parents tore through catalogue after catalogue of the stores they had visited throughout the day. Her kwami expressing his displeasure of the situation on more than one occasion, Marinette found herself silently agreeing every time she caught his eye during their silent conversations. Her parents had loved the bedroom set they had back in China, even shipped the bed beforehand and slept on the couch the last couple of days in their old home, but now they couldn’t find a set that matched the bed perfectly.

The fashion designer inside understood this predicament, but the 16- year-old teenager just wanted to crawl back into the mass assortments of blankets she threw together in her loft and come up with a plan to meet Ladybug tonight and not wuss out like she had last night. She had thought on it as she silently snuck food to Plagg, thinking that she may take his advice and transform before Ladybug did his usual patrol. Have him find her instead and be as far as the bakery as possible so she couldn’t
retreat the second doubt and self-pity started to set it again.

It seemed like the best option to her so far.

Transforming after she knew where Ladybug had landed and was headed wasn’t something she could do again. She’s run with her newfound tail between her legs, her leather cat ears pressed against her wind-tousled hair and Plagg’s irritated voice in her mind yelling at her to go back — again.

Marinette silently groaned, setting her fork down to cradling her face in her palms.

She hadn’t eaten since last night, but even then she felt like she was able to lose all the contents left in her stomach from the nauseous filled anxiety that pounding against her head. Her skin covered in a thin layer of sweat from the heated summer afternoon but she felt nothing but bone-chilling dread. She would have thought it was winter if not for her outfit. No one wears short-shorts in Parisian winters, not if they wanted to live at least.

“Honey?” Marinette picked her head up at her mother’s voice, forcing a smile on her face.

“Yes, *maman*?”

“Are you alright dear?” Sabine’s gaze softened as she took in her daughter’s appearance, “You’re pale and you’ve barely eaten.”

Marinette chewed on her bottom lip, cheeks flush, “I— I’m fine! Promise! Just… just…” Marinette’s gaze turned towards the busy street, eyes catching every car that flew by, every person, piece of clothing—*every step, every cough, every crunched paper, sneeze, whisper, laugh, clap*—

“Mrs. Cheng! Mr. Dupain!”

Marinette’s head whirled around a little too quickly for her liking, catching Alya walking up towards their small table while pocketing her phone. Marinette swallowed, looking down at her purse in hopes of seeing the little feline. Plagg’s head stuck out from her purse for only a moment, he let out a small breath; ‘breathe’ he mouthed before hiding back in her purse. She nodded, smiling at Alya as she stopped next to the table.

“Marinette.” Her friend gave her a small smile, “Are you feeling better?”

“I— I am. Thank you.” Marinette rubbed the back of her neck with a nervous smile. “I’m sorry about yesterday. I—”

“Please, girl,” Alya placed a hand on her friend’s shoulder, lightly squeezing it as she continued, “you don’t need to apologize. I get it. *I’m sorry*.” Marinette quickly stood, pulling her friend into a hug.

She mumbled with a smile, “Don’t apologize.”

Alya laughed, returning the hug, “Only if you don’t.”

“Deal.” The best friends laughed as they pulled away from each other.

“Alya,” Sabine smiled knowingly towards the teens, “Please, come join us!”

“Thank you!” Alya chirped with a smile, grabbing a chair from an empty table as Marinette sat back down in hers. She quickly picked up the purse that fell from her lap, mouthing a small apology to
“Plagg as he glared up at her.

“What are you doing here?” Her mother asked as the check for the families arrived.

“I just finished helping my mom with some errands for the dinner shift tonight at Le Grand.” Alya said as she slid into her chair next to Mari, “I was actually just about to call Marinette when I spotted you.” Alya turned to her friend. “Nino is having a small ‘welcome back, Mari’ party for you—”


“Nothing big!” Alya quickly added, placing her hand atop of Mari’s, “Just me, you, the boys and a much needed day at the arcade. Adrien’s paying for all the tokens, Nino is paying for the food and drinks and I am to bring the guest of honor to the event.”

Marinette’s panicked face faded, relief flooded through her veins and a smile pulled at her lips.

“We can leave any time you want if things get, like… too much,” Alya squeezed her hand, smiling fondly at her friend, “No judgement and no pressure. We just want you to have some fun, Mari.” Marinette pulled her friend into an awkward one-armed hug before looking over at her parents with a pleading gaze, pouted lips and puppy-dog eyes.

Her father laughed. “Just be back before midnight.” Marinette stood, strapping her purse on and moving over to her parents to give them a hug before departing.

“I’ll call you when I’m heading home.” Marinette said after she let her parents go, Alya standing and pushing both their chairs in.

“Have fun, sweetheart.” Tom ruffled Marinette’s hair, her fishtail twin-braids loosening more under her father’s large hand.

“Papa!” Mari laughed, pushing her father’s hand away. “I’ll see you guys later! Thank you!” Marinette grabbed Alya’s hand and sprinted away before her parents could reply. Marinette let go of her friend’s hand once they rounded the corner of the café, already a few feet ahead of her shorter friend when she called out to her.

“Hey, Mari, wait up!”

“H— hey! I said wait up!” Ladybug yelled after Marinette as she jumped from rooftop to rooftop, heartbeat pounding in her ears as she moved quicker and faster than she previously had to reach the spotted superhero—

Marinette sputtered as Alya pulled her back onto the sidewalk, her daydreaming having kept her from realizing she had stepped into a busy street. Her friend hunched over, panting after having pulled her friend back from an oncoming car. Marinette swallowed thickly, looking towards the car as it zoomed past the two teens without even slowing down. Marinette glared towards the back of the car as it disappeared before turning back towards Alya with a worried smile.

“T— thank you, Alya. I— I— I—”

“N— no problem.” Alya stood, smiling at her friend, “Just… don’t do that again. Please? Adrien would kill me.”

“Deal.” Marinette’s cringed with a nod, looking back towards the street and ultimately ignoring the ending comment from her friend. That hadn’t happened before; she never became completely unaware of her surroundings like that, ever. It worried her. Marinette chewed on the inside of her
cheek, fidgeting with her miraculous while shifting slowly from foot to foot.

*What was that?*

“Now. I… I wanted to ask you,” the teen panted as she pulled her phone out from her back pocket, “does… does think look *fake*?” Marinette waited as Alya pulled up the photo, pushing the phone into her friends expecting hands. Marinette’s shoulders tensed, eyes trailing over the picture.

It was from last night.

*Last night, Marinette thought with a slight frown, the first night I transformed, met Ladybug and became known as ‘cowardly kitten’ to the mini-god cat I’d hiding in my purse.*

Someone had caught her and Ladybug before the spotted hero chased her across at least half of Paris’ rooftops. Where they had stood opposite of each other, weapons drawn and apprehensive eyes. His eyes, greener then even the most polished emerald, gleaming in the moonlight as they trailed over her figure with caution. His yo-yo spinning at his side, ready to be used.

She swallowed, her phantom tail coiling around her thigh just as her actual tail had the previous night, her gut twisting as the picture on the screen came alive.

*Marinette swallowed, her tail winding around her thigh, her grip tightening around her baton as Ladybug met her gaze. The two stood at different heights, and although Marinette was on a higher level she felt herself shrinking under his glowing green eyes. She felt her stomach twist, the confidence she just had shattering as Ladybug jumped down onto the roof, pulling his yo-yo off his waist—*

“I know Photoshop is like second nature to you,” Alya used her index and middle finger to zoom onto the leather clad woman on the opposite roof of the spotted-spandex hero, “so I hoped…”

Marinette’s gaze fell over her costume, taking in every bit that she could see on the small screen. She hadn’t had much time to marvel over her costume the night before, too excited to finally meet her counterpart face-to-face. Now, with perfect clarity and no timer, she took in every color, curve and accessory she dares.

It was sleek and black, she remembered it clung to her body comfortably, felt like an extension of herself, another layer of skin—tougher and rough. A thick scarf tied around her waist, flowing behind her as a tail. A golden or silver bell hung loosely against her collarbone, a pocket zipper rested on her waist (and she assumed another zipper was on the other side). The leather on her shoulders were a glossy black, the gloss moving to her chest and dipping into a V, the gloss descending down her arms and disappearing under her cuffs. Leather black cuffs wound around her wrists, her gloves the same texture and color.

Her legs were covered in the same leather as the rest of her body, the sides of her thighs the same glossy black as her shoulders and arms. She held her weapon in her right palm, the moons light reflecting off the silver metal, the baton extended to the size of the staves she’d grown accustom to using at her cousins Wu Kwan. A neon green paw print glowed at the top of her baton, two rings of the same color at the edges of the weapon. Her shoes were clunky, metal plating around the toes and the heel. She remembered catching a glimpse of a small silver paw print against the soles of her shoes. Her hair was out of its usual fishtail braids; free of any hair ties, falling over her shoulders in a flurry of wavy midnight blue tresses. Her bangs swept to the left, just as they did in her civilian life, and the upper portion of her face was covered with a mask much like Ladybug’s though a few inches larger. Her cheeks were nearly covered, forehead invisible because of her hair. Cat ears, tall and sleek, stood proudly on her head, clipping into her hair.
What she hadn’t known about, and probably wouldn’t have until seeing her reflection or a photograph of herself, were that her eyes weren’t hers. Well, they were, they were still blue and bright, still had the little bits of teal she’d grown to love circling the edges of her iris’ but now they expanded into her sclera. Her normal blue human eyes had transformed completely into cat eyes. Her pupils now slit, blown wide in the darkness to help with her vision. Her eyes shift from a deep ocean blue to a crystal blue and glowed.

But cat eyes do that! Right? It isn’t weird that my eyes are glowing— nope! Not at all! None of this is weird to begin with— oh, God, get a grip, Mari! Don’t freak out in front of Alya… again!

She looked at Alya out of the corner of her eye, watching her friend’s lips purse as she looked down at the phone.

“Are people regularly out with high quality camera’s in the middle of the night around here?” Marinette joked, her lips quirking as Alya stole the phone back from her with playful eyes.

“Just the weirdo’s.” She laughed, looking back down at her phone. “I’m… I’m just excited. You already know I’m dead set on Ladybug — but imagine if this hero is his partner! When Le Papillon showed up two years ago, he was peeved to only see Ladybug, even talking about the other Miraculous holder… this could be them, Marinette!”

The two teens started walking again, heading towards the park as Alya continued to gush about the possibility that whomever this is is the other miraculous holder. Marinette listened intently, mentally taking note of how Alya seemed so… headstrong on finding out who this superhero was and — already — talking about how she’d prove who stood behind the mask. Fear sat at the pit of Marinette’s stomach, her steps slowing as her thoughts drifted to Alya finding out about her alter ego. Would she be pissed?

If she did find out, would she still post it on the blog and expose one of her best friends to the world? Would she willingly throw Marinette, her friends and her family under the bus just to get a scoop?

Le Papillon would do anything to find out who Ladybug and… whomever she was going to be identities to get their miraculous’… would Alya allow that if it turned out one of her childhood friends was in danger?

Marinette forced the questions from her mind as they arrived at the park, her fingers continuing to fidget with her ring as Alya continued speaking about her ‘master plan’ to debunk the superheroes.

“Honestly,” Alya started with a sigh, looking back down at the photo, “I’ve already come so close to finding out who Ladybug was, but he’s ten steps ahead of me. Every piece of evidence either disappears overnight, a little red gum wrapper with a drawing of a Ladybug left where I had the evidence, or the documents on my computer become corrupt — even my back-up copies once I try opening them!” Alya groaned, frustrated.

Marinette pursed her lips, taking note that maybe Ladybug had a bit of hacking skills under his wings (stupid puns) as she caught sight of the photoshoot at the fountain. Alya ventured ahead, deeper into the park as Marinette slowed to a complete stop. Adrien twirled a pair of dark grey Gabriel Aviators around as he walked around the fountain platform, waiting for the photoshoot to continue. Two female models and one male sat on the ground, leaning back on the fountain and scrolling through their phones while shooting comments towards Adrien over their shoulder. Adrien quickly twirled on one foot, biting down on one of the temple tips of his sunglasses to crack his knuckles. He stilled, catching Marinette’s eyes across the field.
Marinette gripped the strap of her purse, waving towards her friend with a shy, bright smile and hunched shoulders. Adrien turned to the other models, throwing his glasses towards the other male model before jumping off the fountain and jogging towards her. He stopped a few steps away from her, a nervous smile on his face as he looked her over.

“H— hi.” Adrien’s coughed nervously, his fingers moved to fidget with his right earring.

Marinette giggled, placing her hands behind her back, “Hi.”

“Hey.” His hands dived quickly into his pockets, his cheeks flushing at the sound of his high pitched voice. Marinette covered her laugh behind her hand.

“Hi, Adrien.”

“Hi, Marinette.” A bashful smile appeared on his lips. Marinette tucked some hair behind her ear, staring at the ground with slowly heating cheeks before being pulling into a hug.


If it was even possible, this hug was better than the entire teenage pile of hugs she received when she’d arrived yesterday. She felt something in her stomach drop as Adrien’s arms started to loosened around her. Marinette quickly wound her arms around Adrien’s waist and nuzzling her forehead against his neck. She froze for a millisecond, feeling Adrien tense against her before his arms tightened back around her. He let out a breath, silently chuckling and resting his chin atop her head.

Don’t let go, Marinette thought, shutting her eyes and taking a deep breath, not yet.

Every single worry, doubt, terrifying thought of what could possibly happen tonight left her body as she melted against Adrien. He smelt citrusy, a mix of lemon and ginger, coconut and sandalwood. All she could focus on was him and she became mildly peeved when the photographer yelled at Adrien.

The teens let out a breath they hadn’t realized they were holding at the same time, a same curse leaving their lips as they parted.

“So, I’ll— uh,” Adrien shoot a look over his shoulder towards the fountain, the male model making kissy faces towards the teens, “see you… afterrr? For the arcade, right?”

“Definitely.” Marinette smirked, leaning to the side to raise a brow at the other model. “Thank you again for this. I—”

“You don’t need to thank me, Marinette.” Adrien smiled bashfully, shrugging a shoulder nonchalant. “I just want to make up for yesterday—”

“What?” Marinette attention snapped back to her friend, “But you didn’t—?”

“Agreste!” The photographer called out to him. “I don’t need your father coming down and breathing fire! Get your butt over here!”

“Yeah, yeah! just—” Adrien groaned, running a hand through his hair before looking back at Marinette. “I’ll, um… I’ll be done soon. I…?”

“Agreste!”

“You should go,” Marinette motioned with her head towards the photoshoot, “rather not have you
burned to ashes by your ‘fire breathing’ father before we go out.”

…”

“Wait— what?” Adrien squeaked, wide-eyed and blush rivaling Marinette’s beet red face.

She stammered, “I— I— I— um— I— sor—”

“Agreste!”

“Yes! Coming! N— now!” Adrien yelled back, shooting Marinette a panicked gaze before running off. Marinette cradled her head in her palms as Adrien ran back to the shoot.

“You,” Plagg started, head sticking out of her purse to smirk at Adrien’s retreating form before looking up at his charge, “are a wreck.”

“Thank you for your lovely observation, Plagg.”

“No problem, kitten.”

Marinette sighed, tugging on her braids as she made her way towards the bench at the edge of the park where Nino and Alya sat. Alya was showing Nino the same picture she showed her, asking the same questions and seeking his own opinion on the matter.

“I think it’d be awesome if another superhero showed up.” Nino shrugged, pocketing his own phone and taking hold of his girlfriends. He adjusted his glasses as Marinette sat down, zooming in on the masked feline-superhero. Nino let out a low impressed whistle before getting the phone snatched from his hands.

“Nice costume.” Was all he commented, leaning back on the bench and stretching his arms on the backs behind the girls.

“So, Marinette,” Alya stuck her tongue out a Nino, resting her phone on her thigh before focusing on her friend, “what was it like in China? Nice schools? People? Friends—”

“Lovers?” Nino turned his head to Marinette and wiggled his eyebrows before getting a nice slap to the back of the head.

“Way to be discreet, Nino.” Alya hissed between her clenched teeth, offering a quick apology to Marinette. Marinette snickered, leaning back on the bench and nudging Nino with her elbow.

“You interested, hot stuff?” Marinette nudged his side again playfully, laughing as Nino’s face flared bright red, embarrassed. “I mean, I’m sure Alya wouldn’t mind if she could tag in too.”

“What? No— I— I—… no!” Nino sputtered. Both the girls besides the teen laughed, fist-bumping over him.

“Relax, Nino,” Marinette chuckled, settling back against the bench while crossing one leg over the other, “China was crowded, I felt smothered and cornered. School was… alright, I guess. Friends…”

Marinette sighed, “I made a few, but we’re aren’t friends anymore… and ‘lovers’, well—” Marinette looked towards the photoshoot as the photographer called the shoot to a wrap. She watched as Adrien jumped down from the fountain platform, already pulling off the Gabriel brand over shirt as he made his way to the medium-sized tent on the edge of the photoshoot. The grey, longed sleeved round collar shirt he wore hung loosely on his torso, a small patch stuck to his back from the heat.
The model pulled his shirt up (unknowing he had a small audience), wiping the sweat from the summer heat off his brow. Marinette’s eyes skimmed over Adrien’s abdomen, pleasantly surprised at the muscle the model was hiding.

She felt her cheeks heat up before Adrien got a nice smack to the back of his head from a make-up artist.

“Do you want your father to ‘sternly’ talk at you again?” the artist asked, poking Adrien’s cheek with the end of their foundation brush.

“Gabriel should have chosen a better location if he didn’t want his clothes to smell,” The male model snorts, following his co-worker’s actions and using the hem of his shirt to wipe some sweat off his forehead, “and be a bit wet.”

“You’re both disgusting.”

Marinette could hear Adrien laugh, her lips unconsciously twitched into a smile at the sound.

Light, airy, free…

It was close to how his laughter used to sound, vibrating off the walls of both her home and his mansion during playdates, sleepovers and birthdays.

“No one caught my attention in China.” Marinette breathed out, returning to her friend’s question, chewing on the inside of her cheek as her friends hummed.

“How interesting.” The couple sang, smirking towards the tent.

Adrien pouted as, once again, Nino beat his score in skiiball by over one-thousand points. Nino smirked, a hand on his hip while his other wrapped around his girlfriend (who kissed his cheek to add more flare to his victory). Adrien groaned, turning his gaze back to his pathetic score across the lane and frowning.

349 blinked on the screen, mocking him until he called for another rematch.

“Ah, dude,” Nino let go of Alya and clasped his friend on the shoulder, “don’t embarrass yourself more—”

“No.” Marinette appeared between the two, pushing Nino’s hand away and crossing her arms, “Rematch. You two—” Marinette wiggled her fingers between the couple, “against us.”

“The dream team.” Adrien quickly added with a smirk, throwing his arm over Marinette’s shoulder and leaning against her. “I’m sure you both remember our joint ninth birthday.”

“Where we kicked every kid’s ass, hustled their tickets and got the sweetest prizes.” Marinette bumped her hip against Adrien’s.

“That was fun.” Adrien bumped her hip back, his heart fluttering when Marinette’s laugh rang out in the air around them.

“So much.”

“I still have one of the cat plushie’s you won.” The model spoke softly, looking at Marinette nervously. Marinette turned to him with shocked wide eyes, mouth agape.
Oh, crap. The awkward, ‘what the fuck’, panicky feeling he was able to ignore from their previous conversation suddenly emerged again.

“You…” Marinette’s cheeks flushed, “you do?”

“I…” Adrien’s hand moved from Marinette’s shoulder to nervously rub the back of his neck. “Y— y — yeah…”

“No.” The couple refused with wide eyes, even going as far as taking a step back. Adrien and Marinette’s gaze returned to their friends, any lingering feelings the two previously felt swept into a metaphorical rug in the back of their mind.

Nino gasped, looking between the two teens, “This was your plan all along. Dude… how could you…”

“After eight years of face-rubbing, you had to expect payback. Nino,” Adrien’s grip tightened around Marinette while dipping his head to Nino, “meet payback.”

“Ready for an ass whooping?” Marinette smirked, pulling out two tokens and rubbing them together. Alya and Nino shared a glance before reluctantly nodding.

“We can take them?” Alya forcefully smiled at her boyfriend, trying to reassure them both before screaming could be heard from outside. A few of the patrons around the arcade scattered outside to see the commotion, Alya already reaching for both her phone and her boyfriend.

“How about a raincheck?” Adrien off-handedly asked, already heading towards the door. Alya quickly pushed passed him, Nino on her tail but Marinette… Adrien was at the door when he realized Marinette hadn’t run out of the building with Alya and Nino. Another string of screams filled the air with maniacal laughter following close after. His eyes flickered between his hand and the door, his conscious fighting against himself.

He made a promise to protect Marinette — he should be running the other way, hiding her from the danger before transforming and taking care of the akuma. But he was already late dealing with the akuma.

But Marinette.

She hasn’t seen or dealt with an akuma yet. She doesn’t know what to do. She was probably scared and nervous, get somewhere safe or just wanted to get home to her parents—

“Get her somewhere safe, Adrien.” He heard Tikki’s calm, high pitched voice whisper from her hiding spot in his pocket. “Ladybug can wait.”

His hand wavered in the air over the door handle, more screams—closer, louder, scarier. He swallowed thickly, clenching his hand in a fist before taking a few steps back. He nodded, mumbling a small thank you to his kwami before running back over to the skiiball machines only to find the area empty.

“Marinette?” He walked around the area, calling out her name multiple times while looking in photo booths and behind arcade games.

Five minutes later, Ladybug couldn’t wait any longer.

“I’ll call her after I deal with the akuma.” Adrien told Tikki after she zoomed out from his over shirt.
Tikki nodded with a worried expression, “I’m sure she’s fine.”

“Right.” Adrien took a deep breath and turned to Tikki, “Spots on!”

“I can’t do this— I can’t do this—” Marinette leaned back on the closed bathroom door, sinking down to the floor. “I can’t do this— I don’t want this— I—” Marinette choked, wrapping her arms around her legs and pressing her forehead against her knees. She took deep breathes, feeling tears well at the edges of her eyes. She felt Plagg rest on her arm and heard the kwami sigh as he made his landing.

“Kid—”

“I— I thought I could do this, Plagg—”

“You can.”

“How?” Marinette growled, picking her head up to stare down at Plagg. “I can barely even go a few hours without an anxiety attack—”

“Kitten, listen to me,” Plagg hovered in front of his charge’s face, his expression unusually soft as he continued, “you are you — no matter what you wear, where you stand, what you’ve done — you are Marinette. You are—”

“A cowardly kitten.” Marinette laughed dryly, letting out a breath as she hit her head back against the door. She wiped her tears away, uncaring of the fact her makeup was probably smudged.

“Kid—”

“You said it yourself Plagg. I…” Marinette sighed, hitting her head back against the door again, “am a coward—”

“Now you start listening to me?” Plagg groaned, flying over to her ring, harshly tapping on its metallic surface. “This proves that you are exactly where you are needed to be. You are exactly who you are meant to be—”

Marinette sighed, “Plagg—”

“Shut up and transform, kitten.” Plagg hissed, zooming up to smack Marinette’s forehead.

“Ouch.”

“If I didn’t think you were cut out for this, I’d find a way to be rid of you. Trust me.” Plagg growled, “Say the magic words, kid. You are Marinette fucking Dupain-Cheng; I’ve seen you take down the largest of humans at the stupid fighting place or whatever.”

Marinette chokingly laughed, “You were doing good until ‘stupid fighting place’."

Plagg snorted, resting on Marinette’s knee, “Point is, the old man picked you for a reason and I… You’re made for this kid.”

Screaming broke through the near-silence in the bathroom, causing Plagg’s tail to twitch and Marinette’s eyes focus on the window across from her.

“Plagg.” Marinette’s voice broke through the screams, ocean blue met acid green and an understanding was met between the two. Plagg smirked as Marinette wiped the last of her tears away
and stood.

As she stood, she felt all her worries, doubts, frustrations and anxiety leave her body. She felt new, ready and excited.

Last night, she let her past experiences cloud her judgement. She ran without a second thought, felt her chest tighten and hands shake. She felt like the world was crumbling around her and Ladybug as they looked at each other for the first time.

Now, she felt pleased, amazed, and playful. She wasn’t going to allow fear and anxiety to cloud her judgement. Paris was in danger; Ladybug was too. Paris needed her; Ladybug needed her.

Her friends needed her.

She looked down at her ring, a smirk forming on her lips as she spoke, “Claws out.”

Ladybug grunted as his back made impact with a turned over car, his body slumping to the ground as Chevalier Rogue, the akumatized tourist, made his way towards the wounded superhero. Ladybug pushed himself up, swinging out his yoyo and latching it onto the streetlight only to have the same electricity roll down his spine as last night, falling from the air and rolling against the concrete until his back made contact with another car.

“Fuck me.” Ladybug coughed, pushing himself on all fours and spitting some blood out.

Tikki?

He looked down at his abdomen, another curse leaving his lips as he noticed his suit wearing down from the constant cement takedowns. He pressed his hand lightly against his stomach, keeping his yowl of pain in his throat as he moved to lean against the new car he’d been thrown against. Tikki’s silence worried him, she’d never been one to fall quiet in a fight.

Tikki, talk to me. Please.

Chevalier Rogue turned to the car he had previously threw the superhero against.

Shit, Tikki, come on.

Ladybug shook his head, running his other hand through his hair before focusing his eyes on Chevalier Rogue. The villain stood with the car held over his head, demanding Ladybug’s miraculous one last time.

Please. I need your help.

Ladybug’s eyes rolled into the back of his head as he lulled it to the side, a bolt of electricity rolling down his spine once again and a sharp cry of pain erupting from his lips.

Shit, shit, shit… Tikki, please… what’s happening?

He choked out through the pain, “O— once… again: No!”

Ladybug raised his hand, reaching for something to grab onto and pull himself up with. He cried out in pain as his palm cut across a shard of glass from the window. grabbed onto the open window of the car, pulling himself up as Chevalier Rogue sighed at the superheroes answer. As Ladybug reached around for his missing yoyo the purple moth wing’s appeared in front of the akumatized victim’s helmet.
“Very well.” Chevalier Rogue sighed.

Tikki, please! Where did you go?

Ladybug swallowed, eyes widening as Chevalier Rogue rolled his neck and threw the car at him. Ladybug’s hands fumbled with his yoyo, a string of curses playing on repeat in his mind—

“Cataclysm!”

The car that was mere seconds from crushing him blew up in a cloud of ash. Ladybug shielded his face from the debris, hearing the sound of metal skidding against concrete. The spotted superhero coughed, waving his hand in front of his face as the ash from the destroyed car cleared. Ladybug’s vision was blurry, head spinning from pain and nausea and eyes straining to focus on the figure before him. He blinked, slumping back against the car as the debris finally cleared, both dumbfounded and astonished by who stood there when the debris cleared.

The Black Cat Miraculous holder he chased last night crouched between him and the akumatized victim. The hand she had used to destroy the car with was planted firmly on the ground, balancing herself as the other rested on her lower back, her silver baton clasped tightly in her palm. Her hair had bits of ash scattered on it, cat ears pressed firmly back against her midnight colored hair and her tail twitching against the ground between her and Ladybug. She glanced over her shoulder at him, pupils slit thinly. He couldn’t make out much of her appearance before she looked back at the akuma.

She slowly (and with much grace, the teenage side of him noted) stood, the baton that she held in her palm extending into a staff. She tilted the baton down and behind her back, tilting her head to the side as she rolled her shoulders. Her ears moved into a more alert position, her tail whipping around the ground after every breath.

The street was eerily silent, Chevalier Rogue at a complete loss on what to do – much like Ladybug. Even Alya and Nino, who he carefully threw into a nearby building, were gaping down at the new development.

The first sound to break the silence was her miraculous sounding off its five-minute count down.

“If you want his Miraculous,” the feline hero spoke, twirling her staff through her fingers before stabbing the edge of it into the cracked cement, “you’re going to have to go through me.”
I am trash.

I cut the chapter in half because I'm still having a bit of trouble on the other half. Which means most of the LadyNoir interaction has been cut until the next chapter (and I am so sorry for that because I'm really proud of the banter I have for them so far).

Anyways, I hope you all enjoy this chapter and I'm sorry for the wait. Enjoy~

The familiar purple moth insignia flickered to life in front of Chevalier Rogue’s helmet. It gave Marinette the time to help her counterpart. She pulled her baton out from the cement, clipping it to her lower back as she turned to Ladybug. She swallowed thickly, holding out her hand to the spotted hero. Ladybug’s acid green eyes darted cautiously between her open paw and her masked face. His hand clutched his side tighter as the seconds passed. Marinette frowned, looking over her shoulder at the still preoccupied akuma.

Her head whirled around when she felt a strong grip clamp around her hand. Ladybug struggling to stand as he used her as an anchor. Marinette used her free hand to grab onto Ladybug’s bicep and helped the hero back onto his feet.

“Sorry I'm late.” Marinette let go of her counterpart once he gained his footing. She leaned down, grabbing his yo-yo off the ground. She dusted off the spotted weapon as she stood, offering Ladybug a smile as she handed him back his weapon. Ladybug took his weapon back with thin lips and guarded eyes. He flexed his fingers in the air between them before grasping the weapon. his other arm still wrapped around his waist. Marinette chewed on the inside of her cheek as her tail coiled around her thigh once more. Agitation made her tail twitch as Ladybug looked over his wounds.

Marinette watched, worrying on her bottom lip. She forced herself to not submit to her usual nervous fidgeting. Ladybug continuing to flexed and rolled his shoulders, forcing the kinks out of his muscles. In the end her anxiety won. She shifted from foot to foot as her cat ears pressed back against her hair. The uncomfortable silence weighed down on her.

Say something, Plagg hissed at her.

Her miraculous sounded off between them. Marinette clasped her hands behind her back and dip her head down. She chewed on her bottom lip as she thought about what more to say. It isn’t like she could say much else to someone who was obviously cross with her.

What do you want me to say, huh? She hissed back, ‘Hey, yeah, sorry for running away from you last night! I was terrified you'd wave me away and continue doing what you've been successfully doing without me for the past two years! You don’t even need me, so what the hell am I even doing here!? Hah. Yeah, okay, it was nice meeting you, bye!’

Ladybug started to reign in his yo-yo, oblivious to what was going on around him, as Marinette continued to argue with her kwami.
Just say ‘do you need a paw?’”, Plagg snickered in the deepest corners of her charges mind, *Puns are always a good way to break the ice, kitten.*

“Do you need a paw?” Marinette blurted out without much thought, pointing to the yo-yo in Ladybug’s palm. She nervously smiled as Ladybug paused his actions, sparing her a glance and a raised brow at the horrid pun.

If Ladybug had liked her before, he sure as hell wouldn’t now. There was a reason Marinette didn’t pun—

“I think I got this.” Ladybug cracked an amused smile. He chuckled as he continued to reel in his yo-yo, looking at Marinette, “Thank mew though.”

Marinette smiled back, opened her mouth to speak once again before standing straight. Time slowing around her as her cat-like senses took over. Her ears stood at attention, twitching left and right as the sound of crunching cement echoed in her ears. Her tail uncoiled around her thigh, falling to the ground with the tip pointed up. Her eyes widened, pupils pulling together in thin slits as wind brushed her hair forward. She was moving before she even realizing what was happening. Quickly pulling out her baton and extending it to a stave’s length. She parried an oncoming attack from *Chevalier Rogue.*

She felt Ladybug’s eyes on her the second the sound of metal against metal echoed in the air around them. The two struggled against each other. Marinette struggled against the weight *Chevalier Rogue* pressed down against her baton. Her eyes met his light violet eyes through the slits in his helmet. She noticed how emotionless and lifeless they looked. Even with the intense rage and aggression he was showing. She took a shaky breath, momentarily wondering if all akumatized victim’s eyes looked like that.

Her *parents* might have eyes like that one day — *Nino, Alya, Adrien…*

She shut her eyes, hands tightened around her baton.

She’d have to fight against them one day, wouldn’t she? She’d have to hurt them, have to— *No.* She shook her head. She couldn’t think about that now. Later, when she was alone, when she wasn’t struggling against a villain she'll think about the possibilities.

“Give me your miraculous.” The Akuma sneered, breath puffing out through his helmet.

Marinette’s ears pressed back against her hair as she bared her teeth. She heard Ladybug behind her, heard the hiss that fell from his lips as he staggered away from the car. Her blood boiled and her palms ached. She felt a pain much like her counterpart had when he slit his palm against a glass shard. It gave her the extra push she needed. Her lips thinning in determination as she started pushing back against the villain, fighting against the weight of his sword.

“Never.” She spat. Using her right palm like the hilt of a sword, she knocked her opponent’s sword to the side. She twisted on the ball of her foot before slamming the other against the side of his helmeted head. She spared a glance over her shoulder towards Ladybug, watching him reign in the last of the yo-yo string and trying to perform his own special power.

“Never.” She spat. Using her right palm like the hilt of a sword, she knocked her opponent’s sword to the side. She twisted on the ball of her foot before slamming the other against the side of his helmeted head. She spared a glance over her shoulder towards Ladybug, watching him reign in the last of the yo-yo string and trying to perform his own special power.

“Take your time, Bug!” Marinette called over her shoulder as she jumped into battle. Cartwheeling to the side as *Chevalier Rogue* as tried to bash his shield against her. Her miraculous giving another warning beep, “I’m in absolutely no hurry here!”

“My powers… they aren’t…” She heard Ladybug’s voice from behind the car, confused and
distraught before he yelled out. “Th— the akuma is in his shield!”

“Got it!” She called back, squeaking as Chevalier Rogue swiped his sword at her. She bent backwards, her hands planted firmly on the ground behind herself. Her baton collapsing into one of her palms as the sword swung over her, missed her face by a hairs length. Marinette grit her teeth, picking her feet up and planting them against the Akuma’s chest before shoving him back. She fell onto her back, letting out a small whimper as a sharp piece of cement dug into her lower back. She heard the sound of crunching aluminum. Raising her head, she saw the akumatized victim pulling himself out of the car she had effectively kicked him into it. She marveled at the strength the suit gave her later. She was too busy trying to get back on her feet as the akuma picked up his fallen sword to marvel for long. He strode towards her as she picked herself up, her baton quickly extending once again to its previous size.

Marinette staggered backwards, angling her baton above her head. Chevalier Rogue brought down his sword, again and again, slamming against her baton. She tripped over a piece of cement, landing on her back once again. She continued to hold up her baton up between herself and the Akuma’s sword. She cried out when the Akuma forcefully stepped on her stomach, pinning her down. The Akuma pulled his foot off her, bending down on one knee and replacing his sword with his palm. He grasped her baton and leaned over her, the purple moth insignia flickered around his helmet again.

“You won’t win, child.” Le Papillon spoke through the akumatized victim. “Give me your miraculous now before others get hurt.”

“O— others?” Marinette stuttered through clenched teeth. A smirk flashed through the helmet as the victim motioned to the chaos around them. Her grip tightening around her baton as she took in what laid around her. She had been too busy focusing on protecting Ladybug to see victims of the attack lying on the edges of the street.

Marinette knew there had never been any fatal casualty of the Akuma attacks. She knew that once Ladybug’s Miraculous Cure flew across the city everything went back to normal. But her gut twisted as she took in the scene around them. A few bodies littered the edges of the streets, turned over cars and bent light fixtures. Her eyes landed on a pair of familiar neon orange converse and the world around her seemed to stop.

Adrien…

She didn’t see him with Alya and Nino on the roof when she was sneaking by. She didn’t know— didn’t think that Adrien could have been...

“I can feel your anger. Your sorrow. Your regret… you know you weren’t made to protect people.” Le Papillon purred in her ear. “Get out while you still can... Let me help you.”

Her miraculous sounded again, giving its second to last beep.

1:00...

Marinette’s hand flew away from her baton in a flash. Her hand balling into a fist and smashing against Chevalier Rogue’s helmeted cheek. She heard the satisfying sound of his helmet crack from her punch. At the sound of the crack, the purple moth insignia’s light flickered away as the victim fell back against the cement. She jumped on top of the victim. Grabbing the sword from his grip and tossing it out of his reach before working on pulling his shield from his grip.

0:50…
The second she grabbed onto the shield, Chevalier Rogue felt the need to do to her what she had just done to him. She clutched onto the side of her face, tears welling in her eyes at the sudden impact. She was thrown off of him next, the roles reversed as he straddled her and pulled her right hand from her face. He reached for her miraculous.

0:40…

Marinette, Plagg’s voice made her clench her teeth, move. Now.

“Get off of her!”

Marinette’s eyes snapped open as Chevalier Rogue was pull off her. She watched as Ladybug hurtled the villain across the street. The akuma flipping upside down in the air before he smashed through the windows of the arcade.

“Are you—”

Marinette waved the hero off, curling into herself as blood dripped from her split lip. “Fine.” She groaned, rolling back on her back and cracking an eye open to look at Ladybug.

0:30…

Marinette pushed herself up on her elbows. She watched through squinted eyes as Ladybug jumped through the window after the akuma. He disappeared further into the building until he was no longer in her sight. She fell back against the ground as a flurry of tiny ladybugs flew through the air, fixing everything to how it once was.

“Hey.” Marinette opened her eyes again as the superhero appeared before her. He stood above her, his hand extended down to her while holding her discarded baton in the other. Her eyes moved over to where she spotted Adrien. Relief flooding through her when she saw that the person was not Adrien and that they were fine.

Everyone’s okay...

She looked back at Ladybug, grabbing onto his hand. She groaned as Ladybug pulled her up, muttering a small ‘thank you’ as she was handed back her baton.

You still have some cheese, right, kitten?

0:20…

Marinette swallowed. She looked down at her ring and watching the metacarpal pad of the paw flicker, “I… I gotta go.”

“W— wait!” Ladybug looked at her with wide eyes, hand already reaching out for her as she started jogging away, “You’re hurt. Let me—”

Marinette yelled before vaulting into the air. She landed on a nearby roof before quickly calling over her shoulder, “I’ll see you later, Bug!” She ran towards the edge of the building and vaulted towards the next. She shoved herself through the roof access seconds before her transformation fell. In a flash of green, Marinette was back to being Marinette and the pain she had sustained as her alter ego hit her like a freight train.

She fell to her knees, cradling her face as Plagg fell onto the ground before her, exhausted. Marinette let out a string of curses as she pressed her forehead against the cold tile floor. Her body screamed,
her head was pounding, her eyes burned, everything *hurt*.

She heard Plagg’s voice somewhere soothing and worried, felt his paw on her cheek.

*I didn’t heal…*

“It’s okay, Marinette.” Plagg mumbled, nuzzling his head against her cheek, “You’re okay…”

*Why?*

Marinette sat perched with pouted lips atop Adrien’s sink counter. She watched as her best friend pulled out his first aid kit from under the sink. Their other two friends were in Adrien’s room. Adrien having locked out of the bathroom because of their hovering. Marinette had been anxious enough when she ran back to the arcade. She knew her friends would be doing this once they saw her face. She was glad Adrien locked them out of the bathroom before her anxiety became worse.

“We just wanna apologize, Marinette!” Marinette heard Alya's muffled voice through the two doors. Her nails scraping against the metal door like a cat locked out of its owner’s home. Marinette spared a glance towards to door before looking back at Adrien. She watched as he pulled out a box of Q-Tips and cotton balls. Half used bottle of Neosporin and large black bottle of Isopropyl (rubbing alcohol). He set them down next to Marinette’s thigh before pulling out gauze, gauze wrappings and *Star Wars* themed and regular Band-Aids.

“Nerd.” She picked up a Star Wars Band-Aid with a knowing smile, eyes flickering towards her friend as a blush blossomed on his cheeks.

“And you’re not?” He licked his lips, grabbing a washcloth and wetting it. Marinette’s lip twitched as she opened the Band-Aid wrappings, eyes shining at seeing the familiar red lightsaber stretched across the latex. “I remember a little kid running around in my basement making ‘whooshing’ noises with a yardstick.”

Marinette rolled her eyes with a snort, pulling off the plastic edges as Adrien continued.

“I even remember her trying to force choke me.” Adrien reached up to his neck and grasped it before making overly dramatic choking noises. His other arm extending in front of him as Marinette watched with an unamused expressed.

“*Do or do not.*” Marinette said cryptically, leaning forward and sticking the Band-Aid over Adrien’s mouth. She effectively shut the teenager up, “*There is no try.*”

“I hated Yoda.” Adrien admitted after peeling the Band-Aid off. He moved towards Marinette, sticking the bandage over Marinette’s mouth as she started to reply. She glared at him and he smiled. “Too vague.” Marinette hummed, removing the bandage and pressing it against her exposed thigh, just above her knee.

“We’ll argue about our nerdy-ness once I clean your wounds. Now,” Adrien chuckled, gripping Marinette’s chin between his index finger and thumb and angled her head to the side, “come here.”

Marinette shut her eyes as he gently swiped her cheek of blood, soon moving to her forehead where a small sliver of a wound cut through her right eyebrow. She held in her whimpers and hisses to the best of her ability, more so when Adrien added more pressure on certain areas of dried blood, but with every whimper or moan he quickly mumbled an apology, carefully pulling the cloth away and making sure she was okay before continuing.
Adrien soon found himself wedged between Marinette’s thighs to get better access to her wounds. He was proud of himself to be able to keep his outside exterior calm and collected while inside he was confused, worried and screaming.

Not even because he was close to Marinette – which the hormonal teenage side of him would love in different circumstances.

Marinette got hurt during the attack but wasn’t healed with his miraculous cure? Why not? She shouldn’t be immune to it, right? Was it because she hadn’t been exposed to it before? Maybe she can’t be cured because she wasn’t here in the beginning?

But that doesn’t make sense, Adrien furrowed his brows as he rewet the washcloth, worrying his bottom lip as his thoughts continued to spiral into panic, tourists have been akumatized and hurt and they are always healed. Maybe it’s because of that cat girl? Or my powers aren’t working anymore? I couldn’t even summon my Lucky Charm during the battle…

If she got akumatized, does that mean whatever damage the akuma caused her would be permanent? Could he save her if she ever became akumatized? Would she die when he snapped the connection between herself and Le Papillon? Could becoming an akuma kill her?

…Will he have to kill her?

“Adrien, you’re bleeding.” Marinette’s voice pulled him from his worries, bluebell eyes staring at him with concern as her hands wavered in front of his abdomen. Adrien blinked a few times before looking down, seeing a few patches of red bleed through his shirt. She grabbed the hem of his shirt, starting to exposing his stomach. He grabbed Marinette’s hand before she went further, enough skin exposed to see the few wounds that were left after Tikki healed all she could after the battle.

“You…” Marinette licked her dry lips, eyes darting between his face and his stomach. “Adrien—”

“Let’s focus on you right now, Mari…” Adrien pried his shirt from between her fingers, forcing himself to smile.

“Adrien—”

“I will put Band-Aids over your mouth if you continue.” Adrien joked half-heartedly, lips twitching into a small smirk. Marinette pursed her lips but stayed silent, allowed him to continue cleaning her wounds. He noticed her eyes lingering on his chest as he started to dab her wounds with the rubbing alcohol. He finished quickly, Marinette biting her lips ever so often when in pain, but soon her face was covered with gauze, lightsabers, Yoda and Darth Vader. He placed his hands on her thighs, his thumb rubbing softly against the lightsaber Band-Aid she stuck on herself as he looked over his handy work.

“How about I kiss your wounds to make them better?” Adrien teased, dipping his head down into Marinette’s line of sight with a smirk.

“Hm…” Marinette leaned forward, inches from Adrien’s face with a cheshire smirk pulling at her lips. She purred, “Only if I get to kiss yours.” Marinette bit her lip, hiding her laugh behind her palm as Adrien’s face turned beet red, his eyes growing wide as he stammered over his words.

“R— relax, Adrien.” Marinette pressed her finger against his nose, pushing him back so she could hop off the counter. “Now hop up. It’s my turn to play doctor.”

Adrien groaned, hiding behind his hands as Marinette grabbing his biceps, guiding him back against the counter. He reluctantly pulled himself up, face still red as a tomato as Marinette went to grab the
other washcloth on the rake. He thumbed the hem of his shirt before pulling it over his head, whispering a curse as his arms hit the low ceiling. He struggled against the fabric, cursing the stupid rolled up sleeves as he wiggled around. He stilled as he heard Marinette’s laugh, body flushing bright red as he realized she had been a first-hand witness to the clumsiness he thought he’d successfully been able to hid from her.

*Yup. Dead. Adrien Agreste has died.*

Adrien’s shut his eyes as Marinette’s laugh rang through his bathroom. Airy, light, free, relaxing. It made the butterflies in his stomach flutter and voice catch in his throat.

“Lean forward.” Marinette said through her fit of giggles, grabbing onto his shirt after he leaned forward. “Try not to fall off.” She murmured as she carefully pulled off the shirt the rest of the way. Adrien smoothed his hair back immediately, ignoring how hot his body felt as Marinette eyes trailed up his chest, her own cheeks heating.

“T— t— take a pic— picture, Princ— princess.” Adrien swallowed, cursing his selective stuttering, “It’ll… last lo— longer.”

“I have a few already.” She replied breathlessly, eyes widening and flicking up to his eyes as she quickly added, “A— Alya and Nino… they send me magazine clipping of all yo— your photoshoots. I’m not a— I’m not doing— I’m… I’m…”

Marinette quickly turned, folding his shirt and setting it on the side other of the sink counter. “I’m going to take care of you now.”

“O— okay.” Adrien squeaked out, sitting up straight and dipping his head down as Marinette wet the washcloth under the sink faucet. Marinette lightly dabbed at the few scraps that hadn’t fully healed, lips pulling down as she undoubtedly took notice to his other scars.

“How did this happen?” Marinette inquired, “I— I spotted Alya and Nino on a nearby roof but you…”

“I went looking for you,” Adrien mumbled, watched Marinette’s expression from the corner of his eye as he continued. “I ran back when I realized you weren’t with me. Searched the arcade before heading to the back alley. I had to dodge a couple cars—”

“I’m sorry.” Marinette cut him off, the washcloth hovering in the air between them as Marinette stood to look at him. “You shouldn’t have had to worry about me, Adrien—”

“It was your first akuma attack. I remember mine and…” Adrien worried his bottom lip as he chose his words carefully. “I remember wishing I hadn’t been alone during the attack.”

He was in the beginning, at least, before he flipped on the news and saw the akumatized villain. He had been alone in the mansion — Tikki still dormant in the Miraculous — as he watched Stone Heart rampaging through the streets of Paris without sparing a glance at the destruction he caused.

“Alone?” Marinette’s brows furrowed together, setting the washcloth to the side before moving onto the rubbing alcohol.

“Père was out of the country, Nathalie was out running errands and my bodyguard was with Nathalie.” Adrien ran a hand through his hair before moving it to the back of his neck, rubbing it nervously. “So I was alone…” Adrien met her gaze, arms falling against his thigh and fingers lacing together.
“I’m used to being alone.”

Her heart broke. “Adrien—”

“Like I said, I’m used to it.” His lips pulled into a sad smile as he looked down at his hands. “The mansion… it’s just me making ‘whooshing’ noises in the halls now.”

Marinette frowned, but said nothing further. She replayed walking through the threshold earlier in the hour, feeling the emptiness, depression and cold the mansion made her feel. It was nothing like it used to be. Even when she was here last during the funeral it was more lively. The portrait of the full family still hung at the entrance even though an occupant had passed. A smiling, perfect family in a shiny, perfect mansion. She remembered Gabriel traveling a lot, but also remembered him taking over a year off when he was gone nearly the entire year prior.

Gabriel Agreste was a family man, but now…?

Walking through the threshold of the mansion felt like she had jumped into freezing cold water. Cold, alone, scary even. It was too clean, too bright, too quiet, too cold. It didn’t feel like a home — it wasn’t a home. It felt like a cage; now she understood why Adrien never liked to speak about his family since his mother’s death.

It was nothing like it used to be.

She set down the bottle of rubbing alcohol and wedged herself between his thighs, carefully sliding her arms through his own and around his waist in an awkward yet comfortable hug. Adrien stiffened under her and Marinette, realizing she may be pressing against his wounds, started to dislodge herself from around him before his own arms quickly wound around her lithe figure. Her fingers threaded through the hair resting over his neck as he slumped against her. His breath tickled her collarbone as he pulled her flush against him.

“I’m glad you’re okay, Marinette,” He breathed against her collarbone. “When I couldn’t find you, I…”

Marinette shut her eyes, nuzzling against her friend’s neck. The same scent she smelled earlier in the day clung to his skin, his own natural musk mixing into his faded cologne. She looked down between them, her hand moving to his stomach and feathering over his wounds. She watched his muscles constrict under her touch, a light chuckle puffed against her collarbone.

“You’re still ticklish.” Marinette pressed her lips together in a thin smile, memories of blanket forts tumbling atop her and him during wrestling matches muddled her mind. Adrien’s chest vibrated with another chuckle, his hands gripping around her waist.

“Adrien,” Marinette mumbled, shutting her eyes as she turned her forehead onto his shoulder, “you aren’t going to lose me.”

“I want to believe, Mari. I do—”

“Trust me, Adrien….” Marinette picked her head up, cupping Adrien’s face in her palms. She caressed his cheek with her thumb, brushing off stray tears, “I’m not going anywhere.”

End Notes
Here is my tumblr if anyone wants to come and chat with me vanguardpaladinkeith <--- link

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