## Sting

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## Sting

**by** [KryallaOrchid](http://archiveofourown.org/users/KryallaOrchid)

**Summary**

When Chat Noir inexplicably disappears, leaving Ladybug bee-hind to face Papillon on her own, a new wielder is chosen to keep the akuma from swarming. Ladybug is adamant she doesn’t want another partner buzzing around and why is this new-bee flirting with her?

Meanwhile, Adrien just wishes Ladybug would stop bugging out and listen to him because his bee puns are fuzz-tastic.

The repercussions of the bee are farther reaching than anyone realised.
Bee-mine

Chapter Notes

Author’s Note: I am blaming artgirllullaby, australet789 and wintermoth for this plot bunny. If you watch my tumblr, you might have an inkling on what this will be. If you don’t... well, enjoy.

This is set after first season, and as a result of the cutie-pie Bee kwami. They will be featured heavily, as will my headcanons for the creature, but as the cutie pie doesn’t have a name, I’ve given it one.

French names and spellings will be used. French subtitles over English dub.

Please note: I am Australian. There will be differences in spelling and slang and inaccurate portrayal of Paris culture, but I’ll do my best.

PLEASE ALSO NOTE: THIS WAS WRITTEN DURING THE HIATUS BETWEEN SEASON 1 AND SEASON 2, WHERE GABRIEL BEING HAWKMOTH WAS NOT CONFIRMED (but expected).

PLEASE ALSO NOTE NO. THREE: SET BEFORE POLLEN’S NAME WAS RELEASED.

I will be limiting chapters as much as I can. Do not expect this to be Tendencies length by any means. I have a couple of set scene I want to hit, but most of this is up in the air. Moon has said she bets this particular idea will put me at about 15-22 chapters. I’m aiming for less. Honest to goodness. -OKAY THIS IS A PACK OF LIES LIKE OMG. Leaving it in for prosperity.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Adrien didn’t notice anything was wrong until he was halfway through his morning shower. Hair lathered with shampoo, he stepped away from the water and cocked his head. Something was odd, out of place. Something he hadn’t noticed and really should have. “Plagg?”

No reply from his little friend. Not entirely unusual as Plagg called Adrien’s bathroom a ‘kwami-free zone’, for reasons Adrien didn’t want to think too much about. It was nice to have privacy, Adrien supposed, and with the bundle of bad luck following him around these days, the infrequent times he’d been allowed to be alone had dwindled down to practically non-existent.

Still, something was off about this morning, something missing, and Adrien couldn’t quite put his finger on it.

A nagging itch between his shoulder blades worried at Adrien all through his bathroom routine until he couldn’t ignore it anymore. Towel around his shoulders and shirtless, Adrien poked his head out of the bathroom. “Plagg? Are you still asleep?”

Nothing. No answer. No little bundle of black on his bed sleepily rubbing his eyes and complaining about a lack of cheese and a never-ending hunger. No toilet rolls torn to shreds in a corner. No clump
of black fur left on the edge of Adrien’s sofa.

Walking to his bed, Adrien wondered if Plagg had decided to make himself a cocoon again. “I don’t want to play hide and seek, Plagg.” He stretched out his hand to poke at the bump in the covers and froze.

His ring. It was gone.

Adrien’s eyes widened in alarm. Had it slipped off while he’d been asleep? He pounced on the bed and yanked back the covers. Nothing. No ring. “This better not be another one of your pranks,” he told the air. “I’m not in the mood.”

Dropping to his hands and knees, he checked under the bed. He checked under his computer. He stripped the bed of sheets and shook them out. By the time he upended his mattress, the mild alarm had descended to a blind panic.

His ring had gone missing before, falling off at inopportune times and getting him stuck places, like the inside of a freezer, but this was the first time Plagg had vanished with it. Normally, the kwami scolded him in one breath and demanded cheese in the next while Adrien looked for the ring, but this time there was nothing. No scolding. No cheese.

Adrien was still tearing apart his room when Nathalie came to fetch him.

“What are you doing?” she shrilled, starting at him in horror from the doorway.

Adrien jerked his head over to her. “Uhhh…” He knew he must look a sight; pale and harried, half-dressed and currently holding a cushion from the sofa but being caught like this didn’t diminish the panic bubbling in his chest. “I… er…”

She swept her eyes over the room and then fixed her eyes on Adrien. “This is too much. Explain.”

Dropping his eyes in embarrassment, he checked the area beneath the cushion, then slowly replaced it. “I… lost something.” Adrien forced himself to take a deep calming breath. “Has anyone been in my room?”

“No,” Nathalie replied. “Get dressed. Your father wants to see you.”


“Him?” A shrewdness in her voice alerted Adrien to his slip.

“It,” Adrien amended and dropped to his knees to check the edges of the sofa. “My… project… it’s due today and if I don’t find it—”

Nathalie’s expression remained unimpressed. “You have more organisational skills than this.”

“I know, but—”

“You shouldn’t keep him waiting. You can find whatever it is you’re looking for after you see him.”

No choice. Not really. He just had to hope Plagg was playing another prank on him. A hurried trip to the bathroom to finish preparing for the day did little to quench the nerves shuddering through him. If he lost Plagg…

What was he going to do? How could he help Ladybug without Plagg? She needed him! Plagg
needed him!

Didn’t he?

Gabriel sat at the dining room table, reading from his tablet. A half-finished cup of coffee sat before him and a bagel with a bite out of it. Adrien watched as Gabriel slowly stirred the cup of coffee with his spoon.

“Good morning, Father,” Adrien said. “You wanted to see me?”

Gabriel glanced up, then put his tablet aside. “Good morning, Adrien. I trust you slept well?”

He shifted, impatient. He needed to get back to his room and search for Plagg. “Yes.”

“Are you certain? You seem rather emotional this morning.”

Adrien forced himself to stop fidgeting. “I’m fine. I just… misplaced something.”

“Oh?” Taking the spoon out of the cup, Gabriel took a sip of his drink. “That’s a coincidence.”

Adrien’s senses sharpened. “What?”

Voice carefully sculpted, Gabriel said, “I seem to have misplaced a very special book and it’s important I find it.”

Saliva pooled in Adrien’s mouth and he fought against the urge to swallow it. The book. The book he’d taken from Gabriel’s secret safe yesterday. The safe he wasn’t supposed to know about. A book filled with Miraculous holders including Chat Noir. The book which he’d been trying to read in the library, with… Lila… but had been missing when he’d checked his bag later.

That book.

Gabriel knew about the Miraculous. He knew. He’d asked about Adrien’s ring. He’d been strangely interested in it on the rooftop after Ladybug had saved him from Jackady, then again in Adrien’s bedroom afterward. He had a book which held sacred details about the items and the kwami and the different forms.

Had his father taken Plagg? Why? Why would he do that?

Adrien wished he could remember what else had been in that safe, but Plagg had been so… not forceful, but then, the kwami never was. Evasive. Determined to make sure Adrien took it. It hadn’t been a coincidence that Plagg had tossed that book from the safe. Plagg had known something. And now the book was lost.

As well as his ring. The ring, conspicuous by its absence, vanished the day after the book.

It seemed too coincidental. His brain conjured up another possible solution. What if Plagg had been here for another reason? The kwami had been focussed on the book. And now he had it, maybe Plagg… didn’t need to stay anymore. Didn’t need him.

That thought stabbed him in the chest and gouged out his heart to leave it bleeding. All his insecurities thrust upon him at once. He hadn’t been chosen. He hadn’t deserved the Miraculous. He’d been a means to an end.

No. Plagg… wouldn’t do that. Would he?
“Adrien? Have you seen my book?”

He lifted his eyes from the floor to regard his father. “A book?” he said, struggling to keep his voice mild. “No, sorry, I haven’t seen any lying around, but I have a floor of books in my room. What was it called? I’ll have a look to see if one of the cleaners stored it on accident.”

His mind raced while he struggled not to shrivel under his father’s gaze. Maybe the book was still in the library at school. Maybe he dropped it. Maybe he was reading too much into the situation. Maybe a lot of things, but he needed to get away from his father and take a moment to think. And breathe. And panic.

There was a soft clink as Gabriel placed his cup back on the table. “Do not concern yourself. I am sure it will turn up.”

Adrien nodded. “I need to find my project,” he said, knowing Nathalie would inform his father of the state of his room. “Was there anything else, Father?”

Gabriel picked up his tablet to return to reading. “Enjoy your day.”

Returning to his room, Adrien made sure to lock the door behind him and then slumped at its base. He’d never noticed before just how big and empty his room really was, but now, in the silence and void Plagg had left, it was all he could see.

The alarm had been through two snoozes and had been blaring for a solid five minutes before Tikki turned it off completely. Hovering over the bed, she prodded at her sleeping charge. “Marinette.”

The lump in the middle of the bed curled up tighter. “Five more minutes.”

With an exasperated noise, Tikki poked the lump again. “You’ve had that already. And more.”

Marinette groaned. “Tiiiiikki, you’re worse than the alarm clock.”

Tikki phased through the blanket. Stretching out her paws, she rested them on the end of Marinette’s nose. “You promised Master Fu you’d see if you could find Chat Noir before school. He needs to be aware and Master Fu wants to talk to both of you.”

Marinette sighed and opened her eyes. “It’s just so weird.” Raising her head up enough so she could cup her hands under her chin, she said, “A mythical book, a great guardian, a turtle kwami… it’s all strange.”

“I know.”

Marinette stretched out her hand and scratched the top of Tikki’s head. “He could’ve helped us figure everything out from the beginning. Why did you wait until now to tell me about him?”

Tikki shrugged and evaded. “He wasn’t needed.”

“Yes, he was. There’s so much we don’t know. And he helped you when you were sick! I should’ve known how to do that.” She shook her head and amended, “I should know!”

“And he’ll teach you. That’s why we need to find Chat Noir and return to Master Fu. So you can learn. Together.”

Marinette sighed. “Yeah.” She scrubbed a hand over her face and sat up, throwing the blankets away
from her. “Okay. I’m up.” She stretched her hands over her head. “Tikki, do you think Ladybug should ask Adrien why he had the book?”

“I think Master Fu should tell you what the book is first and why it’s so important. And we need Chat Noir before he will.”

Marinette puffed out a breath and blew her bangs away from her forehead. “Good point.” Twisting her fingers, she continued, “But… I mean, the book is important, right? He had to get it from somewhere. We should probably find out—”

Tikki hummed. “You’d have to admit you’re the one who took the book.”

Marinette flushed. “Oh god.” She clutched at her head and moaned. “I can’t do that!”

“We can’t explain why you can’t give the book back, either. It must stay with Master Fu—”

“After all my talk about hating liars and I’d have to lie to him! If I went as Ladybug, he’d hate me. He’d never talk to me again! And as Marinette? I’d never have a chance with him.” She flopped back on her bed. “And not telling the truth is a form of lying and—”

Tikki said, “You lie to your parents all the time.”

“I don’t lie, I evade and divert attention. Or take whatever punishment they give without complaint.” Marinette said, removing her hand from her face. “It’s a fine line I have to live with because you told me I wasn’t allowed to tell anyone.”

“Isn’t lying by omission still—”

“You’re not helping.”

“Sorry.”

Marinette sighed. “Someone gave me the miraculous and has always known who I was. Do you know how shocked I was to walk in there and have him call me by name?” She frowned, then sat up. “Does this mean he knows who Chat Noir is too?”

“Yes.”

With a shrewd look at Tikki, Marinette asked, “Do you know?”

“You’ll be late,” Tikki evaded. “It might take a while for Chat Noir to answer, especially if he’s not transformed.”

Kneeling, Marinette cupped her hands beneath her kwami. “Tikki.”

“No,” she said, floating down so she sat on Marinette’s palm. “I don’t. You are my responsibility, just as Chat Noir is Plagg’s. We do not find each other again until the time is right.”

Marinette pursed her lips. “And when’s that?”

“When you’re both ready for it.”

Marinette blinked. Then blinked again. “So… I’m allowed to tell Chat Noir who I am?”

Tikki inclined her head. “If you wish to.”
“You told me I had to keep this a secret! Even from him!”

“At the time, it was necessary,” Tikki explained. “And there is a very good reason for that, one which both Chat Noir and you have been deemed trustworthy enough to know. Which is why I told you about the guardian. I believe it is time for you to learn our secrets.”

Marinette wasn’t sure how she felt about this. It seemed like they were a step closer to finding out who each other was. Would Chat Noir like the person behind the mask? Would she like him?

Marinette shook her head. Of course she would like him. She already liked him. She trusted him implicitly. They were partners. Even if he was a horrible flirt, it didn’t mean he wasn’t also a kind and generous person. Whoever he was beneath the mask, it wouldn’t matter. She’d still be his friend and he’d still be hers.

There must’ve been a compelling reason to keep their identities a secret, even from each other. “You were testing me? You were testing us?”

“Of course.” Tikki giggled and bobbed up and down in the air. “Marinette, there is no point being flabbergasted. We shall explain everything at Master Fu’s. But right now, we need to find Chat Noir. He needs to know he’s been summoned. Answers will come, I promise. Patience.”

Chronically late for school, Marinette had always been a pro at getting ready quickly. Even being early, today was no exception to Marinette’s frenzied rush to get ready. Hair brushed and teeth cleaned, she fixed her jacket so that it sat correctly before bouncing to the trap door.

“Where’s the fire?” Sabine asked, looking up from the kitchen sink as Marinette thundered down the stairs.

“Nowhere,” Marinette said and grabbed a bagel from the table. She plucked her backpack from beside the front door. “I just have to see someone before school today.”

“This early?” Sabine asked with a glance at the clock. “It must be important if you’re going—”

“Gotta go!” Marinette said, opening the door so she could avoid lying to her mother. “See you at lunch!” Stuffing the bagel in her mouth, she hurried down the stairs to the bakery so she could say goodbye to her father.

Tom was busy taking bread out of the oven. Trays of bread waiting to be pried from their tins lined the benches, while even more bread cooked. Glancing up, he smiled as Marinette trotted across the room. “You’re up early.”

“It really can’t be that much of a surprise,” Marinette said.

“Normally you bluster past five minutes before the bell, but you’re a full hour early. Where’s my daughter and what did you do with her?”

With a giggle, Marinette stood on her tiptoes so she could kiss his cheek. “I have to do something before school, bye Papa.”

He called after her as she rushed toward the door. “There’s a box of macarons on the counter for Alya!”

“Thank you!”

Running out into the street, she hurried across the road and into the school. It was too early, the
majority of students were still at home. After making sure no one was paying attention to her, Marinette rushed up the stairs toward the library and dropped down behind the concrete bannister so she was out of view. She knew the library would be closed so there was little chance of people seeing her. “Tikki, spots on!”

Pulling her yo-yo from her waist, Ladybug hoisted out of the middle of the building so she could sit on the roof. Dangling her legs over the edge, she activated the phone in her yo-yo.

It rang long enough it diverted to his message bank, so she hung up. Not unexpected. If he wasn’t transformed -and there was no reason to be this early in the morning- so his kwami should tell him there was a call coming and she needed to give him time. Idly kicking her feet, she waited five minutes before trying again.

It rang out to messages again.

The third time she decided to leave a message, smiling to herself at his “Hi bugaboo. It’s paw-ful of me to miss your call, but I’m off doing something dastardly, dashing and debonair. Leave a meow-sage!”

“Hey, it’s me. There’s something important we need to discuss. Like really, really important. Too important to wait for our usual patrol or chance an akuma. I discovered something yesterday and I really need to share it with you.” She sighed, glancing down at the quad below and watching as one of the students arrived. “I’ll be at Collège Françoise Dupont, sitting on the roof for another… forty minutes. If you can’t make it, I’ll be at the Eiffel Tower from one until about one forty-five. It’s really important, Chat. Please come.”

It was a nice day to sit in the sun and watch people move along on their lives but Ladybug felt anxious. So many thoughts churned in her head, a mismatch of adolescent thought, each one flowing like a river through her head, only to be discarded as another thought took its place.


With a heavy sigh, she shuffled and lifted a knee so she could rest her cheek against it as she stared out over Paris. Was she ready to know who Chat Noir was? What if they knew each other? What if they didn’t?

She wondered why Chat Noir’s kwami, Plagg, had never insisted on him keeping his identity secret. Chat Noir had always been so enthusiastic for her to know. To share who he was and she was always the one to turn him down and remind him it was necessary.

Lifting her yo-yo, she tried to call Chat Noir again. Surely it’d been enough time for him to wake up, or free up some time so he could transform.

Still no answer and that confused her. He was normally so quick to pick up, finding any excuse to spend time with her.

Ladybug’s eyes were drawn to the entrance of the school below as Adrien bolted through. He leapt down the small stairs which lead into the quad, then bolted toward the stairs at the back. Heart fluttering, Ladybug watched him surge up the stairs, taking them two at a time. His arm worked against the railing to pull him up the stairs faster. Ladybug froze, her yo-yo cupped in her hand as Adrien rattled on the door of the library below her. He cupped his hands, then pressed his face to the glass to peer inside.
“Damn it!” he said and threw himself away from the door. Palming his head with both hands, he rubbed them up over face, then through his hair to the back of his neck. With a frustrated noise, he turned away and plonked both hands down on the concrete banister. He doubled over, so his torso was parallel with the floor and hung his head.

Ladybug surreptitiously withdrew her legs and lay flat on the roof so she could continue to watch. He’d only see her if he looked straight up and even then he mightn’t notice her. Any other day, and she might go down to speak to him, or throw him a smile and a wave, but the book she’d stolen from him was at the forefront of her mind.

Although… technically Lila had been the one who’d taken it, and she’d liberated it, Ladybug didn’t think Adrien would understand that difference. Especially since she couldn’t give it back.

“Gotta find her,” Adrien muttered and thrust his hand through his hair again and fumbled through his bag for his cell. She wasn’t close enough to see what was on his screen, but she wondered who this ‘her’ was.

The library door creaked open. “Monsieur Agreste?”

Adrien spun. “Mademoiselle Joly! Is it possible I could enter? I know it’s early.”

“Can I help you with anything?”

“I might’ve accidentally left a book here yesterday. It wasn’t a library book, but something from my father’s personal library. And now I seem to have misplaced it. Did you find a book which didn’t belong?”

Ladybug stifled a gasp. He was looking for the book. She’d been hoping against all odds that it had been an accidental find in the library, but it was his father’s book. Which meant she’d stolen from not only Adrien, but her fashion idol as well.

“I’m sorry, dear, I didn’t see anything out of ordinary. What was the book? I can keep an eye out for it.”

“Would you mind if I had a quick look around?”

Ladybug couldn’t see Mademoiselle Joly, but by Adrien’s sudden shift in stance, it seemed she allowed him into the library. Adrien disappeared and the door swung shut behind him.

Sitting back from the edge, Ladybug glanced around and focussed on the rooftops of neighbouring buildings. No Chat Noir and she’d waited the time she said she was going to, plus extra more. She really didn’t know what she should do, but the school would start filling with students soon and she’d have less of a chance to sneak in.

A quick count to ten, she dropped down from the roof and onto the upper balcony and ducked behind a pillar to de-transform.

“We’ll try again at lunch,” Marinette told Tikki as she opened her purse so the kwami could hide inside.

“It’s odd that he didn’t come.”

“There’s no akuma,” Marinette said. “I didn’t do the alert button, just the ‘I want to talk’. If he doesn’t come at lunch, I’ll issue an alert.”
Tikki nodded and accepted the cookie Marinette took from her school bag, then curled up at the bottom of Marinette’s purse. “That would be best. It’s imperative that we talk to him soon.”

“Yeah, I know. And we will.” With a sigh, Marinette turned away from the library and trotted down the stairs. She sat at the bottom to wait for Alya and dragged out her sketchbook so she could doodle while she waited.

She was doodling cat ears when a pair of jeans appeared beside her, then Adrien slumped down on the stairs next to her. “Hey Marinette. Good morning.”

Hearing her name spill from his lips sent a delighted tingle rippling down her spine. She couldn’t control her reactive hunch of her shoulders and small eep, but she certainly could control the deep breath and bright smile which came after. “G-good morning,” she spluttered and concentrated harder on steadying her voice. “You’re here early.”

“I could say the same for you,” he said, smiling. “I’m used to you rushing in last minute.”

“Trying something new,” she said. “I doubt it will last.”

“Well, at least you’re trying, right?” Dropping his eyes, he glanced at her sketch pad. “Cats?”

She flicked her eyes down and flushed. “Oh. Um… yeah. Well. I was just… I mean… doodling. Not thinking… you know.” Internally, she scolded herself and tried not to cringe.

He nodded. “Pretty cute.” He pointed. “I like the ears on that one.”

“Cats are cute,” she said and admired her handiwork. “I like their toes. They’re like little beans.” She babbled, unable to help herself. “I love it when you rub their toes when they purr and they spread their paw as wide as it can go and make a little ‘mrpr’ sound.”

He looked pleased. “You have a cat?”

Chat Noir flashed in her mind and she wondered if he’d spread his hand if she patted his palm. Shaking her head, she banished that thought. Ducking her head, she said, “Sort of. A stray more than anything, I guess you could call him. He hangs around sometimes.”

He smiled, then lost it and turned away to stare straight forward. With hunched shoulders, he rested his elbows on his knees and stared out at the courtyard.

Marinette chewed on her bottom lip, then decided she should be a good friend. “Is something wrong?”

He sighed. “Yeah… I just…” He puffed out a long breath and stared at his palms. “It’s nothing.”

Marinette tilted her head at him, wondering if she should mention the book. Perhaps give him some clue it wasn’t lost. But what could she say?

A thought flittered across Adrien’s face and his spine straightened in response. One of his feet slipped from the stair it rested on. “Lila,” he blurted, hopeful. “I need to see her.”

Her stomach filled with bees, not butterflies. And they stung. “Oh.” She’d been wrong. It could get worse. Her tongue felt too thick for her mouth and air grated against her vocal chords as she managed to say, “You… you… Lila?” Lila was the ‘her’?

“I’m sorry,” he said, turning his head to give her a smile. “I need to go. See you in class.”
Her body felt like it no longer had any bones in it as she melted against the stairs to watch him walk away from her.

Chapter End Notes

*Did I not mention angst too? There will bee some.*
What do you call a bee born in May?

Chapter Summary

What do you call a bee born in May?
A maybe

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marinette’s bones hadn’t managed to grow back completely by the time class started, although the bees had escaped her belly. She puddled against her desk, staring at Madam Bustier without really seeing her.

Adrien liked Lila. Lila the liar, who’d spread so many fake rumours about herself, including the fact she was best friends with Ladybug. Adrien liked that.

Had he no taste?

Disappointment poured through every part of Marinette and made her limbs heavy. Her whole world felt like it was ending. Adrien liked Lila. He’d even said in his room, that while it wasn’t a date, it could’ve been. She hadn’t thought much of it at the time because he’d been so defensive, but now it sat at the forefront of her mind.

He wouldn’t have minded a romantic rendezvous with Lila. It could’ve easily become one. Perhaps, after Volpina yesterday, it had become one.

Even after Lila tried to drop him off the Eiffel Tower… not that he knew she’d tried to do that. Akuma weren’t held responsible for what they did while under Papillon’s influence. They didn’t know what they were doing and never remembered afterward. She couldn’t blame Lila for her actions and she knew Adrien wouldn’t either.

Adrien liked Lila, in spite of all the lies she’d told. Maybe he didn’t realise the depth of Lila’s betrayal and lies, or maybe he did and didn’t mind. He liked Lila and not Marinette. She’d blown her chance with him, if she’d even had a chance with him to begin with. If she’d confessed sooner, or at all, or signed the damn Valentine’s card, she might’ve stood a chance. Now she couldn’t even think of telling him how she felt. She didn’t want to be that girl.

Even if it was Lila.

Marinette’s head hurt and her heart hurt even worse.

“Hey gurl,” Alya said, sliding into the seat beside Marinette. “Why the long face? It’s Friday. We have the whole weekend to look forward to. Moping is illegal.”

Without raising her chin from the table, Marinette held out the box of macarons Tom had given her, “For you.”

“Oh! Awesome! You’re the best.” Opening the box, she plucked out her favourite flavour so she could sample it straight away. Closing the lid again, she hid the box in her bag. “Hmmm, delicious.”
“I’ll tell Papa. He’ll be happy.”

“Okay, spill. What’s wrong?”

Marinette’s eyes flashed to Adrien’s as he entered the room, looking as disheartened as she felt. She tracked his journey and watched as he shared a fist bump with Nino as he took his place. It was stupid to feel this way, even if she couldn’t help it. Adrien wasn’t hers. He was his own person, with a right to his own crushes.

She had to get over hers.

Alya followed her gaze, then raised an eyebrow at Marinette. “I see.”

Marinette sighed and pushed herself upright. Forcing a smile, she turned to her best friend. “No, you don’t. I’m fine, I just didn’t sleep well, that’s all. Summer break needs to get here faster.”

“Ahh,” Alya said with a sassy smile. “And here I thought it was because you didn’t finish your assignment. But you’re right about summer break, I can’t wait.”

Marinette’s eyes widened. “Assignment? What assignment? We had an assignment? Why didn’t you remind me?”

“I did!”

“No, you didn’t—”

“I did, and I quote, ‘Lemme finish hemming’.” To prove her point, Alya held out her phone with Marinette’s message displayed. “See?”

Marinette palmed her face. “Oh shoot. I forgot!” She fumbled for her tablet. “It’s mostly finished, but I need to smooth out the edges.”

Alya laughed. “Are you talking about what you were working on last night, or your assignment?”

“Both.”

Still laughing, Alya waved her tablet at Marinette. “Want a peek?”

“Please,” Marinette said and clasped her hands together. “Pretty please. I’ll love you forever.”

“You’ll love me forever anyway,” Alya said, patting the top of Marinette’s head before she passed her the tablet. “Gurl, I don’t know what you ever did without me.”

“Lived a horrible and lonely existence,” Marinette replied as she read over Alya’s notes.

“Woe is you.”

“It was awful. I cried myself to sleep. Every time I saw the first star of the night, I wished for a best friend who’d share her homework and steal my macarons.”

Alya smiled. “Okay, now you’re exaggerating.”

Marinette placed her hand over her heart. “Complete truth. You’re a wish upon a star, Alya.”

“And you’re a dork.”
Marinette laughed. “Yup.”

As Marinette read over Alya’s assignment and hurriedly made notes and amendments to her own work, Alya engaged Nino in a conversation. Part of Marinette’s attention diverted to Adrien as she saw the screen of his cell flash under the table, hidden from sight from Madam Bustier. They weren’t supposed to be on their phones during class but Madame Bustier was less strict than other teachers. As long as they completed their work and didn’t disrupt class, she didn’t mind.

But Adrien was never anything other than a model student. Why was he using his phone in class?

She tilted sideways to get a better look and she felt her face heat as she caught sight of the screen. He was looking at the Ladyblog.

Adrien flicked his head in her direction and Marinette refocussed her complete attention on Alya’s tablet, futilely pretending she hadn’t seen what he’d been doing. A slight crease in his brow which wasn’t directed at her and he slipped the phone back into his pocket.

Marinette caught Adrien looking at the Ladyblog no less than fifteen times during the course of the morning, and that was only the times she caught him. It could’ve been many, many more. She was fairly certain he was checking the akuma alert page, a system Alya had set up so people could report akuma, allowing Alya to rush to the area to try for an exclusive with Ladybug, but she didn’t understand why he’d be so concerned about akuma attacks.

Unless he’d read the book. Unless he knew something she didn’t. The sooner she found Chat Noir and explained the situation, the better. He’d know what to do. And if he didn’t, together they could go see Master Fu.

Once she finished her assignment, she dragged out her sketchpad again so she could doodle as she listened to the teacher. Cat eyes floating beneath black cat ears.

Unbidden, Chat Noir’s face popped up in her head. In particular, the expression of his face on Valentine’s Day when he snapped back to awareness after she broke Dark Cupid’s spell.

Flabbergasted and confused, he’d lurched away from her the moment he realised he’d pinned her somehow.

But the kiss itself…

Marinette wasn’t sure why she was remembering it right now. She’d thought about it a lot but he hadn’t even been aware that it happened. It wasn’t right that he wasn’t aware, but she thought that if he knew she voluntarily kissed him once, he might ask for a repeat.

Or maybe he wouldn’t. Because beneath the flirting, was a kind, considerate and unabashedly brave person who really cared.

Her pencil circled the edges of the cat eye, lightly tracing the same line over and over again.

She’d always fooled herself into thinking she’d never fall for Chat Noir, when she knew; if it hadn’t been for Adrien, she might have succumbed to her kitty’s charms a while ago. And maybe Adrien was no longer an option, but Marinette couldn’t let Chat Noir be a rebound boy. That wasn’t fair. They were great the way they were.

Marinette sighed and flipped to a new page to start designing flare skirts while she listened to the lecture. There wasn’t time for this. Something was happening within her superhero life. A book and a great guardian and a kwami who wasn’t Papillon’s. Answers were coming. She didn’t have time for romance, crushes and broken hearts.
Lunchtime arrived without fanfare or morning akuma, to Marinette’s relief, and she hurried home to scoff down her lunch before wriggling through her hatch to zip to the Eiffel Tower. Placing the small paper bag of chocolate chip cookies she’d brought on the metallic beam beside her, she settled down to wait for her partner.

And wait.

And wait.

Half an hour into her wait, she called him again, frowning at her yo-yo when the call went through to his messages. “Chat? I’m getting worried. I brought cookies, the ones you really like. Is that enough to tempt you out? Call me. Or come to the Eiffel Tower. Please, we really need to talk.”

She hugged her knees to her chest and scanned the city. Was Chat Noir angry with her? Yesterday, she’d run off on him, determined to check on Adrien and make sure he was okay. Especially after she’d almost surrendered her earrings to Volpina. It was the closest any akuma had come to getting their items and she’d willingly surrendered it. It was only because of Chat Noir’s quick thinking that she hadn’t.

Five minutes before school was due to return, she called him again, “Chat, is everything alright? Are you sick? Are you angry with me? I guess… I can’t wait any longer. I need to get back to… I’ll catch you at an akuma, or maybe patrol tonight. Please call me and leave a message if you can meet earlier. I wouldn’t ask this of you if it wasn’t important. Call me, any time. I’ll find a way to answer, I promise.”

As she swung down from the Eiffel Tower, she caught a flash of someone sprinting through the Champ de Mars and making a beeline for the Tower. Not an uncommon sight when she or Chat Noir lingered somewhere in plain sight. A journalist or a fan, someone who wanted to speak to her. Alya was known for popping up in the oddest of places. So Ladybug paid the sprinting figure no heed as she headed back to school.

Dropping through her trap door and into the room, she de-transformed on her bed. “He didn’t come, Tikki.”

Concerned, Tikki floated up to rub against Marinette’s cheek. “I’m sure he had good reason.”

“He’s never ignored me before.”

“It mightn’t have been his choice.”

“Do you think maybe Plagg is sick?” Marinette asked, scrambling for plausible reasons. “Like you were?”

“It’s possible. If he is, then he’ll probably go to see Master Fu too.”

Marinette nodded. “So, we should go see Master Fu after school.”

“Good idea.”

“We’d better get back.” Marinette bounced down from her bed and headed for school.

“Look!” Alya announced, thrusting a brochure into Marinette’s hands as she returned to her desk. “Check this out!”

Dropping her hand from her greeting wave to Nino, Marinette looked at the title. “Junior Journalist
“I am so entering,” Alya said, thrusting a finger in the air, then pointed it at Marinette. “You’re going to help me.”

“I’m not a journalist,” Marinette pointed out. “Unless you’re doing an item on fashion in Paris, I don’t know how I can help.”

Alya’s voice rang with authority. “You can help me gather research.”

With a light laugh, Marinette said, “Let me guess. You’re going to do an exposé on Ladybug.”

“Nope!” Alya said.

Marinette blinked. “You’re not?”

“I’m going to do a piece on the newest superhero, Volpina.”

Marinette’s stomach gave a painful twist. “Alya—”

Alya had a gleam in her eyes. It would be hard to dissuade her from this particular piece. “It’s sure to win first place. First, I need to snag an exclusive with her. That’s where you come in. We need to find one of the three when they’re transformed and corner them. With both of us working, we’re sure to catch them.”

“Good luck,” Nino said, smiling at her. “You’re the best at wrangling interviews. You’re sure to get one.”

Marinette couldn’t help herself. “Are you sure she’s a hero?”

“You saw the way she saved us from that meteorite,” Alya said, frowning.

“Well, yes, but don’t you think the meteorite itself was odd?” Marinette asked, smiling at Rose and Juleka as the pair walked down to their desks at the end of the room.

“How so?”

“A meteorite which no reputable scientific agency saw coming,” Nino pointed out. He offered a salute to Kim as he took his place.

Marinette latched on that. “Yes. Exactly. Where did it come from?”

“Dude, like,” Nino offered up a shrug, “the conspiracy boards are all in a fit over that. NASA’s boned and I heard that the ESA’s releasing an emergency statement about it. Paris came so close to destruction and no one knew it was coming. The whole world should’ve been on alert.”

“Which is why we should thank the person responsible for saving us,” Alya said. “And learn as much about her as possible.”

“I reckon it’s all Trump’s fault,” Nino said. “I bet he’s got his hand in NASA’s pocket or something. He knew it was coming or he sent it and he didn’t tell anyone.”

Alya gave Nino a flat stare. “Trump sent the meteorite.”

“For the Muslims. Yup.”
In a desert dry voice, she said, “Trump sent the meteorite to destroy Paris, a city where the majority of us are Roman Catholic.”

Nino wore a shit-eating grin. “He must hate God too then.”

“You’re an idiot and you’re giving another idiot too much credit.”

With a grin, Nino winked. “We all know Bush did 9/11. Therefore, Trump tried to drop a meteorite on Paris.”

“Your use of logic is impeccable.”

“Totally.”

“Sometimes, I honestly can’t tell if you’re joking or not.”

“Anything political which comes out of my mouth must be a joke, dude. It’s a Nino-rule.”

Alya shook her head and pinched the bridge of her nose. “Moving on.”

Adrien rushed into the room, his cheeks red. Heart hammering, Marinette sat up straighter in her chair and pressed the palms of her hands against her knees.

“I’m so sorry I’m late,” Adrien huffed, hurrying to his seat. He ducked his head under the stern gaze of Madame Mendeleiev. Class hadn’t begun yet, so she didn’t stay anything.

“Don’t worry about it, man,” Nino said. “I was just telling the girls about that site I showed you earlier.”

Adrien placed his bag on the floor beside him and sat. “Which site? You send me so many, I can’t keep track.”


“Your alien theory better not be like your Bush and Trump theory,” Alya scolded.


Alya told Adrien, “He thinks Trump sent the meteorite.”

“What? Really?” Adrien shook his head. “Nino, your theories are the worst.”

Nino shifted in his seat so he face the girls, resting his hand on the edge of Alya and Marinette’s table as he talked. “Dudes, there’s all sorts of conspiracy theories about Ladybug and Chat Noir. Like that they’re aliens fighting some intergalactic war and whatnot. You should do a piece on that, Alya.”

Marinette should’ve been surprised that such theories existed. The alien was a new one though.

“I need something unique, Nino. Something no one has ever seen before. Volpina would be perfect. No one’s done anything on her yet.”

“Volpina?” Adrien asked. “You want to do a piece on her?”

“Yup. She’s a new hero.”

“Or a complicated akuma,” Adrien replied. He opened his mouth, then closed it again. His face
closed off and Marinette wondered why. Maybe he was more aware of Lila than she knew. After all, Volpina had gone after Adrien, but Marinette didn’t remember saying Volpina was an akuma. Maybe he figured that out on his own… then why was he dating her?

Still, it was a chance for her to spell it out for Alya. With a fake gasp, she blurted, “An akuma! What if Volpina sent the meteorite so that she could pretend to save everyone.”

Adrien pointed at Marinette. “Exactly.”

“If she’s an akuma, then we’ll never see her again,” Alya said. “But what if she’s not, and I get first interview. That would be amazing.”

Adrien warned, “She could be dangerous.”

“She’s a fox,” Alya said. “Think about it.” She lifted a hand so she could tick off her fingers. “There’s Chat Noir, a cat. Ladybug, a bug. And Papillon, a butterfly. Who’s to say there isn’t more around we haven’t seen before? Animal based heroes. I’m sure if we looked into history, we’d find something.”

Marinette fixed her eyes on the table. She cupped her chin in her hands. “That’s… not a bad idea,” she muttered. Surely that book Master Fu now had wasn’t the only source of information on the miraculous. There had to be other records.

“You’ll help me, won’t you?” Alya said, nudging Marinette and gave her best pleading smile.

Smiling, she gave Alya a sharp nod. “Yes, of course I will. No doubt about it.”

“I’ll help too,” Adrien blurted, then drew back as though embarrassed by his eagerness. “If you need it.”

“Yeah, dude. We gotcha back,” Nino included. “Whatever you need.”

“I’ll take all the help I can get,” Alya said, giving Marinette a sly glance. “The competition’s not due until the middle of summer break. This’ll give us a good excuse to get together before lycée starts.”

“Like we need an excuse,” Nino said.

“All right,” Madame Mendeleiev called, standing from her desk and opened the folder on her desk to retrieve her notes. “Enough chatter. Time for physics. We only have another week of preparation time before final exams.”

Madame Mendeleiev was deeply engaged in her lecture on gravity when a high pitched scream echoed through the school.

Adrien surged out of the chair like he’d been struck and Marinette wasn’t far behind him.

Madame Mendeleiev thrust her hand out. “Stay in your seats!” she instructed and strode to the door.

Marinette rested her hand on her bag. “But—”

“Sit!” Madame Mendeleiev snapped, one hand on the door handle, the other one extended toward Marinette, with her finger pointing down. “Now.”

Squeaking, Marinette sat, her posture automatically assuming the ‘I’m a good student’ position. Adrien lowered himself slowly back into his chair.
Madame Mendeleiev opened the door to the classroom and was engulfed in a bright amber light. As it dissipated, a transparent orange-tingled crystal stood in her place, with Madame Mendeleiev entombed.

With a gleeful cry of, “Akuma!” Alya whipped out her phone.

Marinette bounced from her chair and threw up an arm. “Everyone out the window!” The science classrooms were on the bottom floor, they were the easiest to escape from. The windows lead straight outside, an easy escape. “Go!”

Instead of bolting for the window outside, like the majority of the classroom did, Alya and Adrien ran for the window facing the quad so they could peer through.

Kim was the first to open a window and used his height be a leg-up so Alix could get through. Once outside, he reached back into the room to pull Max through the window. Ivan plucked Mylène up and positioned her on his back, then clambered out the window. Rose clutched Juleka’s arm at the elbow as they waited for their turn. Sabrina tried to console a screeching Chloé who was demanding people get out of her way so she could escape.

“Alya, c’mon,” Marinette said, moving to the internal windows so she could drag her friend away from the window.

“No way!” Alya said, shooing Marinette. “I want to get shots of Ladybug when she gets here.”

“We’re pretty safe here,” Adrien said, tilting from left to right so he could peer around another crystal that was outside the window. “Madame Mendeleieiv is blocking the doorway.”


Adrien insisted, “We are out of the way.”

Marinette jiggled her knee nervously as she peered through the window. She needed to go and transform, but she couldn’t leave her friends here. She couldn’t see much through the window. A lot of transparent crystalline growths with frozen people trapped inside, but she couldn’t see the akuma. She pressed her face to the glass beside Alya. Maybe, if she stayed, she could do recon and—

Nathanaël, last of their classmates to climb out, called from the window. “Guys. Let’s go!”

“In a minute,” Alya called. “Let me—”

A large yellow crystal punched its way through the glass window at the back of the room. Glass shattered and desks were scattered as the crystal impaled itself the wall.

Alya shrieked and flailed. Nino yelled. Nathanaël leapt for the window. Marinette hunkered down, curling her hands over her head to protect it, only to find Adrien above her, using his body to shield her from the flying glass. Her heart beat against her rib cage as she breathed in his cologne. Her back was held tightly against his chest and his arms were looped over the top of her, holding her close to him. His breath tickled the back of her neck.

A part of her was immensely embarrassed by her body’s reaction to his closeness. Sweaty palms, hitched breathing, a flush to her cheeks. Even if her reactions could be attributed to fear, it didn’t feel right. They were in danger. She should not be trying to memorise his smell or the feel of his body pressed against her. She should not be enjoying this moment.
His grip tightened on her and he hunkered further down, forcing her to curl smaller.

She loved the feel of him pressed against her.

She was so ridiculous. Crushes were ridiculous. She was hopeless.

He felt so nice.

Noise decreased and movement in the room stilled. The shattered remains of glass burdened the floor. Adrien moved so his hands gripped Marinette’s upper arms and peeled his stomach away from her back. “Are you okay?”

She swallowed and didn’t recognise the noise which came from her throat. A whine and a giggle mixed together.

Adrien’s voice was instantly concerned. “Marinette? Are you hurt?”

“No. You’re perfect-I mean-I’m perfect.” Shame burned at her. He was with Lila. She wouldn’t be that girl. She couldn’t do this. Shouldn’t do this. She had to get over herself. Clearing her throat, she forced herself to move away from him and say, “I’m fine.”

Adrien gave her a confused look.

Nino unfurled from his tight ball and pounced on Alya. Gripping her by the arms, he hoisted her to her feet. “Let’s get out of here.”

Alya protested as he pulled her toward the window. “But—”

“I really don’t wanna risk being cut by glass. Or stabbed by one of those crystal spear things.”

Adrien grabbed Marinette’s hand before she could protest and yanked her toward the window. “Ladybug will be here soon,” he assured her. “Everything’ll be fine.”

Not if Ladybug couldn’t get her hand out of Adrien’s grip, she wouldn’t.

Adrien glanced over his shoulder at Marinette. “You first.”

She dragged her gaze and her hand from Adrien. “Oh. Right.”

Adrien moved forward to help her through the window, but she ducked out of reach. Once her feet hit the ground on the other side, she bolted. Alya and Nino were already running ahead of her, and she heard Adrien’s feet thump to the ground behind her. She had to find some place concealed so she could change.

The footsteps behind her disappeared and Marinette risked a glance over her shoulder. Adrien hadn’t followed her, but she couldn’t see where he’d gone. It didn’t matter. She assumed he was safe, which meant it was time for her to do her job.

She ducked behind a building and with a quick check of her surroundings to make sure no one watched, clicked open her bag. “Tikki, spots on!”

Chapter End Notes
Any similarities between this work and Wintermoth’s Guardians is purely coincidental and is something that should have totally been address in the show and… I totally borrowed it. And she knows. So neener neener. But hey, that meteorite, people should have been going nuts over it, that should've been the biggest sign something was wrong.

Marinette has no chill.
Where did the bee go on holiday?

Chapter Summary

Where did the bee go on holiday?
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Stingapore

Crouching, Adrien lurked by the entrance of the school. He stayed as hidden as he could, watching and waiting, looking for signs of the akuma. Or Ladybug herself. Any moment now, Ladybug would swing in to engage and he needed to be ready.

He could almost hear Plagg’s scolding voice in his head. What could a pipsqueak like him possibly do in civilian form? He wasn’t a superhero. He wasn’t indestructible. He didn’t have a weapon or a fancy suit and his endurance was purely human. No cat reflexes. He was Adrien. Home-schooled model and heir to the Agreste name. He should stay out of the way.

Adrien snorted. Not a chance. Not when he could help. Even without a suit, he was driven to help.

He’d been too slow to catch her when Ladybug had appeared at the Eiffel Tower. It had taken time before the social media outlets had spread her location to him and despite sprinting, he arrived in time to see her swinging away. An akuma, right at his school, he was sure to catch her. He wouldn’t be too slow now.

Even if she didn’t want to know who he was, there was no helping it now. She needed to know his Miraculous was missing. She needed to know she didn’t have backup. As embarrassing as that was to admit he was so irresponsible that he lost it, she needed to be told. He couldn’t lie about it or keep it a secret. Full disclosure.

Because what if Ladybug’s kwami, and Adrien thought her name was Tikki, deserted her? What if he was right and Plagg had only been with him because of the book? They’d never find each other.

He crept forward, peering into the quad in the middle of the school. A number of crystals stood tall, each transparent enough to see the person trapped inside. He recognised some of the students and teachers by sight and some by name. So many had been taken by surprise as they ran toward the exit and tried to escape.

Creeping forward, he used the closest crystal to the exit to conceal himself. Ladybug would come. She had her kwami. He’d seen evidence of her today. She’d come, he knew that with absolute assurance.

There was movement on the level above him, but Adrien couldn’t see clearly through the distortions the yellow crystal prisons made, so he couldn’t tell if it was people or the akuma. He’d have to get closer to have any chance of seeing what was going on and that might put him at risk to be trapped himself.

Keeping low, he scurried to the next crystal prison. Maybe he could get people to safety, or help them find places to hide until it was over. There were bound to be people who hadn’t been encased. Anything to take the pressure off Ladybug since he couldn’t be by her side.
More movement above him and a voice cried out, “I am Citrine! You will not escape me.”

He shook his head, wondering why akuma always felt the need to identify themselves like that. It was pretty easy to guess it would’ve been something rock related.

A snatched peek and Adrien scampered to the next closest crystal in the courtyard. He peered through the transparent gem, then blinked he realised who was inside the crystal. “Lila.”

Unmoving, Lila stared straight out of the crystal, like an insect caught in amber. Trapped in the moment of fleeing for her life, her face was twisted in terror, her mouth open and her head turned to look over her shoulder.

He pressed his hand to the crystal. “Oh no.” Maybe there was a way he could smash the crystal and get her out? But would that hurt her? She appeared frozen, what if the crystals were like ice and smashing them would smash Lila too?

He couldn’t risk it.

Feet thudded to the ground behind him. “What are you still doing here?”

“Ladybug!” he blurted, spinning. Relief burned in his chest. “I need to—”

Her eyes flashed around as she scoped the surroundings. Landing on Lila, her expression hardened. She stalked forward and gripped Adrien’s elbow, pulling him off balance as she tugged him towards the exit. “Your girlfriend will be fine. You should hide.”

Adrien’s lungs emptied of air. She thought Lila was, “My girlfriend—?”

She jerked him forward propelling him up the stairs toward the exit. “Go! I’ll take care of this.”

He twisted at the top, staring at her. “No, wait, I’m—”

With an exasperated glare, she scolded, “Adrien, run!”

“—Chat Noir!”

In the seconds before she swivelled to look, she had the strangest expression dawning on her face. A mixture of hope, relief and… something else Adrien couldn’t place. “Where? Chat?”

Adrien blinked rapidly. That hadn’t gone the way he’d expected and for a moment he couldn’t do anything but stare at her.

Running away from him, Ladybug threw her yo-yo, looping it around the railing of the upper level and hoisted herself up there. “Chat?”

“No, wait!”

She vanished from view and Adrien groaned in exasperation. If she just waited, he’d have been able to explain. He’d have to be quicker next time. Hunkering over, he scampered behind a crystal for cover.

It took time for him to work his way across the courtyard to the stairs, scrambling from crystal prison to crystal prison. Each time he did, he had to check to make sure the akuma wasn’t anywhere near him. If he got trapped in a prison, he’d lose the chance to tell Ladybug what was going on.

Only catching a glimpse of the akuma, Adrien could tell it was a girl. Bright orange, sort of
transparent, and shimmering crystalline clothes, she seemed to be made of similar stuff to the crystal prisons, but he really didn’t get more details than that. His attention was split between navigating the prison field and watching for his lady.

Every time he got close, she moved away. He didn’t think it was deliberate as her concentration seemed solely on the akuma and not on him. He never realised how much they bounced around when they fought, dodging, ducking and weaving away from the akuma before darting in close.

“No pretty kitty today?” Citrine taunted, her voice gravelly. “Isn’t he coming to play? It’s no fun with just you.”

Ladybug scoffed. “Sorry to disappoint you. Do you really think I’d call him in for a dull gem like you? Chat’s my big gun and you’re going down.”

Adrien grinned at his lady’s confidence, even if he did feel like he was playing a game of cat and mouse as he tried to get closer to her. He wasn’t sure what he could do to help, but it didn’t stop him from scrurrying from gem to gem in an effort to be near her.

Ladybug bounced along the top of the prisons, cartwheeling and flipping out of reach of the amber crystals being thrown at her from Citrine. The crystal’s shattered against the already formed prisons, expanding and cracking as the prisons grew. Continual growth, albeit slow, but the floor was slowly taken up by the structures.

Adrien, crouched and hiding, watched in awe as Ladybug performed a perfect backflip, her legs kicking up over her thrown back head, her back curved and toes pointed. Every action was as majestic and graceful as a swan.

“Amazing,” he breathed. His heart thumped oddly in his chest, then increased its beat. It was rare he got to watch her in the middle of battle, normally he was too focussed on his own movements.

She landed on the toes of one foot and, perfectly poised, spun her yo-yo deftly to block the oncoming crystal shots. The corner of her lip quirked upward into a smirk as she deflected and destroyed the crystals. “You’ll need to dig deeper to defeat me, Citrine.”

“You rock,” Adrien said, enjoying her pun. He loved it when she did.

Her eyes flicked upward, scoping the roof, before she honed in on the location of his voice. Adrien knew from the dismay on her face, she’d been expecting his alter-ego. “What are you—?” Her eyes snapped above him and widened in horror.

He didn’t even need to look to know the akuma lurked above him and was, by his best guess, targeting him. Throwing himself sideways was an automatic reaction. A globe of amber coloured rock smashed into the ground where he’d been moments before. Crystals grew out of the ground where the globe landed.

He hit the ground, skidding on his palms and knees on the concrete. Wincing, he scrambled to his feet, running without even looking behind him.

Because he knew to watch for it, he saw the yo-yo spin by him and twine around a beam up near the roof. A hand hooked into the back of his jeans, then his belt dug into his stomach as he was hoisted. The yo-yo retracted, lifting them both into the air. He went limp, trusting her completely. If he struggled, like he knew most people would, it made it harder for her.

Mid-air, she tossed him to reposition, then her arm looped around under his belly, hoisting him to her shoulder. Red spotted legs extended out ahead of her as she pointed them toward her landing point.
Adrien made sure to lift his feet up so they could clear the railing. She landed and, with a strangled grunt, Ladybug skidded sideways. Without placing him back on the ground, she bolted along the balcony.

Impacts hit the walls behind them and Ladybug hunched lower, spinning her yo-yo to act as a shield. Several more burst against her yo-yo and disintegrated.

There was an open door at the end of the balcony and it was here Ladybug threw them into. Ladybug’s release of Adrien was almost a toss and sent him further into the room than he anticipated she would. “Stay!” she commanded as he scrambled to his feet.

“Wait!” he blurted, extending a hand toward her as she rushed back out the door. “I’m Ch—”

She slammed the door behind her and Adrien heard her bellow, “Lucky charm!”

He clenched his extended hand into a fist. If she’d just listen for a minute. Planting a hand on his hip, he thrust the other one through his hair and grabbed a handful to tug on in frustration.

A weapon. He needed something he could use to back her up. Or distract the akuma for a moment so she could concentrate. That was his job, after all. Support her and give her the time she needed to find a solution. Be a distraction.

A glance around the room and he spotted a hard bristled broom leaning against the wall at the back which hadn’t been stored. Not a good weapon, but it’d do to buy Ladybug a few seconds if he could catch the akuma by surprise.

As he rushed back out to the balcony, Ladybug was parkouring across the top of the crystal prisons as she dodged the attacks of Citrine while the akuma in question appeared to grow out of the floor, then vanish back into the crystal. Amber growths jutted from the concrete at various intervals and Citrine could only move on those growths or through the prisons, so while her movement was limited, the more she spread herself by throwing crystals, the further she could move.

Which meant she needed to be contained soon, while she only had a limited scope.

With sweaty palms, he gripped the broom and waited for an opening as he tried not to draw the akuma’s attention.

When Citrine surged out of the ground directly beneath the balcony, Adrien didn’t think. Vaulting over the railing, he brought the broom down on her head.

Wood splintered and snapped and the broom came apart in his hands. Citrine grunted and Adrien landed so hard his knees collapsed. Pain shot up his legs as he fell back on the crystalline floor.

Citrine spun, extending her hand and Adrien tensed as her crystals impacted his chest. He didn’t even have a chance to gasp before the crystals encased him. Ladybug shrieked his name and then…

… she was directly in front of him, filling up his vision as she bent over. A hand extended to help him rise while her ladybugs cleaned up the mess caused by the akuma.

“Ladybug,” he blurted, relieved. He reached out and gripped her hand. “I need to—”

She pulled him to his feet and, by her expression, he braced for a scolding. “That was really—”

He whined, “I was trying to help.”
“I know,” she said. Sighing, she pinched her nose with her free hand. “It was brave. Stupid and reckless, but brave. Adrien, you could’ve gotten seriously hurt. I had everything under control. Please don’t do it again.”

He cupped his other hand around the one he still cradled. His thumb stroked against her suit. “I need to talk to you—”

She looked down at her hand and her cheeks went pink. As Chat Noir, she would’ve playfully reminded him of her boundaries and pushed him away, but as himself, she seemed at a loss of what to do. Perhaps she was being polite. “Um…”

“Adrien!”

Lifting his eyes, he looked beyond Ladybug to see Lila approaching.

Ladybug jerked away from him and the pink cheeks vanished into white. Looking at her hand, she slowly curled her fingers toward her palm, then she reached for her yo-yo. “I need to go.”

He panicked. If she didn’t find out now, he’d have to chase her down again. “Wait, please—”

She didn’t and Adrien was at a loss of how to keep her there especially with Lila coming up fast.

“Are you alright?” Lila blurted. “Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine, thanks to—” he turned, but Ladybug had run away.

Lila smirked, her eyes tracking Ladybug’s departure, before she wiped it as she looked back at Adrien.

“A birdy told me you were looking for me,” Lila said with a coy smile and a hand on his arm.

Adrien narrowed his eyes and moved back so he was out of reach. “Yeah. I had a book in the library yesterday, when I was there with you, and then it vanished out of my bag. It belongs to my father and I—”

Lila blanched, then turned to defensive anger. “Are you accusing me of stealing? How dare you. First, Ladybug pretends that she doesn’t know me because she was jealous of our date, then—”

Adrien lifted his eyebrows. “I was going to ask if you knew what happened to it. Why did you jump to that conclusion?”

Lila blinked. Then blinked again. “Oh.”

“Also, what do you mean ‘date’?” he asked. She’d said something similar as Volpina, but he hadn’t thought much of it at the time. Perhaps this was why Ladybug thought he was dating Lila. “You asked me to meet you. I did. That’s not a date.”

“I thought you realised—”

“Is it done differently in your country? Because here, it’s not like that.”

“It’s not?”

His brow creased. “I just met you. I barely know anything about you except that you like to embellish the truth.”
She seemed affronted. “I do not—”

Preventing her from digging a larger hole, he interrupted. “While you were an akuma, you decided to pay a visit to my home.”

Now confusion danced over her pretty features. “I… what? I did?”

Adrien nodded. “My father is very protective. Naturally, when he discovered someone had broken into my room, kidnapped me, then appeared to throw me from the Eiffel Tower, he wanted to know everything about you.”

Lila couldn’t get any paler. She curled to make herself smaller. “He did? I… kidnapped you? I threw you off the Eiffel Tower? I would never—”

“Your power was an illusion, so it wasn’t me, you just made it seem like it was. Though, my father doesn’t care about that sort of thing.” He placed a hand on his hip and lifted up the palm of his other hand to offer a half shrug. “Normally, people who have been akumatised aren’t held responsible for their actions, since it wasn’t their fault and they can’t remember it.”

“Oh. Um…”

“Lies, though, they have a tendency of unravelling, Lila,” Adrien warned. “It’s bad luck that way and the longer you let them go, the worse off it’ll be. Shall I ask my father what he discovered?”

“Please don’t,” she said in a small voice.

He nodded. Ladybug had been right in her anger, even if she’d overreacted. Adrien was willing to believe everything else Lila had mentioned had been a lie too, all those things she’d done or had given to her, but he gave her an opportunity to redeem herself. “Have you seen my book?”

Her eyes darted around as though she was looking for an escape route. “I… ah… I lost it.”

Adrien closed his eyes in dismay. “I see.”

She babbled. “I was trying so hard to impress you, and it had all these other heroes and one of them was a fox and… I borrowed it so I could find a copy of the necklace and…”

Adrien’s eyes flashed open. “Did you have it when you were akumatised?”

She cringed. “I don’t know.”

Adrien groaned. He stepped away from her to cover his face with his hand. If she had it when she was akumatised, Papillion might have the book now. And if he had the book, they were boned.

“I’m sorry. I never meant to cause trouble.”

He sighed. It wasn’t her fault. He’d been an idiot. “I shouldn’t have brought it to school.”

With hunched shoulders, Lila twisted her fingers. “I’m so sorry, Adrien. Forgive me?”

Looking away from her, he nodded.

Still twisting her fingers, she smiled. “Let me make it up to you. I’d like to take you to dinner.”

Everything screamed at him to refuse. She’d lied to him. She twisted the truth. She’d stolen his father’s book. Plus, he wasn’t interested. “No. Thank you.”
“I insist. As friends.”

Curse his father’s insistence on politeness. Shuffling from side to side, he couldn’t think of how to get out of this and he didn’t believe for a moment it would be ‘as friends’. “I’ll… check my schedule.”

She beamed. “Great!”

Much to Adrien’s great relief, Nino and Alya walked through the entrance of the school, with Marinette running up from behind to catch up with them. He offered Lila a small wave as he went to re-join his friends. “I’ll see you later.”

Marinette stood in the centre of her bedroom, her hands lax by her sides. She took a deep breath in, then let it out slowly.

“You did well today,” Tikki said. “I am proud of you.”

Her lips quirked up in acknowledgement of that as Marinette stared at her wall. Her eyes were fixed on the various photographs of Adrien she’d pinned into every possible place. “I’m worried about Chat Noir.”

“I know. But you have faced akuma on your own before. It’s not unusual.”

“Perhaps,” she murmured. “But, it’s unlike him not to answer. Even if he can’t get there, he always, always calls. He makes sure I’m okay and today, he didn’t.” She scratched her elbow idly. “I’m really worried.”

With a concerned look, Tikki suggested. “We should go and see Master Fu.”

Marinette nodded. She’d thought the same thing too. “He knows who Chat Noir is. He can check in. But first, I need you to help me take these pictures down.”

Tikki spun in a circle, looking between the pictures and Marinette. “What? Why?”

“He has a girlfriend,” Marinette said, keeping her voice steady. “And… having these up is a painful reminder of that.”

“Oh, Marinette.” Tikki floated down to sit on Marinette’s shoulder and placed her paw against Marinette’s neck. “I’m so sorry.”

Her heart gave her a painful twist. “I don’t understand how she can move so fast, how he can move so fast. What’s wrong with him? She only arrived yesterday.”

Tikki tried to be a voice of reason. “Are you sure she’s—”

“She was bragging in the girl’s room about a second date.”

“She’s lied before.”

“But he hasn’t,” Marinette pointed out. “He’s already scolded me once for yelling at her. I can get angry at Chloé and try to keep her from Adrien, because it’s clear he doesn’t like her like that. He gets all stiff and tense and tries to pull away. But Lila… he likes Lila.”

“Kind people don’t match well with liars,” Tikki soothed. “True colours always shine through. He’ll discover that on his own.”
She sniffled, then rubbed at her eyes. “I don’t want it to be like this.”

Floating up to Marinette’s cheek, Tikki nuzzled her. “I know.”

“Do you think… maybe he knows her out of school?”

“It’s possible. You heard all those things she says she’s done.”

With a sigh, Marinette went to her sewing area and pulled out a spare shoebox she’d kept so she could store things. “We’ll put everything in here.”

Still on Marinette’s shoulder, Tikki nuzzled her neck. “Are you sure you want to do this?”

“No,” Marinette replied. “But… if I don’t, I’ll never get over him, will I?”

An hour, a de-Adriened room, a shoebox of memories stored under her desk, and several wet tissues later, Marinette walked out of the bakery. Clutching a small paper bag of cookies as a gift, she rested her hand on Tikki’s bag as she glanced around, then turned to head in the direction of Master Fu’s parlour.

She wasn’t sure why she’d been surprised that Master Fu lived in the same district, only a few streets away from the bakery. Even though she met him when he’d helped Tikki when she was sick, Marinette hadn’t been able to shake the feeling that she’d met him before, but concluded he was probably a regular customer of the bakery.

She wouldn’t be surprised if Chat Noir also lived nearby. She transformed to call him again, leaving yet another message on his answering system and checked her own empty mailbox.

She wondered how Master Fu had chosen her, but hadn’t had the courage to ask yet. The man seemed to be an enigma, and wouldn’t answer significant questions without Chat Noir’s presence.

Knocking on his door, Marinette waited.

It slid open and Master Fu smiled at her. “You have returned.”

“I… Chat Noir hasn’t responded to my calls and he missed an akuma today,” Marinette blurted. Her worry for her partner was starting to eat at her.

Master Fu raised an eyebrow at her. “Is he normally that unreliable?”

“No,” Marinette hastened. “He’s very reliable. He’s always there when I need him. He didn’t say anything to me about going away, so I don’t have an explanation of why he won’t answer.”

“There could be many reasons why,” Master Fu advised.

“I know, but it’s unlike him. I’m really worried.”

Master Fu looked toward Marinette’s bag. “Tikki, what do your senses tell you of Plagg?”

The bag clicked open and Tikki floated above. Inclining her head, she said, “He is a ball of fury, but beyond that, nothing.”

Master Fu stroked his chin. “Plagg has been known to pout and prank, but that would not explain the fury. Perhaps Chat Noir has aggravated him somehow.”

Tikki chirped, “Even if Plagg refused to transform, he would not ignore several calls and an alert. He
would know we rely on him.”

“We shall wait,” Master Fu said. “It is important you learn together.”

“Oh,” Marinette said, disappointed. “Okay. So, I’ll come back when I’ve found Chat?”

Master Fu nodded. “Please. I look forward to speaking with you both.”

Tikki floated upward, her eyes fixed on the room behind Master Fu. Her antennae lifted and twitched, then she dove back down to her bag. “We should go.”

Marinette extended her hand, holding out a bag she’d brought from the bakery. “Here. I brought you some cookies from my parent’s bakery.”

Taking them, Master Fu bowed at the waist. “You have my thanks, Ladybug.”

Still at a loss what to do, Marinette turned and walked away.

Sliding the door closed after her, Master Fu turned and his kwami floated out of the horn that was his home. “Well?”

“It would be wise to check on Adrien, Master,” Wayzz said. “Tikki let slip that was who she stole the book from.”

Master Fu considered. He opened the bag and extracted a cookie, holding it out to Wayzz. “I see. Then this is no coincidence.”

Accepting the cookie, Wayzz scrunched up his face in concentration, then relaxed. “I cannot reach Plagg. Even with his anger, he sleeps. It… feels the same as when Ferris vanished.”

Master Fu chewed his own cookie thoughtfully. “Adrien has been separated from the ring.”

“It is possible. We need to be ready.”
What do you call a wasp?

Chapter Summary

What do you call a wasp?
A wanna-bee!

Chapter Notes

Yes, I know I just updated but Moon made me an offer I couldn’t refuse. Next update will be probably Monday.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Three akuma in one day and Ladybug was certain of two things. One, something had happened to Chat Noir and two, Papillon knew something had happened. Which made Ladybug really worried Papillon had been the thing which happened to Chat Noir.

The akuma Papillon sent were hard and relentless and Ladybug had to really work to defeat them. There'd been no banter about Chat Noir's absence, but more gloating and focus on her items. Two akuma were back to back, forcing Ladybug to retreat so that Tikki could recharge. With no Chat Noir to distract while she did, the move had been incredibly risky for the people of Paris. It was fortunate lucky charm fixed everything.

Marinette was glad it was Saturday. Had the trio of akuma occurred on a school day, she would've had to skip class to attend and her parents had been paying close attention to her attendance lately. She didn't think she'd be able to explain her absence. Nor did she think she could survive another grounding, especially with Chat Noir unavailable to pick up the slack.

She sat on the railing of her small terrace and stared out into the Paris evening, waiting for the sunset and hoping that there wouldn't be a night time akuma. She didn't want to face an akuma at night without Chat Noir's night vision aiding them. She was already exhausted and Tikki had been inhaling cookies to recharge after three lucky charm releases.

Tikki sat on Marinette's knee, allowing herself to be patted under the chin while she nibbled on her cookie.

Marinette fretted, "What if Papillon's got Chat Noir? What if it's not Papillon and he's been in an accident? What if he's in hospital? What if he's dying and I never find out?" Marinette choked on a sob. "Tikki, I don't think I can—"

"Plagg isn't afraid. He's not upset or concerned or embarrassed. He's angry," Tikki soothed.

"That doesn't mean—"

"Plagg would know we can key into his emotions," Tikki continued. "He knows that would be the first thing I would do. The anger itself is a message."
Marinette considered that. "And what's the message?"

"Something's happened out of Chat Noir's control. I think we're on our own for a while."

"I don't know that I can do this on my own," Marinette murmured and hunched her shoulders.

Tikki nuzzled close. "It'll be alright, Marinette. You're doing great. You defeated three akuma today."

"I was so scared," Marinette admitted. "I need Chat. He makes me brave. He believes in me so hard and he gives me a reason to fight. I rely on him."

"I know you do," Tikki said. "But I believe in you too."

"I know and it helps, it does. But even though you're with me in battle, you can't give me advice."
She sighed and rubbed her face. "I really wish we'd thought about other ways to communicate out of costume. It might've—" A soft creak as the trap door above Marinette's bed which lead to the terrace opened. Tikki dove for cover in Marinette's clothes as Marinette turned her head. "Hey, Alya," she said, surprised.

"Hey gurl," Alya said, clambering through the trap door. "Missed you this afternoon, what happened?"

Marinette cringed. "I was fabric shopping and got caught in an akuma attack. Had to hide out until it was over. I'm so sorry."

"Ahh. That sucks. Adrien missed the study session too, so it was just me 'n Nino."

"Just the way you like it," Marinette said with a smile.

"Yeah, well, he's kinda cute and all, but I was more interested in my girl and her crush interacting. And you both bailed."

"Adrien missed it too?"

Alya shrugged. "Something about a last minute photo shoot he couldn't get out of."

Marinette tapped her fingers against her lips as she considered that in silence. A photo shoot he couldn't get out of? So why had she seen him at two of the three akumas?

Alya patted the top of Marinette's head. "I know. It's horrible. Poor guy is overworked. Speaking of Adrien though, your bedroom looked a little sparse downstairs. Spring cleaning?"

Marinette shook her head. "I put his pictures away."

Alya's jaw dropped. "Why did you want to go and do a silly thing like that?"

Dropping her eyes to the river, Marinette shrugged and didn't answer.

Alya nudged Marinette with her shoulder. "Spill."

Marinette sighed. "Rather not."

"Marinette, you can tell me anything. You've been head over heels for him all school year. What changed?"
Another, more heartfelt sigh. "I overheard Lila in the bathrooms. They're dating. He got a girlfriend."
Alya stared at her. "And… why are you being so chill about it?"

"Who he kisses should be his choice, don't you think?"

Alya looked at her like she'd grown another head.

"I don't want to be that girl. I need to move on, and having those up weren't helping."

Alya's expression morphed into sympathetic and she pressed her head to Marinette's. "Oh, honey. I'm so sorry."

Marinette nodded and leant into her friend, seeking comfort. "I'm glad it's nearly summer. I can use that time to break this crush on him."

Wrapping her arm around Marinette's shoulder, Alya hugged her. "Question, do you want nothing to do with him, or do you want to firmly wedge him in the friendship corner?"

Marinette considered the full weight of that choice. Alya would help her achieve what she wanted, no matter what, but for one of the options she'd have to limit her contact with Nino. There was something fledgling between Nino and Alya, and even if it never panned out, Marinette didn't want to get in the way of that. "Friendship corner," she said, finally. "It wouldn't be right otherwise. He's Nino's best friend and I'd have to cut them both out. I couldn't do that. Nino didn't do anything wrong and neither did Adrien. He's a nice, kind person and I don't feel right about ignoring him because of something I did, not him. They're my feelings, I just need to get a handle on them and stop letting them control me."

Alya nodded. "Truer words never spoken. I'll help you."

"Thanks." Seeing an opportunity to change the topic, she said, "Helping you research for your article will help. Oh! Before you ask, I didn't see Volpina today during the akuma attack."

"Aww that's a shame, but—" Alya beamed, "—reports in saying we're missing a certain kitty cat. I wonder what's up with that."

Marinette couldn't help the burst of worry, or the sulk. "Maybe he ran off with Volpina."

Alya gasped and placed the back of her hand against her forehead dramatically. "Oh, the scandal! Poor Ladybug, betrayed by her kitten."

Marinette gave Alya a flat stare. "I was joking."

"I know, but just think of the implications." Lifting her hand from her forehead, she gestured the fading sky. "A sordid affair, a dastardly cat and a conniving fox. A broken heart, a hero striking out on her own. The whole of Paris will mourn with Ladybug. I can just see the headlines already."

"You would make it into a bigger deal than it really is."

"That's what media is supposed to do," Alya teased.

Marinette raised her eyebrows. "I thought it was to keep people informed."

"And embellish the truth. Twist people to our point of view. Make them be believe whatever I want them to believe."
"Sounds very manipulating, Alya."

"Always is," she said with a sigh. "I think that's the worst thing about media sometimes. But I'll tell the truth."

Marinette smiled and turned her head to look at the sunset. "Good."

Alya nudged her. "I got an hour before I need to go home to babysit my sisters. We can either use this hour to study or I can beat the pants off you in Mario Kart."

Marinette gave Alya a look, then threw her legs back over the railing of her terrace to bounce to her feet. "You can try."

Jovial, Alya danced toward the hatch opening. "Oh, you'd better bring it, gurl. I've been practicing."

Alya was long gone and Marinette had struggled through the majority of her physics study when the news came in. Akuma number four. A night akuma.

Ladybug sighed as she sprinted across the rooftops of Paris, following the sounds of the sirens. Papillon really knew how to kick her while she was down. He was going to keep kicking her, she was sure.

Okay, so it hadn't woken her up, so that was a good thing, although she regretted not having a nap when she could. It was late enough that her parents assumed she was tucked up in bed, another good thing (she'd done the pillow trick to be on the safe side). She'd gotten quality down time with Alya. Tikki was completely recharged and raring to go. All pluses.

A minus: Chat Noir still hadn't messaged her. There was a growing dread in her belly that he wouldn't be there to back her up again. It made her feet heavy and burdened her heart.

She pushed the worry away and concentrated on her next leap. Tiles on the roof she landed on rattled, but didn't slip. It was dark out, and darker still on the rooftops of Paris, even with all the lights from the street lamps and sometimes the tiles could be flimsy. Normally, with his bad luck, Chat Noir was the one who caught the loose tiles, but with her exhaustion, Ladybug knew she was susceptible too.

Pausing to catch her breath, she crouched on a rooftop, with her palms on the awning ahead of her.

The akuma was a bright blight against the night sky. A bright beacon of terror and turmoil.

Because the akuma was fire.

Mayhem in the Paris streets. People fleeing in terror or huddling in groups while firelight danced on their faces. Firefighters fought to put out wayward flames, trees and cars and homes. Police fought to guide people to safety and cordon off areas ahead of the akuma. Ambulance officers fought to decide who needed to be tended to first. They would keep things contained, keep people alive and unpanicked, until she could deal with the akuma and fix everything.

On her own. No cheeky face or smile. No puns to put her at ease, and she didn't want to think about how that particular point made her feel.

So much pressure.

The akuma was a bare chested man who was dressed like a circus performer. Stripy red leather pants, belts crisscrossing his naked chest, leather bracers on his wrists. He juggled fire batons and
breathed flame with every breath and when he belched, a great inferno burst forth from his lips and burnt everything.

She couldn't see the item which housed the akuma from where she was. Perhaps one of the belt buckles? Maybe it was one of the three flaming batons being juggled.

Ladybug clenched her hands. So much destruction already. Buildings smouldering, trees on fire, burning cars. First things first. She needed water and lots of it. Turning her head, she eyed the Seine. A good distance away, and already the direction the police were herding the akuma. They must have pre-empted that decision. She'd have to be quick about it and limit the damage the akuma could do.

"Here's hoping for a fire extinguisher lucky charm," she muttered and threw herself over the edge.

She landed in the middle of the street and burst into a sprint, bolting down the centre. People cheered and called her name in greeting as she ran. She smiled and acknowledged emergency personnel with a nod or a look, offering them a confidence she didn't feel. Given the scope of this akuma, and the fact people were working together to quell the fires, she had to give them hope it would be over soon.

Even if she didn't feel the same hope.

A fire akuma. Burning and flames and singed skin, this was going to be dangerous and Ladybug knew she'd need more than luck to survive. As tempting as it was to call for a pre-emptive lucky charm, she wanted to ensure she knew which item housed the akuma first.

She ran by another ambulance. The officers patched up a young man who gave her a grin and a thumbs up as she ran. Just because her ladybugs could heal wounds, didn't mean they didn't hurt when they occurred and she made a silent vow not to leave him in pain for much longer. "Anyone need help?"

One of the officers waved her on. "We got this!"

Fixing her eyes on the rapidly approaching akuma, who she called in her head 'Pryo' until the brute opened his mouth to gift her with a name, she reached for her yo-yo. Her goal was to get him to the water as fast as she could. Or, if that was unmanageable, into a park which had an irrigation system. Some place which was not as flammable as houses.

Roger, one of the officers she knew well since he was also Sabrina's father, was at the forefront of the operation to contain and control the direction of the akuma. As she sprinted up behind the akuma, Roger raised his hand in the air and drew a circle with his hand, a signal to the rest of the officers to get clear.

Pryo juggled his flaming batons as he approached the officers, throwing them into the air. They soared up high, falling down with such a speed the flames on their ends almost burned out, only to burst into life again as he caught them and tossed them once more. Flame illumined the street, orange dancing against the faces of people who stood too close. Ladybug could feel the heat being emitted from Pyro as she approached. Flame roaring from his mouth with every ragged breath; some bursts of flame were huge, while the others were tiny puffs vanishing into smoke.

Knowing she'd have an easier time getting closer to him if she got rid of those batons, she threw her yo-yo, swinging it in rapid succession. Scooping the flaming batons away from Pyro, she snapped each one of them before fetching the next, in case of akuma. They were empty and by the time she'd secured all the flaming batons, she had Pyro's complete attention.
He belched at her, great bursts of flame erupting from his mouth. Still running toward him, Ladybug dropped beneath the flame, skidding on her knees while she leant as far back as she could to escape the flame. Her shoulders grazed against the street before she caught herself.

Pyro dropped his chin, his head following and Ladybug closed her eyes as the fire baked the street above her head. Hoping she gained enough momentum, there was little she could do against the fire. As she slipped between Pyro's legs, she snagged his ankle and yanked him off balance.

He didn't make a sound as he fell, but a plume of flame erupted from his mouth. Ladybug wondered if he could speak or if the flame meant he couldn't.

As she went between his legs, she scoped him, her eyes skimming up and down his form while she searched for the item the akuma was housed in. Normally, it was like a sense had gone off in her, a homing device. Though occasionally it gave wrong impressions, such as Invis-Sabrina's bag (and Ladybug admitted she ignored the sense simply because she didn't want Chloé to be right), it was mostly accurate.

Belt buckle. She was certain of it. It didn't quite fit the rest of the outfit. Grimy and well-loved, it must have meant something to the person behind the akuma, since everything else was pristine and shiny. Except, to get the belt buckle, she'd have to manage to get the entire belt and maybe having to endure a complication or two. Like the fact that his belt was holding up his pants.

Where was Chat Noir? A perfect opportunity for a de-pantsing pun wasted.

Launching to her feet, she bolted in the direction of the Seine, flicking her yo-yo behind her as she did. It caught the akuma around the ankle. The sprint turned into a lurch as she took his weight, then started to drag him, face first, as fast as she could. She had to keep him off balance, had to keep him from breathing flame at her.

The police officers parted to let her dash through, dragging Pyro behind her and she spared a flashing smile at Roger.

"Good luck, Ladybug," he called.

Maybe lucky charm would be a gag. Then she could shove that in the akuma's mouth to prevent the flame, while using her yo-yo to tie him up.

And Chat Noir would have something to say about that too.

Shaking her head, Ladybug tried to clear her mind of Chat Noir. Even in his absence, he'd left an imprint on her. She could almost hear his teasing in her head, that lilt in his voice as he reached the punchline, and the cocky, confident expression he would wear when delivering it.

She ran through the street, swinging her yo-yo from side to side so that she dragged Pyro in a pendulum motion, hoping the added friction on the ground would disorient the akuma. At the very least, while his leather pants would protect him from harm, he was sure to have road rash on his chest.

Pyro seemed to have more strength than she realised. Glancing over her shoulder as she ran, she was just in time to see him sitting up, sliding after her on his heels and buttock as he reached for her yo-yo to grab.

She mentally willed her yo-yo to retract and wasn't fast enough. He gripped it, digging in his heels and used her forward momentum to pull himself to his feet. He yanked and pulled her off balance at the same time he belched at her.
She curled up in a ball with her back toward the akuma. Tucking her chin against her chest, she wrapped her arms over her exposed head and fervently prayed that she was protected. Flame washed over her and heat singed against her suit.

She was very grateful that while the fire tingled her back, it didn't burn. Luck was with her today.

Still having a grip on her yo-yo, the moment the flame seemed to dim, she gave it a hard yank. Pyro yanked back, his chest heaving. With each breath, small flames shot out his nose. A tug of war battle erupted between them as they fought over Ladybug's yo-yo, miraculous against akuma strength.

Ladybug was stronger, but every time she pulled Pyro off balance, he resorted to belching at her and forced her to duck. At least with him belching at her, he wasn't aiming for the surrounding buildings and the street itself wasn't about to ignite. She needed her yo-yo, she needed it to call on lucky charm and this tug of war with the akuma wasn't getting it any closer to the river. It was a complete stalemate.

Taking a deep breath, she braced herself for Pyro's next breath. When it was over, she darted in close.

Ladybug wasn't a fighter. Not like her Chat. Ladybug was an avoider, only landing a physical blow when she absolutely had to. She preferred to be range, rather than get in close. But that didn't mean she couldn't. She could tag-team fight alongside Chat Noir quite aptly, bouncing in to roundhouse then dart away, but any sort of long-term physical confrontation, she'd be in trouble.

So, this was a risk.

A risk which ended with her being backhanded across the face and flying backward down the road from the strength of the blow of the akuma. She hit the pavement on her shoulders, then threw her legs over her head and ended up on all fours. Although her face stung, she smiled. Her actions had caused Pyro to release her yo-yo.

Throwing it into the air, she yelled, "Lucky charm!" A flare of light, then a red and black spotted umbrella dropped into her hands. She stared at it in horror. "An umbrella? Really? How is that helpful? What's next, a bag of ducks?"

Running her hand over her face, she glanced around. There must be a reason for it and she had to think of it quick, before Pyro got close enough to belch at her again. He marched toward her, his face determined, and blowing smoke and fire from his nose like a cartoon bull would as it charged. And she was the red flag it was aimed for.

Heart thumping in her chest so hard it could burst free at any moment, she frantically searched her surroundings for something to help her. Her eyes landed on a fire hydrant embedded into the pavement. Nothing but a small nozzle protruding from the ground, requiring a key to unlock.

Ladybug rushed toward it. Gripping the nozzle, she heaved, ripping piping from the paving. Metal shrieked as she tore it apart and high-pressured water surged from the broken pipe, gushing out into the street with force.

Opening the umbrella, Ladybug got in the path of the water. It was a created item, she was sure it would withstand the water pressure and not be ripped to shreds. The jet of water drenched her and pummelled the umbrella, before it allowed itself to be redirected at Pyro. It slammed into him and a great hissing erupted. Steam rose from his arms as he held his hands in front of himself to prevent the jet of water from hitting his face.
He side stepped, trying to escape the stream. Ladybug adjusted to keep pummelling him. He side stepped again and she angled her umbrella so the water kept hitting him. The longer she kept the water on him, the more steam flooded the area. Between the spray of the water and the steam, she found it difficult to see.

Her arms ached. She was cold, wet and panting with effort to keep the jet of reflected water spurting at Pyro. Pyro forced himself against the direction of the water, his face still carefully angled away and fire pluming with every breath. Step by step, he was slowly getting closer to her and she didn’t know how much longer she could last.

Was she facing a strong man as well as a fire breather? She didn't know. Couldn't tell. Damn akuma. How was she going to get the belt braced like this?

A shadow dropped from the rooftops and landed behind Pyro. Something metallic flashed, though Ladybug couldn't see what it was through the steam and water. She sputtered, trying to peek and see what was going on. The sound of the roaring water didn't conceal the sound of flesh on flesh and bursting flame.

Was it Chat Noir? Could it be? Who else would it be, it had to be him!

She didn't stop her water jet, she had to keep it going because it unbalanced Pyro and kept his attention diverted, allowing Chat Noir to do what needed to be done.

Then, "Ladybug! Catch!"

Dropping the umbrella, she stepped away from the water jet and stretched out her hand to catch the belt flying through the air to her. Snapping the buckle deftly, she grabbed her yo-yo and slung it for the akuma. The moment it was purified and released, Ladybug tossed the umbrella into the air with a cry, then slumped to the ground.

Ladybug ran her wet hands over her face, then flicked water away from her fingers. Her chest heaved as she tried to catch her breath. She sat on her ankles with her hands on her knees and lifted her head to watch the ladybugs do their miraculous work and repair everything.

A black gloved hand reached down to her to offer assistance and for a heartbeat, she found herself automatically reaching for it. Chat Noir was back and she was beyond relieved and ready to hug him to pieces before demanding an explanation.

Except…

The glove was wrong. It was missing the guard. No clawed fingers.

Shocked, her gaze followed the arm up and it was overcome by yellow.

"Wasps up, Ladybug."

Chapter End Notes

*Credit goes to Duck (adjit on tumblr) for the lucky charm item! (hence the bag of ducks)*
Adrien ran his hands over the beige carpet in the library, searching beneath one of the chairs. He’d sat in the library while he still had Plagg, so it was possible the ring had fallen off here. He’d looked everywhere he could think of for his ring. Scoured the mansion from top to bottom, looking in all the places he spent time before it went missing in the hope he’d dropped the ring somewhere. But even if he dropped it, why had Plagg disappeared? He hadn’t the other times.

Today had been rough. Three, unrelenting akuma, two of them not even spaced out. Back to back. The last time they’d had back-to-back akuma was Antibug and Vanisher, and afterward they’d both been exhausted. His poor lady. She looked bone-weary and Adrien was willing to believe her kwami was just as tired.

Although she struggled to hide her emotions, Adrien thought she’d looked defeated and upset as she swung away from the last akuma. Her eyes kept looking for Chat Noir, searching and searching, despair clearly written on her face when she came up empty. Her eyes had passed over Adrien without seeing him as he lurked in the crowd of people, desperately trying to find a way to talk to her. Or help. Let her know she wasn’t alone. Anything.

She didn’t need him. If anything, the three akuma she’d taken down on her own proved that. She’d been fantastic and amazing, but the evidence was insurmountable. She didn’t need him.

And while that thought should’ve stung and eaten his confidence, it hadn’t. Because there was desperation in her eyes. The dashed hope when the akuma was defeated and Chat Noir still hadn’t come broke Adrien’s heart. She wanted him beside her, she wanted to work with him, and that’s what kept Adrien going.

“Adrien?”

Adrien closed his eyes, then pulled himself out from beneath the chair. Resting his hand on the cushioned seat, he gave his father a sure-but-game smile. “Hello, Father.”

With tilted head, Gabriel stood in the doorway, a piece of paper in his hands as he looked at his son. “You’re up late tonight. What are you doing?”

“I misplaced my phone,” Adrien said and cast his eyes around the room, still looking for his ring. “It’s run out of battery, so I can’t call it. I’m just checking all the places I saw it last.”

“I see. Very irresponsible of you.”

“Well, that’s me,” Adrien said and stood so he could move to the next chair. “Irresponsible central. Can’t trust me with anything.”
“Or, perhaps we have a thief in the household,” Gabriel said, scratching his chin. “It does appear that a lot of things have gone missing in recent days.”

Adrien blinked. Then blinked again. Slowly turning to face his father, he asked, “A thief?”

“Obviously it is not one of our staff,” Gabriel continued. “They have all been screened. But I wonder if some of our access points aren’t too accessible, allowing someone to come and go as they please.”

Adrien’s limbs locked up. He swallowed heavily, wondering at the inflection in his father’s voice. Did he know something? Did he suspect? Adrien knew where all the cameras where and how to avoid them, but was it possible his father had added more.

His father had the Miraculous book. Had his father taken the ring?

Adrien couldn’t exactly accuse his father of taking his ring without proof, because he couldn’t admit how important the ring was. He needed to tread carefully and figure out if his father really did take the ring, and where he’d put it if it were gone. The safe? But how would he get into it?

No. No that wasn’t possible. His father wouldn’t do that. He’d know how much Chat Noir was needed. He’d even complimented Chat Noir and Ladybug. As stern and emotionless as his father was, he’d never stolen anything from Adrien before. When Adrien had things confiscated because of behaviour (or danger), Gabriel always made sure Adrien understood why the action was necessary.

So, was he overreacting and he’d really just lost the ring?

Nervous, Adrien licked his lips. “Oh?”

Nathalie appeared behind Gabriel. “Monsieur Agreste, you have a scheduled video conference from Puerto Rico in five minutes.”

Gabriel turned his head. “Of course.”

“Ahh, Adrien,” Nathalie said, lifting her tablet. “There you are. We need to review your schedule for the coming week. How much time would you like set aside for study for your exams?”

“Ahh yes,” Gabriel said, turning back. “Those are soon.”

“As much as you can give me,” Adrien replied.

Gabriel nodded. “I agree. Exams are important.” To Nathalie, he said, “Free up as much time as you can.” To Adrien, he said, “Consider your extra lessons cancelled and all non-essential photo shoots postponed.”

Adrien smiled, pleased with that. “Thank you. I appreciate it. I’ll do my best.”

“I expect nothing less.”

“Your meeting,” Nathalie reminded Gabriel.

Gabriel nodded and strode away and Nathalie approached Adrien with her tablet ready. “Let’s check your schedule.”

Adrien really hated working on his schedule because it always felt like Nathalie chopped his life into little pieces. Having to schedule ‘free time’ and argue for it was a burden. Having to schedule ‘Nino time’ was even worse, because Gabriel hadn’t been impressed with his friend since the Bubbler incident. Today, with Gabriel’s blessing, Nathalie managed to clear most of Adrien’s week of
photoshoots and lessons in lieu of study. Although he’d be expected to be in his room, he probably wouldn’t even be checked on for the majority of the time. His father trusted him not to be disobedient.

With his schedule cleared, it was more time to look for his ring and more time to track Ladybug down.

Free at last, Adrien walked into his room and slumped at his computer. He wished he and Ladybug had devised a way to contact each other if they couldn’t transform and vowed that, when he got his ring back, he’d make sure they had a way to communicate, even if they had to resort to emails. They really should’ve thought of something before. A message board. An email system. A regular meeting place. They relied on their items and their kwami too much.

With all this technology at their fingertips and he didn’t even have his lady’s phone number. They’d been partnering for a nearly a year, they should’ve thought to give themselves another way to talk to each other.

“No point crying over it now,” he muttered and stretched out his arm to nudge his computer out of sleep mode. A couple of clicks and the Ladyblog loaded. “I just… need to get her to listen.”

Maybe he could use Alya’s blog to leave a message. Except that he’d once overheard Alya complaining heaps of people claimed they were Ladybug or Chat Noir, or wanted to use her blog to arrange a meeting with their heroes. Adrien lacked any sort of proof that he was who he claimed to be. Maybe that was why Ladybug wouldn’t listen too…

She was alone. Fighting alone. Without him. Worrying about him because he wasn’t there. He’d seen it, the way she was always looking for him. She worried.

He was letting her down. She needed him and he was failing her. He hated this feeling.

Resting his elbows on his desk, he cradles his head in his hand. “What am I going to do?” Huffing out a breath, he muttered, “A plan. I need a plan. Maybe…” He flicked his head up and googled ‘Chat Noir Cosplay costumes for sale’.

The next fifteen minutes were spent failing to find a costume which was even close to his original. They were close enough to fool the average person, but they all lacked something. Gloves guards the wrong shape or ankle guards too long or too short. Belts too thick or armour pads too large. Masks which covered too much or not enough of their faces. Ladybug wouldn’t be fooled.

He’d have to commission one and he didn’t think his father would approve of that. He barely approved of all Adrien’s anime purchases, but did so because Adrien’s mother had insisted every child needed an outlet, a passion that they loved. If Adrien added cosplaying to his lists of requests, it was sure to be vetoed.

He sighed, slumping back on his chair and let it spin idly in circles. “Now what… think, think.” His eye caught sight of a small charm bracelet on his desk. Adrien sat up straight in his chair. “Marinette!” he blurted, talking aloud because he was so used to Plagg talking back. “She sews. Maybe she’ll make me a cosplay of Chat Noir that would be believable enough to get me close to Ladybug.” He clapped his hands. “That’s perfect!”

As he reached for the phone to leave Marinette a message, and maybe if he was lucky, talk to her tonight, a Ladyblog alert went off advising him of an akuma wreaking havoc in Le Quartier Latin. Alarmed, Adrien turned all his attention to the phone. Four akuma? Four? Ladybug was going to be exhausted. While Le Quartier Latin wasn’t far by baton or car, Adrien had neither of those. He
swiped his phone, hunting more information.

And then distance didn’t matter anymore. Fire. The akuma was fire.

Pre-Plagg, sneaking out of the mansion had been a complicated process, one which Adrien rarely had the patience for since the payoff wasn’t exactly large. He hadn’t known anyone but Chloé, so sneaking out had only been tempting when there was a movie on he couldn’t get at home. But now, Adrien knew all the nooks and crannies, all the ways in and out of the mansion. Ones he could take while transformed, and ones he could use to sneak back in if he de-transformed before he managed to make it home.

He’d never snuck out his secret entrances before and he was fairly certain he made too much noise for it to be considered sneaking. He was lucky his father was on a call and that the rest of the staff had left for the night.

Once he was clear of the mansion, he broke into a run.

She’d head for water. She’d have to head for water. It was the most logical thing she could do. The largest and closest body of water was the Seine. So he pre-empted her decision and angled for the river, hoping he’d come across her that way. It meant he had less distance to travel too.

Sprinting wouldn’t help, he couldn’t maintain that sort of speed and it was fortunate that he was incredibly fit, thanks to his father’s grueling regimes to keep his figure perfect for modelling and the fact that being Chat Noir made being physical a necessity. But without the suit to supplement his own strength and endurance, Adrien had to rely on himself.

He managed to jump on the back of a late night bus travelling along the river, standing on the rear bumper and completely disregarding his own safety, just so he could get a little closer to the akuma. Even with that, by the time he got there, his chest heaved in effort and he was soaked with sweat.

Ladybug wasn’t at the river, but she was close and he followed the flashing lights and sound of crackling fire. Many people milled around, watching the action and staying a safe distance away from the area cordoned off by police. Adrien could see the path the akuma had taken to get here as firefighters fought flames in buildings and trees beyond. Finding a free space to view, Adrien was just in time to see Ladybug turn her back on the akuma and curl into a ball to protect herself before being engulfed in flame.

People around him stifled shrieks and gasps of shock and he could understand that. It felt like his heart stopped beating. Everything stopped. His skin chilled, his lungs froze, his legs locked. His mind shut down, repeating a single word over and over again, an eternal loop of grief and pain. No.

Fire continued to pour from the akuma’s mouth and swept over Ladybug’s form. Heat from the blast seared Adrien’s face even from this distance, but he couldn’t move to protect it.

He couldn’t see her within the fire. Would her suit be strong enough to protect her? Her head was unprotected. Oh, god, what if she was already dead?

People watched. People waited. They talked among themselves, treating the whole thing like a spectacle to gawk at. Why weren’t any of them doing anything?

That thought spurred Adrien to take a step forward, only to smack his chest into a wooden cane held before him. Startled, Adrien glanced over to see a small, Chinese man standing beside him and watching the fight.

“And just what do you think you can do?”
“Help,” he responded, looking back at Ladybug. “She’s in trouble.” He could see it. She was dead on her feet and still fighting because how could she not? People were in danger and with or without a Miraculous, if Ladybug could help, she would. And so would he, even if she yelled at him for it again.

The akuma paused his fire belch to breathe. Ladybug unfurled from her protective position, blooming like a flower as she yanked hard on her yo-yo to pull the fire akuma off balance.

The sheer relief at seeing her unscathed made Adrien’s knees weak.

“Looks to me like she has everything under control.”

Adrien shook his head, then bit his tongue to keep from retorting. The old man didn’t know her. Didn’t know what it was like. What Ladybug needed was a partner. Someone to distract the akuma so she could do her work. Someone to tag team. Someone to be by her side. She needed him and he couldn’t be there for her from the sidelines.

His brain worked overtime as he watched Ladybug duck and dodge flame and play tug-a-war with the akuma. There had to be something he could do. Call to the akuma. Distract it, even for a second. Sneak up behind it and whack the akuma on the head. Something. Anything.

Flicking his eyes to the akuma, he studied it. The belt. It had to be in the belt. It was the only thing which didn’t quite match the rest of the outfit.

He watched as Ladybug darted in close only to be struck across the face and flung across the street. Adrien lurched forward only to smack into the old man’s stick again.

“What could you do, boy?” the man asked. He seemed completely relaxed as he watched Ladybug fight for her life, his life and everyone’s safety. “She’s a hero. You’re not. This is hero business.”

Adrien clenched his hands into fists. “I can help.”

He shook his head. “You’re not indestructible.”

“That doesn’t matter,” he said, watching Ladybug pick herself up and call on her lucky charm. “If I can distract the akuma even for two seconds—”

“You’d get yourself killed.”

He didn’t care about himself. All he cared about was buying her time to defeat this akuma. “It’s a risk I have to take.”

“Why you?”

“Why not me?” Adrien snarled, glaring at the man. “She needs someone to back her up. She can’t do everything alone. She’ll be a target. He’s already targeting her and—”

“She has Chat Noir.”

“No. She doesn’t.”

“Because your ring is gone.”

Blood drained away from Adrien’s face and his stomach fell through the world. His lungs emptied,
then refused to take a breath in. He’d never felt so side-blinded by anything before. “What?”

“Miraculous wielders are always so altruistic,” the old man continued with a shake his head. “Even in the more dire circumstances, they put others needs before their own. It’s a wonder any of you survive.” He sighed. “If you truly must help, even without your ring, use this.” He held up a box. “At least you’ll be around to find him.”

A box which looked exactly like the one Plagg had come to Adrien in.

Adrien squeaked in shock.

The old man placed it in Adrien’s hands. “Good luck, Adrien.”

Eyes fixed on the box in his hands, Adrien didn’t notice the old man leaving. He didn’t snap back to awareness until Ladybug ripped a fire hydrant from the ground, metal shrieking and groaning, to use her lucky charm umbrella to deflect the water. Steam filled the area, fogging up his vision.

Should he use this? Would that be betraying Plagg? He felt a fierce sense of loyalty to his little friend, but it was also divided between Plagg and Ladybug. And right now, Ladybug needed him.

Plagg would… well, maybe he wouldn’t understand, but Adrien could deal with that when he found his friend.

He ducked away, hiding behind some boxes a shop owner had left out and opened the box. A golden comb with a bee perched in the middle lay nestled on velvet. Not even wondering why or how he’d been given the chance at another kwami, he plucked it out of the box and waited.

A golden ball of light, before a small pop and the bee disappeared from the comb as a delightful little creature floated above. Black paws up to her elbows, a stripy stinger and stripes on her head, she had solid dark blue eyes and a patch of fuzz around her neck which looked so soft. “Hello,” she chirped. “My name is Deedee and—”

“What’s the phrase?” he blurted, peering around the box at Ladybug. She was still trying to keep the fire akuma contained by using an umbrella to redirect water. The fire akuma was gaining precious ground on her.

“Rude!”

Cringing, he continued, “I’m sorry, you can sting me later. Right now, she’s in trouble.” Taking a deep breath, he shoved the comb into his hair haphazardly. “Wax on. Honey up. Stripes on. Stingers out.” He went through every combination of bee related things he could think of, switching up the words but she still remained.

An exasperated sigh from the bee kwami. “Fuzz up.”

Adrien blinked. “Really? Fuzz up?”

Giving him stink-eye, Deedee shot into the comb and Adrien was engulfed in yellow light. Blinking open his eyes, he glanced down at himself. Black boots to his knees, black gloves to his elbow, the rest was yellow. Striking, thick black stripes on his stomach, ending in a v point in the middle. Around his neck and down his upper arms puffed the same fuzz he’d seen on Deedee. The mask felt odd, thicker and more encumbering. Glancing in the shop window, he saw in his reflection, instead of a mask, two blue globes, much like goggles, covered his eyes. He ran his hands along the goggles, finding the bee comb tucked in the band at the back of his head. His blond hair had frosted black tips so the spikes looked like stingers, and two stood on end at the top of his head, resembling
antennae.

“She’s not going to recognise me,” he muttered, barely recognising himself.

But maybe she would. She’d been able to tell him apart from his doppelganger… but only after he’d shown her it was him. He’d just have to do it again.

Glancing over his shoulder, he wasn’t sure if he was disappointed or not to find his back absent of wings. A golden hammer was attached to his hip and he lifted it to study it. Like his staff, he was willing to bet it could extend and retract, but he wondered at the hammer end. What was its purpose? The flat end of the hammer head was hexagon shaped, much like honeycomb was, while the other was a bee barb instead of being two pronged. Was he like ‘Fix it Felix’? He really should’ve asked Deedee what powers she had instead of being so impatient. He’d have to apologise.

And rely on skill instead of powers.

Ladybug cried out and the new-bee launched himself upward and onto the roof of the shop. Scurrying along, he made sure he was well behind the akuma before he engaged.

He threw himself into the fray, playing dirty as he hit the akuma from behind. Kicks behind the knees, a hammer to the back and then an uppercut when the akuma turned to confront him. While the akuma had his back to the water, the new-bee fumbled for the akuma’s belt and ripped it from him. Separated from the akuma, the man slumped to his knees.

“Ladybug, catch!” he bellowed, throwing the akuma in a belt to his lady. She worked quickly to purify the akuma and cast her cleansing spell to fix all the damage. Slumping to her knees as her ladybugs raced away from her, she looked completely spent. His heart went out to her, but he was back now. Back at her side. Right where he was supposed to be.

Walking to her, he offered her his hand to help her to her feet. With a grin, he said, “Wasps up, Ladybug.”

Her eyes went wide as she followed his arm up. They went wider still as they landed on his face. “I know I’m late, bee-utiful,” he said, still smiling. “But it s’warms my heart to see you’re—”

She decked him. Surging out of her kneel to issue a sharp and decisive punch to the nose. As he staggered back, she dropped and swept his legs out from under him. He hit the ground on his shoulders and she pressed her foot into the fuzz on his solar plexus. “I am about done with you akuma!”

Wide-eyed and startled, he lay still so he didn’t infuriate her more. “I’m not—”

Her yo-yo span. “You tell Papillon he will never—”

“—an akuma!”

“How dumb do you really think I am,” she snarled. “Volpina. You are not going to do that to me again. Never again. So. What idiotic name did you give yourself?”

“Um... Bumblebee,” he said, thinking quickly. “You know. Like in the Transformers. ‘More than meets the eye’?”

She didn’t look like she understood the reference.
“I helped you,” he pressed. “I threw you that fire akuma’s… akuma.”

“You de-pants one of your own,” she said, then snorted. The ghost of a smiled appeared and she turned melancholy. “Oh, Chat would’ve loved that.”

An opening! He could tell her, he had to tell her. No lies or secrets between them. Grinning his best Chat grin at her, he said, “I do—”

She ignored him. “Fine. Let’s get this over with.”

“My lady, I’m—”

She snarled and her foot pressed all the air out of his lungs. “Let’s get one thing straight, ‘new-bee’. You do not get to call me that. You do not get to call me ‘my lady’ or flirt or anything else with me. I’m Chat’s, do you hear?”

Wait. What?

Her toes pushed against his chest more. “Do. You. Hear?”

“Purrfectly,” he gasped.

She rolled her eyes and stopped spinning her yo-yo, returning it to her hip. “Congrats. You turned out to be my easiest akuma of the day. I hope it was worth it.” Bending down, she grabbed Bumblebee’s golden hammer. “Bye, bye, Bumblebee. Nice talk. Give my regards to Papillon.” Gripping the hammer, she tried to break it.

And failed.

Confused, she tried again. “That’s not right.”

“I told you,” he said, and rested his hand on her calf. “Not an akuma. He can’t do two at once, can he? I’m Bumblebee, your new partner.”

Blood drained away from her face and Ladybug’s mouth dropped open in horror. Dropping his hammer on his stomach, she stumbled away from him. “What?”

Winded, Bumblebee sat up and clutched at his stomach. “I have a kwami and a miraculous—”

Her hands covered her mouth and her eyes filled with tears. “No.”

He frowned, wondering why she was so upset. “Ladybug, what’s—”

She turned on her heel and fled into the night.

Chapter End Notes

Deedee is not the canon name of the kwami, although their appearance is. I made her female, simply because the majority of bees are (and the males are called drones and don’t do anything). But, just because the kwami is a girl, doesn’t mean the Bee can’t be a boy. And personally, I want to see opposite sex kwami/wielder combo!
Headcanons about Deedee coming next chapter.

Stay tuned on tumblr, there may be a couple of surprises coming your way soon! (http://qookyquiche.tumblr.com/post/146873428495/beeadrien-design-for-kryallaorchids-newest-m1)
What's more dangerous than being with a fool?

Chapter Summary

What's more dangerous than being with a fool?
Fooling with a bee!

Chapter Notes

Shh. Don't tell Moon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bumblebee chased after the fleeing Ladybug as fast as he could, but since he hadn’t asked Deedee about the weapon, he wasn’t going to use it like his baton in case the settings were different. He didn’t want to learn on the fly, which meant he had to pursue Ladybug on foot and hope she didn’t swing away from him. “Ladybug! Wait!”

She fled over rooftops, running and leaping from building to building. Wiping her face, she stumbled a few times, tiles slipping under her feet, which allowed him to gain precious ground on her. “First rule!” she snapped over her shoulder at him. “Identities are secrets. Stop following me!”

“Please! What’s wrong?”

Instead of leaping, she planted her feet and stopped on the edge of a building. As she turned around to face him, he saw the water stains on her cheeks and the quiver of her lips. “Is he dead?”

He skidded to a halt so he didn’t run into her. “What?”

“Is he dead?”

He was bewildered by the pain on her face and in her stance. Who dared hurt her so much? His insides twisted up into knots, he asked the question he wasn’t sure he wanted an answer to. “Who’s dead?”

One of the tears in her eyes spilled over and trickled down her cheek. “Chat Noir. Is he dead? Is that why you’re here?”

“Aww, bug,” he crooned. His heart went out to her and his hands followed his heart in the want to offer her comfort. “Have you been carrying that around?”

She shook her head and danced away from him. “Don’t.” Hugging herself, she looked like her whole world was collapsing around her and she struggled to hold it together.

“Chat Noir’s not dead.”

With a strangled sob, Ladybug closed her eyes and pressed her hand to her chest. Curling in on herself, her other hand covered her mouth to muffle the noise. “You’re sure?”
“Absolutely sure, my lady, because—”

She snapped open her eyes to glare. “What did I say?”

With a small cringe, he extended a hand to her, palm up. He was going to embarrass her, he was sure. Especially with her ‘I’m Chat’s’ proclamation before. But she needed to know he was still with her. That he wasn’t going to let her down. “Look, I know you probably don’t want to hear this right now, but I’m—”

She stabbed him in the fluff with her finger. “You are not replacing him! He’s my partner.”

He blinked. “Yes, but—”

“I don’t know where he is,” she continued. “But he’s coming back. I’m sure of it. And I don’t want another partner.”

How did her words manage to hurt and also make him feel wonderful? Conflicted, he said, “Okay, but—”

Her earring beeped and she covered her ear with her hand. “I need to go.”

He was never going to get a word in. “Please,” he begged. Taking several steps toward her, he cupped both hands together ahead of him. “Can I just get two seconds of your time?”

“Excuse me for being exhausted!” she snapped. “Four lucky charms in one day, without help, and then you decide to swan in on the last one and—” She gasped and visibly swallowed her anger. Puffing out the gasp of breath, she scrubbed a hand over her face. “I’m sorry. That was rude. I’m just—”

He understood. He really did. With a nod, he tried to show her he was okay with her outburst. “Grumpy bug when you’re tired.” She wasn’t listening. And she wasn’t going to listen until she’d had some sleep. He could see that. Tomorrow. He’d tell her tomorrow.

A smile haunted the edges of her lips. “Something like that. Do you like cookies?”

Derailed by the abrupt change in topic, Bumblebee nodded. “I do.”

“Do you have a favourite?” A larger smile bloomed and she waggled her finger. “It better not be honey.”

He grinned at her, caught up in her sudden teasing. That was a good sign, right? “Chocolate chip.”

She nodded and the smile turned sad. “Chat’s too,” she said and pointed up at the Eiffel Tower, the static backdrop to any Paris night on the rooftops. “Tomorrow morning. Eleven. I’ll be there.”

“Unless we have an akuma before that.”

She flashed him a brief smile. “Yeah.”

Bumblebee nodded and made a flourishing bow from the waist. The temptation to kiss her hand was strong, but he resisted. “Until tomorrow,” nope, he couldn’t resist, “—honey.”

She made an angry puff and turned to leap away.

He watched her leave with a smile on his face. Wasn’t it interesting how many times she’d mentioned Chat in such a small space of time? Perhaps absence made her heart fonder? Or maybe
she’d just been that worried about him.

He didn’t know. But he wanted to find out. He especially wanted to find out about the whole ‘I’m Chat’s’ business. Was it possible she’d started to reciprocate? Or had she just been so exhausted she didn’t realise what she was saying?

First, though, he had to face an angry bee and apologise.

No one had noticed his absence, so no one noticed him slipping back into his bedroom through the window. Glancing around, he sat on his bed and turned on the lamp beside it. “Fuzz down.”


Yellow lightning crackled around him as the suit vanished and Deedee emerged from the comb. She glared at him and turned her back with a huff.

“I’m so sorry for my impatience, Deedee,” Adrien said as humbly as he could. “Please forgive me. Ladybug was in trouble. She’s the love of my life and she was getting hurt. I couldn’t stand there anymore and watch.”

Deedee peered at him over her shoulder. She sniffed haughtily and looked away from him again. “You haven’t even given me the courtesy of your name.”

He smacked himself in the head. “That was so rude of me!”

“Very rude.”

“Forgive my manners.” Putting his hand over his heart, he inclined his head toward her. “I’m Adrien. Adrien Agreste, welcome to my home.”

The bee kwami lost a little of her ferocity. She tilted her head at him one way, then the other. With a waggle of her stinger, she smiled. “You are polite for one of Plagg’s kittens.”

With a rapid blink, he considered. “I… guess.”

“It’s been a while since I substituted for him. The situation must be dire.”

Adrien leant toward her. “Substituted?”

“Emergency kwami substitute at your service!” Deedee announced and gave a smart salute. Dropping her paw, she wriggled in the air, waggling her little stinger like she was a puppy. “I protect the wielder when their kwami cannot.”

“This happens a lot?” Adrien asked, surprised.

Deedee nodded. “It is my duty. I give other kwami time to recuperate from injury or illness while allowing their wielder to remain at the frontlines. My gifts are suitable replacements for most kwami and, as I am healer and protector of the hive, it is my honour to serve.”

“Doesn’t that ever get lonely?” Adrien asked. “Don’t you want your own wielder?”

“I do not understand the purpose of your question,” Deedee said, cocking her head at him. “This is what I chose. Other kwami bind themselves to one wielder. I bind myself to all. I protect the hive; this is my purpose. And I’m good at it.”

Worried he may have offended her, he murmured, “Oh. Well, thank you. I appreciate it. I didn’t think anything could harm a kwami.”
Deedee inclined her head. “There are ways. The suit can become damaged, if that happens, it injures the kwami. Plagg has been injured, yes?”

“No,” Adrien said and hung his head. He pressed his elbows to his knees and buried his hands in his hair. “I lost the ring.”

Deedee dropped down in the air so she could still be in his line of sight. “Unlikely,” she replied. “You did not voluntarily remove it, did you?”

He released his head. “No. Of course not! Plagg told me never to do that. But it’s fallen off before, I assumed—”

“Plagg would stay active unless he’s had to retreat to protect the integrity of the ring,” Deedee said, patting the fuzz around her neck. “I suspect it was stolen from you.”

Adrien jerked, almost falling from the bed from the force of her words. “Stolen?”

“It has happened before. People get jealous and think they can use a kwami for their own benefits. Has anyone shown particular interest in it?”

“Only… everyone.” A sudden energy burst within him and he stood so he could pace. “They all know. The whole of Paris knows. Papillon made sure he told everyone what he was after. He wants my ring and Ladybug’s earrings. Do you know how many people have asked us to give them up so he’ll stop terrorising Paris? We won’t bow to his demands. Not ever.”

“Good.”

He threw his hands around as he ranted, “I don’t even know why he wants them! How would he even know I have it? Has he figured out my identity? And if he has, why hasn’t he attacked me directly?”

“Well, it would have to be someone who knew what the ring looked like in dormant form,” Deedee said. “Papillon could know what it looked like, but perhaps not. It is also possible the person who took the ring does not know what they have.” Deedee glanced around. “You appear most affluent. Perhaps they thought it would be valuable.”

He stared at her incredulously. “You think I’ve been hit by a pickpocket?”

Deedee lifted her shoulders. “I do not know. Not for certain. But we will find out, together.”

Thinking hard, he asked Deedee a question Plagg had never given him a clear answer to. “What does Papillon gain from taking my ring or Ladybug’s earrings?”

Deedee narrowed her eyes at him for a moment. “You… haven’t met with the great guardian yet, have you?”

“Guardian? That old guy I met today? I didn’t even know there was a guardian. Plagg’s not been very forthcoming with information.”

“I see.” She patted her fuzz and buzzed in consideration, her little antennae wriggling. “In that case I must speak with Tikki as soon as possible.”

“Ladybug’s kwami?” Adrien ran a hand through his hair. “We… don’t know each other’s identity yet. I don’t know how I’d do that.”
“Speak to Ladybug. Request that your kwamis have a chance to speak. I’m certain we could work something out. Separate rooms to de-transform in, for example.”

“I’ll ask. Deedee, can someone else use my ring? What if the person who stole it comes after you? What then? You’re at risk! I can’t—”

“Hush, Adrien. No one can use your ring while you are alive and bonded to Plagg,” Deedee said. “Not even Papillon. That is another reason why I protect the hive.” She smirked. “And no one but those I choose can touch my item without being stung.”

Adrien took the comb out of his hair and rested it in his palms. Flopping back on his bed, he said, “That’s something, I guess.”

Deedee tilted her head the other way as she looked at him. “We will get Plagg back. Do not fret.”

Adrien nodded. “I hope so. I don’t like being without him.” He blinked and said hurriedly, “Not that I don’t appreciate you being here—”

Deedee smiled. “The stronger bond you have with your kwami, the better he will suit you. I am not concerned that you would prefer him over me. I want to help you reunite.” She giggled. “If only for the look on his face when he realises I substituted.”

“Thank you.” He looked at the comb. “This is going to be… difficult to wear all the time.”

Deedee giggled. “Yes. I know.” She rose up to pluck at his hair. “Although it is the colour of sunflowers, you do not have sufficient hair to need a comb. You do not need to wear me until you are ready to transform. I can sit in your pocket until there is need.”

He smiled, then sat up straight. “Oh! I didn’t ask before. What does the hammer do? Can it be extended like Plagg’s baton?”

“No,” Deedee replied. “The other functions are the same though. You will be lighter on your feet than you were as Chat Noir and therefore do not need an extendable baton.”

“I did notice the jumps felt easier. But my baton was also good for a staff weapon, I don’t think I can wield the hammer the same way.”

“It will require you to modify your attacks. I cannot provide you with a staff.”

“What can you do?”

Deedee buzzed in happiness. “Bees are natural architects,” she said. “Great hive colonies for our Queen and our workers. But we are also warriors. I can both build and harm. One end of the hammer creates complex wax structures suitable to your needs, the other injects a poison. With the inanimate object, it will cease functioning, and, if the item is flimsy like cloth, it will disintegrate.”

He nodded to show he understood. “And a living being?”

“They will be temporarily immobilised, but the degree of immobility will depend on the size of the being and their resistance to poison. For a rock akuma, for example, poison wouldn’t work.”

His eyes widened. He could already see the potential in that. “Handy.”

“My ability to create and cause harm means that, while I am not as strong as Tikki and Plagg, I can temporarily replace them, and I can also replace other kwami too. For example, the butterfly kwami
imbues champions with power and while I cannot do that, I can create suits of armour for a chosen person to aid them. Not perfect constructs, but serviceable in time of need."

“Very versatile. What are the calls?”

“You can only use one before I need to recharge,” she warned. “Five minutes before you will de-transform, like Plagg. Anything I create will disappear within a few hours, less if it has already fulfilled its purpose, so if you believe that my wax could, say, repair a building, it won’t work for long, but it would work long enough to clear the area and get everyone safe.”

“Ahh. Gotcha.”

“No one can create like Tikki or destroy like Plagg. But I can buy them time to regenerate. Choose wisely the best course of action. I would recommend for the first few transformations, you do not rely on these powers like you would for Cataclysm. You need to test them first.” She hummed. “I suppose you could build yourself a staff if you need.”

He nodded.

“‘Sting’ for the harm and ‘bloom’, followed by the object name for the build,” she said. “Make sure you concentrate hard on what you wish harmed or built. I will provide.”

“Can you purify akuma?” he asked.

“No, that is something I cannot do, but I can prevent it from returning to Papillon. If you happen to catch one without Ladybug, cup your hands around it. I will store it until we can reach Ladybug.”

“Good to know. Thank you for the information.”

She glanced around and patted her fluff again. “You will need some potted flowers if I am to stay with you for any length of time. I require pollen or nectar to rejuvenate.”

Adrien nodded. “Absolutely,” he said with a glance around his room. He could already see a few places a planter pot could go. He’d have Nathalie organise one first thing in the morning. “Do you have a favourite flower?”

“Bluebells,” she replied. “But really, anything with pollen.”

“How does that work to recharge on the fly? I used to carry cheese around for Plagg.”

“Gummy bears,” she said, brightening. “Or any sort of high sugar sweet.” She shook her paw at him to tease. “And you’d better not snack on them yourself!”

He smiled, pleased. No more smelling like a cheese shop, at least until he got Plagg back. Plus, he actually had some stashed in his drawer. Stretching out his hand, he tugged open the bottom drawer. “Gummy bears are something we have in common then.”

Deedee dove for the packet. “Oh fuzz-erific! The good ones!”

Adrien grinned, watching as she munched on several red gummy bears. “Is there anything else I can get for you?”

“Information,” she said. “There wasn’t time for the guardian to tell me everything. I know you belong with Plagg and I know Ladybug is also active. From the presence of akuma, someone is using Nooroo for evil. You mentioned Papillon, I guess he is the one who has Nooroo captive.”
“Nooroo is… oh, is he the butterfly kwami?”

She daintily patted her mouth before she shoved the next gummy bear in, nodding as an answer.

“All I really know is Ladybug and I are fighting against Papillon. We defeat his akuma and restore everything afterward, but we’re having trouble locating Papillon himself. He always sends his akuma and they can’t remember anything once they’re purified. He hides himself away, so it’s made for a drawn out battle. Can you tell me more about the guardian?”

Deedee gulped and rubbed her belly, pleased. “Delicious. The guardian is the one who gave you the bee comb. He and his kwami, Wayzz, protect us when we are dormant.”

Lifting his foot, Adrien undid the laces of his shoe. “So he’s like us?”

“Yes and no, but that is for him to explain.”

“Does Ladybug know about him?”

“I do not know,” Deedee replied.

Dumping one of his shoes on the floor, he wriggled his toes and stretched his foot. “I guess it’ll be another thing for Ladybug and I to talk about.”

Deedee nodded and glanced at the night sky outside. “Is it time for you to sleep?”

“Yes. I have a piano lesson at nine that Nathalie couldn’t get me out of, so I need to be awake early.”

She brushed a paw over her antenna. “Nathalie?”

He lifted his other foot to undo that shoe. “My… keeper, I guess you could say. She’s my father’s assistant, but she also looks after me and my schedule.”

Deedee buzzed, dipping up and down as she warbled around the room. She zipped from place to place, looking at the different features and areas of his room and Adrien wondered what she was looking for. “So much space for one person.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Plagg must love you.”

“Plagg loves cheese. Make yourself at home, Deedee.”

“Thank you.” She flitted. “This wall is interesting, although the bees who made it were most unorthodox with their design.”

“That’s a rock climbing wall,” he replied. “I use it for exercise.”

“Oh. I see. May I use it as a hive?”

“Absolutely. What’s mine is yours. Just, try and be subtle and stay out of sight.”

“I am not a larvae.” She wiggled in excitement and then dashed over to the wall. Flitting from hold to hold, she studied them.

Dropping his shoes on the floor, he headed to his bathroom to brush his teeth. Still in awe, Deedee zipped after him.
“What is this?” she buzzed. “You have another room to yourself?”

“Yes,” he said. Grabbing his toothbrush, he squirted toothpaste on the bristles, then proceeded to brush his teeth.

“This mirror is amazing,” she said and lazily turned in the air so she could see her back. She wriggled her stinger at the mirror.

“I’m a model,” he said. “My father likes me to have the best.”

“And you ended up with the cat?” She laughed. “Ferris would’ve loved you.”

“Who is Ferris?”

“Peacock,” she replied and made a face. “Pretentious, pompous and precious. He is a wonderful drama pea with a heart of gold and I wouldn’t have him any other way, but he does like to preen.” Adrien laughed, since that was exactly what Deedee was doing. “I see. I hope you don’t think all models are like that.”

“Cats are aware of how beautiful they are, they just don’t care what you think about them.”

“I dunno,” Adrien replied, stretching out his hand to tickle her belly. “I think bugs are pretty cute.” She giggled and flittered away from him. “You, sir, are a flirt.”

“Not a very good one,” he replied. Putting his toothbrush back in the holder, he washed his mouth out. Smiling at Deedee, he gestured back out into the bedroom. “Would you mind? I need to… um…”

“Oh! Of course!” Deedee darted out of the bathroom and back over to his rock climbing wall and Adrien closed the door behind her so he could use the rest of the facilities. By the time he came back out, Deedee had built herself a small honeycomb structure to sleep in and had nestled inside it. Adrien wandered over to her, peering at her choice. It was well hidden within the wall, quite inconspicuous. He didn’t think people would notice it, scattered among the other hand and foot holds on that wall. Not unless they knew what they were looking for. “Do you need anything?”

“This is suitable,” Deedee replied. “Do not fret over my needs. I adapt.”


Just announcing it was bed time didn’t help Adrien sleep. He tossed and turned and stared at the ceiling. He adjusted his pillows several times and kicked the blankets on and off at a whim. He puffed out a breath and tucked his hands behind his head. So many thoughts whizzed through his head, mostly buzzing around Ladybug’s furious declaration of ‘I’m Chat’s.’

He didn’t know what to make of it. Just thinking of her voice at that moment made him feel strange. Jittery and nervous and happy all in one. He didn’t know what he should do about it, if he should do anything at all, but the temptation to crow happily from the rooftop was almost too strong to ignore.

Eventually Deedee sighed. “Are you usually so twitchy?”

“She said she was mine.”
Deedee rose from her hive and floated across to him. “Pardon?”

“Ladybug. She said: ‘I’m Chat’s’.”

“And this is a surprise because…?” Deedee asked.

Adrien resisted the urge to pout. Plagg would’ve understood why he was so awed at the declaration. “We’re not… we’re not like that.”

“Well, you did buzz in full flirt and punning,” Deedee said.

“I’m always like that with her though.”

“Chat Noir is, but Bumblebee is not. Perhaps she said it to dissuade you from continuing?”

Adrien sat up. “Does that mean she likes it when I flirt with her as Chat?”

“How would I know?” Deedee replied. “I’ve only seen Ladybug for a total of five minutes and the poor girl looked distraught and exhausted.”

He was disappointed. “I guess. Um… Deedee, not to presume, but you’re a girl.”

Deedee regarded him with a flat stare. “I will try not to take offense by that.”

He cringed. “I’m sorry.”

“Why the concern over gender?”

“You wouldn’t have any advice for dealing with girls, would you?” He pushed on without waiting for an answer. “See, Ladybug, she said, ‘I’m Chat’s’, but she’s never said anything like that before, at least, not to me, and she said it to me, but didn’t realise, because she doesn’t know I’m Bumblebee too. And I get that, I do, because I look very different, and she’s seen me out of costume before and couldn’t tell, and, do the suits have some sort of glamour on it? It’s very strange that she hasn’t recognised me, but then no one else has put two and two together that I’m Chat, and I haven’t figured her out either. While I want to tell her… I could use Bumblebee to find out what she really thinks of me.”

“You drone without purpose. What is your question?”

He rubbed the back of his neck in embarrassment. “Do I tell her I’m Bumblebee? I mean, that Chat’s Bumblebee. Or do I pretend that Chat and Bumblebee are two separate beings and… I dunno… see what she thinks about me?”

“I think most human girls would appreciate honesty,” Deedee said and cupped her chin in her paws. Her stinger gave a wiggle. “You should tell her before she finds out on her own. It could be worse for you if you do that.”

He knew that, even if he didn’t like hearing it. “Would Tikki tell her?”

“Tikki would know it was your choice. I doubt she’ll say anything. The guardian might, if Ladybug knows him.”

“Oh. Right.”

“Ladybug assumed Chat Noir was dead,” Deedee counselled. “And that fear will continue to haunt her until she trusts you. Perhaps you should alleviate that fear.”
He nodded. “You’re right. Don’t you think it might be embarrassing for her? She said that, but she didn’t mean to say it to me. And… I’m afraid she’s going to take it back.”

Deedee gave him a motherly sort of smile. “Honeykins, the truth is always preferable to lies. There will be less hurt in the end.”

“Yeah. I guess.”

“Bee yourself,” Deedee said with a sassy, self-assured smile, stressing the ‘bee’.

He laughed. “Nice one!”

“Sleep, Adrien,” she said, flitting down to rub the centre of his forehead. “Worry in the morning. We’ll see Ladybug tomorrow. Follow your heart when speaking to her.”

He settled back on his pillows with a sigh. “Thanks, Deedee.”

“It is my pleasure,” she said, and waggled her stinger at him as she flew back to her hive.

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: Written before any information on the Bee kwami was given. All this is my own ideas.

Quick note on Deedee's 'stinger wriggle'. Bees communicate by doing a complicated dance and abdomen wiggle (the abdomen is the whole back half of the bee), but by the way the bee kwami's been drawn, she has an tummy and a 'bee tail', I can't exactly keep saying 'Deedee wriggled her butt', in a G.

Since bee anatomy is not something people generally know, I settled on 'stinger' for her whole backside, rather than just the poison injection point. I'm sure most people knew what I meant anyway.
What did the sushi say to the bee?

Chapter Summary

What did the sushi say to the bee?
Wassabee!

Marinette woke to the overhead sun peeking through her trap door and tickling her face. She moaned, rolling over and buried deeper into her covers. It was too early and she was still tired. Plenty of time before she had to wake up. She built herself a cocoon, snuggling down as far as she could. There was no way she was getting up any time soon. Her bed was too inviting and comfortable. No amount of hunger or nagging thought there was somewhere she was supposed to be was going to rouse her. Not today.

“Five more minutes,” she told air.

Air didn’t have an answer for her. Air was unassuming and didn’t care if she slept her entire Sunday away. Air was nice that way.

Alya, on the other hand, was quite put out to find her best friend still asleep. “Gurl, what are you still doing in bed? I’ve been trying to call you all morning!”

Marinette moaned and covered her head with her arms, holding the blanket to her. “Sleeping.”

Alya yanked the blanket, dragging it out of reach and rather than chasing after it, Marinette just curled up into a ball. “It is too fine a day for you to be in bed! You have five minutes, missy. Get dressed, right now. We’re going out.”

Marinette blinked open her eyes. They felt crusty and awful and she rubbed at them with her knuckle. “Huh? Out?”

“We have research to do. You promised me, remember. There’s a new hero and the dude’s been sitting at the Eiffel Tower for a good half hour. We have to go and see if we can get an interview!”

Sitting up, Marinette yawned, stretched, then scratched her head as she blinked at her best friend. “Alya, you’re not making sense.”

Alya was in full journalist mode, cataloguing and planning her piece in her head. Marinette could almost see her come up with and discard several theories in a matter of seconds. She paced in tight circles at the end of the bed as she spoke in disjointed and hurried words. “Well, okay, it could be an akuma, but the dude’s just sitting there and not attacking anyone and last night there was an akuma in Le Quartier Latin and Ladybug was all there and fighting by her lonesome again and kicking ass mind you. And bam!—”

Alya smacked her hands together to make a loud noise and Marinette jumped in fright.

“—dude comes swinging in and takes the akuma out for her. My sources said he’s a fricken wasp or something like that.”
Marinette’s eyes widened and her face drained of blood. *Bumblebee*. Bumblebee was waiting for Ladybug and she was still in bed. And it was – Marinette scrambled for her phone – eleven thirty already.

“What’s with this animal theme? Ladybug, cat, fox, bee. I wonder what else they have,” Alya mused, then glanced at Marinette. “Gurl, get up! You promised me you’d help. Come interview this guy with me.”

Marinette felt horrible. Miserable. She’d left the poor guy waiting and hadn’t come, after she was the one who suggested it. And with the mood Alya was in, there was no way she was going to let her slip away. “I… um…”

“I’m not taking no for an answer! I will drag you out of here in your pyjamas if I have to!”

Marinette scrambled. She grabbed her clothes as fast as she could and dashed for the bathroom. “Can you go and ask Papa for some chocolate chip cookies?” she called, hoping to keep at least one of her promises. “We can bribe him.”

Alya snapped her fingers at Marinette in excitement. “You are brilliant!”

Slamming the bathroom door, she glanced at Tikki as she floated free from Marinette’s clothes. “What am I going to do? I told him to meet me and then I didn’t show!”

“I am certain he will be forgiving,” Tikki said. “He hasn’t tried contacting you. I would have woken you if he called.”

Marinette stripped as fast as she could and dove into the shower. “Yeah, but now I can’t get to him without ditching Alya.”

“We have to try.”

“And I will. Who is he anyway?”

“The bee is always a temporary replacement,” Tikki told her, floating on the other side of the shower curtain to give Marinette privacy. “Relied upon when the circumstances are dire.”

“Temporary… so Chat will come back!” Marinette yelped as cold water flushed against her skin and scrambled for the tap.

“Of course he will,” Tikki assured her. “And until Chat returns, Bumblebee will be your partner. It is important that you let him. You should not do this on your own.”

Marinette flushed. “I was so rude to him. I thought he was an akuma.”

“Understandable,” Tikki said. “We did just deal with Volpina. I am certain that Bumblebee does not hold you any ill-will.”

“He might now,” Marinette mumbled as she scrubbed herself. “What if Chat doesn’t understand? What if Chat thinks I betrayed him by taking another partner so quickly. I don’t want to hurt him. He means a lot to me.”

“Chat will understand,” Tikki said and her voice turned mischievous. “Especially since you told Bumblebee you were Chat’s.”

The soap slithered out of Marinette’s hand and skidded across the tiled floor in the shower. “I did
“what?”

Tikki giggled.

“Tikki!” Marinette complained, certain her little friend was teasing her. “I did not!”

Covering her mouth with her paws, Tikki giggled and Marinette couldn’t get anything else out of her.

When Marinette rushed downstairs to the bakery, still putting her hair in her pigtails, Alya was jiggling up and down on the spot, a bundle of nervous and excited jitters and anxious to get her interview done before her subject disappeared. Marinette danced around her parents for a moment, offering them greetings, kisses and other apologies, and snatching up their offers of food then she grabbed Alya’s elbow and rushed them both from the bakery.

It was fortunate they lived in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower.

“How are you even going to get him down from there?” Marinette asked as they hurried across the bridge.

“I thought maybe waving my arms in an exaggerated fashion and yelling might work.”

Marinette snorted.

“Well, it works on Ladybug!” Alya declared.

“It’s your secret power,” Marinette teased. “Being able to call superheroes from their perch.”

Alya snickered. “Here waspy-waspy-waspy,” she crooned, using a tone one would use to call a puppy.

Marinette shaded her eyes with her hands as she looked up at the Eiffel Tower. Bumblebee balanced along a beam, walking to the end before turning to walk back again. He had the patience of a saint if he was still waiting for her. Dropping her gaze, Marinette glanced at Tikki, who peeked out from the bag and gave Marinette a knowing look. “He looks more like a bee.”

“How do you even tell the difference?” Alya asked, squinting. She lifted her phone and zoomed in, but they could still only see his basic shape and not his face.

“The shape of their bum,” Marinette said, speaking without thinking. “A bee’s butt is rounder while a wasp’s is pointy.”

“I am not going to ask him to turn around so I can check out his assets.” Alya’s eyes glinted. “But make sure you do.”

“Alya!” Marinette complained, unable to help the blush burning her cheeks.

With a laugh, Alya patted her head. “You make it so easy!” Stepping away from Marinette, Alya waved her arms in the air. “Hey! You up there!”

Several people turned toward the sound of Alya’s call. Some followed her gaze, while others returned to their conversations.

“It’s not going to be that easy,” Marinette said, then bit her lip as Bumblebee turned toward Alya’s sound. She fretted and worried at the edge of her jacket with her fingers. If he came down here, she’d have no chance convincing Alya to leave so that she could go up and meet Bumblebee.
Alya gripped Marinette’s wrist and forced her hand in the air. “C’mon, make a fuss with me. Hey! Heeeey!”

Marinette half-heartedly waved her hands and the bag of cookies from her parents’ bakery in the air.

Alya cupped her hands over her mouth to amplify and direct her sound. Taking a deep breath, she bellowed, “Can we talk to you?”

Bumblebee appeared to hesitate. He lifted something that Marinette couldn’t really make out, but she suspected it was his hammer. The one she’d tried to break last night. Colour flooded her cheeks. “Alya, I’m not sure this is—”

Bumblebee leapt off the Eiffel Tower and Marinette held her breath. He spring boarded off the legs, angling his way down toward them. He was agile and there was something familiar about the way he moved but Marinette couldn’t put her finger on it.

Alya bounced up and down in excitement. “Yes.” She offered her hand to Marinette to high five.

After obliging Alya, Marinette lowered her hands and clutched the bag of cookies. She angled herself slightly behind Alya, worrying that Bumblebee would be able to see who she was by looking at her. Chat Noir had never been able to tell, but she’d only met him a few times out of costume, but there was no telling what this new guy would do. If he had more experience than Chat, he might be able to see who she was even out of costume.

Bumblebee landed in front of them, softer than Marinette had expected considering the height he’d leapt from. Straightening up, he smiled and Marinette got a good look at his suit in the daylight. So different from Chat’s but just as complex. The hammer was interesting and she wondered at his powers, and then chastised herself because if she’d gotten up earlier, she’d know by now. His goggles were weird and she didn’t like the way she reflected in them, but the fuzz… the fuzz looked soft and pet-able, and she wondered if he’d mind.

Probably.

Chat wouldn’t’ve minded.

With a smile Bumblebee said, “What’s the buzz, mademoiselles?”

Marinette barely concealed a snort, twisting her lips into a thin line to hide the smile. It sounded exactly like something Chat would say. And in the daylight, they shared a similarity. Blond hair, similar heights, a smirk as wide as their face.

Or maybe she just had a thing for blondes.

He grinned. “You’re Alya, right? From the Ladyblog.”

Alya’s chest puffed out and her smile doubled in size, “That’s me! Wow, you know me?”

“Anyone who is a Ladybug fan knows the Ladyblog.”

“So, you’re a fan?” Marinette asked. It was a good opportunity to find out about him, without being Ladybug, especially since he didn’t seem to recognise her.

“Who isn’t?” Bumblebee said. “Ladybug is amazing.”

Stepping forward, Alya commanded Bumblebee’s attention. “I was hoping we could ask you a few
questions."

“Sure.”

“Do you mind if I record this?”

“I do, actually,” Bumblebee said. “Right now, no one knows anything about me, including Papillon. I’d like to keep the element of surprise.”

Alya lowered her camera in disappointment. “So, you’re a new hero? Not a complicated akuma?”

“I’m a hero,” he replied with a light laugh.

“How can we be sure of that?” Alya asked.

“Have I done anything which looks like typical akuma behaviour?”

“Typical akuma behaviour seems to be changing,” Alya countered. “There’s a raging debate as to whether Volpina was an akuma or not.”

“Volpina was an akuma based on a real hero,” Bumblebee said and scratched his chin. “Her powers were based on illusion. Mine are not.”

Alya seized that opportunity. “What are you powers based on?”

Bumblebee replied, “I protect the hive. And that’s all you’re getting.” He shrugged. “But, if you need proof. Last night, I was active at the same time as an akuma. It’s not possible for Papillon to have two akuma at the same time.”

“So you say,” Alya said, even though she’d said something similar earlier.

With a helpless grin, Bumblebee spread his hands and shrugged again.

“The goggles are so weird. Why are you hiding your eyes like that?”

He shrugged. “I think they look cool.”

Alya prowled around Bumblebee as she inspected his suit, looking similar to a shark circling prey. “We were trying to figure out which you are. Bee or wasp?”

With a grin, Bumblebee placed on hand on his hip and gave them a two-fingered salute with the other. “Bumblebee, at your service.”

Alya waggled her eyebrows at Marinette and gave a pointed drop of her eyes.

Trying to ignore Alya’s teasing, Marinette piped, “Transformers, right? ‘More than meets the eye’?”

Bumblebee brightened and focussed on Marinette. “You’ve seen it?” he asked, excited.

“Heard about it,” she replied, nonchalant.

“You should watch it, it’s fuzz-erific.”

She wasn’t going to commit to that, but her lips quirked up at his joke. “Maybe I will.”

Pointing, Alya said, “What were you doing up there?”
“Waiting for Ladybug.” He glanced around, then reached up to pat the fuzz around his neck. Marinette watched him stroke his fingers through the fuzz and wondered at how soft it really was. “I guess I startled her more than I thought.”

“Startled Ladybug?” Alya pressed.

“She wasn’t expecting me,” he said and cringed. “I… sort of dropped in unannounced and got on her bad side immediately.”

Marinette fought not to wince.

“Her bad side?” Alya asked, shrewd. “Are you replacing Chat Noir?”


“Has something happened to him?” Alya asked.

“I have it on utmost authority Chat Noir is perfectly fine,” Bumblebee said, sounding like he really was sure of that. “He’s simply unable to fulfil his duties at the moment.”

Duties? Marinette narrowed her eyes. An odd way to explain it. And what was that about upmost authority? “I hope nothing horrible has happened to him,” she blurted and tried to play the part of concerned citizen. “We’re fond of Chat.”

Bumblebee’s attention was on something else and Marinette suspected he was looking for Ladybug. “So is Ladybug. Maybe that’s why she’s avoiding me.”

Alya pounced on that. “Did she say something? There are always rumours, but I’ve never been able to get her to admit to anything.”

Bumblebee appeared startled, dragging his gaze back to Alya. “Huh? What makes you say that?”

“Alya!” Marinette complained and covered her eyes with a hand to prevent her friend from seeing the blush slowly spreading on her cheeks.

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“Anything’s possible!” Alya declared. “They’ve been partners for ages. You’ve seen the dopey expression on his face when he looks at her.”

Marinette went red. “Yeah, but he’s such a flirt.”

Alya looked at Marinette like she’d grown another head. “Gurl, what are you on about? He’s never flirted with me.”

Bumblebee floundered. “I— er…”

“I brought cookies,” Marinette said, steering the conversation away from the uncomfortable place it was currently in. She opened the bag and offered it to Bumblebee. “Do you like chocolate chip?”

With a grin which said he was as relieved about the topic change as she was, he reached into the bag. “Knowledge of Bumblebee the Transformer and chocolate chip cookies. Must be my lucky day.”
Marinette smiled and cast Alya a meaningful glare. “I’m just that good.”

Bumblebee bit into the cookie with a soft moan of delight. “Oh, these are the best. I love that bakery.”

“My parents own it,” she said, proud.

Bumblebee licked his lips. “You lucky thing.”

Alya pressed, “Can I get a picture? A quote? Something I can put on the Ladyblog. People have been worried about Chat Noir, and knowing there’s another hero out there would set their minds at ease.”

Bumblebee looked back at Alya. “I’d really love to, but I need to talk to Ladybug. There are things we need to discuss, and I don’t think she’d approve of me blowing all my secrets in one interview, regardless of who it’s for.”

“I can keep it secret,” Alya promised.

“Honestly, I don’t expect I’ll be around long,” Bumblebee said.

Alya frowned. “Why’s that?”

“When Chat returns, I’ll move on,” he said. “This is temporary. Don’t waste your time reporting on me.”

“Well, where are you from? Why are you here?”

“When Chat returns?” Marinette asked. “Did he go somewhere?”

“Rest assured, I’m here to help,” Bumblebee said and gestured the cookie bag. “Can I have another one?”

Marinette offered the bag to him again. “Sure.”

Bumblebee took a few. Bowing from the waist, he said, “Thank you, Marinette.” He nodded to Alya. “Alya. Now, if you’ll excuse me. I need to buzz.”

Alya stretched out her hand. “I have more questions!”

“I have no answers that would satisfy you,” Bumblebee said and leapt away.

Alya stamped her foot. “Well shoot.”

“We learnt some things we didn’t know before,” Marinette said, still watching Bumblebee as he climbed the Tower again. She wondered if he’d stay there and if she had time to get away from Alya and circle back before he lost patience.

“Gurl, are you checking out the roundness of that booty?”

Flushing, Marinette tore her eyes away. “No way!”

“You’re okay to look, you know. Look more. Maybe it’ll help you get over Adrien.”

“Alya!” she whined.
Alya tossed her hair as she laughed and wrapped her arm around Marinette’s shoulders and tugged her to walk. “Well, that was certainly enlightening.”

Marinette fell into step beside her. “That’s good. I’m glad you got what you wanted out of that conversation.”

“What’d you think of him?”

“He’s… nice, I guess?” Marinette shrugged and worried her bottom lip with her teeth as she considered. “I don’t really know. I kind of feel I’m not supposed to like him.”

“Like a loyalty thing to Chat?”

“Yeah, maybe. Or maybe I’m more concerned about where Chat is.”

Alya nodded sagely. “I hear you. I really wish he’d given up more of his secrets, but I guess I’ll just have to wait until the next akuma. I hope one’s soon, I want to see him in action.”

Marinette shook her head in dismay. “Alya, you know you really shouldn’t be hoping for an akuma.”

Alya laughed and waved her hand at Marinette. “Yeah, I know. I hope Ladybug’s okay. Four akuma in one day is a bit much. Is there no limit to her power?”

Marinette wondered that herself. She felt tired, but nowhere near as exhausted as she’d felt last night. “No idea.”

“Do you think Papillon sent so many akuma because he knew Chat Noir was unavailable?” Alya bounced and turned to walk sideways so she could look at Marinette. “What if Papillon managed to turn him?”

Marinette shook her head. “I doubt it.”

“You never know. Black cats are supposed to be bad luck,” Alya pointed out.

“If Chat Noir’s been turned, don’t you think he would’ve appeared to take Ladybug’s earrings? He’d be hard for her to beat, especially after having that many akuma thrown at her. I think it’s like Bumblebee said, Chat’s just… unavailable. Maybe Papillon was testing her. The attacks stopped after Bumblebee arrived and we haven’t had one this morning, right?”

Alya brightened. “Papillon’s scared of the new player!”

“Or biding his time.”

Bouncing close, Alya gave Marinette a one armed hug. “I need to write this up while it’s all fresh. Do you wanna come over and help?”

Glancing over her shoulder, Marinette felt mixed emotions as she saw Bumblebee leap away from the Eiffel Tower. “I have some study I should get done. Those exams aren’t going to study for themselves.”

“It’s a good thing I woke you up then,” Alya said.


“Oh, that deadpan. Any deader of a pan and you’d be six feet under.”
“Anything’s better than exams.” She sighed, dejected. “I hate them. Physics especially.”

“You’ll be fine,” Alya said. “We could ask Nino to tutor you.”

“I might have to,” she admitted. “I just…” she shrugged. “It’s hard.”

“How about I come over tonight? I can check your working and help for a while, then we watch a sappy romance movie together?”

“That would be awesome!” Marinette said.

They parted ways at the end of the bridge after making a time to meet up after studying and Alya skipped away with a spring in her step. Marinette rested her hand on her bag and felt Tikki stir.

“He’s nice.”

“You’re surprised.”

“A little. I don’t know. Not sure what I expected.”

Tikki poked her head out. “We should go and see if we could catch up to him.”

Marinette sighed. “I know. I feel awful but I don’t know if I can face him right now.”

“At the very least we should leave a message.”

Marinette nodded. “I will. We’ll go home and do that now.”

Ladybug didn’t call Bumblebee immediately. Instead, she called Chat Noir and waited until it rang through to his messages.

“Hey Chat. It’s Sunday and I haven’t seen you since Thursday. I think this is the longest I’ve gone without hearing from you. It feels… weird. So. Um… you may have seen, or maybe you will see, but there’s a new hero and I—” She sat back in her chair and stared at the ceiling. “I just want to make it clear you’re not being replaced. You’re my partner and that’s not going to change in any way. You and me, forever, you hear?” She sighed. “But… it’s also painfully clear I need someone. Papillon hit… and he hit hard, Chat, and then he stopped when Bumblebee showed up. I don’t know what that means, but… I dunno. Bad vibes. We had Volpina working for Papillon, and then you vanish and then this guy shows up… Bumblebee, like the Transformer, apparently.” She laughed lightly. “You’d probably like him. He says he’s an emergency replacement, so I can only assume something’s bad’s happened to you. He said you weren’t dead, but… I don’t know if I can believe him. I… was supposed to meet him today but I slept in, and now I guess… I just… We’re good together, Chat. You and me. I don’t want to have to… break in a new-bee partner. I really hope you’re okay. I don’t know what I’d do without you. Hurry back.”

Taking a deep breath, she let it out slowly, and then clicked on the new contact in her yo-yo. The fact that he was listed as a contact was important. Tikki wanted her to trust Bumblebee. Not for the first time she wondered at the magic behind their items. How did they even have a message bank when they weren’t transformed? Was there a magical kwami message bank service in the sky? And why wasn’t Papillon listed on there? It would certainly make things easier, but then she supposed he’d be able to track them as well.

A large part of her hoped Bumblebee wouldn’t answer. She really didn’t know what she wanted to say to him. It seemed, as his message started to play, he had something to say to her. “Ladybug.” A heavy sigh. “I guess I startled you more than I thought. I can only imagine what you’re thinking right now. I know you have no reason to trust me but I really am on your side. I need to talk to you,
but I’ll wait until you’re ready to listen. I need to relay a message. My kwami, Deedee, wants to talk to Tikki as soon as possible. Leave a message if you want, no pressure… otherwise I’ll see you next akuma.”

Ladybug sighed and hung up. She wondered if he thought name dropping her kwami would help her trust him more. With a heavier sigh, she murmured, “Spots off.”

Tikki floated free of the earrings, her face awash with concern. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know,” Marinette replied. “I really don’t. Something doesn’t feel right and I don’t know what it is, and I can’t make sense of anything right now.”

Tikki nodded. “I understand. But—”

“I need to talk to him. I know. And I will.” She sighed and reached for her pen. “Next akuma.”

Tikki alighted on the desk beside Marinette’s tablet. “Do you want to go see Master Fu?”

“I… not today.”

“Marinette—”

“Master Fu said he wanted to talk to me and Chat. Bumblebee is not Chat. I’m afraid, if I got back, he’ll blow me off again.”

“Or he might be able to tell you about Bumblebee.”

“He might. And he might not.”

Tikki sighed. She curled into a ball and rested her cheek on Marinette’s wrist. “Do what you think is right.”

“I just need a little bit of space,” she said, reaching across to pat Tikki on the head. “And to study for exams.”

After several hours of worrying the end of his tablet pen with his teeth, rereading the same passage over and over again and listening to the happy buzzing in the background, Adrien finally gave studying up as a bad joke. “It’s so much easier with friends,” he muttered. Threading his hands together, he pushed both palms toward the ceiling to stretch.

A happy noise from behind him. “You are done?”

“For a while anyway.” He tilted his head from side to side to loosen the muscles on his neck.

“Good. All work and no play makes for unhappy bees.”

That was interesting. “Do bees play?”

“Bees dance,” Deedee replied.

“Ooh, that sounds cool. Dancing can be quite fun,” he said, thinking of all the styles of dancing his father had made him learn. “You’ll have to teach me.”

“I do not believe you have the correct abdomen for it. It requires a lot of wriggling.”
“Bees belly dance?” Adrien asked, intrigued.

Deedee giggled and her tone turned teasing. “In a sense, you could say we are the original belly dancers.”

Plagg never offered to teach him anything. “I’d still like to learn,” Adrien replied.

“Then it would be my honour to teach you.”

Adrien stood, stretching his back, then twisted his torso with his arms held out. “Anything from Ladybug?”

“Beyond the one missed call, not a peep.”

He sighed.

“I am sorry.”

“Don’t be,” he replied. “It can’t be helped. We’ll get her to trust me.”

Turning, he looked at Deedee as she nestled in her new indoor flower garden.

Upon hearing Adrien’s request for some potted flowers in his bedroom, Gabriel had overcompensated. In the corner near the window so it would get the most sun until the lamps were installed, stood a tiered flower garden taller than Adrien. A large circular pot at the bottom was filled to the brim with flowering plants then the planter tiered upward with three levels of pots around a stem in the middle. The whole arrangement looked like it was a flower itself. A variety of flowers flowed from the pots themselves, petunias and tulips, bluebells and a variety of plants Adrien couldn’t name.

Deedee buzzed happily around her garden, weaving in and around the flowers. She’d spent most of the day buzzing around them while he’d been working on his homework.

“Enjoying yourself?”

“This is buzz-tastic,” she said, rising out of the flowers so she could speak to him. “Incredible. I feel most spoilt.”

“I’m glad.” Glancing at the clock, he said, “It’s dinner soon. Would you like a tour of the mansion? We haven’t really had a chance to look around.”

Deedee dashed to Adrien and, instead of snuggling down in his pocket, she buried herself in his hair.

“Um…”

“Don’t worry, no one will see me,” she assured him.

“Okay. Well… welcome to Agreste Mansion,” he said, putting on a falsetto tour guide voice.

Deedee remained mostly silent as he walked through his home, showing her around. He could feel her moving around in his hair, but unlike Plagg, who’d had a lot of scornful things to say about his father’s taste in furniture and lack of cheese, Deedee was more concerned about something else.

“It feels so empty for such a large hive.”

“I guess,” Adrien replied and glanced around the room. “It’s just me and my father, so… well, I
mean, there’s other staff, but I’m not supposed to interact with anyone besides the Gorilla and Nathalie.”

“Who is the Gorilla?”

“My bodyguard.”

There was an odd little tug in his hair. “You require a bodyguard?”

“I don’t think I do,” he said. “But my father is very overprotective, so if I want to go out then I need to take him.”

“Why?”

“For my father’s peace of mind. The Gorilla’s pretty nice though. He lets me sneak away sometimes. It really wasn’t until Plagg that I got a taste of true freedom.”

“That is sad.”

“He’s always been like that,” Adrien said, wandering through the hallways as he headed for the dining room. “Mom used to temper him a little, I suppose, but she disappeared when I was ten. It scared him, so he overcompensates.” He stopped before one of the rare family portraits. “That’s my mom.”

Deedee floated free of his hair to study the picture.

He lifted his eyes to the portrait. Everyone said he looked like her, especially his father. His hair, his eyes, his smile. His temperament. It was like his father was trying to find pieces of her within him.

“May I ask what happened?” Deedee asked and Adrien flicked his eyes from his mother to Deedee. Was that a slight hitch in her voice?

“I… don’t really know,” he admitted. “I don’t think my father knows. She… just left.” There were times he wished she’d taken him with her, just as there were times he wished he knew what he’d done to make her leave him.

Floating higher, Deedee rested her paw on Adrien’s mother’s face. “She was a grand queen.”

Adrien’s eyes misted. “Yeah.”

Deedee bowed her head, then turned to float back, alighting in Adrien’s hair. Pressure against his scalp and a slight thrumming buzz and Adrien had the sense Deedee was hugging him in her own way. When Plagg felt sympathy toward Adrien, he buried himself in the crook of Adrien’s neck and purred, which always made Adrien feel better. Having a bee buzzing in his hair…

He closed his eyes. A buzz and a purr weren’t much different. He could pretend.
Why did the bee get married? (again)

Chapter Summary

Why did the bee get married? (again)
Because he was bee-gamous

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Come Monday morning, Bumblebee was a hot topic for Alya. She’d received positive reviews for the small piece she’d done on him after the interview on Sunday and was happily sharing that with anyone who would listen.

Resting her forehead on her desk during homeroom, and wallowing in her own puddle of guilt and worry, Marinette listened to Alya tell Nino about their interview with Bumblebee. She felt so horrible. She hadn’t called him. Hadn’t met up with him. She promised she would and now… well, she felt so anxious about the whole situation, it was making her not want to meet with Bumblebee even more. She didn’t think she could face him.

Could she hide forever?

“I even had someone from La Tribune call me about my source,” Alya said with pride.

“Hey! First time for them to call,” Nino said with a grin. “You’re getting noticed!”

“Ladyblog is on the up!” Alya declared and waved her hands around. “This can only mean good things for that competition!”

Adrien reached back and rested his hand on their table. “Didn’t you meet him too, Marinette?”

Marinette lifted her head. “Yeah, I did.”

Having Adrien’s gorgeous smile focussed on her wasn’t as disarming and heart palpitating as it normally was. She still felt her heart skip, but it didn’t seem to overwhelm her. Marinette thought maybe it was because she was tangled up about Chat Noir being missing and potentially disappointing Bumblebee. Firm wedge in friendship corner here she comes.

“What did you think?” Adrien asked.

She lifted her shoulders. “I don’t know. He seemed… nice. He liked my cookies.”

“Who doesn’t like your cookies,” Nino announced. “Man, those things are delicious.”

Marinette smiled at Nino.

Alya said, “You should’ve seen my gurl. All checking out Bumblebee’s—” she lifted her hands to air quote, “‘assets’.”

Jaw dropping, Adrien rocked back in his chair. His gaze snapped from Alya, to Marinette, to Alya
“You did?” he asked, his voice suspiciously squeaky.

“We were trying—” Marinette stressed with a glare at Alya, “—to see if he was a wasp or a bee. They’re hard to tell sometimes.”

“That doesn’t explain the ‘asset’ checking out,” Nino said, exchanging a grin with Alya.

Marinette rolled her eyes. “Gee, you two. You’re as bad as each other. It was purely for science.”

“For science, she says,” Alya leered.

Straightening her back, Marinette clasped her hands together and recited, “The rear of a bee is rounded while a wasp is pointy.” With another glare at Alya, she pointed out, “And you were looking too, so don’t give me that.”

Nino wilted and gave Alya puppy eyes. “You were?”

“For science,” Alya said. “And I was more interested in the bee comb thing in his hair than his backside.”

His cheeks turning red, Adrien made a nervous grab at the back of his head. “Really?”

Marinette huffed and changed the subject. “Nino, I need your help.”

“Sure, I got you,” he responded, without question and turned his gaze to Marinette. “What do you need?”

“Physics and I had a disagreement.”

Nino sucked in his breath through his teeth. “Nasty.”

“We’re no longer on speaking terms,” she said. “Can you give me a few pointers?”

“Well, it’s not like I set up a study group on Saturday for physics or anything.”

Marinette cringed at Nino’s gentle rebuke. “I got caught in an akuma attack,” she explained. “Otherwise I would’ve been there.”

“My father let me clear my entire schedule for exams,” Adrien announced. “We could do another study group. I’m pretty good at physics.” The smile on his faced dimmed. “I mean, if you want.”

“Dude,” Nino said, flabbergasted. “Your entire schedule?”

“Yes.” Adrien grinned. “Amazing, huh? He said the exam was important and ordered it cleared so I had time to study.”

Nino over-exaggerated his gape. “Your old man actually did something nice. We need to celebrate.”

Adrien laughed.

“Study group sounds perfect,” Alya said. “I need help with my English, you’re pretty good at that aren’t you, Adrien?”

He lifted his shoulders to shrug. “I’m passable.”

Alya scratched her cheek as she considered. “My place is out though. My sisters just get in the way
“and it’s not conducive to studying.”

“Yeah, that didn’t go so well on Saturday, did it?” Nino said with a nod. “And my place isn’t big enough. Library?”

“We could go to mine,” Marinette said. “I have heaps of space and we can take snacks from the bakery.”

Both Nino and Adrien perked up at the mention of bakery snacks. “Can we go today?” Adrien asked.

Marinette blinked and fought against the rising flush. Just study. It was just studying. Adrien had been in her room before. Nothing new and exciting about that. Friendship corner. Friendship corner. “Um. Sure. After school?”

“Sounds awesome,” Nino said, raising his fist to Adrien. “Pretty ladies and snack foods, perfect.”

“Study and snack foods,” Alya corrected as Adrien bumped Nino’s fist.

Chloé slammed her hand down on Adrien’s table, commanding attention and startling all of them. “Have you seen this so-called new bee person yet?”

“Maybe,” Nino said, suddenly sour. He cupped his face in his fists and rested his elbows on the table, giving Chloé a bored look and a strong hint to leave, which she ignored.

“Hey, Chlo,” Adrien said, and Marinette could tell by the toss of his head and Chloé sudden pupil dilation and flirtatious look, he was smiling. “What do you think of the new bee?”

The flirtation died. “He’s a boy,” she sneered. “Bees are girls. A boy has no business being a bee. Clearly I am a better choice.” Pompous and self-important, she steepled her hand on her puffed out chest and put her other hand on her hip. “I have the colour scheme for it. I don’t know why Ladybug picked a boy to be a bee! She already has a cat-boy. Too much testosterone is a bad thing.”

Alya snickered. “Ladybug has a harem. I like it.”

“Alya!” Marinette complained.

“What? I’m saying what we’re all thinking.”

“Pretty sure that’s not what Chloé meant!”

Chloé shook her head at Alya. “Idiot.”

“I don’t think Ladybug had much of a choice about her team,” Adrien mentioned.

“Exactly,” Marinette said, snatching up that. “And what about poor Chat Noir. What’s he supposed to think? He doesn’t make a few battles and suddenly he’s replaced. He must be devastated.”

Adrien twisted to stare at her. “I’m sure Chat would want Ladybug safe—”

“Bumblebee said he was temporary, remember?” Alya pointed out. “Chat Noir will be back.”

Marinette felt righteously indignant on Chat Noir’s behalf. “I just don’t think we should be so quick to accept—”

“Have a think about how the new bee feels,” Adrien said, still staring at her. “He wants to help. I
think Ladybug should give him a chance. Let him prove himself.”

Marinette clicked her jaw shut. Her hands slid off the table and she clasped them on her lap. Why was she fighting so hard against accepting Bumblebee? Loyalty to Chat was a huge part of it, but there was something about Bumblebee that made her uneasy.

Not uneasy. Uneasy was the wrong word.

Guilty.

“And what if he’s bad?” Nino suggested. “I mean, think about it. I mean, there’s a running theory that Papillon is like them and that’s how he can create akuma. Which means, Ladybug, Chat Noir and this new dude, they can go bad too.”

Alya rebuked, “That would never happen. They’re heroes—”

Nino shrugged. “It happens all the time in comics. Heroes turn bad. They lie. They change. They all have a weakness. Who’s to say that—”

Madame Bustier cleared her throat, drawing the attention of the class and Nino and Adrien turned to face her while Chloé flounced away.

Alya leaned over to Marinette to whisper, “Look at you, holding down conversations without stuttering. I’m so proud.” Alya winked. “Did you see his face? He’s totally jelly you checked out someone else.”

Marinette’s stomach flooded with butterflies, fluttering and flittering and making her nauseous. There was no way Adrien was jealous. “He doesn’t think of me like that. Friendship corner, remember? You’re supposed to be helping.”

“And the best way to do that is to make him think you’re looking at other guys.” Alya gave her a look. “‘Cause you are looking at other guys, right?”

Marinette straightened up. “I don’t want a rebound, Alya.”

“I’m talking about looking. Not rebound.”

Chat Noir flashed into her head. His infectious smile and how much the ache in her chest compelled her to want to see him again. “Then yeah. I guess I am.”

Alya grinned at her. “Atta girl.”

The lunchtime break brought with it an akuma.

Ladybug knew, as she bounded across the rooftops on her hasty journey to deal with the akuma, that she should’ve expected it. She hadn’t. Not really. Papillon didn’t attack every day after all and she’d hoped she’d have some time to sort herself out before he attacked again. Some time to approach Bumblebee and apologise.

Now, there was no choice. She was thrust into this with a tangled mess of emotions, anxiety coupled with guilt and frustration. Her mind was in turmoil and she felt physically sick as a result. What was she going to say? What was she going to do? They had a job to do, a duty to uphold, she couldn’t blurt out an apology on sight.

Papillon saw through the akuma, any sign of weakness or discontent and he would know. Ladybug
couldn’t afford to show anything Papillon could exploit. He’d already run her ragged with the akuma train and she didn’t want a repeat of that. Not now, not with exams so close. She had to go in and pretend she was happy with her new partner and she was confident she’d prevail.

Ladybug had to hope that Bumblebee knew that too.

Perching on top of a roof, she crouched at the edge so she could study the situation.

Dressed in a navy blue boiler, a man held out a large, thick bristled broom ahead of him as he ran. He was mostly bald with scraggly white hair wisped around his temples and his face crinkled with anger lines. Behind him, the street changed colour, spreading chrome everywhere and Ladybug got the impression he was turning everything metallic. A bright orange squirt bottle was strapped to his hip and a rag dangled from a pocket. He felt like a crotchety old grandpa yelling at kids to get off his lawn.

Ladybug watched as the man dragged his squirt bottle from his belt and sprayed a fine mist over the nearest by-stander who didn’t have the good sense to get out of the way. “Can’t make a mess if you can’t move!”

The horrified by-stander turned into a shiny, metallic chrome statue and his friends scattered like roaches, scrambling into nearby buildings to flee.

“Right,” Ladybug murmured, taking note of the other statues. “Stay away from the squirt bottle.”

Movement drew her gaze and her eyes fell on Bumblebee making a bee-line for the action. She watched as he leapt over the gap between buildings. He was well behind the akuma and still a distance away, but positioned strategically in a blind spot.

They were on opposite sides of the akuma. If they worked together, they could divert his attention and attack in sync. Normally, Ladybug could convey a strategy with a look, but she had no idea how to talk to Bumblebee.

Ladybug was the one who was in line of sight of the akuma. So Ladybug would be the one to distract. Grabbing her yo-yo, she tossed it behind her to hook around a chimney and leapt from the building. Landing in the middle of the street, she recalled her yo-yo and smiled at the akuma. “Looks like it’s time to make a mess.”

The akuma made a screech and rushed toward her. “I will sweep clean these streets of all filth, including you!”

The Sweeper, as Ladybug not so fondly named the akuma, was slow on his feet, but everything the broom brushed or the squirt bottle misted turned to chrome and the Sweeper was apt at using both.

Ladybug bounced off the closest car, narrowly avoiding the broom swipe. She had to keep the akuma’s attention on her and away from Bumblebee so he could get close. She ducked under another swing of the broom and tossed her yo-yo so it twined around the Sweeper’s ankle. Using the same tactic she’d used on Pyro, she yanked hard and tried to pull him from his feet.

The Sweeper slammed his broom into the twine of her yo-yo. Chrome crept along the string, spreading its shine outward. Unsettled, Ladybug recalled her yo-yo, snatching up the disc.

The Sweeper’s fleshly lips retracted from his teeth to smirk and Ladybug caught sight of a golden front tooth with a diamond embedded in it. Something out of place for what appeared to be some sort of janitor. The akuma’s item. She was sure of it.
She pulled a face. She really didn’t want to go into the guy’s mouth to get it.

Behind the Sweeper, the chrome on the road continued to spread, creeping over cars and up lampposts which hadn’t been touched by the broom. Dread filled her heart. She hadn’t realised the chrome could continue to spread, regardless of whether or not the broom touched it.

Her hand felt strange. A heat which froze and stiffened. Heavy and encumbering and…

*She couldn’t move her fingers.*

The string. The string had been completely engulfed and now the chrome was creeping up her hand and eating away at the edges of the yo-yo. If she didn’t call a lucky charm before it was engulfed, she’d never be able to cure and that could be disastrous.

Ladybug staggered back, then turned and bolted to put some distance between her and the akuma. The Sweeper’s laugh rushed after her.

She hopped, twisting mid jump so she could watch the akuma and thrust her yo-yo into the air. “Lucky charm.”

The chrome crept down over her wrist as a bright light burst from her yo-yo. Dragging her arm back down, she used her other hand to catch the item provided.

“Ladybug!” Bumblebee blurted, his voice panicked. He appeared on the street near her, the chrome creeping between them.

Ladybug met Bumblebee’s gaze. “Don’t let it touch you!” she bellowed and lobbed the can of silly string at him. “The akuma’s in his mouth. Gold tooth!”

Catching the can, Bumblebee blanched and lifted his hammer with his other hand. “That’s biting off way more than I want to chew.”

Ladybug couldn’t help the hysterical snort. It was just the sort of thing Chat Noir would’ve said.

Bumblebee flashed her a confident grin. “Leave this to me, honeybug,” he called.

The chrome crept up to her elbow as she took refuge behind a parked car, peering around the rear bumper. “Make it quick!”

Lifting the can of silly string, Bumblebee pointed it at the nearest car. “Hey, chrome dome!”

The Sweeper turned with an inquiring look.

Bumblebee covered the car in silly string, holding down the button on the can until it was completely empty. Dropping the now empty can on the ground, he smiled. “Oops.”

The Sweeper charged him, the bristled end of the broom held before him like a battering ram. Bumblebee held his ground, with a cocky grin etched on his face. Arms loose by his sides, Bumblebee didn’t even flinch as the Sweeper opened his mouth to roar.

Ladybug’s heart pounded in her chest and recognition tickled at the edges of her mind… and the chrome kept spreading.

At the last second, Bumblebee leapt, somersaulting over the top of the Sweeper. Mid-air, Bumblebee twisted, extending his legs out straight. Ankles crossed and one arm tucked against his chest, Bumblebee swung his hammer toward the Sweeper’s back.
With bated breath, Ladybug watched as the point stinger end of Bumblebee’s hammer embedded in the Sweeper’s shoulder.

“Sting!”

With a painful yelp, the Sweeper arched his back and stumbled. The broom cluttered to the ground, slipping from frozen fingers. Mouth open in a gape, one foot held comically in the air, he couldn’t move a muscle.

Bumblebee cartwheeled a landing, then spun back to the Sweeper. With a light laugh, he tossed his hammer from hand to hand. “Oh, Deedee, you are fuzz-tastic.” Two steps brought him to the front of the Sweeper. Amateur dental surgery with a screwed up face, and the tooth was extracted from the Sweeper’s mouth.

Taking the tooth between his fingers, Bumblebee pulled another face as he applied pressure to the ends to snap the tooth. Seconds later, the akuma fluttered free.

Although the chrome covering everything didn’t vanish, but it stopped spreading. It had slithered up to coat her shoulder, ceasing its journey there. Her whole hand was immobile and her yo-yo was encased in silver. There was no way she could catch the akuma. If it got free and they had to endure an army of Sweepers…

“Bee!” she called, pushing as much urgency into her voice as she could. “I can’t—”

Bumblebee cast her a wild glance. Seeing her predicament, Bumblebee snatched the akuma out of the air and cupped it in both hands. Ladybug didn’t even have a chance to yell at him to stop. Tikki always told her never to touch the akuma. It was dangerous and they risked corruption.

A slop of something yellow appeared in his hands and solidified, then Bumblebee held up a hexagonal prism made of wax. Pleased, he winked at her, then remembered her arm. With an ‘oh shit’ face, he scrambled for the discarded can of silly string.

Running over to her, he pressed the string can into the palm of her free hand. “Do your thing.”

Flashing him a grateful smile, she threw her good arm up and tossed the can. “Miraculous Ladybug.” Power and ladybugs flooded the area, wiping the futuristic look away from the street to return it to its homely cobblestoned way, reverting all the chrome statues scattered around back to their normal form. People blinked and looked around and the Sweeper turned into an old man.

Feeling returned to Ladybug’s arm as the ladybugs did their work. Nerves fired painfully and made her feel like she’d whacked her funny bone. She grimaced as her elbow gave, before wrapping her hand over the top and concentrated on wriggling her fingers to get the blood flowing through them again. “This is not what I imagined I’d be doing today.”

Bumblebee grinned. “Wasps the problem, honeybug?”

She narrowed her eyes at him. “Okay. No.” She chopped her hand through the air as though she could slice up his word. “Not ‘honeybug’. Not anything.”

He held up his hands in supplication and smiled. “Only Chat.”

She looked away. Maybe she had said that she was Chat’s. If that was the case, there was no harm in letting Bumblebee think that. “Only Chat.”

“Is there something going on between you two?”
Ladybug sighed and rested her fingertips on her earring as it beeped. Was there? Could there be? She wasn’t sure. But she certainly wasn’t going to tell Bumblebee of the nigglng feeling lurking away in her chest before she mentioned anything to Chat Noir.

Bumblebee appeared to study her. “Absence makes the heart grow fonder?”

Well. She could admit that. Except, “I was already fond of him.”

Bumblebee held his hexagon wax structure out to her. The smile blooming on his face was blinding. “Good, because I’m ‘fondue’ you too.”

Shooting him a confused look, she took the wax. “How did you do that? I’m not supposed to touch the akuma.”

The two pieces of hair on the top of his head which resembled antennae dropped in dejection. “You still don’t get it.”

“Get what?” she asked and stuck her thumb into the wax to release the akuma. “Look, about yesterday,” she said as she spun her yo-yo, then swept up the butterfly to purify it. “I’m sorry I didn’t come. I overslept.” Flicking open the yo-yo, she released the white butterfly.

“I see.”

Dropping her eyes, she returned her weapon to her hip. Words tumbled out of her. “And then I felt so guilty and embarrassed about it, because I promised I would, and I know I’m not making a very good impression, especially since I attacked you and accused you of being an akuma and then ran, but it’s hard too, because I really feel like I’m betraying Chat by allowing myself to partner with you, even if he’s coming back, but I don’t know that I can trust that and I know that’s not really fair to you because all you want to do is help and—”

To stop her babble, Bumblebee rested his hand on her shoulder and the words died in her throat from the tender look on his face. Her stomach flip-flopped and a tingle flittered down her spine. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

His smile bloomed wider. “Because you’re adora-bee.”

“What did I just say?” she asked, exasperated.

“Ladybug, I’m Ch…” A beep and Bumblebee reached toward the back of his head, startled. “Oh.”

“We should go,” Ladybug said. They’d both used their powers, de-transformation would happen soon. “Um… I can meet you—”

“No.” He looked over at the steadily approaching group of grinning Parisians ready to congratulate him. “There is never going to be a good time to do this,” he muttered. He straightened his spine, took her other shoulder with his hand and tugged her so she faced him and appeared to steel himself.

“Ladybug, I’m Chat.”

Ladybug blinked. Curled one hand against her chest. Barked out a laugh. “No, you’re not.”

His fingers dug into her shoulders. “There’s so much to explain and no time.” He cast another glance at the oncoming smiles. “Meet me this time. At our spot. Sunset.” His grip tightened for one brief moment. “Please.”

He pulled away before she could answer, bounding away from her and launched himself back onto
the rooftops.

No. It wasn't possible. It just wasn't. Bumblebee had to be lying. This had to be some kind of trick, a ruse...

But *Chat* would never lie—

And if he wasn't lying and Bumblebee was Chat Noir then...

Cognitive thought snuffed out.

*I'm Chat's.*

*You and me, forever.*

*I was already fond of him.*

She was in so much trouble.

Chapter End Notes

Note: When Alya is talking about 'English', she's talking about the language.
What do you call a bee that prefers nectar to pollen?

Chapter Summary

What do you call a bee that prefers nectar to pollen?
Snob-Bee

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Adrien didn’t know why Marinette walked into the door of the classroom instead of opening it, but the resulting smack and door rattle was enough to cause everyone to cringe.

Alya gasped, her hands flying to her face to cover her nose and mouth. Nino surged out of his seat, gaping in horror. Chloé cackled and nudged at Sabrina and in a loud voice, complimented Marinette’s clumsiness. Adrien rushed out of his seat to fling open the door.

“Are you alright?” he blurted, reaching down to take her hand and help her to her feet.

Holding onto her nose, Marinette blinked at him like she was only just become aware he was there. “Um…” She sniffled and blinked away the tears of pain which formed in her eyes. Pulling her hand away from her face, she checked her fingers for blood, then wrinkled her nose to sniffle again. “Yeah.”

Concerned, he shifted his grip from her hand to her elbow to keep her steady. “Are you sure? That was a pretty hard hit.”

“She’s faking it, Adrien,” Chloé called.

Madame Bustier approached. “Do you want to get some ice?”

Marinette sniffled again and shook her head. Rubbing her nose, she said, “No, I’m fine. Really. I was just… thinking.”

“Must have been a really intense thought for you to completely miss the fact the door was closed.”

Marinette’s giggle sounded a little hysterical. “Yeah.”

Moving his hand from Marinette’s elbow to the back of her shoulder, Adrien escorted her into class. Alya hurried down the stairs to take Marinette from Adrien and he slipped back into his seat.

“That looked like it hurt, dude,” Nino said, twisting around to look at Marinette.

“That’ll teach me not to pay attention,” she replied as she sat down.

Alya fusses, cupping Marinette’s face in her hands and lifting her chin so she could see Marinette’s nose. “You’re so clumsy.”

“I know.” Marinette sniffled again, then smiled at Alya as she pulled herself free. “Everything’s ready. Papa’s making an extra batch of cookies and Mom’s preparing the blueberry violet eclairs you
like.”

Alya hissed out an elongated, “Yes.” Holding up her hand for Marinette to slap, she continued, “You, gurl, are amazing.”

Adrien grinned. “You spoil us.”

“Well, I’m the one who needs help,” Marinette said. “It’s only fair I provide snacks and entertainment.”

“More entertainment than you walking into a door?” Alya asked.

“Well,” Marinette said and smiled coyly at Alya. “I kind of borrowed Transformers too.”

Adrien perked up. “Really?” She’d actually listened to him? That was sweet of her.

“I heard it was good,” Marinette said. “Plus, we need to practice English, right?”

Alya laughed. “Sneaky. But are you sure it’s not because you’re trying to impress a certain Bumblebee?”

Marinette’s cheeks went pink. Her eyes flicked to Adrien’s for a fraction of a second, then dropped to her desk. “I just thought’d be nice, that’s all,” she mumbled, her word slurring together.

What was this strange flutter? It was like someone had run a warm hand down Adrien’s spine. Why was her embarrassment so adorable? He was quite touched, a wayward comment to a cute girl who’d brought him cookies so her friend could get an interview had encouraged her to do something she mightn’t have done otherwise. It hadn’t mattered that he’d already knew her and had really taken the opportunity to tease. She’d still taken what he’d said on board.

Nah, the flutter couldn’t mean anything. He was still reeling from Ladybug’s words. The promise of a proper conversation between them. Ladybug was fond of him and she not only admitted that, but she’d reaffirmed that only Chat Noir was allowed to flirt with her.

What did that mean?

Ahh, Ladybug. Adrien felt like warm honey from thinking her name.

Marinette lifted her head and rubbed her nose. “It’s not like I’ll ever see him again. He’ll never know.”

Unless a certain Bumblebee wandered into her home, begged for cookies and let her know she was appreciated. But how likely was that?

“Do you have to go home first?” Marinette asked all three of them. “Or are you coming over straight after school?”

“I gotta go home for about five minutes,” Alya said.

“I’ll walk you, Alya,” Nino suggested. “That way your dad can’t wrangle you into babysitting.”

Planting her elbows on the desk, Alya cupped her chin in her hands and smiled at Nino. “That’s sweet of you.”

“I can come straight after school,” Adrien told Marinette, smiling at Nino’s dopey grin. “You can thrash me in a few games of Mecha Strike while we wait.” It would give him a chance to talk to
Marinette about Alya and Nino’s budding… whatever it was. He wanted to help his best friend, like Marinette would want to help Alya, and it would be beneficial if they were on the same page about their friends.

The pinkness in her cheeks deepened but she gave him a smile that lit up her face. “You bet I will.”

Afternoon sessions passed quickly. Most of the classes were taken up with revision and exam preparations, including some time for group discussions. Marinette seemed to be in a bit of a daze and Adrien wondered if she’d hurt herself more than she’d admitted. There were several moments when Alya had to drag Marinette back into the conversation and get her to contribute. By the looks Alya was giving Marinette, she was concerned about the dazzled look on Marinette’s face too. But then, Adrien wasn’t much better either, his brain kept shunting off to think about Ladybug and what he was going to say to her tonight.

At the end of school, Alya and Nino chattered, suggesting they bring back drinks to go with Marinette’s snacks after they’d been to Alya’s home. Placing his bag on the desk, Adrien checked on Deedee’s little nest while he waited for Marinette to pack up. Deedee had made herself a hive, blinking open her eyes to smile at him before curling up again. Storing his tablet in his bag, Adrien scratched her on the head.

Nino tapped Adrien on the shoulder and gave him double thumbs up. “See you soon, man. Try not to get your ass kicked too hard.”

Adrien finger gunned him. “I’ll do my best.”

Marinette bounced down the stairs to stand beside him. She rocked back and forward from her heel to her toe, with her hands behind her back, looking as eager as a puppy. “Ready?”

Adrien swung his bag onto his shoulder. “Absolutely. I’ve been practicing Mecha Strike with Max. I think I got you beat this time.”

A slow smile spread on her face. “Oh, do you now?”

“Max taught me all his secrets. I am going to own you.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Spamming buttons and hoping desperately you get a good combo?”

Adrien pressed his hand to his chest, then held the classroom door open for her. “Lies and slander! I know all the good strats.”

“Spamming buttons with style,” she countered as she walked through, turning so she could continue talking to him as he followed.

“And how to poke my tongue out of my mouth just right so it looks like I know what I’m doing.”

“Ahh, yes,” she replied, her voice laced with mock self-importance and arrogance. “An art form in itself. A lot of gamers don’t understand the necessity of the tongue.”

Adrien burst into laughter.

She blinked. “And that sounded so wrong.” She covered her mouth and went pink. “Oh my god.”

He laughed harder, just from the expression on her face. “Wow.”

“Kill me now,” Marinette wailed.
Descending the stairs from their classroom they fell into step together as they walked toward the exit of the school. Still snickering, Adrien grinned at her. “Don’t worry. I knew what you meant.”

“Well, good,” she said, lifting her palm from her mouth until it rested on her forehead. “‘Cause I don’t know what I meant.”

Marinette’s parents greeted them happily as they walked into the bakery. There was no one else there at the time which meant Marinette, and by extension Adrien, had Marinette’s parent’s full attention. A new feeling, he wasn’t used to being greeted so enthusiastically upon returning home from school.

“Here’s my girl,” Tom said, swooping out of the baking area to gather Marinette up. “Did you have a nice day?”

Marinette giggled as Tom spun her around and then peppered her cheek with kisses. “Yes Papa.”

“Adrien,” Sabine said, smiling as she wiped her hand on a cloth, then hid it behind the counter. “It’s nice to see you again.”

Adrien beamed at her and bowed. “Nice to see you too, Madame Dupain-Cheng.”

“Sabine is fine, dear, there’s no need to be so formal,” she said, waving her hand. She kissed her daughter’s cheek as Tom let Marinette slip from his grip and asked, “No Nino and Alya? I thought it was study group.”

“They’re on their way,” Marinette assured her. “Alya had to drop home for a few minutes, so Adrien and I are going to play a few rounds of Mecha Strike while we wait.”

Sabine gave Marinette a look which made the girl flush red. “There is food upstairs. Enjoy.”

Marinette headed to the back of the bakery, toward the door to the stairs and gestured for Adrien to follow her. “Thanks, Mom.”

“Thanks for having us,” Adrien said to Sabine.

She smiled. “Any time, Adrien. It’s our pleasure.”

As he entered Marinette’s place and followed her up the stairs to her room, he was again struck by how small, yet how loved, her home felt. Her entire apartment could probably fit into his room but it felt so full of life.

Opening the hatch to her room, Marinette clambered inside. As Adrien followed her up, he saw her place her school bag on her chaise, then pull her little handbag off her chest. “Make yourself at home,” she said, smiling as she took the stairs up to her bed. “I’ll just be a minute.”

Unhooking his bag, Adrien placed it beside Marinette’s and flipped it open. Deedee rose up so she could peer curiously at Marinette’s bedroom. Her small antennae waggled and her stinger gave an excited wiggle.

“We’re at a friend’s place,” Adrien whispered.

“May I explore?” she whispered.

She looked so excited, Adrien couldn’t bring himself to say no. “Stay hidden.”

“You will not even know I am here,” she said and zipped away, pouncing into a potted plant by the
Marinette trotted down from her bed and hurried toward the attic door. “I forgot the food,” she said as she rushed past him.

“Can’t forget that.”

“It’s why you all came,” she replied.

“That and the company,” he called after her and grinned as her laughter echoed up the stairs to him.

Something had changed in Marinette and Adrien wasn’t sure what that was, but he liked it. She seemed more relaxed around him now. Not as fidgety and prone to babble. It was nice to see that sassy girl who’d berated him over chewing gum shine through.

He glanced around her room, smiling at all her seamstress equipment. Pink, everything was so pink and happy, even with the clashing of cultures. She had Chinese decorations mixed with French and Adrien though that was wonderful. Knickknacks, handmade dolls, pictures on the walls. A lot of personal touch unlike his room at home. A dummy wore a half-pinned pink polka dot sundress in the corner and there was a pile of wax paper designs on her desk in the corner. Knitting needles were stuck in a ball of blue twine, with what looked to be a half-finished sleeve or scarf attached to it.

There weren’t many pictures on the wall, and Adrien had been sure he’d seen more up when he’d last been here when the Puppeteer attacked, but there were quite a few Alya and Marinette selfies. A couple with Nino. One or two with a girl he recognised by sight and not by name. One enlarged class photo (sans Chloé and Sabrina) which they’d taken in the park.

Spotting a pin board above her sewing machine, Adrien wandered into the alcove beneath Marinette’s bed to look. Leaning forward, he pressed his hand to the wall beside the pin board so he could get a better look. A lot of sketches, mostly of people without heads dressed in various outfits, redrawn again from the back. Every now and then there’d be a cat’s eye tucked away in a corner. As he looked for more, he realised it wasn’t a cat’s eyes, but Chat Noir’s eyes. Sometimes one. Sometimes both with the black mask between.

Lifting up a piece of paper, he was shocked to see a full body sketch of Chat Noir’s suit, front and back. Maybe he should ask her for a cosplay after all. So much detail. She really paid attention. The mop of hair was right, as was his eyes and mask, but she hadn’t drawn his mouth and other features seemed vague. She’d spent more time on his suit than she had on his face… and did his butt really look like that? “Wow.”

“He stops around sometimes,” Marinette said from behind him.

Adrien jerked around, embarrassed to be sprung looking. He hadn’t heard her coming back. “I wasn’t—”

Her eyes looked beyond Adrien at the picture. “I think my house must be on his patrol route.” She shrugged. “Or he detours because he can smell cookies, I’m not sure.”

The latter. He tried not to overstep his bounds but sometimes the promise of cookies was just too strong to ignore. While Marinette might give him an exasperated roll of the eyes when he popped in, she always had a cookie on hand. But maybe she’d paid more attention to his visits than he had. “Oh.” He swallowed. “Are you worried about him?” he asked, wondering if there was anything he could say that would help. It seemed strange that people other than Ladybug might miss him. “In class before, it sounded like—”
“I am,” she said and dropped her eyes to the plate of snacks she held. “I mean… I was. Um… I guess… Bumblebee convinced me that he’s okay.”

“He did?” When did he do that?

“Innocent until proven guilty, right?” Marinette replied. “He wants to help. If Ladybug can give him a chance, so can I.”

And how did she know Ladybug would give Bumblebee a chance? Maybe Alya had heard something and hadn’t put it up on her blog yet. Adrien glanced back at Marinette’s drawings and changed the subject. “You’re a good artist.”

She laughed. “Nathanaël is a good artist. I doodle and dabble and usually concentrate on the fashion side of things. Faces are sometimes fun to draw, but… meh.” Looking back at Adrien, she held out the plate she carried. “Cookie?”

He took one, partly because cookie, and partly so it gave him something to do.

Moving over to her computer, she slid the plate onto her desk. “Ready to get your butt kicked?”

“Actually, there’s something I wanted to talk to you about first.”

Her movements seemed stiff as she turned and tilted her head. “Okay?”

“Nino and Alya,” he said and watched Marinette visibly relax. “They’re getting pretty close.”

She smiled. Cupping her hands around the edge of her desk, she sat against it. “They are. An exciting time. I was wondering how long they’d dance around each other.”

He smiled and took a few steps toward her. “I think we should try to be subtle about giving them some alone time when we’re in a group, you know?”

Her laughter pealed like bells. “Alya will see straight through that.”

He puffed out a breath. “Probably.”

“I agree, though.”

“It also means, while they dance around each other, we’re going to be spending a fair amount of time together.”

She tilted her head at him, her brow creased in confusion. “I guess?”

Why wasn’t she as excited about that as he was? It was a chance for them to get to know each other better. His hand cupped the back of his neck. “I just wanted to make sure we were on the same page.”

“We are.” She picked up a controller and tilted it toward him with a sly smile. “Now, are you going to bring it or not?”

Adrien laughed. “Oh, you’re on.”

Deedee had known the instant Adrien had entered the school on Monday, Tikki was close. Very close. It had taken all her concentration not to burst out Adrien’s bag and find her sister-bug. There had been too many people around and Deedee knew she’d be caught. She had to stay hidden. She
had to wait until the right moment.

By the Queen, how did Plagg and Tikki survive being so close and yet having to maintain their distance?

And now… Now Deedee was in the same room as Tikki and their wielders were alone. Adrien had gone home with the object of his affection and he didn’t know. There was no doubt, Marinette was Ladybug. She could smell Tikki everywhere.

Deedee dashed from hiding place to hiding place, watching as Adrien conversed with Marinette. Tikki must love this. So close to Plagg all the time, watching the humans have their cute little dramas.

Her stinger wriggled in excitement, swishing back and forward so fast her entire body moved with it. She couldn’t wait. She couldn’t wait! It’d been so long.

There she was. The little red bug, perched on a cat pillow on Marinette’s bed, watching their charges fight over a screen.

Still wriggling, Deedee pounced.

Tikki turned, joy etched on her face and her own antennae twitching madly, holding out her arms to catch Deedee. They tumbled, a tangled of limbs, fuzz and spots, falling back in a heap on to Marinette’s bed. They twittered and chirped at each other, Deedee rubbing the top of her head beneath Tikki’s chin. Tikki thrummed as she patted Deedee’s head. “You found me!”

“Oh, I missed you!”

Tikki wriggled down so she could press her forehead to Deedee’s. “This is such mess, Deedee. Is Plagg okay?”

“Tikki, the ring is missing. Plagg’s scent is muted but I am positive I will be able to find it. I have already scoured the mansion and it’s not there. Until I find him, Adrien will be protected.”

Tikki closed her eyes. “I’m worried for them.”

Deedee soothed her sister-bug as best she could. “I will find him. Adrien’s bond to him is strong.”

Tikki’s paw stroked against the fuzz on Deedee’s neck. “I’m afraid I caused Plagg’s capture. Adrien had the Miraculous book but something else Plagg saw worried him only there was no time for him to explain. Adrien is always closely watched, but we had to get the book back to Fu before it was discovered Adrien had it, so we had Marinette steal it from him. I assumed Plagg would guide Adrien to Master Fu’s as well, but… then he didn’t show. I don’t think it’s a coincidence. The book being in the Agreste home and then Plagg goes missing.”

“Hmm,” Deedee mused. “However, we are fighting against Nooroo’s wielder, yet there is no scent of Nooroo in Adrien’s home, nor have any attacks on Adrien occurred. If Papillon has Plagg, then he does not know the bond must be severed before Plagg can be used.”

Tikki brightened. “So, it might not be Papillon?”

Deedee stroked her paw down Tikki’s cheek and gently touched her antennae to the top of Tikki’s head. “I have another possibility in mind.”

Downstairs, Adrien laughed. “Take that!”
Marinette replied, “Do you really think I’m going to let you get away with that?”

Deedee perked up. “This is most amusing. I never thought I would get to witness two of yours
before they find out about each other. How do they not know?”

Tikki rose, floating to the edge of the bed to sit on it so they could watch their charges. “Love makes
them blind. It is not uncommon.”

Joining her, Deedee snuggled. “Then she does?”

“Oh yes, she does.” Tikki giggled. “He is in love with Ladybug, she is in love with Adrien and
neither of them can make a move for fear the other does not feel the same way.”

“Hopeless.”

Tikki looped her arm over Deedee’s shoulders. “And then Marinette makes a declaration that she
is Chat’s. He vanishes and she pines for him.”

“He is so excited about that.”

“I cannot wait to see how this plays out tonight. It’s so different and fresh every time.”

“Plagg will be sorry he missed it.”

“Plagg will ruin the fun,” Tikki scoffed. “I want to squeal with delight.”

“We shall squeal together. I’m glad I’m here for this.”

Tikki rested her head against Deedee’s. “I am, too.”

Marinette sat up from her hunch over her tablet and stretched her arms over her head. Glancing at her
clock she sighed as she saw it was only seven thirty. Sunset was still hours away— in June it usually
settled before ten— so she still had time before she had to meet Bumblebee.

Despite inviting her friends over, her mind wasn’t really on her study for her exams. It was tangled
up in the mess she’d created by not listening and blurt things out when exhausted. And now…

Bumblebee. Bumblebee was Chat Noir. Chat Noir was Bumblebee. Why? How? What had
happened? Was he really telling the truth?

She wasn’t much of a friend if she couldn’t recognise him. She’d recognised him in all his other
forms. Copy Chat. Reflekta. And she failed to recognise him with a new miraculous which made her
wonder if she’d failed to recognise him without the mask.

Not only that… Chat Noir had an inkling she might feel more than a passing fondness for him. A
love that went beyond friendship and partnership. She didn’t even know how she felt yet, but she did
know now was not the right time to confront it.

Marinette glanced at Adrien through her eyelashes. This ‘let’s be friends’ seemed to be working out,
even if she was cursing the stomach flutterings. But, she wondered at the conversation before. Why
would he be worried about them getting along? Surely, since he was with Lila, she’d be joining their
group. He wouldn’t need her.

She didn’t know how she felt about that. Turning her eyes to Alya, she considered her best friend.
Alya had certainly been taken with Lila after that interview about Ladybug, but they hadn’t really
discussed it. It was still so new and fresh and Lila’s lies hadn’t been discovered by the general student group yet. Marinette wasn’t even sure it would be found out before they all changed schools.

Marinette had been replaced before, not that she believed Alya would do that. Marinette flicked her eyes to Nino. They’d both been replaced before.

The four of them were moving from collège to lycée. There would be a whole host of changes and new people to meet. Summer break was so close she could smell the holidays. They just had to make it through their exams.

Sighing, Marinette said, “How about a break?”

“Oh hell yes,” Nino said, tossing his tablet pen down. “I thought you’d never stop.”

“Don’t be lazy, Nino,” Alya said, still scribbling.

“Not being lazy,” Nino replied. “But all work and no play makes Nino a… something-something… See? I’m brain dead. Let’s do something else for a while.”

Still reading his textbook, Adrien jotted down notes. “What do you suggest?”

“Didn’t you say something about a movie?” Nino asked Marinette.

“Ahh, no,” Alya said, lifting her free hand to waggle a finger without taking her eyes off the screen. “I need to go home in about an hour. I won’t get to finish it.”

Adrien nodded, peering at the time. “I suspect I’ll be getting a call any minute.”

“So, let’s finish now,” Nino whined. “Play some cards. Jenga. Monopoly. Twister. Shoot each other with water guns. Hell, I’d even play Mecha Strike. My brain is putty, dudes, we need to do something other than study.”

“Twister?” Adrien asked, raising his head. “What’s that?”

With a light laugh, Nino slapped his hands together. “Oh, my poor naïve friend. You’re in for a treat. Marinette, tell me you have that game.”

Twister? With Adrien? “Umm…”

“Bad idea, Nino,” Alya said, taking no notice of Marinette’s wide eyed stare and mental messages not to encourage this. “I am a master at that game. I will have you tangled in knots before you can say boo.”

“Never knew you were one to run from a challenge,” Nino crooned at her. “If you can’t hack it…”

Alya lifted her head and met Nino’s gaze. “Marinette. Get the game.”

Marinette bit her lip. “Alya—”

“Nino needs to understand what he’s dealing with,” she replied, still challenging Nino with her eyes.

Marinette sighed and heaved herself to her feet. Gathering up the plates and cups they’d been using so she could take them downstairs, she said, “Fine, but you clean up so we can have floor space.”

Alya snapped closed the textbook she’d been taking notes from. “Done.” Nino practically sprung to his feet to clear some space, while Adrien looked bemused.
Sabine sprawled on the couch, watching one of her soaps as Marinette left the plates on the kitchen bench. “How’s it going?” she called.

“We’re finished for the night. Going to play a game before they have to go home.”

“Good idea,” Sabine replied, returning her attention to her soaps.

“Papa in bed already?”

“Early delivery. Your dinner’s in the oven when you’ve finished.”

“Thanks, Mom,” Marinette replied and wandered to the games cabinet. Grabbing Twister from the shelf, she walked back to her room to find Nino and Alya explaining the game to Adrien.

“That sounds… a little— um— invasive,” Adrien said, casting a wide-eyed glance at Marinette.

“Oh, pssh,” Alya said and flopped her hand. “What’s a little bump and grind between friends?” She grinned, reaching for the box Marinette held. “This is gonna be fun.”

Marinette bit her tongue. While Twister wouldn’t help her predicament, it would help Alya and Nino. So she’d play. For her friends.

Alya and Marinette spread out the mat while Nino dug his toes into the heel of his shoes, grinning at Adrien. “Dude, it’s better without shoes.”

“You’d better not have stinky socks,” Alya told him.

“Well, they’re not going to smell like flowers,” Nino said. “Deal with it.”

“Unfair advantage.”

“Get a peg for your nose then.”

“Are you okay with this?” Adrien asked Marinette.

She nodded. “Let’s see if we can make those two fall on top of each other.”

Adrien was a lot more flexible than Marinette realised. Nino was solid as a rock, nothing seemed to topple him, even Alya draping herself over him provocatively. Nino and Alya played side by side, tangling each other as much as possible, while Adrien and Marinette tried to stay out of each other’s personal space.

It didn’t work very well.

Adrien stretch out a hand to spin the dial, then groaned as it landed on right hand, green. One foot and one hand on red, the remaining foot on blue, Marinette was crouched between him and green. She’d been lucky enough to have all four limbs close together on blue and yellow.

“You’re doomed,” Nino said, limbs stretched wide. He was belly up, while Alya faced downward, consequently the two of them were wedged together, so close and yet not touching, as per the rules.

“Just try not to knock us down when you fall,” Alya mentioned.

Marinette made herself smaller.
“Right then.” Adrien stretched out as far as he could, triangling over the top of Marinette so he could put his hand on the green circle. He kept his one legs as straight as physically possible, taking all of his upper body weight on the green hand, while the red hand now only had its finger tips on the circle.

His head was right behind Marinette’s. She could see the hang of his blond hair out of the corner of her eye and feel him bump and brush against as she moved to spin the dial. Heat flooded her face and continued down her neck. “Sorry!”

“If he’s touching you, he’s out,” Alya teased.

“Not touching,” Adrien retorted, sounding strained and there was no way Marinette was going to admit they were brushing against each other and that her skin felt like fire wherever he touched.

Marinette’s next spin turned up right foot, red. The closest and only accessible red was between Adrien’s feet. Twisting her hips, she angled her foot down between his legs and touched her toes to the circle.

Adrien wriggled his legs slightly wider in response while keeping his feet firmly on the circle.

Nino’s go was easy, since he dialled up right foot blue, and his foot was already on blue. It required a wriggle to the side and then he grinned at Alya again. “Your turn, babe.”

“Don’t you babe me;” she muttered, reaching for the dial.

Adrien puffed out a breath, blowing his hair away from his face. “This is harder than it looks.”

“You’re more flexible than I expected,” Marinette replied, smiling at him.

He winked at her and the constant blush on her cheeks deepened. “Right back at you.” When it was Adrien’s turn again, and he muttered, “C’mon left hand.” It spun true and Adrien shifted his left hand onto yellow. While he was still triangled over the top of Marinette, both palms were on the same side.

Marinette spun, and her eyes widened. “Oh no.” Left foot, green. Opposite end of the mat, plus she was beneath Adrien which limited her movement. She was going to have her legs spread wide and that would unbalance her.

Alya laughed and winked at her. “Nice one.”

She shifted fast, moving her left foot from the blue circle to the green in a hop and a lunge. The small of her back hit Adrien’s abdomen as she moved.

“Careful,” Adrien warned, lifting his hips away as much as he could.

“Sorry!” Marinette hunkered down as much as her muscles allowed her to. Being Ladybug had helped her get physically fit, but even then there was a limit to the length she could hold an awkward position while beneath the object of her affection. Her heart rattled against her rib cage and all she could do was concentrate on keeping her breathing even. Not him. Not on him. Not on how close he was and how that twisted her up inside. God, why couldn’t she just get over this feeling already?

“It’s cool,” he said.

She was going to have a heart attack. Any moment now, it was just going to give and she’d die of embarrassment. Tikki was probably in a corner somewhere having a good giggle. The great
Ladybug, undone by her personal space being invaded.

Surely she could handle Adrien being so close. Chat Noir invaded her space all the time and she was able to deal with it.

And yet…

Chat Noir’s smirk flashed into his mind as he bent toward her. The soft greenness of his eyes and the way his pupils dilated as he focussed on her. His body language dedicated its attention on her, mimicking and melding so it matched. The way his eyes would drop to her lips and the way he wanted but never pressed. She’d never let herself see that before and now it sat forefront in her mind.

She was thinking about Chat Noir while in the presence of Adrien. Thinking about what it would be like if Chat Nor was the one bending over her, if it was his teasing smile she saw and his puns she heard.

All it took was one random thought that perhaps… and she was undone.

Marinette barely managed to conceal the tea kettle noise bubbling in her. Nope. No, that was worse. So much worse. Her heart hammered. Her breath hitched. Her world spun on its axis.

She had a crush on him. She did. She had a spine tingling, butterfly inducing, nauseatingly stupid crush on Chat Noir.

He was going to be such a smug bastard about this.

“Are you okay?” Adrien asked.

With a blush that, for once, wasn’t caused by her proximity to Adrien, she nodded. Hunching her shoulders, she turned her face away from him.

“That was an elbow wobble,” Alya teased Nino. “Having a hard time, old man? Muscles screaming?” She drooped her eyelids at him, and crooned, “Do you just wanna… relax?”

“Maybe, but the view is fantastic,” he quipped and waggled his eyebrows at her.

Alya’s head reared back and she looked affronted. “If my hand wasn’t stuck, I’d smack you.”

Alya and Nino’s moves went off without a hitch as they crabbed around each other, but Adrien’s spin landed on right foot, green.

There was no physical way he was going to be able to achieve that, not with him over the top of Marinette. Marinette tensed, waiting for the inevitable tumble. He moved and his knee hit her leg. They were too tangled together and the hit unbalanced him.

“Sorry!” Adrien blurted and made a grab for Marinette, catching her hips to keep her steady. Which meant his hands were no longer supporting his weight and he crashed into her. Although she was ready, the sudden weight of him caused her to squeak. She was thrust forward and her face smacked into Nino’s chest before tangling in a heap.

Nino wobbled but didn’t fall. Cackling, he crowed, “I win.”

“We win,” Alya corrected.

With a groan, Adrien untangled an arm and swatted at Nino’s elbow, helping his friend to lose his balance.
“Nope,” Alya crowed, grinning down at the three tangled teens on the twister mat. “I win!”

“No way,” Nino complained. “You cheated.”

Plastic crinkled as Adrien hoisted off Marinette. “You okay?”

She squeaked at him as she wriggled out of the tangle. Scooting away from the mat, she sat on the floor and smiled, trying to control her blush and keep the grin from becoming too cheesy. “Yup.”

Adrien sat back and laughed. “That was fun!”

“Told you!” Nino said and held his fist up to bump against Adrien’s.

“Wanna go again?” Alya asked.

Adrien crawled to his phone. “I need to go,” he said, sighing heavily. Standing, he fetched his bag, checking inside it for a moment, then swung it onto his shoulder.


Adrien laughed. “Yeah, yeah.” Glancing at Nino and Alya, still sprawled on the mat, he caught Marinette’s eye, then offered her his hand. “Walk me out?”

Marinette didn’t know if Alya’s emphatic nod was because she wanted to spend alone time with Nino, or if she wanted Marinette to spend alone time with Adrien. Taking Adrien’s hand, she let him pull her to her feet. “Sure.”

Trotting down into the living area, Adrien politely bade farewell to Sabine, then Marinette followed him down the stairs to the side door.

“Do you think you have a better handle of physics now?” Adrien asked, holding the door open for her.

“Nope,” she replied. “Physics and I will never be on speaking terms again. But I have a better idea on which equations to memorise.”

“That’s a start,” he said. “The majority of physics equations can be worked out by knowing just a few, it’s which few that’s difficult.” He sighed and Marinette followed his gaze.

Seeing his driver hop out of the car and then open the passenger door for Adrien, Marinette asked, “Was he waiting here the whole time? He could’ve come in, it would’ve been more comfortable.”

“No,” Adrien said. “He wasn’t, I just wish he was a little… less punctual. It would’ve been nice to spend more time with you guys.” He waved and gave her a bright smile which didn’t reach his eyes. “I had fun tonight, see you tomorrow.”

She watched his car leave and bounced back inside. Instead of going back up to her room straight away, she washed the snack dishes she and her friends had used and packed the leftovers in a paper bag with the intent to take it with her when she went to meet Bumblebee. Making more noise than necessary, she thumped her way back up the stairs to her bedroom to warn Nino and Alya she was coming.

Alya met her at the hatch. Grabbing both of Marinette’s hands, she lifted them up to chest height. “Nino’s going to walk me home,” she said while over her shoulder, Nino gathered his gear and gave Marinette two thumbs up. “And then I’m gonna call you and we can gush, okay?”
Marinette nodded and her room emptied of friends and left her alone. Silence and space crept up on her, and with it came anxiety and worry.

Bumblebee was Chat Noir. Chat Noir was Bumblebee. She’d given him free reign to flirt with her. She’d given him approval.

Somehow, a crush had snuck up on her and taken hold when she least expected it.

“Tikki?”

Tikki popped up from Marinette’s bed, floating down through the air toward her. “Yes, Marinette?”

“What am I going to do about Chat?”

Tikki smiled. “Talk to him,” she said like it was the easiest thing in the world.

“I’m not ready for this. I am absolutely not crushing on Chat Noir.”

“Yes, you are. And that’s okay.”

Marinette covered her face with her hands and stifled a shriek.

“Talk to him anyway. He’s still your friend, that hasn’t changed. If you don’t talk to him, nothing will ever be settled, and we need to know why he’s the Bumblebee. You don’t have to make any decisions other than listening to what he has to say.”

Marinette nodded. “Something I should’ve done from the start. Did you know he was Bumblebee?”

Tikki nuzzled Marinette’s cheek. “Why don’t you go heat up your dinner, then we can watch that Transformers movie. At least you’d have something to talk to him about that’s neutral.”

Marinette nodded. “Good idea.” She frowned and waggled her finger at Tikki. “And don’t think I didn’t notice you avoiding the question.”

With veiled eyes and a small smile, Deedee watched Adrien pace his room. “You are nervous about tonight.”

He cast her a glance as she flittered among her flowers and nibbled on pollen and nectar. Cheeky bee was amused by his pacing. He’d moved non-stop since they’d arrived home, and it was barely eight thirty. They still had another hour before they could even think about leaving to meet Ladybug.

“Yeah. Yeah, I am.”

“Why?”

Adrien raked a hand through his hair, then gripped a handful and tugged. “I don’t know what to say to her!”

Deedee smiled. “Start with ‘The ring is missing’, and go from there.”

He cast her a glare that he didn’t mean. “That part is going to be easy. She already knows something is up.”

“Then what is the problem?”

“She’s fond of me. She admitted that only Chat could flirt with her and I’m Chat. What do I do
with *that*? Do I talk to her? Do I press the issue? Will she smack me if I walk up to her and… I dunno…” he shrugged. “Kiss her?”

“Humans are so complicated,” Deedee said with a sigh. She buzzed away from her flowers so she could sit on the top of the couch and watch him. “What is the most important thing right now? The one thing you hold above all others events occurring right now?”

Adrien met her serious question with a truthful and equally serious answer. “Finding Plagg.”

Deedee nodded. “Ladybug needs to know Plagg is missing. Start there. Everything else will fall into place.”

Truly pathetic and steeping to new lows, he whined, “But I really want to talk to her about what she said.”

“I would assume Ladybug does as well,” Deedee said and patted the fuzz around her neck. “What is your ultimate goal when it comes to Ladybug?”

Adrien flushed. He shuffled and dug the toe of his shoe into the carpet. “I’d really like to kiss her. But… she has to want to kiss me too. It’s not right otherwise. And for that, I need to know she feels the same way about me as I do about her. I don’t want a pity kiss or an unsure one.”

“Then wait for an opening to discuss how she feels. She may be as confused as you are or may not even be aware of how she feels. ‘Fond’ could mean many, many things. She may also have said it to deter you from flirting.”

He really didn’t want to think about that. “Oh.”

“You mentioned her possible reciprocation was new, if you come on too strong, she may flee.”

Face draining of blood, Adrien stood perfectly still. “Oh. I don’t want that. If she runs, I might never get her to stop.”

“Slow and steady,” Deedee advised. “This is important to you. This is what will linger with you once Plagg returns. Do not rush ahead.” Deedee waggled even sitting down. “If you start with business, it may help you both relax and a discussion on feelings will come easier.”

Adrien sat on the couch facing her. “Good point. The important thing is she’s brought up to date with what’s happening and why I’m now Bumblebee instead of Chat.”

“Exactly,” Deedee said with a giggle. “Bee yourself. If she wants to talk about what she said, she will show signs of that and I believe, if what she said holds any meaning to her at all, then she will broach the subject.”

Adrien blinked as he considered that. “So… I should wait until she mentions it?” he asked, seeking clarification.

“Perhaps. I do not know, but I feel it would be inadvisable to rush into anything at this juncture or force her to talk about things not related to the miraculous. Not without proper dialogue and clarification and for that you will need to wait until she’s ready. I want you to be able to kiss her, Adrien,” Deedee told him, smiling. “Impulse is nice, but communication is far more important, especially if you want more than one kiss.”

“More than one,” he murmured and fought the urge to lick his lips. “Do you think that’s possible?”
“Trust me on this,” she waggled. “Bees are the masters at communication.”

Grinning, Adrien stretched out his hand and stroked her head. “Thanks, Deedee.”

“I liked your friends,” she said, lifting up to dip and dive back to her flowers. “Nino is very funny. His jokes require a certain sort of humour.”

“I like them too. Nino’s great.”

“Alya is most shrewd and your friend Marinette is cute,” Deedee said, flitting around a bluebell. She nuzzled the flower with her face and gave a waggle of enjoyment. A physical being, Deedee expressed her emotions in the oddest of ways.

Adrien brushed his fingers through his hair. “Yeah, Alya’s going to be a great reporter when she finishes school. And Marinette…” Her smile flashed into his mind. “Yeah, she’s pretty cute. Nice too. I like her.”

Deedee shook her head and peered over her shoulder at him. “Your mind is too caught up in the impossible, you miss the possible in front of you.”

Why were kwami so mysterious? What was she talking about? “What does that mean?”

Deedee turned and waggled. “Come. I shall teach you to dance. That will pass the time until sunset.”

A few minutes and several demonstrations later and Adrien muttered, “Why does this feel more like twerking than dancing?”

Chapter End Notes

Sooooo, there is a tiiiiny amount of “I wrote filler because I wanted to” in this chapter, which is why it’s so long. Strictly speaking, the whole study group scene doesn’t do much to for the plot or character development (except Alya and Nino), and the bits that have plot could’ve been included somewhere else... but teenage awkwardness. We need more.
Marinette was three-quarters through the Transformers movie when there was a knock on something wooden that didn’t sound like it was part of the soundtrack. Pausing the movie, she turned toward her hatch. Daughter of bakers, her parents had to rise early to fire up the ovens and start on the morning baking, so Marinette wondered what her mother was still doing up.

Taking her feet off her desk, she gathered up the swath of knitting she’d been doing to keep her fingers occupied while watching and rested it on the basket, storing the needles so they didn’t slip. Getting to her feet, she trotted over to the hatch. “Mom?”

The knock came again, not from ahead of her, but above and behind. Halting, Marinette raised her head, following the sound.

Bumblebee waved at her sheepishly from the trap door above her bed.

Marinette blinked. Glancing at the window, she saw the tell-tale signs of twilight. Sunset. He must be on his way to meet… her. So then, why was he here? Nerves flooding her, she went to open the hatch. “Look what the cat dragged—” she said, then shook her head, remembering she wasn’t supposed to know he was Chat Noir. “Wait… I can’t say that. Look what the bee bumbled?”

Bumblebee laughed. “Hello, Marinette.”

“Did Chat Noir send you?” she asked. “Just because he drops in occasionally for cookies, doesn’t mean that invitation is extended to all peckish heroes.”

He gave her his best kitten look and she kicked herself for not seeing the resemblance before. “There’s no cookies?”

“There’s cookies. But I might like to eat them on my own.”

He smiled and her knees felt weak. “Surely you could spare one cookie for a peckish lost bee.”

“You can’t be lost if you found your way here.”

“I followed my nose. The smell of your place is bee-vine.”

Snorting, she backed away from the hatch to allow him access to her room. “You’ll have to be quiet. My parents are asleep.”

“I will be as quiet as… bee,” he said and dropped through the hatch.
With a smile, she stepped away. “Technically, bees aren’t quiet.”

“We can buzz softly.”

She trotted down the stairs. It felt weird having him in her room, especially since she didn’t really understand how she felt about him yet. Awkward and nice and strange all at once. But he didn’t need to know that, so she had to pretend everything was fine. He was just a new hero and she was supposed to know nothing about him.

“Was that Transformers I heard?” Bumblebee asked.

Sprung, she hunched her shoulders. “Ahh.”

“The music is a dead giveaway. Were you watching?”

“Yeah.” She reddened. The eagerness in his face made her stomach flutter, a fluttering which eclipsed all the heart palpitations she’d had from Adrien earlier. Strange how quickly the feelings transferred across now she knew Chat Noir and Bumblebee were the same person. And she still wasn’t sure if she liked it or not, especially since her Adrien crush hadn’t gone away. Could she be crushing on both of them at the same time? “I needed a break from studying and some bee told me it was good.”

He bounced. “Are you enjoying it?”

She watched him as he came down the stairs and stopped at the base. “It’s… interesting. The action is exciting and the transformations are epic. But I could do without the gratuitous butt shots and tacky romance subplot.”

Bumblebee stiffened, then chuckled. With an embarrassed look, he ran his hand through the hair at the nape of his neck. “Oh. Yeah. I’d forgotten about that.”

“Those sound effects,” she said and rested her hands on the back of her chair. “They’re amazing. Especially when they’re transforming.”

“Oh, that’s awesome, isn’t it?” His demeanor lit up and he waved his arms around. “The whole neeerroooowwwmmmm—wubwub—”

Marinette laughed at his attempt.

Disgruntled, Bumblebee patted his fuzz. “Oh, shuddup. You can’t reproduce it either.”

“I’m not silly enough to try, but I like that you did.”

He gave her a dorky grin. “You do?”

“And the Bumblebee car; I can see why you named yourself after him.”

Bumblebee tilted his head.

Marinette smiled. “It’s cute. And it’s not a Decepticon.” There was meaning in the name too, if she looked hard enough.

Bumblebee grinned at her. “He’s not. I thought it was fitting.”

“I think so.” She fixed her eyes on the yellow fuzz covering upper chest as Bumblebee ran his fingers through it. “Is that soft?”
“Huh?”

“Your fuzz. Is it soft? You seem to like patting it.” She raised her eyebrows at him. “I noticed Chat Noir likes to play with his tail. Is it some sort of… hero costume fetish?”

His fingers stroked through the fuzz, somewhat of a nervous gesture now, while his other hand went to his hip. “I… don’t actually know if it’s soft,” he said. “The gloves don’t let me feel textures well.”

That was odd because hers did allow for that, but maybe that was a perk from Tikki. She was reaching for his neck before he’d even finished the statement.

He adjusted his stance, leaning away. “Um…”

She drew back a fraction but left her hand up. “May I?”

Shrugging, he stepped closer so she could touch his fuzz. “Okay.”

Marinette’s fingers brushed against the fuzz near his collarbone, then sunk into it. It was like she was touching the ears of a kitten. Soft, divine, barely corporeal, her fingers tingled at the touch. Softer than velvet, lighter than candy floss, even rubbing it between her fingers she could barely feel it. Marinette had the luxury of touching chinchilla fur once and this was so much better. She wanted to bury her face it in, feel the texture against her cheek.

She couldn’t see his eyes. Just herself in the reflection in his goggles. One lip caught between her teeth, her eyes half lidded. Oh, god. She was flirting with him. Not okay, that was not okay.

Except… he wasn’t flirting back like Chat Noir would to Ladybug. Or the toned down flirting he would conduct with Marinette when begging for cookies. There was still the same sort of humour in his tone, but the body language felt different. That, in itself, was interesting. Had she done this at Ladybug, he’d be right in close to her by now, eyes intent, mischief clear on display, voice lowered to a purr.

Or maybe she was reading too much into the situation.

With effort, she pulled her hand away. “Wow… it’s… incredibly soft.”

“Really?” He preened and stroked his fingers through the fuzz again. “Well. Thanks.”

“I would love to know how your suits are made,” she said, dropping her eyes and looking away.

“Me too,” he replied. “You’re a designer, right?”

He wasn’t doing a good job of pretending not to know her. “Did Chat tell you that?”

“Among other things.”

“What other things?”

His fingers petted at his fuzz again. “All good things. You’re nice, kind, give good scratches and always have a cookie and a smile available when he’s hungry. You have a pretty cool sense of humour and you’re not afraid to tease him like a friend would. He likes you.”

Marinette felt her world tilt. She hadn’t expected Chat Noir to notice those sorts of things about her. Her, not Ladybug. Fumbling for something to say, she glanced at the frozen screen. “Would you like to watch the rest with me?”
“I… ahh…”

Marinette cocked her head and put her hands on her hips. “You didn’t come all this way to steal my cookies and then leave, did you?”

Judging by his expression, he absolutely had. “I’d love to watch the rest with you, would you mind if I raincheck it and maybe come back tomorrow for the sequel? I’m meeting Ladybug at sunset and I shouldn’t keep her waiting. I just…” He squared his shoulders. “I wanted you to know I appreciated the article.”

She regarded him. “I didn’t write it.”

“I don’t know where Alya lives,” he said. “You told me where you were. I also…” He adjusted his stance, appearing more eager. “You were very concerned about Chat Noir and I wanted to reassure you that he was okay.”

She nodded. Watching him, there was no doubt now he was Chat Noir. He was being friendly and polite, maybe a little flirtatious… and kind of sweet to be worried about her, amongst all the people of Paris. Another check in the Chat Noir box for kindness. “I believe you, but thank you for thinking of me.” She picked up the bag of cookies sitting on her desk. “Here. I had a study group today and this is what’s left over. Give my regards to Ladybug.”

He grinned at her. “Thank you, Marinette.”

“You’re welcome,” she replied. She didn’t know why it was easy to talk to Bumblebee while she was crushing on him, but… well, they were friends first. Maybe that made all the difference. “Now, buzz off.”

“Oooh,” Bumblebee said, smirking, and gave her double finger guns. “Nice one.”

Marinette shook her head and shooed him up the stairs.

Thinking better of it, she followed and clambered out the hatch behind him.

“Are you waving me off?” he teased, offering her a hand.

Taking it, she let him pull her out of her bedroom. “Don’t get a swollen head,” she said, walking to the terrace railing so she could lean on it. “I’m going to watch the sunset.”

“Ahh.” Copying her stance, he leant against the railing beside her and peered out at Paris. “Do you do that often?”

“Sometimes,” she said, resting her elbow on the railing, then her chin in her palm. “I like to watch the boats down La Seine. On nights like this, the colours inspire me.”

“Sunsets are pretty,” he responded. “The sky becomes ablaze with brilliant honey and poppies, blended so well you can almost taste the kaleidoscope of colours, then it fades to bluebells and lavender. Sunlight kisses the clouds goodbye and leaves the sky to romance the moon with bouquets of baby’s breath stars.”

Curse the little flutter nibbling away. He’d really taken to the whole bee persona, like Chat Noir did with cats, and she wondered at that. What would he be like as himself? “Are you always this big of a dork?”

He laughed and rubbed the back of his neck. “Sorry. Sometimes, I guess.”
“Only sometimes? That was some pretty…” She bit her lip and then went for it. “Fuzz-tastic bee poetry right there. I suppose a bee would approve of flowers in the sky.”

He laughed. “It’s buzz-erific.”

“Meow-velous.”

Still smiling, he said, “Isn’t that Chat’s line?”

“He’s not here. Someone has to bring in the cat puns.”

“A-buzz-ing.”

“Des-bee-cable.”

Bumblebee snorted and nudged her with his hip. “Can’t bee sting-gy with puns.”

Marinette giggled. It was still him. More to the point, it was still them. And she could banter with him like she used to, even if she was twisted up into knots, crushing on Chat Noir didn’t mute her in the same way her crush on Adrien did. That could only be a good thing. They could still be partners. It didn’t have to affect them or change anything.

He grinned at her for a moment longer, then wiped it from his face. Taking a deep breath, he straightened. “It feels like it’s going to be a good night, but I must take my leave.”

Marinette watched him with veiled gaze. He seemed happy. Eager. It was a nice look on him.

What was she going to do? What was she going to say? She wanted to keep that look on his face and yet…

Would he be disappointed with this side of her? He didn’t seem to be.

Sweeping into a bow, he lifted her free hand from the railing and pulled it up toward his mouth, intent to kiss the back. The action was so heartbreakingly him she felt her knees go weak. “Have a good evening, Marinette. Enjoy your—”

His expression lost its humour and he released her hand to take her shoulder instead. “Get indoors,” he said, pushing her toward her hatch. “Stay there.”

Rather than listen to him, Marinette turned and gasped.

La Seine was blanketed in a thick, red mist. The colour of blood, the mist bled into the water and bellowed along the surface. It crept up the sides of the riverbanks, slowly engulfing the base of the Notre-Dame, where it slowly wafted up the sides. As Marinette watched, it slithered over the bank and crawled toward them.

Before Marinette could even speak, Bumblebee swept her into his arms and dropped her back inside her room. Squeaking in surprise, she bounced as she landed on the bed and stared up at him.

“Stay,” he commanded.

“Wait!” she called before he could close her in.

He hesitated, casting a wild glance away, but politeness kept him there. “What?”

“Bee careful,” she said, emphasising the ‘bee’.
His jaw went slack for a moment before he recovered to grin at her. With a two fingered salute, he said, “I always am, princess,” and closed the hatch.

“Yeah,” she muttered, throwing her legs over the edge of her bed. “If I didn’t know for sure before, I do now.” She peered through her window from her loft and watched the mist creep along the ground. Something about the mist and the way it moved filled her with dread. Bumblebee fell down from her roof, past her window and landed on the pavement below.

Bumblebee dropped to all fours, Chat Noir style, and bounded to a mist free section of riverbank, launching himself across to Notre-Dame; a jump neither she nor Chat Noir would’ve been able to make without using their items but Bumblebee cleared with ease. She wondered if he had a tiny set of wings underneath all that fuzz. “Tikki?”

Soft paws on Marinette’s shoulder and Tikki nuzzled into her neck. “I’m ready.”

Marinette took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Clenching her hands into fists, she said, “Spots on.”

Ladybug crept from her trap door, keeping out of sight as much as she could. It would be a bad thing if Bumblebee saw her coming from this direction. She could make him out, bright yellow against the fading sky, on top of Notre-Dame. He appeared to be watching the mist over the edge of the building. The mist itself had climbed about ten metres up the side of Notre-Dame before halting and while it billowed up the bank at this side of the river, it was no longer spreading. Whatever the mist was, it was focussing on Notre-Dame, slowly encircling it.

So that’s where she needed to be.

Leaping from her terrace across to the school, she threw her yo-yo for Notre-Dame, twining it around one of the gargoyles at the top. Pulling back, she allowed the yo-yo to retract, pulling her with it.

Bumblebee met her on the roof, extending his hand to help pull her up. “Hello, honeybug. You look bee-utiful this evening.”

She eyed him and refused to acknowledge the rising flush of her cheeks. Releasing his hand, she stepped away and peered over the edge at the mist. “That conversation we need to have will have to wait.”

“I am capable of multitasking,” he replied, with his patented wide smirk. “I can waggle and fight akuma at the same time.”

She frowned and put her hands on her hips. “I think it’s the sort of conversation that we need to focus completely on—”

He lost the playful attitude. “Promise me you won’t run away after this,” he implored. “We can find a place to de-transform where we can’t see each other and the kwami can recharge but I need to talk to you.”

“Bumblebee,” she mumbled, trying to avoid confrontation. “I think—”

He touched her shoulder. “Please.” He lifted his right hand so it was right in front of her face. “It’s really important.”

His bare right hand. The finger where his ring should sit was covered in black gloves with no hint a ring was hidden beneath the suit. She grabbed his hand and yanked it toward her so she could
inspect it. “What happened?”

“It’s missing,” he said simply and she could hear the pain in his voice. Awkward, he adjusted his stance but didn’t try to pull away from her.

Her thumb stroked against his hand where his ring should be. Keeping her tone carefully neutral, she fixed her eyes on his hand rather than looking at his face. “And Plagg?”

“Gone.”

Her heart broke for him. Tears filled her eyes unbidden. What had he been through over the last few days? She could imagine how she’d feel if Tikki vanished. He’d been going through that alone, because she’d been an idiot and hadn’t been willing to listen. “Oh Chat.” Before she even realised what she was doing, she rose up on her toes, looped her arms beneath his until her palms cupped the back of his shoulders and were buried in fuzz, and hugged him. Resting her face in the crook of his neck, she breathed in his honey scent and ran her finger through his fuzz. “I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you.”

Bumblebee held himself stiffly, then she felt a tentative hand on her waist. “Ladybug—”

“I haven’t been a good friend. All I’ve been thinking about is how I was so alone and I didn’t think you’d be feeling the same. I made things for you so much more difficult. I should’ve just listened.”

He came at her all at once, like he’d been holding himself carefully in check and couldn’t any longer. He fell into her embrace, cradling her so tight he squeezed the breath out of her. Enveloped by his arms, she could feel the cool shape of his goggles as the side of them pressed against her cheek. Her toes no longer held her weight, he did as he pressed them both together to clutch at her.

She held him, because no matter how hard it had been for her without him while she’d been fighting akuma, he’d had it so much worse. Watching and unable to help, and then when he did find a way, she yelled at him, wouldn’t listen and then ran.

She was here now. She could be here for him now.

The way he fell into this hug made her wonder how long it had been since someone had hugged him. Surely her happy-go-lucky cat had a whole stream of people who loved him, but he clutched her like she could vanish at any moment. And yet, there was tenderness. She was a precious thing, she was his precious thing and he was so careful.

She wanted to speak. Wanted to tell him it was okay. But she couldn’t find her voice.

His voice cracked, his words husky as he murmured, “The akuma.”

Yes. Of course. An akuma. The floaty red mist thing licking at the heels of the Notre-Dame. Except he wasn’t letting go. His hands roamed along her back, keeping to neutral areas, while her traitorous fingers toyed with his fuzz.

Was he nuzzling her? She was sure that was his nose against her neck, along her jaw. His hands felt so warm where he brushed her with them. She could feel his heart beating through the wall of his chest and her own heart seemed to match its rhythm. The movement of his ribs and belly as his breathed echoed her own and when he swallowed, she felt it. She could feel it all, every tiny shift he made. Every movement, ever heartbeat.

She liked him. She liked holding him. She liked being held. Safe and warm, nothing could harm her here. She never realised how nice cuddling someone could be.
One hand lifted to her neck as Bumblebee raised his head and Ladybug felt herself tense. She wasn’t ready. Not for this. Not for the thumb stroking her cheek. Not for his breath dancing against her face. Not for the way the butterflies in her stomach morphed into bugs and went mad with anticipation. Not for the enthralled yet tiny smile he gave her, or the wide-eyed reflection of herself in his goggles.

But… for all her indecision, she wanted him to try. If he tried, she would most likely throw herself whole-heartedly behind this. She’d missed him, more than she’d cared to admit and he’d only been gone a few days. Surely, if he were brave, if she was brave, this tangled mess inside her would unknot and give her an answer to the question she hadn’t been aware she’d been asking.

Her fingers flexed against his shoulder blades and she lifted her chin.

A flash of something unreadable flitted across his face and pinched at the edges. His head turned and, with one final thumb stroke, he stepped back and released her.

He took the strength in her knees with him as he left. She dropped her hands to let him go and rocked back on her heels. She felt… disappointed. Sad. A moment had been discarded without cause.

“Right,” he said, then had to clear his throat so his voice returned to its normal tone instead of husk. “We have an akuma to vanquish.”

Had… she misread something? She’d thought he’d… and maybe he didn’t… maybe… maybe the flirting was just flirting. Did he only flirt because she didn’t reciprocate? Was she… was she a practice run for him?

She was so confused and heart sore. The pain in her chest felt very real and the tears pricking at her eyes stung. Maybe this was for the best. They were friends, partners, maybe this was all they were meant to be. Nothing had to change.

Embarrassed, she had to work hard to keep her tone even. “Any ideas?”

Stepping even further away from her, he peered over the edge. “Very ominous red mist and at Notre-Dame…” With a laugh that sounded forced, he tried to joke, “I wonder if Archdeacon Frollo has a hand in this.”

Ladybug smile was weak, but she was grateful for the small sense of normality and tried to pick up their usual banter. “Well, maybe you should go and ring a bell, see what happens.”

“Excuse me?” he asked and pretended to be affronted. “If anything, I’m Captain Phoebus.”

“Shallow and self-centred and willing to let the girl die?”

He turned his head toward her. “I was going for blond and pretty.”

She crossed her arms against her chest. Well, maybe he was blond and pretty, but she wasn’t going to let him have that. “Have you read the book?”

He grinned. “I have! It’s not often I met someone else who has.”

“I’m over five thousand years old,” she scoffed. “I was there when it was written.”

He laughed. “Oh, that’s right. Mighty Pharaohs cower before Ladybug, but she’s never heard of a temporary replacement kwami before.”
“Oh, shut up.” She hesitated, then asked, “Is that what Bumblebee is?”

“Yup. Deedee is an emergency substitute kwami. I’ll explain later.”

She forced her eyes away from him and to the mist. It still licked the edges of the cathedral, spreading out across the river but it didn’t seem to be moving anymore. She couldn’t see anything lurking in the mist either. Akumas had to have form; they’d not had any who weren’t corporeal. Invisible, yes, but not incorporeal. They needed shape and substance, but they could *use* the mist. “Is this one of those ‘attack the darkness’ situations? Do we fire blindly and hope to hit something?”

“Do you have a magic missile?” he quipped.

“Do you?” she countered.

“It’s possible,” he said, considering his hammer. “I’d turn into a pumpkin in about five minutes, though, and therefore be useless and I’d rather not do that until we know what we’re dealing with.”

“Plus, I’m guessing we need a physical body for that sting of yours to work.”

He nodded. “Yeah, I don’t think stinging mist would be very beneficial.”

She pointed away from her. “Circle around the roof and scout. I don’t really want to get stuck in red mist, so we need to know where to attack.”

He nodded. “Someone has to be down in the mist making it.”

“And we both know what happened last time one of us inhaled something from an akuma.”

The grin died. “Yeah, yeah.” Slipping the hammer back onto his hip, he bounded away.

She’d meant it as a joke. He’d taken it as something else. Reaching up, Ladybug gripped both her pigtails and let them support the weight of her arms as she watched Bumblebee. “Boys need a manual or something.”

He paused and peered back at her. “What was that?”

Ladybug eeped and turned away, pretending to be engrossed in searching the mist. She held onto her pigtails as she walked as the pressure of her hair pulling against her scalp helped her think.

Nothing in the mist that Ladybug could see. No akuma lurching out of the red for them. No people reacting to the mist in odd ways, which, since it was nearly ten at night, the cathedral would be closed. But didn’t people live here? A lingering priest or two. A caretaker maybe. She couldn’t even see anyone. None of those.

Nor could she see the ground from this vantage point. It was engulfed in mist. If anyone was down there, they were shrouded from view.

The akuma was probably watching her, hidden in the mist, able to see out better than she could see in.

She shuddered and wrapped her arms around herself. That was a creepy thought.

She stopped and narrowed her eyes as she looked down at the mist. There was definitely something down there. The shape was right. It could be a figure, standing in the murk, looking up at her in the rapidly fading daylight.
Keeping her eyes fixed on the mist, she turned to call Bumblebee.

His name came out a strangled moan as the mist parted.

Chat Noir stood in a circle of clean air, the red mist billowing away to reveal him. Her Chat. Green eyes. Blond hair. Sassy smile. Black belt tail dusting the pavement below. Everything was him. Something ripped inside her and, as Chat Noir stretched out his hand toward her and smiled, Ladybug fell to her knees.

Chapter End Notes

The geography of Paris in Miraculous Ladybug is skewed. In a couple of scenes, Marinette is shown to be living across the river from Notre-Dame. In another, Adrien is shown pretty close to the Eiffel Tower (it could be off because distance and scale.) An aerial shot shows Marinette and Adrien to be within… probably a few minutes walking distance of each other.

But Marinette’s also said to live in the 21eme, and there is no 21eme, they’ve essentially slotted in a new district… so, grain of salt on distance and locations.

I don’t own Hunchback of Notre-Dame, but I have read it. The book is not nearly as happy as the movie.
What do you call a Bee who is having a bad hair day?

Chapter Summary

What do you call a Bee who is having a bad hair day?
A Frisbee.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Trying not to look like he was dying inside, Bumblebee walked away from Ladybug to search the mist for the akuma.

He should’ve kissed her. Why didn’t he kiss her?

She was right there, in his arms. Her lips parted, her cheeks flushed, her eyes gazing into his. He hadn’t had a hug in so long, not counting his father’s odd one after the Jackady incident and maybe he’d fallen into it more than he should’ve, but Ladybug hadn’t minded.

She was so nice to cuddle. Better than he ever expected and he hadn’t wanted to let her go. Soft and warm and snuggly. They fit together. He never wanted to let her go.

He should’ve kissed her. He should’ve at least tried and let her push him away like she always did. Every other time she’d even shown a hint, he’d been all over it. So why had he pulled away? What had been different about this time?

Maybe, if it had been Plagg’s impulse influencing him instead of Deedee’s careful consideration, he might have kissed her.

The promise of more kisses tantalised him. Not one, and that’s why he pulled back. If he did this right there could be more kisses. If they talked first, if they made sure they knew where they stood, there would be more kisses. And he wanted more. To kiss her whenever he liked. To be with her.

It was to be his first kiss though. The first kiss that he actually wanted to be a part of and hadn’t been part of an act or a photo shoot… well, no that was a lie too, because there was that moment with Marinette where he wanted but was interrupted, and he really would’ve preferred not to have been…and he really shouldn’t be thinking about Marinette when Ladybug was standing right there. First kiss, first kiss with Ladybug. That should be special.

A part of him believed it should be the cat and the bug who kissed, not the bee and the bug. There was an akuma lurking below and Papillon watched. They would lose the element of surprise if Papillon discovered the bee and the cat were the same and they couldn’t afford that. They couldn’t allow Papillon to discover the ring was missing.

Unless it was Papillon himself who stole it, however unlikely Deedee said that was.

Glancing over his shoulder at his lady, he was shocked to find her looking forlorn. Clutching both her pigtails as she wandered around the rooftop peering into the creepy red mist. Had she wanted him to kiss her?
His hands clenched into fists and he swore under his breath. He was screwed. He was so screwed. He couldn’t get that moment back. She probably thought...

He didn’t know. But it couldn’t be good. Not if her body language was anything to go by.

He tugged at the hair at the back of his neck hard enough to cause himself some pain in the hope it would bring clarity. It didn’t.

Tangled into knots, he glanced at Ladybug again. Frozen, she stood at the edge of the roof, staring down at something. Concern gripping him, he stopped to watch her. If she’d found the akuma, she’d call for him. If she was confirming the shadow of one of the many statues he knew were down on the ground, she’d wouldn’t.

Ladybug clutched at her chest and fell to her knees.

Panicked, Bumblebee bolted for her, her name clawing itself from his throat.

She raised her head and turned to face him and, while her eyes filled with tears, her face was vacant. He skidded into her side on his knees, his hands planted on her shoulders. “Ladybug, what’s wrong? Are you hurt?”

She hunched over. “Chat Noir doesn’t lie to me,” she whispered, her voice void of emotion. “It’s a universal truth. The one thing I can always depend on. He doesn’t.”

Did she think he was lying to her? “I would never—”

Her gaze dragged away from him and back down to the mist. “If you’re Chat, then who is that?”

Bumblebee looked down and into the circle of mist which had parted below them.

Everything, even the mist hanging in the air below, stilled. His lungs locked and refused to expand. His stomach turned to ice, spreading out through his torso and down his limbs. The spreading chill caused his muscles to seize and his fingers clenching Ladybug’s shoulders so hard she whined. “No.”

It couldn’t be. Absolutely impossible. There was no way this was real. It was a trick, caused by the akuma. It had to be.

He couldn’t move. His chest had been torn open to expose his heart. His hands slithered from Ladybug and hung limp. “Oh, that’s not fair. That’s not fair.”

“I don’t understand,” Ladybug whispered. When he didn’t—couldn’t—answer, her hand curled around his bicep. “Chat?”

“Mom.” The name ripped from his throat in a wail, filled with terror, pain and longing.

She was so beautiful. More beautiful that he remembered. Blonde hair cascading over her shoulder. Her brilliant and loving green eyes he’d inherited from her. The way her lips crinkled up as she saw him. He yearned, the vision of her blurring beneath tears.

His mother stretched out her hand toward him and beckoned.

If he went down there, would she hold him like she used to? Would she cuddle up and stroke his hair and croon under her breath? Would she smell the same?

Would she make him feel safe and loved like she used to?
Bumblebee whined, a sound forged of deep despair and pain.

“Chat?”

“But you’re gone,” he told his mother. “You’re gone. How are you here?”

Her mouth moved but he couldn’t make out what she said. With a regretful look, she dropped her hand and the mist swallowed her.

Bumblebee followed without thought.

Ladybug screamed at him to wait and some part of him said he should listen, but he followed where his heart lead. A moment of freefall and then the mist engulfed him too. His feet hit the cobblestone as he looked up into red.

A single breath and he wasn’t on the pavement beside the Notre-Dame any longer.

Water lapped against the softly swaying boat, the sound of its hollow bobbing echoing in his ears. An oar creaked before it plunked into water, while its pair rose dripping. The smell of flowers so achingly familiar.

He knew this place. Knew this moment. He knew the breeze upon his face and the heat of the sun on his knees. He knew the rough feel of the oars against his palms. He knew that laugh and the body pressed against his back.

Hands slid against his, guiding. “If you don’t do them together, you’ll just turn us in endless circles.”

He knew this. He knew this.

A chin against his shoulder. “Try again, sweetling.”

The light, unbroken and indignant voice of a child. “I can do this, Mom.” His voice.


This was… the last day.

“I know you can,” his mother said, her hands gently leading his as they dipped both oars into the water. “But try. For me.”

Memory or gift? Could he control the outcome of today? Or was he destined to relive it?

He shifted his grip on the oars and flexed his fingers. It sure felt like he was here. Part of the moment, living the time again. He knew what happened in the original memory. He’d get frustrated because his ten-year-old body wasn’t coordinated enough to move both the oars together. He would pout and complain and ruin their last day by accidently tipping the boat.

He brightened. He could do it all again. Say the things he wanted to say to her. Make it perfect.

Bunching his muscles, he dragged both the oars through the water and lifted them out effortlessly.

Surprise and pride in her voice. “Well done. I knew you could do it.”

He showed off. Fifteen years of experience in a ten-year-old’s memory. Plunging the oars into the water, he glided them through and the boat lurched forward as it picked up speed. They toured the lake, up to one end, then he’d turn them carefully, before sending the boat gliding toward the other.
The sun shone brightly on his knees. Bees hummed as they flittered from flower to flower. Birds in the trees and insects sang to spring. On the bank, a peacock spread its tail as it wooed a peahen. People… or shadows because he really hadn’t paid attention to them the first time, lingered along the bank in groups and his mother waved as they passed the picnic blanket his father napped on.

“Well,” his mother said. “You are amazing. Rowing championships, here we come. Shall I ask your father to include rowing lessons into your schedule?”

His chest puffed out. “That’s not all I can do.”

Hands on his shoulders. “Be careful. You don’t want to tire yourself out or give yourself blisters.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“I know you will.”

He didn’t know how long he had. Whether or not this moment was real. How long before Ladybug fished him out? Did he even want to go? Could he go?

Lifting the oars out of the water, he rested them on the oarlocks and allowed the boat to glide through the water on its own. “Mom, why do you have to go?”

Her arms roped around him from behind. “It’s for work, sweetling. You know that.”

He leant back, resting his head on her chest. “Couldn’t you stay, though?”

She sighed and kissed the top of his head. A tendril of blonde hair curled in front of his eyes. “I can’t, Adrien.”

He reached up and curled the strand of hair around his finger. “But I’ll miss you.”

“I’ll miss you too. I’ll think of you every day. And I’ll be back in two weeks with lots of presents for you from Tibet.”

“What if you don’t come back?”

“There is nothing in this whole wide world that will keep me from you.”

He remembered her telling him about her trip. He remembered her saying she’d be back and mentioning the presents. He remembered it was to Tibet. He remembered his father had gone there in a panic after his mother had failed to show up at her hotel. And he remembered the devastation in his father’s face as he told Adrien his mother had somehow boarded the plane to Tibet, but never disembarked. And they never knew why.

His heart ached at her lie.

“I love you, Adrien,” Mom said and squeezed him.

*Chat!*

Something red and spotted. Something spinning out of the corner of his eye, winking at him, but he didn’t look. Didn’t want to see. Not yet. Instead, he closed his eyes and let himself have this moment with her. A new memory, maybe. “I love you too, Mom.”

“Nothing will keep us apart.”
Pulling out of her embrace, he hunched forward and pressed his hand into his chest. “I wish that was true,” he mumbled and fought back against the tide of tears.

Soft and gentle, a hand on his back and love in her voice. “Adrien, what’s wrong?”

“You left me alone, Mom. You left us alone. Didn’t we love you enough? Wasn’t I a good enough reason to come back? Why didn’t you take me with you?”

She said nothing, because there was nothing for her to say. This was a place of memory and mist and he wouldn’t find an answer because there was no answer to be had. She was gone and she’d never be able to tell him why she didn’t want to stay.

“You walked away from us and you didn’t look back. You abandoned us.”

He was so alone. Always alone. Trapped in his castle with only his father and Nathalie for company. Separated and tutored because his father feared Adrien would leave too. Overcompensated love, inability to relate and a bodyguard, because his father didn’t want whatever happened to his mother happening to Adrien. And in stifling Adrien so much, it had pushed them further away from each other.

It had only been this last year, because of Plagg, that Adrien had known true freedom. Freedom and cheese. The ability to walk in sunlight and shadow whenever he wanted. Friendship and laughter. A school with other students.

He wanted to tell his mother how he really felt. How much he missed her. How hard things had been without her. What his father was like now. But he couldn’t, because if this was going to be the last memory of his mother, he didn’t want it tainted.

He wanted…

Twisting, he threw himself at her. A flash of her face, surprised and lovely, as she opened her arms to received him. The boat rocked wildly. Face buried in her neck, arms clutching her back, it didn’t matter that his movements had caused the boat to tip.

They hit the water with a splash and sank like a stone. Water flowed around them and into them as they sank and Adrien still didn’t release her. Weed and lilies tangled them and he didn’t care. This moment, it could last forever and he’d be happy to drown in it.

His mother was here and he was in her arms, warm and safe and loved, and everything was right with the world.

_Chat! Please! Where are you?_

_Ladybug?

Adrien flinched as his lady’s scared voiced echoed through the water. His eyes snapped open, then filled with tears. His mother was gone. His arms were empty and he never felt so alone. Covering his face with his hands, Adrien wept.

He drifted among red cloud, his grief spread open, his soul laid bare for all who cared to look. Nothing solid beneath his feet. He dangled and floated, trying to stem the flow of tears.

“You know this isn’t real, don’t you, kid?”

Adrien unfurled, then gasped. “Plagg!”
Plagg folded his arms on his chest. “None of this is real.”

Swimming through the mist, Adrien held out his hands as he tried to reach of Plagg. “I know. But I’m really glad to see you.”

Plagg rolled his eyes and stayed where he was. “So, have you figured it out yet?”

Adrien looked around at the mist, then wiped his eyes on his wrist. “It’s an akuma.”

*Where are you?*


Adrien grinned at Plagg. “I missed that.”

“Think, Adrien.” Plagg tapped at his head with his paw. “Think reeeeeeally hard. What did it show you?”


“Desire is a complicated feeling,” Plagg said and his tail swished back and forth, dispersing mist. “And an utterly human one. You humans mistake it for sexual, but it’s much stronger than that. Everyone wants. Everyone desires. It’s primal.”

“Even you?” Adrien asked.

Plagg shrugged. “I want cheese. How much more primal do you need me to be?”

Adrien laughed.

“Annnnd,” Plagg drawled with a smirk. “What did the akuma show Ladybug?”

Adrien blinked. “I… um…”

Plagg leant forward and gestured. “C’mon. You can do it. Use those brain cells.”

“Me?” Adrien’s eyes widened and his stomach flopped. “I mean, Chat me. She saw Chat Noir.”

“And you’re still here. Ladybug’s out there, desiring you, and you’re in here. She’s all you ever wanted and now you have a chance and you’re wasting it here.”

Twisting, Adrien looked every which way to see if he could find a way out. “Well… how do I get out?”

Plagg shrugged. “Beats me. You wouldn’t happen to have any cheese, would you?”

“No,” Adrien replied, patting his pockets anyway. “I have gummy bears.”

Plagg screwed up his nose. “Deedee. She better not be leaving her little wax nests everywhere and stinking up the place with flowers.”

Adrien snickered. “Absolutely she is.”

Plagg sighed. “You mind your manners with her, kitten. She’s as sweet as honey, but give her cause and she’ll sting. And no one wants to be around when that happens.”
Adrien paused. Swivelling, he looked at his friend. “You’re really here, aren’t you?”

Plagg nodded. “You and me, we’re connected more than in mist and memory.”

“Why did you leave me?”

“Hey, it wasn’t my choice, ya’know,” Plagg said, affronted. He crossed his arms on his chest again. “It’s not like I’m on some picnic on a beach in the Bahamas or anything.”

“I wouldn’t put it past you.”

“If I decided to take a holiday, don’t you think I would’ve been very loud about it?”

“You’ve packed your suitcase in front of me before, complaining very loudly about how you were leaving to a land with better cheese.”

“Exactly. And I didn’t do that this time, did I?”

“Then what happened to you?” Adrien blurted, desperate to know. “Where’d you go?”

“Don’t worry about me, kid. Deedee’s on the case. She’ll find me. Hang tight till then. But —” Plagg nodded behind Adrien. “I think I see a way out.”

Adrien twisted around and spotted Ladybug’s yo-yo in the mist. It hung, the yo-yo revolving slowly. All he had to do was grab it. Torn, he looked over his shoulder at Plagg. “But... Plagg—”

“She’s waiting.”

Adrien stretched out his hand and gripped the yo-yo. “I’ll find you. I promise.”

“I know.”

The yo-yo yanked and Adrien found himself hurtling through the mist. Twisting, he tried for one last look at Plagg.

Plagg cupped his paws around his mouth, “Tell Deedee not to get too comfortable. And tell Tikki—”

Bumblebee ejected from the mist. He caught a snatch of the grey walls, columns and windows as he was yanked up the Notre-Dame. Ladybug stretched out her hand and he grabbed it so she could pull him onto the roof.

Dusting off his suit, he kept her hand and tried to be blasé about what had happened. “Thanks, honeybug, you saved my bee-hind.”

“What were you thinking?” she scolded.

He cringed and dropped his chin.

The hand on her hip drummed its fingers. “Let me guess. You weren’t.”

Hunching his shoulders, he gave her a sad kitty look. “Sorry.”

She huffed and looked down at the mist. “At least tell me you saw the akuma while you were traipsing around in there.”

“No,” he mumbled and rubbed the back of his neck. “Sorry.”
“We need to be able to see,” she muttered. “We can’t do anything if we can’t see the akuma.”

“The mist is a by-product of whatever the akuma is,” Bumblebee said and coughed in embarrassment. “Apparently, it shows you something you… um… desire.”

Ladybug’s eyes widened. “Oh.” She dropped her eyes and looked away from him. He felt as awkward as she did, especially considering she’d seen him and he hadn’t seen her. “Yeah.”

“Well… um… here’s hoping for a fan,” she said and threw her hand into the air. “Lucky charm!”

“Bit early for that,” he said, and then his eyes widened as he saw the object fall into Ladybug’s hands. “A crank?”

“Really?” she blurted and stared at the crank as though it offended her. “Really? How is this helpful?”

Trying to joke, he said, “We could crank up some tunes and—”

“No,” she snapped. “Just no.”

“We need to get a handle on the situation—”

“I will use this on your head.”

He took an exaggerated step away from her. “Violence is never the answer, honeybug.”

Ladybug puffed out a breath hard enough to blow her bangs away from her forehead. “Fine. Okay. Think. What could this be used for?”

With a glance down at the mist, Bumblebee held out his hand. “May I see it? Without it indenting my head.”

“Wouldn’t want to mess up your pretty hair,” she mumbled, handing over the crank.

“You think it’s pretty?” he asked.

“How long did it take to dye the ends into stingers?” she asked without answering his question.

“Deedee does that,” he replied. He turned the crank over in his hands as he studied it. “Part of the costume.”

“Ahh. Are you naturally blond?”

“Are you naturally black?” he countered.

“Yes.”

He hadn’t actually expected her to answer that. “Oh. Well. Yes, naturally blond.” Lowering the crank, he asked, “Are you angry with me?”

“You scared me,” she replied in a meek voice that slowly became scolding. “Jumping into the mist like that. You know we’re as susceptible as anyone else to an akuma’s powers and you jumped anyway.”
He stretched out a hand toward her, intending to comfort her. “I didn’t mean—”

She shook her head. “It doesn’t matter. You’re safe and we need to get this done. Any ideas?”

“Just one,” he said and lifted his hammer, silently hoping this would work since he hadn’t had a chance to practice. “Here goes. Bloom very large, hand-cranked fan!” he called and gave a solid whack of the hammer on the crank.

The crank began to vibrate in his hand and Bumblebee took a step away from the edge, holding the crank out. Golden wax appeared in his palm in small square sheets which unfolded into hexagonal structures. It built quickly, each hexagonal prism spawning more and more prisms as the wax fan created itself in front of them. It stood tall, yellow blades in a circular frame.

Ladybug stared. “Wow.”

“Pretty waxy, huh?”

“You get two powers? That’s not fair.”

He grinned. “One hammer, two ends. That’s why Deedee’s so good. She’s not powerful like Plagg or Tikki, but she’s versatile.”

“Well, Monsieur Versatile. You waxed it, you crank it.”

With a light laugh, he lifted his arms and flexed. “If you wanted me to show off, all you had to do was ask.”


Bumblebee snickered and reached for the crank. “And here I thought you weren’t a fan of my puns.”

Ladybug’s eyes twinkled with amusement and her mouth quirked up. “Only the bad ones.”

He loved that she bantered with him. While it might’ve been forced before, now their natural back and forth, give and take, had returned. Nothing changed and that could only bode well for them.

Bumblebee angled the fan so it pointed down at the mist and reached for the crank. “Um… Ladybug, I’m probably not going to be able to fight. The akuma… it looks like—”

With a tender and understanding smile, she touched his shoulder. “Don’t worry, Chat. I got this.”

Ladybug proceeded to remind Bumblebee why he fell in love with her in the first place.

The akuma, as it turned out, was a stage actor. Bumblebee thought him a pompous and arrogant bastard. He immediately started sprouting the injustice of the situation. Something about a part he desired and didn’t get, which somehow gave him the right to trap others in a moment they desired. From what Bumblebee could glean, it might’ve been a Shakespeare play. He wasn’t sure about the mist though, but they couldn’t stick around to find out.

The comb and earrings beeped, signifying time was running short.

Bumblebee threaded his fingers through Ladybug’s and she turned toward him, brow furrowed. Instead of pulling away, her fingers closed around his. “We need to talk,” he reminded her. “Will you come with me? I have a safe place we can go to recharge where we won’t be able to see each
other.”

Ladybug swallowed and nodded.

Chapter End Notes

Gratuitous Plagg being a little shit because I missed the guy.

Next up, that conversation. For reals this time.
What do you call a sulky bee?

Bumblebee led her to an abandoned metro station. There were a few around the city, most closed off from the general public and some even blocked from everyone. The station was decrepit and falling down around them and Ladybug wrinkled her nose at the stained seats and the walls thick with mould and mildew. He guided her to a small hole in a crumbling wall, so remote no one had found it to graffiti the walls around it.

Looking at the hole Bumblebee gestured, Ladybug guessed it could’ve been caused by a cataclysm. Judging by the wear on the edges, she didn’t think it was recent.

“I… ahh… realise this looks very creepy,” Bumblebee murmured, not even trying to hide the desperation in his voice. He had a minute left before he de-transformed, while Ladybug still had two minutes since her countdown didn’t start until she used the lucky charm to fix everything. “And I completely understand if you don’t—”

She lifted her eyes from the hole to Bumblebee. “I trust you.”

He shot her a relieved look. Releasing her hand, he crouched down.

“That,” she continued, “and I could probably still kick your ass as a civilian.”

“I don’t doubt that,” he laughed and scrambled into the hole.

Taking a deep breath, she followed him and the small, scratchy tunnel quickly dropped into pitch black. Rough stone beneath her fingers, the tunnel was so small her shoulders brushed against the walls.

“Okay, this is very different without night vision,” Bumblebee muttered.

“How far?” she asked.

“Not very. Just… stop. I’ll get a light.”

She stayed hunched over in place, listening to the drip of water and the scurry of… she didn’t want to know. Bumblebee fumbled in the dark, wood scraping and footsteps. “Do I even want to know how you found this place?”

“Plagg,” he said. “He… ah… well… apparently one of the Chat Noir’s was a bit of a dastardly… er… ‘chap’ as Plagg said. He had hidey-holes all over Europe. Especially during the war. So Plagg told me about a few around Paris. There’s nothing in them anymore. A few boxes. Rats.”

She shuddered. “Eww.”
“They’re a good place to go in a pinch—” A crash and a low moan.

Startled, she blurted, “Are you alright?”

His voice laced with pain, he muttered, “Hit my shin. This is really hard without night vision. But I found it and—”

A brilliant yellow light and a buzzing sound. Ladybug squeezed shut her eyes so he wasn’t revealed by the light of his de-transformation.

“Oh crap.”

A soft, honeyed voice. “It so dark!”

“Deedee, Ladybug’s here.” Now he wasn’t Bumblebee anymore, she was going to affectionately call him Chat in her head. Maybe they’d tell each other who they were tonight, but Ladybug wasn’t confident of that. It might be too much at once.

“I know. Greetings, Ladybug, I’m Deedee.”

“Hi,” Ladybug said. “Nice to hear you. My eyes are closed, Chat.”

Chat asked, “You’re still transformed?”

“I have about a minute.”

“Okay. Hang on.” A click and her eyelids turned pink as whatever room she was in filled with light. Her head turned toward the sound of something metallic scraping on wood, then Chat’s hands were on her shoulders. “Here.”

He helped her to her feet and several steps forward, before slight pressure on her shoulders told her to sit. Feeling behind her, she felt rough wood and guessed it was a crate. Taking a seat, she murmured, “I’m not ready for you to—”

“I know,” he replied and moved around her. The crate wobbled, then Ladybug felt a firm body against her back. “You can open your eyes if you want. I’m behind you.”

“You won’t—”

“I won’t look. Promise.”

Ladybug cracked open an eye, then blinked them both open. There wasn’t much to see. Small rectangular room with a wooden pallet in the corner and an old, stained mattress. A portable battery lamp shone beside her on the crate and there looked to be a backpack on the floor beside it.

Chat moved and Ladybug twitched, fighting the urge to look behind her. Swallowing, she said, “Spots off.”

Tikki burst from the earrings with a playful cry and zipped away. “Deedee!”

High pitched giggling and Marinette saw yellow and red twirling out of the corner of her eyes but she couldn’t turn her head to get a better look.

Chat chuckled. “Guess it’s been a while since they saw each other.”

“ Probably.”
“Something tells me we should do this again when I get Plagg back,” he said. “They probably missed each other too.”

Listening to the happy noises Tikki and Deedee made, Marinette smiled. “Yeah. I think so.”

Chat nudged a paper bag into Marinette’s hip. “Gummy bear?”

She peeked down, catching sight of a white shirt. Maybe jeans. “Gummy bear?”

“Deedee’s food of choice. So much better than cheese. Plagg makes me smell like gym socks.”

Sticking her hand in the bag, she took a few. “Eww. I got lucky then; Tikki likes cookies.” Opening up her bag, she pulled out a cookie for Tikki. “So…”

“So…” He laughed, a nervous bark of sound. “I just… I’m so tempted to turn around right now.”

She stiffened.

“I won’t,” he promised. “But… you can’t tell me you’re not tempted too.”

“I… um… no. I can’t…” She ducked her head. “You’re wearing white.”

He laughed. “You’re in something dark. Yeah, I peeked too.”

Marinette swallowed. “Tikki said…” she frowned. “No, that can wait. What happened to Plagg?”

“Oh. Right. Yeah.” He wriggled and his back bumped against her. “I woke up on Friday and the ring was gone. Just gone. I looked everywhere for it but couldn’t find it. Deedee’s pretty sure it was stolen rather than fallen off, because Plagg vanished too.”

“Stolen?” she shrilled, her hands going reflectively to her earrings. “Do you think it was Papillon?”

“He hasn’t come after me,” Chat murmured. “Deedee says it’s unlikely. Unless he’s biding his time. But we don’t know for sure.”

She clutched her arms. “What can I do?”

He pushed back against her. “Just being there is a help. And don’t lose your earrings.”

“I’ll be extra vigilant. I’m sorry about Plagg,” she said. She didn’t know how to comfort him. She couldn’t hug him like she wanted to. Leaning back, she rested her head on his shoulder and stared at the roof, trying to ignore the blond hair she could see out of the corner of her eye. “You must be so worried about him.”

“I am. But Deedee’s confident we’ll find him.” His tone lost the solemnness in favour of a lighter, teasing nuance. “We really need a way to communicate outside the items, by the way.”

Marinette laughed and lifted away from his back. “Is that a round-about way of trying to find out my number?”

“Absolutely. Will it work this time?”

“May-bee,” she teased. “But you better not send me cat memes.”

“Bees are all the swarms now.” He sighed. “I tried getting to you. The akuma on Friday, I was there.”
“You were?”

“Youp. And for each of the akuma on Saturday. I wasn’t going to let you face them alone.”

She lifted her feet and wrapped her arms around her knees. “I wish I’d known.”

He leant into her. “I couldn’t get close enough. I would’ve been a liability or a distraction and wouldn’t have done either of us any good. Then that fire akuma hit.”

“Ahh.”

“I was… you were fighting him and he covered you in flames, and I was ready to run in there as myself to be a distraction and this old guy… well, he said if I was determined to help, to use the comb.”

Marinette’s eyes widened. Her feet dropped from the crate and back to the floor. “Small, Chinese man? Likes to speak in riddles and wears a floral shirt?” When she’d gone to him to explain Chat Noir was missing, she hadn’t expected Master Fu to offer this as a solution.

“Um… yeah,” Chat said, confused. “Someone you know?”

“His name is Master Fu. I have some things to tell you too.”

“Hello!” a friendly voice chirped and a little yellow kwami zipped into Marinette’s line of sight. An adorable little kwami with a stripy black head, a ring of fuzz around her neck and a stringer that wriggled non-stop. “I’m Deedee!” Her stinger still wriggling, Deedee zipped forward to brush her paws on Marinette’s nose. “Nice to meet you!”

“And I’m Tikki!” Tikki said and Marinette felt like Tikki was in Chat’s sight.

“Oh, you are adorable!” Marinette said.


Bobbing up and down in the air, Deedee said, “Emergency substitute kwami at your service. I protect the hive.”

“She protects us when our kwami cannot,” Tikki said and zoomed around into Marinette’s sight. “Her ability to build and cause harm means she can replace all of us.”

“Replace… do kwami go missing often?” Marinette asked and held out the cookie to Tikki.

Deedee and Tikki exchanged a glance. “No,” Deedee said. “I am mostly called in when a kwami is injured beyond the capacity to create a suit. Rarely do kwami go missing, but it has happened.”

“Lots of people come after the items apparently,” Chat murmured. “Most don’t succeed.”

“It is dangerous for a chosen to be without the capacity to transform,” Tikki said and took a bite of her cookie.
“Which is why I protect the hive,” Deedee said. She brightened. “Ooh, gummy bears.” She nipped down to take a few gummy bears from the paper bag beside the two teens.

Chat laughed. “I was wondering how long it would take you to notice.”

“Why is it dangerous?” Marinette asked, watching as Deedee shoved a yellow bear in her mouth.

“Because we tend to run headfirst into battle,” Chat said. “And we’re vulnerable as ourselves.”

Deedee waggled. “In this instance, you were also susceptible to Papillon’s powers, as well as vulnerable against whoever stole Plagg.”

“What if Papillon stole Plagg?” Marinette asked. “Is that possible?”

“He must break the bond between Bumblebee and Plagg before the ring could be used,” Deedee said. “He has not come after Bumblebee.”

“Break the bond?” Marinette asked.


Both Tikki and Deedee gasped and vanished from Marinette’s field of view. “Explain.”

“He said we were connected in more ways than mist and memory. Is that what you meant by bond?”

“What else did he say?”

“He said he didn’t know what happened or who took him, but it wasn’t by choice. He also said you shouldn’t get too comfortable, Deedee.”

Tikki’s laugh sounded strangled. “That’s my Plagg.”

“We’ll find him, Tikki,” Deedee promised.

“Why did the mist show you Plagg?” Marinette asked.

Chat’s voice was saturated with embarrassment. “Plagg said it showed me things that I wanted.”

Her face heated up. “Oh.”

“I saw… I saw my Mom. I saw the day before she left us.”

Swallowing, Marinette asked. “Do… do you want to talk about it?”

“Can I not?” His voice broke and he hunched away from her. “Not yet.”

She leant back into him again, with her head on his shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

His fingers touched the top of her head, then retreated. “Thank you.”

Marinette closed her eyes and waited. She didn’t know the story with Chat’s mother, but the pain on his face when he’d saw who was in the mist was telling. It hadn’t been fair for Chat to endure something like that, but she didn’t blame him for jumping into the mist.

A mournful Tikki landed on Marinette’s knee and Marinette lifted a hand to stroke Tikki’s head. Curling up in a ball on Marinette’s knee, she snuggled into the palm of Marinette’s hand and closed her eyes. Since they’d always been partners, Marinette thought Tikki must be taking Plagg’s loss
Chat cleared his throat, but his voice remained husky. “I really want to look at you. It’s so tempting. I want to know who you are under that mask.”

She felt giddy. A blush crept over her cheeks and down her neck. “Oh.”

“We could, you know. Look, I mean.”

“Oh…”

“I’m… nervous too, though,” he admitted. “I don’t think I’ll be what you expect.”

It never occurred to her that he might be concerned about that. Her vain kitty, who continued to tell her how hot he was, was insecure. “It’s you, Chat,” she said. “I like you, bee goggles and all.”

“I like you too.” His swallow was audible. “May I… ummm…”

Her chest felt tight. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad, especially since Chat Noir liked Marinette, but she was still nervous about it. “Not… not now. We’ll start with exchanging numbers. Give me a chance to get used to this.”

He made an excited noise and Deedee giggled.

“Okay,” Chat said, trying to be serious. “So. Who is Master Fu?”

“He’s the guardian of the Miraculous when they’re dormant,” Marinette said. “He’s the one who gave us Tikki and Plagg. I don’t know much more about him than that… he wouldn’t tell me anything without you.”

“He is very wise,” Deedee said.

“He wants to see us,” Marinette said. “We should probably go tomorrow.”

“It’s time for you both to learn,” Tikki said, nuzzling Marinette’s hand. “And with the return of the book, it will be a lot easier.”

Chat went stiff. “Book?”

Wide-eyed, Tikki gasped and clapped her paws over her mouth.

Marinette frowned at her, but answered Chat. “There’s a book about Miraculous wielders which I recently recovered. That’s what lead me to Master Fu—”

“Is it written in a strange language?” Chat mumbled. “Symbols? With elaborate diagrams of people wielding Miraculous and what their suits are like? More than just ours, there’s hundreds of designs.”

Confusion clouded her. “Yes.”

A relieved puff of breath. “Thank God, I thought I’d lost it.”

A chill splintered down her spine. “What?”

“The book’s mine. I was afraid the book was the reason Plagg went missing. I was stupid and brought it to school and a friend saw it. She borrowed the book and when she was akumatised, I thought Papillon got it. I’m unlucky that way and it was too big of a coincidence.”
Marinette’s brain short-circuited. The world pitched, tilting to an angle which made her feel like she
was eternally falling. Her hands crept up to claw at her cheeks. A tremor ran through her, hard,
violent, and Tikki rose into the air to avoid from being knocked off. Marinette’s lips parted to snatch
a sharp breath, then another. Hysteria rose, bubbling and brimming and spilling over the edge. She
dug her fingers into her eyes until she saw nothing but sparkles. Her chest felt tight and her breath
felt raspy.

Stricken, Tikki tried to console her, shaking her head and patting Marinette’s cheek with her paws
but it didn’t help.

“I’m so glad it’s not lost. It seemed like it was very important.”

Anger replaced the shock. Marinette dropped her hands, then curled them into fists. “That very
important book was thrown in the trash by your girlfriend.”

“What?”

“Spots on.”

A horrified Tikki flew into her earrings and Ladybug felt her kwami’s strength flow through her. It
wasn’t enough to stop the world spinning.

“What’s going on? What are you talking about?”

A pulse throbbed in her temple. Heat in her belly. Pain in her heart. The anger robbed her of speech
and all she wanted to do was run. Run until she exhausted herself. Run so far away and scream at the
world.

“I am done being stupid,” she snapped and went for the tunnel.

Adrien. Adrien Agreste. She’d stolen the Miraculous book from Chat Noir himself.

That was why he didn’t kiss her. Because he wanted to kiss Lila. Because he was with Lila.

Not her. Never her. She was... a test run. Someone to flirt with but never be serious. A practice.
She’d suspected that, which is why she’d never let herself fall for him.

And yet. She had. Twice.

Chat Noir didn’t lie to her. But he didn’t tell her everything, either.

She was so stupid.

She scrambled through the tunnel. Behind her, she heard Chat call his transformation phrase. Any
other day she might’ve giggled about ‘Fuzz up’, but now she stumbled. Her back scraped against the
wall of the tunnel as she skittered through it.

“My lady! Wait!”

She didn’t answer him. Throwing her yo-yo, she looped it around the column closest to the exit and
set the yo-yo to retract, sending herself hurtling through the air and giving herself a massive head
start on Bumblebee. Leaping out of the metro and onto the street, Ladybug picked a direction and
launched her yo-yo that way. Hoisting herself onto the rooftops, she ran for the closest place to hide.

It ended up being a small chimney. Pressing herself against the scratchy brickwork, she opened her
yo-yo and removed Bumblebee’s privileges. No phone calls. No tracking. Nothing. Holding her
breath, she peeked out from her hiding place.

Bumblebee burst out into the street, spinning widely as he tried to find her. He lifted his hammer, he tried to call her. When that didn’t work, he cupped his hands over his mouth and yelled her name.

Tears falling, Ladybug watched Bumblebee grip handfuls of his hair as he spun in circles, searching, searching, searching. He launched himself up to a rooftop and stood there, looking in every direction.

She guessed he must’ve seen something when he suddenly took off, but it was the wrong way. Away from her.

Pushing away from the chimney, Ladybug vanished into the night.

Bumblebee didn’t understand. What had he done to elicit that sort of response from Ladybug?

And girlfriend? Where did she get that idea from?

He didn’t have a girlfriend. Except… Ladybug had mentioned him having a girlfriend before. As Adrien.

Shock hit him like a bus and he fell to his knees on the rooftop. She knew. She knew who he was. That had to be it. She’d figured out his identity by something he’d said. Maybe she’d known when she’d taken the book who it belonged to. Maybe she went to the same school as he did. Maybe that was why Ladybug had seemed to pop up out of nowhere.

Lila had the book. Lila had thrown it in the trash and Ladybug had taken it. The only way Ladybug would’ve known Lila threw it in the trash was if she had seen it.

God, if she thought Lila was his girlfriend, what did she think about the hug he and Ladybug shared? He’d nearly kissed Ladybug. If she was starting to feel the same way as he did about her, and then fallen under the false belief that he had a girlfriend…

Bumblebee moaned and clutched at his head. Oh god.

But why? Why did she think that?

What if Lila lied and told Ladybug she was his girlfriend? But Ladybug knew Lila lied, because Lila had lied about being Ladybug’s friend. So why did Ladybug believe Lila now? What had he done, as Adrien, to make her think that he was with Lila?

Ladybug had already seen Adrien and Lila together when Ladybug yelled at her for lying. When else had she seen them together in a way which might be mistaken for romantic? He’d been by Lila’s crystal with the akuma on Friday. That was the first time Ladybug had called her his girlfriend. Lila had come to his room as an akuma and he’d said… well, he’d said it could’ve been a date. Was that it? Had she assumed?

He pulled on his hair so hard he felt his scalp sting. Something was going on with Ladybug and he didn’t have all the information. But he knew where he could get some. He knew the source.

He couldn’t keep looking. Wherever Ladybug had vanished to, she was probably home by now. It was nearing midnight, he needed to get home as well.

Sighing heavily, he turned away from his search and picked his way across the rooftops of Paris. Sliding in through his bathroom window, he slumped on the floor by his bath. “Fuzz off.”
Deedee swooshed out of the comb. “Are you alright?”

Reaching back, Adrien pulled the comb out of his hair and held it in his hands. “I don’t know what happened.”

Deedee swooped in and nuzzled his cheek. “We’ll figure this out.”

“She… she seems to think I have a girlfriend.”

“Do you know why?”

Adrien rested the palm of his hand against the side of his face Deedee wasn’t nuzzling against. “There’s a girl. At my school. She’s called Lila and she arrived last week. Lots of fanfare on her arrival, but she told all these stories about the things she’s done. She had a song written for her by Jagged Stone. She’s met Steven Spielberg. That sort of thing. One of the things she lied about was being best friends with Ladybug. She… Plagg told me to take the book and I had to get to school. Lila must’ve seen it and she… she tried to convince me she was a superhero called Volpina. But Ladybug came and got so mad at her for all her lies and Papillon turned her into an akuma. When we cleansed her and Ladybug apologised… Lila didn’t care. She didn’t even take responsibility for her actions and own up to lying.”

Deedee continued to nuzzle. “And now it appears Lila has continued to lie. What are we going to do?”

“Find out who Lila told that she was dating me. One of them must be Ladybug.” He frowned. “You saw Ladybug. Who was she? Did you recognise her?”

Deedee shook her head. “Adrien…”

“You don’t know? She’s someone I haven’t seen yet?”

“Well, I have been inside your bag the entire time we were at school,” she pointed out. “However, if I told you, I do not believe that would be fair to her.”

He knew that, but it didn’t stop him asking. He cupped his hands beneath her. “Deedee, please. I need to know. What does she look like?”

“She is cute,” Deedee said with a smile. “Beyond that, I think you need to focus on finding out what this Lila said. I think confronting her may lead to Ladybug.”

Adrien’s shoulders slumped.

Deedee kissed his nose. “Ladybug is quite an emotional creature, I am certain once she calms down, she will speak with you. Tikki and Ladybug must be talking things through as we speak. There is nothing we can do tonight. We must wait.”

Sighing heavily Adrien buried his face in his knees.

“Tomorrow,” Deedee continued as she landed in his hair. Her familiar buzzing rumbled through him to help comfort and soothe. “I want you to pay attention to other students. Really pay attention. Someone will behave differently toward you, I am sure of it.”

“What makes you say that?”

“It’ll be alright,” Deedee said and her paw patted his head. “Get some sleep.”
“Deedee, please. Can I have a straight answer?”

“If Ladybug knows it’s you, and if she goes to your school, then do you really think she’ll be able to hide what she’s going through?”

“Maybe? Is that an admission that she does go to my school?”

“Trust me, little honeybee. Now, go, wash your face and get ready for bed. There is nothing we can do right now.”

Summoning his willpower, Adrien heaved to his feet. “Okay.”

Grumpy and heartsore, he cleaned his teeth and readied for bed. Stepping out of the bathroom, he pulled up short. Alarm and dread filled him.

Gabriel sat on Adrien’s computer chair, one leg crossed over the other and his fingers clasped together on his knee. “Hello Adrien.”

One look on his father’s face and Adrien knew he was in trouble, unless he could spin this somehow. Trying to be blasé and hoping Deedee was out of sight, he said, “Evening Father.”

Gabriel stood, his hands returning to their usual place behind his back. “Extraordinarily long time to spend in the bathroom. I was beginning to wonder if you were even in there at all.”

He shrugged. “Well… you know… teenage boy.”

Gabriel raised an eyebrow. “I see.”

Adrien felt his jaw drop. “No!” he blurted, waving his hands frantically in front of him. “Not like that! I just meant, my routine’s pretty extensive now! Skin care and all that.” He gripped the back of his neck. “Tonight is mud pack night, I had to wait for it to set and—”

“Adrien—”

“Plus the deep cleansing conditioner, because the hair dressers use so much product sometimes and I don’t want to get split ends. And I had to—”

Gabriel extracted a hand from behind his back to pinch the bridge of his nose. “You are emotional. Take a breath.”

Adrien sucked in a gasp and straightened his spine. “Sorry.”

Removing his fingers from his nose, Gabriel fixed his tie. “Nathalie informs me that your studies are going well. You even had a group study session today.”

Adrien swallowed. “Yeah. I mean, yes. At Marinette’s house. She needed help with physics and Alya wanted to practice English with someone.”

Gabriel didn’t appear impressed. “And how did this study session benefit you?”

“I consolidated my own knowledge of physics by explaining concepts to Marinette. I refined my skills with English.” He flashed his father a smile. “And I got to learn a new game when we were finished.”

“I see.”
“I would like to host a study group session myself,” Adrien said, as politely as he could. “Friday afternoon, if that’s possible. The exam is next week, so it’ll be one of the last chances we get.”

“What can your friends provide you that a tutor cannot?”

“Different points of view and upbringing. We were going to discuss Totalitarian regimes in the thirties.”

“Interesting topic for discussion, I can certainly see how that would benefit you.” Gabriel took a breath and exhaled through his nose. “Marinette,” he said and his tone turned considering. “She is the one with the exquisite potential in hats.”

Adrien smiled, happy that his friend had been remembered. “Yes, that’s her.”

Mild curiosity now. “You spend a decent amount of time with her.”

“She’s a good friend.”

Gabriel nodded. “You may conduct your study session here on the condition I do not find you up so late again. Sleep is important.”

“Thank you, father,” Adrien said.

With an incline of his head, Gabriel headed for the door. “Goodnight Adrien.”

“Goodnight,” Adrien waited until Gabriel closed the door before he sagged. “That was close.”

“Indeed,” Deedee said, floating out from behind Adrien with her eyes fixed on the door.

“What’s wrong?” Adrien asked.

Turning, she offered Adrien a bright smile. “Nothing. Get some sleep.”

Flopping face first onto his bed, Adrien slipped his arms under the pillow. “Today really hasn’t been my day,” he muttered.

Deedee’s voice sounded like she floated above him. “Do you wish to talk?”

Adrien rolled onto his back. “No. Sleep would be better.”

“Not even about your mother?”

He pressed his lips into a thin line. “Not much to say. I saw her. I hugged her and as much as I wanted it to be her, it wasn’t. It was a lie the akuma had made and I wasn’t strong enough to resist it.”

Deedee shook her head. “Adrien, you cannot fault yourself for that—”

“Please, Deedee, I don’t want to talk about it. I just want to go to sleep and hope that today was a bad dream.”

Her antennae drooped and she lost her waggle. “Okay. But if you need to talk…”

“You’ll be the first to know,” he said. Pulling his pillow out from under his head, he pressed it to his face. “Night, Deedee.”
“Happy hive nap, Adrien.”
What do you call a bee you can't share secrets with?

Chapter Summary

What do you call a bee you can't share secrets with?
A blab-bee.

Chapter Notes

I want to thank kit-chat-noir for spending two hours going through all the mistakes I made over the course of Sting. Dropped words are my bane, as well as the switcheroo words. It should read a lot better now! Thank you so much, I appreciate all your effort.

Also, thank you to giggleteehee for the Bumblebee picture which can be seen here

While I'm at it, I don't think I thanked anonymous-miraculer for their Bumblebee picture either, so that's very long overdue!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Geez, dude, you look exhausted. Didn’t you get any sleep last night?”

Feeling drained, Marinette lifted her head from the metal railing of the stairs and blinked open her eyes. Stifling a yawn, she said, “Morning, Nino.”

Swinging his backpack off his back, he turned to sit beside her. “All-nighter? Bit early for that. We still have a week before exams.”

“No,” she replied. Closing her eyes again, she tilted sideways and let her head rest on his shoulder. “Just… couldn’t sleep.”

“When?”

Upset. Hurt. Questioning everything she ever knew. A spiralling journey of self-deprecation and doubt. But she knew that wasn’t what he was talking about. “You could say that.”

He nodded sagely. “I hear you. It’s only like, the rest of our lives and all.”

“No even,” she mumbled. “We still have lycée.”

“Yeah, but this grade determine what classes we can take and what schools we can go to. It’s a lot of pressure I don’t really need right now.”
“Nino, you are brilliant,” Marinette murmured. “You’ll kick the exam’s ass.”

“So will you. We got your back, dude,” he said. “If physics is still kicking your ass, we’ll come help you return the favour.”

“Thanks, Nino. You’re the best.”

He tilted his head and rested it on hers briefly. “Pillow Nino’s got you.”

“Good pillow,” she crooned. “Nice pillow.”

“You are really out of it.”

“Wake me never.”

Nino shuffled a little bit as he moved his headphones up to his ears. “I’ll nudge you when Alya gets here.”

“Hmmm.”

She could just make out the Jagged Stone music blaring in his headphones. Nino’s normal jubilant copying of the drum he heard was absent in his necessity to remain still for her, but he bobbed his head along with the beat and that rocked his shoulder. He hummed along with the tune, quiet, normal tones and Marinette smiled.

He was a good friend. She was going to miss this.

Her mind was such a turbulent place right now. Twisting and tangled thoughts. But she knew she had to stay away from Adrien until she sorted herself out. By extension, that meant she’d need to stay away from Nino too. And… since Alya and Nino were… whatever they were, she couldn’t ask Alya to sacrifice that. It was nearly summer break. She could deal until then.

For the first time in a long time, Marinette had seriously considered ditching the entire day. Her attendance wasn’t stellar, not with all the skipped classes or the sudden bathroom breaks. Missing an entire day, especially when they were neck-deep in revision for the exams, would set her back so much.

Plus, her mother would ask why and that would lead to questions she didn’t have answers for. Sabine had already noticed a difference in Marinette this morning, a listlessness she thought might have been stress. Avoiding answering Sabine’s questions was why Marinette had come to school early.

Even with exams looming, Marinette knew she should’ve stayed home today. Everything about her screamed that she should. She wasn’t emotionally ready to be near him. How was she going to manage an entire day sitting right behind him?

Nino nudged her. “Alya spotted. Go wash your face and wake up or you’ll have mama-Césaire on your ass.”

Blearily blinking open her eyes, Marinette heaved to her feet. “Yeah. Good idea.”

“I have the best ideas. I’ll keep her busy till you get back.”

Somehow she didn’t think that would be hard. “Thanks, Nino.”

She didn’t trip over her feet on the way to the bathroom. She didn’t drown in the sink. She didn’t fall
in the toilet. Nothing she did could hide the bags under her eyes, but, as she practised smiling in the mirror, she thought that would be okay.

Heading out the door with her plastered-on smile, she ran straight into someone.

“Hey! Watch yourself!”

“I’m sorry!” she blurted. “I wasn’t—”

“Ahh, you’re Marinette.”

A tone, somehow similar to Chloé’s when she was getting ready to bully someone and yet not Chloé. Bracing, Marinette lifted her eyes.

Lila.

Any other day, Marinette might try for a friendship with her. Put everything from the past behind her, especially since Lila hadn’t done anything to Marinette, only Ladybug. Kill them with kindness mentality. But today, she was too emotionally wrung out to even smile. “That’s me.”

“Little old for pigtails, aren’t you?” Lila smiled brightly but Marinette got the distinct impression she was being patronised. “Or are you trying to imitate Ladybug?”

“I wore them first,” Marinette replied in the tone of voice she usually reserved for Chloé. Side-stepping around Lila, she scanned for Alya and spotted her at the stairs where Nino still sat. By her body language, Alya was full on flirting with Nino, whose smile said he was lapping up every moment.

“Rude thing, aren’t you?”

She made an effort to be polite. “Can I help you with something, Lila?”

“Adrien went home with you yesterday.”

Wondering why it felt like she was being grilled instead of just idle chit-chat, Marinette shrugged. “So? We had study group. Exams are close and—”

“Stay away from him. I thought I made my claim on him clear.”

Marinette barked out a laugh. “You don’t get to tell Adrien who his friends are.”

“He doesn’t like you.”

“Now who’s being rude?” Marinette said. She studied Lila. She was used to getting what she wanted and very much unused to humiliation. On any other day, Marinette might’ve tried to understand her. Today, she was just too tired. There was nothing Lila could say to hurt her any more than she’d been hurt already. “Do you enjoy the amount of lies you have to tell to get people to like you?”

Something flashed in Lila’s eyes. “He told me last night. On our date.”

No. That wasn’t right. Chat Noir didn’t lie to her. He said he liked her. Except, maybe Chat Noir didn’t lie to Ladybug but Marinette was perfectly fine.

“I asked around about you,” Lila said, her hands on her hips. “Fashion design groupie. Gabriel Agreste is your idol or something like that, so you’ve leeched onto Adrien so you’ve got an in. You don’t care about him at all.”
Marinette clenched her hands into fists. “That’s not true. Adrien is the kindest, sweetest person I have ever met and I would care about him no matter what.” Even if he was with this… person.

Lila smirked. “He thinks you’re a silly hanger-on. A fangirl. He humours you, that’s it. He’s heir to the Agreste fortune. What does he need you for?”

“Oh please,” a voice interrupted and Marinette’s mouth twisted into a grimace as she recognised Chloé. “As much as this is amusing, I’m not going to let you spread any more lies about Adrien.”

Marinette blinked at the unexpected back-up from Chloé. She stood a small distance from them, hip cocked, scowl set and Sabrina by her side. “Marinette’s all Adrien ever talks about. Ladybug and Marinette. Anyone who spends five seconds with the boy knows this.”

Marinette’s jaw dropped.

Lila turned to regard Chloé. “Ahh. Little Miss Thing herself. I heard about you, too.”

Chloé steepled her fingers on her chest. “Of course, you did. I’m Paris’ darling.” She narrowed her eyes and gestured with a limp hand. “You, on the other hand, are a compulsive liar, spreading your little stories.” She flicked her eyes to Marinette and her lips quirked up. “You’ll love her newest one, Marinette. It’s simply divine. Apparently, she designed Jagged Stone’s newest album cover.”

Marinette never had a stronger urge to punch someone in the throat than she did right now. “No.”

Lila narrowed her eyes. “I did. Jagged Stone and I are good friends. He wrote a song—”

Chloé inspected her fingernails. “And here I thought it clearly states M. Dupain-Cheng as the artist on the cover.”

“It’s a pseudonym. Obviously, I couldn’t put my name on the cover. The fans would mob me.”

Chloé, being who she was, and Lila, being the school’s newest attraction, drew a crowd by their altercation. Students were stopping to watch. Marinette saw Alya turn from Nino and set her eyes on what was occurring.

“Look at her,” Sabrina said, copying Chloé’s stance. “Changing her story. It calls into question every other thing she’s told since she got here. I wonder if any of it is true.”

“I doubt it, Sabrina,” Chloé said and waved her hand to dismiss Lila. “We really shouldn’t waste our time on a liar.”

“I don’t lie,” Lila snapped. She jabbed her hands down on her hips. “How dare you insinuate that!”

Marinette didn’t trust herself to speak. She knew the second she opened her mouth, she was going to let Lila have all her rage.


Blood drained away from Lila’s face. Her hand slithered off her hip and she spun around. “Adrien!”

Marinette felt dizzy. She wasn’t ready. She wasn’t ready. Yet, her eyes were drawn to him anyway.

Adrien was angrier than she’d ever seen him. The knuckles of the hand which clenched his schoolbag at the shoulder were white. He looked magnificent and frightening and still completely gorgeous. He didn’t even give her a glance, the fury in his eyes was focussed on Lila. “You know,” he said. “I was going to discreetly have a word with you about the lies you’ve been spreading about
us, but now you’re trying to steal an incredible accomplishment from one of my friends as well. I can put up with a lot, but no one does that to my friends.”

Marinette was going to fall over. She was sure of it. Apparently, she wasn’t done being stupid after all. He wasn’t with Lila. He wasn’t. She’d believed a lie because she had been hurt by it and hadn’t thought it through. If she’d taken a moment instead of jumping to conclusions…

Lila looked aghast. “Adrien, I would never—”

“Oh, she totally would,” Chloé said, gleeful. She sauntered around until she was at Adrien’s side and rested her elbow on his shoulder. “She did and she has.” She inspected her nails again. “Really rather rude of her.”

“I warned you,” he snapped at Lila. “I said lies unravel. Guess what. It’s unravelling. Somehow, the person who matters to me most of all heard your lie about us dating and I’m not even going to question how anymore. I doubt anyone in this school will trust anything you have to say, ever again.”

Marinette thought she might have squeaked, but Adrien didn’t seem to hear her. Marinette’s entire world had narrowed to Adrien in his fury. She couldn’t see anything else, not Lila’s shame, not Chloé’s smugness.

“I don’t know you, Lila. I don’t want to know you now. No third chances. My schedule concerning you is indefinitely booked out. There will be no renegotiation.” Adrien stretched out his hand to Marinette. “Marinette.”

She didn’t even question taking his hand.

Tugging Marinette to his side, Adrien shot Chloé a smile. “Seeya, Chlo.”

Chloé’s eyes were fixed on the wilting Lila and smugness oozed out of every pore. “Bye, Adrikins.”

Adrien marched away, pulling Marinette with him.

Struggling to find her feet as Adrien pulled her along, shame burned at Marinette’s cheeks. Guilt churned in her belly. She’d jumped to conclusions. Again. Said things she didn’t mean. How was he ever going to forgive her for this? He was going to look at her like he looked at Lila. When that happened, she’d break.

“Please tell me you didn’t believe her too.”

Marinette swallowed. “Her… no…”

Adrien stopped and swung to face her. Hurt splashed on his face. “Did I ever give the impression I was interested in her?”

“On Friday,” she murmured. “You said you needed to find her. You looked so hopeful and you were around her all day on Thursday. And she said… and… I— I didn’t want to but—”

Adrien shot her an angry look. “I lost a book. She was the last person I knew who saw it. That’s it. I barely know her, Marinette. I thought you knew me better than that.”

That cut her deep but it was true. She hung her head. “I thought I did too. I’m so sorry.”

He glanced at the stairs where they’d had their conversation on Friday. “I need to know someone
before I let it go anywhere,” he snapped. “We didn’t have anything in common, I had no interest in
learning more about her. I’m just too polite to say no. I don’t exactly have a lot of experience with
girls, you know. If it was going to be anyone at this school, it would’ve been—” he froze and looked
away.

Marinette swallowed but before she could find her voice, he asked, “Was there anyone else around
on Friday? Did you tell anyone I was dating Lila?”

She fidgeted and plucked at invisible lint on her jacket. “I told Alya.”

Adrien pinched the bridge of his nose. “That’s how,” he muttered. Dropping his hand, he sighed.
“You should’ve just asked me, Marinette. I wouldn’t have minded, in fact, I would’ve rather heard it
from a friend than the way I heard about it.”

If the ground would swallow her now, that would be fine with her. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean—”

He sighed again. Squeezing her hand, he lifted his other one to her shoulder. “I don’t blame you for
believing. Lila can be quite persuasive and I think she’s had a lot of practice at lying. I fell for her lies
too.”

That really didn’t make her feel any better. “You did?”

Adrien nodded and opened his mouth to reply.

“Dudes, what’s going on?”

Adrien snapped his gaze to his best friend. “Did you know Lila was telling people I was in a
relationship with her?”

“Course not,” Nino replied with a quick shake of his head. “I would’ve said something. Is that what
she’s been spreading?”

“Yup. Among other things.”

Nino shuffled awkwardly. “Bummer man. Hope you set her straight.”

“As soon as I found out. I really, really didn’t need this right now.”

“Is that what the argument was about?”

“Yeah, get this—”

Dragging her gaze from Adrien, Marinette was surprised to find Alya grinning at her. Marinette tilted
her head, silently asking her friend why she was so excited. Alya dropped her eyes, then flicked
them back up and winked. Confused, Marinette followed her gaze.

She and Adrien were holding hands. Not romantically; not fingers entwined and palms pressed
together like yesterday when he led her to the hideaway, but they were still linked. She opened her
fingers and he released her hand without breaking his conversation with Nino. Marinette wasn’t even
sure he realised he hadn’t let go.

He was standing right here, all the time. Chat Noir, Bumblebee, Adrien, different facets of the same
person. She’d been so blind to him.

Stepping away from Adrien, she looked at Alya. “I’ve been an idiot.”
“Yes, you have,” Alya said and patted Marinette on the head. “And the mood you were in, you wouldn’t have listened to me anyway. Think of it as a learning experience. You’ve grown as a person and as a friend. You can hold down a conversation without being flustered. That’s a good thing.”

Marinette gave Alya a watery smile. If only Alya knew the whole story on just how badly she’d screwed this up.

“Big question is; what are you going to do now?”

Marinette turned her gaze to Adrien. That was the real question, what was she going to do?

Adrien’s eyes flashed around as he talked to Nino. He was looking for someone. He was looking for her. Searching the crowd, checking on people watching, judging their reactions. He’d given himself away yesterday, but she’d given him a piece of herself too. A place to start.

She was standing here. Right beside him. And he still couldn’t see her.

Knowing that she was right here and he couldn’t see her should hurt. It should slice her up inside. Was she so invisible to Adrien that he couldn’t see her? But for some reason, it hadn’t hurt. Maybe he was blinded by Ladybug, but she’d been blinded by him. And maybe she was already too hurt, the extra pain didn’t register.

They really were a pair of oblivious idiots. She’d overreacted, again, to a situation where all she had to do was talk to him and things would’ve been fine. Instead, he was probably nursing just as much hurt as she was.

She had to make this right. Somehow.

Her eyes were open. It was time to open his. No more running. No more hiding. She owed him the truth.

“Marinette, are you alright?” Adrien asked, his hand returning to her shoulder.

She blinked. Then blinked again as she found he was barely visible among the water filling her eyes.

His other hand landed on her other shoulder so he could pull her closer to him. “I know it’s horrible knowing something so important has been stolen from you, especially with how much work you put into that album cover, but we’re not going to let her get away with this.”

She wiped her eyes and smiled at him. The tears weren’t for the stolen credit; that made her angry more than anything. The tears were because she’d been so stupid and hurt him so much and here he was, still being kind. It made her ache. “Thank you.”

“She what?” Alya shrilled. She planted her hand on her hip and lifted a finger. “Uh-ah! No way. Don’t tell me she tried to claim that! The little thief, stealing from my bestie. I’ll rip her lying lips off —”

“Chloé took care of it,” Marinette said, slightly awed. Chloé had done something Marinette wouldn’t have been able to in her current state; taken Lila down simply and effectively by showing the entire school that Lila was a liar. Quick and easy and Lila was discredited. The whole take-down had been perfect.

“Chloé did?” Nino blurted. “Wait, wait, did I hear that right? Chloé, class bully, spoilt brat extraordinaire, she took care of it?”
Alya laughed. “That’s a first.”

“I probably would’ve punched Lila in the throat,” Marinette said, trying to be obvious about the glance at Adrien. “But violence doesn’t solve anything.”

Missing the cue, Adrien asked, “Are you sure you’re alright?”

She nodded. “I am.”

“We should get to class,” Nino said, tilting his head at the classroom. “Instead of standing around like dorks and then get written up for being late.”

When they reached their homeroom, Marinette saw Chloé daintily perched on her seat, checking her phone while Sabrina unpacked Chloé’s bag. After a moment’s hesitation, Marinette stopped beside Chloé’s desk.

Chloé flicked her eyes at Marinette. “Ugh. Sabrina, it’s looking at me.”

Marinette didn’t let it bother her. Not today. She had too much else to worry about. Like what she was going to say to Adrien. “Thank you. For before. You didn’t have to do that with Lila, but you did.”

Chloé put her cell on her desk and turned up her nose. “I didn’t do it for you. She was stealing all my attention with her lies.”

“I get that. But it was still a nice thing to do. That smack-down was amazing.”

For a heartbeat, Chloé seemed like she was at a loss for words at the praise. Gathering herself, she said, “You just have to know the right way to gut people like that. Besides,” she glanced over at Adrien. “He’s my friend. I’m not about to let her get away with hurting him.”

Nodding, Marinette took her seat. After grabbing her gear for the first class, Marinette cupped her chin in her hands and put her elbows on the table to watch Adrien.

He was definitely looking for her. Every dark-haired girl who walked past on the way to their class was scrutinised. Adrien followed Juleka with his eyes right up until the moment she sat in her chair and Marinette knew why. She’d told Bumblebee she was naturally dark. He was judging. Watching. Trying to figure out who she was.

As Adrien glanced behind at Juleka, then flicked his eyes to Marinette, she offered him a bright smile, a wave, and fluffed her pigtails.

Adrien returned her smile and turned away.

Marinette decided it wasn’t just her fault for being oblivious.

“Did you end up watching Transformers?” Alya asked.

“Mmmhmm,” Marinette muttered. Straightening, she turned to Alya. “I still have the last half hour to watch, ’cause I got interrupted by a certain bee sniffing around for cookies.”

Alya blinked. “You did? He came to your house?”

“I did sort of tell him where I lived. I guess he doesn’t really know anyone yet, or not many people know his superhero identity, I’m not sure, but he said he appreciated your article.”
“He did?” Alya blurted, earnest. She reached out and grabbed Marinette’s arm. “Why didn’t you call me? I could’ve done another interview. People are dying to find out more about him.”

Marinette spread her fingers in apology. “It was late. There was an akuma and he told me to stay.” Glancing at Adrien, she saw he was paying attention but trying not to look like he was.

“An akuma?” Alya asked and whipped out her phone to record the details. “What kind of akuma?”

“A strange red mist,” Marinette replied, then shrugged. “Wasn’t really a lot to see, it surrounded the Notre-Dame for about ten minutes before Ladybug and Bumblebee defeated it.” A flicking glance at Adrien again. “I thought may-be he’d drop back in afterwards to let me know he was safe.”

“Aww, is that all?” Alya said, disappointed. “Just a red mist? No akuma specs?”

“Sorry, I don’t keep binoculars in my room,” Marinette said. “I did see one thing of note, though.”

Adrien’s head snapped around to hers, his eyes wide with panic even though the rest of his face was carefully schooled to be clear of emotion.

“What’s that?” Alya asked, leaning in.

“Bumblebee jumped straight off Notre-Dame and into the mist and Ladybug had to fish him out.”

“He did?” Alya asked.

“No way,” Nino said. “Straight in?”

“It was a complete bumble of a move,” Marinette said, meeting Adrien’s gaze. “If anything, it looked like he was channelling Chat Noir’s ‘leap first, ask questions later’ strategy.”

“I’m sure he had a good reason,” Adrien said, defensive.

Marinette cupped her chin in her hand again, keeping her gaze on Adrien. “He’s lucky he’s so adora-bee.”

There it was. A slight reaction. The corners of his eyes twitched. A blush coloured his cheeks.

Marinette continued, “If I were Ladybug, I wouldn’t have been happy with him risking his life like that.”

Nothing. No recognition. No flinch. The boy was still too caught up in ‘adora-bee’. Was it really that hard to see Ladybug in her?

“It’d be so cool to be Ladybug,” Alya said, her voice turning dreamy. “She’s amazing.”

Something twisted in Adrien’s expression, matching the twist of the knife in her heart. Hunching his shoulders, Adrien turned away.

“She’s not that amazing,” Marinette mumbled, slumping. “I bet she has a heap of flaws and makes stupid mistakes like the rest of us.”

“Yeah, but she gets to protect Paris and have superpowers and two hot boys in tight clothes running around with her.”

Nino cleared his throat.
Alya leant toward him and turned her voice sweet. “Maybe you should run around in skin-tight clothes too, Nino.”

Nino’s eyes blew wide, then he developed a lopsided smirk. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

“Absolutely.”

Suppressing a sigh, Marinette turned her attention to her tablet and, by extension, the back of Adrien’s head. She drummed her fingers against her cheek in thought. She wanted him to figure her out, to maybe take the edge of that pain off him, but really didn’t know how to do that. Puns, dropping hints, talking about Bumblebee, that seemed to work. She’d have to take it up a notch.

Although, maybe him figuring it out in class wouldn’t be the best idea. It might lead to a scene. It might hurt him even more. Ladybug should be the one to tell him. That was only fair. Ladybug should apologise, no, grovel. Ladybug was the one who had to make it better, not Marinette. Marinette… he didn’t seem to see. Not really.

Marinette dropped her eyes to Adrien’s bag. Deedee. She would know who Marinette was. Maybe… maybe Adrien already knew. No. That wasn’t right. He was looking for her. If he knew, he’d be reacting differently. Wouldn’t he?

She didn’t know. Confused and heartsore, she didn’t know what she should do.

“How about you, Marinette?”

She blinked, focussing on Adrien and realised she’d missed a question directed at her. “Huh?”

He smiled but it didn’t reach his eyes. “My father said I could hold a study group on Friday. Would you like to come?”

He certainly wouldn’t be asking her if he knew who she was. Could she say yes now, knowing he might take the invitation back once he knew?

“It’s gonna be amazing, that bedroom of yours,” Nino said and nudged Adrien. “We’ll have a blast.”

“It’s for study, Nino,” Adrien chided. “If we don’t make an effort, my father won’t let me hold one again.” He glanced back at Marinette. “How about it?”

Aware that Alya was nodding eagerly and urging her to yes, Marinette gave herself some time to think, some time to fix things. “I’m not sure. I’ll have to check with my parents.”

By lunchtime, Marinette was emotionally exhausted. Pretending nothing was wrong and hyper-aware of everything Adrien did, even more so now she knew he was Chat Noir, had taken its toll. She still didn’t know what she was going to do or how she would fix this. Alternating between awkward silence and dropping hints or puns, she couldn’t pick a mood to stick with. And it showed. Alya was giving her looks. Nino seemed concerned.

Adrien was oblivious.

“Can’t let the errorists win,” during Grammar got a raised eyebrow from all three friends.

“How can you be Hungary next to Turkey and Greece?” got a snort from Nino and a giggle from Alya.

“I used to hate Maths because of decimals but then I realised they have a point,” made Adrien turn
around with a smile.

“I’m reading a book on Anti-Gravity, it’s hard to put it down,” received a laugh from Adrien but it was her one and only physics pun she knew.

And then there were all the bee puns she injected as frequently as she could. Un-bee-lievable, bee-hind, all the buzz, bee-ing. So many puns that Alya had leant over and asked if she had a thing for Bumblebee, which shut Marinette up quickly.

Standing at the top of the stairs at the entrance of the school, Marinette watched Adrien get into his car.

“Nino and I are going to a café for lunch,” Alya said. “Do you want to come?”

She wanted to wallow and sulk. Talk to Tikki. Cry. “No. I’m fine.”

Alya put her hand on Marinette’s shoulder. “Gurl, are you okay? You’ve been off all day. All those puns, what’s gotten into you?”

“I’m just tired. And stressed about exams.” She summoned a smile and trotted down the stairs, waving to Alya. “Enjoy your date!”

“It’s not a date!” Alya protested, unable to hide the smile or the blush.

“It’s totally a date,” Marinette replied, waving over her shoulder. “I expect raving reviews after lunch and play-by-play on the handholding.”

By the end of the short walk home, Marinette had mustered enough strength to fake a smile for her parents. It was fortunate it was busy at the bakery as she arrived, so they didn’t have much time for anything beyond a greeting kiss on the cheek and a hello.

She forced herself to take a few bites of the bagel her mother had lovingly prepared for her as she wandered up to her room. It felt like it stuck in her throat, then sat heavy in her stomach.

“Marinette?”

Sighing, Marinette dropped her backpack by her attic door. “I screwed up. I royally screwed up.”

Tikki soothed as best she could. “It’s alright. We can fix this.”

She stared at a spot on her floor. “Can we? I’m not so sure. I don’t even know where to begin. I know I have to do this as Ladybug… because… because Adrien doesn’t see me as Marinette. What if he’s disappointed it’s me? What if… he was looking and looking and he still didn’t… but I can’t… I can’t…” She sighed, long and deep, pushing all the breath from her lungs. If she started crying now, she’d never stop.

“Just talk to him. Communicate. Once you start, don’t stop until everything which needs to be said has been said. It’s the only way.”

Marinette walked to her desk and picked up the Chat Noir doll she’d so painstakingly made. She hugged him tightly to her chest and stared out the window.

“Marinette…”

“I know. I know. Talk to him. But… tonight. I don’t… I don’t think I could sit through school if it goes wrong.” Pulling the doll away from her chest, she ran her fingers over Chat Noir’s face. “What
if I’ve lost him, Tikki? What if I’ve hurt him so much that… we can’t fix this?”

“Stalling the conversation will only make it worse. You need to do this before we get an akuma, Marinette. The longer you wait, the worse it’ll be.”

She sat at her desk and reached for her box of fabric. “I’ll… make him a gift. To break the ice. At least… that’ll give me something to do.”

Tikki nuzzled Marinette’s cheek. “I’ll help.”

She had felt in the correct colours for a Bumblebee doll and it was relatively easy to make. She had all the measurements in her head and the basic doll pattern she’d used on the other, more memorable akuma. It was just a matter of cutting and stitching them together. The fuzz would be a problem. None of the swatches of fabric she had felt right. They weren’t soft enough or fuzzy enough.

“We might have to make a fabric trip,” Marinette muttered, discarding another potential. Frustrated with the lack of perfect cloth, Marinette pushed away from her desk. Grabbing one of her storage boxes, she plonked it on the floor and yanked open the lid. “There has to be something!”

“It doesn’t have to be perfect,” Tikki said, running her paws over one of Marinette’s dismissed swathes. “This one is—”

“Yes, it does.” Rummaging around, Marinette tossed fabric over her shoulder so she could get to the cloth at the bottom of the box. Reams of transparent cloth and fuzzy swathe littered the ground around her, tossed haphazardly away. She found pieces of fabric she’d stored for years for a just in case, fabric she’d purchased on a whim because she liked the colour or the feel. Nothing was right.

“Why?”

She knelt on the floor, clutching at a piece of shaggy, yellow faux fur. “If it’s not perfect, how will he know how sorry I am?”

Tikki’s mournful blue eyes watered in sympathy. “Oh, Marinette.”

She pressed her face to the faux fur and squeezed her eyes shut. “It has to be perfect. He deserves that much.”

“You’re too hard on yourself.”

“This one,” Marinette said and lifted her face from the faux fur. “This one is the closest.”

Tikki didn’t answer and Marinette turned her head in time to see Bumblebee dropping through the trapdoor.

Chapter End Notes

*Shame on you, Kry. Another cliffhanger. How could you?*
What do you call a bee who's had a spell put on him?

Chapter Summary

What do you call a bee who's had a spell put on him?
He's bee-witched!

Chapter Notes

There were quite a few artist who drew pictures based on Sting. I’d love to thank jara-does-art-things, chibi-kiwi93 and hchano for the beautiful pieces they drew.

jara-does-art-things
chibi-kiwi93
Hchano

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shocked, Marinette said the first thing which popped into her head. “Don’t you knock?”

With a cringe, Bumblebee stepped down from her bed and stood at the top of the stairs. “I’m sorry. You seemed engrossed, I wasn’t sure you’d hear me.”

“Chat Noir always knocked,” she chided. She glanced at the mess of fabrics strewn around her. She should be embarrassed at the state of her room, but mostly she was in shock at his arrival. How much did he hear? “Why are you here?”

“I didn’t come back last night tell you the fight was over and I felt bad about that.”

She blinked. Then blinked again. Tilting her head, she said, “You’re a hero. You don’t need to worry about me.”

“It comes with part of being a hero. I worry about my friends. And as Bumblebee, I don’t have a lot.”

Stabbing her in the heart would hurt less. “Oh.”

“Would you mind if I hang out here for a bit?”

Maybe, if he did, she could find a way to tell him who she was. Drop some more hints. Pun or flirt. Or maybe he already knew and was allowing her time to confess? She didn’t know, but… she didn’t want him to leave. She had a chance to make things right. “Um… I don’t have any cookies.”

“I’d prefer company over cookies.”

She nodded. “Okay.”

Grinning, he bounced over the railing beside her bed and dropped to the floor. “So, what are you doing?”
She went red. “I… um…”

He gasped as he spotted what was on her desk. Shooting her an incredulous look, he bounced closer to the desk. “No way! You’re making me?”

“It’s tradition,” she muttered. “It was supposed to be a surprise.”

“How long have you been working on this?”

“I… just started.”

He picked up the already sewn goggles to peer at them in awe. “You are amazing, Marinette. I mean, look at this detail! And you just started?”

Nope. No. She couldn’t do it. She couldn’t sit here and pretend she didn’t know who he was. Not when they were alone like this. She couldn’t stand knowing how much she’d probably hurt him.

“Can I help?” he asked, puppy-eager. “I always wanted to know how to sew. Could you teach me? Can I watch?”

Her throat burned. Scratchy and raw and full of grief and guilt. She couldn’t handle this. Not right now. Not like this. Everything hit her all at once, there wasn’t even a chance she could suppress it. She hunched her shoulders and pressed her face into the faux fur.

“Marinette?”

Folding in half, she bent over her knees to make herself smaller and hide from him while she struggled with herself.

Footsteps, and rustling as he hunkered down beside her. “Marinette?”

She shook her head and curled tighter. More shuffling as he shifted to sit beside her, then she felt his hand between her shoulder blades. He rubbed, soothing up and down strokes or small circles, while Marinette fought against the surge of tears, suppressing ugly sobs as much as she could. The kindness in him only made her cry harder. She didn’t deserve this. She didn’t.

Somehow, between the sobs and the pats, she managed to blurt out, “I hurt a friend by believing a lie and now I don’t know if he’ll forgive me.”

He bent over with her, his hands on her upper arms to coax her up. “Oh, honeybug,” he murmured, his voice right beside her ear. “It’s not as bad as you think. Some lies can be pretty bee-lievable.”

She lifted her head a fraction. The faux fur was damp with tears. She couldn’t use this. It seemed a silly, inconsequential thing to be worried about at this point in time, but she was a mess. “And now I ruined your fuzz.”

He gently pried the fabric from her fingers. With deliberate care, he placed it on the floor, then took her hand. “Come here.” Another gentle tug and reposition and he pulled her into his lap. Arms around her, he coaxed her so her cheek rested against the fuzz at his collar and her knees were across his leg. The top of her head fit into the curve of his neck perfectly. “I don’t care about that. I care about you.”

She lifted a hand to run her fingers through his fluff. “I don’t deserve it.”

“Sure you do. You are wonderful and amazing and don’t let anyone tell you that you’re not.”
She closed her eyes in pain. “Chat, you don’t understand. I need to tell you something.”

“You don’t need to tell me anything,” he said, resting his cheek against her head. “I already know. I figured it out, honeybug.”

She went rigid. That was twice he’d called her honeybug. She hadn’t really registered the first one, because she thought he was just being nice, but the second was quite deliberate. Plus, he hadn’t reacted to her accidently calling him ‘Chat’.

His fingers stroked up and down her spine. “Shh. It’s okay.”

She squeaked.

“You weren’t being half obvious about it with the hair fluffs, the puns and kitten eyes.”

“But— but— I— what?”

“I didn’t want to get my hopes up that it was you.”

Her brain felt like it was stuffed with cobwebs. “Huh?”

“It would’ve been too perfect and I can’t be that lucky. I was convinced I was seeing things that I wanted to see. Deedee told me to watch for a change and… you were the only one who seemed to sincerely believe Lila. And that made sense if you were Ladybug too.” He chuckled. “I can’t believe you were right behind me all this time.”

She burst into more hopeless, wet sobs and covered her face with her hands. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

His arms encircled her. “Marinette, it’s okay—”

“No, it’s not. It’s really not. I was so stupid! I ran away and I was hurtful and I don’t know how to make it better.”

“I believed her lies too,” he said. “Plus, you already said you believed me over her. Something I’d done made you think her lies could be true and I’m sorry for making it seem like I could.”

She wouldn’t let him take the blame for this one. It was on her. “No, no, it’s not your fault, I jumped to conclusions, I always jump to conclusions. It was easier to believe you could be into her because she’s glamorous and confident and beautiful, than think I was so lacking in what you wanted that you couldn’t fall for me.”

He seemed appalled. “Marinette, that’s not true.”

She continued to babble, “I was stupid and jealous. I should’ve just listened. Given you a chance to explain.”

He lifted his hand and cupped her neck, cuddling her to him. “It’s okay. It really is. I forgive you.”

She choked on a sob. “You shouldn’t. I don’t deserve it. I hurt you.”

“I don’t deny that,” he replied and her chest gave a painful squeeze. “You did. I still forgive you.”

He held her while she cried, rocking and soothing and allowing her time to quell her tears. He stroked his fingers along her spine, up to the back of her neck and down to the small of her back. He nuzzled and crooned, small nonsense noises to let her know everything was fine. He was there. It
was okay.

Eventually, the tears dried and her hands fell from her face to her lap. She stared at swirls in her wooden floorboards and listened to the soothing rhythm of his heartbeat.

Crying left her feeling emotionally drained, with an undignified runny nose. Trying to be subtle, she sniffled and pulled her handkerchief from her pocket to wipe her face. Bumblebee’s hand dropped from her neck to clasp his other one at her hip, a more comfortable position for both of them.

She didn’t know what to say. She didn’t feel like she deserved forgiveness at all. Tentatively lifting her hand, she reached out and buried her fingers in his floof, feeling the soft texture slide between her fingers.

After a while, he nuzzled the top of her head. “Marinette?”

She swallowed, mentally preparing herself for this conversation. “Yes?”

“Were you really checking out my butt?”

She covered her face. “Oh. God.”

He teased, “And do you really think I’m adora-bee?”

She whined and mumbled something to the effect of, “You know you’re gorgeous.”

“Your opinion is the one which matters.”

She sighed and dropped her hands. Keeping her head tucked into his neck, she murmured, “Do you remember the first time we met?”

He sucked in a breath. “Yeah. The dreaded chewing gum incident.”

“You apologised and you gave me your umbrella, remember that?”

“Of course.”

Catharsis came from crying, leaving her emotionally open and honest. “I’ve had a massive crush on you since then.”

A sharp intake of breath. “Really?”

“I mean… I was fine watching you from afar and being your friend and seeing you happy… and making stupid goo-goo eyes at you in class.”

He slid his hand from her hip, trailing fire across her forearm until he reached her hand. Spreading his fingers, he invited her to interlock her fingers with his. Such big hands compared to hers, but they fit together so well, palm to palm. “You did?”

“I am completely hopeless,” she admitted.

“You’re not the only one, you know.”

That was nice to hear. “And then… Chat went missing and I went crazy with worry. I never… I thought if anything happened between us would destroy what we had and… I never let myself think of you that way, and then suddenly you were all I could think about.” She lifted her head so she could look at him. “I need you, Chat. I need you to fight beside me. You make me brave and strong.
and lift me up so high. But I don’t want to ruin that. We have a duty to Paris, what if—what if we lose that?”

The intensity of the expression on his face made her heart flop. She doubted, by the tilt of his head, he was looking at her eyes. “Marinette, we won’t lose that.”

The huskiness in his voice threatened to turn her into a puddle of goo. Fighting against the urge to lick her lips, she murmured, “Adrien’s my crush and Chat’s my best friend and I don’t know how to make those jigsaw pieces fit together in my head. Everything is muddled.”

Drawing back a fraction, he swallowed. “Stone-heart,” he said. “That was it for me. You stood on the Eiffel Tower and you yelled at Papillon and made the promise that you’d never let him win and I was in absolute awe of you. I vowed right there I’d love the girl beneath the mask.”

Her cheeks burned at hearing him say that. “But you didn’t see Marinette.”

The arm around her back lifted so his fingers could stroke her neck beneath her ear. “I saw you.”

The world spun. Fire burned beneath her skin where he touched her and kept the heat in her cheeks. Her palm was ridiculously damp against his. She wished she could see his eyes instead of her stunned reflection in his goggles.

“Yes, I was hung up on Ladybug and didn’t want to take a chance with anyone else, but that doesn’t mean I don’t like you. If it was going to be anyone at school, it would’ve been you,” he said, finishing the sentence from earlier today.

“Really?”

He nodded. “Did you think I was lying all those times I said you were amazing?”

“I…”

“You’re amazing and kind and courageous and bee-utiful and…” he laughed. “I tried to set you up with Nino!”

She drew back. “What?”

“Well, he liked you and I liked you, but I knew I couldn’t, well I thought I couldn’t at least, and Nino’s a great guy!”

Marinette nodded. “He is.”

“I thought, if it couldn’t be me, at least I’d get to see you happy and I knew Nino would do that.”

“Wow.”

He ducked his head down until his forehead rested against hers. “We’re really blind, aren’t we?”

“Yeah.” She swallowed. “I’m really, really sorry, Adrien.”

“I know.”

“Adrien, can Deedee come out?” Tikki called.

Marinette and Bumblebee turned their heads. Tikki was lying on her stomach in the air above the desk, with her chin cupped in her paws and a serene smile on her face as she watched them.
Embarrassed, Marinette buried her face in Bumblebee’s neck while he laughed. “Sure. But only for a little while. We need to go before I’m missed. Fuzz off.”

“Fuzz off,” she said as the suit tremored. “Really?”

“It’s cute,” Adrien said as his transformation was zapped from his body.

Deedee zipped circles around them, squealing excitedly. Her waggle was so happy, she couldn’t fly straight. “I knew you could do it!” She darted up close to Adrien’s face and kissed his nose before she nipped over to Tikki. “Oh, this is so exciting.”

“They’re going to be incorrigible about this,” Marinette said.

Adrien watched the kwami. “Plagg will be worse when he gets back. Full of ‘I-told-you-so’s’ and demands for cheese.”

“Adrien?” Marinette murmured and Adrien turned his attention to her. “What happens now?”

“I don’t know,” he replied and his cheeks turned pink. “What would you like to happen now?”

“I think… it’s still hard to believe.”

“Yeah. Yeah. It’s crazy.”

“We should… get used to… being ourselves around each other? In and out of the mask. Maybe? I don’t know. What do you think?”

Adrien smirked and she could see her Chat in that smile. “I think,” he purred, “you’re currently curled up in my lap. And I like you there.”

Chat’s smirk. Adrien’s face. Chat’s flirting. Adrien. She couldn’t handle it. She yelped and squirmed. With a light laugh, he let her scramble away. “I didn’t say you had to leave.”

She turned her back on him and brushed herself down, trying to distract herself from her embarrassment. She glanced over her shoulder and wondered if the blush gracing her cheeks was going to become permanent as she saw the puppy-dog look on Adrien’s face as he watched her.

His eyes widened and he wiped the expression off his face as he realised he’d been caught. Rising to his feet, he mumbled, “So… um… we take this slow?”

“I… don’t know?” she mumbled. “But… I don’t think we should rush into anything. I like you, Adrien, I really do, but this is also… kind of weird.”

“That would be prudent,” Deedee said with a sage nod. “Change is often hard and it will take a while before you are comfortable with the revelations you learnt today. Take it slow, you don’t want to rush into anything.”

“No,” Tikki whined, playfully batting Deedee. “Don’t you therap-bee them! I want to see them kiss!”

“Tikki!” Marinette scolded while Adrien nervously laughed in embarrassment.

“What?”

“For the record,” Adrien said and rubbed the back of his neck. “I would like to, but I think Deedee’s
right.”


“I did not!”

Ignoring the complaints of their kwami, Marinette gulped. Life was really, really unfair. He wasn’t allowed to look that gorgeous as he said he wanted to kiss her. Or make her knees that weak from just thinking about it. It took a lot of work, but she kept her voice level. “For the record, so would I. Eventually.”

Adrien smiled and held out his hand. “Slow and steady?”

“Kitten steps,” she said, placing her hand in his.

She expected a handshake, but he surprised her by bowing to kiss the back of her hand. With his lips hovering over her hand, he looked up at her. “I assure you, my lady, kittens can move very fast when they want to.”

How was she still standing? “That’s cheating.”

“Absolutely.” Keeping her hand, he straightened out of his bow. “So, what were you going to do with the fuzz?”

“Well, Bumblebee is fluffy, his doll needed to reflect that.” She bent down and scooped up the yellow fuzz from the floor. It wasn’t too bad, now she looked at it. She could probably clean it up. “I can show you. If you want.”

He smiled. “I’d like that.”

They sat, heads close together and kwami curled up and watching, and Marinette taught Adrien how to make his doll. She taught him how to make his stitches even and how to stuff the doll so it wouldn’t be lumpy. Gentle fingers guided him through threading a needle and firmer hands taught him invisible stitching. She watched his pink tongue stick out of the corner of his mouth as he concentrated on gluing the goggles in place and imagined what it would be like to taste it. She couldn’t help the blush which coloured her cheeks every time their hands touched, or the tingles creeping down her spine, or the dorky smile on her face, but at least she didn’t stumble over her words anymore.

By his smile, he knew exactly what he did to her because she did the same to him. That was as gratifying as it was nerve-wracking. Their hands touched, brushed and lingered way more than was necessary, but neither of them minded.

They didn’t get to finish the doll before their break for lunch ended but neither of them cared about that either.

“May I come back tonight?” Bumblebee asked as he trotted up the stairs to exit through the trap door.

“You were going to watch one of the Transformers movies with me, weren’t you?” Marinette asked, following him up.

He flashed her a smile. “Can I really? You won’t mind?”

“Absolutely,” she replied. “I’m counting on it.”
“Then I’ll definitely come back.” He grinned and ran his hand down her arm until he reached her hand, giving it a squeeze. “May I take you to lunch tomorrow? I think Nino and Alya have the right idea.”

She beamed at him. “I’d like that.”

He lifted his arms and gripped the wooden frame of the trap door and pulled himself out. Outside, he crouched down to look down at her. “See you back at school soon.”

After he closed the trap door, Marinette quietly counted to ten before she covered her mouth and squealed. She ran on the spot, then folded back to flop on her bed. “Oh my gosh!”

“I’m so excited for you, Marinette!” Tikki said, darting to her.

She felt limp. “Did that really happen?”

Floating above Marinette, Tikki covered her mouth with her paws and giggled. “Oh, yes.”

Cloud nine had nothing on Marinette as she floated back to school.

Nino and Alya held hands as they waited on the stairs of the school, their body language completely focussed on each other. Nino laughed, his hand rubbing the back of his neck as he responded to whatever joke Alya had told. Marinette watched as Alya gripped Nino at the elbow and pressed her chest against his upper arm, rising up on her toes so she could whisper in his ear.

“Oh, they are going to be so grossly adorable,” she told Tikki as she walked. She felt so excited for her friends and they deserved happiness. Seeing them together made Marinette feel so much lighter than she was already.

“Like you and Adrien,” Tikki responded, sounding smug.

“We’re not going to be—” the words died in her throat as Adrien’s car pulled up to the school.

“You were saying?” Tikki said, and the smugness increased.

“Urk.”

Giggling, Tikki closed Marinette’s bag around her. “Hopeless.”

Marinette stalled, standing still as Adrien hopped from the car. He adjusted his bag on his shoulder as he looked up the stairs at Alya and Nino, smiled and waved at them.

They hadn’t discussed what they were going to tell their friends. She wasn’t even sure if they were a ‘they’ yet. He might’ve expressed a desire to kiss her, but that didn’t mean—

Turning his head, Adrien caught Marinette’s gaze and broke out into a massive grin. Her heart picked up its pace, racing away with all the strength in her legs it could.

“Must not swoon, must not swoon,” she mumbled to herself.

Her bag giggled again and Marinette pressed her hand to it.

Gesturing for Marinette to join them, Adrien trotted up the stairs to join Alya and Nino, offering up his fist to Nino for a bump. Alya turned and waved at Marinette without releasing Nino’s hand.

Marinette smiled and moved to her friends. “Seems the lunch went well,” she noted.
Adrien grinned, standing closer to Marinette than he would have before. So close his shoulder brushed hers. “It does, doesn’t it? Spill.”

“Nothing happened, dude,” Nino protested.

“Yeah, we had a nice lunch, that’s all,” Alya said, unable to stop the smile.

As one, Adrien and Marinette dropped their eyes to Alya and Nino’s interwoven fingers. “I don’t know about you,” Adrien said to Marinette. “But that looks like something happened.”

“Definitely something. Must be an akuma,” Marinette said and pressed the back of her hand to her forehead. “Some dastardly akuma out for revenge attacked the café where you were having lunch and forced this hand-holding atrocity on you.”

Getting right into the game, Adrien rubbed his chin in a thoughtful manner. “Must be.” Throwing up his arm, he wrapped it round Nino’s shoulder. “Oh, my poor Nino, eternally bound with Alya. Woe is you, I hope Ladybug shows up soon to aid you. Be strong!”

“It’s not an akuma,” Alya deadpanned.

“Did Nino’s wristband get stuck around your wrist?” Marinette asked. “I have a pair of scissors in my bag.”

“No.”

“Nino had an accident with the superglue again?” Adrien asked.

“Dude!” Nino blurted, scandalised.

“Again?” Alya asked and smirked. “That sounds like a story.”

Adrien grinned. “Yeah, see—”

Releasing Alya’s hand, Nino took Adrien by the shoulders and shoved him toward the entrance of the school. “Gotta go! We’ll be late for class.”

Adrien shot Marinette a smile while allowing Nino to manhandle him away.

Reaching for Alya’s elbow, Marinette said, “Regardless of the teasing, I’m happy for you.”

Alya beamed. “Me too. And don’t worry, Nino and I will make sure we return the favour when you two figure yourselves out.”

---

It hadn’t taken Marinette long to clean up and re-store her fabrics after returning home from school, before settling into her study for exams.

Somehow, Adrien and Marinette managed to make it through the rest of day without anyone commenting on the silly grins they both developed whenever they looked at each other. Alya and Nino’s budding and obvious relationship eclipsed any oddity their classmates might have noticed about Adrien and Marinette’s actions.

She tried concentrating on her study, but the lack of sleep and the heightened emotions of the day had taken their toll on her. She wasn’t really able to think straight or concentrate for long periods of time, so she wandered down to challenge Tom to a few games of Mecha Strike to help keep her awake.
She helped Sabine cook dinner, chopping up vegetables while her mother hummed as she cooked. Afterward, Marinette washed the dishes while Tom and Sabine snuggled together on the sofa and watched one of their shows together. Anything to pass the time, and it sure felt like it was travelling slowly today.

She was anxious and nervous and watching the clock but she didn’t think her parents noticed. As Tom went to bed, Marinette also bid her mother goodnight and headed back up to her room to see if she could manage to concentrate on something other than Adrien for more than a few minutes at a time.

It seemed he was just as excited about spending time with her as she was. Within minutes, there was a soft knock at her trapdoor.

“Sorry,” he babbled as he dropped through the trapdoor and onto the bed. “I couldn’t wait and I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to come as myself, but I don’t think my father would’ve let me so I would’ve had to sneak away anyway and then I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to ring the doorbell or wait here and—”

Marinette giggled and sat on her bed. “It’s fine. I was excited too. Mom’s still downstairs, but I told her I was going to watch a movie before bed.”

He calmed down a fraction to sit beside her and say, “Hi.”

Marinette beamed. “Hi.”

“Oh. Um. Should I power down?”

Marinette nodded. “But we... we should stay up here for a little while. Mom can’t see the bed from the door and we’ll have a little bit of warning if she’s coming.”

“Fuzz off,” he responded, then Deedee zipped around him. He extended a hand and Deedee brushed against it for a second before darting over to nuzzle Marinette’s cheek.

Giggling, Marinette cupped her hands around Deedee. “Hi Deedee.”

“Deedee!” Tikki called from downstairs where Marinette had set her up with a plate of cookies. “Marinette got us sweeties!”

Deedee waggled happily. “Oh!”

“There’re gummy bears too,” Marinette called as Deedee darted away.

Adrien ran a hand through his hair and gave her a sheepish look. “We’ve only just started and I’m already sneaking into your room without your parents knowing.”

Marinette shrugged. “Well... I’m not supposed to have anyone over after they go to bed, but that’s a school night rule. Weekends are different as long as I’m sensible.”

Adrien swallowed. “Even for a boyfriend?”

*Boyfriend.* Oh, that made her chest tight and her heart pound. “Is that—I mean—are we... I... I thought—” Words, Marinette, get them out. “I thought we were taking things slow.”

His bottom lip jutted out and he gave her sad eyes. “Does that mean I can’t hold your hand?”

She jolted. “Oh. Do... do you want to?”
In answer, he reached for her hand, allowing his to hover over the top of hers and held still, waiting. He left the choice to hold his hand to her. The choice whether or not to take that step with him. He wouldn’t push or demand.

With a smile, Marinette spread her fingers and lifted her palm to meet his.

Chapter End Notes

Team Tikki or Team Deedee?
What bee is good for your health?

Chapter Summary

What bee is good for your health?
Vitamin bee!

Chapter Notes

So, we’ve had more Sting art! I love you guys! Thank you to gigglezteehee and meumixleijayjay. Please, if you draw art for my stories, don’t hesitate to drop me a direct message. I don’t always see the tags or get notified.

gigglezteehee_1

gigglezteehee_2

meumixleijayjay

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Not even bothering to hide her smile, Deedee watched Adrien prance around his room like a lovesick fool. Up and over the couch, spinning circles as he waltzed with an invisible partner to music she couldn’t hear.

“I held her hand!”

“Yes, I saw.”

He spun in a circle, arms outstretched. “She fell asleep on my shoulder!”

“I saw that too. You carried her to bed and tucked her in.”

Spinning past her, Adrien cupped his hands around Deedee and dragged her with him. “How long should I wait before I try to kiss her?” Bringing her to his mouth, he made an exaggerated ‘muah’ sound against her head. “Do you think tomorrow is too soon?”

Waggling, Deedee floated away from his hand. “You are buzzing with anticipation, but slow down. Take a breath. You both need time to work through this. Do not rush.”

“How long before I tell her I love her?”

“Adrien!” Deedee scolded.

He spun to face her and stopped moving his torso and legs, but left his arms swinging, producing a somewhat comical effect. Giving her a mischievous grin, he asked, “What?”

“You are exhausting to watch. Go to bed.”

Adrien laughed. “Yes, Mom.”
“Ooh,” she teased, giving him a mock outraged waggle. “I will sting you!”

Adrien bolted for the bathroom, still laughing.

Shaking her head, Deedee floated down to the little wax hive she’d built among the flowers. She ran her hands over her head to soothe herself, then patted her fluff as she surveyed the room. “Plagg, you have a good kitten, if boisterous. It must be exhausting.”

Grinning to herself, Deedee put on a Plagg-esque voice, “Who asked you, Deedee? You better not be eating my cheese.” Giggle, she snuggled down in her hive and waited.

Deedee was always good at waiting. It was all she did. Waited and watched and was ready when she was needed. She was their backup, their last resort and final hope. And perhaps she didn’t spend as much time on the frontlines as they did, but that didn’t diminish their need for her. Like any good bee protecting the hive, she brought them **time**.

She waited for Adrien to return from the bathroom. More subdued than when he entered, he wandered across the room and gave her a loving pat before he switched off the lights and headed for bed. She waited for the restless energy to dim and the movement to stop. She waited for his breathing to even out and for him to slip into sleep.

She waited for the door to open and watched as a figure slipped into the room. Then she rose from her hive and drifted closer.

Standing beside the bed, Gabriel stared down at his sleeping son. A moment’s hesitation and he sat down and removed his glasses to clean them with a cloth he pulled from his pocket. He’d done this every night Deedee had been with Adrien and she suspected the ritual began long before Plagg arrived. Hidden in the dark, admiring his son as he slept.

Gabriel lifted a hand and rested it on his son’s head and Deedee turned away. It wasn’t right to intrude upon this moment. It was a shame Gabriel could only show affection for his son in the dark, just as it was a shame Adrien did not know Gabriel did this.

Fingers slid against her comb. Fingers she didn’t know. Didn’t trust. She could feel them, worming their way in, gripping and pulling and—

Deedee retaliated without thought.

Gabriel jerked away from Adrien as the comb stung him. Deedee buzzed in anger and attacked. She dove into his hair and gripped handfuls, yanking his head back. Releasing his hair, she zipped out and slammed her little body into his chest. Gabriel staggered, then yelped in surprise as Deedee vanished up the leg of his pants and bit his calf.

Lifting his leg, Gabriel hopped in pain. Deedee phased out and spun circles around him. Gathering speed, she turned and dove, slamming her body into his shoulder hard enough to spin Gabriel toward the door, then smashed into the centre of his back to propel him forward.

Caught beneath kwami fury and strength, the man staggered, then ran for it. His hand scrambled for the handle and he fled into the hallway outside Adrien’s room.

He swatted the air, spinning in circles as he tried to see her. “Where are you, you little pest?”

That told Deedee everything she needed to know. She buzzed in anger, her stinger itching to bury itself in his nose. She zipped circles around him, biting and snapping at him, but never allowing him to catch more than a glimpse of her yellow blur. “How dare you?”
“I—”

“How dare you touch me! How dare your filthy hands grace my comb! You are unworthy!”

He swatted and spun, flailing wildly, as most people would when confronted with her angry buzzing.

Deedee’s stinger was trained on Gabriel, ready to strike as she skirted around him. “Return the cat miraculous at once!”

“I will not allow you to drag him into some meaningless endeavour which will only result in his death!”

Deedee paused behind Gabriel’s head. “You have no idea what you’ve done!”

“I am protecting my son from the likes of you!” Gabriel spun and swiped at her and Deedee allowed herself to become incorporeal so his hand phased right through her. Once his hand had passed, she continued to zip and dart around him.

“You are hurting him,” Deedee scolded. “You betrayed his trust when you stole his ring. You opened him up to so many forms of attack.”

“You are lying!” Gabriel snarled.

“Did you learn nothing from studying the book, Gabriel?” She laughed, bitter and angry. “Oh, I forgot, you cannot read it.”

He continued to swipe at her. “You. You stole it.”

“Adrien stole it,” she snapped. “I guess that makes you even.”

“My son would never have done that before you kwami interfered with his life!”

“My son, my son,” Deedee buzzed. “He has a name. He has a personality. He is not a doll!”

A visible flinch from Gabriel and he clenched his hands into fists. Nostrils flaring, he took a breath and released it slowly. “No,” he said, his voice calm and collected. With deliberate care, he fixed his tie and his hair as he spoke. “You will not incite an emotional response from me. You will not drag me into your games.”

Still circling at speed, Deedee narrowed her eyes. “I am not the butterfly. I do not use emotions to become dangerous.”

“What you are is a plague upon this world,” Gabriel said and rubbed his hand where the comb had stung him.

She positioned herself inches from his face. “You think the world would be better without us? You rid the world of us, who are trying to protect and aid humankind, and something worse will take our place.” She jabbed his nose, hard. “You stole the cat miraculous and you made us all vulnerable. Including Adrien. Return it.”

“No,” Gabriel said and moved his hands so they were behind his back. “I want him safe and he is not safe prancing around in that ridiculous cat suit pretending to be something he’s not.”

“You have no concept of what he pretends,” Deedee replied. “You are completely out of touch with his wants and needs.”
“I make every effort to keep him safe and protected.”

“You keep him under control and caged. You keep yourself distant. What kind of protection is that? Members of a hive love each other, they want to share and experience life together.” She gestured the mansion. “This hive is so cold. Love here haunts the shadows and hides in pictures.”

Gabriel’s lips twisted. “What would you have me do?” he hissed. “There is a monster out there who preys on emotional weakness! I will teach him to be strong. I must teach him control! It is the only way for him to survive.”

Deedee continued to buzz at him, her stinger poised to strike. “Do you really think Papillon is the only threat a wielder endures? Stealing the cat exposed Adrien.”

Gabriel blinked. “What?”

“You have too little knowledge of our world. It makes you dangerous,” Deedee said.

“I know enough.”

“What you know will get Adrien killed,” Deedee snapped.

“Like you got Aurelie killed,” Gabriel spat.

Deedee floated back, losing some of her anger. Here was the root of Gabriel’s anger and she sensed she’d barely scratched the surface. “She made her choice.”

“There was no choice! You creatures brainwash your wielders from a young age. You make them believe they are powerful, invulnerable.” Gabriel clutched his chest. “She was my wife.” He thrust out an arm to indicate Adrien’s bedroom. “She was his mother. And none of you cared enough to help her.”

“We didn’t know.”

“Don’t give me that.”

Deedee kept her voice soothing. “Gabriel, I am the bee kwami. I protect the hive. I will give my life in exchange for their safety so they can continue their duties. Bee-lieve me, I did not know.”

Gabriel stared at her. Then abruptly snorted. Turning away, he placed one hand on his hip and gripped a handful of hair. “Oh, he must love you.”

She allowed herself a small smile. “He is most fond of puns.”

“So was she.”

Deedee sighed. “We come to them young because the young do not have time to become corrupt. The young do not know greed. Or hate. Or lust for power. The young will work with us and grow into their powers slowly. The older will use us. Hurt us. Abuse us. You have seen what Papillon has become. How corrupted he is.”

“Oh yes,” Gabriel said and laughed, a harsh, horrible cackle. “Your greatest mistake.”

Deedee let that slide. “I wish it was different, but this is the way things must be.”

“He’s so young.”
“So is his lady,” Deedee pointed out. “But she cannot do it without him.”

Gabriel shook his head. “He’s not suited for that life.”

“They have a hard journey ahead of them, Gabriel. The cat and the bug, they are the most powerful, the most dangerous of us. For them to have chosen wielders, for them to rise together—” Deedee hid her worry behind wringing paws. “There are bad times ahead and Adrien and his lady need time to grow into their powers. Papillon is just the beginning, the first test if you will. If you stop his progress now, Adrien will not be ready.”

Gabriel gritted his teeth. “I’m not going to let him—”

“It is not your choice.”

“It’s not yours either,” Gabriel snapped.

Shaking her head mournfully, she said, “I will give you a week to return the cat miraculous to its rightful wielder. After his exams. How the ring is returned is up to you. You do not even need to reveal it was you who stole it if you do not wish for him to know. If he does not have the ring in one week, then I will tell him what you have done.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

A buzz of anger. “I dare many things, Gabriel. I protect the hive. Even from family.”

“You didn’t protect her.”

Deedee frowned. “Be thankful the cat knows how much Adrien loves you and tempered his rage. I sting, Gabriel. Plagg destroys. Think about that for a moment.”

“Does he know?” Gabriel asked. “Does he know who Papillon is?”

Deedee hesitated in front of Adrien’s door. “I do not believe so.” She looked back at Gabriel over her shoulder. “The day is coming where he will find out. It might be kinder coming from you.” Turning away, she zipped back into Adrien’s room.

"Marinette? C’mon honey, it’s time to get up. You’ll be late for school.”

Marinette moaned and snuggled deeper.

“Breakfast is ready,” Sabine called from the trap door. “And you have a visitor. You might want to get dressed first.”

“Alya?” Marinette mumbled. Shuffling, she pushed her palms flat on the bed and heaved herself up so she was kneeling on the bed. After rubbing her eyes, she stretched her arms over her head and yawned. “Okay. I’m up.”

Scratching her head, she trudged down the stairs of her room and headed straight for the attic door. She didn’t bother getting changed, it was just Alya after all. She didn’t even remember getting in her pyjamas last night, but, as she tugged her shirt down over her belly more, she figured she must’ve. “Morning, Mom.”

Sabine met her at the base of the stairs to her room. “Honey,” she said, grabbing Marinette’s shoulders and spinning her around. “Go get dressed.”
“Huh?”

Sabine’s smile was too big, which was Marinette’s first clue something was going on. Her second was the fact Adrien was sitting on the sofa talking to her father.

Marinette yelped and scrambled back up the stairs. She fell over part way up and had to finish the journey on her hands and knees. Spinning around, she hissed back to her mother. “What is he doing here?”

With a knowing smile, Sabine said, “You tell us. He said he wanted to walk you to school.”

“We live next door to the school.”

“Then he’s interested in something else, isn’t he?” Sabine replied and winked at her. “Anything you want to share?”

With a yelp, Marinette shut the attic door. “Tikki!” she blurted, rushing to her drawers so she could change. “What’s he doing here?”

“Maybe he wants to spend as much time with you as he can. It happens that way, sometimes. The initial rush—”

“Where’s my hairbrush?”

“— of endorphins, the feeling of being with each other—”

“Tikki, I can’t find my shoes.”

“—the first moment of seeing them after you’ve been apart—”

“Ahh!”

Tikki watched in amusement. “Your shirt is inside out.”

“Ahh!”

“Calm down.”

“He’s down there with my parents!” Her imagination ran wild. Surely her father was down there, telling Adrien wild and embarrassing stories about Marinette’s youth. Her mother had to be asking him all sorts of questions, interrogating him about his plans for the future and/or planning their wedding already. It was mortifying.

“And he can probably hear you thumping around like an elephant trying to get ready.”

“Ahh!”

Tikki giggled into her paws, bobbing up and down in the air. “Calm down, Marinette. Deep breath. Everything will be fine.”

Marinette took a deep breath and let it out slowly. She shook out her hands and forced herself to relax. “Sorry.”

“Now, just concentrate. You’re nearly there. You just… need to put both feet in your pants.”
Marinette resisted the urge to look down at herself. “Shuddup.”

Last night had been exciting and nerve-wracking. He’d held her hand while they watched the rest of the Transformers movie, and continued to hold it as they started the second. They’d moved her chaise to the centre of the room so they could watch her computer screen more comfortably, and…

She didn’t remember falling asleep. She didn’t remember getting into bed. She didn’t remember moving the chaise back to its original position. She didn’t remember what part of the movie they’d gotten up to.

She did remember how comfortable his shoulder had been. She remembered how warm she’d felt. She remembered a hand on her hip, an arm around her and a lulling heartbeat.

God, had he carried her to bed?

She scrubbed a hand over her face and hurried to her mirror to put her hair up and clean her teeth.

Once she was ready, and checked over by Tikki to make sure she was presentable, she took another, deep, calming breath and rested her hand on the latch of her door.

So much for taking it slow. As much as she was excited he was here, this early, just so he could spend time with her before school, she hadn’t expected to start the day in such a frenzy. She’d thought she’d have time to mentally prepare herself before seeing him.

Opening the door, she walked down her stairs.

Tom and Sabine sat together on one side of their corner couch, with Adrien on the other. Tom was leaning on his knees, his attention riveted on Adrien, who was waving his arms around as he spoke.

“— and that’s why Link is already dead in Majora’s Mask.”

“Yes,” Tom said, nodding emphatically. “Yes, it all makes sense.”

“The whole game is set about the stages of grief—” Adrien trailed off as he spotted her. Developing a sheepish grin, he said, “Hi Marinette.”

Hunching her shoulders to make herself smaller, she waved. “Hello.”

Sabine bounced to her feet. Flashing Marinette a smile, Sabine headed for the kitchen. “Breakfast’s ready when you are.”

“Sweets,” Tom said to Marinette. “Has Adrien ever told you about his theory on Majora’s Mask? It makes such perfect sense, I don’t know why I didn’t see that before.”

She glanced between her father and Adrien. “Umm… I thought Nino was the one with the outrageous conspiracy theories.”

Adrien shrugged. “I have a few of my own. And it’s not outrageous, there’s heaps of evidence for it all the way through the game.”

“Marinette,” Tom said. “You and me. Speedrun. Tonight. I need to confirm this theory.”

She made an exasperated noise. “Papa, I have study—”

“It shouldn’t take long,” Tom said. “You can do it in about… what was it? Two hours?”
“Two hours?” Adrien blurted, half turning on the sofa to look at her. “I knew you were good at games, but that is amazing!”

She flushed. “The record is about an hour and twenty minutes. And two hours is generous, it’s probably closer to two and a half. I don’t really practice it.”

Tom smiled. “Adrien, are you free? You have to watch and show me where all those clues are.”

Adrien’s face lit up with excitement and she knew she’d do it, just for that look on his face. “I would love to come back and watch that. You wouldn’t mind?”

Tom clapped his hands together and then slapped his knees. “Good. It’s settled.” He got to his feet. “But I must return to the bakery. Duty calls!” He came around behind the sofa to kiss Marinette’s cheek. “Have a good day.”

She bounced and threw her arms around his neck. “Thank you, Papa!” She waited until Tom headed down the stairs before she spun to face Adrien. “What are you doing here?”

He wiped the adoring expression off his face. “I wanted to see you.”

When was she going to stop being so nervous around him? “Oh.”

“I… didn’t expect you to still be sleeping,” he said, running his hand over the back of his neck. “I always thought you rushed in late because you were helping out at the bakery.”

She almost died in embarrassment. “I am… not a morning person.”

“Ahh… Night owl?”

“Yeah.”

“Me too. Well, bit of both. Plus,” he glanced around Marinette to Sabine. “Deedee wanted to talk to Tikki.”

“She’s upstairs—”

Without saying hello, Deedee dove from Adrien’s shirt and phased through the ceiling.

“I guess it was important,” Adrien replied and got to his feet. “I’m sorry if I overstepped any boundaries. I just... I really wanted to see you.” He thrust his hands into his pockets. “Deedee says this will die down. It’s initial rush stuff. So... if I’m...” he flushed and dropped his eyes. “If I’m not respecting your space, let me know.”

“I... I was surprised, that’s all. I don’t mind.”

“Marinette, breakfast,” Sabine called. “Or you’ll be late.”

Marinette held out her hand. “Do you want a croissant?”

He grinned and put his hand in hers. “Love one.”

Marinette tried to ignore how close Adrien sat beside her at breakfast. And the flutters she got when his knee bumped hers. And the smile on his face as he laughed with her mother. And her mother’s smug smile. And when his hand disappeared beneath the counter to brush its knuckles along her leg as he pretended to scratch his knee.
“So,” Sabine drawled, with all the subtly of a brick being hurled through a glass window. “When did you two start dating?”

Marinette choked on a piece of croissant. She fumbled for her glass of water while Adrien looked a mix between alarmed and terrified. “Mom!”

Smiling, Sabine rested her chin on her hand as she watched her daughter turn various colours. “What?”

“We’re not— I mean… I don’t know that we are—” she looked at her hands as she rubbed her fingers together nervously, trying to figure out what to say. “I suppose, technically, um… —”

Sabine smiled. “So, he’s not taking you to lunch? That ‘technically’ classifies as a date.”

Marinette shot Adrien a startled look and he had the grace to look flustered and embarrassed. “I… um… sorry? It… slipped out.”

Marinette did the only thing she could think of to save face. She ran away. “We should go. We’ll be late for school.”

“Will you be home for lunch?” Sabine teased as Marinette rushed upstairs to fetch the kwami and her school bag.

“No,” Marinette called in return, sure the embarrassment couldn’t get any worse. Holding open her bag, she ushered the two sombre kwami into it. “Apparently, I have a date!”

“Marinette,” Tikki whispered. “We need to go to Master Fu’s today.”

“Okay, okay,” Marinette replied, wondering at the sudden rush. “We will.”

“Well, that’s one way to get her to admit it,” Sabine’s voice echoed up from downstairs. “It was nice to see you again, Adrien.”

“Ahh, thank you, Madam Cheng.”

Marinette rushed back downstairs and grabbed Adrien’s elbow, pulling him behind her as she hurried for the door. “Bye Mom! Love you!”

“Bye, honey! Have a nice day.”

Adrien stopped her mid-stairs. “I’m sorry,” he mumbled, disheartened. “I have no experience with this. They asked my plans for today and it slipped out. Was it a secret? Did you not want them to know?”

Smiling up at him from the stair below the one he stood on, Marinette reached out and took his hand. “It’s fine. We don’t really know yet and my parents can be quite devious.”

“Lies and slander!” Tom called through the open door at the back of the bakery.

Marinette’s constant blush became a shade of red she hadn’t experienced before. “Papa!”

“That’s my name, don’t wear it out.”

Curling his fingers around hers, Adrien chuckled and hunched over so he was closer to her. In a
hushed, yet dramatic voice, he said, “I think they like embarrassing you.”

“They do it so well,” Marinette replied, using the same tone. “Been training for years in preparation.” She squeezed his fingers and dropped the play. “I don’t mind that they wrangled it out of you. We were going to tell them some stage, right? Once we figured things out. This gets the teasing out of the way. Plus, you already scored yourself a second invite.”

That seemed to please him. “I did, didn’t I? That’s a good thing, right?”

She nodded. “Hard work is done. Don’t worry, handsome boy, they like you.” She didn’t know why she did it, but she bopped him on the nose. Adrien went cross-eyed trying to watch her finger. His nose twitched like a rabbit and Marinette thought it was adorable.

As she dropped her hand away from his face, Adrien’s face followed her hand. He stepped down so he was on the same step as Marinette and she saw his eyes flick down to her lips before they came back up to her eyes. “You think I’m handsome?”

Her stomach flooded with nerves, her face felt hot and her hand went clammy, but she couldn’t tell if that was him or her.

“Because I think you’re purr-fect.”

Her mouth went dry.

He sidled closer. “Marinette,” he said and his voice squeaked mid-way through her name.

The squeak felt like it jolted straight through her. She was trapped in his eyes, helpless against his gaze. She couldn’t determine if she wanted to lick her lips or giggle uncontrollably.

Adrien stopped. Blinked. Then laughed at himself. Smoothing out the hair at the back of his neck with his free hand, he said, “Wow, that was suave.”

Marinette settled on a nervous twitter.

He smiled, and the hand on his neck travelled to hers. “Deedee’s probably going to sting me for this, but would it be—”

“Well, well, well.”

Adrien froze and Marinette felt faint.

“Looks like the dreaded hand-holding akuma has struck again,” Alya said, grinning at them from where she stood in the open front door. “Nino, you owe me ten euros.”

“Aww, man,” Nino complained, digging around in his pocket. “Couldn’t you have waited until tomorrow at least? I would’ve won then.”

Chapter End Notes

Animation of Deedee kicking Gabriel's ass, by Australet789
What's a bee-line?

Chapter Summary

What's a bee-line?
The shortest distance between two buzz-stops!

Chapter Notes

I’d just like to thank everyone who’s reviewed, faved, bookmarked, or left kudos. Its really fantastic how well received this story has been and I’m grateful to everyone who is joining me on this journey!

Gigglezteehee has done another wonderful drawing for Sting! Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Geeze, Agreste, keeping it in the friends’ group or what?”

Adrien rolled his eyes at Kim and pulled his gym shoes out of the locker. He sat on the bench beside the lockers and slipped his orange sneakers off.

“You two planned this, didn’t you?” Kim continued, gesturing between Nino and Adrien. “Both getting girlfriends, both within a day of each other. Best friends too, just like you two. Do you have to do everything together?”

“It does seem planned,” Max added. He stroked his chin and nodded. “Although, statistically, friendship groups do have the most pairings. It’s not uncommon for matches to occur within them.”

“Somehow I doubt the girls are getting this same interrogation,” Nino muttered to Adrien.

“Probably not,” Adrien agreed.

“Are you trying to put the rest of us to shame?” Kim continued. “The two dorkiest guys in the class, getting girlfriends before the rest of us.”

“No,” Adrien said, tying his shoelace. “Just you. Ivan’s been with Mylène all year.”

“Ivan’s not a dork.”

“Well, you got us there,” Nino said. Planting his feet back on the floor, Nino stood and stretched his arms over his head to warm up. “Dude, you’re jealous.”

“It’s the principle of the thing!” Kim said. “We’ve got lycée soon, why are you getting girlfriends now when you could go for lycée girls?”

Straightening from his hunch over his feet, Adrien gave Kim a flat stare. “Really?”

“Ahh, Kim,” Max said. “Hate to hash up your logic there, but Alya and Marinette will be lycée
Girls."

Nino slammed his locker shut and laughed. “Yeah, dude, we’ll have a head start on you. Plus, we get all summer break to be with them.”

“So what?” Kim asked.


Adrien blinked. Marinette in a bikini. A red polka-dot one. Would she wear one? How soon could he convince her to go swimming with him?

“Yup,” Nino said and rubbed his hands together. “Woe is me. I totally should’ve waited until lycée.”

Kim narrowed his eyes. “You’re an ass.”

“I’m not one to brag,” Nino said and jabbed both thumbs at his chest. “But this ass has a girlfriend.”

Pulling a disgruntled face, Kim walked toward the exit. “I’m going to beat the pants off you on the court.”

“Should I be worried you’re stuck on my pants?” Nino called and held out his fist to Adrien to bump.

One of the other boys in their year headed to the door with his friend and side-eyed Adrien as he went. “Did you see the look on Lena’s face when he walked in holding Marinette’s hand? Man, I thought she was going to freak out right then. So many girls after him, it’s completely unfair.”

Curious, Adrien asked Nino, “Who’s Lena?”

Nino stared at him then shook his head. “Dude, you are so oblivious sometimes. She’s in Quatrième.”

Adrien gave him a blank look.

“Leader of your fanclub? She’s the one who tries to break into your locker every few weeks to leave heart notes.”

Adrien hadn’t even been aware that had been happening. He hadn’t found anything. Had Plagg been destroying them? “She does? That’s kind of creepy.”

“Dude. WOW. Really?” Nino shook his head and walked for the door. “Seriously, how did you actually figure out Marinette had a massive crush on you?”

Picking his orange sneakers off the ground, Adrien stood and deposited them in his locker. A quick glance at the other guys and he slipped Deedee’s comb from his jacket pocket to the pocket of his basketball pants. There was no way he was going to leave her comb unattended, but it was difficult to wear without it being spotted. Following her comb, Deedee phased through into his pocket.

Another difference between her and Plagg. Plagg would’ve just hung out in his locker until the game was over.

Stepping from the boys’ locker room, Adrien ran straight into Chloé. Hands on her hips, fingers drumming, she looked ready to bite. “You,” she snapped and grabbed his wrist. Yanking him off
balance, she pulled him away from the boys’ room and away from the basketball court. “Come with me.”

Adrien protested, “The guys are waiting.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Huh?”

She pulled up short and spun to face him. Stabbing him in the chest with her finger, she said, “You and Marinette. I’m your best friend and you didn’t tell me. I had to find out through Lena the lurker.”

“Oh. Um… we haven’t really told anyone yet. We’re still… sort of—”

“Is she or is she not your girlfriend?”

“I… I guess?”

Chloé scowled. “You are so clueless. If she is, you own it. You declare it. Don’t give me this wishy-washy ‘I guess’ crap.” Using air quotation marks, she put on a fake tone for ‘I guess’, mocking the way he’d said it.

Affronted, Adrien said, “Yes. She’s my girlfriend.”

Hands on her hips, Chloé narrowed her eyes and pressed her lips into a thin line. Adrien held his ground as Chloé’s fingers began to drum against her hips again and the scowl deepened. “I don’t believe you.”

“She’s my girlfriend,” he repeated. “And you don’t have to believe me if you don’t want to, but she is.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Chloé snapped and rolled her eyes. “The tone. The stance. Geez, Adrien, you know the press will be all over this when they find out. Fix it.”

“Huh?”

“Shoulders back, chest out. Smile. I thought you were good at this.”

“You’re not… angry?”

She was. He could see it on her face, carefully masked behind her abrasive attitude. “You’re an idiot. She’s an idiot. You’re probably all cutesy-cutesy gross together but I have an image to uphold. I am not about to have my best friend looking like a total loser because he can’t wipe the puppy-dog grin from his face long enough to act diplomatic. Sabrina is a better actor than you.” She fussed, straightening his shoulders for him and lifting his chin. “Show some backbone.”

“Chloé…”

“She hurts you, I will kick her ass and make her life miserable for the rest of her days,” Chloé promised. “If she’s your experimental choice, then so be it. Have your cutesy school fun. See if I care.”

He frowned. “She’s more than that. She’s better than that.”

“Fine. Whatever,” Chloé said and waved her hand dismissively. “But the press will eat you alive if you’re not careful. So shape up!”
“Am I just an image to you?” he asked. “A prop?”

“Don’t be stupid,” she muttered. “You’re my friend. I’m supporting you.”

“Strange way of supporting.”

“Oh, give me a break,” she retorted. “This is new to me. No one will ever be good enough for you, Adrien. Accept that.”

“Except you, I suppose.”

He’d meant it to be bitter but Chloé took it another way. “Well, of course. As it should be.”

Adrien fought not to roll his eyes. He understood she was trying to be nice, for his sake, but he was concerned about the havoc Chloé’s ‘niceness’ would cause for Marinette. The two of them really didn’t have the best relationship. Adrien made a mental note to talk to Marinette before the next class. “Right.” Lifting a hand, Adrien tilted it toward the court. “Can I go play now?”


“Yeah. Show some backbone.” Turning away, he walked back toward the court where the rest of the group was splitting into teams to play. It was free period for their year and while Marinette and Alya had opted to head to the library to study, both Nino and Adrien had energy to burn.

“You alright, dude?” Nino asked as Adrien joined him.

“Yeah. Chloé just wanted a word.”

“I’ll guess it was about Marinette.”

“Yeah. She’s trying, in her Chloé way. I probably should tell my father about Marinette, before he finds out some other way.”

Nino let out a low whistle. “I don’t envy you at all.”

“Let’s just play,” Adrien said.

Adrien had always enjoyed basketball. It used to be one of the only times he could interact with people his own age, even if those people had been handpicked by his father and were only there because they were also sons or daughters of prominent people around Paris. He found the rules he’d enjoyed when playing with them had nothing on a pick-up game of basketball at a school. Particularly when Kim was a captain. And on the opposing team. Adrien might’ve had speed and dexterity on his side, but athletic Kim was much taller than the rest of them and used that to his advantage.

With no teacher assigned referee, they had to rely on honest play. And while no one would call Kim a cheat, bending the rules was right up his alley. Calls of obstruction were common as well as penalties for imagined hits. Both teams scores climbed high, their spirits higher and Kim’s layups even higher.

It was even worse since Alix’s ball of competitiveness was on Kim’s team. The two of them were mayhem on the court, a cornucopia of talent no one could deal with. It could’ve been seven vs two and Alix and Kim still would’ve kicked their asses.

Panting, Adrien bent over and clutched his knees as Kim strutted away from the basket and high-
fived Alix. “I swear he’s cheating somehow.”

Nino rested his arm on Adrien’s back and used him as a brace to keep upright. “Probably.”

Wiping his face on his wristband, Adrien muttered, “Whose bright idea was it to sweat this early in the morning?”

“The choice between study and exercise wasn’t a hard one.”

Straightening, Adrien flicked his sweaty hair away from his face. “True.”

“Just be glad the girls aren’t here to watch our crushing defeat.”

“Again, true. We get to embellish later.”

“Absolutely,” Nino said and patted Adrien on the back. “Now, let’s go score a million—”

One side of the glass windows on the second floor of the school shattered, exploding outward and spraying the courtyard with glass. Adrien covered his head with his arms and ducked down to protect himself from the spray of glass. Yelping, Nino hunkered to the ground beside Adrien.

Small, square pieces of smashed glass plunked against his back and scattered across the ground beside him.

“Shit. Shit,” Nino muttered under his breath.

The sudden glass rain subsided. Other than a few minor cuts, no one seemed hurt as they unfurled from their protective crouches. Shoving his hand into his pocket, Adrien reached for the bee comb and stuffed it in his hair, hoping no one would notice.

“Was that the library?” Nino asked, looking up at the second level.

A swarm of students and teachers broke from their classrooms and rushed down the stairs from the second level, running for the exit of the school. Nino and Adrien both pushed their way through, looking for their girls. Glass crunching beneath feet was overshadowed by the sounds of screams and cries of friends’ names.

“Nino!” Alya shrieked. Her sprint hit him dead on in the chest and sent them both staggering. His arms roped around her to hold her steady. “Babe, you okay?”

Alya turned back wildly, looking through the crush of people. “I can’t find Marinette! We were in the library, then there was this green thing and—”

The library doors flew from their hinges and was flung over the balcony railing and Adrien dove for his friends. Arms wove around them and pushed, forcing them as low to the ground as they could without getting cut by the glass on the ground, while Adrien covered them to the best of his ability. The doors crashed to the ground beyond them, away from everyone, much to Adrien’s relief.

The second floor was practically empty now with the swarm of people fleeing for the exit slowing to a trickle. Empty except for the shaggy green monster, with its horned head lowered as it charged at—

“Marinette!”

She didn’t even look at the call of her name. Sprinting along the pathway, away from the stairs, she grabbed one of the support poles at a corner and used it swing herself around. The green monster,
unable to stop, crashed into the wall behind Marinette as she continued to sprint. Glancing down, she threw out a wild arm and shooed them. “Run!”

He knew why she told him to run. It was common sense. Get Alya and Nino to safety. Transform. Come and rescue her. But he was riveted to the spot.

The monster clawed the floor and the wall as it scrambled to its feet chase after her.

It gained rapidly. Even if she was transformed, Adrien thought it would be difficult to outrun. The noise its claws made against the concrete floor sliced down his back and grated in his ears. Drool slopped from its mouth, massive teeth jutting from its gaping jaw. This akuma was dangerous.

“Oh, god, run,” Alya breathed, her fingers clutching her cheeks.

Marinette reached the next turn and leapt for the pole. Instead of using it to get around the corner, she tucked up her feet and used the swing to clear the railing. She fell.

Abandoning Nino and Alya, Adrien broke into a sprint. He’d never reach Marinette in time to catch her, not untransformed and there were still too many people around to risk it. The most he could do was pick her up from her landing and run with her.

Marinette landed hard, expelling a grunt as her feet hit the ground. She tumbled forward, rolling with her hands over her face and Adrien heard the crackle of glass beneath her as she came to rest on her back. Adjusting herself slowly, he heard her small moan of pain as she bent her knees to begin the arduous task of getting to her feet.

Above them, the monster roared in anger and charged for the stairs.

He slid to a stop beside her, careful not to displace any more shattered glass. Ignoring her hand, he scooped her up, hoisting her until she was secure against his chest. Casting a wild glance over his shoulder, he bellowed to Nino, “Run!” then ran the opposite direction. There was an emergency exit at the back of the change rooms. He just had to make it there. The monster was going to come down the stairs between Adrien and Nino and Alya, so Adrien was sure they’d run the other way.

Marinette’s arms looped around his neck and he spotted several small cuts on her bare forearms. Slamming his shoulder into the swinging door of the change room, he propelled through the door.

Marinette watched over his shoulder as he heard the door swing shut. “You’re clear behind.”

And ahead too, as he made a beeline for the emergency exit. Given the vicious nature of this akuma, people had vacated already. “Deedee, fuzz up.”

“Tikki, spots—”

“No!” Tikki yelped. “Shards!”

Deedee’s strength powered into Adrien’s limbs as the transformation wove around him. Increased stamina and endurance, the exhaustion from the basketball game vanished and Bumblebee picked up the pace. He didn’t care that Adrien had entered the change rooms and Bumblebee would exit. The only people that would’ve known Adrien carried Marinette would’ve been Nino and Alya, and they should be running toward the front of the school.

As for the monster, it crashed into the change rooms, ripping and tearing at lockers as it forced its bulk through the narrow pathways to chase them.
“What does she mean shards?” Bumblebee asked, bursting out into the street behind the school. Casting a wild glance around, it was tempting to hightail it home and get behind that massive fence to hide. And the only reason he didn’t was the cameras he knew his father had.

Clusters of people were fleeing away, forewarned by escaping students that something was going on. By the ruckus behind him, the beast was having trouble getting through the door.

Making a decision, it took Bumblebee two bounds to scramble up onto the roof of the three-story building behind the school. “Can you stand?”

“Yes. I think so.”

He gently placed Marinette on the tiles of the roof, keeping one arm around her hips to hold her steady. She hissed, shifting her weight to one leg. He glanced down, trying to see why she’d done that, but she moved the leg out of his sight by lifting an arm covered with small pellets of glass. They’d caught in the folds of her jacket and she brushed them free. “It’s after me.”

The beast struggled with the door, whining and scrambling as it tried to force its way through the narrow exit. It twisted and turned, wriggling as it tried different angles to get through. Green, so very green. Green fur, green claws, flashing green eyes.

Bumblebee said, “Green-eyed monster. Someone’s jealous?”

She made a noise of disgust. “Yeah.”

“Marinette. Shards?”

“I think there’s some glass in my side,” she said and her hand flinched toward her ribs. “If I transform with it in me, the suit’ll go over the top.”

He hissed through his teeth. He took a step forward, so he was lower on the slanted roof, and turned to face her. Without meeting his eyes, she opened her jacket to reveal the bloody tear in her shirt.

“Shit, Marinette, why didn’t you—”

Her fingers trembled as she dug them under the hem of her shirt and lifted it to expose the curve of her waist, stopping at the bottom of her ribs. A piece of glass slashed her skin and wedged, not deep but certainly stuck. Hunkering over, he hesitated.

“I don’t think it can jump,” she said. “The park. Near my home. Lure it in and close the gate.”

“You shouldn’t have jumped, you should’ve waited for—”

A sudden frown. “It’s faster than me. I couldn’t risk being exposed and you were too busy gaping like a fish to come help.” She winced and her fingers dug into his shoulder. “I’m sorry. It hurts. Please?”

“Okay. Okay.” Steeling himself, he gripped the piece of glass between his index and thumb and pulled it out.

Marinette hissed and closed her eyes but not before a pained tear could escape.

He hated that he hurt her. “Marinette—”

Tikki popped her head out of Marinette’s little bag. “Bumblebee, put your hand over her cut.”
“Huh?”

“Just do it. Then her leg.”

He didn’t bother questioning her. Shuffling, Bumblebee said, “Excuse the hands.”

She squeezed his shoulder and smiled. “Don’t worry about it.”

Bumblebee tried not to think too much about what he was doing. It wasn’t necessarily a private spot and he couldn’t really feel her skin with the gloves, but it was still, technically, up her shirt. He pressed his hand to her ribs, apologising when she winced.

There was a small flash of light beneath his hand, much like when he’d summoned Deedee’s wax structure to contain the akuma. Marinette flinched away from his touch with a small whimper and Bumblebee murmured an apology.

“That’ll hold it,” Tikki advised. “You’ll just have to be careful until we get a cure done.”

Taking his hand away, Bumblebee saw a small wax structure covering where the glass had cut her. “That’s pretty cool.”

“Deedee is a healer—”

A roar from below them as the beast continued to wriggle through the door. It gouged the pavement around it, ripping up stone and brick as it squeezed through the door. It had its shoulders through and was trying to wriggle its hips through. Cracks were appearing on the wall above the door.

“It’s not smart,” Bumblebee said, dropping down so he could wax-patch Marinette’s leg too. The cut was bleeding more freely than the one on her chest, but he couldn’t see any glass in it. Wrapping his hand over the top, he kept his attention half on the beast.

“Do not let appearances deceive you,” Tikki advised. “Jealously might make it blind, but the rage will give it clear thought.”

“You sure it’s after you?” Bumblebee asked as Deedee provided the wax to stop the bleeding.

“Pretty sure.”

He flashed her a grin. “Then let’s make it run.”

“I can transform.”

“Yup,” he said, standing and scooping her up again, making sure the cut side was away from his chest so he didn’t bump it. “The suit won’t help your leg and there are too many people around. Let’s bait it away from all these people. Get some distance.”

She looped her arms around his neck. “I’m not sure if my boyfriend would approve of you using me as bait.”

“He doesn’t,” Bumblebee said and leapt from the roof. He landed with ease in the middle of the street and smirked at the akuma, adjusting Marinette in his arms. “But he’s thrilled that you called him that.”

The beast instantly roared and writhed and busted through the doorway. Half the wall came with it, the frame of the door still stuck around the beast’s waist.
Bumblebee bolted.

With Marinette keeping tabs on the beast chasing them, he was free to concentrate on his path and chose one with the least amount of people or obstacles in the way. Marinette’s idea of the park had been a good one but it was too close to the school and, by extension, Alya and Nino.

Bumblebee had a larger arena in mind. The stadium that the school used was close. Lots of space for the beast to rampage and large overhanging roofs so Marinette could yo-yo out of the way. Convenient places to ‘stash’ her so Ladybug could come and play.

Marinette shifted her chin on his shoulder. “Stadium?”

“Yup.”

“Nice idea.”

Tucking up his feet, he leapt, then bounced off the top of a car, before sliding around a corner.

“Thank you.”

Crashes and grinding noises from behind them. “Mike Wazowski’s gaining.”

Bumblebee snorted. “Looks more like Sully.”

“With horns.” Her arms tightened around his neck. “CAR! Dodge right!”

He changed direction, banking hard to the right and a small two-door car came crashing down in the path they’d been on a moment before. “I miss my baton,” he muttered and leapt for the roof of one of the neighbouring buildings to try and stay ahead of the beast.

“I miss the ears,” she murmured, then gasped. “Leap over opposite. Can’t jump but Envy can climb.”

Bumblebee followed her instruction, leaping across the street. He risked a glance behind him, seeing ‘Envy’ clawing its way up the side of the building he’d just vacated. It was closer than he would’ve liked.

“Such a mess,” Marinette said.

“Nearly there.” Two more large bee-leaps to put some distance between him and Envy, then he touched down outside the stadium and sprinted inside. Boots and rapid breathing echoed through the empty tunnel to the stadium oval, which was empty, to his relief. Reaching the oval, he spun and jumped straight up into the stands above the tunnel.

“No wings,” Marinette mused, her hand running over his shoulder blades. “But you sure can fly.”

He laughed. Skidding to a halt, he placed her carefully back on the ground in the secluded stands.

Calling on Tikki, Marinette spotted-on to become Ladybug. He watched her test the strength in her cut leg and grimaced.

“No good?”

She tried to smile and failed. “I won’t be running marathons.”

“Can I convince you to stay up here and leave it to me?”

“You know how hard it was for you to watch me fight?”
“Yeah?”

“Turnabout is fair play.”

He blinked. He had expected her to argue. “Really?”

Her smile gave him her answer. “I’ll provide ranged support. Lucky charm!” A large piece of red cloth with black spots fell into her hands. “Well. A dashing cape, perhaps?” she asked, swinging it around her shoulders and bunching it up at her neck as she modelled it for him. “How do I look?”

“Nope!” Laughing, Bumblebee took it from her and spread it out, holding it by his hip. His boots clicked together as he stood at attention and shook the cape. “I always wanted to be a matador.”

“Oh, this is a brilliant idea,” she muttered. “If you get hurt—”

He ran a finger along her cheek, enjoying the way her words died in her throat. Giving her his best smile, he teased, “Do I get a kiss for luck?”

He’d laid the charm on too thick, it seemed. Ladybug’s mouth dropped open to gape at him and then she went crimson. She made an elongated single syllable noise and squeaked.

Bumblebee hesitated. Was she considering that? He hadn’t expected that she might. He was more used to her rolling her eyes at him, pushing him away by the nose and calling him a silly kitty. What should he do?

Then again, things were changing between them. They’d already had one close call. Maybe she wouldn’t—

Envy roared and crashed below them, skittering through the tunnel and dashing any thought of following through with his tease.

Breaking her stare, Ladybug’s step back seemed shaky. “Defeat the akuma, then we’ll talk.”

“Really?”

“Shoo.”

Ladybug ducked down behind a folded seat to conceal her presence and Bumblebee ran back to the tunnel just as Envy burst into the stadium. With a grin, Bumblebee launched himself from above the tunnel and landed on Envy’s shaggy back. He doubted sting would work on something this size, but it’d slow Envy down long enough for him to find the akuma item hidden somewhere in all the fur.

Running along Envy’s back as it twisted and turned trying to buck him off, Bumblebee sprang boarded off its head. Flipping in the air, he landed a distance away from Envy and turned back to face it. “Looking a little green there.”

“Where is that little bitch?”

So, maybe enticing Envy to charge at him like a bull wouldn’t work. There was intelligence lurking in the envious eyes. “Safe and hidden, you’ll never find her and I’ll thank you never to call her that again.”

“She stole him from me!”

“A person isn’t an object which can be stolen,” Bumblebee countered, looking at the cloth. Not a
matador cape, but perhaps… “A person makes their own choices and you have no right to interfere or impose your wants over theirs.”

“She has no right to Adrien!”

“She has every right because he loves her,” Bumblebee snapped. Another one. Another one in love with a face, a name, a reputation. Another one who didn’t look beyond to the person. Which one this time? Who? Did he even know about them? Or did they feel so entitled to him even though he hadn’t been aware of their existence?

“He will love me!”

There was no reasoning with akuma. They were completely bound by whatever reasons they were akumatised in the first place. Sure, an akuma was an extreme version of a person, in a way, but there had to be those thoughts lurking in a person for them to exist in an akuma. “You are completely blind,” he muttered. “Aren’t you supposed to demand my miraculous?”

Envy let out a huffing sort of laughter. “He doesn’t want yours.”

Bumblebee raised an eyebrow, then chuckled. He spread his hands, folding the cloth so it was a large triangle, then took the two corners of the hypotenuse and wrapped them around his hands. “Alright then.”

Envy leapt for Bumblebee, then flopped flat on its belly. It slid backward, clawing the ground. Looking beyond Envy, he saw Ladybug with her yo-yo tightly wound around the Envy’s back legs. She heaved and kept Envy still for him. Flashing him a smile, she yelled, “Go!”

Bumblebee leapt for Envy’s writhing head. It flicked it around as hard as it could, trying to dislodge him. Legs hooked around Envy’s neck added extra hold as Bumblebee clutched the shag and wrestled the cloth across Envy’s eyes. It took him a few tries and a lot of near dislodges before he managed to tie the cloth. Snatching his hammer from his hip, he plunged the stinger into Envy’s body. “Sting!”

Envy went rigid and tilted. By the twitching, sting wouldn’t hold it long. Knees tight and ankles crossed beneath Envy’s neck, Bumblebee threw his body to the side. Planting his hands on the grass, he hoisted Envy into the air and tossed it, copying a wrestling move he’d seen. The poor beast roared as it flew through the air.

Ladybug’s yo-yo retracted, then slashed through the air. Envy landed on its shaggy back, hogtied and blindfolded.

Bumblebee leapt to his feet and punched the air with both fists. “I bet that stung!”


“Right! Sorry!” he called back and hurried over to Envy’s side.

Envy growled low in its throat, its limbs twitching as it tried to wriggle free of the yo-yo and its head turning from side to side as it tried to listen for him. Bumblebee’s eyes searched it, looking for something out of place. A piece of jewellery. An item. Something which didn’t belong on this shaggy green beast.

“I can’t see it!”

Her yo-yo taut, Ladybug sat on the edge of the tunnel and let herself drop down to the stadium
ground, landing on one leg. “Lena has a silver ring on her right hand.”

Bumblebee blinked, then wrinkled his nose. A silver ring. A silver ring he was willing to bet was similar to the silver ring Adrien normally wore. Lena, the apparent leader of the Adrien fan club. Scrambling up the side of Envy, Bumblebee peered at the claws, spotting a ring wedged on one of the claws.

Pulling it off, he yanked the blindfold off on the way down Envy’s furry chest. A glance at Ladybug saw that she was recalling her yo-yo, ready to catch the butterfly and he snapped the ring.

Returning to Ladybug’s side as she released the purified butterfly, he handed her the blindfold so she could heal and cure everything. Throwing the item high into the air, she made her call and her friendly ladybugs zoomed around her. The relief on her face was clear as she redistributed her weight evenly on her legs and twisted her torso.

He asked, “All good?”

“Yes. Thankfully.”

A puff of breath whooshed out of him. “That’s a relief.”

With a smile, she extended her fist to him. “Nice work.”

Grinning, he bumped his fists against hers, then opened his hand and rested his fingers on the back of hers. She blinked at him, relaxing and lifting her hand so they could thread their fingers together. Her eyes flicked behind him and she jerked her hand away as though he’d stung her.

Bumblebee spun, then took a few rapid steps backward, heat flooding his face. “Oops.”

Ladybug sounded choked as she spoke. “I don’t think she saw.”

“Ladybug!” Alya blurted, running straight for them. Beyond her, Nino was still running through the tunnel. Alya pulled up short near them, planting her hands on her knees as she panted. She pulled herself up and blurted, “Where’s Marinette? I have reports Bumblebee was carrying her!”

“Safe,” Ladybug said, glancing at the bewildered Lena sitting on the grass. “We hid her since the akuma seemed to be after her.”

“What about Adrien?” Alya said, looking around wildly. “Shouldn’t he be here too?”

“He’s probably hiding,” Ladybug said.

“Adrien?” Lena asked, drawn to the conversation. She ran her fingers through her hair to groom it. “Adrien Agreste? He’s here?”

Bumblebee looked at Lena. “Yeah, he got here pretty quick after me and I told him where I was taking Marinette.”

“What?” Lena blurted and pulled a disgruntled face. “She’s here too? Why is she here?” The disgust in her voice was clear.

“Excuse me?” Alya said, affronted as she turned on Lena. “What’s with that tone?”

Lena didn’t seem to recognise who she was speaking to. “She waltzed into school, flaunting the fact she stole Adrien away from—”
“Stole?” Alya said, her tone carefully controlled. Her hands planted on her hips as she focussed her ire on Lena.

“He’s perfect,” Lena said. “And she’s—”

“Not?” Bumblebee snarled, clenching his hands into fists. “You don’t know anything about her. Or him.”

Lena’s head swivelled to him and she gaped at his expression. Alya’s hand slipped from her hips in surprise.

Bumblebee gritted his teeth, glancing at Ladybug to judge her reaction. She stared at a spot on the ground a short distance away and didn’t say anything. “You can’t take people’s choices away from them,” Bumblebee said, making no attempt to keep the bite from his voice. “You don’t own him and Marinette didn’t steal him. Given how quickly he got here chasing me, he’s very fond of her and I bet he wouldn’t appreciate hearing what you said.”


“You can’t make someone love you, Lena.”

A miraculous beeped and Ladybug stepped back. “We should go.”

Nodding, he turned away and the pair of them ran toward the opposite end of the stadium.

“Wait,” Alya called, frantically trying to keep their attention. “Can I ask a few questions—”

Together, Ladybug and Bumblebee bounced up the stadium seats and leapt for the roof. They paused, looking back down into the stadium. Flicking his eyes to Lena, he ran his hand through his hair and touched the bee comb. Alya looked like she was giving Lena a piece of her mind. “I don’t like people who think like that.”

Ladybug flinched. “Oh.”

Turning his back, he ran down the sides of the stadium roof and dropped down to the ground. Still angry, Bumblebee stalked through one of the empty tunnels, looking for a place to de-transform. There were multiple ways into the stadium and given that it was empty, the chances of the change rooms being empty as well was high. “I knew I had fans but she barely knows me. She knows what’s written in those magazines, not me, and she thinks she’s entitled to dictate who I’m with? That’s not right.”

Ladybug followed him at a more sedate pace, head down, shoulders hunched.

Bumblebee held open the door for her. “How can someone be so angry over who dates who they get akumatised over it?”

Ladybug stopped in the centre of the change rooms and kept her back to Bumblebee. “People have been akumatised for less.” She turned and sat on one of the benches in the room. “Papillon preys on moments of weakness, we can’t blame them for what they say during it.”

He huffed. “And yet, she still seemed to believe she had a right to me after we freed her.”

“Adrien—”

“How many?”
In a small voice, Ladybug asked, “How many what?”

“How many people are angry at you because of me?”

Clutching the edge of the bench, Ladybug’s eyes were fixed on the floor. “It’s… easier than you think to obsess over a person.”

He blinked. Tilting his head, he noticed how she was curling in on herself, trying not to be noticed. “Marinette?”

She couldn’t meet his gaze. “I have a box. In my room. A box of magazine clippings and articles about you. Up until Friday, I had them all over my walls.”

He wondered what she was getting at. “And I have a load of Ladybug paraphernalia in my room. But if you choose someone other than me, I would’ve accepted it and supported you.” He hesitated. “Wouldn’t you have done the same?”

“I tried,” she said, hunching her shoulders. “I put everything away and I wanted to support you.” She lifted her legs off the floor and hugged them to her chest. “I followed you around on Thursday,” she admitted. “I was so angry about the lies Lila was telling about Ladybug, the lies I thought you were believing.”

He nodded. “You hate liars. I know.”

“There was a really tiny part of me that wanted to mess things up between you, too. I wanted to keep her away from you. Then I trapped her in a lie and I was so smug about it and I showed off and put her in her place and…and…you scolded me for being so harsh. I was so caught up in exposing her, embarrassing her in front of you… I went overboard and I didn’t like who I’d become.” She shook her head. “I realised I didn’t want to be that girl. When I thought you were dating her… it was your choice to be with her. I couldn’t interfere. Yes, she might’ve been a liar but if she’s who you liked… then I was going to accept it and be the best friend I could. I took down all your pictures and I focused on finding Chat and—”

Bumblebee swallowed. “So Chat was a rebound?”

Her head snapped up and she looked horrified at the suggestion. “No! No, of course not. I would never—” she cringed. “I literally thought I couldn’t let you become a rebound! I was going to take my time exploring what I felt for you, because I knew, if it wasn’t for you-you, then it would’ve been Chat-you and… I wasn’t even going to mention anything until I sorted myself out! I swear! And then Bee-you comes along and I’m so stupid about it all and say things I don’t mean and—”

She gasped and covered her mouth with her hands. “The messages.”

“Huh?”

She cringed again and flushed. Curling her fingers away from her mouth, she left her hands on her chin. “I…the kind of left a lot of messages on your baton. Some of them… were a little more open than I meant, but I was worried.”

His lips quirked up. “I look forward to listening to them.”

She moaned and ducked her head, hiding her face in her knees. “Oh, god.”

Crossing to her, he crouched down by her and put his hand on her foot to get her attention. “What was the first concert I went to?”
“Jagged Stone,” she responded, peeking up at him in confusion. “I was there. You sang along with all the songs and went overboard buying t-shirts for all of us. I wear mine to bed sometimes.”

That made him smile. “Who’s my favourite teacher?”

“Madame Bustier,” she said. “Your favourite class is physics though, but you don’t like Mendeleiev much. Your nose scrunches up when she talks sometimes.”

He hadn’t realised that. “What’s my favourite ice-cream?”

“It was strawberry, but you had honeycomb at that little parlour around the corner from school and you have it every time we go there. Why are you asking me this?”

“Trying to prove a point. What’s my favourite baked sweet?”

“Chocolate chip cookies, but you’re also partial to macarons and eclairs.”

“How bad am I at Twister?”

She flushed. “You were pretty good.”

“What’s my favourite computer game?”

She hesitated. “I don’t know. Mecha Strike?”

“Not even close.”

She dropped her eyes, embarrassed. “Sorry.”

“That’s a good thing. It’ll be more exciting to learn when we don’t know things.”

She looked confused.

“You might’ve had my picture on the wall,” he said. “But you still made an effort to know me.” He lifted his hand so it rested on her knee. “Jealousy is a normal, human emotion, and I don’t fault you for feeling it, but, c’mon, cut yourself some slack. You knew Lila was a liar, you had proof of that. Of course you wouldn’t have wanted me to be with her. Nino wouldn’t have wanted it.”

“Oh.”

“Yet, you accepted who I’m with is my choice. Lena got turned into an akuma over it and she still can’t see she’s wrong.” He leant forward. “You’re not Lena. You might have extra knowledge because of the magazines, but you recognise those magazines aren’t me.”

“Oh.”

“And, I have all sorts of Ladybug merchandise. Do you fault me for that?”

“No. Of course no.” She met his gaze for a fraction of a second. “I have several Chat Noir items.”

“And we made Bumblebee together.”

She smiled and met his eyes properly. “Yes.”

“And I seem to recall you have a bunch of Jagged Stone merchandise too. It’s okay that you had my picture on your wall. I don’t mind.”
“I’m being silly, aren’t I?”

“Yes.” He booped her nose. “You are.”

She dropped her knees to the floor and hunched forward, her hands gripping the sides of the bench. “This is all… so new and sudden and I don’t know what I’m doing.”

Moving so he knelt between her knees instead of crouching, he assured her, “I don’t know either. We can work it out together.”

Lifting her hand, her fingers brushed his chest, then removed to hover above like she didn’t deserve to touch him. Curling his hand over hers, he pressed it to his chest. Her earrings beeped, reminding her of impending de-transformation, and she closed her eyes to release it. Tikki tiredly descended toward Marinette’s bag without saying anything.

He smiled at her and released his as well. Deedee zipped around them both before buzzing down into Marinette’s purse to curl up with Tikki.

Marinette sucked in a breath and went red. Her hand clenched on his chest, gripping a handful of his shirt.

“What?” Adrien asked, startled.

Her eyes roamed around everything in the room except him. She pulled her hand free so she could tuck both of her hands beneath her knees. Rocking, she babbled, “Ahh. Sorry, I wasn’t expecting— I mean—it’s totally unfair— basketball uniform— dammit arms should not make me this flustered what’s gotten into me?”

He hadn’t heard Marinette flounder in quite a long time and it was hard to make sense of her words. He took a moment to process her embarrassment and shy glances and realised it was the basketball shirt causing her dilemma. As much as he wore a skin tight suit, it was apparently different to be confronted with a naked area he normally wore clothes on. Even if it was his arms of all things. A bare shoulder, how shameless.

But then… maybe he’d have the same reaction to her, in say… a bikini.

He could tease her, he knew that. He could flex and pose and pun and invite her to touch but he felt that perhaps a little understanding would suit this moment better. Punning and teasing could come later, when they were more comfortable with what was occurring between them. Deedee was right. Change was hard. Slow was better.

“Hey,” he said, keeping his voice soft. He ducked his head and kept his eyes on hers, hoping to draw her gaze to his face. “It’s okay. I don’t mind if you look at me.”

She caught her bottom lip between her teeth and tried to make a joke of it. “The great Ladybug, undone by biceps. Don’t tell Papillon.”

He tugged her wrist, coaxing her hand out from beneath her knee. “He might send an arm-y after you.”

She laughed and it was a delightful sound. “Oh gosh.”

Standing, he pulled her to her feet. “They’re pretty amazing biceps. Even he might fall under their sway.”
She snorted. “Well, you’re certainly not modest.”

“Hey, it takes a lot of work to look this good. I like being appreciated, especially by you.”

She kept moving forward. Her arms looped around his waist and she snuggled into his chest. “They’re good arms.”

“All the better to hold you with, my dear,” he teased. Heart picking up its pace, he returned her impromptu hug with enthusiasm. Getting hugs was probably the best part of this.

“Thank you for being so understanding.”

“This is new for both of us,” he said. “And I think we should—we should talk. There’s going to be issues and we should be smart about things. We need to be on the same page.”

“Like if Ladybug and Bumblebee are overly flirty or affectionate, it might cause trouble for Chat when he comes back.”

Adrien cringed. “Yeah. Like that. I’ve been so naive about all this, really, and excited and not thinking straight about how we’d handle things, especially what other people might think and that put you in danger and maybe it would be better if—”

A hand curled around his arm as she rose up on her toes, then soft lips brushed against his cheek. Words died in his throat and Adrien froze, completely focussing on the feel of her lips on his skin. How could something so innocent feel so amazing? If he turned his head, his lips could brush against hers.

Her breath warmed his face as she exhaled and drew back and he found himself following her. Not much, but enough to bring their faces closer. She blinked open her eyes and smiled at him. He found his gaze drawn down to her lips, then back up again to judge her reaction.

“Marinette! Adrien!” Alya’s voice echoed down the tunnel and into the change room they hid in. “Are you down this one?”

“Say no,” he mumbled. “Just say no—”

Nino’s yell was next, “Adrien? Marinette?”

Marinette sighed. With a mournful noise, Adrien released her so they could go find their friends.

Chapter End Notes

I maaaay have butchered French school culture a little there, I’m unsure, because the research I did seems to suggest different schools have different rules. A lot of schools have a free period for studying and some schools even forego the classes in the last week before exams so that students can study and use teachers as resources. And some of the sites were in French, so it’s difficult. So, creative licence? They had free time, they chose to have a game of basketball instead of studying.

Quatrième is the year below the one Adrien and Marinette are in.
How many bees do you need in a bee choir?

Chapter Summary

*How many bees do you need in a bee choir?*
*A hundred!*

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Can’t we go to lunch first and *then* Master Fu’s?” Adrien whined. “I was looking forward to it.”

“I will sting you,” Deedee said from Marinette’s purse. Both kwami peered at the teens through the open lid of her bag. The bag itself, while still hanging from Marinette’s shoulder, had been positioned between Adrien and Marinette as they took the bus to Master Fu’s. They sat up the back so that the only other passenger on the bus didn’t overhear the kwami as they talked.

“It’s important,” Tikki chided. “You have stalled long enough.”

“It’s not my fault I didn’t know him,” Adrien complained. “Why didn’t he reveal himself earlier?”

“Apparently,” Marinette said, clutching the strap of her bag with both hands. “We weren’t ready.”

Adrien scoffed. “No, we were just thrown in blind and left to fend for ourselves.”

She shot him a smile. “I wasn’t the one who went into an akuma battle the first time without getting all the information from my kwami and thought cataclysm could be repeated.”

He grinned in return, able to see she was teasing him. “A mistake that wouldn’t have happened if we’d had a mentor.”

“He’s not a mentor,” Deedee said. “He’s a guardian. There’s a difference.”

“And besides,” Tikki said. “All miraculous wielders begin as you do. It’s a slow learning process.”

“They were testing us,” Marinette told Adrien.

Adrien gaped at her for a moment. “Us?” he said, gesturing between him and Marinette. Looking at Tikki, he asked, “You were?”

“As individuals and how you acted as a partnership,” Tikki confirmed.

“Why?”

“Because we must. The powers Plagg and I can grant, even the ones Deedee bestows, are great. We had to be sure you were the right people for this,” Tikki said. “Before you are taught the full extent.”

“And if we’re not found worthy?” Adrien asked.
“But you have,” Tikki said with a bright smile. “Why worry about that?”

“Ahh, because Plagg disappeared? What if he thinks I’m not worthy?”

“You are,” Deedee assured him.

“Hmm, don’t think I didn’t see that neither of you answered the question, but fine,” Adrien said. “What’s Master Fu like?”

“Enigmatic,” Marinette said. “But… he really wouldn’t tell me much without you there. And when I went to him for help after I couldn’t find you, he didn’t really offer much as a response.”

“He offered me,” Deedee said.

“Yeah, but he didn’t tell me he was going to do that. Warning would’ve been nice.”

“He couldn’t,” Deedee said. “We didn’t know what kind of situation I would be going in to and whether you knowing Bumblebee was coming would put you at risk too. Sometimes it’s better to keep me a secret.”

“There have been cases where we’ve had to keep whoever Deedee protects completely concealed,” Tikki said. “Even from our wielders.”

“Which is why you didn’t tell me,” Marinette said.

“I was waiting on acknowledgement from Deedee. I confirmed it once I knew it was safe for Adrien.”

“Are we going to learn all the secrets?” Adrien asked. “Because something tells me there’s a lot.”

“There are,” Deedee confirmed.

Tikki said, “But we can only give you information concerning yourselves and your powers at this stage.”

Taking note of the street names, Marinette said, “We’re nearly there.”

Adrien nodded. “Okay. But we’re going to lunch together afterward, right?”

“Of course. Although, I suppose where we go depends on how long this conversation goes for,” Marinette replied.

“I don’t care if we go for sandwiches in the park,” he told her.

“That sounds like fun.”

He bounced in his seat. “Can we take the bus?”

Marinette smiled at his eagerness. “If you like.”

He grinned at her and ducked his head. “Sorry. I know it’s kind of dorky to be this excited about a bus ride, but it’s my first.”

“I don’t mind,” she replied. “It’s nice to see you experiencing new things. That’s why you came to school, isn’t it?”
“That and to make friends.”

She closed her bag, hiding the two kwami and scooted over closer to Adrien, nudging him. “This is our stop.”

Adrien bounced out of his chair and let her go first down the aisle to the front of the bus. Following her off, Adrien fell into step beside her as they wandered down the one-way cobblestone street toward Master Fu’s small massage parlour. It was an older part of Paris, the architecture full of swirls and stone statues. He turned, walking backwards for a moment as he studied the rooftops.

“What’s wrong?” Marinette asked.

“I’ve been here before,” he said, turning around to walk beside her again. “As Chat. I got a weird vibe from this whole street and couldn’t get away fast enough.”

“Really? I’ve never been here as Ladybug.” Marinette put her hand on her bag and unclipped it. “Tikki?”

Tikki poked her head out. “Master Fu’s abode is protected by powerful wards. You would never find this place without a kwami’s permission. The unease you would have felt was Plagg warning you to stay away.”

Marinette glanced at Adrien. Tikki was much more forthcoming with information with him here. “I see.”

Tikki said, “He is the guardian. He needs to be protected.”

“Guardian of what?” Adrien asked.

“Guardian of us,” Deedee said. “When we are dormant.”

“Here,” Marinette said and tugged the door. A bell above the door tinkled as it opened. “This is it.”

They stopped in the small foyer. A row of seats sat against the wall and a small coffee table stacked with magazines in the corner. Marinette glanced at the Chinese paper wall separating the waiting room and Fu’s massage room. A sign on the door instructed, ‘Take a seat, someone will be with you momentarily’.

Tikki and Deedee rose out of the bag. “Wait here. We will fetch him,” Deedee said and the pair of them vanished before either Adrien or Marinette could say anything.

“He’s probably with a client,” Marinette said and gestured the seats. “I had to wait last time I was here.”

Adrien flopped into the closest seat. “Do you have any idea what he wants to tell us?”

“No really,” Marinette said, sitting beside him. She clasped her hands together on her knees and crossed her ankles. “I met him, I gave him your book and he told me who he was and that he knew who I was, then said we had to wait for you. Then everything else happened.”

“Ahh.” Adrien sighed. “I wonder what my father was doing with the book anyway.”

“It’s not like we can ask him.”

“No. He’ll know I took it then.” He glanced at Marinette. “Could you read any of it?”
Marinette shook her head. “Tikki really didn’t allow me time to look at it. What I saw I couldn’t read.”

“Hmm. Me either. I assume Master Fu can.” Adrien drummed his fingers against the arm of the chair he sat on.

After watching him for a moment, Marinette asked, “Are you alright?”

He stilled his hands, then rested them in his lap. “Sorry. I guess I’m just anxious.”

“Me too,” she admitted. “It’ll be nice to have some answers that haven’t been kwami-cryptic-sised.”

Adrien laughed. “From what I saw of Master Fu, he’s just as cryptic.”

She giggled. “I guess so.”

Another awkward silence before Adrien said, “I have fencing after school today. Do you think it’ll be okay if I come over after that for the Majora’s Mask speed run?”

She tilted her head at him. “I thought your father cleared your schedule.”

“Non-essential bookings,” Adrien replied. “I still have a photo shoot Thursday afternoon and Sunday morning for line-ups that were too important for me to miss or reschedule. Besides, I like fencing. It’s fun and I’m good at it.”

“Yes. You are.” She bit her lip, then said, “I was on the fence about your skills at first, because I didn’t really see the point.”

His eyes blew wide before a grin spread across his face. Resting both his forearms on the arm of the chair between them, he used them to prop himself up as he leant toward her. “I’m glad you took the lunge. It’s not always a bout how you use the skills, it’s about foiling the competition.”

She laughed. “I yield. This is obviously your forte.”

“Touche.”

She giggled. “I hate to cut this short, but that’s all I have.”

He lifted his hand and offered her a fist bump, which she gratefully accepted. “Shame, I had heaps. You did well for a non-fencer.”

“Thank you.”

The paper-screen door slid open and Master Fu poked his head out. Smiling at them, he slid the door open even more. “Ahh. Chat Noir. Ladybug. Please, come in.”

Adrien bounced up first, offering Marinette a hand to help her stand, or for support, she wasn’t sure. “Hello Master Fu, I’m Adrien.”

“I know,” Master Fu said. He walked across to the glass door which led out into the street and locked it, turning the sign from ‘open’ to ‘closed’. “Adrien Agreste and Marinette Dupain-Cheng. It is good that you are known to each other. We have much to discuss.”

Marinette glanced into the parlour, seeing Deedee, Tikki and Wayzz floating above the massage bed in the middle of the room. Heading into the room, Adrien thrust his hands into his pockets. Marinette clasped her hands behind her back and waited for Master Fu to finishing locking up.
“I guess we were always going to find out about each other,” Adrien said.

Marinette nodded. “Tikki said it was time.” She smiled at him and shrugged at his questioning gaze. “She said I wasn’t allowed to tell anyone and that included you.”

“You weren’t ready,” Tikki said. “And Plagg never enforces that rule, I knew I had to make sure you didn’t reveal yourselves to each other before you became comfortable with your new abilities.”

Adrien laughed. “Yeah, that sounds like Plagg.” Giving Marinette a smile, he said, “Sorry for being pushy.”

“I wanted to tell you.”

“Tea?” Master Fu asked, sliding the door closed. “Coffee? Water? What can I offer?”

“I’m fine, thank you,” Marinette said.

“Answers would be appreciated,” Adrien said.

“Yes, of course,” Master Fu said and gestured the mattress. “Please, have a seat.”

Wayzz zipped forward, floating in front of Adrien as he sat down. “I’m Wayzz.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Adrien said.

Sitting beside Adrien, Marinette cupped her hands around Tikki as she floated down.

“Deedee tells me you have taken to the bee well,” Master Fu said.

Smiling at Deedee, Adrien said, “She’s amazing. Thank you for giving me the opportunity.”

Deedee nuzzled Adrien’s cheek. “You’re amazing.”

“Unfortunately,” Master Fu said, crossing to the cabinet along the far wall, “I can do little to aid or enhance your abilities, Adrien, until such a time Plagg is returned to you. As a replacement kwami, Deedee’s full set of powers is already available to you.” He lifted a book off the cabinet and Marinette saw that it was the miraculous book she had returned to him. “This book details all the kwami that ever were, or ever will be, and details of the powers, should a wielder need it. Would you both please transform?”

Adrien and Marinette looked at each other, then lifted their kwami to do as Master Fu requested.

Master Fu sat on the mattress facing them and placed the book upside down in front of him. Opening it, he flipped through the pages.

So many kwami and transformations, it was hard for Ladybug to keep up. She only caught glimpses of them as Master Fu turned the pages. Bear, peacock, fish, panda, kangaroo, tiger, dog, birds of all sorts, she saw him pass over the turtle kwami, and stop on Chat Noir.

Bumblebee leant forward eagerly.


“Really?” Bumblebee asked, nervous. “Dangerous?”

“You can destroy anything with a single touch,” Master Fu said. “Anything you set your mind to.
Should you press your hand to the ground and concentrate, you could destroy all of Paris.”

Bumblebee sucked in a startled breath. “But I wouldn’t.”

“There is a world of difference between ‘can’ and ‘would’. Can you read anything?” Master Fu asked.

Glancing at the book, Bumblebee shook his head. “No.”

Nodding like he had expected that, Master Fu continued to turn the pages. “The bee kwami,” he said, stopping on Deedee’s page. “Kwami of protection. The true altruistic among us.”

Bumblebee leaned forward. “Deedee. There’re hundreds of her sisters out there.”

Ladybug blinked at the page. She couldn’t read anything on it. How did he know that?

“Why can I read this?” Bumblebee asked, his fingers brushing over the strange lettering. “And I couldn’t read the… Wait… is it tied to transformation?”

“A safeguard,” Master Fu said. “Only a wielder can read, and only those pages permitted by a kwami. To read the cat miraculous page, we need Plagg.”

Bumblebee sighed.

Turning his eyes to Ladybug, Master Fu turned the pages until he reached her page. Ladybug sat forward expectantly.

Then blinked. Some of the text was legible, but a lot was still written in the strange language. “It says, ‘Kwami of creation, bound to the stone of creation. Forged in an earring and granted a matched pair to aid with disguise, the stone grants the wielder all the powers of creation’.”

“All of them?” Bumblebee asked.

“I guess?” Ladybug replied, her eyes hunting the page for clues. “There’s a lot I can’t read.”

Bumblebee gaped. “Really? I could read all of Deedee’s page.”

“You’re not ready to know everything,” Master Fu said. “The bug and the cat miraculous are the two most powerful miraculous. Their full powers will come to you as you grow into them. Miraculous aren’t supposed to be used for evil, but under certain circumstances they are. As you have seen with Nooroo, it depends on who wields them. If the cat and the bug granted their full powers without judging the person wielding them, then the results could be devastating.” Master Fu clasped his hands on his lap. “Plagg and Tikki led me to you. They chose you out of all the possible candidates. They have watched you both as individuals and a team.”

“You cannot hide your true nature from kwami,” Wayzz said. “If you are worthy, you will grow. If you are not, you will stagnate.”

Ladybug hunched her shoulders as she tried to read the pages. “But… there’s so little information there. Am I still not good enough?”

“My lady,” Bumblebee began, set to console her.

One of the passages on the page shimmered and changed. Blinking, Ladybug leaned forward. “Woah.”
“What?” Bumblebee asked.

“It changed!” Unhooking her yo-yo, she studied the script on the page. It indicated the yo-yo was a Rubik’s Cube in a way. A moveable puzzle. A twist here, an adjustment there, twisting and shifting to create something new. If she could follow the instructions to find the right combination of moves, the right assembly…

“What are you doing?”

“It’s like a mechanical puzzle,” she said, concentrating. “Get the right combination and—“

A click and a whirr and the yo-yo changed. A strap appeared, clamping down over her wrist before two shimmering wings ejected from the sides of the yo-yo. As they spun, faster and faster, Ladybug extended her arm so the spinning wings didn’t hit her. Smiling at Bumblebee, she said, “It’s a shield!”

He looked excited for her. “Paw-some!”

She pressed a button on the strap of her wrist and the shield retracted back to a yo-yo. Her eyes fixed back on the page. “There’s other combinations too! And I can split it in half and create two yo-yos if I need it, then make one into a shield and… oh, wings? Really?” Excited, her fingers deftly followed the instructions for that, disengaging the cap of the yo-yo from the rest. She reached back over her shoulder and stuck it to the centre of her back.

The same shimmering wings as she’d seen in the shield burst from her back and buzzed.

“So unfair!”

“You will need to practice flight,” Master Fu said. “As well as the combinations to produce the various weapons and defences so you can do it without thinking about it. And I cannot allow you to take the book with you, so you should practice here until—”

“It’s like a game,” Ladybug said, following the sequence of twists and button presses. “Right combo of buttons and voilà!” She lifted the shield again.

“You are a quick study,” Master Fu said with an approving nod.

“I’m so jealous,” Bumblebee said.

His tone was a mixture of awe and envy and Ladybug glanced at him. He seemed both pleased and disheartened and she saw him rub the finger where Plagg’s ring usually sat. Realising she was showing off, and Bumblebee couldn’t, Ladybug put her yo-yo back together. “If the miraculous are supposed to be used for good, why does Nooroo allow Papillon to do the things he does?”

Master Fu lifted his and allowing them both to see his bracelet. “We wield them.”

“We are bound to our items,” Wayzz said. “He who wields is he who controls. We must obey.”

“You’re joking. Plagg never obeys anyone,” Bumblebee said.

“The only way we can control what our wielders can do is by controlling what they know about us,” Wayzz continued. “Papillon happened upon Nooroo, who we thought was lost when his last wielder died. Only certain people have the capacity to summon a kwami, and while Papillon has the magical ability, he has proven unworthy. Nooroo keeps his full powers from Papillon as it is the only way he can resist. This is why the return of this book is so important. You can surpass him. Otherwise
learning new techniques would have been very difficult. Master,” Wayzz said. “Tikki said it was
time.”

“Time for what?” Ladybug asked.

Master Fu opened the book back on the bee kwami page. “There was a time when bee kwami were
numerous. Bee and ant worked together to keep the rest of the kwami and wielders safe. Many
kwami of all kinds were lost to the Great War, but the devastation would have been greater was it not
for the sacrifices of the bee and ant. There are few bees left, and Deedee is the strongest and most
experienced of them, which is why the Queen assigned her to Tikki and Plagg’s circle.”

“Great War?” Ladybug asked. “Circle?”

Master Fu explained, “The records say the Great War was a time of strife, a plague on our world.
Many objects of power and miraculous stones were lost during this time. Kwami were corrupted or
forced to become something else… it was a dark time and the remnants of the enemy they faced
remains to this day, although they, too, have diminished power.”

“Oh.”

“Afterward, the circles were created out of the survivors. Seven kwami of both complimentary and
opposite powers, with a remaining bee or ant to protect and a reptile as a guardian. Each circle was
carefully planned so that the Great War would never reoccur. Most circles, or hives as Deedee would
call it, contain both strong and support kwami, except for ours. Because of the additional need for
Tikki and Plagg to remain together, our circle is the strongest and therefore comes under the most
attack.”

“Attack by who?” Bumblebee asked.

Master Fu replied, “Ancient magical sects. Cults. People who possess the necessary magic to
summon the kwami but aren’t suited for wielding them and people who think they have the ability,
yet don’t.”

“Who are the other members of our circle?” Ladybug asked.

Wayzz answered, “Kitt, the fox, Ferris, the peacock, and Nooroo, the butterfly.”

“Wait, Nooroo’s in our circle?” Bumblebee blurted, exchanging a surprised glance with Ladybug.

Master Fu nodded. “To control our circle would be to control them all.”

Ladybug pressed, “And you control our circle?”

Master Fu stroked his beard and shook his head. Before they could question him, he said, “Legends
say, if the cat and the bug miraculous were used by the same person, with complete knowledge of
both sets of powers, they could unravel the fabric of the universe and create a new one any way they
wanted to. It is written that the Great War was the last time this occurred and the results were
devastating. We believe this is why Papillon hunts you.”

Ladybug felt her stomach drop. Bumblebee went stark white.

“Ultimate power,” Wayzz said, “is seductive.”

“And you think giving that kind of power, that kind of responsibility to two fifteen-year-olds is a
good idea?” Bumblebee asked, anger lacing every word. One hand clutching his knee, the other
hand swept away to gesture outside. “Somewhere out there is the other half of the most powerful 
weapon in the universe and I lost it.”

Caught up in her own turmoil, Ladybug could only stare at Bumblebee.

Keeping his voice steady, Master Fu said, “Fifteen never used to be considered ‘young’. Your body 
is strong, but you still have time to—”

“I didn’t ask for this,” Bumblebee snapped at Master Fu. “I didn’t want this kind of responsibility. 
All of Paris could crumble at my fingertips? And now the universe could be altered? Maybe it’s a 
good thing I lost him! Maybe he’ll stay lost, then Papillon will never get his hands on this ultimate 
power.”

“Chat,” Ladybug said and stopped. She didn’t know how to help him and he had a right to this 
anger.

“Plagg was stolen,” Wayzz said. “He will be returned.”

“We don’t know that! ‘How’d you like to be a hero, kid’,” Bumblebee ranted. “That’s what he said. 
Nothing about any of this. And maybe if I’d known, I would’ve said no.”

“You can still say no,” Master Fu said, his voice calm and serene. “There are others who have the 
potential in them although none as great as you. If you do not want it, when you find the ring, return 
it to me. I will find another to fight by Ladybug’s side. But ask yourself, could you bear to stand by 
and watch?”

Bumblebee rocked back. His head swivelled to Ladybug and he stared at her.

It was all so surreal. “Adrien’s right,” she said, keeping her eyes on Bumblebee. “We should’ve been 
told this from the beginning. We’ve taken risks with our miraculous and ourselves that we never 
would’ve done had we known. But Adrien,” she stretched out a hand and placed it over the top of 
his, “losing Plagg wasn’t your fault. I know you feel guilty about it. We will find him.”

“I can’t help it,” he said. “I’ve been so wrapped up in…” he hesitated a moment before continuing, 
“That I haven’t been dedicating my time to find him. And now, he’s one-half of this ultimate power 
thing? Maybe it would be better if I don’t find him. Maybe I should stay Bumblebee.”


“Deedee said no one else could use him until they break the bond between me and Plagg.”

“The longer you are without him, the weaker the bond,” Master Fu said. “And there are ways of 
breaking it without your consent.”

Ignoring Master Fu, Ladybug focussed on helping Bumblebee. “I can’t do this without you.”

Dropping his chin, he muttered, “Yes, you could. You’re amazing.”

“Addendum,” she said and squeezed his fingers. “I don’t want to. You and me, Chat. We’re in 
this together,” she continued and let as much confidence as she could ring through her voice.

“We’re going to find Plagg, then we’re going to come back here and study the book together, then 
we’ll take this fight to Papillon and get a member of our circle back. Okay?”

Bumblebee nodded. “Okay.”
Twisting back to Master Fu, Ladybug said, “We should go. You’ve given us a lot to think and talk about and I think we need to take some time to work through that.”

“Of course,” Master Fu said and closed the book. “You know where to find me should you have further questions. But there is one more thing you should know.” He locked his eyes on Ladybug and he smiled. “As creation, when you are ready, this circle is yours to command.”

Ladybug felt the blood drain away from her face and the room tilted.

Her? Command a circle? The most powerful of the kwami? *Her Tikki*? Her responsibility?

Her Tikki whooshed away from her, then came zipping back. “Marinette?”

Marinette shook her head and kept walking.

“Fuzz off.”

“Adrien?” Deedee asked.

Adrien’s footsteps paddled softly behind her. “Just— just give us a minute, okay? Thank you, Master Fu, we appreciate what you told us today.”

Sliding the paper door to the side, she left it open and went for the exit.

For some reason, she couldn’t figure out the lock on the door. It wouldn’t open. It wouldn’t twist. Rattling it, she shoved and pushed and considered kicking the door.

A hand closed over hers. A gentle, tender touch on her back. “Let me,” Adrien murmured.

Her hands flopped by her sides and she looked at him. He seemed as pale and queasy looking as she felt. His lips twitched up, giving her more of a grimace than a smile, and he snapped the lock open and held the door for her.

Marinette walked out into the street and stopped at the edge of the pavement, at a complete loss of what she wanted to do. Adrien stopped beside her, phone in hand.

“There’s a park,” he said after a moment and gestured to their left. “About five minutes walk. Why don’t we go sit for a while?”

“That sounds like a good idea.” They walked in silence and Marinette following his points when she came to a junction in the road and didn’t know where to go. The street changed as she passed by, apartments, the odd car, shopfronts, a flower shop, a corner grocery store and then grass beneath her feet and shade overhead.

Pausing, she looked up and shaded her eyes as she looked through dappled leaves of the large plane tree above them. Wind wafted through the branches, swaying the leaves. It all seemed so silent and yet so noisy. Devoid of urban chatter in favour of nature. Branches creaking, rustling leaves, the
wind through flowers, the squeak of a swing, a chirp of a bird.

In a sweeping move, Marinette removed her bag and folded down, lying on her back in the grass.

Without obstructing her clear view of the plane tree’s leaves, Adrien tilted his head at her. Lifting a hand, she tugged on the ankle of his jeans and invited him to join her on the grass.

Adrien raised his eyebrow, then shucked out of his white jacket and folded it. He plopped his folded shirt on the ground beside her head, then used it as a pillow. “Sorry,” he said, sheepish. “My father will have my head if I get dirt in my hair.”

Aware that both kwami were looking at her through the slit in her purse, she stared up at the tree and said nothing.

Adrien rested his hands on his chest. “How are you doing?”

“I think I ‘noped’ right out of there.” She lifted her hand and made it zoom through the air like it was a rocket.

He laughed. “That’s one way of putting it.”

“Sorry,” she said. “I just… I don’t know how to handle that.”

“Completely don’t blame you. That was really heavy.”

“Marinette?” Tikki ventured. “Are you okay?”

“Nope,” she said.

“Can we help?” Deedee asked.

“Probably not.”

“It helps if you talk,” Deedee said. “We can answer questions.”

“Mmmhmm.”

Snuggled up together, Deedee and Tikki dropped into silence.

Adrien hummed under his breath as he looked up at the tree. He lifted the arm furthest away from Marinette and tucked it under his head. “I’m going to tell my father about us tonight before he finds out some other way. He’s going to want to meet you. Would that be okay?”

Although she appreciated the illusion of small talk, that prospect made her nervous, which was ridiculous since she had just been told the fate of the most powerful circle of kwami would soon be in her incapable hands. “Sure.”

“Chloé seems to think that there might be some media interest in us as well.”

Marinette blinked. Rolling onto her side to face him, she propped her head up on her elbow. “Really?”

“Well, maybe. I’m not too sure, normally the media isn’t really interested in me.”

“You are kidding me, right?” Marinette asked. “The media loves you.”
He flinched a frown. “Really?”

“There’s an article about you every week. Mostly the same thing over and over again, but they are very interested in you.”

He breathed out loudly through his nose. “Nathalie and my father must try to keep that from me.”

“Your face is all over Paris, Adrien. Of course there’ll be media interest.”

“And you don’t mind?”

She picked up a leaf lying on the ground and twirled it in her fingers. “Ladybug helped me get used to that. I mean, I like being anonymous as myself, but I think I can cope with it. They’ll see we’re boring and cute and leave us alone.”

“Hmm… I’ll still talk to my father. Maybe we can head off any interest.”

She nodded. “Okay. Also, just to warn you, there will probably be some people who claim I’m only interested in you because of your name.”

Adrien blinked at her and adjusted his head. “What do you mean?”

She pointed her leaf toward herself. “Aspiring fashion designer.” She pointed it at him. “Hot model son of lead fashion designer in Paris.”

His eyes widened. “Oh.”

“It helps, though, that I already won one of your father’s competitions when you barely knew me. We can use that.”

“You’ve thought this through.”

She stroked the tip of her leaf down his nose. “I have.”

He smiled at her and twitched his nose.

“The thing I’m surprised about is Chloé warned you it would happen. But I suppose I shouldn’t be. She cares about you.”

“I like to think she does.”

Marinette tucked the stem of her leaf in his hair and picked up another one. “Chat, we’re partners.”

“Absolutely.”

That leaf joined its friend in Adrien’s hair. “So… why does our circle have to have a leader?”

Tikki raised her head but said nothing.

He made a considering noise. “I suppose someone has to. You’re a brilliant leader. You call the shots in battle. You come up with the plans.”

“Absolutely.”

Tikki raised her head but said nothing.

He made a considering noise. “I suppose someone has to. You’re a brilliant leader. You call the shots in battle. You come up with the plans.”

Marinette found another leaf. “You come up with your share of plans too.”

He rolled onto his side to face her and propped his head up on his elbow, copying her position. “You’re strong and confident and people rally around you. You’re class president. People look up to
you; I look up to you. You’re inspiring, both in the suit and out.”

She pulled a face at him, even though she was pleased.

“It’s not like you won’t have time to grow into it. Literally two seconds before he said that you told me exactly what was going to happen and I believed every word of it.”

“Oh. I suppose I did.”

“Tikki wouldn’t have chosen you if she didn’t think you could do it.”

“I wouldn’t have,” Tikki said. “Each Ladybug has brought something unique to the transformation, but you all have been incredible people and leaders.”

“Have you ever chosen wrong?” Marinette asked and stuck another leaf in Adrien’s hair by his ear, making this one stand straight up. She plucked a strand of grass next.

“There have been Ladybugs who haven’t reached their full potential,” Tikki admitted. “But I do not believe their choices or mine were wrong.”

Marinette threaded the blade of grass through Adrien’s bangs. “And I suppose that just because you and Plagg wielded together have the ability to rewrite the universe doesn’t mean it’s something we’d actually do.”

“We wouldn’t let it come to that,” Deedee assured her. “Not again.”

“You lost so many of your sisters last time,” Adrien said. “I’m sorry.”

Deedee patted her fuzz and tilted her head so it rested against Tikki’s head. “They are with me, always,” she said. “The hive must survive and while we regret their sacrifice, we are also grateful to them.”

“Can you tell us more about this Great War?”

“No,” Tikki said. “We cannot.”

Adrien and Marinette both looked from each other to Tikki. “What?”

“Why?”

“I can’t tell you that either,” Tikki said, regretful as she wrung her paws.

Deedee said, “We work to make sure it is never repeated and one of the ways we collectively decided to do that was by never allowing anyone to wield both items again. And never telling our wielders about the war in any details.”

Tikki spread her paws and shrugged. “I’m sorry.”

“Why mention the war at all?” Adrien asked. “If you can’t talk about it then—”

“Because you need to know it happened,” Deedee said. “Why there are kwami in the book which do not exist. Why there are hives. Why Tikki and Plagg are so sought after. You need to know those risks so you can be prepared.”

“I suppose.” Marinette turned her attention back to threading Adrien’s hair with grass and leaves.
“Adrien?” Deedee asked.

Adrien watched Marinette’s hand as she toyed with another leaf. “Yes?”

“I promise I will return Plagg to you. You do not need to feel guilty about his loss. It was beyond your control.”

Adrien’s eyes lost a little of their sparkle. “Doesn’t change the fact I do. He was in my care and I lost him.” He frowned. “Are we sure it’s a good idea for both Chat and Ladybug to be active at the same time? Surely it would keep people from coming after us if we pretend the cat miraculous was lost.”

“Sometimes,” Tikki said, “Plagg and I rise separately to ensure just that scenario. But a member of our circle called for help and… and we… we couldn’t answer the last call. We weren’t prepared to lose Nooroo again. People are aware we are both active. Now, it is too late to pretend.”

“I cannot stay with you, Adrien,” Deedee said, mournful. “You are Plagg’s kitten and though you can wield me, you are not truly mine. If the bond between you and Plagg breaks, you will not be able to use me either. I cannot help you reach your potential. Plagg can.”

Adrien closed his eyes. “I know.”

Marinette paused with her fingers in Adrien’s hair.

“That doesn’t mean you will never see me again,” Deedee consoled, floating up to nuzzle against Adrien’s neck. “Either of you can pull me from my comb if you wish to visit me.”

Adrien smiled and patted Deedee’s back. “Good. I don’t like the idea of you being alone.”

Deedee nestled into Adrien’s neck and stayed curled up there. “I am never alone, little honeybee.”

Letting Adrien have a tender moment with his kwami, Marinette picked up another leaf.

Adrien’s eyes went to the leaf, following it again as she stuck it in his hair. “Having fun?”

She smiled at him. “Yes.”

“Okay then.”

“Can’t have you being pristine all the time. No fun in that.”

“Do you want to rub dirt on my face too?”

She paused. “Would you let me?”

He laughed and, cupping his hand around Deedee so she didn’t fall off, he sat up to brush the twigs and leaves from his hair. “We should go to lunch.” He pulled his phone out of his pocket to check the time. “Before school goes back in.”

As much as she wanted to keep lying here and fill his hair with tree products, Marinette nodded. “Probably a good idea. Nino and Alya are going to bug us for information anyway.”

“So we’d better have something to tell them then.”

As it turned out, Nino and Alya were more interested in the stray leaf hidden in the back of Adrien’s hair than Marinette and Adrien’s lunch.
'Plane’ trees are one of the most common trees in Paris. Technically they’re called the London plane tree, but most Parisians apparently just call them ‘plane’ trees. Not a typo, but a type of tree.

Some of the early test screens for Ladybug had a shield, so I like the idea that her yo-yo can be changed into other items to aid her. And give our girl wings already. (yes, yes, I know. Old idea is old.)

I am considering upping the rating to a T simply because there is a scene coming up where a certain thing happens, and Marinette gets a little... um... flustered by it. So, I'm not sure if I'll keep that scene in its entirety as it is at the moment or remove a lot of it and make the full version a deleted scene later. If you watch my tumblr, you might have an inkling to the scene in question. Let me know if you have a problem with me upping the rating, happy to discuss.
A soft knock at the attic door. “Hello, sweetheart, you in here?”

“Oh-huh,” Marinette called around a mouthful of pins. She replaced the seam gauge in its holder and added another pin to the hemline of the shirt she was working on.

“May I come in?”

“Oh-huh.”

“Is that your dad?” Alya said, her face filling Marinette’s computer screen as Alya leant close. She smiled as Tom emerged through the attic door and waved. “Hi Tom!”

“Afternoon Alya,” Tom said, grinning broadly at her. “I’m not interrupting, am I?”

Carefully taking the pins out of her mouth one by one, Marinette stabbed them back into the cushion. “No, we were talking.”

“I was talking,” Alya said. “Marinette was being distracted girl.”

“I wasn’t,” Marinette protested. “I was listening while you collected your thoughts on the new Ladyblog piece you’re writing.” To Tom, she said, “Sometimes Alya just needs to talk it out before she figures out what she wants to write.”

Alya nodded sagely. “It’s true. Marinette’s a good listener.”

Marinette poked her tongue out at Alya.

“I’ll leave you to it,” Alya said, giving Marinette finger guns. “I got this blog in the bag now. Enjoy your games afternoon.”

“Bye Alya!” Marinette replied and fumbled with the piece of fabric she was trying to pin so she could hang up the call. “Talk soon.” Hanging up, Marinette looked at the hem and sighed. It still wasn’t right and she couldn’t make it sit straight.
“Is something troubling you?”

About a million things right now. Normally sewing was therapeutic for her, a time where she didn’t have to think too much. Not like designing where she was matching colours and determining styles. She’d been trying to create an invisible hemline in this shirt since Alya got on Skype with her and had pinned and unpinned it countless times. Caught up in her own thoughts, Alya hadn’t noticed the fact Marinette had been working on the same hem the entire time they’d been talking. Her father had noticed within seconds of being in the same room.

Some things she just couldn’t hide from her parents.

“I’m just not with it this afternoon. I can’t seem to get this seam straight.”

“Mom always says: if something’s not working, take a break and come at it from a different angle.”

“Yeah, I know, but I just want to get this done.”

Tom lumbered over to sit on Marinette’s chaise. “Before Adrien gets here?”

Marinette’s shoulders tensed. Sliding the shirt back on the table, she picked at some lint. “Yeah.”

“You really like him,” Tom noted.

She nodded. “I do. He’s kind and sweet and—I” she sat forward earnestly, but still couldn’t look at her father, “—he’s a really great guy, Papa. Funny and considerate. He’s really great with puns.”

“And he’s a model.”

Bashful, she smiled at the shirt. “Well, he does have that going for him. And he likes me too. It’s just…it’s really weird.”

“Lunch didn’t go well?”

“Lunch was… enlightening.”

Tom wiped his hands on his pants. “Did I do the wrong thing in inviting him over? We don’t have to—”

“No,” she blurted and swivelled to face him. “No, of course not, Papa. It’s just all so new I… feel kind of overwhelmed by it all.”

Not just by Adrien, but by everything she’d discovered at Master Fu’s as well. It was still hard to understand, but the more she and Adrien talked about it, or she and Tikki, the better she felt about the situation. Tikki was right, it would’ve been a lot to spring on them while they learnt about their newfound powers. Even now, when she believed in herself, her kwami and her partner, it was tough. It wasn’t hard to imagine how far she might’ve run from this if she’d found out the very first day.

Marinette continued, “And I know you guys want to know him too. I was… we’re trying to take things slow, that’s all.”

“That’s understandable,” Tom said. “First love, it’s always new and exciting and a bit scary.”

She dropped her eyes and swivelled the chair from side to side. “I don’t know that it’s love.”

Tom’s smile said that he saw right through her. “First boyfriend then. First serious relationship. They’re always scary, daughter-mine, but don’t be afraid of making mistakes. If he’s worth it, he’ll
make them with you.”

Marinette smiled. “Thanks, Papa.”

“Just be sensible too,” Tom warned. “First love can go to your head. There’s a whole… chemical reaction which goes on and… well, don’t change yourself to suit him. You still have hopes and dreams and I would hate to see you give up on that. I don’t want to see you get hurt.”

“I’m not going to change.”

“Yes, you are, of course, you are,” Tom said and gestured to her. “You’re already different. Change is not a bad thing, especially when you become a ‘we’ instead of a ‘me’. Don’t change for him, change because of him.”

“Is there a difference?”

“Oh yes,” Tom said. “I’ve changed because of your mother. She influences me in so many little ways. She inspires me to be better than I am. We’re in this together and you have to make compromises to grow as people and a couple. You, my lovely, throw yourself whole-heartedly into a situation or an idea and I have a feeling Adrien is really something special to you. All I’m saying is —”

“Don’t be a Meredith.”

Tom closed his mouth then nodded solemnly.

Thoughts of Meredith saddened her, but it was a good lesson. “Papa, it’s really, really early days yet. It’s too soon to be worried about me like that.”

Tom held up his hands. “I know, I know. Forgive an old man for worrying.”

“I’ll be smart, I promise.”

Tom patted his knees with both hands and stood. “I’ll leave you to your pin monster. We’ll send Adrien up to rescue you when he gets here.”

“Thank you,” she chirped at him and picked up the shirt again. “He shouldn’t be too much longer, I don’t think.”

Kissing the top of her head, Tom said, “I love you.”

She tilted her head back to smile at him. “I love you too, Papa!”

After Tom lumbered down the stairs, Tikki poked her head out of Marinette’s yarn basket. “Who’s Meredith? You’ve never mentioned her before.”

Marinette sighed. “Meredith and I were friends through école. We were pretty close, like Alya and I close. But when we got to collège, she changed. She hit puberty sooner than I did and I guess she tried to grow up too fast. She started hanging around older students out of class, saying I was into silly, girly things like pink and sewing dolls. She started dressing in black and lace and reciting poetry.”

“Like Juleka?” Tikki asked.

Marinette shook her head. “No. Juleka has always dressed that way. The only thing Juleka’s
changed over the last few years is that she dyes her hair purple now. She dresses that way because she likes it, not because it’s ‘grown up’ or ‘trendy’ or ‘deep’. Juleka doesn’t push her style on other people. She just is, and that’s wonderful.”

“I see.”

“Then in 5e, Meredith got a boyfriend in 3e and devoted every second to him. She neglected me, she neglected all her older friends. She said he was everything she needed. He wasn’t… he wasn’t nice. I found him creepy and the things he said to me… She didn’t believe me and then… well.” Marinette sighed. “Then she did and her parents sent her to a different school.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Mom says; being a teenager is all about finding yourself and trying out new things. Sometimes you take things too far and sometimes you don’t take things far enough. Friendships break. People change. Mistakes are made and lessons learnt. Alya’s important to me and because of Meredith, I know I need to make time to spend with her. I have to find a balance.” She grinned and scratched Tikki’s head. “Ladybug is all about balance.”

Tikki snuggled into Marinette’s hand. “She is.”

“Plus, Alya’s dating Nino, who is Adrien’s best friend, so we can spend time together as a group. That’ll help keep us all close.”

“Are you worried the shift to lycée will change you and Alya?”

“You know, I was,” Marinette said. “But it seems trivial now.”

“Life is never trivial, Marinette.”

She touched her earrings and watched her littlest friend float before her. “My wants and hopes seem that way now.”

Tikki’s expression was full of sympathy and understanding. “Marinette, we didn’t tell you to scare you. I don’t want you to stop living your life. Everything you ever wanted is still within your grasp.”

“With the additional responsibility of being the holder of one-half of an extremely scary power.”

Tikki ran her hands over her head. She flicked her eyes around the room for a moment, then sighed. “The Great War happened several millennia ago, in a time where there were few human records. With archaeologists finding clues all the time and theories being imagined we have to make sure our wielders are aware. Ladybug is known now. The Ladyblog is worldwide. People are looking at Paris. We’re highly visible, which is unusual for kwami, we are used to helping from the shadows. Being ghosts and fairy tales, Pixies and brownies, mischievous little beings caught in myth and magic not… not highly visible superheroes. This… technological boom for humans means information can be across the world in an instant. Twenty-five years ago, before the world-wide-web became so ingrained in your society, we would have waited until you were much older before telling you. We might never have told you. Now? We can’t take the risk. Information can be accessed at the touch of a button. Active kwami are watching. Dormant kwami are stirring. Nooroo calls for help and the fact that he’s the one being used to try and get us has all kwami worried.”

“I… didn’t think of it like that. It must be so strange for you. I thought you… I mean, our items have access to so much technology, I assumed—”

“Your items have access to that because both you and Adrien felt that’s what you needed to aid you.
Neither of you has noticed that these things just appear when you think of them.” Tikki giggled.
“Tracking devices, phones, access to internet databases were not standard with kwami suits. You and Adrien were the first to have this. Some older wielders still have analogue instead of digital, and Master Fu still doesn’t have that sort of access.”
“I… wow. Okay.”

“With Bumblebee now making headlines, kwami know, the wielders know something has happened. Some might come to investigate. Some have already been in contact with Master Fu. We need you to be ready. That’s why it was so important that we tell you.”

“Do you think they’ll attack us?”

“I think the bear is more likely to offer his services as a bodyguard, but the raven may just try and steal your miraculous to horde it. One of them could easily let slip the importance of Plagg and my items. We needed you to hear it from us.” Tikki swooped in and pressed her paws against Marinette’s nose. “You are strong and brave, Marinette. You have such great potential in you. Both you and Adrien have opportunities no other wielder has had before. I wish I had time to let you grow at your own pace. I wish we had time to do things slowly. Things are changing too rapidly and we needed you aware.”

“I should tell Adrien this.”

Tikki giggled and looked behind Marinette. “Oh, he knows.”

Adrien groaned. “Thanks, Tikki. I was going to sneak up on her.”

Marinette whirled, her hand on her chest. “Adrien, how? When?”

“Cat’s grace,” he said, looking guilty as he stood with his hands in his pockets within arm’s reach of her. “I didn’t mean to overhear anything, but you were talking miraculous stuff and… it sounded important.” Glancing at Tikki, Adrien said, “Tikki, how old is Master Fu?”

Tikki regarded him. “Why?”

“You said older wielders have analogue and Master Fu doesn’t even have that. I’m sort of imagining him with one of those hand crank radios they used to have.”

“That would be an accurate assumption,” Tikki said.

Marinette snorted out a giggle, clapped her hand over her mouth, then burst into laughter.


For some reason, the thought of the kwami communication line having an operator was hilarious. She doubled over, clutching at her stomach. The chair, unbalanced by her sudden movement, skittered sideways and she would have fallen if Adrien hadn’t grabbed her.

“Well, I’m glad you two find it funny,” Deedee said, huffy. “Keeping up with technology is hard.”

“Bee keeping,” Adrien said, snorting.

Scoffing, Deedee waggled over to Tikki. “He’s been cracking puns all afternoon,” she complained. “It’s getting ridiculous.”
Still chuckling, Adrien tried to control himself. “Sorry, Deedee.” He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “It’s been hard processing what you’ve told us, but you’re right. The more we talk, the better we’ll feel about this.”

Being understanding, Deedee nodded. “I suppose it’s good you still have a sense of humour.”

“Sometimes all you need is a good laugh,” Adrien said and smiled at Marinette. “I certainly feel better. How about you?”

“Immensely.”

“Though I think there’s a lot of things we need to talk about, I really think we need a break.” Adrien offered Marinette his hand. “Shall we? I want to see your amazing Zelda skills.”

“We’ll stay up here if you don’t mind,” Tikki said.

“Sure,” Marinette said as Adrien pulled her to her feet. “You know where the snacks are.”

“Have fun!” Deedee said, wagging and waving at the same time.

Tom had occupied himself by reading a book while he waited for them to come down from Marinette’s room. The coffee table in front of him was filled with snacks and drinks. He looked up and grinned as they approached.

What followed was the most fun Marinette had ever had while playing Zelda. Adrien sat by her side, his knee pressed against hers while she played. Marinette followed all Adrien’s directions to get to specific areas and cutscenes where the clues for his ‘Link is dead’ theory were hidden and she had to admit, there were a lot of things which lined up with the stages of grief. His knowledge of the game was immense, but he was constantly in awe of how fast she could take down bosses and do temples.

Watching Adrien geek out with her father was an amazing sight.

It was unfortunate when the Gorilla turned up early, summoning Adrien home. Adrien looked so despondent as he got to his feet that Tom announced they’d just have to finish the game another day and he looked forward to seeing Adrien again, then left Marinette alone to walk Adrien to his car.

“That was fun,” Marinette said, squeezing Adrien’s hand.

Adrien practically bounded down the stairs. “You’re amazing at the game! Wow, that was incredible! I didn’t realise watching someone would be so much fun.”

She pretended to shine her nails on her shirt. “I got mad skillz.”

“I’m going to have to think of something else to call you. I’ve used ‘amazing’ too many times.” Adrien stopped at the bottom stair and turned to face her. “May I walk you to school tomorrow?”

“I’d like that,” she said. “I promise to be ready when you get here this time.”

“Okay.” Smiling, he lifted her hand to his lips, pressing a soft kiss against the back. He hesitated, then bounced forward and pressed his lips to her cheek. “Good night, my lady,” he whispered against her skin.

Marinette blushed, giggled and floated all the way back up the stairs.

Although Adrien sought his father out the instant he got home, he didn’t get to speak to Gabriel until
dinner. It wasn’t unusual for Adrien to eat dinner alone, even on their scheduled family dinner days, so when Gabriel strolled into the dining room, hands clasped behind his back, and sat at the head of the table, Adrien stopped pushing his peas around the plate dejectedly and corrected his posture. “Good evening father,” Adrien began. “I wanted to talk to you about—”

Gabriel shook out his napkin and rested it on his knees. “Nathalie tells me you’ve spent a lot of time away from home and neglecting your studies today.” Lifting a hand, he signalled the cook to supply his meal.

“I haven’t been neglecting my studies at all,” Adrien said. “But that’s what I wanted to talk—”

“She also tells me your time is being spent in the company of a female friend. You abandoned your bodyguard in lieu of riding a bus. Did I not tell you any ventures outside the house were to be in the company of your bodyguard? And that it was non-negotiable?”

“Yes, you did, however—”

Picking up his knife and fork, Gabriel cut into his cordon bleu. “Did I give any indication he did not have to accompany you?”

“Can you please let me finish?”

Gabriel looked up from his meal and locked his eyes on Adrien.

Adrien’s eyes widened, but that was the only reaction he allowed himself to have.

Replacing his knife and fork against his plate, Gabriel gave Adrien his full attention. Gesturing, he said, “Please. Do continue.”

“It’s Marinette Dupain-Cheng. From school. We’ve decided to pursue a relationship. I took her out to lunch. Her father invited me to join him in a gaming session to get to know me and I thought it would be impolite to refuse.” So, not exactly true, Adrien had jumped at the chance to spend time with Marinette and her family, but his father didn’t need to know that.

Gabriel raised an eyebrow. “Marinette Dupain-Cheng. The fledgeling fashion designer? One of your friends?”

“Yes.”

He didn’t look pleased. “If you have time to pursue a romantic relationship, then I have been lax in creating enough for you to do. I’ll speak to Nathalie about—”

Adrien was the wielder of one-half of an ultimate power. He could have a conversation with his father and expect to be treated like an adult. “No. You won’t. I’m old enough to decide my own schedule.”

Gabriel gave a self-suffering sigh. “Adrien, you’re too young to be—”

“I’m fifteen.”

“Teenage entanglements are barely worth your time. Wait until you’re older to pursue romance. You have better things to—”

“Teenage ‘entanglements’, ” Adrien interrupted, “help social skills and development of self. They’re meant to be experimental. When I get to the older you want me to wait to, I will lack experience
which could be detrimental.”

“Adrien—”

“I’m not asking permission, father,” Adrien said, his posture stiff and still. He tried to radiate confidence. “I’m telling you that I’m in a relationship with her. It’s the responsible thing to do before the media gets a hold of that information.”

Gabriel sat back in his chair and studied Adrien. “I see.”

“I really like her. But she’s a little bit worried there could be some media backlash. I was hoping you could advise me how to deal with that.”

“Undoubtedly.” Gabriel picked up his knife and fork. “Very well. I’ll have Nathalie organise some media relations. And I want to meet Marinette.”

Adrien barely managed to conceal the grin of excitement. “Of course.”

“Is she coming to your study group on Friday?” At Adrien’s nod, Gabriel continued, “Have her come early.”

“Thank you.”

The door opened, casting a rectangle of light upon the otherwise dark carpet. Soft footfalls across the room, then the bed depressed as Gabriel sat on the edge.

Deedee watched the nightly ritual, snug in her hive among the flowers.

After a moment of staring at Adrien, Gabriel said, “Bee? May I speak to you?”

Deedee raised her head. Casting a wary glance at Adrien, she rose and followed Gabriel from the room. “My name is Deedee,” she said.

Gabriel clasped his hands behind his back. “Of course. Deedee.”

She folded her arms over her chest and stared at him. “What is it?”

“This girlfriend of his, this Marinette, I assume she is Ladybug?”

Deedee was completely still, ready to strike at any hint of danger. “You know I will not confirm that theory.”

Gabriel noted her body language. “You do not trust me.”

“You have not given me a reason to,” she replied.

“And yet, you keep secret the fact I have his ring.”

“For Adrien’s sake, not yours,” Deedee said. “Although I am questioning that. The guilt he feels for what he believes is ‘thoughtlessly losing’ Plagg is immense. If it gets worse, I will need to fix it.”

“You gave me a week.”

She snapped, “I am not obligated to give you any time at all. If I think Adrien knowing would be better for him, I will tell him. Even if he has to lose trust in you. Now, did you honestly ask me to
speak with you about his girlfriend?”

“I’ve been watching what recordings of Chat Noir and Bumblebee I could find since I found out,” Gabriel said.

Deedee waited.

“He throws himself into danger too often. He’s the distraction, the one who gets turned against Ladybug, the one used as a punching bag. Why?”

“You should ask him,” Deedee replied.

“I’m asking you.”

“He’s that sort of person. He’d prefer to get hurt over seeing others injured. I suspect he also does it because Ladybug is the only one who can purify the akuma and fix the damage done. Without her…” Deedee shrugged.

“He shouldn’t even be doing it in the first place,” Gabriel said. “It’s not safe. He’ll get himself killed.”

“Or you will,” Deedee said.

Gabriel’s head reared back. “I beg your pardon?”

“Did you try and stop her too?”

Gabriel lost his emotionless demeanour. “No,” he snarled. “And maybe I should have. She might still be here if I had.”

“And she might have gone anyway,” Deedee said. “Without backup.”

“She did go without backup,” Gabriel hissed. “Ferris refused to help her. She left him here.”

Deedee pounced on Gabriel, gripping his tie and yanking his torso forward.

Gabriel glared at her and spoke through clenched teeth, “Unhand me, Deedee.”

“You have Ferris? Did you steal him too? Did you cause this?”

“I found his broach after she vanished,” Gabriel said. “He abandoned her.”

Deedee shook her head, her mind working hard. “By the Queen, are you that dense? We can’t abandon them. They wield us, not the other way around. They make the decisions, we only guide.” She floated away from him, tapping herself in the temple as she thought. “She must have been protecting him. We thought he was lost when she was! Aurelie knew she was walking into danger, she would have taken every precaution and—”

Shaking his head, Gabriel took a deep breath and composed himself. “I know there are ways to break a bond between wielder and stone. I know Aurelie would not have wanted this life for him. I will find a way to free my son from you.”

Deedee pressed her lips together. Gabriel wasn’t her problem. He wasn’t part of her hive. She didn’t have to interfere with his life. But he was part of Adrien’s hive and she cared about Adrien. “Why don’t you ask him what he wants?”
“I know what’s best for my son.”

Deedee regarded him. “Do you?”

“I do. I let him go to school because I thought an akuma might take him if I didn’t. I guess that’s not a problem anymore. Perhaps I should pull him out.”

Deedee narrowed her eyes at his bluff. “One week, Gabriel. One week at most, then this secret you carry will no longer be a secret. One way or another, Adrien will find out.” She softened her voice. “I do this for Adrien’s sake, for Aurelie. Not for you. This… betrayal could very well break his trust in you, and I do not want to tear apart what she—”

Gabriel said, “I will give you both the peacock and the cat miraculous, right now, if you leave and never to bother or involve my son in kwami business again.”

Deedee paused. Torn, she weighed up her options. She couldn’t make that decision, but the offer of both Ferris and Plagg’s miraculous was something she couldn’t ignore. Perhaps she could trick him into—

Gabriel smirked. “You would have to swear by your miraculous.”

Or perhaps not. “It’s not my decision.”

“Take it to Master Fu. Let him decide.”

Deedee gave him a bland look. “Creation is awake. It will be her decision. Shall I tell Ladybug’s kwami you have the ring? Are you prepared for her wrath?”

Gabriel blanched.


Chapter End Notes

3e is sort of equivalent to tenth grade… you know what, let’s go by age. 3e is basically 14-15. 5e is 12-13. 3e is what Marinette is in currently. École is primary school.

Mum hat: Teenage relationships are hard. 15-year-olds do date 13-year-old and (most) people don’t have a problem with it. Teenagers try out new things, mistakes are made heaps. Often you don’t know a healthy relationship from a toxic one. Often your friends don’t know either. At that age, everything is new, hormones are often uncontrollable. Friendships are broken on a single word, relationships can seem like the end of all
things incredible. The majority of adults look back on our teenage years and think ‘I was such a dumbass, if I’d known then what I know now…’, but the point is, most things when you’re a teenager feel perfectly natural and wonderful. You feel like you’re in control of your life, making decisions and becoming adults, but you lack experience. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes, as long as you learn from them. It’s a time to learn and experience but be safe about it.
What’s a bee’s favourite dance music?

Chapter Summary

What’s a bee’s favourite dance music?

Beyoncé

Chapter Notes

Warning: Rating has increased to a T, mainly because I felt I was pushing the limit with a few things already (ie Marinette getting hurt), and T will give me more freedom to explore a few things.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I can’t do this. I can’t. What was I thinking?”

“Of course, you can.”

Marinette wrung her hands together. “It’s impossible.”

“Gurl, you are adorable,” Alya said, patting Marinette on the head. “He’s going to love every cute freckle on your face. Just show him that backbone you showed him during the competition.”

“It’s different now!”

“How?”

“I… ah… well, it’s his son, not a design.”

Alya laughed. “I don’t think he’s one of those ‘I won’t have you corrupting mah baby’ types.”

Marinette shrugged helplessly. “He’s… very foreboding.” She remembered Gabriel’s wall of Adrien pictures. “And he’s really proud of Adrien.”

“Maybe. But Adrien will be right there, won’t he?”

Marinette glanced over to where Adrien was laughing with Nino. “Yeah. But he wants me to make a good impression too and what if I blow it?”
“You already made a good impression with Monsieur Agreste. Adrien said he remembered your hat, didn’t he?”

Marinette brightened. “Yeah. He did.”

Alya rubbed Marinette’s upper arm in an attempt to soothe her. “You’ll be fine. Just be yourself. Nino and I will be there in an hour for study group, so don’t worry so much, okay?”

Marinette nodded.

“Did I hear that right?” Chloé asked, standing on the stairs behind them. “Adrien’s taking you to meet his father?”

Marinette stiffened, turning to look up at her. Chloé hadn’t exactly been cordial, but she hadn’t said anything directly to Marinette either. “That’s right.”

Chloé pulled a disgruntled face. She trotted down the stairs with Sabrina at her side. “Good luck with that, the man is an unemotional stick sometimes. If he even says hello to you, you’ve made headway,” she said, then said to Sabrina in a voice Marinette knew she was meant to overhear. “I don’t know what he sees in her.”

“Good thing I do,” Alya said and slung her arm around Marinette’s neck. “You’ll be fine.”

Marinette nodded, watching as Adrien’s car rounded the corner and pulled up in front of the school. She swallowed heavily, accepting Alya’s comforting pat on the back. Her eyes were drawn to Adrien, who bumped his fist against Nino’s and turned, looking to see if she was ready.

She wasn’t. She so wasn’t ready. She wasn’t ready when he pulled her by the hand. She wasn’t ready as the leather seats squeaked beneath her when she slipped into the back seat. She wasn’t ready for the Gorilla’s nod and smile although she had enough sense to smile back. It wasn’t even a long trip back to Adrien’s home so she could use the time to settle her nerves.

He squeezed her clammy hand and smiled. “Hey, he’s really not _that_ imposing. You’ll be fine.”

Glancing at his driver, she leant over to whisper, “He was pretty imposing even to Ladybug.”

“How you’ll be fine,” he insisted, then pressed his lips to the top of her head. “Promise.”

She squeezed his hand and sat back up straight.

It had been a good few days for them as a couple, even if Plagg had been missing for a week now. She knew Plagg’s loss still ate at Adrien but they were no closer to finding him. She knew Adrien and Deedee continued to scour the mansion looking for the ring. Marinette had a sinking feeling the ring was no longer there, and since Deedee was sure someone had _taken_ it, Marinette had started to worry it was one of these cultists or non-wielders Master Fu had mentioned.

She didn’t know why Tikki and Deedee didn’t seem worried, assuring Adrien and Marinette Plagg would be found, and soon, but giving no indication of _how_. Certainly, nothing Adrien and Marinette were trying worked.

Marinette and Tikki had practised with her new yo-yo combinations, the wings and the shield, but she’d yet to use them in battle. She wanted to wait until Chat Noir came back so they could debut new powers together, even if Adrien said he didn’t mind if she used them, it didn’t seem fair. The akuma over the last few days had been pretty easy, so there hadn’t been a need for extra powers.
She felt closer to Adrien now. He’d come to her house every morning to walk her to school. They had lunch together. Studied in the library with Nino and Alya. Walked and talked and patrolled together. As much time as they were spending with each other, they tried not to neglect their friends.

It was hard because she wanted to spend all her free time with Adrien, and likewise, Alya and Nino wanted to be together. Going out as a group seemed to be the best way to spend time together. Going to lunch with Alya and Nino, or splitting up so Alya and Marinette went somewhere and Nino and Adrien got their quality time together.

Bumblebee and Ladybug were flirty with each other, an easy sort of banter, but they kept their distance too. Never flirting in front of the public, the cameras or the reporters asking about Chat Noir. Ladybug made sure to mention how much she missed her kitty, but she was so grateful for Bumblebee’s assistance.

Alya was practically frothing at the mouth with gossip and possibilities regarding Ladybug’s words. She had several stories planned and ready to post at even the hint of confirmation from Ladybug. Adrien found that amusing.

Adrien hadn’t tried to kiss her again and, to be fair, she hadn’t tried to kiss him either. Slow and steady, they were building something together. There had been one or two cheek kisses, a hello, a goodbye, a test to see how receptive the other person was. There’d been kisses on the back of her hand, but that had been normal even before they were together. There’d been a sneaky one on the back of her neck as he joined her in the library, but nothing which had pushed any boundaries.

Marinette had had a few days to prepare for this meeting with Adrien’s father, and yet, as they pulled into the driveway, she was overcome with nerves. Gabriel Agreste was a fashion idol of hers, and she was meeting him as Marinette, aspiring designer and girlfriend to his son, not Ladybug, the hero of Paris. As Ladybug, she could hide behind the mask, but Marinette had no such luxury.

Nathalie met them in the foyer of Agreste Mansion, not Gabriel as Adrien had expected. Marinette watched the look of disappointment cross Adrien’s face as he saw Nathalie.

“He’s on an important call and cannot be disturbed,” Nathalie told Adrien, brusque. Her eyes swept over Marinette, then snapped back to Adrien.

“Oh, but—”

“He is aware you have a visitor.” Nathalie glanced at the door to Gabriel’s office. Looking back at Adrien, Nathalie smiled. “Why don’t you go to your room? I’ll fetch you as soon as he’s finished with the call.”

“Thank you.”

Nathalie nodded and turned away. Her shoes clipped smartly across the floor and back into Gabriel’s office, leaving the two teens in an otherwise silent home.

Sighing, Adrien gripped Marinette’s hand and led her toward the stairs. “Somehow I’m not surprised.”

“I’m sure it was an important call.”

“Yeah.” He ran his free hand through his hair until it rested on the back of his neck. “But it seems like everything else is more important sometimes.”

“You’re important to me,” Marinette said.
He grinned at her and increased his speed until he was bouncing up the stairs. “C’mon. I really haven’t had a chance to show you my room. Every other time you’ve been in here has been because of an akuma.”

Smiling at his eagerness, she said, “I know how impressive it is.”

“Ahh,” he said and tapped the side of his nose. “You haven’t seen Deedee’s hive.”

“Huh? Deedee’s hive?”

“Oh wait until you see,” Deedee said, shooting out of Adrien’s shirt and zipping upstairs ahead of them. “It’s amazing!”

Tikki, caught up in Deedee’s excitement, dashed out of Marinette’s bag and zoomed after her. Both of them phased through the door into Adrien’s room.

Marinette’s eyes lit up as she saw the tiered garden in the corner of Adrien’s room. “Oh my!” she said, rushing over. “It’s gorgeous!” She ran her fingers along the petals of a bluebell, then cupped her hand beneath a tulip so she could smell it.

“How isn’t it amazing?” Deedee said, flitting around her flowers.

Nestled among the flowers, clinging to the underside of a pot, Marinette spotted a little yellow wax structure. “Is that where you sleep?”

“That’s my hive-nap home,” Deedee chirped, waggling. “It’s so pretty, I feel so spoilt.”

Adrien put his schoolbag on his desk. “Plagg sleeps on my bed,” he said. “He wouldn’t let me spoil him like this.”

“Plagg is perfectly happy with an endless supply of camembert,” Tikki said.

“You two can hang out here while we do homework,” Marinette suggested.

“Oh, we will,” Tikki said, joining in on Deedee’s flit through the flowers. “It’s been a while since I’ve had a good hunt for aphids.”

“Not on my flowers,” Deedee complained. “My flowers are pristine.”

“There are always aphids,” Tikki said as she peered under a leaf. Casting Deedee a sly look, Tikki continued, “If you know where to look.”

“Not in my flowers!” Deedee repeated.

Leaving the two kwami to play and bicker with each other, Marinette took her time exploring Adrien’s room. She left her bag on the sofa as she did since that was probably where they’d be doing their homework. Aware that Adrien watched her, she ran her hand along the back of the sofa and studied the second level. “So much space.”

“Yeah.” He shrugged.

She flashed him a smile. “Defeats the purpose of sending you to your room when you’re naughty if you have all this to play with.”

He laughed. “I don’t think I’ve ever been sent to my room because I was naughty. Just ‘overstimulated’ or ‘emotional’. Am I missing out on some key component of growing up?”
“No, not really,” she shrugged. “It’s overrated.”

“Ooh, are you a naughty girl?” he purred.

Her face heated a little. “Me? I am never naughty.” Even though she was still getting used to Chat Noir’s flirty nature shining through and affecting her this way, the pieces of Chat Noir and the pieces of Adrien melded together so much better in her head now.

“Oh, that guilty face,” he teased.

She rolled her eyes at him. “You wish.”

“Do you want a drink?” he asked, pulling out his phone. “The kitchen’s been instructed to provide some snacks when Nino and Alya get here, but I could send down for some sodas.”

“I’m fine. I suppose you’re a master at this,” she asked, pointing to his dance machine.

He glanced over, then placed his phone on his desk, plugging it into the charger. “Yup.”

“Pointless to challenge you then,” she said.

“Hardly. Challenge away. I’d love to find out if I was better than you at some games.”

She laughed. “I have two left feet when it comes to dancing. Alya finds it hilarious.”

“I find that hard to believe.”

“It’s true. She’s tried to teach me, but I guess I just wasn’t meant to be good at everything.”

“Adrien could teach you,” Deedee said. “He’s a great dancer.”

Adrien’s eyes blew wide and he thrust both his hands at Deedee, waving them frantically. “No! Deedee—”

“He’s mastered so many different forms of dancing. You should ask him to—”

“Deedee!”

Deedee waggled to face him. “What?”

“She doesn’t need to know!”

“You didn’t,” Tikki said, floating up beside Deedee. “You did, didn’t you? Oh please, tell me you did!”

Deedee waggled. “I did. He picked it up very quickly. One of the best.”

Tikki covered her mouth with her paws and giggled. “Oh please! It’s been such a long time since I’ve seen Deedee dance and
it’s so much better when she has a partner!”

Marinette asked, “Bees dance?”

“It’s nothing, really,” Adrien told Marinette. “You don’t want to—”

“I would love to see you dance.”

Tikki whooped. She spun in a circle and darted back to Marinette. “Oh, this will be magnificent.”

Adrien’s hands flopped to his sides. “You would?”

Marinette nodded and clasped her hands behind her back.

“You… you know how bees dance, don’t you?” he asked. “And you know how it translates into a human.”

“I am assuming your hips don’t lie,” Marinette teased.

He narrowed his eyes at her. “Oh. Really. This is an excuse to ogle, isn’t it?”

She widened her eyes and gave him her best smile. “C’mon, Chat, dance for me.”

He tilted a finger at her. “You know what? Fine. Fine. But you’re not allowed to laugh.”

“I would never,” Marinette assured him, hand over her heart.

Deedee tilted her head. “Why would she laugh?”

He held up both hands and walked backward until he was at his desk, then turned to retrieve his phone. Finding whatever he was looking for, he left the phone on his desk again and walked into the space in the middle of his room. Holding out his hand toward his kwami, he said, “Deedee, would you do me the honour?”

“Fuzz-tastic!” Deedee replied, waggling happily as she placed her paw in Adrien’s.

Tikki landed on Marinette’s shoulder, her eyes shining with anticipation. Marinette sat on the back of the sofa, trying not to smile too hard. From what she understood about bee communication, it involved a lot of abdomen wriggling, and their abdomen were more than half the size of their bodies.

Music filled the air and, lacking any sort of musical training, all Marinette could say was it was definitely belly-dancer music, played by a violin with soft drums to back it up and sounded suspiciously like the thrum of a bee hive.

From the first waggle of Adrien’s hips and twerk of his buttocks, Marinette was riveted. Neither he or Deedee did much with their arms, beyond extending it out to each other, but Adrien’s hips, Deedee’s entire lower body… they swung, they waggled, they shook and shimmied. They twerked. They sashayed around each other, cocked hip and extended leg. Fast swishes of hips, or slow snaps, followed by a flurry of shimmies. Figure eights and circles of dance, sometimes Deedee would circle Adrien as his lower body waggled, sometime Adrien would slide around Deedee.

Deedee was clearly a master. Full of grace and poise, each waggle was carefully crafted so she looked melodic and glorious, communicating a great love and respect through dance. Adrien looked like a lost duck trying to find his way home. But for every crisp slice of Deedee’s stinger, and every sharp flick of Adrien’s hips and consequential stumble as he over-extended, Marinette could see they were enjoying dancing with each other. Deedee seemed so proud of him, a pleased smile rested on
her face and a broad grin on Adrien’s.

Tikki clapped her hands eagerly. Marinette could feel the vibrations of Tikki’s excitement through her shoulder as her bug kwami started to copy Deedee’s movements.

Adrien’s belly and lower body undulated, rolling forward and backward, followed by what Marinette could only describe as hip thrusts and buttock shakes merged into one and Marinette clamped her hand over her mouth.

“Shut up,” he said, casting her a mock glare.

“I can’t help it,” she said, swallowing as much laughter as she could. “I’m imagining what you’d sound like if I made a belly dancer costume for you. All the jingles.”

“Maybe, if you make one, I’ll wear it,” Adrien said as he circled Deedee again with his hips sashaying and swinging. “Jingles and all.”

“I’m so doing it now.”

“Ooh, can I have one?” Deedee asked, excited by the prospect as she continued to dance. “I wouldn’t mind jingling and being shiny.”

“Absolutely,” Marinette replied, being more serious. “It would be my honour. I have some pretty blue sheer which would look lovely on you.”

Tikki’s dancing became too enthusiastic for her to remain on Marinette’s shoulder and she darted up to circle around Deedee and join in. Grinning Adrien abandoned his circle with Deedee and sashayed over to Marinette. “Do you want to have a go? It’s harder than it looks.”

She waved her hand at him. “Oh, no, I’m most content to watch and laugh inwardly.”

He waggled his hips exaggeratedly, deliberately being overly ridiculous with his movements and Marinette couldn’t help the burst of laughter which erupted from her. He sashayed up and hip bumped her away from the sofa. “Dance with me.”

“Ahh,” she said, laughing. “You don’t want to see me try that.”

“Yeah, I do. You got to see me. I absolutely want to see you dance.” With a teasing wink, Adrien took her wrist. With great flair, he lifted her hand and tugged her so she spun underneath her arm until her back crashed into his chest and her arm was pulled tight across her body.

Squeaking, Marinette froze at the contact.

Laughing under his breath, he said, “That was a little more enthusiastic than I meant it to be.”

She swallowed. “Yeah.”

“Are you okay?”

“Yup.”

“May I put my hands on your hips?” he asked, putting a little bit of distance between them so she wasn’t pressed against his chest.

He could put them wherever he liked and she wasn’t going to complain. “Uh-huh.”
His hands slid into place, touching lightly like he wasn’t really sure he was allowed even with permission. “Okay. Bend your knees, little more,” he said when she followed his instructions. “Right, now what you want to do is straighten one knee so your hip cocks.”

The pressure of his hand became firmer on the hip she cocked. “I don’t remember agreeing to this.”

He chuckled, a breathy laugh against her neck. “You don’t have to do it. Now, lower again, then lift the other one.”

Marinette giggled as she followed his instructions, working her knee slowly so that her hip cocked.

“Keep your heels flat on the floor. Let your knees do the work.”

“I keep thinking I should start singing ‘Shakira, Shakira.’”

“If it helps,” Adrien said, coaxing her hips with his hands so she kept practising the movement. “This is the ‘shimmy’. I had to look up the names of all the things Deedee was trying to teach me since this is as natural as breathing to her. So many dancing moves are based on what she does, I’m willing to bet she or one of her sisters, were the inspiration for all these dances.”

She kept rocking her hips. “That seems likely.”

“As you get better, you get faster.”

Marinette glanced over to where Deedee and Tikki were twirling around each other, shaking their tails and giggling. “You and Deedee have been working on this for a while.”

“Yeah, a little bit. It was a good bonding experience.”

While he led her hips through a series of practice shimmies, the music hit a crescendo, then ended. The next piece of music was a soft piano instrumental, completely unsuited to belly dancing. Glancing at Tikki and Deedee, who were now waltzing and twirling with each other, Marinette kept practising her shimmies, mostly because of Adrien’s closeness and his hands on her hips. She didn’t want the moment to break.

Her shoulders brushed against his chest, tiny little brushes swaying in time with the rhythm of her hips. She glanced over her shoulder at him, smiling in what she hoped was a flirty manner.

A heat existed in his eyes she hadn’t been expecting and his fingers clenched. Pulling her toward him, she was coaxed so her back lined up against his chest. His touch slipped from her hips to her stomach and she lifted her hands to cover his.

No longer shimmying, they swayed together to the piano music.

His hair tickled her ear as he ducked his head down. Marinette gasped when his mouth covered a portion of skin on her neck and began to tingle where his tongue flicked out to taste. As he straightened, she let her head fall back so it rested on his shoulder.

Swaying to the music, he rested his cheek on the side of her head, then slipped his hands to her hips to apply pressure as an invitation to turn around. Swivelling to face him, she spread her fingers across his chest, feeling his hammering heartbeat beneath her palm. The look in his eyes was electrifying, it jolted through her, making her weak-kneed with anticipation. Fingers curled, clutching at his shirt.

He moistened his lips. “Marinette—”
“Ahem.”

Their bubble of solace burst, splattering against the unapologetic ground. Marinette practically leapt out of her skin at the interruption and tried to spring away from Adrien, who wasn’t able to release her in time. Instead of leaping away, they snagged together and Marinette smashed her face into his chest.

“Ow.”

“Are you okay?” Adrien asked, gripping her upper arms.

“Yeah.” She peeked around him to the door and went rigid as she saw Gabriel standing there. Hands behind his back, mild curiosity flitting across his features, which was so much better than the indifference and indignation she’d seen when she’d met him as Ladybug. “Um…”

Adrien’s eyes widened, then he carefully schooled his expression. Stepping so he was beside her, both his hands went behind his back in a subconscious imitation as he turned to face Gabriel.

“Father, this is Marinette.”

She grinned. Too big. Too stupid and bright but she couldn’t make herself lessen a number of teeth she showed. “Hi!” Nothing to see. Marinette certainly hadn’t been trying to lay one on Gabriel’s one and only son in his bedroom. At all.

“The pleasure is mine,” Gabriel replied and glided further into the room. He switched off the music and strolled past them until he reached the sofa and sat down. Crossing one leg over the other, he extended an arm along the back of the couch. “Join me.”

Adrien had to nudge her to get her moving. They circled around the sofa like scolded children and Marinette cast a glance around for Tikki, spotting her in Deedee’s flower garden. Sitting down, she poised on the edge of her seat, hands on her knees and was thankful when Adrien sat between her and his father, but offset so she could still see Gabriel.

“So,” Gabriel said. “You go to Adrien’s school. How fortuitous for an aspiring fashion designer.”

“Father,” Adrien blurted. “You don’t need to—”

Marinette smiled and tried to settle her nerves. She’d been expecting nothing less from Gabriel and had already rehearsed several things she wanted to say for this type of scenario. “Adrien’s one of my best friends. It didn’t start out that way, it’s been more of a gradual thing.”

Gabriel raised an eyebrow. “How so?”

“She thought I put gum on her seat,” Adrien explained. “She got quite irate with me.”

“You can’t blame me for that.”

“I don’t,” he said. “It was very suspicious.”

“After much grovelling and enduring glares, Adrien explained what had happened and gave me his umbrella,” Marinette continued. “And he’s best friends with Nino and Nino and I have been friends forever, so, we all sort of fell into a group together.”

“I see,” Gabriel said.

“I try not to judge on circumstances. I prefer actions. Adrien’s were very kind and sweet and caring
and he made an effort to rectify a misunderstanding as soon as he could. Most people don’t bother and that set him apart in my eyes.”

A pleased smile from Gabriel and a broad grin from Adrien.

“Where do you plan on applying?” Gabriel asked.

“Esmod,” she said, “For an undergraduate degree in design, then perhaps into Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne, but that would depend on finance and talent.” It would depend on more finance and less on talent, but there were potential scholarships she could win.

“You’re incredibly talented, Marinette,” Adrien assured her.

“Your hat was exceptional,” Gabriel noted and cupped his chin in his hand in thought. “Chambre Syndicale, although ambitious, could well be within your grasp. And then?”

“An internship. I’d like to intern at Chanel or Céline. Perhaps even Yves Saint Laurent,” she said and dropped her eyes. “But that’s where everything breaks apart. I don’t know which house I’d be suited for, or what I want to specialise in yet. I love designing. I love seeing people wear my designs, however, I’m not sure if I have the right mentality for high-end fashion.”

Gabriel nodded to show he understood. “Not everyone is and there’s no shame in that. Often you don’t know until you try. I have many acquaintances I went to Chambre Syndicale with who were convinced they’d make it and didn’t and others who weren’t sure they were suited and were. What is your dream?”

“I love elegant functionality. I really want to have my own little house and my own label and design jeans with pockets.”

Gabriel laughed, a sound quickly smothered and Adrien sat up straighter in response. “An admirable goal,” Gabriel said. “And you certainly have time to refine as you grow older. You designed the clothes you are wearing?”

Marinette nodded.

Gabriel inclined his head. “Your earrings are very pretty. Do you dabble in jewellery design as well?”

Adrien stiffened and Marinette’s hand flinched toward her ear as it always did when someone mentioned her earrings. “No. They were a gift.”

“I see. And what do your parents think about your goals?”

“My parents support me and are behind me all the way. They’ve endured late nights, cut fingers, fabric mishaps and sewing machine breaks. Papa has become an expert mechanic when fixing machines, although I can do it myself now mostly. I’ve done a few freelance logo designs and album covers, I even designed the logo of our bakery.” She smiled. “I have a pretty tight budget to use on fabrics, but freelance designing and mending services help. I do costumes and cosplay too. They’re pretty proud of me since it’s all self-taught.”

“Very resourceful,” Gabriel said. “Self-taught?”

Marinette nodded. “The internet is a fabulous resource. I try to go to as many shows as I can afford and keep up to date with trends and predict upcoming ones.”
Adrien smiled at her.

“Monsieur Agreste,” Nathalie called from the door. “My apologies, but the Milan office is on the phone. They said it was urgent.”

Sighing, Gabriel stood. “Everything’s urgent with them,” he said. “It was nice meeting you, Marinette.”

She beamed at him.

Gabriel fixed his cuff. “Adrien, a moment.”

“Yes, of course.”

Sliding his hands behind his back, Gabriel walked stiffly to the door. With a quick squeeze on Marinette’s shoulder, Adrien stood and followed him out.

Marinette watched them leave and fretted. Was she too confident? Did she have plans that sounded too concrete? In truth, she wasn’t even completely sure she would want to do half the things she planned for as she got older, but she’d thought it better to have definite plans to impress Gabriel. Esmod was her preferred school, but beyond that was empty. It was a plan and not a lie, but she also knew plans were subject to change. Surely she wasn’t expected to have her complete life mapped out at fifteen?

Could he tell? Is that why he was taking to Adrien? Was Gabriel telling Adrien he didn’t approve of her? She plucked at her jeans and looked over at Deedee’s garden, spotting Deedee and Tikki peeking at her from the flowers.

“You could’ve told us he was coming,” Marinette said.

“There wasn’t time,” Deedee said, spreading her paws apologetically.

“Sorry,” Tikki said. “But that went well, don’t you think?”

Marinette looked at the door, then hunched her shoulders and looked at her knees. “I don’t know. I thought so, but…” She touched her earrings and frowned.

Deedee floated closer. “Something wrong?”

“A lot of people notice my earrings,” Marinette said. “But that’s… it’s the second time he’s done that and it’s given me a chill each time.”

Tikki darted forward. “Marinette, I think Gabriel was impressed with you—”

“I think I’m just nervous,” Marinette said and looked over her shoulder at the door. “It’s not like he knows what they are.” Marinette frowned and caught the tail end of a thought. “That can’t be right.”

“Marinette,” Deedee blurted. “Have you seen how big Adrien’s television is? I wonder—”

Caught in her own thoughts, she laughed at herself. “No, he wouldn’t—” she stopped as the niggling little thought became more concrete in her head. “Would he? Why would he—? The book. He had the book. He knows about miraculous.” Gasping, she covered her mouth with her hands. “Oh. Oh. Oh no.”

Tikki and Deedee drifted closer together.
Tears filling her eyes, Marinette looked at both of them. “Did Adrien’s father take his ring?”

Neither of them said anything.

“What do we do? Did you know? Is that why you’ve not been worried?” Her head snapped toward the door. “Does Adrien know?”

Deedee shook her head. “He is not yet aware.”

She looked back at the kwami. “But you knew. Why didn’t you tell him?”

Deedee pressed her paws to her chest. “It was… a decision I did not come to lightly.”

“By letting him believe he lost Plagg?” She stood, sweeping her arm out to the door. “Deedee, he’s been crazy with worry over Plagg. This is going to crush him. We need to tell—”

“I agreed with her decision,” Tikki said. “So does Master Fu.”

Arms slack by her sides, Marinette gaped at them.

“We need you to keep it a secret,” Deedee said with a frantic look at the door. “Just for now. This is a delicate situation and Tikki can explain more when you get home, but—”

“You want me to lie to Adrien?”

Deedee begged, “Omit the truth. It’s not a lie if you don’t outright say it.”

“No. No. No.” Each ‘no’ held a different emotion. The first was outright disbelief, the second contained traces of humour and the third was flat out denial. “I won’t. I can’t lie to him. This isn’t right.” She looked beyond Deedee, appealing to her kwami. “Tikki, this isn’t right—”

Tikki looked between Deedee and Marinette and said nothing.

“It’ll break Adrien,” Deedee insisted. “His father is the only family he has left, and a betrayal like that… please, it’s not for much longer. Think about what this will do to Adrien. We have every reason to believe Gabriel will be returning Plagg soon. Tikki can explain—”

The door opened and Adrien walked back into the room smiling, and Marinette felt her heart shatter.

Chapter End Notes

*Goes for gold!*
What is a baby bee?

Chapter Summary

What is a baby bee?
A little humbug!

Chapter Notes

Radishlyloving drew an amazing picture of Adrien and Deedee dancing! Thank you so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gabriel Agreste. A man she looked up to and admired and yet that had nothing on what Adrien felt for the man. Marinette didn’t want to think about it, yet she couldn’t stop thinking about it. Adrien’s father had taken Plagg, in full knowledge of what Plagg stood for. Gabriel had snatched the kwami of destruction.

Adrien seemed to walk across the room toward her in slow motion.

This was… inconceivable. Horrible. How could his father do something like that to Adrien?

How was she going to tell him? She had to. She couldn’t lie to him. Not now. Not with this.

But… Deedee was right. It could easily break Adrien. He’d been so worried about Plagg and his father had taken him. How would she feel if it had been her father taking Tikki?

Nino had always disliked Gabriel. He never said anything outright, but there was an underlying anger there. Small remarks, a rolling of eyes, a sad watching as Adrien walked away. Was something else going on she didn’t know about?

Marinette twitched. Maybe she should go home. Claim she wasn’t feeling well and run. Delay the decision. Adrien smiled at her as he continued to walk toward her. Bright and cheerful and it broke her even more. She was going to see that smile wiped from his face. She was going to cause it.

Marinette turned her head to regard the kwami. Tikki’s paw was on Deedee’s shoulder as they floated close together and watched her solemnly. This was her decision. She could tell him, then deal with the consequences. Or she could wait and hear Tikki’s explanation, then decide what to do. Perhaps it was best if she got all the information first.

Coward’s way out. Right?

“He likes you!” Adrien announced. “He was impressed.”

Mariette moistened dry lips. “Oh?”
“Well, he didn’t say it, but he squeezed my shoulder and nodded, so I’m definitely taking that to mean… what’s wrong?”

She closed her eyes. She hoped Adrien would forgive her. What if he didn’t? What if she told him and he hated her for it? What if she broke their family? Could she be responsible for that?

“Marinette? Are you alright? You look sick.”

She’d just have to pretend everything was fine. For the entire night. Could she even do that? How long had Deedee been pretending?

Forcing her eyes open, she tried to smile. “I’m feeling a little overwhelmed.”

He grew concerned. One hand on her elbow, the other took her wrist as he guided her back to the sofa. “Sit down. You look like you’ve seen a ghost. Do you want some water?”

She didn’t know if she could do this. Shaking her head, she looked helplessly at the kwami.

“Marinette,” Deedee said. “Have you seen the size of Adrien’s television? You could kick major butt on Mecha Strike.”

Adrien’s hand stroked Marinette’s back. “Deedee, I don’t think—”

She pounced on Deedee’s suggestion. “Yes,” Marinette said, too enthusiastically. “Yes. Let’s do that.”

He frowned, confused. “Um. Alright,” he said and stood to fetch the controllers.

Marinette died a little inside. This was going to go wrong. So wrong.

She couldn’t concentrate on the game. She made stupid mistakes, sloppy moves and cringe-worthy attacks. He side-eyed her halfway through the second round, changing the way he fought to give her openings in his attacks and when she couldn’t even follow through, she could tell he knew something was wrong. After the second sound thrashing by Adrien, he took the controller from her hand.

Leaning forward, he put the controllers on the coffee table ahead of them and half turned on his seat toward her. “What’s wrong?”

She stared at a spot on the floor. She hadn’t even managed to hide this from him for ten minutes. “Do you ever think we don’t know people as well as we think we do?”

It was cryptic, she knew and it only confused him more. “I guess? Maybe?”

“And people we idolised turn out to be something we didn’t expect and we realise we put them on a pedestal, and then they don’t live up to expectations and you have no idea what to do?”

He pressed his lips together.

“I’m sorry,” she said, ignoring the two kwami among the flowers. “I just don’t know—”

“I thought things were going well,” he said.

Marinette blinked. She wasn’t too far gone in her own misery not to notice the catch in his voice. “Adrien—”
He clasped his hand together and stared at his palms. “If the thought of kissing me is that bad, then please, just tell me. I’d rather know it’ll never happen than hope it will.”

She tried to wrap her mind around that. She’d been thinking she didn’t know how to deal with Gabriel stealing Adrien’s ring and he’d been worried about her not wanting to kiss him. “No,” she breathed. “No, Adrien, don’t think that. I’m really looking forward to kissing you again.”

“It’s kind of hard when you’re being all—” He jerked. “Wait. Again?”

“I want it to be perfect and we can never seem to find the right time or we get interrupted and it would be really, really wrong to try and kiss you now, knowing that—” she caught herself from mentioning it, casting a frantic glance at Tikki and Deedee.

“So, you do want to kiss me?” he clarified.

“No.” She slid her fingers along his palm until he unclasped his hand to take hers. “Of course, I do.”

He puffed out a breath. “Good. ‘Cause I really, really want to kiss you.” He lifted his hand to cup her face and stroked his thumb along her cheek.

Dropping her chin, she closed her eyes. “Chat, I...” How? How could she tell him? How could she not? She couldn’t keep this a secret. It was going to gnaw away at her until he knew. But Tikki, Deedee and Master Fu had agreed to keep this from him.

“May I kiss you now?”

Not fair. Not fair. His voice did so many wonderful and crazy things to her heart and she knew, had her eyes been open to see his face as he asked, she would have let him kiss her without qualm. But it wouldn’t be fair to him or to her. She didn’t want this hanging over her head. She didn’t want him to wish he’d never kissed her to begin with when he found out. “No. I can’t. Not now. It wouldn’t be right.”

A trembling gasp and his hand slipped from her face.

She broke away from him, standing to move away from him, unwilling to look at the heartbreak she knew danced on his face. Bracing herself, she said, “Adrien, I need to tell you something and I don’t know if I should, but I think it’s really, really wrong to keep it from you but I know there has to be a good reason. I can’t, I just can’t and—”

“Please,” Deedee said, appearing before Marinette. Her head bowed, her stinger unbearably still. She clasped her paws against her chest and bowed lower. “Ladybug. This is my mess and I should not have asked of you what I did. Please, allow me.”

Confused, Adrien said, “What’s wrong? What’s going on?”

Marinette inclined her head and wrapped her arms around herself.

“I’m so sorry,” Deedee said. “I never meant for this.”

Marinette nodded.

“Marinette?” Adrien asked. “Deedee?”
Floating over to Adrien, Deedee kept her stillness as she said, “We know who took Plagg.”

Marinette hugged herself tighter at the sudden elation on Adrien’s face. “You do?” he blurted. “That’s fuzz-tastic! We can go get him!”

“It’s not that simple,” Deedee said. “I need you to listen. There’s a lot you don’t know and you need to understand.”

Adrien frowned at Deedee, then Marinette. “It’s something bad, isn’t it?”

Deedee cast a helpless glance at Tikki, who nodded. Taking a deep breath, Deedee said, “Sometimes… when a kwami needs to rise, there is more than one choice available to them. For kwami like Tikki and Plagg, the choice is simple. It takes a special kind of person to wield them, a strong, courageous person, but also people who match each other, that part is very important. Even if they rise separately, a wielder is chosen who will match but not bonded. Remember when we told you only certain people can summon a kwami?”

“Yes,” Adrien said, glancing between Deedee and Marinette again.

Tikki said, “What we did not tell you was within those people is the power to summon any dormant kwami as long as their power is enough for the kwami to bond with. Had you or Marinette touched Kitt’s necklace, for example, without being bonded to myself or Plagg first, you may have bonded to them instead. Ill-matched and never able to reach your full potential, but still a bond. This is why Fu guards us while we are dormant, and makes sure we get to the people who are best suited to use us.”

Deedee continued, “In the case of Papillon, Nooroo’s broach was lost, and therefore unguarded.”

Adrien nodded. “That’s how Papillon got him. He forced a bond?”

“He did,” Tikki replied. “Papillon’s power is great enough that he could potentially form a bond with me or Plagg, but he could never wield us to our full potential.”

“So he couldn’t have this ultimate power,” Adrien said, excited about that.

“If he had both of us, then he could, theoretically, access a portion of it,” Tikki said. “Even that would be catastrophic.”

“Oh. Shoot.”

Deedee took the lead in the story, “For kwami like Ferris, there were several who had potential.”

Keeping his eyes on Deedee, Adrien extended his hand to Marinette.

“Thirty years ago, when it was time for Ferris to rise, there were two people who called to him the most. A sixteen-year-old boy, and a fourteen-year-old girl. Siblings from a family with a history of wielders dotted back through the ages. Not everyone, sometimes that family went generations without producing someone with potential, but each wielder was stronger than the last.”

Swallowing, Marinette crossed to Adrien and took his hand. She sat beside him as close as she could, feeling the need to comfort him as much as she needed comfort herself.

Deedee drifted a little away from them. “The siblings were judged by Master Fu, Wayzz, Kitt and Kitt’s wielder and myself, and the girl was found more suitable. But because they came from a long line, a courtesy was extended to the family, making them aware of the judging.”
“It was a mistake,” Tikki said. “The family was more aware of the miraculous than we realised and the beginnings of a cult had formed around the potential for wielders. They were... essentially breeding the potential to wield the stones. The girl accepted Ferris. The boy demanded a kwami of his own. One just as powerful, or even more so that what he believed Ferris to be. He demanded Plagg.”

Adrien swallowed. “So, he has Plagg?”

Deedee shook her head. “She loved her family and they were all turning on her, believing the boy had a greater gift for it, saying she could never reach her full potential because she was so kind-hearted. He... he loved his sister and tried to shield her, but the family turned him against her too and he demanded she turn over Ferris to him. It... was messy and... horrible for her. Ferris fled with her and helped her hide from her family.”

Tikki said, “She grew up. She fell in love. She had a child. She was happy. Then, five years ago, her brother found her.”

“Or, she found him,” Deedee said. “We’re not sure. He never gave up his search for a kwami, for hers or one with a great power.”

“What we do know is she found out about it and tried to stop him,” Tikki said. “We know that he found Nooroo. And we know... we know her bond was broken with Ferris. That could mean any number of things, but we suspect...” Her voice cracked. “We suspect she perished.”

Marinette covered her mouth with her free hand. Gears were churning in her head, dragging her to a devastating conclusion and she knew she wasn’t going to like what came next.

Adrien looked between kwami, then to Marinette.

“She left her young son without answers and her husband with a kwami he couldn’t use. A husband with enough knowledge of the miraculous to know what powers Nooroo held, what dangers he could represent and how to fight it. A husband who, in trying to protect his son,” Deedee’s eyes filled with tears, “took away his miraculous.”

Adrien’s hand crushed Marinette’s. “No.”

Marinette’s cheeks were wet and there was a pain in her chest and in her hand, but she didn’t dare release him.

So still, Deedee said, “I’m so sorry, Adrien.”

Adrien shook his head. “He wouldn’t.”

“He has both Ferris and Plagg and he tried to take Deedee,” Tikki said.

“He had the book, Adrien,” Marinette said, being as tender as she could. “He knows.”

Adrien turned his head to stare at her and she saw the moment he believed the kwami cross his face. He jerked away from Marinette, standing to stalk away.

Marinette made to follow. “Adrien—”

He twisted back to face them. “You weren’t going to tell me, were you?” He scowled at all three of them in turn and Marinette realised he included her in his anger.
Marinette curled in on herself. “I didn’t know,” she whispered.

Deedee said, “In honour of Aurelie, I was trying to give Gabriel a chance to return it.”

“You let me believe—” he held up his hand, denying Deedee’s words as he stalked toward the door.

“Adrien?” Marinette called. He didn’t answer and Marinette rushed to follow him with Tikki and Deedee dashing after her. “Adrien, wait, please.”


Marinette followed as Adrien stalked to the double doors to his father’s office and slammed them open. Marinette was close enough behind him to see both Nathalie and Gabriel’s startled faces. Stomping inside, Adrien demanded, “Nathalie, I need a moment with my father.”

Nathalie snapped, “This is most uncalled for. You are being very rude.”

Marinette lingered in the doorway and tried not to be noticed. She wasn’t sure if she was supposed to be here or not.

Gabriel stared, one hand behind his back, the other pressing a phone to his ear. His eyes flicked to Marinette. Flicking a button, he lowered the phone. “I see. Nathalie, a moment.”

Nathalie looked scandalised. “But Gabriel, this behaviour is—”

“Nathalie,” Gabriel said in a warning tone.

She gaped at him. Turning on her heel, she obeyed and stalked toward the door. Spotting Marinette, she extended her arm in an attempt to usher Marinette from the room. “Come on, we need to—”

“She stays,” Adrien snapped without taking his eyes off Gabriel.

Marinette swallowed. “Adrien, I don’t—”

“Stay,” he repeated. “Nathalie, please close the doors.”

Nathalie, bewildered, did was she was instructed, forcing Marinette to step further into the room so she wouldn’t get hit by the doors.

“You’re going to give Plagg back,” Adrien said. “And you’re going to give Ferris back to Master Fu. And you’re going to tell me why you lied to me about my mother!”

“No. I’m not.” Gabriel placed his phone on the desk ahead of him. “We had an agreement, Deedee.”

“I said ‘at most’, Gabriel,” Deedee said rising from behind Marinette’s shoulder. “I am not obliged to —”

Tikki rose. “That agreement wasn’t with me.”

Gabriel blanched and took a step back. “So. My theory was correct. Marinette is Ladybug.”

“Leave her out of this,” Adrien snapped and sidestepped so he stood between Gabriel and Marinette. “You brought her into this, Adrien,” Gabriel replied.
Adrien thrust out a hand and pointed. “Deedee, there’s a safe behind the picture of my mother. That’s where we found the book.”

“You stole the book,” Gabriel corrected as Deedee rocketed toward the portrait.

“It wasn’t yours to keep,” Tikki said. “It should’ve been returned, along with Ferris. You know this.”

Deedee popped back out and shook her head mournfully. “It is empty.”

“I will not be returning the cat or the peacock miraculous,” Gabriel said. He stepped toward Adrien, his hand outstretched. “Adrien, it is too dangerous. I’ve watched you. You throw yourself into danger, you put yourself at risk so often. You’re going to get yourself killed if you don’t stop. It’s my job to protect you.”

Adrien jabbed his hand on his chest. “You left me vulnerable!” He thrust his hand to where Marinette stood. “You left her without a partner!”

Reaching Adrien, Gabriel rested his hand on Adrien’s shoulder. “You don’t need to be Chat Noir or Bumblebee. There are others more suited to that kind of life. People who have trained from birth, who know the risks.”

“I know the risks,” Adrien snapped. “I would be Chat Noir with or without a miraculous. It’s who I am.”

“You are emotional, Adrien. You need to calm down. Take a breath and—”

Adrien laughed and Marinette got chills. “I get it. Emotional. You don’t want me akumatised, right? Keep on the straight and narrow, never show emotion, that’s what you’ve been trying to teach me. Well, I wield a miraculous. I can’t be akumatised. So you can’t control me like that anymore. Give me Plagg.”

“No,” Gabriel reaffirmed. “You are young and playing the hero. You don’t know what you want and—”

“My mother is a wielder,” Adrien said. “Did you try and control her too?”

“Your mother was a wielder,” Gabriel corrected. “I believe she gave her life to their cause.”

Adrien crumpled. “No. No. It’s not true. You told me she was missing.”

Gabriel’s voice turned sympathetic. “You are so young, Adrien. She didn’t want this life for you. She didn’t want it for herself. It causes too much heartbreak and pain. Her entire family abandoned her because of it.”

Adrien hung his head, then covered his face with his hands. “How could you keep this from me?”

“It was for your own good.”

Adrien shook his head. “That’s not fair,” he said, his voice cracking several times, then muffled a sob.

Dropping his hand from Adrien’s shoulder, Gabriel fixed his cuff, then his tie, visibly controlling his own emotions. “I will not be returning the cat miraculous to you. We are going to break this bond between you both, then we are going to forget this nonsense ever happened. You are not a hero, Adrien. You are a child. My child and it is my job to protect you.” His tone lost the tenderness and
became instructive. “Study group is cancelled for tonight. Go to your room and control yourself. We’ll discuss this in the morning.” Flicking his eyes to Marinette, he said, “It was nice meeting you. Unfortunately, I do not approve of Adrien pursuing a relationship right now. Please see yourself—”

Adrien lifted his chin. “No.”

Gabriel paused. “I beg your pardon?”

Adrien wiped his face, dashing away tears. “You don’t get to dictate anymore.”

“Adrien—”

Adrien’s voice was soft and unemotional, yet every word was like a visible slap to Gabriel. “I loved you. I trusted you. And you lied to me. You stole something you knew was important without caring what that would do to me.” His voice started getting higher and angrier. “Not just to me, but to Ladybug and all the kwami. You stole an ancient power and kept it from its rightful wielder for some stupid, petty reason. This is my decision and I want my kwami back.”

“No,” Gabriel said. He jerked forward, clutching both Adrien’s upper arms, hunkering down so he was eye-level with his son. “I lost your mother, Adrien. I am not going to lose you too.”

Adrien’s chest heaved as he stared at his father, his breath expelling out his nose with huffy bull noises. “You just did.” Yanking himself from Gabriel’s grip, Adrien turned and marched over to Marinette. He looked broken, barely holding it together. Tears stained his face and his eyes watered. He couldn’t meet her gaze and she knew there was nothing she could do to take away the great pain he now carried. “C’mon,” he said, taking her hand.

He pulled her along, marching them both out of the room. Tikki and Deedee dove down to hide in Marinette’s pockets as they moved past a confused Nathalie.

“Adrien? What’s going on?” Nathalie asked.

Adrien didn’t answer. Instead, he pulled Marinette up the stairs.

Marinette glanced down as Adrien pulled her along, seeing Nathalie heading into Gabriel’s office to look for answers. “Adrien?”

“Deedee. Lock the other door,” he said as he pulled Marinette inside his room. Deedee flashed away. Releasing Marinette, Adrien locked that bedroom door, then pressed his forehead against the wood. His chest heaved, his shoulders shook and his breathing sounded raspy. “I can’t breathe.”

She touched his shoulder and he trembled beneath her hand. Startled, she drew back. “Adrien?”

He shook his head. “She’s dead. She’s gone.”

She wanted to hold him, to soothe him and love him, but she didn’t know if he’d accept that right now. “I’m so sorry.”

A strangled noise then he pushed away from the door. His face was almost grey and sweat dotted his brow. He took a few steps into his room then stopped.

Her hands curled against her chest, Marinette watched him. “What do you need?”

“I just… I need a minute, okay?”

Marinette nodded. She reached out a hand and placed it on his chest, over his heart. It thumped
against her palm, a rapid flutter against his heaving ribcage.

A tear trickled down his cheek and he looked everywhere but at her. “Don’t go anywhere. And don’t let them in. Okay?”

“Okay.”

He walked away from her and entered the bathroom, closing the door behind him. Hopelessness swamped her as she stared at the shark on the door. “Tikki?”

“Deedee is with him. She will help him.”

“What just happened?”

“Something that was a long time in—”

An alarm went off and loud clattering as shutters slipped across Adrien’s row of windows startled Marinette. The view of the sky outside vanished, blocked off by security doors.

“What?”

Tikki sat on Marinette’s shoulder and snuggled into Marinette’s neck to help soothe her. “Security system,” she guessed. “We saw this before.”

“He’s trying to stop us from leaving,” Marinette said, gaping at the windows.

“That seems likely. Don’t worry, a lucky charm can create an exit.”

“But… why?”

“Because I am creation and—”

Marinette shook her head. “No. Why would he lock us in here?”

“There’s a lot about Adrien’s life we don’t know,” Tikki said. “A lot he’s been keeping close. I suspect a dam has burst.”

Feeling the need to sit, Marinette walked to the closest place she could, which happened to be across to Adrien’s bed. “I’m beginning to see that.” Taking a deep breath, Marinette closed her eyes. Hunching over, her rested her face in her hands and muffled a sob.

“Marinette?”

“I’m okay,” she whispered.

“You’re not and that’s okay. He’s going to need you.”

“I know. I’ll be here when he’s ready.”

She concentrated on her breathing. Flopping back on his bed, she kept her hands over her face. She shouldn’t cry. Not yet. Not here and now. Not when he was probably doing the same thing in the bathroom. Snatching a moment where she couldn’t see him vulnerable. The pain he must be feeling would be immense and she didn’t know how to help him.

The door rattled and Marinette sat up, startled. She looked between the main door and the bathroom door, unsure what she should do.
Gabriel’s voice echoed through the door. “Adrien, this is ridiculous and juvenile. Unlock the door.”

“Says he who locked us in,” Marinette muttered.

“Marinette,” Gabriel called. “You know this doesn’t concern you. You shouldn’t get between us. Open the door and let me speak to my son.”

Tikki zipped toward the door. “I’ll take care of this,” she said and phased through. Even through the door, Marinette heard Tikki’s voice. “If you do not leave him be until he is ready to speak with you, I will remove all creativity from you. You will never design again. Do you understand?”

Zipping back in, Tikki smiled at Marinette’s astonishment. “You can do that?”

“Absolutely,” Tikki said. “I don’t like to, but it’s good incentive for him to give Adrien a moment.”

“Remind me never to get on your bad side.”

Tikki smiled, then let it die. “I should have told you about Gabriel. I should have prepared you.”

Marinette bit her lip. “You had your reasons. I should’ve listened to you.”

“Deedee hoped he’d see reason and return Plagg. We hoped we could avoid this sort of altercation altogether, saying he could leave Plagg in a place for Adrien to find. Gabriel is all Adrien has left, and while what Gabriel did was wrong, it came from the part of him which loves his son. We couldn’t take that away from Adrien.” Tikki dipped down to nuzzle Marinette. “Sometimes things don’t turn out the way we hope.”

“I’m sorry. I should’ve held it together. I should’ve been stronger and—”

“This is not your fault,” Tikki soothed. “We shouldn’t have expected you to keep a secret like that.”

Marinette flopped back on Adrien’s bed. “How did it get so bad so quick?”

Tikki curled up on Marinette’s chest and Marinette closed her eyes. Thinking better of it, she pulled out her phone and typed out a quick message to Alya, warning her not to come and that she’d call her later to explain, then she turned her phone off. She wasn’t sure if Adrien wanted this known yet. She wasn’t sure of anything.

When bathroom door clicked open, Adrien came out carrying a duffle bag. He couldn’t look at her as he dropped it on the floor by the door and then thrust his hands in his pockets. His face was splotchy and red, as were his puffy eyes. Deedee sat on his shoulder, looking more dejected and still than Marinette had ever seen her. Marinette stared at Adrien, then at the duffle bag.

His voice was hoarse. “I can’t stay here. I thought I could, I thought I should, but then he locked us in and I can’t.”


“I really need a hug,” he mumbled.

She rushed him, her hands around his hips and her face buried in his chest before he’d even had time to drag his hands out of his pockets to catch her. He tangled and fumbled and made a strangled noise as he buried his face against the top of her head and got his arms around her to hold on.

“I’m sorry,” she murmured. “I’m so sorry. I should’ve said something straight away, but… I was so scared about what it meant.”
He clutched her tighter and didn’t say anything.

Marinette listened to his heartbeat slow and his breathing even out as the hug seemed to help him find his feet. Even still, it was some time before Adrien raised his head and made signs that he was almost ready to release her.

He stroked a hand down her back and let it rest at the small. “Do you think your parents would mind if— I mean, I have a credit card, I can go to a hotel or something, I—”

“No,” Marinette replied. “You’re coming home with me.”

“Okay.” He took a shaky breath and let it out slowly. Rubbing his hands along her arms, he murmured, “Get your bag. Deedee says a sting will get us through the shutter. I don’t want to… I don’t want to talk to him right now.”

Marinette nodded. “Tikki says she can make a door for us.”


Gabriel sat glued to the security feed, watching as Bumblebee scurried up the fence, bag in hand, and followed closely by Ladybug. Bumblebee stopped on the wall and faced the camera. “Don’t look for me,” he mouthed, then dropped down to the other side.

Ladybug cast a helpless look in the direction of where she thought was a camera, then followed Bumblebee.

His heart sank into the pit of his belly and Gabriel clawed at his hair. “No. No. No, you can’t leave. Don’t be so stupid. I can’t protect you if you leave.” Despair twisting inside him, he pushed away from the screen and turned just in time to see a black butterfly vanish into his ring.

“Hello Gabriel. I’ve waited a long time for this.”

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Chapter End Notes

Yes. Yes. I know. You came for puns. I gave you angst.
“Look at his little toe beans,” Alya crooned from her position curled up in Nino’s lap, with the little stray kitten Nino had found playing in her lap. She curled its paw around the tips of her finger. “Cuties! He is absolutely adorable.”

“Pretty sure it’s a girl,” Nino said. “It’s lacking certain things.”

Alya rolled her eyes. “Trust you to look.”

“Someone had to!” Nino protested.

“Where’d you find her?”

“Down by the river,” Nino said, reaching around Alya to scratch the little grey calico behind the ears. She mewed at him, blinked big blue eyes, and then attacked his fingers. “Someone dumped her in a bag. Poor dude was soaked and starving.”

“Oh, that’s horrible.” Alya picked up the kitten and rubbed her cheek against its soft fur. “Who could be so mean to this precious little bundle of joy?” Leaving the kitten beside her face, she put on a baby voice as she blinked at Nino. “You’re keeping her, aren’t you? You’re going to look after this little precious thing and make her happy?”

Nino laughed. “I wish we could. My uncle’s allergic to them. But he said he’ll take his meds until we find her a nice home.”

The kitten yawned and a pink tongue lolled out of her mouth.
Alya let the kitten curl up in her lap, feeling the purr rumble through her knees as the kitten snuggled down. "Aww, Nino, you have to keep her."

Nino pressed his chest to her arm and stroked some hair out of the way of her neck. "Rather keep you," he said and dotted kisses along her shoulder.

Giggling, she lifted her shoulder toward her neck. "Stooop," she complained.

"Nope," Nino replied and nibbled on her ear. He rested his hand on her hip, pulling her toward him.

"We need to get going or we’ll be late."

"Adrien won’t mind."

"Marinette might," Alya said, even though she snuggled down in Nino’s arms. "She’s formally meeting Monsieur Stoic, remember? She might welcome the intrusion."

Nino pulled a face at her. "Poor Marinette. Dude’s got a massive stick up his ass."

"Yeah. So I’ve heard. We need to go be dashing and daring and rescue her."

"Okay, okay," Nino said and squeezed her hips. "But if we interrupt Adrien put his moves on Marinette, you’re taking the blame."

Alya snorted. "Since when does Adrien have moves?"

"Since always. Dude’s got ‘polite, awkward and oblivious’ as baseline moves."

Alya giggled. "Don’t forget the fact that he’s a model."

"How could I ever? He lives and breathes that. I shudder to think how many showers he has a day."

Alya shook her head. "You need to educate him."

"What do you think I’ve been doing?"

"Poor Marinette."

"Poor Nino. Can we stop talking about Adrien? Rather occupy your mouth in other ways."

Alya rested her head on his shoulder. "Is that so?"

"Nah, on second thought, let’s go rescue Marinette," Nino said, pulling away from her. Untangling his feet from her, he heaved himself upright.

"Hey!" Alya complained. "That’s just rude."

Grinning, Nino said, "Did you want something?"

Alya’s jaw dropped and she made a little ‘ach’ noise in the back of her throat. "Right. Well. See if that hand-holding akuma ever comes back to haunt you." She fusssed about, putting Junior back in her box so she could sleep.

Nino offered Alya his hand to help her rise. With a side-eye, she accepted his help and Nino pulled her to her feet and straight into his arms. "Far more interested in the lip locking akuma."

"That was so corny," Alya said with a light laugh.
“Yeah,” Nino said, ducking his head down to peck her lips. “But it worked.”

Draping her arms over his shoulders, Alya toyed with his headphones. “I don’t know. You’ll have to show me again.”

With a smile, Nino was happy to oblige.

They took their time in strolling hand in hand to Agreste Mansion, talking about mundane things and making plans for the weekend that didn’t involve studying furiously for the exams beginning on Tuesday. Neither of them had a lot of time to spare in the busy study schedule, so they wanted to make the most of their time.

That, and the dreaded lip locking akuma may have struck several times on their meander. Not that they minded in the slightest.

Neither of them expected to arrive at Agreste Mansion to find it locked up.

Nino pressed the buzzer a few times, but no one answered, which was unusual. “Dude, hello?” he called, waving at the blank intercom screen. “Adrien?”

Alya pulled out her phone to check her messages. Then dialled Marinette’s phone. It went to message bank. Adrien’s phone rang. And rang.

“Nothing,” Alya said, slipping her phone back in her pocket. “That’s really weird.”

The automated gate slid open. Alya and Nino exchanged a glance and Nino shrugged. “Maybe the coms are broken.”

“Maybe. But Marinette’s phone is off and Adrien’s not answering his.”

Nino smirked and sauntered off to the front door. “Maybe they’re ‘occupied’,” he said, using air quotes.

Alya followed at a more sedate pace. “In that case, do we really want to be walking in on them?”

“We’ll stomp up the stairs and make noise, don’t worry.”

“And what if Gabriel meets us at the stairs?”

“Do what I do,” Nino said and trotted up the front stairs to open the door. “Smile, be polite, and move along as fast as possible.”

The immaculately designed and kept foyer was empty, which Alya found strange. She’d always assumed there’d be butlers, or Adrien’s Nathalie to meet them, but there were no signs of life. It was hard to imagine Adrien enjoyed living here, it all felt so sterile.

But maybe that was just the foyer.


Alya followed his gaze. A marble statue of Nathalie stood in front of a closed doorway. She held a tablet in her hands, her glasses halfway down her nose as she appeared to concentrate on what the empty screen depicted. “That’s… odd, that’s what it is.”

“Old man Agreste has peculiar tastes, I guess.”
“Somehow I would not be surprised. Do you think he has one of Adrien?”

Nino snorted. “Probably in his bedroom.”

Alya shoved Nino. “You are such a creep.”

Nino laughed at her and walked to the stairs. “Adrien?!” he bellowed up. He rested his hand on the bannister and swung on it so he could peer up the staircase.

Alya glanced back at the Nathalie statue. “That’s weird.”

“What’s weird, babe?” Nino asked, walking up the stairs ahead of her.

“I could’ve sworn she was looking at her tablet.”

Nino cupped his hands ahead of his mouth. “Adrien! Dude! We’re coming up! Get your clothes back on!”

“Nino!” Alya scolded. “What if he’s up there with his dad?”

Nino snorted. “Dude can barely stand to be in the same room as adolescents for long. It’s like our immaturity will rub off on him. Doubt he even spent more than five minutes with her.”

“Marinette is not you, Nino,” Alya retorted. “She knows how to charm.”

“Are you saying I’m not charming?” Nino asked, over his shoulder then pulled up short. “Woah, another one.”

A pristine marble statue of Adrien’s Gorilla stood in the middle of the stairs, blocking the route forward.

“Yeaaaah,” Alya said, unnerved now.

“It’s so lifelike,” Nino said, peering up and down at Gorilla. He got in close to peer at the statue. “There’s even a small fray on the collar. That’s attention to detail right there.”

Alya glanced back down the stairs and a chill shot through her. Gasping, she grabbed Nino’s arm and backed up the stairs. Nathalie stood at the foot of the stairs, staring up at them. “She moved!”

Nino glanced down, then looked around. “Ha-ha, Adrien. Nice joke, man! Where are you, dude?”

The Gorilla grabbed them both from behind.

Sabine listened carefully as Marinette told her an abridged version of what had happened in the mansion. Glancing between the barely-holding-it-together Adrien sitting on the couch staring into the distance and the imploring Marinette, she finally said, “I’m not sure if it’s a good idea to get between Adrien and his father, Marinette. He’s grieving, don’t you think they should be together?”

“I’m not between them,” Marinette replied. “His father kept this from him and… Adrien’s devastated.”

“And that’s horrible, it really is, but running away? No good comes from that.”

“He just… he needs a place he can feel safe. It’s only for tonight. Please. I don’t want him to be alone, and if he’s at home or in a hotel, he will be.”
“Don’t you think his father will be worried where Adrien is? Shouldn’t we tell him?”

Marinette pressed her lips together, unwilling to lie. She didn’t know if Gabriel would be worried at all. “He… probably already knows. We weren’t… we weren’t subtle about leaving. I know it was stupid, Mom. It was very impulsive. I get that. But Adrien just had to get away. I think… there’s a lot I don’t know about Adrien yet but I don’t think he’s very happy at home.”

Sabine closed her eyes and expelled a breath out slowly. “Alright,” she said. “I’ll have your father bring up the air mattress, and although I’m not too happy he’ll be in your bedroom, I understand.”

“He said he can sleep in the loungeroom.”

“And hear your father lumbering around at three in the morning? No. If he actually gets to sleep, we want him to stay that way.” Sabine cupped Marinette’s face. “Emotions get tangled when you’re grieving,” she said. “Don’t let anything happen because you think it’ll make him feel better. If you wouldn’t do it when he’s of his right mind, don’t do it now. Okay?”

Marinette nodded, knowing why Sabine had said it. “I know. I promise I’ll be sensible. I think he just needs to be held.”

“That is likely. But he probably doesn’t like that you’re seeing him at his most vulnerable too.” Sabine kissed Marinette’s forehead. “Try and get him to talk, but don’t force him. Listen.”

“I will.”

“Alright. I’ll send your father up soon. I’ll get some snacks together for you both, okay?”

Marinette kissed her mother’s cheek. “Thank you.” Raising her voice, she called, “Adrien.”

He turned his head and gave her a blank look.

“I’m sorry if I got you in trouble,” he mumbled.

“Don’t worry about me,” Marinette said. “At all.”

“I’m imposing.”

“Adrien, you’re not. Not at all.” She released his hand so she could dump their bags. “Just tell me what you need.”

“You,” he said, shoulders hunched and hands in his pockets. He lifted his gaze from the floor, checking her reaction and, when she smiled at him, he said, “I just need you.”
She stepped toward him and gathered him into her arms. “I’m here.”

Holding on to him tight, she rose up on her toes so she could get her chin on his shoulder. He hunkered down to meet her, then picked her up off the ground and carried her the ten steps so they could migrate to Marinette’s chaise.

It took a bit of rearranging until they were comfortable and even longer before he was ready to talk. With pillows behind her back to cushion, Marinette sat against the head of the chaise with Adrien between her legs. Although both his shoulders were against her stomach, his head was turned so he could listen to the steady rhythm of her heartbeat. He played with her fingers of one hand, stroking along their length or touching the tips of his fingers against the tips of hers.

Tikki and Deedee were curled up together by Marinette’s hip, safely out of sight if anyone came up the stairs.

“Her name,” he said in a voice too ancient and hollow to be her beloved Adrien’s, “was Aurelie.”

“That’s a beautiful name.”

“I had such high hopes for today,” he said. “I didn’t expect this.”

Marinette rested her cheek on his head. “I’m sorry.”

“We were going to have a blast,” he mourned. “Father had given his permission, you were allowed to be there. Snacks and laughter, my best friends in my room. Sure, there’d be study, but there’d also be other teenage things. Maybe I’d hold your hand or flirt through looks. Maybe we play games or I’d feed you bits of fruit. Maybe we’d dare each other to do stupid, outrageous things. Teenage shenanigans. Maybe Nino could see Alya kick butt on the dance machine. Maybe it’d be me and Nino showing off for you both. Maybe I’d get to kiss you goodbye as you went home. Nino!” Adrien blurted, tensing. “I forgot! We need to—”

“I sent Alya a message,” Marinette said, stroking her hand through his hair. “She knows not to go.”

“I should call him.”

“Later. I’m sorry today didn’t turn out like you hoped. It sounded wonderful.”

Silence lingered for a time while Marinette stroked Adrien’s hair, then he sighed, deep and sad. “Her name was Aurelie and I didn’t even know she was gone. What kind of son does that make me?”

She comforted him as best she could. “You didn’t know, kitty. It wasn’t your fault and there wasn’t anything you could’ve done.”

He breathed out slowly, then lifted her fingers to his mouth. He placed a kiss on the tip of each of them. “That mist akuma we had recently showed me Mom. We were boating, it was the last day I saw her and I got to say all the things I wanted to say to her. It was… fantastic and heartbreaking and…”

Marinette made a soft noise to show she was listening. He was all over the place and the best thing she could do was just let him talk.

“Oh, I can’t… I don’t know if it was a true memory. I can’t really remember her voice anymore. Her face… I know what it’s like because we have photos, but… what did it look like as she began to smile? To see it spread? What did her laugh sound like? What did she look like when she was angry? What were her and my father like together? I remember being happy, but what if… what if that
wasn’t real? What if what the mist showed me wasn’t really her, but what I thought she was? What if I remember wrong?”

Marinette didn’t know what to say to that.

“My father doesn’t like to talk about her, so all I really have is what I can remember of her. But I was ten when she left... And... I always thought that there was something about me that kept her away but I could never remember what.”

She squeezed him. “Oh, Chat.”

“Knowing she’s gone... I guess its closure of a sort. I guess. I don’t have to wonder anymore. It hurts... it really does... but... I think... I think it hurts more that my father lied about it. Is... is that bad of me?”

“No,” Marinette said. “I don’t think so.”

“Sometimes,” Deedee said. “Grief manifests in strange ways and—”


Deedee ducked her head down and hid beneath Tikki, covering both eyes with her paws.

“I get it,” Adrien said. “You were trying to protect me. That’s what you do, you protect the hive. But you shouldn’t have kept it from me. I’m sick of being lied to.”

“Adrien,” Marinette said into his hair. “It’s not her fault. She did the best she could. No matter what, you would’ve reacted badly to this. Deedee was trying to minimise damage. If you knew that something would hurt someone, wouldn’t you try to keep it from them too?”

He sighed and rolled his head away from her heart. “It depends on the size of the hurt. This doesn’t feel like it should’ve been kept from me. You didn’t keep it from me.”

Marinette bit her lip. “I considered it. I held out all of ten minutes.”

He tensed. “Why?”

“Because I didn’t have all the information. Deedee said there were reasons and... I trusted that there were. Ultimately, I couldn’t. I didn’t feel right about lying to you.”

“I’m glad you didn’t.” He sighed. “When did you find out, Deedee? Or did you always know?”

Deedee didn’t answer, but Tikki did. “We were aware of the possibility when Master Fu delivered her. It happens sometimes with family members when they find out,” she said. “People get jealous or scared. Most of the time all we need to do is convince them to return the item and the wielder remains unaware.”

“Why?”

“So this doesn’t happen,” Tikki said. “It’s a moment of weakness, usually driven from a place of caring. If we can help it, we don’t take away your support. You have a life beyond the miraculous and we try not to interfere.”

Adrien snorted. “In not telling me, you were interfering.”

“It was the night you and Marinette sorted things out that I knew for certain,” Deedee said in a tiny
voice. “You were so… giddy and happy and I… I didn’t want to ruin that. And you have exams coming up and… I gave him a week to do the right thing, Adrien, and then I was going to tell you.”

“Hmm.”

“We had a chance to get both Ferris and Plagg back, as well as a chance to get better support for you at home, Adrien,” Tikki said. “I am sorry. I know our actions have hurt you, but I stand by Deedee’s decision.”

Adrien sat up. “It wasn’t driven from a place of caring,” he said, pressing his hands into the cushions so he could scoot away from Marinette. “It was driven from a place of control. He controls everything. Where I go to school, who I work for, what activities I do. When I sleep and eat and how much I eat. How I react to things. He tried to control my every emotion! I should’ve know he’d try and control my miraculous too.”

“A little knowledge about the miraculous can be a dangerous thing,” Tikki said. “Gabriel knew how the butterfly could work. What would you have him do?”

“Don’t justify it,” Adrien snapped as he stood up. “I know you think it was for the best but right now it doesn’t feel like it. I used to think that he wasn’t always like this, but now I wonder if he was always like this, but Mom shielded me from it. I feel… manipulated. Let down. Angry.”

Marinette watched with a heavy heart as Adrien walked across the room to her doll stand. He picked up Chat Noir in one hand and Bumblebee in the other and stared at both the dolls. “My uncle. My uncle is Papillon. Someone who I never met, who I don’t even know and… some crazy cultist who thinks he’s entitled… he’s tormenting Paris and us and poor Nooroo. What am I going to do? I can’t even begin to sort this out.”

“We’re in this together,” Marinette said.

“I promise,” Deedee said, floating out from beneath Tikki. “I’ll make it up to you. I’ll set this right.”

He nodded and put Bumblebee back in its place. Holding onto Chat Noir with both hands, he walked back to sit on the chaise.

Deedee looked stricken at that action.

Tikki looked between Marinette and Adrien. “Perhaps we should leave them alone for a while,” she suggested, floating to Deedee’s side. A gentle tug and Tikki pulled Deedee away and the pair of them zipped up through the trap door. It was a semblance of privacy and not really much of one. Marinette knew the kwami would remain within calling distance.

Marinette watched Adrien stare at the Chat Noir doll. “Do you want me to leave?”

He shook his head. “This is your room.”

“If you would prefer to be alone, I don’t mind. I can get us some snacks or—”

“I miss Plagg.” He clenched the Chat Noir doll tight, squishing its stomach between his palms. “He’s a… a little shit sometimes, but he always seemed to say the right thing to get through to me. Whether that’s get me angry or make a distraction or complain about the lack of cheese… I’m sorry,” he said and wiped at his cheek. “This is really pathetic of me.”

Marinette crawled across the chaise. Kneeling behind him, she pressed her chest into his back and wove her arms around his shoulders. “I don’t think so. This is… it’s a lot. It really is. I don’t… I
don’t know what to do either. I don’t know how to make it right or if it can be made right and I
know there’s a lot going on in your head right now. But I’m here for you. Whatever you need.”

“I don’t know what I need.” He took her hand so he could press his lips to it. “And I know I need to
talk. I dragged you into the middle and I know you’re probably confused about everything. I will, I
promise, just…”

“Whenever you’re ready, kitty.”

“Thank you.”

A loud bang from downstairs and a rattle startled them both. “Marinette!” Tom called. “Come get the
air mattress.”

Kissing Adrien’s cheek, she gave him a final squeeze and drew back. “I’ll be right back. Do you
want some snacks?”

“Water, if it’s not too much trouble. Do you want some help?”

“Nah,” she said, crawling from the chaise.

Tom and Sabine met her at the base of the stairs, Tom with the air mattress and pump at his feet and
Sabine with a tray of croissants, milk and water. “How’s he doing?”

Marinette glanced up at her room. Sighing, her shoulders slumped as she lost some of the strength
she’d been trying to give to Adrien. “He’s… torn up. Confused. Very hurt. I’m really not sure how
to help him.”

Sabine nodded. “You’re doing the right thing in terms of helping him. Just let him talk when he
needs to, give him space when he needs it.”

“Anger comes with grief too,” Tom warned. “If he lashes out, not that I think he will, he probably
won’t mean it.”

“I know, Papa,” she said. “We did the stages of grief, together, remember?”

“I think I should go and tell Gabriel he’s here,” Tom said. “It doesn’t feel right otherwise.”

Marinette opened her mouth to try to convince him not to.

“We know how worried we would be if it were you,” Sabine said. “Just knowing where you were,
even if you weren’t willing to talk to us, it would be a relief.”

Marinette closed her mouth and nodded. “I’ll let Adrien know. But, Papa, please don’t meddle.
Adrien will… when he’s ready…”

Tom rested his hand on Marinette’s head and ruffled her hair. “Of course not. I’m just going to tell
him that his son is safe. Give him a chance to talk if he needs it. Sometimes parents are willing to
open up to other parents more than they are to their children.”

Marinette stooped down and picked up the air mattress box and pump in one hand, then balanced
Sabine’s tray of goodies in her other. “Thank you,” she said and trotted back up the stairs.

Adrien lay on the chaise, one foot flat on the floor and the other propped up on the chaise. The Chat
Noir doll was clutched tightly by the hand on his chest, while his other arm lay across his face.
Marinette slid the tray of food onto her desk, left the air mattress box on the floor and went back downstairs for bedding. It wasn’t even remotely close to being time to sleep and they hadn’t had dinner yet, but she felt it was better to be prepared. She wouldn’t set the air mattress itself up until he was ready to sleep.

Maybe she should suggest they watch the rest of the Transformers movies together.

Adrien hadn’t moved when she brought the bedding upstairs. She left it on the floor by her attic door and closed it as quietly as she could. Since it looked like he didn’t want to be disturbed, she crossed over to her computer, grabbed her sketchbook and colouring pencils and logged on.

Typing up her research topic, she studied the outfits and began to sketch. Designing was cathartic, or distracting, she wasn’t sure. Possibly both, but she knew she couldn’t sew right now. Adrien needed peace and quiet.

Green and black, there was no doubt that would be the colour scheme for this. Threads of gold? Or silver? She’d have to colour match to see, either could work, although gold might be better to cross-match with Deedee. Perhaps a similar pattern… or stripes?

A vest for sure, fringed with the same metal coins decorating the hip belt… or maybe he’d like bells instead? The thought of bells made her snicker and she doodled a Chat Noir bell choker.

Harem pants perhaps might suit him better. Sheer or not? Maybe half-sheer? That’d be something for him to decide, but she sketched a couple of variations and made a small colour chart of possibilities.

He’d want something on his arms. She didn’t remember him using them too much and he had such nice arms. She gave a small sigh of delight as she thought about his arms. He’d want something to draw attention to them, wouldn’t he? Arm guards or bangles and bracelets, there were so many choices. Something to accent them, something special.

“What are you doing?” Adrien asked as he came up behind her.

Marinette chewed on the end of her pencil and used her mouse to scroll. “Researching for a design.”

“Um. Okay. So. Well… I like your idea of research but I’m… very envious right now.”

Marinette blinked and tilted her head back to look at him. “Why?”

Adrien nodded toward the screen and Marinette refocussed from the costumes to the people wearing them.

And blushed scarlet.

Half-naked, muscular men in provocative positions and she’d had them on display on her screen. In front of her boyfriend of only a few days. She yelped in horror. “I wasn’t! I didn’t! Oh my god, I wasn’t looking at them—”

He dropped his eyes to her sketch pad of half-finished designs and rough outlines. “You… you really were looking at the outfits, weren’t you?” he asked, sounding amazed.

She covered her face with her hands and squeaked at him.
Throwing his arm over her shoulders, he pulled her in toward him so she could bury her face in his neck. “You are adorable,” he said as he hugged her and laughed.

That laugh. His carefree laugh bursting from his chest and spilling out to grace the world with its golden sound. She remembered the first time she heard him laugh when the first spark ignited within her chest. Standing in the rain and holding his umbrella and falling in love and now, here she was, sitting beside him and falling harder than ever. She lifted her face from his neck and watched him laugh.

He didn’t seem concerned with her gaze as the laughter pealed to an end. Smiling, he said, “Thank you, I really needed—”

Gripping his shirt, Marinette pulled him toward her and pressed her lips to his.

Adrien made a muffled noise of surprise and Marinette released him. She sat back and stared at him with wide eyes. “Sorry!” she squeaked and covered her mouth with the tips of her fingers.

“I…” His pink tongue flicked out as he licked his lips. “I don’t mind.”

She cringed. “I do.” Removing her hands from her mouth, she clutched at her head. “You’re hurt and vulnerable right now and I shouldn’t take advantage of that or complicate things. I’m so impulsive sometimes. I keep thinking about our other kiss and how much I wanted to do it again and—”

“Wait. Other kiss?”

Her eyes widened. “Oh. Um… Remember Dark Cupid?”

“Yeah?”

She dropped her hands to her lap. “You were under his spell and the only way to break it was a kiss. I had to chase you halfway across Paris to get you.”

He looked shocked. “You kissed me? You chased me down to kiss me?”

“Well, Rose said only love can conquer hate and a prince always kisses a princess to break a spell… that seemed like the easiest way.”

He snorted. “So… I’m your princess now?”

She giggled. “If you want to put it that way. You’re a very pretty princess.”

“You’re a very pretty princess too.” He chuckled. “I spent all that time working up to it and you’ve already had our first kiss. You really kissed me to save me?”

“You’re my best friend,” she assured him. “I love you. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you, Chat, including chasing you across Paris to kiss you and bring you back to me.”

Adrien’s breath hitched, his eyes widened and his pupils dilated.

“Of course, I secretly hoped you’d remember it,” she said, saddened. “But, that’s okay, we can—”

Cool hands cupped her face, the pads of his fingers soft against her cheeks as Adrien tugged her toward him. The warmth of his mouth aligning with hers sent a current streaking through her body. She forgot to breathe, forgot to think, forgot everything but the softness and sweetness of his lips.
Her hand was halfway through reaching for his chest when he released her tingling mouth. She gasped in a breath, peeking out through her eyelashes to see the fuzziness of his face and his enraptured expression. Soft and gentle and still so very close, his breath tickled her cheek as he stroked his nose against hers. “I love you too.”

Her hand finished its journey to his chest, clutching at his shirt to coax him forward so they could kiss again.

Tom pressed the intercom button for Agreste Mansion and waited. He peered through the gate. Such an empty, lonely sort of building. There didn’t seem to be any signs of life inside the fence. What must it be like for Adrien growing up here? To have everything except the one thing he wanted?

Trying again, Tom spoke to the speaker. “Hello? I’m Tom Dupain, Marinette’s father. I was hoping you’d have a minute. I wanted to speak to you about Adrien.”

The gate rattled open.

Chapter End Notes

_Qooky’s responsible for the prompt for Nino and Alya._

*It's not a mistake that Alya didn’t get Marinette's message (cause I know people are going to say that).*
What do you get if you cross a bee with a door bell?

Chapter Summary

What do you get if you cross a bee with a door bell?
A hum dinger!

Chapter Notes

Links for art since last chapter, thank you so much guys!

Giglezteehee

“Chloé, I don’t think we’re invited. You don’t even have the class with Adrien that they’re studying for tonight,” Sabrina said, standing nervously beside Chloé as her friend held her perfectly manicured fingernail on the buzzer outside Agreste mansion.

“I’m his best friend,” Chloé said, her hand splayed on her chest. “He always welcomes my presence. And if Marinette wants to have her silly little romance with him, she has to put up with me.” She waited, then impatiently pushed the buzzer again. “What’s with this stupid thing? Hello? Hello? Is anyone listening? Let me in.”

A click and the gate rattled open, allowing them access.

“See?” Chloé said and flounced inside. “I’m always welcome.”

Shoulders hunched, Sabrina followed. “But we didn’t even bring any study materials, we’re going to interrupt them.”

“Quit being such a downer,” Chloé scoffed, flipping her ponytail. “Obviously, they’ll need to take a break and our presence will encourage that.”

When she reached the front door, Chloé thrust them open to make a dramatic entrance. “Adri-honey!” she called. “I have arrived!”

“I don’t think Marinette would—”

“That’s weird,” Chloé said, peering toward the corner of the foyer. With a laugh, she blurted, “Oh my god, it’s so tacky!”

Sabrina peeked around Chloé, spotting a lifelike marble statue of Nino standing in the corner. “Is that Nino?”

“Niiiiice,” Chloé drawled, moving closer for a better look. “I’m going to tease him. Do you think he posed for that? I wonder who made it. I should ask my father to commission one of me for the lobby. It would look fantastic there, don’t you think?”

Chloé snorted, then beamed. “I bet there’s one of me in Adrien’s room! Oh, what a sweet boy he is, getting statues of his friends like that.”

“Monsieur Dupain?” Sabrina said, tilting her head at the bulky statue which barred entrance into one of the rooms behind the stairs. She rounded the stairs so she could look. “Chloé, why would there be a statue of Marinette’s dad?”

“How should I know?” Chloé asked. “Wow—” she reached out to flick the pearly white headphones around the statue of Nino’s neck. “Even Nino’s headphones are tacky. Whoever did this really captured the essence of Nino. I have to commission them.”

The statue was so lifelike Sabrina was sure she could see it breathe. There seemed to be life in those eyes, staring straight into her soul. Unnerved, Sabrina took a few steps back and hunched her shoulders to make herself smaller. “Chloé, I don’t think we should mess with them. This is very freaky.”

“Oh, pssh, Sabrina,” Chloé said, flopping her hand at her friend. “You worry too much.”

Flicking her eyes to Chloé, Sabrina gasped. “Chloé! He moved!”

“Don’t be silly,” Chloé said, turning back to Nino. “He’s a statue, he can’t— eek!” She scampered away in fright as she noticed Nino’s hand reaching for her. “He moved!”

“Chloé!” Sabrina blurted, her eyes tracking Alya as that statue began to move toward the stairs to descend down from that level. “We need to get out of here!”

Chloé bolted for the door. “Get out of my way!” she said, shoving Sabrina to the side.

Sabrina hit the floor, sliding on her side a small distance away. She looked up in time to see Chloé smack into a statue of the Gorilla, who’d blocked the exit.

Wrapping his arms around the girl’s small frame, the Gorilla hoisted up Chloé and threw her over his shoulder.

“Put me down, you brute!” she complained, kicking and swinging her legs. “I am Chloé, the mayor’s daughter and I demand that you unhand me this instant!”

The Gorilla walked toward one of the doors, Nino moving to meet him and hold the door open.

“Chloé!” Sabrina yelped.

“Help me!” Chloé screeched, then her eyes widened and she went pale as she ceased her struggling. “Sabrina, run!”

Panicked, Sabrina scrambled to her feet, dodging around Tom’s large hands before they could snatch her. “Leave me alone!” she yelped and made a run for Chloé. “Chloé, hang on!”

Extending her hand, she managed to catch Chloé’s wrist. Sabrina dug her heels in and tried to pull Chloé free. The floor was slippery and she wasn’t strong enough, so the Gorilla dragged them both closer to Gabriel’s office.
Chloé shoved Sabrine’s hand away and shrieked, “Get Ladybug! If Alya’s here, the Ladyblog won’t know!”

Sabrina’s face twisted up as she was torn at what to do. Chloé was right, the best thing to do was to get Ladybug, but that required Sabrina to leave her friend behind.

“Run!” Chloé shrieked.

Heart racing, Sabrina fled.

“I’d like to believe he cares,” Adrien murmured. They lay curled up together, side by side on Marinette’s chaise. Legs entwined, foreheads pressed together, with the hand they lay on curled around their partner’s hand. Marinette’s eyes were closed, as were Adrien’s, but neither of them were sleeping. It seemed easier for Adrien to speak when he wasn’t looking into her eyes and judging reactions. “Ultimately, I think he believes that he cares. He believes he’s doing the right thing…”

“The wrong thing for the right reasons?”

“Are they the right reasons?”

“I think he thinks they are.”

“I wish he’d trust me. Instead of taking my ring, if he’d just thought to talk to me…”

“I keep wondering what my parents would say,” Marinette whispered. “I don’t think it’d be good.” Sour, Adrien muttered, “But I bet they wouldn’t take your miraculous away.”

“Maybe they’d ask for it, though.”

“There’s a difference between ask and take. I bet they’d support you in the end.”

“I hope so.”

“I don’t think he’d ever support me.”

“He lost your mother too, Adrien.”

“Doesn’t make it right.”

She curled in on herself. “I’m sorry.”

He kissed her nose. “It’s okay. You’re trying to give me plausible reasons why he’d do something like this, but I get it. I do. I want to think the best of him too. He’s my father and I…”

“You love him.”

“Yeah.” He swallowed. “Marinette?”

“Yes?”

“I… I don’t mean to sound needy and pathetic… and in saying that, I probably do…”

“No, you don’t.”
He tugged on the fabric of her shirt by her hip. “It’s… it’s been a long time since someone’s told me they loved me.”

That astounded her and she blinked open her eyes to look at him. His father didn’t tell him? There wasn’t a day where Tom and Sabine didn’t let her know she was loved. How hard must it be for Adrien?

Adrien snuggled closer. “Can you tell me again?”

“I’ll tell you every day,” she murmured and tightened her grip on his hand. “I love you.”

He kissed her, his mouth lingering against hers. “If you tell me every day, I might just have to kiss you every time you do.”

“Heqoul love you.” She waited for her kiss and when he was done, she repeated, “I love you.”

He laughed and obliged her. “You’re the best.”

She dropped into silence and she chewed on her lip before she decided to broach the subject. “Chat?”

“Yeah?”

“You need to forgive Deedee.”

He sighed. “Honeybug—”

“Or talk to her, or something. She’s so still. Deedee shouldn’t be still.”

“Yeah, I know. Would you forgive her?”

“Absolutely. That’s what friends do. It would have to be something really horrible for me not to want to talk it out with my friends. It doesn’t have to be now, but you need to talk to her. Tell me, what’s the most horrible thing Plagg has done?”

“Stored his camembert in my shoe and didn’t tell me. When I put my foot in it, it’d melted and slimed everything.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Gross. Did he say sorry?”

“Nope. But that’s Plagg. He never admits to any mistake.”

“Deedee said she was sorry.”

“And that makes her, what, better than Plagg?” he asked with a touch of heat in his voice.

“It makes her different than Plagg,” Marinette soothed. “She came in with no knowledge of what she was getting into, no knowledge of what your life was like, and absolutely knowing she’d have to leave when we found Plagg.”

Adrien frowned. “So, she lied to me so that she could stay out longer?”

“She protects the hive, but she also protects the status quo. And your status quo was believing your father wouldn’t hurt you. I think she did the best she could with very little knowledge.”

Adrien hummed at her and rolled onto his back, using his hand to cushion his head.
Marinette propped herself up on her elbow and placed her free hand on his stomach. “Deedee likes to see the best in people. I think she truly believed he’d give your ring back given the chance. And then maybe it was too late.”

“It doesn’t—”

“And… if I remember correctly, the day after we figured things out, she was in a bit of a tizz, rushing off to talk to Tikki, who then told us we had to go straight to Master Fu. I’m betting they had a discussion behind those doors on what they should do. Perhaps they thought it would be too much all at once.”

“You’re doing that thing again.”

“What thing?”

“Giving me plausible reasons to someone’s actions.”

She stroked her fingers along his nose. “I’m just trying to see both sides.”

“I know I need to talk to her. I’d like to be irrationally angry for a little while longer, thanks.”

“Okay.”

“And maybe kiss you until my lips are numb.”

She smiled at that. “Okay,” she said and leant down to kiss him.

Kissing him was nice. Easy. Gentle. They weren’t skilled and it took a moment for them both to align correctly. Bumped noses and teeth didn’t bother either of them, but it did cause a few muffled giggles. She wasn’t sure what she wanted to do with her hands, except for knowing she wanted them on him. His hands took up residence in her hair and on her neck. Little chaste kisses that turned into parted lips, longer and slower and somehow more sensual than before. When the burning in her lungs reminded Marinette she should be breathing and not concentrating on the feel of him, their breath mingled in the heated space between them.

There were a few experimental kisses, preluded by a “May I try?” or “Is this okay?” and one kiss that had Marinette descend into uncontrollable giggles and a pouty “Shuddup, I’m learning,” from Adrien.

Little pecks and deeper kisses, nibbled lips and a tasting of tongue and when they finally stopped to cuddle, Marinette felt flustered and warm all over.

“That was…” Adrien cleared his throat to try and get rid of the huskiness.

“Amazing.”

“Yup. My lips are numb, so that’s one part of my day that worked as I planned.”

She giggled. “Good.”

“Marinette?” Sabine called from the base of the stairs. “It’s wonton time. Would you and Adrien like to help?”

“Wonton time?” Adrien asked.

Marinette nodded. Pulling away, she stood and sniffed the air. “Smells like a soup day. We roll
wontons and cook them in the soup. It’s pretty fun, would you like to have a go?”

“Cooking?” he said, perking up. “I… I never… I mean, I don’t know how.”

Offering him her hand, she said, “Wanna learn?”

Adrien slid his hand into hers. “You bet I do.”

Sabine had everything set up on the bench as they wandered downstairs and stood washing bok choy in the sink. On the stove top, two pots bubbled, one with the beginnings of the soup, the other was water to boil the wontons. She looked over at them and smiled. “Hello.”

“Hi Mom,” Marinette said, flouncing over. Feeling cheeky, and in the mood for some normality, she hip bumped her mother to move her aside so she could wash her hands.

“Ooh, manners, child,” Sabine scolded fondly, leaning her shoulder into Marinette deliberately.

“Pardon me,” Marinette said, with a mock haughty voice and hip bumped her again. “Adrien, come wash your hands.”

“Feeling better?” Sabine asked, shaking the bok choy clear of water.

“Yes. Thank you,” Adrien said.

After drying her hands, Marinette went around the other side of the bench and sat on a stool. Sabine had set it out as she usually did. Wonton skins, small bowls of water, already prepared wonton fillers and plates for the completed product.

“This looks complicated,” Adrien said as he sat down.

“Not really,” Marinette said, peeling one of the wonton skins away from the pile. “Okay, so, water is used to glue the skin together.” Reaching for one of the spoons in the wonton mixture, she scooped a bit into the middle of the wonton skin. Wetting her finger in the water bowl, she ran it around the edge of the skin, then folded the skin in half, pressing the edges together. “You want to get as much of the air out as you can.” Dabbing a bit more water, she folded two of the corners together to make a nurses cap. “And that’s it,” she finished, holding up the finished dumping. She tucked it under the wet cloth-covered plate beside her and reached for another skin.

Adrien watched her, copying her actions closely. “You make this look easy.”

“Practice,” Marinette said. “Papa and I have races to see who can get them done the fastest. He always wins. You can do triangles if you like.”

“I’ll… try.”

Blinking, she paused and looked up at Adrien. “You’re not allergic to shellfish, are you?”

Sabine stopped chopping vegetables for the soup. “Oh, I should’ve checked. These are pork and prawn wontons, but I have chicken I can—”

“No,” Adrien assured them with a disarming smile. “I’m only allergic to feathers.” Adrien held up a lumpy, misshapen wonton. “Like that?”

It looked like one of Marinette’s first attempts when she was much younger. “Well done.”

They continued making wontons, while Marinette and Sabine chatted about customers of the day
and other mundane things. Small conversations, allowing Adrien to remain silent and concentrate on folding wontons, or join in if he wished. It was nice to see Adrien focussed on something other than what had taken place today, as well as see that proud little smile on his face as he finished a wonton.

When they had a small pile ready, Sabine swapped the plate with an empty one so she could cook the first batch of wontons while Marinette and Adrien finished folding.

Adrien laughed and lifted one of his creations to show Marinette. He’d folded it in a triangle, then took the two corners and folded them so they stuck out above the remaining point. “Cat face,” he said, proud.

Marinette giggled. “It’s perfect.

“Oh, dear,” Sabine said after a few minutes. “The zombies are attacking. We’re going to have to eat their brains.”

Marinette ducked her head to giggle. “Oh yum! We haven’t had zombie brains in ages!”

“Huh?” Adrien asked, confused as he looked between both women.

“Come and look,” Sabine said, moving aside to give Adrien access to the pot.

Adrien pushed away from the bench to go and see what Sabine was talking about, but Marinette knew what it meant. Some of the wontons hadn’t glued together properly and had come apart, making a mush of cooked pork and prawn with strips of wonton skin.

“Zombie brains,” Sabine said, nodding sagely.

“I’m so sorry!” Adrien blurted, cringing. “Did I ruin it?”

“Of course not, I love zombie brains,” Marinette said, continuing to fold wontons. “I mash up my wontons anyway, that just saved me some time.”

“She really is a disgusting eater,” Sabine said, scooping broken up bits of wonton from the pot of water into a bowl.

Shoulders slumped, Adrien sat back down, staring at the wontons left to be folded.

“Don’t stop,” Marinette said. “Half the fun in cooking is the mistakes you make.”

“Marinette would know,” Sabine said, still cooking at the stove. “She makes the most magnificent rubber cakes. Tom is very proud.”

“Rubber cakes?” Adrien asked, intrigued.

Marinette giggled and lowered her voice. “We dropped it off my terrace. It bounced.”

Adrien snorted and perked up. “Really?”

“Yup. Second bounce it splattered all over the pavement, but the first bounce was impressive.”

Sabine said, “She’s never been able to match the height of that first bounce since. Not for lack of trying.”

“One day,” Marinette said, placing another wonton on the plate. “I’ll perfect the bouncy rubber cake.”
“Nearly done, Marinette?” Sabine asked, glancing at the clock on the wall. “Your father should be here soon, but you two can eat now if you want.”

“Zombie brain soup,” Marinette replied, dusting her hands together. “And yeah, we’re done.”

“Pack them for me, would you? We’ll freeze the excess.” Sabine slid a bowl in front of Adrien. “Here you go.” She put her hands on Adrien’s shoulders and gave a squeeze. “Zombie brains.”

He laughed as he looked at the bowl. “It really does look like brains, doesn’t it?”

Marinette stood to retrieve a container. As she moved past Adrien, she squeezed his upper arm and drawled, “Braaaaains,” then chomped her teeth at him to make him laugh.

Marinette was halfway through her soup when someone pounded on the downstairs door. Blinking, she waved her hand at Sabine, who wiped her hands on a towel. “I’ll get it,” she said. “It’s probably Nino and Alya.”

Adrien put his spoon in the bowl. “I’ll come—”

“Sit,” Marinette told him, waving her hands, then gestured his bowl. “Eat.”

It wasn’t Alya or Nino. It was a red, scared and out-of-breath Sabrina, who gasped when Marinette opened the door. “Madame Cheng—” she blinked. “Marinette! You’re not a statue!”

Marinette frowned. “No? I’m not? Should I be?”

Sabrina spoke in a rush between panting breaths. “We were, well, Chloé made me, but we were there and Alya and Nino and your father and oh my gosh she made me leave and now she’s in danger and I didn’t know where else to go!”

Marinette rested her hand on Sabrina’s shoulder. “Slow down!”

Sabrina heaved in a gulping breath. “Do you know how to contact Ladybug?”

“What?”

“There’s an akuma at Adrien’s house!”

Marinette felt like her brain shut off. She stared at Sabrina, refusing to understand her. “What?”

“At least I think there’s an akuma. I didn’t actually see one, but statues don’t move. Chloé wanted to surprise Adrien, so we went over there, even though we knew you guys were studying, but when we got there, no one was answering the intercom and then the gate opened and we went inside and there were all these statues! And they moved! That can only be an akuma, right? There was one of Nino and Alya and—and Adrien’s driver and your papa was there, Marinette, they were all statues! That’s why I came here. Alya has the Ladyblog, but I don’t know where she lives, I thought maybe you had access to it and your mom could help and—and gosh, I’m so scared!” Sabrina trembled. “Chloé was still there and she told me to run and—”

“I have access to the Ladyblog,” Marinette said, squeezing Sabrina’s shoulder to stop the babble. “Run home, Sabrina, and stay inside. I’ll get hold of Ladybug.”

Sabrina hopped from foot to foot. “I can’t, I have to go back for Chloé!”

“No, you have to get yourself someplace safe and hide,” Marinette said. “I’m sure that would be what Chloé would want.”
Sabrina nodded furiously. “Okay! Yeah, you’re right. Akuma 101, get out of the way.”

Marinette watched Sabrina run off, then closed the door and stared at the blue paint. Dread swamped her, clinging to her like black sludge. She let her head fall forward, pressing it against the wood.

What was she going to do?

An akuma. At Agreste mansion. She felt sick to her stomach.

There was really only one person who that could be, but Adrien was in no shape to deal with that at the moment. Or at all. Nor would he be willing to let her take care of it by herself. What was she going to do? If she lied to him now and went to deal with the akuma without telling him, she’d be like everyone else who’d lied to him recently. He’d never trust her again.

And if she told him the truth, he’d be devastated and guilty and run in there without a plan. The guilt he’d feel, the guilt they’d both feel. They caused this.

Nino and Alya were caught in this akuma’s web. Why were they there? Hadn’t she sent a message? Maybe it hadn’t gone through? And Tom. Her papa had gone to tell Gabriel where his son was and had been dragged into this too.

Marinette let out a small moan as the gravity of the situation hit her. It was worse. Gabriel knew who she was. He knew who Adrien was.

It was inevitable that Papillon now knew who they were.

Which meant… Papillon would know where she lived.

Strength vanished from her knees and she clutched at the door. Papillon knew. He had to know. Her home was in danger, her family.

The cat miraculous. Gabriel had the cat miraculous. So Papillon had that too.

One-half of an ultimate power and…

Only Ladybug stood in his way.

What was she going to do?

Marinette took a deep breath to settle her nerves. First things first. Get Adrien and Sabine out of the line of fire. Didn’t matter how. Didn’t matter if she was found out. Papillon knew and they didn’t have time.

“Mom!” Marinette bellowed and bolted for the stairs. “Mom!”

Sabine met her at the door, responding to the panic in Marinette’s voice. “What’s wrong?”

“We have to go,” she blurted, pushing past her and into the living area. She grabbed her mother and dragged her into the room so she could shut the door. “We need to leave. Right now.”

“What?” Sabine said. “What’s going on?”

“There’s an akuma coming here.”

“What?” Adrien blurted, knocking over his chair in his haste to stand.
She met his gaze for a second, before turning to her mother. “We need to leave. We have to get out of here before we get trapped.”

“Marinette,” Sabine said, keeping her cool. “We’re safe here. I’m sure Ladybug is on her way.”

“Even if she is, we need to get out,” Marinette said. “We’re in danger here and we can’t just sit.”

Adrien moaned in distress. “Oh no.”

Marinette spun, turning her attention to him. “Adrien—”

Pale and sweating, he looked at her as though he wanted her to deny everything. “It’s him, isn’t it? He’s coming after me.”

Not knowing what to say to make it better or even bareable, Marinette nodded. “I’m sorry.”

Another moan and Adrien clutched at his head and fell to his knees. “No. No. No.”

Sabine blurted, “You think Adrien’s father is the akuma? But… but your father went to see him!”

Adrien looked up at Marinette, stricken. “This means he knows.”

Marinette nodded, her lips pressed together to keep herself from crying.

Adrien curled in on himself. “No. This is my fault, all my fault.”

“Marinette, your father—”

She was torn between two people she loved, trying to get them both moving. “Mom, we gotta go. Papa would understand!”

Sabine covered her mouth with her hands.

“He’ll be okay,” Marinette assured her mother. “Ladybug can fix this. But we need to get Adrien away from here.” Scampering across to him, she tugged on his arms, trying to get him to rise. “We need to go. This is not your fault, not at all. Don’t think that. Just hang on, okay? Please.”

Adrien whimpered. “Plagg. He’s got Plagg. I’ll never see him again.”

“We don’t know that,” Marinette said, still tugging. Caught in misery, Adrien was dead weight in her arms, his legs refusing to work. “Adrien! Please.”

Something crashed downstairs, as though something large had forced its way through the downstairs door. Sabine yelped in fear.

Releasing Adrien, Marinette bolted to the door and flung it open. Hitting the bannister with her stomach, she peered down the gap between the flights of stairs. A marble statue of Tom peered up at her through the slit in the stairs and she watched him begin to flounder his way up. Racing back inside, Marinette slammed the door shut, hitting all the locks she could, even though she knew they wouldn’t hold.

Running for the bookcase by the wall next to the door, Marinette bellowed, “Upstairs, now!” Feet scrambling on the floor as she heaved, she managed to drag the bookcase away from the wall, then tip it so it blocked the majority of the door.

Adrien hadn’t moved and Sabine wasn’t having much luck coaxing him.
They were out of time, Marinette couldn’t afford any more delays or questions as she shoved her mother toward her stairs. “Go, I’ll get him.”

Sabine didn’t look convinced. “But—”

“Get something heavy to drag on the door,” Marinette suggested, then rushed back to Adrien, dropping to her knees in front of him. “Adrien.” She ducked her head, trying to get in his direct line of sight. “Adrien. Look at me.”

He was slow to meet her gaze, but he made it.

She cupped his face with both her hands to bring his gaze up even further. “We’ll get him back. I promise. But we need to go. We have to protect Tikki right now.”

“This is my fault.”

She couldn’t let him wallow. “Run with me.”

“Run?”

“Run or I’ll carry you over my shoulder.” She tried to smile. “And you know I will.”

The glassiness in his eyes cleared. “You would.”

“Damn right I would. We’re not engaging, not until we’re ready.”

He swallowed. “Tactical retreat and re-evaluation?”

She nodded. “You don’t even have to fight. I can—”

“I won’t let you do this on your own. You and me against the world.” Taking her hand, Adrien staggered to his feet and Marinette pulled him up into her room. She slammed shut the door behind her, then spun to help her mother drag the chaise over it.

Marinette rushed to the closest window, clambering up on her desk so she could look out.

The street below was full of statues. Ordinary people turned into marble. They circled the street below, all looking up at her home like the statues were expecting someone to burst onto the terrace.

“What’s the akuma?” Sabine asked as she dragged Marinette’s set of drawers across to further block the attic doors. “Can you see?”

“Papa was a marble statue,” Marinette said, her heart sinking. “And… so is every passer-by from here to Adrien’s house. I can’t see the akuma though, but I guess his power is to make statues and command them.”

“Porcelain dolls,” Adrien muttered. “Marble statues. Pretty to look at, never say a word. Does he want to control me that much?”

“If we go out to the terrace,” Sabine suggested. “Maybe one of them will get stuck in the trap door if they try and get through. We can hide on the rooftops until Ladybug gets here.”

Marinette shook her head. “Mom—”

“There’s no need to panic,” Sabine continued with signs she was beginning to panic herself. She hustled Adrien toward the stairs heading up to Marinette’s bed so they could get to the terrace.
“We’ll be safe. She’s the hero of Paris. She’s never let us down. Marinette, honey, come on. Everything will be alright, we just have to get to safety.”

Marinette took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Even if she somehow managed to duck away from her mother to transform, she couldn’t leave her unprotected. Papillon would know who Ladybug was, if he caught Sabine, she could be used as bait. Like her father would be. Maybe everyone would soon know who she and Adrien were. After all, what better way to get the items than out the heroes wielding them? There was always someone who thought giving Papillon what he wanted would keep everyone safe.

Maybe it would be easier on Sabine if it came from her.

Her fingers slid from the glass until her hands rested by her sides. There was a small tug on her sleeve and Marinette cupped her hand around Tikki, who smiled at her as if knowing Marinette’s thoughts.

Turning away from the window, Marinette jumped down from the table. “There’s no way to get around that dividing wall,” she said and resigned herself to what was about to happen. “You and Papa made sure of that before you let me go up there, remember? If we go out there, we’re sitting ducks.”

“I’m sure if we prop things up, we could—”

She hunched her shoulders and looked at Tikki, who nodded in support. “Mom, you’re proud of me, right? You always said I was destined for greatness.”

“Marinette?” Sabine asked.

Marinette lifted her chin and stared straight ahead. “Tikki, spots on.”
What did the confused bee say?

Chapter Summary

What did the confused bee say?
To bee or not to bee.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Aware that her mother was gaping at her, Ladybug reached for her yo-yo. A twist and a few button presses and she separated the lid, then reached back to press it to her back between the shoulder blades so her wings could sprout. As they shimmered into existence, she hooked the remaining yo-yo piece around her hips and peeked up at her mother.

Eyes wide and breath hitched, Sabine’s mouth opened. Then closed. Then reopened.

Adrien stood quietly above and behind Sabine, watching with half-lidded eyes. Shame burned Ladybug’s cheeks since she realised she’d revealed them both without consultation or warning. He didn’t look angry. He looked resigned and burdened and she hated that look on his face. She knew she’d have to apologise as soon as she could but she also knew he could keep his half of the secret if he chose. He didn’t have to transform as well, especially if he didn’t trust Deedee. He could feign shock and she’d rescue them both.

“Mom, Adrien,” Ladybug said and rubbed her neck with her hand. She met Adrien’s gaze to see him frown at her in thought and she hoped he knew why she included him. “Look, I know this is freaky, but we need to get out of here. I need you to trust me.”

Sabine put her hand on the railing of the stairs to Ladybug’s bed to keep herself standing and gurgled.

Adrien’s sudden jerk forward startled Ladybug. He reached up to clutch behind his head and Deedee ducked out. As Adrien turned sideways, Ladybug saw the comb placed in the back of his hair. Adrien’s expression was torn, while Ladybug wasn’t in a position to see Deedee’s. Ladybug did see Deedee float to Adrien’s nose and Adrien stroke his hand across Deedee’s head.

Turning her attention back to her mother, Ladybug walked toward Sabine. “We need to leave.”

Adrien said, “Fuzz up.”

Having a second hero appearing in the room caused Sabine to whirl and clutch at her chest. “Oh! Oh, you’re— you’re— oh.” She jerked her gaze between the two of them, trying to understand. “But — I thought Ladybug and Chat were… a— and— you’re… um…”

“That is Chat,” Ladybug said as took her mother’s upper arm to encourage her up the stairs.

“It’s a long story,” Bumblebee said, scrambling through the hatch. Lying down on the terrace, he reached back in to help Sabine through the hole. “What’s the plan?”

Ladybug buzzed the wings and lifted her dazzled mother up to Bumblebee. She really wasn’t sure.
She needed to protect her mother, but she couldn’t just leave her somewhere and hope that Papillon wouldn’t come for her and she couldn’t take her mother into battle. That would divide her attention. She considered telling Bumblebee he had to stay behind and protect her, but she didn’t think he’d go for that. Making a decision, she said, “We’ll go to Master Fu’s. It’s not ideal… but…”

He nodded. “I hear you.”

After helping Sabine through, Bumblebee reached back down for her with a smile. She could see the effort he put into appearing normal for her. “Have you mastered them yet?”

She closed her hand around his wrist. “I’m… well, I haven’t face planted any walls!”

He pulled her up, teasing, “Yet.”

“I’ll use you to cushion us if it happens,” she said, stepping into the middle of her terrace. Ladybug wrapped one hand around Bumblebee’s waist, pulling him in close so she could carry him and extended her other toward Sabine. “Let’s go.”

Sabine looked toward the trap door. “But your father—”

A loud crash from downstairs made them all jump. “Mom, please.”

As Ladybug spoke, Bumblebee looped his arms around Ladybug’s shoulders, crossed his wrists so Ladybug’s neck was in the circle his arms created, and extended his hands to Sabine. “You won’t fall. We got you.”

Checking Bumblebee’s stance, Sabine stepped close so she could copy. Bumblebee gripped Sabine’s upper arms while Ladybug wrapped her arm around Sabine’s waist.

Gritting her teeth, she shot straight up in the air way too fast to be safe. Sabine stifled a shriek and Bumblebee hooked his knees around Ladybug’s leg for more grip.

“Sorry!” Ladybug said, halting mid-air to hover. Bumblebee and Sabine slammed into her sides from the momentum of her flight.

Ladybug had only just managed to learn solo flights, practising under the cover of darkness. She certainly hadn’t mastered carrying people while she flew or even attempted it. She wobbled and warbled, drifting left and right like a drunken ladybug, even though she was trying to hover. It didn’t help she felt lopsided. Bumblebee was lankier and heavier than Sabine, but Sabine clutched her too tight to find a balance between them. She could feel Tikki helping her, correcting the suit and applying pressure to show her how to fly burdened as she was.

Her mad dash upward had gotten them almost level with the top of the Eiffel Tower and Ladybug could feel Sabine’s fear trembling through her. “Sorry, Mom! I overcompensated.”

Sabine made a shaky noise and didn’t reply.

Bumblebee hung from her shoulders, peering down at the ground wavering below them. “According to the laws of physics, bumblebees are the ones who shouldn’t be able to fly, not ladybugs.”

She appreciated the tease even though she made her voice tart. “Doing my best.”

“Circle,” Bumblebee suggested. “Let’s look while we can.”

She grunted. “Rather just get out of here.”
“You fly, I’ll look. I… I need to know.”

She nodded. As requested, they circled once, then Ladybug pointed them in the opposite direction of Master Fu’s with the intent on circling back around once they were clear.

As they flew she told Sabine about Tikki and how she’d come to be Ladybug and Bumblebee mentioned Plagg. They told her about the items and how they were supposed to protect them, but they didn’t tell her about the ultimate power. They mentioned Master Fu, calling him a friend of the miraculous and not mentioning he had one. They told Sabine about how Gabriel had taken the cat ring in an effort to protect Adrien, and now that Gabriel was an akuma, the ring was in danger. Abridged and hurried, Sabine didn’t say anything during the explanation.

Ladybug worried, “Mom?”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Sabine asked, and Ladybug knew she was hurt. Her parents had thought she could tell them anything, and here she was withholding the greatest of secrets.

“I tried. First thing I did when Tikki appeared was yell for you, but she told me I couldn’t tell anyone.”

“Not even me,” Bumblebee said.

“I guess it’s a safeguard so… what happen to Adrien doesn’t happen,” Ladybug said. “I’m needed. Tikki’s needed. If she falls into the wrong hands it could be disastrous and—”

“And you think you’re the right hands?” Sabine asked and her hands clenched around Ladybug. “You’re fifteen, you have your whole life ahead of you—”

“I don’t think we’re being followed,” Bumblebee interrupted. “You should be safe to land.”

Ladybug tightened her grip on them both and started her descent. “We’ll go for the roof.”

Sabine squeaked and squeezed her eyes shut.

“I haven’t perfected landings,” Ladybug said as they neared the rooftop near Master Fu’s abode. She stopped and hovered, lowering them down bit by bit. It was not graceful and she wobbled all over the place as she tried to land.

Bumblebee snorted. “I’ll drop and catch you. Sabine, hold onto Ladybug.”

Sabine tightened her grip on Ladybug and Bumblebee dropped down to the rooftops with a soft thump. It took a bit of work to get them both down and safe on the rooftop, even with Bumblebee catching them.

Stepping back, Bumblebee raised his fist to Ladybug. “Good work.”

Ladybug bumped her fist on his and reached for her wings so she could reforge her yo-yo.

“We’re going to have to tell your father,” Sabine said, staggering away to clutch a chimney.

“Yes, I know.”

“Why you?” Sabine asked, looking between them. “Why either of you? You’re so young! I assumed you were both much older. How could anyone put such pressure on you so young?”

“We asked that ourselves,” Bumblebee said.
“And what answer did you come up with?” Sabine asked.

Bumblebee shuffled. “I think ancient and powerful beings chose us to be their avatars,” he said and ran his fingers through his fuzz. “I think there’s… a lot more going on than we can explain in a few sentences. And I think fifteen wasn’t always as young as we considered it now.”

Ladybug said, “Tikki told me mid to late teens are ideal. We’re mostly grown but there’s still a lot of change ahead. She said we’re more likely to work with the kwami than seek to control them and that… the older you are, the more chance of corruption.”

“Papillon, for example,” Bumblebee said.

“And you think Papillon’s coming for you today?” Sabine asked. “After everything, he picks today?”

“Strike while the iron’s hot,” Bumblebee muttered. “My father has the cat ring and knows who Ladybug is. As far as we know, he can’t withhold that information from Papillon. It’s another reason why we never told anyone. Now everyone we love is in danger.”

“But,” Ladybug said. “If he comes today, it’ll be the first time he’s shown his face. We have a chance to end this for good.”

“End this?” Sabine asked, her eyes blowing wide. “Do you mean kill him?”

“No!” both Ladybug and Bumblebee blurted, horrified.

“We’ll take his miraculous,” Bumblebee hastened. “And the law can take care of the rest.” He glanced at Ladybug. “We need to get going. I don’t like… the longer we stay away, the more of an army he builds.”

“Master Fu can explain things,” Ladybug said, walking to Sabine’s side and swooped her mother into her arms. She hoped. Here they were, dropping in unannounced and leaving her mother with Master Fu as protection. She didn’t know the man well, but she doubted he’d take the situation kindly. She was essentially outing him too, even if she never mentioned he was a holder.

Not that there was much choice. A decision had to be made and this was all she could come up with. Besides. Ladybug was supposed to be the leader of this circle so… she’d better start acting like it. Confidence and leadership.

Sabine said, “I don’t want you going back out there. It’s dangerous.”

Bumblebee stepped from the roof and Ladybug followed him. “Mom, all those people are in trouble and I have the power to help them. I’m not going to stand by and watch.”

On the ground, Bumblebee held open the door for Master Fu’s shop and Ladybug and Sabine slipped into the small foyer.

“Can’t you give it back?” Sabine asked.

“I could,” Ladybug said and set Sabine down. “In the beginning, I tried.”

“You did?” Bumblebee and Sabine asked at the same time.

Ladybug nodded. “I didn’t think I was right for it and I tried to pass the earrings on. Then Alya got hurt and the Stone-heart clone had Chat and… I had to help.” She shrugged. “We’ve been protecting
Paris for nearly a year, without fail and we’ll continue to do that. I chose this.”

The door to Master Fu’s parlour slid open and Ladybug was unprepared for his smile and welcoming bow. “Ahh. I have been expecting you. Good evening, Madame Cheng. My name is Fu and I have green tea and scintillating conversation prepared for you.” He stepped away from the door to allow access and bowed. “If you’ll join me. These two have an akuma to battle.”

Surprised, Ladybug and Bumblebee exchanged a glance. Then Bumblebee put his hands on his hips. “One day you’ll explain to us how you know these things.”

“Turtles are the bearers of burdens, young cat,” Master Fu said. “Allow me to carry this one for you.”

“Mom,” Ladybug said, fiddling with her fingers. “I know this is must be hard for you but I have to go. People are in danger and—”

Sabine wrapped her arms around Ladybug. “I don’t like this,” she said, clutching Ladybug tightly. “I don’t want this for you. I’m terrified you’ll get hurt and I’m mortified I wasn’t there for you. But you’re right. You’ve been doing an amazing job already and I know I raised a proud and courageous woman who always tries to do the right thing.”

Touched, Ladybug squeezed her eyes shut and clutched her mother. She hadn’t known what she expected, but to hear her mother accept her as Ladybug warmed her soul.

“I love you so much.”

“I love you too, Mom.”

Sabine stepped back and cupped Ladybug’s cheek. “Bring your father back to us. We have a lot to talk about.”

Ladybug gave a shaky nod and blinked back emotional tears. If she started now, she’d mightn’t stop.

“You,” Sabine said, turning to Bumblebee and hugged him. “Stay safe. Don’t be reckless; I know what Chat Noir’s like.”

Bumblebee clenched and unclenched his hands several times before he could bring himself to hug her back. “Thanks.” He peeked at Ladybug over Sabine’s head and she smiled at him.

Sabine drew back and touched his cheek to smile at him, then turned to Master Fu. “And you have some explaining to do!”

Master Fu blinked and looked unnerved. “Ahh. I see. I shall do my best.”

Bumblebee reached for Ladybug’s wrist and pulled her toward the door. “I feel like we got the better end of that deal,” he said as they headed outside.

As one, they turned and leapt for the top of the building. Bumblebee didn’t meet her questioning gaze or pause, breaking into a run to head back to their district.

She had no choice but to run alongside him, matching his stride and his leaps from rooftop to rooftop. Her lips pressed into a line as she tried to figure out what to say to alleviate the obvious tension in him. He’d been showing a united front and a brave face for Sabine’s sake and now, as he ran, Ladybug watched him crumble.
He must have seen her concern. “I know,” he said, his voice hard. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Chat—”

“It’s not my father. It’s an akuma. We’ll deal with it the same as we deal with—”

“You know it doesn’t work like tha—”

“Can’t I just pretend it does?” he snapped.

She tried to be patient. “I can do this on my own if you think—”

“Don’t I know it.” Bumblebee muttered.

Hurt, she slowed down. “Chat?”

“I get it, you don’t need me,” he spat.

She knew why he lashed out. Anger was a part of the grieving process. The filter that usually resided between his brain and his mouth, wrapped beneath layers and layers of innate politeness, was probably at the weakest it had ever been. She shouldn’t take it personally.

But she did.

He was hurting. She’d transformed in front of her mother. Papillon was coming and Gabriel was an akuma and their friends were in danger. Everything was wrong.

She stopped running.

Bumblebee continued on, bounding across a street to the next rooftop where he stopped. He didn’t look at her, just thrust his hand into his hair and paced in tight little circles of anger.

Miserable, she hugged her arms to her chest and tried not to descend into tears. Even though every delay made a triumph that much harder, she didn’t care. She needed her partner at her side if they had any chance of being victorious.

He stopped pacing and took a visible, calming breath, then bounced back across the street to her.

“I’m sorry. That was unkind of me. I shouldn’t take this out on you.”

She took a step forward and pressed her hand to his chest. “I need you. I’ll always need you. Ladybug and Chat Noir, no matter what form you take. Just because I can, doesn’t mean I want to. I’m happier when you’re around. I’m more relaxed and confident knowing you’re right there. I firmly believe you can do this on your own too.”

He made a noise that sounded like he disagreed.

“We’re stronger together. Both of us.”

“Yeah.”

“I know how hard this must be for you and I’m trying to be considerate. We’ve fought loved ones before, but not like this.” She swallowed. “Plus… from what Sabrina told me, he’s also got Nathalie and your driver… and Nino, Alya and Chloé.”

His head reared back. “They weren’t supposed to be there!”
“I know. I don’t know why they were.”

Burying his hands in his hair, he tugged. “And he’s got your dad too.”

“We’ve done this before,” she said and sidled a little closer, hoping that maybe he’d hold her instead of tearing his hair out. “We can do it again. But I need to know if you can handle this.”

He responded to her closeness by resting his hands on her hips. “I can handle this.”

“It’s okay if you can’t. I won’t be disappointed or judge you for it. I need you to know that.”

“Thanks for saying it.” He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I’m… I’m not okay but I can handle this. Nothing will stop me from backing you up. I need to see this through.”

“Okay.”

“We good?”

Ladybug hung her head. “I’m sorry. I transformed in front of her and I didn’t even think about the position that would put you in. I know that had to be a shock and I didn’t even warn you or get permission and I tried to make it so you didn’t have to and—”

He pressed his lips to her forehead and enveloped her in a fierce hug. “I ran off after my father to yell at him and outing you, too. I’m not angry.”

She held onto him, unwilling to let go. “You’re not? I thought you would be.”

“Things were happening so fast and there was no real choice, and you still managed to find a way to leave it up to me. I was wondering how we were going to get away, you made it simple. Her reaction… it’s what I hoped my father’s would’ve been.”

“Oh, Chat—”

“Still think you’re not cut out to be leader?” he asked with a proud smile. “I couldn’t have made that decision so fast. Even deciding to go to Master Fu for help, I couldn’t have done it so quickly. But you did and you owned it.”

She smiled ruefully into his chest. “I’m starting to believe.”

“Good.” He gripped her upper arms and moved back, trying to smile. “No more dwelling. Let’s go do what we do best.”

“Gratuitous puns and flirting?”

He laughed and it didn’t sound forced. “Let’s save that ‘til after.”

“Good plan.”

There were more statues of transformed people when they arrived. Police vehicles cordoned off the roads and were void of actual police officers. There were no bystanders of any kind milling around like there normally were in an akuma attack and that wasn’t a good sign.

Ladybug and Bumblebee crouched on the roof of Collège Françoise Dupont, peering down at the statues standing below. They had been frozen in place, standing around in various poses and positions, but the longer Ladybug and Bumblebee studied them, the more the statues were turning to face them, watching with glassy eyes.
“It’s kind of eerie,” Bumblebee said and shuddered. Ladybug had to smile, her attention more on him than on the statues. Even though he was a bee at present, he sat exactly like he would if he were Chat Noir in his classic kitty-sit pose. He glanced at her, then tilted her head. “What are you smiling at?”

“A bee sitting like a cat. It’s…”

He perked up a fraction. “Fuzz-tastic?”

She rolled her eyes at him, then stroked her fingers through his hair and down to his chin to give him a scratch. She couldn’t pass up a chance to feel like things were normal. “Catastrophic.”

“Paw-bees,” he said, using the same tone he would if he was saying ‘please’.

She giggled. “Nice!”

“Been working on that one. Bee-claws I can.”

A snort and she covered her mouth with her hand while Bumblebee looked pleased.

“Hold your ‘a-paws’,” he said. “But we do have a job to do.”

“Right.” She dragged her eyes away from him and to the scene below. “Do you think the police officers were taken to be made into statues?”

Bumblebee nodded. “I’ve spotted several people in uniform and I see Sabrina’s dad down there…” Without looking at her, he stretched out a hand so he could brush her wrist and provide comfort. “And yours.”

Ladybug’s heart gave a painful twist. “Yeah—” her voice squeaked and she cleared her throat. “I saw.”

“He isn’t here, though,” Bumblebee said.

Ladybug pulled out her yo-yo and opened the compact. “News reports are instructing people to stay indoors and get to high places. Apparently, the statues have trouble with stairs.”

Bumblebee frowned. “The one coming to get us didn’t have any trouble.”

“Maybe it depends on what type of stairs,” she said. “They look… clumsy. I don’t think they’d be able to get up circular stairs.”

Bumblebee sat up straight. “If we push them over, do you think they’ll be able to get up?”

Ladybug closed her compact with a snap and let it dangle over the edge of the building. “Let’s test that, shall we?” she said as she stood. Winding up, she picked one of the further away statues so she’d have better control and launched her yo-yo. Twining around the statue’s legs, she tugged them together, then yanked the statue off balance.

With flailing arms, the statue toppled. It lay on its back, arms and legs waving in the air, but unable to bend to stand up.

“Looks like it’s fallen for you, honeybug.”

Smiling, Ladybug said, “That might be one way of—” the smile died as two neighbouring statues lumbered over to help the fallen statue up. “Damn it.”
“No,” Bumblebee said, excited. “No. This is good. Look how long it’s taking them to get their friend up. We topple them, it’s less of them trying to get us, even if it’s only for a short time.”

“I suppose a small window is better than no window at all.” She sighed. “If the akuma isn’t here, then—”

“He’s at home.” He stood and offered her his hand. “Shall we?”

“Right behind you.”

They sprinted across the rooftop to the corner which had the best view of Agreste Mansion.

More statues graced the pavement, children and parents, people who looked like they were dressed for work and more police officers in uniforms. So many people had already been changed. He must have started transforming the moment he became an akuma, which made her wonder why he hadn’t come for Adrien straight away. Normally when akuma fixated they went for the object or person of their desire immediately. She didn’t want Bumblebee thinking about those implications, so she asked, “Did you get a chance to talk to Deedee?”

“She said we’ll have all the time in the world once this is over to talk.”

“That’s good.”

Lifting his hammer, Bumblebee used the small screen on the handle like he would use the screen on his baton, zooming in to study parts of the building. “It’s still in lockdown mode.”

“How can you tell?” she asked. “Wait, don’t answer that.”

He smiled at her. “We can probably use the door you made in my bedroom window to sneak in. I bet my room’s still locked. I can access the internal cameras from my computer.”

“You’re assuming he’s still inside.”

“Look,” he said, tilting his hammer toward her so she could see the screen. It wasn’t a good angle, but they could see people being taken to the gate. “People are being carried in by the statues. He’s inside.”

She curled her hand around his upper arm as she looked at the screen. “Do you think it’s a good idea to go in?”

“He won’t expect it. Do you have a better one?”

“We draw him outside. To our element. Then we hit him on the rooftops where his statues can’t help.”

He paused, then gave a throaty and embarrassed laugh. “Okay, so that’s a better idea.”

“Yes, but we don’t exactly know how he turns them into statues yet, which puts us at a disadvantage. Let’s try yours and see if we can get some information at least, and then if we have to run, we draw him to the rooftops.”

Nodding, Bumblebee said, “Follow me.”

They made it back to the door she’d created as they left in record time. They went a different route that they had when leaving and Ladybug wondered at that. Instead of landing on the fence, Bumblebee had jumped clear across the gap between the houses behind his home and landed on the
shutter beside Ladybug’s makeshift door. Gripping the wall, he’d held his hand out for her. Knowing she couldn’t jump that far, she hooked her yo-yo around the gazebo structure on the roof and swung across to him.

As they peered inside, his bedroom seemed empty. Not willing to take chances, they entered cautiously. Ladybug scouted and checked the doors were still locked while Bumblebee went for the computer.

Ladybug pressed her ear to the door and listened to the foyer, trying to hear what was occurring beyond the doors. Muted voices, someone yelling, but she couldn’t make out much more of it.

“Got it,” Bumblebee whispered, pointing to the massive screen above him. With a strangled cry, he reared back, distancing himself from the computer screen. Stiff and still, he stared at the screen, horrified by what he saw.

Dread filled Ladybug. Noises emerged through the speaker, someone pleading and struggling and Ladybug darted to Bumblebee’s side so she could see.

The foyer was filled with statues. Nino, Nathalie, Alya, even Chloé lingered around, each frozen in a pose which best reflected their personality. Nino bopped to music, Chloé checked her nails, Alya smiled and waved, and stern-face Nathalie looked down her glasses at the Gorilla, who carried a kicking and screaming man into the foyer.

“Please, please,” the man begged. “I don’t want to be a statue. Please don’t make me.”

On the platform in the middle of the staircase, lording over the statues, stood the akuma.

The akuma wore an exquisite golden breastplate fit for kings, including inspiring definition in the sculptured impressions of imagined abdominal muscles. Intricate swirls and patterns were carved in silver into the shining armour. A gold war skirt trimmed with silver embroidery hung around skinny hips. His right shoulder was adorned with a tasselled pauldron and attached to that was a golden cape, which draped across his back and skirted the floor, then reattached to his left golden wrist bracer. Gold and silver greaves wove down his shins and attached to bare-toed sandals. Gaudy flecks of gold streaked above his eyebrows and dotted his jawline. In his hands, he held a regal golden sceptre, trimmed with all manner of sparkly gems.

The whole ensemble had an unearthly glow. He looked like a Greek God come to life.

“I am,” the akuma announced, spinning so his cape flared out around him, “the Conservator.”

Chapter End Notes

Next up, Adrien flailing and Marinette goes a tad overboard with design appreciation.
One hand covering his eyes, Bumblebee tilted his head back as far as it could go on his seat. “I changed my mind. Can I have a mental health day?”

“Look at the contours of that,” Ladybug said, peering closer. It was absolutely gorgeous, something she’d certainly expect Gabriel to have designed. Such high-end fashion in a breath-taking garment. “It’s exquisite! Do you think akumas might actually get to pick what they wear?”

“You can completely handle this on your own. I have confidence in you.” His fist half-heartedly punched the air. “Go team Ladybug.”

“Just look at the use of lighting. It draws the eye exactly to where he wants us to look. It’s amazing, I never thought I’d get to see something like this up close.”

Bumblebee stood, throwing up his hands as he walked to the window. “I’m done. I’m out. My father’s in a skirt.”

“They’re called pteruges,” Ladybug said, studying the screen. Could she duplicate that? Probably not with the materials she had at home, but maybe she could make something similar. She was filled with the sudden need to sketch the design. “Can this take photos? I want to have a copy.”

“I don’t even want to know how you know what they’re called,” Bumblebee said. “My father. Is in. A skirt.”

“Yes, he is.” How did he get the feathers of the skirt to sit that way? Akuma magic? “I’d give anything to get a closer look—”

“A leather one.”

Ladybug shook her head. It would make more sense if the skirt was silver and gold chainmail over leather, especially with the way it hung. She’d need a closer look to tell for sure. “Actually, it looks more like—”

“And a muscle-plate.”

“A breastplate. A finely crafted one. The engravings are superb—”

“And a cape.”

Would the cape be velvet? Satin? Or something more expensive. Certainly, something which could withstand such intricate embroidery without stretching or bunching. But perhaps that was akuma magic too. What material was that trimming the edges? “I wonder how—”

“Okay, you can stop now,” Bumblebee grumbled. “Stop drooling over the design and consider the
fact that it’s my father wearing it. Do you know how awkward that is for me?”

Pausing in her thoughts, she glanced at Bumblebee. If she were honest, she often studied an akuma’s costume design so she could redraw it later and some designs were better than others. “Oh. It is?”

“What if that you was your father?”

“Papa would rock that outfit,” Ladybug said, rubbing her chin. “It could’ve been worse. He might’ve been bare-chested.”

“Oh, there’s an image,” he muttered and collapsed backward on the sofa, disappearing from sight. One arm extended up and gave her a thumbs up. “Thanks. I completely didn’t need that one added to the horror of my eyes.”

“Haven’t you worn outlandish things as a model?” Ladybug asked. “Or seen other models wear them? I was fairly sure I have—”

“Sometimes,” he admitted. “But my father’s not a model. I have this image in my head and it’s been… violated.”

“Papa wore a pink frilly dress to my first day of school,” Ladybug mentioned. “With fairy wings.”

A heartbeat of silence. “He did?”

“I was nervous. He thought it’d make me feel better. We have pictures.”

“Did it?”

“Absolutely. Sometimes its good to break images we have of our parents. Makes them seem less perfect and more like people.”

He made a noise. “This makes him look like he’s some sort of drama queen.”

Ladybug snorted. “You mean he’s not? I thought it was a pre-requisite when you’re a fashion designer.”

“You’re not a drama queen.”

She tilted her head and smiled at him. “And maybe you just haven’t seen that side of me yet.”

A pause. “Now, I’m intrigued.”

“Considering this,” Ladybug said, bringing the conversation back to the Conservator. He’d descended the stairs while they’d been talking. “Where do you think the akuma is? Do you think it’s the staff or… oh. Adrien, look.”

“Rather not,” he muttered.

The Conservator gripped the man’s arm and Ladybug leant closer to witness. Everything screamed at her to rush in there and save that man but she also knew if she did that, she’d be caught herself and then she’d never be able to help and protect the innocent.

Having a magical reset button like her lucky charm made it feel like she could take risks she otherwise shouldn’t. If she didn’t have that power, there was no way she could stand there and watch people get hurt or monuments get destroyed. Knowing that didn’t make it any easier to watch and there’d been so many times in the past where she’d had to fight her own morals to get the job done.
Like allowing the Eiffel Tower to be destroyed.

She often worried about the limitations of the charm too. Could she bring someone back who had died under the effects of an akuma? She could bring them back if they’d vanished, she knew that from Timebreaker… but she also knew she didn’t want to think about it. If she thought about it, maybe one day she’d allow it to happen.

She felt sick to her stomach as the marble streamed across the man’s skin. He screamed and begged and Ladybug clutched at herself, fighting against her nature to charge to the rescue. The scream cut off as the marble reached his throat and she watched his expression go vacant as the marble covered his face.

The Conservator smiled and welcomed his new statue and Ladybug turned away, blinking back tears of frustration and horror. “Midas touch.”

She glanced over at the sofa, seeing Bumblebee peeking over the edge to watch the screen.

As he saw her eyes on him, he flopped down out of sight. “Great. Just great. How do we fight that?”

“I don’t know. Can you see an akuma item?”

“Among those bells and whistles?” he muttered and rose. Hanging both his arms over the back of the sofa, he rested his chin against the top. “You’re going to make me study it.”

“Kitty, please.”

He sighed and heaved himself up. “That lucky charm better contain brain bleach, that’s all I’m saying.” Wandering back over, Bumblebee put his hands on his hips to study the image of the Conservator as he swept back up the stairs. He sniffed and wrinkled his nose and pulled faces. “Lots and lots of—” His shoulders stiffened. His back straightened and his mouth thinned to a pale line. “Shit.”

Ladybug blinked. “What’s wrong?”

Shaking his head, he stalked away from the computer. Spinning around to walk backward, he implored, “Run away with me. I hear Antarctica is good this time of year. Lots of snuggling.”

She frowned and crossed her arms over her chest, trying to be stern.

Frustrated, he tossed up his hands. “We are boned. We are so boned.” He flopped down on the sofa face first on the sofa and groaned.

Confused by his reaction, Ladybug turned her eyes to the screen. It had to be something. Something simple. Something that Gabriel always wore. Something which didn’t fit with the rest of the outfit. Cataloguing, she named all the parts of the akuma’s costume she could, reciting in her head the fabrics used. Something small. Something simple.

Not the breastplate or the cape. Too gaudy for everyday wear. Perhaps the akuma item was a picture, something hidden or tucked in a pocket. Perhaps something ornamental or etched into the breastplate. A stud or a button. A piece of jewellery perhaps. The wrist bracer? No, they matched the theme. So did the pauldron. She couldn’t imagine Gabriel having a sceptre like that lying around…

Well, no, she could imagine it. He probably had all sorts of props lying around from fashion walks. But it wouldn’t be sentimental enough to use for an akuma item and too easy to snatch away from him. Akuma liked to keep their items close, sometimes even use the item as their power source.
Ladybug watched the Conservator regally descend the stairs, ready to create another statue out of someone who’d been caught. This time, she paid close attention to the transformation.

Every other item she and Bumblebee had encountered had meant something to the person taken by the akuma. Earrings. A magician’s hat. A deck of cards. A photograph. A newspaper cutting. A belt buckle. A golden tooth.

A ring.

A silver band, worn on his middle finger of his left hand. Plain, almost delicate in its appearance, the simple fact it wasn’t gaudy meant that it didn’t mesh with the rest of the ensemble. The same hand the Conservator had used to transform someone into a statue.

No wonder Bumblebee didn’t want to tell her. A ring. On an akuma who used a Midas touch power. One of them had to get close enough to snatch the ring straight from his hand. One of them had to risk being turned into marble.

She glanced over her shoulder. He hadn’t lied to her. He hadn’t. But just because he wouldn’t lie to her, didn’t mean he didn’t withhold the truth. She knew what he must be fighting internally. Chat Noir. The bait. The distraction. Expendable.

Bumblebee had already resigned to the idea that he’d be the one turned to stone and was taking a moment to wallow. His father would win, like he always won. A pristine marble statue of his son, it didn’t matter how long he was a statue for, what mattered was that he was. Silent and beautiful. Forced to smile and dance to a tune that wasn’t his.

Well, that wasn’t going to happen. Not today. Not when she could do that for him.

All she had to do was wait until he started showing signs of recklessness and when he went for the ring, get there first and hope that Papillon wanted the earrings more than the Conservator would want to make her a statue. Even if the Conservator managed to make her a statue, he’d have to release her to take the earrings off.

She hoped.

“Chat, I have a plan.”

“I’m all ears, honeybug,” he muttered.

She kept her eyes on the screen. “First step is to stop the supply of statues. The less army he has, the less threat he’ll be.”

A rustled from behind her as Bumblebee sat up. “Okay, and how do you propose we do that?”

“The fence. The statues can’t jump, right? So we stand on the fence and rescue people as they pass through the gate. Better yet, we close the gate, separating the statues from the main house. We can leap them to safety or leave them on the fence, depending on how many people we can save. Looks like there’s a steady stream of them.”

He sounded excited by that. “That’ll have the added benefit of drawing the Conservator outside.”

“Exactly.”

“Especially if I’m there.”
Snapping around to face him, she growled, “You’re not bait.”

The corners of his lips turned up in a rueful smile. “We both are. Me being his son; You being the last piece Papillon needs. We’re excellent bait. Shall we, my lady?”

She pressed her lips together and glanced at the screen. “Let’s go before we lose more people.”

Going out the way they came, they both leapt for the fence. The top of the fence was flat and easy enough to run on, especially with their enhanced balance. Taking opposite directions to run around the house, and making as much noise as possible so the security system would notice and alert the Conservator to their presence. Even though it wasn’t a race, Bumblebee reached the gate ahead of her.

Smirking at her, Bumblebee cartwheeled into a handstand. With his hands on the edge of the arch above the gate, he let himself fall, hooking the open wire gate with his foot as he did so he could drag it closed. Knowing she wouldn’t be able to match his long legs, or even grab the small point at the top of the fence like he could, she opted to leap for the closest person-carrying statue and leave Bumblebee to get the gate.

Landing on the statue’s shoulders, she flung her yo-yo for the large double entrance doors of Agreste mansion, winding the string around the handles of the door and pulled it closed. She didn’t want the reinforcements inside coming out until they’d taken care of these statues in the courtyard. Keeping her magical, string-growing yo-yo taut with one hand, she reached down to pluck the captured woman from the statue’s grasp.

“Evening, Madame,” she said, hoisting her over her shoulder. “I’ll have you out in a minute.”

“Ladybug!” the woman said with a nervous and somewhat hysterical laugh. “Thank goodness!”

Ladybug leapt down from the statue and ran for the fence. Glancing at Bumblebee, she smiled at the small waxy deposits now clogging up the gate. Leaping up the fence, she placed the woman on the top. “Stay here. Keep out of reach.”

Turning back to the courtyard, Ladybug was pleased to see Bumblebee in the process of toppling statues who weren’t carrying people. A tug on her yo-yo told her statues inside were trying to come out. “We need to be quick!” she bellowed.

Bumblebee leapt on the back of a statue and dragged it to the ground. “On it!”

She went for another statue, carrying someone who she recognised from school, but couldn’t recall their name. She grabbed his hand and kicked the head of the statue at the same time to distract it enough to release the boy. Black hands wrapped around the neck of the statue and Bumblebee grinned at her as he toppled the statue. Returning his smile, Ladybug carted the boy to safety.

The gate clanged as one of the statues smashed their fists against it. “It’ll hold!” Bumblebee yelled at her, continuing to topple statues.

On her fourth and last rescue, Ladybug saw double windows of an apartment on the other side of the street swing open and a bald man in a white uniform poked his head out to wave. “We can take them!” he bellowed. “The statues can’t get up here!”

With a wave and a smile, Ladybug called, “Thank you!” Twisting, she called, “Bee!” and waited until he glanced at her. One she had his attention, she tossed him her yo-yo string so he could keep the doors tightly shut. “There’s a window. I’ll get these people out.”
Catching the yo-yo string, he called, “I’ll start on the outside ones!” Turning, he leapt for the archway over the gate and disappeared outside the fence line.

Ladybug hoisted the first person onto her back and leapt across the street to the window. She landed on the sill with ease and peered inside. Several people huddled together, staring at her with hopeful eyes. “Everyone okay?”

The man who’d called her helped the woman from Ladybug’s back. “We’re fine. My wife and I pulled as many people from the street as we could when the statues started coming.”

Ladybug nodded. “It shouldn’t be much longer. We’re trying to lure the akuma out.”

Leaping back across, she picked up the next person. Bumblebee landed on the fence near the gate and delivered a young woman. He pointed across to where Ladybug was and the woman slowly made her way along the top of the fence. Turning away, Ladybug continued to leap people across the street to the apartment.

After rescuing the third person, Bumblebee signalled to her. He stood on the gate arch and held her yo-yo tight, pulling against it to keep the door closed. The gate below him rattled as the statues tried to force their way through. “The fish in the barrel are becoming agitated.”

Glancing down at the courtyard, she saw all the statues they’d knocked over still on the ground. “Last two.”

Bumblebee nodded and braced himself to hold the door. He twined some of the string around his arm so he could have more leverage and waited.

Ladybug got the remaining people to safety as fast as she could, then ran lithely across the top of the fence until she could join Bumblebee on the archway. She glanced behind them, seeing the mayhem Bumblebee had wrought. Many statues were downed, but many more were helping their comrades to their feet. Sliding her hand down Bumblebee’s arms she took the string of her yo-yo from him. “Are you ready?”

Stepping forward so he was ahead of her, he lifted his hammer and juggled it from hand to hand. “Nope.”

“Don’t use it unless you have to,” she cautioned, bracing. She could see what he meant, the string of the yo-yo trembled and yanked at her hands as the statues inside tried to open the doors. She suspected they might resort to breaking the doors soon. “We might be facing Papillon. We can’t afford the downtime.”

Over his shoulder, he said, “This is not my first akuma, honeybug.”

“Sorry.”

He stepped back to her and stroked his hand down her back until he reached the small. Pressing his head against hers, he said, “I’m worried too.”

Not caring who could see them, she closed her eyes and leant into him. She shivered when he kissed her ear and whispered that he loved her.

Opening her mouth to tell him the same, her hands were jerked forward by a massive tug on the door. It opened inward partially, before it slammed shut.

Bumblebee stepped away. “Let’s do this.”
Taking a deep, calming breath, Ladybug recalled her yo-yo, untwining it from the handles of the door so she could spin it at her side. Smiling, she tried to portray as much confidence as she could. Power couple, that’s what they had to be. Nothing could get between them and nothing could stand in their way, united as they were.

The double doors slammed open and the Gorilla lead the charge through them. While they were slower, they were solid and Ladybug did not look forward to toppling that many statues all at once.

“Thread the stairs,” Bumblebee suggested and flipped from the gate arch. “I’ll see if they’ll rush me.”

With a nod, Ladybug flung her yo-yo, willing it to wind up and down the stairs, looping through the stone railings and twinning back on itself so that the stairs became a criss-cross of yo-yo string the statues would have to navigate to through to get to Bumblebee. She managed to tangle the Gorilla and Nathalie in her webbing, but none of the other statues followed them in. Keeping the string tightly gripped, she leapt down to join Bumblebee.

The statues fanned out on the balcony above the stairs. Ladybug’s gaze zeroed in on Alya and Nino, her heart clenching in her chest as they stared down at her with blank eyes.

The Conservator swept out from the mansion, his cape swishing regally behind him. His eyes didn’t even register Ladybug’s presence, his whole demeanour lighting up as he saw Bumblebee. The smile which graced his lips chilled Ladybug. “You have returned. I knew you would.” He thrust out his arm, indicating the statues. “Look at what I have conserved. I can keep you safe.”

Bumblebee tensed. “Turning me into a statue won’t keep me safe.”

“Not just you,” the Conservator crooned. He extended his arms, pointing his sceptre up to the sky. “The entire world shall be marble.” The smile died, his face becoming stern and foreboding. “Remove your miraculous. You no longer need it.”

Bumblebee and Ladybug exchanged a glance. “Um… no,” Bumblebee said. “That won’t be happening.”

“I am not changing you into the pinnacle of perfection in that get-up,” the Conservator said.

“You’re one to talk,” Bumblebee retorted.

“You look ridiculous,” the Conservator sneered.

“This is who I am,” Bumblebee said. “I’m not going to change a part of me just because you don’t approve. I’m not that desperate for approval.” He paused. “No. No. Don’t argue with an akuma,” he muttered.

The gate behind them rattled and the metal gave a high pitched groan. Bumblebee twisted around to face it then took up a defensive position behind Ladybug. “The gate won’t hold. Plan?”

Ladybug recalled her yo-yo. “We grab the Conservator and drag him to the roof.” Swinging it in a circle to gain speed, she threw it at the Conservator, intending to wrap the yo-yo around him and drag him from his perch.

She didn’t expect him gracefully sidestep and catch her yo-yo. Nor did she expect her yo-yo to be turned to stone. She stood frozen in shock as the marble crept up the string toward her. Her ‘unbreakable’ yo-yo. Maybe she should just start saying, ‘breakable by certain akuma’ yo-yo.

Horror sank its claws into her belly. How was she going to call a lucky charm without it?
The Conservator smirked at her. “You’re the cause of all this trouble,” he sneered and yanked her toward him. “Once you’re out of the way—”

Ladybug’s toes hit the bottom stair and she staggered part the way up before she managed to dig her heels in and stop the pull from taking her further. Far too close to the released Gorilla and Nathalie for comfort. They lumbered for her, arms outstretched, lips drawn back in a sneer.

“Ladybug!” Bumblebee blurted and spun so he could help. Behind him, the gate crashed open and statues rushed into the courtyard at a great speed.

Statues closing in around her, Ladybug wrestled the looped string from her finger and tossed it away. Leaping upward, she bounced off the Gorilla’s arm and back flipped to get away from him. She had to get back to Bumblebee. They had to fight this together.

A hand closed around her ankle, yanked her out of the air and slammed her face-first into the stairs. Before the pain could even register, Ladybug was airborne again as Nathalie swung her over her head and slammed her down on the stairs by the Conservator’s feet. Her head hit the corner of the stairs and her vision exploded into stars.

Pain flooded her head, sharp and heavy. Rushing and roaring in her ears and someone screaming. She could taste blood. Her body felt heavy and far away. All she wanted to do was fade but the screams kept her tethered.

The Conservator grabbed the front of her suit, dragging her off the ground and hoisted her into the air. Her body flopped and hung from his hand, limp and disconnected. The sky whirled above her, before her head tilted so she could see Bumblebee.

Upside-down, she could still tell he was panicked, lashing out at any of the statues which dared touch him as he struggled to reach her. Every step he took toward her was barred by another statue and he didn’t seem to care. Marble hands on his arms and hands around his ankles from fallen statues, so many stood in his way and weighed him down and still he pulled at them. Straining, he heaved them forward and broke free only to be waylaid again before he’d even taken a step.

“You will stop!” the Conservator commanded.

“Let her go!”

A hand hovered above her chest. The hand with the ring. The threat was clear. “Stop now,” the Conservator commanded.

A muffled sob and Bumblebee ceased his struggling to hang in the grip of the statues. “Please. Please let her go.”

The Conservator smiled. “There’s a good boy,” he crooned. He slowly descended the stairs, still holding Ladybug aloft, until he was right in front of Bumblebee. “Now, remove your—”

A purple shadow graced the face of the Conservator and he paused. Turning his head, the Conservator looked at Ladybug. Lowering his arm until her toes touched the ground, his fingers grazed the skin beneath her ears.

Ladybug willed her body to move. To fight back. To kick free.

“You want the ladybug miraculous, Antoine?” the Conservator crooned. “Come and get it.”
What do you call a tired bee?

Chapter Summary

Sleep-bee

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Conservator turned away from Bumblebee and swept back up the stairs, still carrying the limp Ladybug in his hands. “Bring him.”

The pain in her head throbbed hard and hot. She wanted to lift her hands to rub her temples but, although her fingers flexed, her arms seemed to weight more than she could lift. Every step jolted through her, pounding in her head, but each step brought more clarity.

Papillon was coming. He was coming here. He was coming to get her miraculous. He might already have the cat miraculous. If she took the time to play dead and recover from the blow to the head, they might get a shot at Papillon himself, and possibly get the cat miraculous back in one fell sweep.

Statues dragged Bumblebee up the stairs behind her and she saw the statues of the Gorilla and Nathalie step forward to take him. Everything about him seemed to emulate defeat; the hang of his head, the drag of his feet and the dangle of his hands. Had he given up?

She had to tell him somehow she was okay. In pain, recuperating, but she’d be ready when it was necessary. She couldn’t see his eyes so she couldn’t be sure he was looking at her.

The double doors loomed overhead as the Conservator strode inside the mansion. The statues of Nino and Alya closed the door behind them and remained outside to guard.

It was just them inside. Two statues. One akuma. Two heroes.

Good odds. Amazing odds, considering what waited outside. If they were quick, if they struck fast, they might have a chance.

Keeping a firm grip on her, the Conservator lowered his arm and picked up the sceptre he’d left lying against the railing of the stairs. Ladybug let herself slump against his leg, still playing dead. She lolled her head and let out a small moan.

Bumblebee’s head lifted at the noise. “Please, let me check her—”

Ladybug winked at him.

Bumblebee’s head reared back in surprise, then went thoughtful.

Swishing his cape regally as he turned, the Conservator extended his hand. “Your miraculous. You don’t need it anymore.”

Bumblebee lifted his chin. “Nope. Not happening. If Papillon is coming here, this is the only thing that will protect me.”
Steepling his hand on his chest, the Conservator insisted, “I will protect you.”

Bumblebee snorted. “No, you won’t. There’s no way you possibly could. You know why he wants the miraculous, don’t you? Those particular two? Do you know why he doesn’t really care about the bee miraculous? Do you even know the easiest way to break a bond?”

The Conservator pressed his lips together.

“What am I even talking to you for?” Bumblebee sneered. “You’re a puppet.”

One golden etched eyebrow rose up his brow. “You think so?”

“Akuma always are,” Bumblebee told him with a shrug. “Don’t think you’re any different than them.”

“I am not a—”

“He’s going to kill us, you know that, right?” Bumblebee said. “Does that even get through your thick akuma brain? Same as he killed my mother. That’s the easiest way to break a bond. Only it didn’t work with her because she didn’t take Ferris to confront him.”

“He has assured me that he will not—”

Bumblebee scoffed. “He’s terrorised Paris and you’re going to believe him? He’s torn down buildings and allowed akumas to prey on people in a moment of weakness. He preys on children. The only reason people don’t think he’s as big of a threat is that we can put everything back the way it was. Without that, no one would feel safe in Paris. Do you really think a little murder isn’t beyond him? Wow. I didn’t think you were that naive.”

“He will not harm you—”

“My lady is the only thing standing between him and total destruction. If he gets his hands on both our miraculous, you won’t be able to stop the devastation.”

The Conservator didn’t appear fazed. “I will ensure—”

“The Conservator.” Bumblebee lifted his head, then tilted it. “Really, Father? You wanted to control me that much? Conserve the status quo? Am I not allowed to change or grow up? Not allowed to have opinions and want to be more than I am. You don’t get to dictate what happens to me. You don’t get to keep information from me. I deserve the right to know of my mother’s death, you arrogant piece of shit.”

Ladybug felt her eyes flare in horror. This wasn’t a distraction. This was a son yelling at his father. She shouldn’t be witnessing this and he shouldn’t be doing it. Not now. Not like this.

“You will not speak to me this way,” the Conservator scolded. “I am your father and—”

Bumblebee’s laugh was bitter and long. “No, you’re not. You don’t even know how to be a father.”

The Conservator scowled. “You will not—”

“Here’s the thing. Akuma never remember what’s happened to them when they’re transformed.” His voice turned sing-song. “I can say anything I like right now and you’ll never remember it.” He laughed, haunting and chilling. “You’ll never even know.”

Ladybug shook her head. It didn’t work like that. The akuma didn’t remember, but they did.
Anything he said, he’d remember. Anything he said would eat away at him like a cancer, chiselling away parts of his soul.

Bumblebee’s voice and expression turned hard. “You took away my chance to grieve for her. To grieve with you. You let me believe she’d abandoned us. Abandoned me. You kept me locked away in this prison of a house under the misguided notion that you were protecting me. And I hate you for that,” he spat through gritted teeth.

The Conservator released Ladybug and she slumped down, staring at Bumblebee.

His face twisted in pain and he strained against the Gorilla and Nathalie. “I hate you!”

Ladybug abandoned all pretence of being injured beyond the ability to move and crawled toward him. It hurt, her head pounding, but she had to get to him.

The end of the Conservator’s sceptre hit Ladybug square in the back and pushed her flat to the floor, preventing her from getting to Bumblebee. “There will be no more idle chatter,” the Conservator said.

“You’re not even human, are you?” Bumblebee spat. “You literally don’t care.”

“Don’t,” Ladybug whispered. “Chat. Don’t do this to yourself.”

His head reared back, like he just realised she was there, listening to him lay out his dirty laundry. All fight seemed to drain from him and he hung limply in the statue’s grip. “You never even loved me.”

The weight against Ladybug’s back was removed as the Conservator strode forward. He gripped Bumblebee under the chin and lifted his head up. “Of course I love you. I’m making the world a better place. For you. So you’ll be safe.”

The doors bang and Ladybug tensed. She propped herself up on all fours, ready to leap for Bumblebee and get them both away. They couldn’t do this. Not right now. Not today.

Except they might never get another chance like this. To finish Papillon for good. She had to do this. Box up the pain and the anger and the frustration. Lock and key. Get the job done. Crumble and weep later. People were counting on her. On them. She had to fight. Had to fight to win.

The Conservator lifted his head. “I’ll prove it to you.” Reaching behind Bumblebee’s head, the Conservator yanked out the comb. “You don’t need this anymore.”

Transformation unravelling, Adrien jerked and struggled as he tried to stop the Conservator from taking the comb. “No!”

The Conservator jerked as something zapped, then tossed the comb across the room. It made a sad plunk against the floor, then skidded out of sight.

Deedee didn’t appear.

“Deedee?” Adrien blurted, twisting and turning as much as he could, trying to see. Without the goggles, his face was blotchy and red and his eyes watered. Panicked, he shrilled, “Deedee!”

With a flare of his cape, the Conservator walked back to Ladybug and hoisted her up by the back of her suit. When he was ready, he tapped his sceptre on the floor.

The statues of Nino and Alya opened the door and held it open as Papillon sauntered through. “Had
I known you would’ve been so effective,” Papillon said and swung his cane, before clicking the end of it against the floor. “I would’ve have targeted you much earlier.” His eyes swept over Adrien. “Hard to imagine that the thorn in my side all these months was my own flesh and blood. The resemblance is uncanny. Grandfather would be most—”

“You do not get to look at or talk to my son, Antoine,” the Conservator said.

Papillon gave the Conservator a flat stare, then dismissed the threat in the Conservator’s voice with a wave of his hand. “The boy needs to be aware of his heritage—”

“You will have no more interaction with him.”

Papillon inhaled through his mouth, then breathed out slowly. “Hand over the cat miraculous, then you may go.”

Ladybug’s eyes shot to Adrien’s. The Conservator still had the cat miraculous. There might still be a chance to save Plagg. She balled her hands into fists and waited, planning what she had to do in her mind. First thing would be to take care of the statues containing Adrien so he could retrieve Deedee.

The Conservator smiled and dropped Ladybug back onto the floor. Stroking his fingers down his sceptre, he walked toward Papillon. “Tell me, how, exactly, do you plan to break the bonds between them and their kwami? The same way you tried to break Aurelie’s bond? Or do you have a different strategy in mind?”

Ladybug gripped the floor with her fingers and braced herself. One glance at Adrien and she saw he was watching both Papillon and her closely, waiting for a signal.

A flare of irritation and Papillon lifted his wrist to pluck at the sleeve, unaware that the room behind him was slowly filling with statues. “You may leave, Conservator. Guard outside.”

“You gave me the power to protect my son and that is exactly what I plan to do.”

The doors slammed shut. Statues lunged. Papillon whirled.

So much sound. It rattled away in her brain and all she wanted to do was clap her hands over her ears and hum loudly so she could concentrate.

Among the sounds and the lights, Adrien struggled. Unprotected. She had to help. Pushing all the mayhem and noise away, Ladybug focussed on Adrien. Forcing herself from the floor, she sprinted for him. She dropped into a front flip as she neared, extended her legs as much as she could. She made sure her hands landed Adrien’s hunched back, while her feet were planted in the solid marble faces of Nathalie and the Gorilla. Using his back as support, she did a handstand spin and kicked out at their heads again.

As they released Adrien, he dropped to the ground and Ladybug tucked in her head, rolling away. Digging in her toes, she pushed off, bouncing back for him to haul him away from the statues.

“Did you see where the comb went?” he rushed.

Ladybug pulled him to the far corner away from the main door and they crouched behind one of the support pillars. “No.”

“You’re bleeding!” he blurted and his hand touched the back of her neck. “Are you alright?”

She grazed the back of her head with her hand and winced at the sharp throb that caused. Blinking
her eyes, she forced them to refocus on the fight. Lifting up from her crouch, she said, “See if you can find the—”

Adrien’s hand planted on her shoulder, keeping her there. “You’re not going out there.”

“This might be the only chance we get,” she replied. “I have to—”

“You’re hurt,” he protested. “If you’ve got concussion—”

“You told me you could handle this,” she said, then cringed. Brain to mouth filter seemed to have vanished with the hit to the head too. She didn’t doubt that concussion was a very high possibility.

He baulked and dropped his eyes. “I… I… once I started… I… I couldn’t…”

She touched his shoulder, then his jaw to lift his chin. “Later. Find the comb. Come rescue me. I’ll last as long as I can.”

Unable to meet her eyes, Adrien nodded.

A guttural groan and a crash of a toppling statue dragged their attention back to what was occurring. All around Papillon, statues were freezing and unfreezing, staggering backward and forward in repetitive motions like they couldn’t decide what they were doing. Papillon had a hand extended and curled like a claw as he grinned at the Conservator, who spasmed and shook under Papillon’s gaze. The sceptre slipped from his fingers and clattered to the ground.

“I gave you those powers,” Papillon sneered. “I can take them away.”

The Conservator’s hand rose like a puppet being dragged on strings, exposing the ring on his finger. Ladybug could see the akuma flapping away, partially pulled from the ring enough to obey Papillon’s commands.

Papillon demanded, “Give me the cat miraculous.”

Sweat dripped down the Conservator’s face as he fought against Papillon’s power. The statues spluttered harder. The ring on the Conservator’s hand led the way, its fingers diving beneath the bracer on his wrist.

Ladybug charged. Leaping high, she bounced across the top of the statue hoard, landing on their backs, heads or shoulders before spring boarding to the next statue. She extended her leg and slammed her shin into Papillon’s head as hard as she could while simultaneously making a grab for the Conservator’s bracer.

The cat ring practically leapt into her hand.

A laugh filled the air. Mischievous and dangerous, echoing and shrilling all at once, it haunted all the dark places of the room. A black and green force erupted from the ring and sang, “About time!”

“No!” the Conservator yelled and grabbed at Ladybug as she threw the ring.

“Plagg!”

Such elation and joy in Adrien’s voice, it made her heart sing in response. Maybe one day he’d call her name with such passion, but this moment belonged to him and Plagg. As it should.

Ladybug landed on one foot. She spun into a roundhouse, kicking the Conservator in the side of the head. With her sharp lash, he staggered back. Still spinning, Ladybug dropped to a crouch to sweep
Papillon's legs. Continuing the rotation, she rose and slammed both fists into the Conservator's stomach, then palmed his nose.

"Claws out!"

Hoping her strikes would keep the Conservator occupied, Ladybug turning to Papillon. Although she stopped, the room kept spinning around her and she staggered. She shook her head to clear it then was forced to duck under a swipe of Papillon cane. She brought her wrists up to protect her face, blocking another swipe and missed the blow to her stomach. Her breath expelled out in an 'oof' as she took a more defensive stance.

With a smirk, Papillon went for her with his cane, striking at exposed parts of her body. Ladybug curled up to protect herself from the flurry of blows as much as she could. The pounding headache made her reactions slow and fuzzy and she took more blows that she wanted to.

It was obvious Papillon was trained in the art of battle. Ladybug had no formal training, relying on surprise and fast attacks, innate dexterity and improved suit reflexes as well as Tikki's subtle guidance to protect her. She removed herself from danger with quick thinking and diversions while Chat Noir threw himself into it.

Like he did right now, sliding in with an outstretched arm to shield her and his baton extended to block Papillon's cane.

She was so happy to see him with his floofy hair and tail. "Chat."

"In the flesh, my lady," he purred and the tip of his tail brushed against her leg. "Let me take care of this."

She nodded and allowed herself a small sag of relief as she stepped away. "With pleasure."

Papillon's gaze shifted from Ladybug to Chat Noir. "Don't think it'll be—"

Twirling his baton in one hand, Chat Noir doubled it and passed the extra to Ladybug, completely ignoring Papillon. "Here."

Papillon lunged, Chat Noir parried with ease and kept himself between Papillon and Ladybug.

While she understood and appreciated the thought, she'd never actually wielded his baton before. "I don't... um..."

Riposting, Chat Noir struck out and whacked Papillon in the upper arm. "Middle button extends. Don't press any of the others."

She wrinkled her nose as she studied the baton. "Right."

He laughed. "Just swing it like a bat."

That she could do. "Okay." Lifting the baton, she held it up like a bat. "I'll be right back."

His eyes fixed on Papillon, Chat Noir nodded. "Don't stray far. You don't look too good."

"I need my yo-yo."

The Conservator was struggling to control his statues, which continued to jerk and splutter as they moved. Ladybug wondered at that. Had the partially pulled akuma caused it, or had her hits? Maybe a combination. For good measure, she smacked him in the head with Chat Noir's baton on the way.
Scampering outside, she leapfrogged over the back of the statues staggering around the courtyard. Spotting her marble yo-yo, she wove through the statues to get it. She’d need it once she managed to wrestle the akuma away from the Conservator. She hoped the marbleness would wear off once the akuma was separated from the ring. Most of the time, an akuma’s effects wore off, but not the damage it caused.

If the yo-yo wasn’t able to be used… well. She wasn’t sure but she’d think of something. Assuming she still had the capacity to think soon.

She scrambled back inside the mansion, vaguely noticing she landed on Alya’s shoulders at one stage on her journey. She just wanted to get this over and done with. Her head hurt so much, a miraculous cure would be perfect right now.

Landing on the back of the Gorilla, Ladybug was surprised to find the world swim in and out of focus. Another dizzy spell, perhaps she’d done more damage to her head than she’d realised. Especially with all the leaping around. Sliding from the Gorilla’s back she touched her fingers to her forehead. She didn’t have time for this. She had a job to do.

Taking a moment to recuperate, she watched Chat Noir. He was in fine form. Being back in his suit and connected to Plagg had completely balanced his equilibrium. A weight had been lifted. A small smile on his face as he held his own against Papillon. Each strike was easy and fluid and with a cat-like grace Ladybug knew she’d never be able to achieve. This was his element. This was what he trained for.

An easy sidestep, another parry and a parting shot with his baton and Chat Noir circled Papillon.

This was why Papillon never made a move on them before. Having Chat Noir in her corner, her sweet, underrated powerhouse of a partner with a heart to match the responsibilities his powers granted him, had kept them both safe.

She wondered if Chat Noir knew that.

She glanced at the Conservator and wondered if he knew that.

She forced herself to move to his side. “Are you watching this?”

The Conservator didn’t stop trying to wrestle the half-phased akuma back into his ring. “Watching what?”

“Your son be absolutely amazing.”

The Conservator looked up. He lowered his hand, staring at the duel raging across the foyer of the mansion.

“He doesn’t need you to protect him,” Ladybug said. “He needs you to love and trust him.”

“He’ll get hurt.”

“That’s life. You can’t shield him from that.” Ladybug stretched out her hand and rested it on the Conservator’s, feeling the cool sensation of his ring beneath her fingertips. “But when everything’s said and done, you’re the one who has the ability to hurt him the most. He’s not a statue. He’s flesh and blood.” She sighed. “I really hope you remember that.”

Chat Noir cried out in pain and Ladybug snapped her attention away from the Conservator just in time to see the end of a blow to the head. Papillon lunged, knocking Chat Noir’s baton away, and
then grabbed him in a headlock.

Turning toward them, Papillon leered and extended his hand. The Conservator whirled and grabbed Ladybug by the throat. He lifted her off the ground and let her hang while Ladybug clawed at his hand, trying to get free.

“Make her stone,” Papillon snarled. “And get her miraculous!”

The Conservator lifted his hand and Ladybug grabbed that wrist instead. She wrestled and heaved, keeping his hand away from her, while he squeezed her neck.

The suit offered protection but even it was being crushed beneath akuma strength. She gulped and gasped, kicking her legs at the Conservator’s body. She smacked him with Chat Noir’s baton, but under Papillon’s thrall, he was as immovable as a statue himself. Planting her foot on his chest, Ladybug heaved, pulling away as much as she could.

Chat Noir struggled, wrenching and panting, Papillon’s grip tight around his neck, but he was unable to break free. A trickle of blood dribbled down from his temple. Papillon used his size and longer reach against Chat Noir to hold him still. Miraculous to miraculous, they were evenly matched.

Ladybug shoved the baton between her and the Conservator and pressed the middle button and held it. With her other hand, she clawed at the Conservator’s ring. The baton extended, throwing the Conservator and Ladybug in opposite directions and she yanked the ring with her. Mid-air, she snapped the ring, then collided with a pillar.

The butterfly fluttered free while Ladybug lay, dazzled, at the base of the pillar. Around her, statues turned back into people and sprawled to the ground, overcome. Gabriel lay on the floor a distance from her. Still slumped, she plucked her yo-yo from around her hips, pleased to see red and black spots. With a deft and Tikki driven twirl, she spun it to catch the akuma.

Instead of releasing the butterfly, she left it contained in her yo-yo. She was not going to give Papillon another chance to prey on anyone else.

She was so tired. Her head ached, her back hurt and all the air had emptied from lungs which refused to fill. In pain and exhausted, but she still had work to do. Hauling herself to her feet, she tried to portray confidence as she faced off against Papillon with her yo-yo spinning.

Papillon’s expression hardened. He changed his grip, tightening his elbow and gripping the back of Chat Noir’s neck. Eyes locked on, lips twisted up into a sinister smile, he sneered at her.

Her eyes flung wide as she realised his intent. Everything seemed to freeze up, her entire being focussed on Chat Noir and a scream of denial rose in her throat.

Chat Noir closed his eyes and lifted his right hand away from Papillon’s arm. He opened his mouth to speak.

Angry buzzing filled the foyer, the sound louder and more dangerous than any natural swarm of bees could be. People who had recovered their wits fled, rushing for the doors to escape the terrible sound. The room emptied of all but a few people.

Deedee descended upon Papillon, a ball of yellow and black of rage. She slammed her small body into him, darting away and rushing back, sharp hits, in rapid succession. Deadly accurate and painful by the sound of her body hitting Papillon’s and the resulting grunts he made. Papillon released one hand from his grip on Chat Noir’s neck, swatting at Deedee as she attacked him.
Then she vanished.

Papillon howled and clapped his hand over the back of his neck.

Chat Noir was thrown away from Papillon as the man spasmed in pain. Chat Noir skidded on all fours, then into a bounding run as he circled to join Ladybug. Straightening, he positioned himself slightly ahead of her. “Wha—?”

She shook her head and shrugged, stretching out her hand to grip his shoulder, partly for comfort, partly because it was hard to stand.

Both hands clutched the back of his neck as Papillon bent double.

There were others watching. Gabriel sat, unable to rise as he started at Papillon. Nathalie crouched by Gabriel’s side, her hand on his back to help him sit up, with the Gorilla looming over them protectively. Nino clutched Alya to his chest, his arms encircling her stomach, ready to pull her away to safety at a moment’s notice while the reporter herself held her phone up to record.

Something yellow lifted away from Papillon. She swung drunkenly in the air, then lost the ability to fly, falling to the ground with a sad plop.

Chat Noir’s breath caught in his throat. Ladybug’s hands flew to her mouth.

Deedee didn’t move.

Papillon dragged his hand away from his neck and looked at his palm. “You stung me!” He lifted his foot to stomp.

The yowl Chat Noir made wasn’t human. He thundered across to Papillon and tackled him away from Deedee. They rolled and scuffled and Chat Noir planted both his feet into Papillon’s stomach, kicking him across the room and into a pillar, where he threw himself at the older man again. Pinning Papillon by the neck against the pillar, Chat Noir raised his claw. “Cataclysm!”

Ladybug sucked in a breath.

Papillon stopped struggling, his face and body leaning away from Chat Noir’s hand, lips pinched white in terror.

“You do not touch her!” Chat Noir snarled, his clawed hand flickering with power. His tail flicked with anger, his back stiff and every muscle tensed as he held Papillon at bay. Through gritted teeth, he asked, “Is she okay?”

Ladybug rushed to Deedee, scooping the fragile bee into her hand. “Deedee?” she whispered, her finger stroking the fuzz around Deedee’s neck. “Deedee?”

Deedee seemed to have trouble breathing. When she flicked open her eyes, she didn’t even appear to see Ladybug. “Everyone… underestimates the bee…”

“What’s wrong? What can we do?” Ladybug asked, still stroking and trying to coax her to wake up more.

Deedee sighed and closed her eyes. “Need… sleep.”

“Ladybug?” Chat Noir asked, his voice harsh and grating.

Tears in her eyes made it difficult to see Deedee. “I don’t—” Ladybug gasped as Deedee’s toes
seemed to disintegrate into light and sparkles. "Chat!" She scampered to her feet and rushed to Chat Noir’s side. She held out her hand so he could see, not caring that she gave Papillon a view of Deedee too.

More of Deedee turned to dust and glitter, fading away like ash blown on the wind.

Chat Noir’s voice cracked. “Deedee!”

Ladybug stifled a sob. “I don’t know— I don’t know what to do.”

Deedee opened her eyes and smiled. “It’s okay,” she whispered as her chest turned to light. “It’s meant to happen.”

A moment hung in the void between them, a kiss on the wind and a waggle of a stinger and then she was gone and Ladybug held nothing but air.

Chapter End Notes

Bee-gone
What’s the first thing you say to a cat?

Chapter Summary

What’s the first thing you say to a cat?
HELLO KITTY!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ladybug stared at her palm unable to believe what had just occurred. She flexed her fingers, certain she’d feel Deedee’s weight against her palm. Nothing. No weight. No anything. Her hand was empty.

Dragging her eyes from her palm, she met Chat Noir’s devastated gaze.

He couldn’t seem to believe it and she wasn’t sure she did either. Honeybees died when they stung but was Deedee technically a honeybee? Did all bees die? Maybe she returned to her comb because kwami couldn’t die. They were eternal and—

But they could. They could die. Bees and ants, dying to protect the others and… so many had been lost in that war and now—

Chat Noir growled. He snarled and bared his teeth and his lashing tail struck Ladybug’s hip. “This is your fault,” he told Papillon.

Papillon shook his head, his eyes on Chat Noir’s claw and the black power he held. “I didn’t do that—”

“You started this. You came after us. You came after my mother. You killed her!” he snarled and Ladybug wasn’t sure if he meant his mother or Deedee. She wasn’t sure if it mattered.

Papillon flinched. “I didn’t—”

One-handed, Chat Noir hoisted Papillon away from the pillar and slammed him back against it. “Always hiding in the shadows, weren’t you? Safe and sound and hidden. Thinking we’d never find you. Well, we got you now and you’re going to pay.”

Striking fast, Papillon gripped Chat Noir’s wrist and forced it against the pillar. “Now you can’t—”

Chat Noir laughed and something froze in Ladybug’s heart. As the marble pillar began to fleck and crack, disintegrating beneath Chat Noir’s cataclysm, he sneered, “Oh, you really shouldn’t have done that.”

Lifting her eyes, she saw the decay spread upward, reaching beyond the pillar to the balcony above them. It was slow, slower than his normal spread of powers and she wondered how he’d done that. Normally the destruction was instantaneous, but this… this crept and spread and kept going. Flaking along the balcony, oozing to the stairs and climbing down an untouched pillar.

“Did you know,” Chat Noir said in an almost conversational tone. “I can destroy all of Paris with a
single touch? I just have to want it bad enough. Care to guess what I want right now?”

Heart pounding and fear in her stomach, Ladybug dragged her eyes to Alya and Nino, hoping they were too far away to hear that particular nugget of information.

Papillon curled his lips to a smirk. “You wouldn’t dare. You’re a hero and heroes never break the rules.”

Chat Noir laughed. “You don’t know a thing about me.” The humour in his voice vanished. “You’re not worthy to wear a miraculous,” Chat Noir hissed and reached for Papillon’s broach.

Papillon retaliated before Chat Noir could strip him of the miraculous. A knee to the side and a fast jab to the nose, then he clapped his hand over the broach. “You’ll never succeed in—”

“Looks like we have to do this the hard way.” Gripping the front of Papillon’s suit, Chat Noir turned and threw the man across the room and into a pillar on the opposite side of the foyer. “Get them out,” he told Ladybug.

With a groan, Papillon slumped at the base of the pillar.

“You,” she murmured. Keeping her back to Papillon, she half-stepped in front of Chat Noir’s path and halted his advance with a hand to the stomach. She didn’t say anything else, didn’t know what she could say to stop him or let him know how scared she was about his behaviour. She was tired, so tired and in pain and she wasn’t sure of anything anymore. Could she be reading everything wrong? Was he in control? Closing her eyes, she rested forehead on his shoulder.

He paused, half his body pressed against half of hers. He stroked the backs of his fingers down her cheek to her jaw where he coaxed her head up so he could look at her. “Do a charm and fix yourself,” he murmured, his voice soft and tender and in complete contrast to his tone a moment ago. “I won’t be long.” He kissed her temple and tilted his ring at her. “I have less than five minutes to make Deedee proud.”

He wouldn’t know how relieved she was to hear that. “And… you’re good?”

“I am purr-fect.”

Reassured, Ladybug stepped out of his way, turning so she could watch him strut toward Papillon. Clenched fists, stiff back, his tail dusting the ground as it swished behind him, a visage of power, grace and anger.

She glanced over at his father and tried not to smile. Even Gabriel was slack-jawed as he watched.

Raising her yo-yo, Ladybug called, “Lucky charm!”

Catching the piece of paper which fell, she was surprised to see a drawing of a cartoon goose and bear, dancing together. She blinked at it and turned the paper over, but there was nothing on the other side. A message of sorts, she supposed, since there didn’t seem to be a use for it.

Lucky charms weren’t always supposed to be used. Sometimes they were a message and sometimes the message didn’t come from Tikki. She’d learnt that from the book. So which was this?

Papillon scrambled to his feet, his fists raised like a boxer would to protect his face. Chat Noir unclenched his hands into claws and growled. Chat Noir blocked a strike from Papillon, retaliating with a punch to the stomach. He swiped out at Papillon’s head, dancing around him, then bounced back to kick him in the small of the back.
The balcony above Ladybug cracked and trembled.

First things first. Ladybug turned her head to where Alya and Nino stood. Rushing over, she ushered them both toward the door. “You need to leave.”

“But this is the final showdown!” Alya protested, her camera trained on Chat Noir and Papillon’s fight. “We need to record this! It’s the scoop of a—”

Pain made her tone sharp. “There’s no point scooping if it costs your life.”

Alya shook her head. “But you’ve got your charm and—”

“Which when I cast will cure everything up to this point right now. Not beyond. If anything happens, I can’t fix it. Now out. Please.”

A pillar crumbled into dust, scaring Nino, whose tugs on Alya’s stomach became more insistent. “She’s right. Alya, babe, we gotta go. Leave this to the pros.”

Alya looked so torn but she allowed Nino to pull her away.

“Get everyone away from here,” Ladybug cautioned. “Safe distance. I promise an exclusive after.”

“I’ll hold you to that!” Alya called as Nino dragged her out the door.

If only that worked on Gabriel. “I’m not leaving,” he said as she approached, his eyes firmly fixed on Chat Noir and Papillon.

“But, Monsieur Agreste,” Nathalie protested, eyeing the slow creeping destruction Chat Noir’s cataclysm was causing. “It’s dangerous and—”

Gabriel fixed his tie, then clasped his hands behind his back. “This is my home and I am not leaving. I insist that you do,” he glanced at the Gorilla. “Both of you. Right now.”

Rather than argue, Ladybug chose to grip Nathalie and the Gorilla’s arms and rush them toward the door. “Run,” she said as she shoved them through. “I’ll take care of Monsieur Agreste.” Taking a quick snatching view of the now empty courtyard, Ladybug slammed the door shut behind them.

Turning, she leant against the door and watched Chat Noir and Papillon.

Swipe and cleave, Chat Noir used only his claws to attack. On all fours, he skittered around, dashing in to rake, then darting away to circle. He growled, low and soft, but perfectly in control. Tail lashing and back hunched over, he didn’t give Papillon any breathing room. And he was brutal. He threw his entire body behind each strike and the hits looked like they hurt. Each blow caused Papillon to stagger, or a violent jerk, depending on where he was struck. He aimed for vital points, solar plexus, clavicle, or kidney, slamming his fist or his knee into those areas.

Releasing the butterfly from her yo-yo, Ladybug cast the charm back into the air, “Miraculous ladybug!”

The ladybugs descended on her, swirling and swarming, crawling through her hair and across her face before they swarmed away to take care of the rest of the damage caused by the akuma. The pain in her head didn’t disappear completely. Phantom pain niggled at the edges, that strange tunnel vision tiredness which came from a pain which had been dulled and a body that remembered and was afraid of its return.
But she could think. She ached and felt raw but she could act. She wanted to curl up and cry. She wanted to cuddle Chat Noir until she couldn’t breathe. She wanted her mom. She couldn’t have any of those things. Not yet. Soon.

The ladybugs fixed everything they could, including dusting over Chat Noir to heal him. Ladybug smiled as she saw them avoid Papillon.

Walking forward, she planted on hand on her hip and let her yo-yo dangle in the other. Should she help? He didn’t look like he needed it and it didn’t feel right to interfere. Chat Noir had so much invested in this. It was personal for him.

She’d be ready if he needed it. Until then, she’d witness.

A ladybug drifted past her eyes, dropped down to land on her shoulder and crawled in a circle. It lifted away and Ladybug felt drawn to the bug as it flew into a corner and landed on something golden.

Eyes blown wide, Ladybug scampered across the floor and scooped up the bee comb. “Deedee?” she whispered, hoping against all reason their little bee had retreated to the comb instead of disappearing.

Nothing. No little smile or waggle. No sparkle or little bee appearing as she brushed her fingers over the bee on the comb. But her ladybug had led her here, so perhaps not all hope was lost.

Master Fu. Master Fu would know.

She shoved the comb into her hair and spun back to the fight.

Papillon had changed tactic. Escape, rather than fight. He ran for the door, but Ladybug moved to bar his way. Skidding, he altered his direction went for a window instead, only for Chat Noir’s claw to land on his shoulder and drag him back into the centre of the foyer.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Chat Noir hissed and tossed him toward the stairs. “You need to pay for what you’ve done.”

Papillon hit the ground, skidding away on his back until he hit the base of the stairs. He raised his hands to Chat Noir in supplication. “Stop.”

Chat Noir advanced. “No.”

Ladybug’s fingers clenched and she lifted her yo-yo to spin it.

Papillon’s face and lips were starting to swell as a result of Deedee’s sting. “You have me at a disadvantage. You cheated with that sting and—”

Chat Noir laughed. “Really, you’re going to call us cheaters.”

“I thought heroes had honour. You wouldn’t hurt—”

Chat Noir stopped, looming over Papillon. He planted his hands on his hips. “You came after me. You came after my home. My mother. My kwamis. Worse of all, you came after her—” he thrust his hand out behind him to indicate Ladybug “—and I can’t forgive you for that. You made our lives hell for a year and you want to talk about honour.”

Papillon patted the air between him and Chat Noir as he tried to reason. “We’re family and—”
“You tried to kill me,” Chat Noir snapped. He bent down and hoisted Papillon up by the front of his suit. “Justice will be served.”

Ladybug gripped her yo-yo and waited to see what he would do.

Papillon sneered. “Go on. Take that step. Become destruction.”

Chat Noir shook his head. “I already am destruction and I am nothing like you.” He turned and extended Papillon out to Ladybug. “My lady, if you would.”

Ladybug let her yo-yo fly. It twined and twisted around Papillon, encircling him until he was completely bound by her weapon.

Chat Noir released Papillon and let him collapse on the ground. Crouching down, he regarded the bound Papillon. “It occurs to me that it’s a bad idea to allow me near his throat.”

Nodding, Ladybug walked over to join him. Bending over she ignored Papillon’s glare and feeble struggle to unclip the broach and pull it away. The transformation unravelled in a flash of purple light but Ladybug didn’t care about the person beneath the suit. She only had eyes for the relieved little butterfly who floated above the broach for a moment, bowed, then vanished in a puff of glitter and sparkle.

Glitter and sparkle. Like Deedee. She locked her eyes on Chat Noir and saw the same flicker of recognition flash through him, the same rising hope.

Chat Noir stood and stretched out a hand to grab Ladybug’s arm. “Do you think—?”

“We need to get to—”

Chat Noir nodded. “I have about a minute left. Maybe two. I wasn’t counting.”

She offered him Nooroo’s broach and Deedee’s comb. “Go. I’ll take care of—”

“I will tell everyone who you are.”

Ladybug tensed and Chat Noir went pale. Turning as one, they look down at the man who’d been Papillon. Blond hair, much like Adrien’s. Icy blue eyes. Expensive looking clothes, a dress suit similar to what he wore as Papillon without the frills. He had the appearance of a business man who should know better than to be a terrorist.

Antoine sneered, “Your secret is out, Adrien, you can’t hide anymore. Everyone will know who you are—”

Appearing beside them, Gabriel reached down, gripped Antoine’s silk shirt to heave him up and punched him in the nose. That final abuse was too much for the man, stung by a bee, beaten by a cat and clobbered by a father and he slumped, unconscious.

Straightening, Gabriel fixed his cuff. “He never knew when to shut up.”

“Father,” Chat Noir breathed.

Gabriel’s hands swung behind his back, returning to his natural stance as he turned to address them. “You should go,” he said. “I’ll take care of this.”

Chat Noir looked torn. “But—”
“My son,” Gabriel said, “is currently visiting his girlfriend and could not possibly be Chat Noir. I would never allow something like that, it’s far too dangerous.” He glanced down at Antoine. “He is quite obviously deluded. If you would send the police in as you exit, that would be appreciated.”

Her earrings beeped and Ladybug recalled her yo-yo. Fiddling with it, she unfolded her wings and slapped the extension to her back. “He’s right. We should go. We need to make sure Nooroo’s alright, recharge and come back.”

Chat Noir looked between her and Gabriel, then took a step toward the door. “Okay.”

Gabriel waited until they reached the door before he called, “Adrien.”

Chat Noir halted and Ladybug waited with her hand pressed against the wood door.

“I understand if you wish to spend tonight away,” Gabriel said, sounding vulnerable and uncertain. “However, my schedule tomorrow is completely clear. Please, can we talk?”

Chat Noir hunched his shoulders. “I…”

“Marinette can join us, though perhaps not for all of it. There are things I should tell you both. Whenever you are ready.”

Chat Noir’s eyes drifted to Ladybug’s, then back to Gabriel’s. Swallowing heavily, he nodded.

Ladybug flung open the door, then stepped behind Chat Noir, she looped her hands around his chest, beneath his arms, then lifted them both in the air. They flew low, ducking over the top of the crowd of people loitering outside Agreste Mansion’s fence line.

“Papillon is contained,” Chat Noir bellowed and gestured to the mansion. “If you would detain him for us.” Several police officers, and the Gorilla, broke into a run, heading for the mansion.

“We’ll be right back,” Ladybug called over the sound of sudden cheering, then darted straight into the air.

She flew as fast as she could, seconds counting down. They only had a minute or two to fly across Paris to get to safety and she knew, the moment they stopped it was all going to come crashing down.

“Final count down,” Chat Noir murmured, looking at the flashing of his ring.

Ladybug increased her speed.

They blustered into Master Fu’s home. Sabine and Master Fu looked up from their cups of tea and conversation as the pair of exhausted heroes stumbled through the door.

“We got Nooroo,” Chat Noir blurted. “But Deedee—”

“And we got Plagg—”

“—stung Papillon and then vanished—

“Nooroo vanished too and—”

“Is she okay? Is she gone?”

“Oh God, we just left him there. We left Papillon there and we ran—”
“Is there a way to check? She can’t be dead, she just can’t—”

“How do you break a bond? We didn’t break it and we have to go back—”

“Please,” Chat Noir begged, placing the comb and the broach on the table in front of Master Fu. “Tell me we didn’t lose Deedee.”

Ladybug closed her mouth and waited.

Master Fu seemed to be having trouble figuring out what they were talking about. He swung his head between the two of them. “I am sorry, I do not—”

Sabine rested her cup back on the table. “They defeated Papillon and saved— Nooroo, was it? But Deedee stung someone and now both Nooroo and Deedee have vanished. They didn’t sever a bond because they don’t know how.” Sabine winked at them. “I speak fluent babble.”

“Ahh,” Master Fu said. “I see.”

Green lightning flashed around Chat Noir as he lost his transformation. Plagg floundered out, flopping onto Adrien’s waiting palms. “Really, kid?” he moaned. “I just get back and you throw me into a showdown with Papillon of all things. Not even a ‘hi Plagg, I missed you, have a year’s supply of cheese’.”

Adrien parroted, “Hi Plagg. I missed you. Now, about Deedee—”

Plagg rolled his eyes. “Ugg, really? I’m barely gone and she’s stolen another kitten and—”

“She stung Papillon and vanished and—”

“And now she’s gonna hog all the glory,” Plagg complained and flopped flat. “Like Tikki and I didn’t do anything.” He eyed Ladybug, then frowned with titled head. “What’s been happening since I’ve been gone?” He sat up. “Wait. Did I miss the big reveal?”

Ladybug and Adrien exchanged a glance and Ladybug let her transformation fall, cupping her hands to catch Tikki. “I guess so. Hi Plagg, it’s nice to finally meet you.”

Plagg looked at Tikki. “Who won the bet?”

Tikki smiled tiredly at him. “I did.”

“Oh, of course,” Plagg complained, flopping dramatically. “And you had Deedee. Cheater.”

“Yes. Deedee,” Adrien insisted. “Who we’re very worried about because she stung Papillon.”

“So?” Plagg muttered. “I’d like to bite him.” Rolling onto his belly, he propped his head up with both paws. “Hello, darling, you look bugalicious.”

“Oh, hush, Plagg, they don’t understand,” Tikki said, waving her paw at Plagg. She zipped out of Marinette’s hands so she could float in front of Adrien. “Deedee’s not a honeybee, Adrien. She doesn’t lose her stinger if she stings. The comb was removed, Plagg was back, her link to allow her to be active was superseded by his and with a sting… she had to retreat to her comb.”

Adrien’s knees went out from beneath him and he slumped to the floor.

Marinette gusted out a breath, feeling a tension she hadn’t known she carried seep away. “She’s okay?”
Plagg floated out of Adrien’s hands. “Well, *duh*. She’s in a circle with me ‘n Tikki. She better ‘bee’ extraordinary. Deedee won’t let a little sting keep her down.”

“She’s sleeping,” Master Fu assured him. “As it was meant to… well…” he smiled and spread his fingers like he was telling a joke. “Bee.”

Marinette sagged. Adrien dragged his knees up to his chest and hid his face in them. Marinette could hear him taking deep, controlled breathing. She knelt down beside him to rub his back and murmur soothing noises. It was such a relief to know that Deedee was alright and she knew Adrien must feel incredibly overwhelmed by everything that had occurred.

“It will be several days before we can coax her from the comb again,” Master Fu said, regarding Adrien. “As for Nooroo’s bond, which one of you removed it?”

“I did,” Marinette replied. She kept her eyes on Adrien, feeling him lean into her hand.

“And when you did, what was your intent?”

Marinette thought about that. “To rescue Nooroo. Papillon wasn’t worthy enough to wield him. Nooroo appeared and bowed, then vanished into his broach.”

Master Fu nodded. “Then it is already broken. A miraculous wielder removed a miraculous with the intent of helping the kwami not stealing the item, and the kwami in question wanted to be removed. It is one of the easier ways of breaking a bond. We’ll give him a few days to recuperate too, then call him out.”

While it was an interesting conversation, Marinette really didn’t know why they had to have it now. Adrien was hurting and needed comfort and she couldn’t give it to him while so many in the room. Understanding, Tikki lifted away. “Master, could we trouble you for some food? We both used our gifts and given the situation, we have not had a chance to stock up on food.”

“Ooh,” Plagg said, perking up. “Cheese.”

“Oh, if everything’s back to normal, I should call your father,” Sabine said, giving Marinette a meaningful glance and Adrien a more sorrowful one. “May I borrow your phone, Fu?”

Master Fu nodded. “Of course, this way.”

Marinette touched Adrien’s shoulder, then his hair. “Adrien?”

The moment the door clicked closed, he lunged at her. Wrapping his arms around her as tightly as he could, he buried his face in her neck. Falling to her knees, she clutched him back, squeezing him.

He hiccupped and shook in her hands. “I thought—I thought—”

“I know. I did too,” she soothed. “But she’s not. She’s okay.”

He jerked away like he’d hurt her. He touched her everywhere, her face, her neck, her wrists and knees, checking each part of her before he cupped her face with both hands. “And you! Your head! You were bleeding and—”

“I’m fine,” she promised. “The cure fixed me up. There’s a little headache, but I’m okay.”
His cheeks were wet and she tried not to notice as he crushed her to him again.

“Aww,” Plagg cooed. “They’re so sweet.” He made gagging noises. “It’s enough to make me sick.”

“And you missed it,” Tikki teased. “And Deedee saw it all. She participated.”

“It’s not my fault I got cat-napped. Besides, it would’ve happened the first day if I’d had my way,” Plagg scoffed, extending his paw to Tikki. “None of your ‘we have to wait until we’re sure’.”

“One of us has to follow the rules,” Tikki replied, drifting closer to Plagg and placed her paw in his.

“You’re such a stickler for them,” Plagg said and twirled her before he snuggled up. “Breaking the rules isn’t a bad thing, you know, it just depends on the rule.”

The two kwami drifted away from them, dancing away and bickering like an old married couple and Marinette wondered at their lack of joyful reunion. Considering how close Adrien was, she wondered if there hadn’t been a bit of sneaking between schoolbags.

Adrien flexed, showing signs he was ready to talk, even though his grip on her didn’t lessen. “We did it. We beat him.”

Marinette clutched his shoulders. “You did it.”

“We won.”

She snorted and shook her head. “That was all you, Chat. You were fantastic.”

“I thought… I’m sorry if I frightened you. I was trying to intimidate him.”

Her fingers stroked his back. “You didn’t. I was scared for you, not because of you. That was… that was very personal for you and it— I didn’t know what I should do and— only you could decide.”

“I just… I wanted to cataclysm his face but I kept thinking about what Deedee would want.”

She stroked her hand through his hair. “You were amazing.”

He kissed his way along her up her neck and jaw until he found her mouth. It wasn’t a very long kiss, but was hard and it carried desperation in it. Like he needed to be as close to her as he could, but couldn’t figure out how to achieve that. Breaking the kiss, he pressed his forehead to hers. “I’m so tired.”

“I know,” she said, stroking and soothing. “But we have some things we have to do before we can sleep. We need to make sure Papillon is in custody.”

“And that he won’t talk. Or at least, he’s not believed.”

“I can do that if you—”

“I’m not letting you go. Like ever. Plagg and Tikki might need cheese and cookies to recharge, but I need you.” He squished her nose with his. “We’re staying right here. At least for the next five minutes.”

There was nothing she wanted more right now. “Okay.”

“So, this is the thorn in our side?” Andre Bourgeois asked, peeking through the door at the man
handcuffed to a chair in Gabriel’s office and guarded by several officers.

Standing beside him, Roger nodded. “Not much to look at. Although, we think he’s having an allergic reaction to something. Not sure. Doctor’s coming.”

“Do we have a name?”

Roger lifted his tablet to check the records. “He wasn’t carrying identification. We’ve taken fingerprints, but we’re waiting on Ladybug and Chat Noir to return before we try and move him. Just in case.”

Andre scratched his chin as he stared into the interrogation room. “Apparently, there’s surveillance footage?”

“The mansion is on lockdown,” Roger said, indicating Gabriel as he waited with Nathalie across the room. “Gabriel hasn’t said why. He won’t allow us access to the complete footage without a court order but he did show us about thirty seconds when we can see Papillon becoming the man we have here. It’s enough.”

Andre rubbed his chin. “And Ladybug or Chat Noir? Why aren’t they here?”

“I gather it was an exhausting battle. They’ll be back. In the meantime, we’ll question him.”

Andre nodded. “Good. Good. I’m to be informed of everything he tells you and—”

The front door to the mansion opened and a woman in a brown dress jacket, white skirt and knee-high heeled boots entered. She was short, her brown hair pinned up behind her head as she looked around the foyer through rectangular glasses. Andre evaluated her immediately; her whole ensemble screamed ‘professional’ and ‘trouble’ at the same time.

Behind her, a man filled the doorway, then slipped inside. Big, bulky, his suit as immaculate and professional as hers appeared. Andre was a big man, but this man was much larger than him and Andre felt intimidated.

Singling them out among the masses of officers in the foyer, she woman lifted a badge. “I’m Josephine Gant and this is my partner Harold Gerben, we’re with Interpol. We’re here to take control of the Papillon investigation.”

“I’m Officer Roger Raincomprix,” Roger said, extending a hand which Josephine gleefully shook. “How did you get here so fast? We’ve only just apprehended him and—”

“Interpol?” Andre questioned. “Surely this is a domestic issue and—”

“And you are?” she asked.

“I am Mayor Andre Bourgeois and this is my city—”

“Good. Pleased to meet you both. Under normal circumstances, yes, but Papillon is wanted for questioning in a string of offences in Tibet and Germany. The City of Paris has done fine work in apprehending him, but we’ll take it from here. Please turn any and all information over to us.” Her smile widened. “I trust Ladybug and Chat Noir will be returning soon?”

Perplexed, Roger nodded. “We hope so.”

Josephine nodded and tucked away her badge. “Good. We’ll wait to speak to them. In the meantime,
I’ll just have a little chat with the suspect.”

“This is my city,” Andre said, drawing himself up, “and he will answer for the crimes he has done —”

“This has become classified,” Josephine said, still smiling in her infuriating way. “Interpol will share any and all information we deem pertinent, but trust us when we say he will be dealt with swiftly and harshly.”

Harold moved so he was behind Andre and Roger, dwarfing them with his size as he ushered them away.

Smiling, Josephine opened the door to where her suspect waited. She nodded to the guarding officers. “I’ll take it from here,” she said, flashing her badge.

One of them tipped her hat. “Madame.”

Josephine walked toward the bound man sitting on a chair with his head hanging. Glancing up, she smiled at her partner as he closed the door and joined her. “Hello, Antoine.”

He raised his puffy, swollen head. “How did you know my name?”

She smiled. “We’ve been looking for you for a long time.”

Chapter End Notes

*It’s a myth that all bees die when they sting. Only honeybees do because their stinger is barbed. Bumblebees and other sorts do not die, but it also takes a lot more to get them to sting. Deedee wouldn’t joke about stinging Adrien if she’d die as a result.*
The crowd of people outside the mansion had doubled in the short time Ladybug and Chat Noir been gone. Well-wishers, people celebrating and media all vying for information. Police had cordoned off the mansion and many littered the courtyard, using the mansion gates to keep civilians away.

Ladybug studied the media frenzy below, unsurprised to see Alya and Nino among them. She needed to remember to call them as soon as she could.

Assuming she wasn’t grounded. She worried and fretted about that, trying to push it out of her mind. Sabine had gone home to speak to Tom and Ladybug wasn’t looking forward to that conversation at all. They’d promised her they’d come as soon as they made sure Papillon was secure.

“How are we going to make sure he doesn’t tell them?” Ladybug asked. “What if he already has?”

“Then we’ll deal with that,” Chat Noir replied. “We have to trust that my father would’ve spun something already.”

Ladybug hunched her shoulders and rubbed her hands along her opposite arms. “God, we shouldn’t have left him there.”

Resting his hand on the back of Ladybug’s shoulder, Chat Noir replied, “We had to. We were emotionally wrecked, honeybug. I’m surprised I’m standing, to be honest.”

She shifted her eyes from the media circus to his in sympathy. “Yeah, I know.”

Chat Noir pulled his baton from his back and spun it in his hand. “Let’s just go see what waits.”
She nodded. Throwing her yo-yo, she swung from the top of the building. Chat Noir vaulted after her.

The moment they were spotted, the cheering began. Yelling and screaming and flashing lights as cameras raised to take photos. Instead of greeting the press, they landed in the middle of the courtyard, behind the closed gates, and offered the people at the gate a smile and a wave.

The Mayor met them before they’d even gotten to the entrance of the mansion. “I’m so glad you’re here,” he said. “Perhaps they’ll listen to you.”

Chat Noir and Ladybug exchanged a confused look. “Who will listen to us?”

“Interpol showed up,” Andre explained. “They’re taking Papillon.”

Ladybug tried to keep her breathing steady. Interpol? How did they get here so fast? What would they want with him? Granted, she and Chat Noir weren’t sure what to do with Antoine, but to give him over to Interpol seemed dangerous, especially since Antoine knew who Chat Noir was.

“Where is he?” Chat Noir asked, his voice tight.

“In Gabriel’s office, I’ll escor—”

Ladybug and Chat Noir broke into a run, leaving the Mayor behind. So many officers in the foyer and Ladybug saw Gabriel, Nathalie and Gorilla camped out in the corner. Chat Noir saw them too, his step slowing as he met his father’s eyes, then had to turn away.

Throwing open the door to Gabriel’s office, they darted inside, expecting a fight.

Sitting on a sofa in Gabriel’s sunken lounge, a woman looked up from the piece of paper she was reading and beamed at them. “Here they are! Please, close the door behind you. Congratulations to you both on your victory.”

Unnerved, Chat Noir turned to do as she requested. Ladybug glanced over, seeing Antoine unconscious and tied to a chair.

“Oh, don’t worry about him,” the woman said with a dismissive wave of her hand as she rose from her seat. She buttoned up her jacket, then dusted it off. “He’s been prepped for transport. We’ll take him off your hands.”

“Who are you?” Chat Noir asked, cautious. “Why—” he sneezed abruptly, an action which rocked his entire body.

Ladybug frowned at Chat Noir, then focussed her attention on the woman. “Why does Interpol want —”

A large man moved toward them and Ladybug braced, ready for an ambush, only to be scooped up into a bear hug. “Oh, look at these little cubs,” the man said. “Aren’t they adorable?”

Trapped in the man’s massive arms, Chat Noir squirmed and Ladybug found herself face-first in the man’s chest. “What?”

“Get off me!” Chat Noir yelped, kicking his legs and pushing away as much as he could.

“Can I keep them?” the man said asked, squeezing them.

“Harold,” the woman said, scolded. “Put them down.”
They were both tucked into the crook of his arms, leaving his hands free so Harold squished Chat Noir’s cheeks. “But they’re cute. Look at their little noses and their innocence and, oh they’re little babies compared to—”

The woman sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. “Harold.”

Mollified, Harold carefully placed both Ladybug and Chat Noir back on the ground. “Sorry, Josie.”

Immediately, Chat Noir danced away from Harold, pulling Ladybug with him by the wrist. Once at a safe distance, he hunkered down ahead of her protectively and reach for his baton.

Ladybug put her hand on his shoulder as a sign of solidarity. “What’s going on?”

Pressing her hand over her heart, Josie bowed. “I am Josephine Gant and this is Harold Gerben. The Queens offer their most sincere apologies for not sending aid sooner.”

Ladybug swung her head between the two of them. “The Queens?” Her eyes widened. “You’re wielders!”

With a smile, Josie nodded.

“What?” Chat Noir asked, losing his defensive stance. “They are?”

“The goose and the bear!” Ladybug said, relieved. She sagged, leaning heavily on Chat Noir. “Oh, I wondered what that meant.”

Josie smiled. “At your service. We are the Queens’ royal guard.”

“So you’re not Interpol?” Ladybug clarified.

“Goose?” Chat Noir asked, and sniffled. “Oh, great.” Standing up straight, he took an exaggerated step backwards and covered his mouth with his hand. “Sorry, but I’m allergic to feathers. I’d rather not have an episode today on top of everything else.”

Josie nodded and took a step back herself. “I understand. And we are Interpol, we’ve been keeping tabs on the situation and—”

Chat Noir sneezed. “Sorry,” he muttered, sniffling.

“Aww the poor mite,” Harold cooed. “Josie, can I—”

“Leave the petting of the cat until later. I don’t think the boy can handle you right now, Teddy.”

Chat Noir stepped back further. “No. No petting of the cat. At all.”

“Why now?” Ladybug asked, rescuing her cat. “We’ve been fighting him for nearly a year, what took you so long?”

“Circle politics,” Harold said. “And the Queens do not ignore a command from Creation.”

Ladybug closed her eyes. “Tikki. Of course.”

“She asked for time. We gave it. And the Queens agreed it was good battle training for you both and no one is better equipped to deal with the butterfly than the ladybug.”

“Once your circle’s bee was activated, we knew the situation had become serious,” Harold said,
lumbering over to stand by Josie.

“We contacted Fu and he assured us it would be resolved soon,” Josie said. “The Queens were content to watch, but Aranha send a warning from the web, so we thought backup might be appreciated. It couldn’t hurt to have extra wielders in Paris and Josie and I are the ones with the highest credentials. There will probably be several more arriving soon.” She looked at Harold and said, “I believe Komodo was on his way.”

Harold nodded. “Magpie and Rák, too.”

“We were just going to tell you we were available if you needed help. I don’t think anyone expected the final confrontation with Papillon to occur. When we heard, we came straight away, but it was over.”

Ladybug nodded. “We certainly weren’t expecting it. Aranha?” she asked, unfamiliar with that word.

“Spider,” Harold said, translating. “She weaves threads and possibilities. A seer of sorts.”

Chat Noir pointed at Antoine. “So, what’s going to happen to him?”

“The Queens want a word,” Josie said, glancing over her shoulder at Antoine. “After that, he’ll disappear.”

Ladybug’s mouth went dry. “You’ll kill him?”

“No, of course not,” Harold said, patting the air with his hands. “Interpol will take care of it.”

Josie smirked. “It helps the Director of Interpol also wields a miraculous.”

Ladybug blinked. “Really?”

“Protection wielders often go into law enforcement,” Harold said with a shrug. “We have that type of personality.”

Chat Noir glanced at Ladybug. Running his hand over his neck, he said, “That certainly takes a load off. We weren’t sure what we should do.”

“It is rather a unique situation,” Josie agreed. “Normally, wielders operate from the shadows, but you both have been quite… showy.”

“That’s not our fault,” Ladybug said, defensive. “It’s hard to work in secret when he announced himself.”

Josie nodded. “No, it’s not your fault, and it’s another charge he’ll have to answer. The world knows about us now. It’s an interesting time.”

“There are many wielders who are considering following in your footsteps,” Harold said.

“Really?”

“Not us,” Josie said and smiled at Harold. “We’re happy, dancing away in the shadows. It’s an easier place to work from.”

Reminded of work, Ladybug asked, “So what do you need from us?”
“Statements,” Josie said, becoming brusque. “Details of the final battle. A media release will be expected soon, but I would prefer your silence on the matter until we’ve secured Antoine. We don’t want certain… erm… parties becoming aware we have him.”

“And if you could tell that nosy Mayor of yours to back off, that’d be appreciated,” Harold said.

“Wait, you know who he is?” Chat Noir asked, stepping forward.

“We’ve been watching him for a while. Since…” Josie hesitated and exchanged a glance with Harold. “Adrien, we know who you are.”

Chat Noir jerked. “Wait, what?”

Josie tipped her finger toward Antoine. “He couldn’t wait to tell us who you were.” She smiled. “It’s okay. This is part of the reason why we’re here. We’ll take care of it. Your secret is safe.”

Chat Noir puffed out a breath, then sneezed again.

“Plagg always did like the pretty ones,” a small voice announced and a brown feathered head poked out of Josie’s pocket.

“This is Glossa,” Josie said and patted her kwami on the head. “And she’s supposed to be hiding.”

Glossa ducked her head back down. “Aww, I wanted to see the pretty one.”

Chat Noir snorted.

“We also know he’s your uncle,” Harold said, gentle.

Chat Noir crossed his arms on his chest. “No, he really isn’t.”

“I was a friend of your mother,” Josie said. “We… used to work together whenever I was in Paris. And I’ve met your father on many occasions.” She laughed. “Boy, was he relieved when he called and I said I was already here.”

Chat Noir’s arms slithered to his sides.

Josie lowered her eyes, then removed her glasses. “Her death was a great shock to a lot of us. I am sorry for your loss.”

Chat Noir sucked in a breath and Ladybug stepped closer to him, threading their finger together.

“There will be a lot of anger toward Antoine,” Harold said. “He will have to answer for that too.”

“Seems like everyone knew but me,” Chat Noir muttered. He dropped his eyes and turned his back on Josie and Harold.

“I… I don’t understand,” Josie said.

Moving with him, Ladybug squeezed his fingers. “We’re… pretty exhausted,” she said on Chat Noir’s behalf. “I’ll speak to the Mayor and tell him you have our full support.”

“Of course,” Josie said with a nod. “Harold will take your statements and we’ll give you our contact details. We’ll be in Paris for the next few days, wrapping things up officially. Please, don’t hesitate to contact us if you need to talk.”
It took several hours, a lot of questions and getting stories straight, and one irate Mayor before they could leave. Sunset approached and the crowd of people outside the mansion hadn’t dimmed. If anything it had increased in size, but then, so had the police presence.

Ladybug stood at the top of the stairs on the balcony at the entrance to Agreste mansion, Chat Noir crouched on the railing beside her, and watched as Josie and Harold escorted a heavily sedated Antoine to a vehicle. They had an armed police escort as well, ready to act as they transported him to an undisclosed location.

Gabriel stood on the other side of the balcony above the courtyard, his hands behind his back in silent witness at the interlopers intruding in his home made their grand exit. Ladybug wondered how both Agrestes could so resolutely pretend the other didn’t exist but she didn’t draw attention to it.

Josie turned to face them and waved her hand before slipping into the passenger seat. Harold raised his hand in salute as he sat in the driver’s chair.

Then the bear and the goose were gone, taking with them all the mayhem of the day. Chat Noir let out a sigh and Ladybug leant into him.

“I’m so glad that’s over with,” he said and shifted so he sat rather than crouching. He looped an arm around her waist and pulled her close as they watched the car drive away.

“Alya’s going to be so pissed,” Ladybug mentioned, as the media followed the car.

“She’ll understand we can’t divulge information—”

“No,” she laughed and nudged him. “I mean, we were supposed to be doing a study group.”

Chat Noir cringed. “Oh yeah. Seems so long ago already.”

“And we’ve been off the grid. Alya might be caught up with what’s going on, but I bet Nino’s tried to call you several times. He’ll rant to Alya and she’ll blast me.”

“We’ll just say I had a fight with my father and turned the phone off,” he said. “Nino will understand.”

She nodded. “Our day turned out completely different than what I had planned.”

“Anything specific?” he asked, giving her a smile. “There’s still time.”

“Sleep,” she replied and heaved a sigh. “But I still have to face my father.”

Chat Noir raised his head, watching as his father sauntered back inside the mansion and closed the door. “Yeah. I know how that is.”

“Are you coming home with me?” she asked, hesitant. “Or did you want to talk to him now?”

“Has your offer of a sleepover been rescinded?” he asked. His cat ears flattened, giving him a vulnerable appearance.

“Of course not,” she replied and reached over to scratch his head, hoping to perk him up again.

“Then I’m coming with you,” he turned his head and stared out at the river. “I’m… I’m not ready for him.”

“Okay,” she said and stepped away. “But we should go.”
“We might have to do a lap of Paris,” he said. “There’s so many reporters out there and it’s not dark yet. We’ll be spotted.”

Ladybug hummed. “Yeah, you’re right.”

“We could… hmmm no, that’s probably not appropriate.”

She tilted her head at him. “What?”

He glanced at her and ducked his head in embarrassment. “The sunset’s pretty tonight. We could… sit on the Eiffel Tower and watch until the sun goes down. Have a breather before we face the music.”

“Aww, Chat, I’d love to, but all eyes are on us, as you said. We’ll be noticed. And he’s probably waiting up for us. I don’t want him to be exhausted for work.” She nudged him. “Raincheck.”

“Ahh.” He ran his hand through his hair. “Sorry, I forgot. Yeah, it would be very late for him.”

Tom was waiting for them as they dropped through the hatch and into Marinette’s room. He and Sabine had camped out on her chaise, watching the news on her computer. Ladybug paused, standing on her bed and twisting her fingers nervously as Chat Noir dropped in behind her.

Tom rose from the chaise, gazing up at her.

Nervous, Ladybug babbled, “Papa, I know this is a big shock. I really, really wanted to tell you but Tikki said I couldn’t and I know you’re probably angry at me for putting myself in danger and—”

Tom spread his arms in invitation. “There’s my girl.”

Ladybug sucked in a breath, then rushed down the stairs into his embrace.

He scooped her up, cuddling her close. “I am so proud of you,” he murmured. Pulling back, he lifted her up off the ground and into the air, holding her up like he used to do when she was little. “My girl, the superhero!”

Ladybug thought her grin might make her face break.

“What do you do on sleepovers anyway?”

Dragged from her thoughts, Marinette rolled over and peered down at Adrien. He lay on his back on the air mattress, Plagg curled up and purring on his chest. “Can’t sleep?”

There had been hugs and tears from her parents and it made her ache inside as she wished that could happen for Adrien. But it was late and Tom had to get up in less than four hours to begin the day, so Marinette had insisted they go to bed. She knew there’d be lots of conversations later, but for now, she felt happy and accepted.

Alya, too caught up the events of the day, hadn’t really noticed the absence of Marinette and Adrien. She’d chided them for not calling when they called her, then launched into an in-depth explanation of what had occurred with Ladybug and Chat Noir. Nino had noticed and got very quiet while Adrien talked, before asking if he was okay. When Adrien explained where he was staying for the night, Nino started with the teasing and innuendo, prompting Adrien to take the phone off speaker and hiss at his friend.

“My brain feels… too full to sleep,” he said. “I’m exhausted, but I can’t switch it off.” He cringed.
“Sorry, you probably were nearly asleep, weren’t you?”

She was quick to reassure him. “No. I think I’m suffering from the same thing as you.”

“So, what do you do on sleepovers?”

Lifting her head, she propped it up with a hand on her chin. “You’ve… never had one before, have you?”

“Nope. I feel compelled to make the most of it.”

She considered. “Well… Alya and I watch movies. Talk a lot. Do our hair and paint our nails, that sort of thing.”

“Okay.”


“Nails and talk. I mean, I get my hair and nails done all the time but normally I’m not supposed to talk.”

Marinette giggled. “Oh, kitty, we don’t do it the ‘model’ way.”

“What way do you do it?”

She waved her free hand around. “Crazy, embarrassing hairstyles galore. The ‘I wonder how many mini-braids I can put in your hair before we run out of room’, kind of style.”

He adjusted his head on his pillow as he looked up at her. “How many braids can you fit in your hair?”

“Mine can fit about twenty. Alya’s can get more because she has thicker hair so the braids can be smaller. We do nail art too.”

He seemed interested in that. “Nail art?”

“Pretty patterns. Star constellations.” She grinned. “I could even paint your nails like ladybugs, or black and then do little green paw prints on each nail if you wanted.”

“Really?” he asked, perking up. “Can we do that?”

“Sure,” she chirped and bounced out of her bed. Even if they removed it tomorrow morning so they could go and see his father, it’d be fun to do at the moment.

“Is it time to get up already?” Tikki asked, floating up. She yawned and rubbed her eyes, then blinked at Marinette.

“No, little bug,” Marinette said and rubbed her hand over Tikki’s head. “Go back to sleep. I’m going to paint Adrien’s nails.”

“Ooh. Is it makeover time?” Tikki asked, excited about the prospect. “Can I join in? It always looks like such fun when you and Alya do it.”

“Sure!” Marinette said, probably a little too enthusiastically for so late at night.

“Goodie!” Tikki said and zipped down to Adrien where she pounced on Plagg. “Plagg! Wake up!
I’m going to paint your nails.”

The cat kwami opened one eye, then closed it again. “No. Sleeping.”

Adrien nudged Plagg from his chest so he could sit up. “C’mon. It’ll be fun.”

“I was having fun,” Plagg protested, floating up. “Naps and scratches, what can be better? Unless you have more cheese? Do we have more cheese?”

Adrien laughed. “I can’t believe I missed the cheese smell.”

Plagg grinned. “You never know how good you have it ‘til it’s gone.”

Marinette switched on her desk lamp and then the fairy lights that rimmed the alcove beneath her bed for light. She grabbed the small box of nail supplies and carried them over to the air mattress. Eyeing it, she said, “Let’s do this on my bed. It’s not going to move every time we do.”

Adrien glanced up toward her bed. “You sure?”

“The light’s better up there,” she said, switching the fairy lights back off again, although she left the desk lamp. He’d be able to find his way back down afterwards.

The air mattress squeaked beneath Adrien as he hauled himself out of it and trotted up the stairs after her.

“How are you going to paint my nails? I don’t have any,” Plagg complained as he floated up to Marinette’s bed to join them.

Tikki pointed out, “You have claws.”

“Yeah, but those nail brushes thingies are huge,” Plagg said. “It doesn’t work.”

Adrien snickered and placed his hand beside his mouth to whisper, “He’s tried it already.”

Marinette covered her mouth with her hand and giggled.

“Shuddup,” Plagg said.

Tikki tapped her paw to her mouth. “Oh! I know!” she said and zipped away to find a brush. “We can braid Adrien’s hair while Marinette does his nails!”

“I think I’d rather watch,” Plagg replied and draped himself on his belly on Marinette’s shoulder. “This is comfy.”

“Spoilsport,” Tikki complained.

Adrien and Marinette sat facing each other on her bed so close their knees touched. He sat cross-legged, while she had her legs extended on either side of him, with one knee lifted so she could use it as a table.

“So, Monsieur Agreste,” she said as she pretended to be a manicurist in a salon. Picking up his hand, she tread her fingers with his in a very unprofessional way. “What shall it be? Kitty paws or ladybug spots?”

“Both? Can you do both?”
Tikki rushed back and dumped a hairbrush on the bed beside them, then vanished again.

Smiling because of her kwami, Marinette said to Adrien, “Alternative patterns. Well, we don’t ask for much, do we?”

“You offered.”

She smiled, winked at him and reached for the primer. She slipped a cloth on her knee, then lifted his hand and she plonked it on the cloth.

As Marinette prepared his nails, she realised she’d never studied his hands before in any detail. He had large hands and long fingers, she knew that. She knew how perfectly her own hand fit with his and how soft his skin was. But she hadn’t known he had a freckle on the ring finger of his left hand or what looked to be like a chicken pox scar on the back. She hadn’t known about the tiny callouses across his right palm, possibly from his fencing sword.

Tikki came back and dropped a large bundle of brightly coloured hair ties on the bed, then picked up the brush. There was a gleam in her eye which boded ill for Adrien’s hair and Marinette was glad she never invited Tikki to braid hers.

Holding still as Tikki messed around in his hair, Adrien watched her as Marinette hunched over his hand and worked. “So, what do we talk about? What did you and Alya talk about?”

She flashed him a smile. “It used to be about you. And Nino. Boys in general. Ladybug and Chat Noir. Plans for the future. All sorts of things.”

He laughed. “I can talk about me.”

“Oh, look at that ego,” she teased, peeking through her eyelashes at him.

“What about me?” he pressed.

She dipped the brush into the red polish and angled his index finger. “Well. Alya used to try and give me advice about how to confess to you. Or flirt. She was very big on me trying to flirt, except I could never quite get my words out with you and anything I did say was a garbled mess.”

“But you flirt so well!” He coughed and cleared his throat. “I mean, I like it when you flirt.”

She flushed and tilted his hand to get a better angle. “I’m getting better. Words still garble.”

“I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

“You’re Chat too,” she said and smiled. “I can talk to Chat for days. I think it’s mostly because I’m still having trouble believing it’s real.”

“Yeah,” he replied, his voice soft and husky. “Me too.”

“Please tell me you’re not dancing around your room singing and swooning like you normally do,” Plagg muttered.

“I’m not singing and dancing around my room,” Adrien deadpanned, glaring at his kwami.

“Deedee taught him to dance,” Tikki said around a mouthful of hair tie, her paws making quick work of a braid in the middle of his head.

Plagg jerked away from Marinette’s shoulder. “No,” he breathed in horror. “She didn’t.”
“He’s amazing at dancing,” Marinette said. “I’m going to make him, Deedee and Tikki costumes. Do you want one so you can join in?”

“Oh, hell no!”

Adrien teased, “No little green vest to match your eyes?”

“We could give him a bell,” Marinette said.

“We need one for everyday living,” Adrien replied. “Pretty pink ribbon and a bell. He wouldn’t be able to sneak up on me then.”

“You are not putting a bell on me!”

“Does he do that often?” Marinette asked.

“All the time,” Tikki complained, starting on the next braid.

“What cat doesn’t like to pounce?” Adrien replied.

Giggling, Marinette lowered the knee he had his hand on and raised her other one. “Don’t move,” she warned. “It needs to dry.”

He chuckled. “I’ve had my nails done before.”

“And yet,” she said as she started working on her other hand. “You’re wriggling.”

“There’s a bug in my hair,” he complained.

Tikki gave a tug. “Hold still!”

Marinette giggled.

“Hey, honeybug?” he asked in a quiet voice.

“Yes?” she asked, adjusting his thumb so she could get the polish on.

“Chat Noir’s back.”

She beamed. “He is. I missed the sight of him. You. I missed that you. Bumblebee was awesome, but wow… when you slid in, it was such a relief. It was like a weight’d been lifted.”

“Yeah, I know how that is. It felt amazing.”

She stretched out her hand and patted Plagg. “And I got to meet this little guy too.”

Plagg purred and rubbed himself against her palm. Poking his tongue at Adrien, Plagg cooed, “She likes me.”

“She likes me too,” Adrien said, slightly put out by Plagg’s tone. “But, look, I was wondering, Chat’s back and we said that Ladybug and Bumblebee shouldn’t flirt because people would get the wrong idea.”

Marinette hesitated, then continued to work on his nails. “Yes.”

“I know we were sort of leaning on each other before, but I think anyone could attribute that to us being exhausted and finally winning. And it’s… it’s not more than what we’ve normally done. But I
was thinking…”

Putting the black nail polish brush away, she lifted his hand and blew softly on his nails. “You were thinking?” she asked, looking up at him through her eyelashes.

His pupils got bigger and his Adam’s apple bobbed. “If you keep making cute faces at me, I’m never going to be able to do this.”

The wording of that got her attention and she sat back, still holding onto his hand. “Do what?”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea for Ladybug and Chat Noir to be in a relationship at the moment.”

Her stomach sank. “Oh.”

“No. No, don’t look like that. It’s an awesome idea for Adrien and Marinette,” he hastened, his other hand tightening on her knee. “I just think… with everything that’s happened and how so many people are watching us right now, cultists, press, other wielders… these Queens. I think… it’d be…”

“Bad,” she said. “Yeah, I see what you mean.”

“I’m still going to flirt heavily with you,” he said. “And pun. And do everything the same because… I think that’s established that’s what I do. And, I mean, you can flirt back, I have no problem with that.”

She switched to his other hand to check the drying polish. “Just no kissing in the suits?”

“Yeah. Platonic affection. Hugs and fist bumps. If we’re asked, we say we’re friends. What do you think?”

“I think that’s probably a good idea.”

“I have this… feeling,” he said, glancing at Plagg. “That Papillon was not the worst villain we might face.”

Plagg suddenly found the end of his tail very interesting and it had to be washed right then.

Marinette nodded. “I’ve had that feeling for a while.”

“For now,” Tikki said, starting another braid and ignoring Marinette’s pointed look. “You have both earned a break. Enjoy it.”

“And cheese,” Plagg said. “Wait. No. I’ve earned cheese. You two can have the break.”

Marinette snorted. “He really does love cheese, doesn’t he?”

“Get used to the gym sock smell,” Adrien muttered. “It clings to you.”

She put the red nail polish back in the box and made sure the black one was sealed out of habit. “Have you thought about getting a smell proof bag?” she asked, looking for the right shade of green.

“Thought about it?” he asked, incredulous. “I’ve bought one. His highness says he doesn’t like the taste after his cheese has been in one of those.” His tone changed from outraged to frustrated. “Marinette.”

“Yes?”
“My nose is itchy.”

She glanced up at him to see him wriggling his nose and trying to reach his shoulder to scratch it, without moving his hands. Tikki floated around his head, following his movements while she continued to braid. “Oh. Poor you.”

He leant forward, offering her his twitching nose. “Please?”

“Busy.”

“Marinette,” he complained, elongating her name as much as he could.

“Doing your nails,” she replied, lifting his hand to blow on polish. “It’s a very important that you remain still so I can focus and—”

He buried his face in the crook of her neck and rubbed it around vigorously as he tried to scratch his nose. Giggling, Marinette hunched her shoulders and ducked her head in. The rub turned into a nuzzle and his lips pressed against her neck.

Another kiss, this time on her jaw line and he whispered, “I want to kiss you.”

The ladybugs in her belly wriggled in anticipation. “I see. This was all an elaborate plan to get me into bed, wasn’t it?”

His head reared back and he blurted, “No! I wouldn’t—” He took in the smile on her face and the tease in her voice. “Oh… oh. Yes. Absolutely. You foiled my evil plans.”

“And I have one of my own,” she murmured, leaning close. She brushed her nose against his, thrilled at the way his eyes glazed and became half-lidded. “See, you can’t touch me or you’ll ruin those pretty, unfinished, nails I worked so hard on. But—” she rested her hand on his neck. “I can touch you.”

“That hardly seems fair.”

“Your lips are too busy forming words to kiss me,” she told him and ran her fingers up his throat to his chin.

“Truly, you are the master at evil plans,” Adrien whispered and tasted her lips.

“Oh. Ick. I’m outta here. C’mon Tikki.”

“I haven’t finished his— eek!”

By the sound of the squeal, Tikki was being dragged away but Marinette was beyond caring. His lips were soft, his mouth was warm and his body was warmer. She rested her hands on his chest, feeling the soft fabric of his pyjamas against her palms. Her fingers curled, taking a handful of his shirt to pull him closer.

Divested of sight by her own choice, Marinette was free to concentrate on her other senses. Like feeling his quickening pulse beneath her hand and the way he pushed further into her hand in an effort to get closer. Or the sound of fabric rustling as his fingers clenched on her knees. Or his fragrance, the scent of his shampoo and the musk of his soap mingling to produce something uniquely him. His sweet taste against her lips and how he moved his mouth with hers.

His hands remained resolutely on her knees and she hated them there. She wanted to be held, she
wanted to be touched, but more than anything, she wanted him to break enough that he had to.

Since she already had her legs on either side of him, she scooted a little bit closer, draping her legs over the top of his. His hands clenched but didn’t budge from her knees.

She gave an experimental lick. He mewed at her and licked back.

She let her hands roam around his chest because a boy’s chest was fair game, right? And he had such a nice chest. Oh, and his arms. She squeezed his biceps. His breath seemed to become more ragged, but he didn’t move his hands to hold her.

She had underestimated his ridiculous amount of self-control. Why did Chat Noir seem to have so little but Adrien was made of the stuff? That made her think. Would Chat Noir be all over her? All his flirting and floundering, whenever it went physical, he was always so careful and considerate. He was constantly checking for a reaction, positive or negative and if he got a negative one, he backed off.

He needed permission and she’d told him not to move his hands.

Damn it.

Sliding her hands down his arms, she took his wrists and tugged his hands away from her knees. He resisted and she whined through a kiss.

“I thought,” he whispered with haggard breath between kisses, “I wasn’t supposed to—”

Peeking through her eyelashes, she nipped his bottom lip. Adrien’s eyes flew open in surprise and he made a strangled sort of moan. Resistance gone from his arms, she pulled them so his hands were on her hips. Keeping his lip between her teeth, she gave a gentle suck and then wrapped her arms around his neck so she could dive back in for a deeper kiss.

She loved this. She loved kissing him and feeling close. She loved that things felt still awkward as they learnt about each other but they were both becoming more and more confident. Bumped noses and teeth, hands that strayed further than they had before and still remained in safe areas, but, oh, the way his mouth moved against hers now. It was divine. That part hadn’t taken them long to figure out.

Movies always made it seem wonderful and romantic and even though there was no swelling music, she loved everything about kissing him. Each kiss made it feel all the more real to her. This was him. This was them. This was the stuff dreams were made of, except it was all real and happening and she couldn’t wait to see where it took them.

She loved the earnest movements of his mouth and how he pushed against her. She loved the gentle brushes his fingers made at the hem of her shirt, seeking little patches of bare skin where it rode up and she loved the tingles his fingers caused against her back. He might need permission, but once he had it, he was going to test the boundaries and see where that permission took him and she loved that too.

And she really, really loved that he pulled her into his lap so he could clutch her tight.
We have three chapters left, at most. Gabriel and Adrien will have the stage next chapter. We also need to go visit Deedee one last time, and there are also a few issues that, while they won’t take up much space, need to be addressed before this can be marked complete, so we might have a chapter where a lot of little things get tied up and then the fun-fun-fun final chapter.

So, if there’s anything you guys desperately want to see before Sting is no more, let me know. Adrien reading the book is a given.

Sunset in Paris in June is 10pm
Do you want to hear a bad cat joke?

Chapter Summary

Do you want to hear a bad cat joke?
Just kitten.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Paris was quietly celebrating. Banners and posters had appeared almost overnight, hanging proudly in windows as businesses congratulated their heroes on their victory. Ladybug and Chat Noir were on every Paris-based news program. The Mayor was planning a city-wide celebration in honour, a party which would last for a week if Chloé had her way. Alya was posting bits of footage she’d managed to sneak from inside the foyer during the final battle, with Nino as her insider witness recounting what he’d seen.

Oblivious to the joy other people might be experiencing, Adrien sat on the rim of the fountain in the plaza outside his home and looked up at Agreste mansion. “I’m not sure I can do this.”

It was almost two. He and Marinette had slept late, only waking when Sabine started moving around downstairs as she prepared lunch for her and Tom.

Adrien still felt exhausted, physically and mentally. They’d stayed up later than they should have, kissing and talking and doing their nails until he’d finally fallen asleep on her. That had made for an awkward awakening but both of them had been too tired to do more than stagger downstairs for food.

They’d talked to Tom and Sabine about the whole situation, working out contingency plans and ways for them to make sure Marinette could still be Ladybug while keeping her parents informed. He and Marinette helped out in the bakery before Sabine gently informed them they needed to go and see Gabriel and not to put it off any longer. Which brought them here, to the fountain outside, and not a step further.

Even though Marinette had offered to remove his polish, he decided to leave it on. His father could deal. Maybe it’d even be a talking point.

Marinette squeezed his hand, wearing his own messy nail art like a badge of honour. “You don’t have to. There’s a little café around the corner I like to go to. We could go get coffee and cake.”

Smiling at her, he said, “You’re not supposed to be enabling me.”

“You know your father better than I do,” she replied. “What do you want to happen?”

Adrien considered that while he stared at his shoes. “I want… change. I want him to trust me. I want… to be treated like an adult.”

“Sounds reasonable to me.”

“I don’t want things kept from me because he thinks I can’t handle it. I mean… I didn’t know about
just how many magazine articles there were until you showed me your treasure box. I don’t know if it’s Nathalie or— what?”

Marinette had gone red and hunched her shoulders. “You mean when Plagg ‘accidently’ pushed the box out and the lid came off.”

He nudged her with his elbow. “I’ll show you my treasure box if you want. It’s just as embarrassing.”

“I’m going to hold you to that,” she said.

He smiled at her, then sighed, looking back the mansion. “You know, I’ve never heard him apologise. To anyone. I think… I think I’d like that most of all.”

“Do you want to forgive him?”

Adrien chewed the inside of his lip. “Do you think he deserves it?”

Concentrating on their joined hands, she toyed with his index finger. “I think only you can decide that.”

“I want to,” he admitted. “He’s my father.” He leant forward, resting his elbow on his knee and cupping his face with his free hand. “Am I a coward?”

“You’re the bravest person I know.”

She sounded so sure and that lifted him up so much.

“You don’t think forgiving him would be the easy way out?”

“I think forgiveness is one of the hardest things we can do,” Marinette said. “And it’s not like your forgiving unconditionally. More… you understand there’re mitigating circumstances governing your father’s actions but those actions still hurt you and you need him to acknowledge that. And you don’t want things back the way they were. I don’t think there’s any point forgiving someone if everything goes back to the status quo. Forgiveness is only good if it comes with change and growth.”

He lifted his head and looked at her. “How’d you get so wise?”


He laughed.

“We don’t have to do anything you don’t want to—” Marinette trailed off with a frown as a black car pulled up to the mansion and stopped outside the gate.

“So much for having a free day,” Adrien muttered, bitter. Adrien knew he couldn’t expect his father to wait around for him all day, especially since he probably didn’t know Adrien was outside, but he had thought at least Gabriel wouldn’t be working.

“Is that Josie?”

Adrien followed her gaze and stiffened. Josie stood at the top of the stairs of the mansion, deep in conversation with Gabriel. “She did say she knew—”

Josie stretched out her arms and gestured, enticing Gabriel into a hug. Surprisingly, Gabriel stooped down and gathered the small woman up.
“— whoa.”

Wordlessly, they watched as Josie trotted down the stairs, waving over her shoulder and got into the car. Gabriel stayed at the top of the stairs, his hands behind his back as the car drove away. Instead of turning back and going in the mansion, he remained there.

“I think he knows we’re here,” Marinette whispered.

His feet seemed like concrete weights on the end of his legs. “I’m not ready.”

Gabriel trotted down the stairs and each step toward them filled Adrien with dread. It was only Marinette’s hand which kept him from bolting. Squeezing his hand, her free hand slid onto his elbow so she was effectively hugging his arm. “It’ll be okay,” she said.

“What do I do? What do I say?”

“Perhaps let him start?” she suggested.

“Or let me bite him,” Plagg muttered from inside Adrien’s shirt.

“We’ll keep that as back-up,” Marinette said.

Gabriel stopped before them, his hands still behind his back. “May I join you?”

Adrien let a shaky breath out, then nodded.

With a soft sigh, Gabriel sat on the concrete rim of the fountain beside Adrien. Stiff-backed, hands clasped on his lap, he looked incredibly uncomfortable.

Adrien was sure he was hurting Marinette’s hand by how tight he clenched it, but she didn’t complain.

“How is Deedee?” Gabriel asked. “You seemed quite worried about her.”

“She’s… okay,” Adrien said, pleased that Gabriel asked. “She retreated to her comb.”

“Good. Good.” Gabriel unbuttoned the front of his jacket so it didn’t stretch so tightly across his stomach. “And you, Marinette? Are you well?”

Marinette squeaked, then nodded furiously.

Gabriel nodded. “I… wasn’t sure you were going to come.”

Adrien swallowed. “Yeah. Well. Um… was that Josie? The Interpol agent?”

“Yes,” Gabriel said. “She’s… an old friend of your mother and… it’s been a while since I’ve seen her but…” He sighed. “No one says no to Mother Goose.”

Adrien’s pocket snorted. “She got you good, didn’t she?”

Gabriel frowned. “Who is that?”

“Plagg,” Adrien said. “He’s angry with you.”

“Yes. Well. He would believe I deserved her wrath.”

“And more,” Plagg muttered.
Unsure, Adrien dipped into an awkward silence. He didn’t know how to breach this gap between him and his father. He wanted to, but despite his father asking him to meet, he wasn’t sure if Gabriel wanted a better relationship with him or not.

“I never wanted to buy this place,” Gabriel said after a time. “No garden. Too formal. Too much space. I wanted a separate office, not to work from home. I was building an enterprise and I wanted clear distinctions between my work life and my home. Your mother insisted on this place and then we couldn’t afford a separate office on top.”

Adrien looked at the mansion. “Why did she insist?”

“She saw something in it I couldn’t,” Gabriel replied. He hesitated. “Have you been made aware of the powers of the peacock?”

Adrien and Marinette exchanged a glance. “We haven’t asked.”

Gabriel nodded. “I see.” He stood abruptly, buttoning his jacket with deft fingers. “Come. There’s something I need to show you.”

Adrien jerked after him automatically, drawn by the command in his father’s voice. He almost pulled Marinette off her seat in his haste, before he stopped. “No.”

Gabriel hesitated mid-step and then swung around to face Adrien. “Pardon?”

“I’m not a doll. Or a statue,” Adrien said, deliberately phrasing it to remind Gabriel of what he’d done as an akuma. “I’m fifteen. You don’t… you don’t get to dictate what I should or shouldn’t—”

Gabriel flinched and the words died in Adrien’s throat.

“I know—” Gabriel cleared his throat. He shook out his shoulders and fixed his eyes on Adrien. “I know there’s a lot of things I need to answer for. I spent a lot of time last night agonising about how I should… how we could fix this.”

Adrien swallowed and tightened his grip on Marinette’s hand, needing comfort. “And what did you come up with?”

“That I needed to start from the beginning. And the beginning is your mother.” He removed one hand from behind his back and offered it to Adrien. “Please. You need to see her… well, she called it a ‘nest’.”

Adrien blinked. “Her nest?” He looked at the mansion. Where would her nest be? He thought he’d known almost every inch of it… but then he hadn’t known about the safe behind the painting. What other secrets did it hold?

“Please. Will you come with me?”

After exchanging a glance with Marinette, he nodded. “Alright.”

“We’ll have to get your allergy medication,” Gabriel said with a considering look. “She was a peacock after all. All her feathers are… well, they’re all confined to that room.”

Adrien snorted. “Oh. Great.”

“She was so upset when we discovered his allergy,” Gabriel told Marinette as they walked back toward the mansion. “She thought she’d caused it.”
“It runs in his side,” Adrien muttered as they walked under the gated archway. “I won the genetic lottery.” Marinette gave him an appraising look and he smirked at her. “Good looks have their downside,” he murmured to her so his father couldn’t hear.

Gabriel paused to close the gate behind them. “It’s a kwami haven too,” he continued. “Aurelie didn’t like the idea of ordering Ferris into his broach so Adrien would be able to breathe.”

“Ordering Ferris into the broach?” Marinette asked. “Like, inside the items? We can do that?”

“You could,” Tikki said, opening Marinette’s bag so she could speak. “If you wish. We do not need to be active unless you want us too.”

“Is anyone inside?” Adrien asked, responding to Plagg’s incessant pat against his chest.

“No,” Gabriel replied. “It’s just us.”

“I think Plagg wants to yell at you,” Adrien said, somewhat jovially and trotted up the stairs to the front door.

“You think?” Adrien’s pocket shrilled and Adrien placed his hand over the top of his kwami.

Adrien opened the front door to the mansion, releasing Marinette’s hand so he could brush the small of her back with his fingers as she was ushered inside. Once out of view, both Plagg and Tikki darted out of their hiding spots and floated in front of their wielders.

Gabriel closed the door and waited expectantly. “I assume you have something to say.”

Plagg growled and the sound echoed through the foyer. “If you ever, ever touch my ring again, I will disintegrate you.”

Gabriel arched an eyebrow. “You don’t have that kind of power.”

“I am destruction,” Plagg snarled, his tail lashing. “Do you want to test me?”

“The bee could’ve made me return you at any time,” Gabriel said. “And yet—”

“Don’t you bring Deedee into this,” Adrien snapped. “She did what she thought was best.”

“So did I,” Gabriel said. “And once you see Aurelie’s room, you’ll understand.”

“You know best?” Plagg blurted. His whole body seemed to bristle, his hair standing on end. “Are you kidding me? You don’t even—”

Tikki lifted her paw, stopping Plagg’s anger. He huffed and spat, baring his teeth at her, but backed away. “She saw something, didn’t she?”

“Saw something?” Marinette questioned.

“The peacock,” Tikki said. “Vision keeper and mesmeriser. They gaze upon the future with a thousand eyes.”

Marinette tilted her head. “I thought Aranha was the seer—”

“There are many among us,” Tikki said. “Not all who wield a miraculous fight on the front lines. Some are healers of the mind or the body. Some are songsters and lore-keepers. Some catch glimpses the future, some look into the distant past. The peacock is… well, Ferris isn’t a powerful seer. He
sees into the truth of things. It helps, but that’s not why he’s in our circle.”

“Have you ever been able to look away from a peacock dancing?” Plagg asked. “He keeps the attention of a foe on him, so the rest of us can work.”

“I want to see her nest,” Tikki said.

Gabriel inclined his head. “Adrien, go take your medication. We’ll wait.”

Adrien wrinkled his nose and released Marinette’s hand. “I’ll be right back.”

He practically ran up the stairs toward his room, not wanting to leave Marinette alone with his father for long. He rushed into his bathroom, grabbed his tablets and gulped them down with water. He pulled a face at himself in the mirror, then hurried back to the door of his bedroom.

Gabriel’s voice echoed up from the foyer. “Do your parents know?”

Adrien paused, listening.

“Yes,” Marinette replied, sounding nervous and unsure.

“And how did they take it?”

“As well as to be expected, I guess,” Marinette said. “They’re… concerned and worried, but really, really proud of me.”

“Hmm.”

“My father would like to come and speak with you,” Marinette said. “He believes there needs to be some sort of support system in place, especially if we need to be out late at night. Papa is very big on communication.”

“They didn’t ask you to stop being a wielder?”

“Yes, they didn’t,” Marinette said and her tone got hard. “It led to an open and honest discussion about my life and my future and it was my decision.”

“They didn’t try and steal me,” Tikki scolded.

Gabriel looked set to reply, but Adrien closed his door, making sure it made noise. “All done,” he called down. “So, where’s her nest?”

“In the attic,” Gabriel said and removed one hand from behind his back to gesture for Marinette to follow as he glided toward the stairs. “Easy access to the roof.”

Plagg made a rude gesture behind Gabriel’s back, then darted through the air so he could ask Adrien, “Can I bite him?”

“Maybe later.”

Pouting, Plagg flopped on Adrien’s shoulder on his belly. “Didn’t know you had an attic.”

Adrien considered. “It’s mainly cluttered. I don’t go up there because there’s a huge…” he laughed. “There’s a huge peacock fan on the wall and it always made me sneeze.”

Gabriel nodded. “It was a good deterrent. Aurelie’s nest is behind it.”
Adrien waited at the top of the stairs for them, taking Marinette’s hand as soon as he could.

The stairs to the attic were tucked away in a storage closet down the end of the hallway, out of the way. Gabriel had already unlocked the door and pulled down the attic ladder in preparation.

Adrien watched Marinette scramble up first, the two kwami dipping and diving after her.

“Where did you stay last night?” Gabriel asked.

“With Marinette,” Adrien replied in a sing-song tone and started up the stairs. “In her bedroom. Alone.”

Gabriel’s mouth dropped open. “You— what?”

“With two kwami for chaperone; what do you take me for?” Adrien continued, smirking. He scrambled into the attic and lost the smirk as he sneezed. At Marinette’s concerned look, he said, “It takes a while to kick in.”

With a sympathetic nod, Marinette dug around in her pocket. “Here,” she said, offering him a pink handkerchief with a floral ‘M’ embroidered in the corner. “Might lessen it.”

“Thanks,” he said and covered his mouth and nose.

The attic was full of boxes and trunks, with the occasional stored painting and old dressmaking manikins. A small circular window shed a little light into the room, but Marinette had found the switch for the light. Several boxes, or was it furniture, were covered in a white dust sheet. On one wall, a magnificent blue peacock tail-feather fan.

Marinette regarded it. “I guess, if we ever fight, I know how I can keep you away for a little while.”

He gaped at her, worried she would follow through. “You wouldn’t.”

“Feathers would work better than a spray bottle,” she teased.

“Marinette,” he whined. “So mean, using a weakness against me.”

“I could hide your Christmas presents beneath feathers,” she said. “Or my diary. It’s good deterrent.”

That intrigued him. “You have a diary?”

“I could hide my camembert stash with feathers,” Plagg said.

“I don’t want your camembert stash.”

Gabriel climbed through the small hatch into the attic and walked toward the peacock tail-feather fan, astutely ignoring the two teen’s conversation. “There’s a switch,” he said, lifting the fan up. There was a click and the wooden panel on the wall slid back.

Adrien sneezed again and groaned into the handkerchief.

“Yeah, I don’t want that back,” Marinette said, half-teasing, half-serious.

“Sorry,” Adrien muttered.

Gabriel walked into Aurelie’s nest and Marinette followed quickly, with Adrien wandering at the rear.
It wasn’t a large space and it was clear of cobwebs, which made Adrien wonder if his father kept it clean. That titbit was hard to imagine. There was a desk and two large pin boards on wheels positioned side by side, covered with post-it notes and little purple and pink cut-outs of butterflies. The room had no windows or any other means of exit beside the door.

But the feathers; so many peacock tail feathers were scattered around the room. They hung in bundles from the ceiling and adorned the edges of the pin board. Small twig nests cluttered the room, some up high, some on the wooden floor, all of them lined with feather down. Adrien pressed the handkerchief harder against his mouth.

Tikki and Plagg floated closer to the board, studying the writing. Most of it seemed to be in the strange symbols the book was written in, but some of the text was French. Adrien spotted his name at several points. Antoine’s name was on the board too. As was ‘Can’t let him know’. The words ‘Feeds on emotions’ were written in bold and circled several times, and surrounded by the purple butterfly cut outs.

Marinette stepped closer as she looked at the board and pointed to a scrawling cartoon of a cat’s paw and a ladybug.

“Towards the end… before she left, she started spending a lot of time up here. Transformed and using her gifts to try and see… well, she wouldn’t tell me what, but as you can see, she knew the butterfly was coming.”

Adrien lifted one of the post-it notes which had his name. Beneath were the words ‘not strong enough.’ He frowned and pulled a face. He lifted up a paw print. ‘When the time comes,’ was written under that.

“I spent weeks up here pouring through her files, searching for every possible clue. The only answer she gave me was that I had to control my emotions. That we both did. And that I couldn’t let Adrien know.”

Marinette lifted a note which had a ladybug on it and Adrien saw ‘I miss so much’ scrawled under that.

“A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, Gabriel,” Tikki said.

“Never assume with the peacock,” Plagg added.

“You wouldn’t even be able to read most of this,” Tikki said.

“You’ve misinterpreted,” Marinette said, absently.

“I beg your pardon?” Gabriel asked, incredulously.

Marinette blinked and straightened. “Huh?”


Marinette went red and her eyes darted to Adrien, then back to Gabriel. “I… um… I don’t mean to imply— its just— there are so many notes here and none of them are linked, but you should never read anyone’s notes because things are always out of context and— I mean, my notes at home are all garbled and all over the place, Alya has such trouble trying to figure out my train of thought and that’s just school work and, Tikki said flashes and—”

“Marinette,” Tikki said, interrupting the babble. “What can you see?”
Taking a deep breath, Marinette glanced at Tikki. “She knew Ladybug and Chat Noir were coming.”

Tikki nodded. “That would be likely.”

Marinette pointed to a note which read, ‘She who rises up… bread?’ “That’s me,” she said. “That’s my name, right there.”

Adrien blinked at it. “How? What do you mean, that’s your name?”

With an exasperated sigh, she said, “You’re going to love this. Marinette means ‘The one who rises’ and Dupain…” she huffed out another breath and sounded grumpy, “means ‘from bread’.”

He blinked at the paper. Then at her. Then smirked, dropping the handkerchief away from his face so she could see his grin. “Your name’s a pun.”

“Shut up.”

“Your name is a pun. This is like— the best thing ever.”

“Shut. Up.”

The Cheshire grin wouldn’t go away. “Maaarinette—”

“Focus, Chat,” she snapped.

He swallowed the humour, then sneezed so hard his body shook.

“You deserved that,” she muttered.

“Sorry.”

“It’s just,” Marinette said. “If she knew my name, then—”

“She— she knew,” Gabriel said, staring at the board. “She knew who Ladybug was going to be, that means she knew you’d be and that means…” Gabriel planted a hand on his hip and gripped a handful of his hair.

“She knew, so it doesn’t make sense she’d want Adrien to control his emotions. We’re not susceptible to akuma.”

“That… that changes everything. I had completely the wrong mindset for these notes. Why didn’t she tell me?”

Tikki frowned at the page. “She couldn’t see,” she said to Plagg. “Plagg, here.”

Plagg drifted closer. “Yeah, darling, I see.”

“She couldn’t see?” Marinette asked.

Tikki darted up, studying more of the board. “A peacock’s vision is based on decision. Until one is made, she can’t see beyond. She knew you could both be bonded; that decision was made when you were born, whether or not it would occur remained to be seen, you were chosen in case you were needed. But she couldn’t see beyond Antoine.”

“She knew he was after the butterfly,” Plagg said and rested his paw on the ‘Can’t let him know’ note. “And she knew she couldn’t tell Antoine that a member of their family was chosen to get the
“It would’ve started a war,” Gabriel said, staring at the kwami, then fixed his eyes on Adrien. “He would’ve been… well, they weren’t above taking what they wanted.”

“Probably,” Plagg said.

“She was always so afraid for him,” Gabriel said. “It’s why we had all the security.”

“To keep me from them?” Adrien asked.

“I may have gone overboard during the last few years,” Gabriel admitted without looking at Adrien. “They still might try.”

“If her family is… as bad as you say… I can’t say I blame you,” Adrien said, staring at the board. “If you’d told me…”

“Would it have changed anything?” Gabriel asked.

“Well, yeah,” Adrien said. “I wouldn’t have been nearly as reckless sneaking out of the house. I wouldn’t have snuck away from my bodyguard so frequently.” Gabriel frowned, so Adrien hurried, “I’ve spent nearly a year as Chat Noir. It would’ve been nice to know it was my uncle after us.”

“Maybe it was better you didn’t know,” Marinette said, reading the board.

Adrien frowned at her, fighting not to glare. “Why would you even—”

“When we met, you were so excited,” Marinette said, turning her head to look at him. “It was a game. A game you took seriously, but it was fun. An escape. A chance for you to be the person you wanted to be, even if you were over the top about it. You were happy. If you’d known… you would’ve been different.”

“You thought I was… over the top?”

Marinette flicked her eyes to Gabriel and then back to the board and pressed her lips together. Since she looked like she would’ve elaborated if Gabriel hadn’t been here, Adrien stored that thought away. “I just think, if you’d found out earlier, things wouldn’t have happened the way they did.”

It was certainly true. If things hadn’t happened the way they did, he and Marinette might never have figured things out. “There’s protecting someone and then there’s going too far,” Adrien said and turned to Gabriel. “Yeah, maybe it was better that I didn’t know about Mom and Antoine, in the beginning. But once you found out I was Chat Noir, you should’ve trusted me and told me. Not taken my ring.”

“I lost your mother to the miraculous,” Gabriel said. “I wasn’t about to lose you.”

“It’s not your decision,” Adrien said. “It’s mine. Don’t you trust me?”

“You are young and impulsive. You allow your emotions to get the better of you and—“

“I’m not the one who was a Midas-touch-have-to-turn-everyone-into-statues akuma.”

Gabriel stiffened.

Adrien gestured the room. “This doesn’t make any of it any better. Knowing about Mom it—it doesn’t— Maybe it makes it more understandable or relatable or… I don’t know. Marinette, what’s
the word I’m looking for?”

Marinette’s eyes darted to him and she shrugged. “Acceptable? Plausible?”

“No. No. Because… like it’s—” He abandoned that thought with a shake of his head and a sneeze. Sniffling, he said, “The point is you lied to me. You stole from me. You let me believe—You— you seem to think everything you’ve done was,” he snapped his fingers. “Justified! That’s it. And it wasn’t.”

“I did what I thought was right.” The words were clipped and tightly controlled, Gabriel’s face an impassive mask. Everything about his stance and words screamed that he didn’t care.

Adrien was aware that Marinette, Tikki and Plagg were bunched up together, trying to make themselves very small, but most of his focus was on his father. “You don’t get it, do you?” he said, his voice rising. Tears filled his eyes and made his voice husky, but he forced himself to say the words. “You did to me what her family tried to do to her! Except you succeeded.”

Until he said it, Adrien hadn’t realised that himself. Not completely. And the truth was out now, the crux of Adrien’s pain laid bare.

Gabriel recoiled from Adrien’s words like the where a physical blow. His hand clutched his chest and he staggered back. “No. No, I—”

“Would you even have given Plagg back?” he asked.

Gabriel seemed at a complete loss for words.

“I have to believe you had good intentions because the alternative is so much worse.” Adrien’s voice broke and he pushed on anyway. “I want to forgive you. I want to so bad. Because you’re my father and I love you and… and I’m all you have left.”

Adrien left the rest unfinished. He was all his father had, but Adrien had Marinette. He had Plagg, Tikki and Deedee. He had Nino and Alya. He had Chloé. He’d be okay. Eventually. His chest heaved. His throat felt raw. Pain knotted within him, frayed and raw and laid out for everyone to see.

It would take time to work through, Adrien knew. So much had gone wrong. So much pain and betrayal and heartbreak. All he wanted was his father to take that first step.

His father stared back, unmoving, unblinking.

Adrien waited. He hoped. He wished. A tear spilt and dripped down his cheek. It pooled under his chin, then dripped onto his shirt and still Gabriel didn’t speak. The longer Gabriel was silent, the more certain Adrien became that this wasn’t fixable. This would never be fixable because his father just didn’t care.

The stark contrast between Tom and Gabriel burned Adrien. Tom had accepted Marinette was Ladybug without question. The pride in him for his daughter had been absolute. Bright and shining and awe-inspiring to look at. Even as her father laid ground rules for Marinette, precautions to keep her safe —and Adrien to a lesser extent which had both mollified and surprised him— and keep her parents informed, there was no doubt in Adrien’s mind that Tom loved his daughter. He told her. Right in front of Adrien.

Adrien was never going to feel that sort of love from his father.

Ferris had helped Adrien’s mother disappear. Plagg could help him disappear. If he asked.
Adrien took a step back. His knees wobbled, but he remained standing. “Okay.” He let out a shuddering breath, glad he already had a handkerchief in his hand. “Okay. I’ll just—”

With a soft cry, Gabriel lunged for Adrien, wrapping his arms around Adrien’s neck and shoulders and crushed him to his chest. Startled beyond movement, it took Adrien a while before he could return the hug.

“I’m sorry,” Gabriel murmured and his voice shattered. “I’m so sorry.”

Closing his eyes, Adrien held on tight.

Chapter End Notes

So, obviously, Adrien and Gabriel are going to take time to work through this. It's not going to be easy. There's probably going to be a few fights and discussions and maybe even therapy sessions. I'm not doing the whole healing process in-depth. They've done the important step. They're starting.

Next chapter is Chat listening to the messages, a reunion with Deedee and closing off a few more loose ends.
What do you call a cat that can't stop licking itself?

Chapter Summary

What do you call a cat that can't stop licking itself?

Purrr-verted.

Chapter Notes

Contains gratuitous filler and unintentional (and then deliberately left in) innuendo.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“What the hell is that monstrosity!”

“That’s—”

“It’s in my patch of sunlight!”

“Well—”

“It’s hideous. Get rid of it.”

“No.”

“I’m allergic to flowers. You’ll kill me.”

“No, you’re not,” Adrien said, smiling at the temper tantrum from his kwami.

“I am! I so am! I’m going to balloon up and pop and—”

“Plagg, stop it. Those are Deedee’s and they stay.”


“I like Deedee, Plagg. I want her to able to visit and when she does, she needs a place for a hive.”

Plagg fell silent, then he drifted closer. “She really made an impression on you, didn’t she?”

“She’s adora-bee.”

Plagg sighed, “I’m gonna have to share you with the bee.”

“Yup.”
“You’re not dragging me into that stupid dance of hers.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it, Plagg. You don’t have the hips for it.”

Plagg spun, his jaw dropping. “I don’t have the hips! I’ll have you know—”

“Yes?” Adrien drawled, grinning. “Can you dance, Plagg?”

“Oooh. You are insufferable.” Plagg pouted and crossed his arms over his chest. “I want my patch of sunlight back.”

Adrien grinned. “It stays.”

“I will push all the pots over and smash them on the carpet.”

“You’d do that anyway,” Adrien said. “And you’d stare at me while you did it. It still stays.”

Plagg growled in annoyance.

“But, if you’re a good kitty, I’ll buy you a scratching post. Or a whole kitty play set.”

Plagg’s look was filled with disdain. “I’m sleeping on your face tonight.”

Adrien laughed. He flopped on the bed and put his hands up behind his head to stare at the ceiling.

Plagg plopped down on Adrien’s stomach. “Doing okay?”

Adrien pulled out one hand to scratch Plagg. “Yeah. Better at least.”

“As much as I want to bite him,” Plagg said, nuzzling Adrien’s hand. “I’ll admit… right reasons, wrong action.”

“Yeah. I mean. I get it. He was afraid. Her family… they must be really… bad, I guess.”

“They were. She was… she was really scared Antoine would find out about you,” Plagg said. “I saw it in her notes.”

“I guess… he lived it, didn’t he? He lost my mom because of the miraculous. And her family. I guess… me having one too, really made things hit home.” He sighed. “I get it. I do. I just… wish he’d trusted me. But he’s trying now and that’s what important. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Kid, that stuff’s not up to me.” He sighed. “We tell you what you need to know when you need to know it. Everything else just drags you down. Imagine if I told you about all the enemies every Chat Noir ever had to face, we’d be here for years.”

“You could’ve told me about my family.”

“Could’ve. Didn’t.” Plagg shrugged and patted his tail. “There are some things we don’t like to interfere with.”

“Hmm.”

Marinette seemed to understand Gabriel’s actions better than Adrien had and Adrien thought that might’ve been because she was more removed from the situation and could be objective. She also had a record of jumping to the wrong conclusions, so maybe that helped.
Marinette had kissed him and said she was going home and that he could call her if he needed. She thought that they needed time to reconnect and they’d probably find it easier if they weren’t constantly filtering their thoughts with things they didn’t want to share with her.

Adrien and Gabriel had talked. They’d cried. They’d hugged. They’d gone over Aurelie’s notes and Gabriel had explained what he’d seen and what he’d done as a result and Adrien had tried really hard to listen and see things from his father’s point of view, just as, for what felt like the first time, Gabriel had tried to see his.

There was anger. Of course, there was anger. Snapped words and grating responses. There was still pain and raw grief. But sitting on the wooden floor in the attic, staring at his mother’s handwriting, seeing pieces of her all around him and helping his father re-interpret her words, he’d felt closer to his father than he had in years.

They’d eventually come down from that attic for dinner, and then Gabriel had excused himself, saying they both needed some time.

“Oh,” Plagg said sleepily, and rumbled a purr, “by the way, your inbox is nearly full.”

Adrien grinned. He’d forgotten about Marinette’s messages. “Hey, Plagg?”

Plagg raised his head. “Yeah?”

“Claws out.”

“Aww! Wha—”

Grinning, Chat Noir rolled onto his stomach, propped himself up on his elbows, tucked a pillow beneath his chest, and pulled out his baton. Then gaped.

“A few?” he muttered. “A few! Oh, bugaboo. How much did you miss me?”

Getting comfortable, he clicked play.

“Hey, it’s me,” Ladybug said. “There’s something important we need to discuss. Like really, really important. Too important to wait for our usual patrol or chance an akuma. I discovered something yesterday and I really need to share it with you.” She sighed. “I’ll be at Collège Françoise Dupont, sitting on the roof for another… forty minutes. If you can’t make it, I’ll be at the Eiffel Tower from one until about one forty-five. It’s really important, Chat. Please come.”

Listening to the time stamp, he realised she’d been sitting on the roof, waiting for Chat-him, as him-him had run for the library. She’d likely seen him. Marinette had appeared while he’d been in the library, sitting at the base of the stairs. Had she done that so she could meet up with him? Perhaps not, since she’d been doodling cats and thinking about a certain stray.

“Chat? I’m getting worried. I brought cookies, the ones you really like. Is that enough to tempt you out? Call me. Or come to the Eiffel Tower. Please, we really need to talk.”

Cookies. She’d brought him cookies. She didn’t always bring food when they met up, but he’d noticed a pattern. If she had something important to talk about, it was cookies, always his favourite ones too. If it was really important, she’d bring hot chocolates as well.

The book. She would’ve been trying to tell him about the book. Chat Noir scratched his cheek and clicked on the next message.
“Chat, is everything alright? Are you sick? Are you angry with me? I guess… I can’t wait any longer. I need to get back to… I’ll catch you at an akuma, or maybe patrol tonight. Please call me and leave a message if you can meet earlier. I wouldn’t ask this of you if it wasn’t important. Call me, anytime. I’ll find a way to answer, I promise.”

He could hear the concern in her voice and he didn’t blame her at all. What must it have been like for her when she didn’t know?

“Chat, what’s going on? Why haven’t you called me? Are you hurt? God, we need a better way of communicating. When you get back, we’re exchanging emails, even if I have to put up with cat memes.”

He laughed at the grumpiness in her voice, completely agreeing with that sentiment. Idly kicking his feet in the air, he clicked on the next message.

“Two akuma. The bastard sent two akuma in one day. We barely had time to recharge. Please. I need you. I just... I need to hear your voice. I need to know you’re okay.”

The pain in her voice made his chest ache.

“Make that three. I’m exhausted.”

“Aww, honeybug,” he murmured, his thumb stroking the baton as though he could comfort her through a message that was a week old. His heart went out to her as he imagined what it had been like for her. Clinging to his voice on the message bank, leaving messages in the hopes he’d hear them. “I know. I was there.”

“Hey Chat. It’s Sunday and I haven’t seen you since Thursday. I think this is the longest I’ve gone without hearing from you. It feels... weird. So. Um... you may have seen, or maybe you will see, but there’s a new hero and I—I just want to make it clear you’re not being replaced. You’re my partner and that’s not going to change in any way. You and me, forever, you hear?” She sighed. “But... it’s also painfully clear I need someone. Papillon hit... and he hit hard, Chat, and then he stopped when Bumblebee showed up. I don’t know what that means, but... I dunno. Bad vibes. We had Volpina working for Papillon, and then you vanish and then this guy shows up... Bumblebee, like the Transformer, apparently.” She laughed and it sounded like bells. “You’d probably like him. He says he’s an emergency replacement, so I can only assume something’s bad’s happened to you. He said you weren’t dead, but... I don’t know if I can believe him. I... was supposed to meet him today but I slept in, and now I guess... I just... We’re good together, Chat. You and me. I don’t want to have to... break in a new-bee partner. I really hope you’re okay. I don’t know what I’d do without you. Hurry back.”

He was glad she’d liked him as Bumblebee, even if she hadn’t shown it very well and thought it was hilarious that she said he’d get along with himself.

Reading between the lines it was clear she was feeling Chat’s absence in more ways than one. She was letting slip just how much she missed him. He wondered if it was about then when her feelings for him had become muddled, or if they were always muddled and it was only his absence which brought them to the forefront of her mind. “You and me forever.”

It was comforting to know that she was thinking of him first. His needs, his feelings about being replaced. He sat forefront in her mind. She wanted to work with him over anyone else and that made him feel wonderful.

“It’s you. Bumblebee is you. You jerk! I said things and, oh god, you’re flirting and why didn’t I see
“It?! The puns were terrible and it was so like you and… I’m supposed to be your partner and best friend and I could tell with Copycat and I couldn’t with Bumblebee? I’m so mad at you, Chat! Relieved to, but so angry! You must’ve been laughing so hard at me!”

“I would never,” he said and waited for the next message.

“Having fun, Chat?” Ladybug asked, her voice filled with humour.

Chat Noir eeped, glancing around the room as though he expected her to be watching.

“I knew, the moment I let slip about leaving messages, you’d be all over them. So, I thought I’d leave some that weren’t me moaning about you not being around. I hope it’ll be entertaining. If I haven’t said it to your face, and I hope I have, I really missed you. Welcome back, kitty.”

Grinning, he clicked the next one.

“I have a joke for you! What is smarter than a talking cat? A spelling bee!”

He burst into laughter. “Oh! I like that one!”

“Are you going to pick me up every morning? I’m not complaining. Not at all. I like it. It makes me feel warm and mushy inside. But if you are, I’m going to have to start going to bed earlier so you’re not always waiting for me.”

Maybe he should be listening to these messages with her. Or maybe he’d listen to them all, then go and listen to them with her, and tease her to bits. He smiled at that thought and swung his feet in the air.

“I miss you,” she said, her voice soft and tender. “Chat-you. I miss the black and the hair and the eyes and I can see, even though you really love Deedee, you miss being Chat too. There’s so much cat in your bee, I guess.”

Smiling, Chat Noir clicked onto the next message.

“I’m getting better,” she said, sounding pleased. “At seeing the Chat in Adrien, and the Adrien in Bumblebee. The jigsaw pieces are coming together. It’s like… people expect you to act one way as Adrien, so you do unless you’re really comfortable with that person, but as Chat, you’re… freer? I guess? To be who you think you want to be, and not be limited by expectations but… you’re not Chat either. It’s like… you got a taste or a chance to be who you wanted to be, and you went overboard with it, and now you think I expect you to be that way. Does that make sense? You’re some weird mesh in the middle… and I really like the middle. I don’t know why I didn’t see it before. I just wanted you to know.”

Chat Noir grinned, feeling warm all the way through. He wanted to go and see her and hug her to bits, but he’d been rather clingy today and she was probably enjoying time with her family.

“I feel like the bubble’s going to burst. Is this a dream? You’re amazing and sweet and funny and I really like what we’re building but I’m scared too. It feels like its fast but it also… it feels so slow too. Like, I’ve known you forever… that sounded really weird. Gah, can you delete these messages? I’m such a dork.”

He chuckled, agreeing completely.

“What do you call a cat that wears make up? A glamourpuss.”
“That was baaaad.”

Only one message remained. “I am really, really nervous about meeting your father. As Marinette, I mean, cause I’ve already met him as Ladybug and… I want to make a good impression, I really do. I don’t want to be an embarrassment for you.”

“You could never embarrass me,” he murmured.

“Also, why haven’t you kissed me? I know you want to. I mean, Chat tried all the time. You can, you know. I won’t mind. Or would you like me to take the initiative? Tell you what, if I haven’t kissed you, or you haven’t kissed me, by the time you get these messages, you have my permission next time you see me. But—” she giggled. “—I have plans for tonight. Alya and me, we’ve thought of a game to play and I really hope we get to. You’ll like this one.”

A game? What game? She never mentioned any game! Should he call her and ask? Still smiling, he started listening to her messages again.

He was halfway through when there was a soft knock on the door and Gabriel called, “May I come in?”

Thumbing pause, Chat Noir tucked his baton away. “Yup. Sure.”

If Gabriel was surprised by seeing Chat Noir instead of Adrien, he didn’t show it beyond a raised eyebrow. “Are you going somewhere?”

He sat up to sit cross-legged in the middle of the bed. “Catching up on a few things that I haven’t really had a chance to.”

“Ahh. I see.”

“It’s not like people can see in,” Chat Noir continued, gesturing the windows. They were tinted glass, as Gabriel had requisitioned, able to change opacity at a whim. After six in the evening, he had it programmed so people couldn’t see in.

“That is true.” Unbuttoning his jacket, Gabriel sat on the edge of the bed. “I spoke to Tom. They’re all coming to dinner tomorrow night so we can discuss how we’re going to approach everything.”

“How to deal with two miraculous children?”

Gabriel nodded.

Chat Noir smiled. “Okay. Good.” In more ways than one. It was rare for his father to reach out to anyone.

“For the most part.”

Chat Noir narrowed his eyes. “That sounds ominous.”

“Well, you two are in a relationship,” Gabriel continued. “I think it’s important we talk about that too and so does Tom. Expectations and responsibilities.”

“I see.” He wondered if Marinette knew about that. He should probably give her a heads up.

“I know we have a long way to go,” Gabriel said and reached into his breast pocket. “But I hope this will mend a few fences,” he said as he pulled out a small peacock broach.
Chat Noir’s breath hitched and his fingers tingled. Everything in him screamed to snatch the miraculous away, but he knew that’d be taken the wrong way.

Gabriel cradled the broach. “Ferris and I… never really saw eye to eye about a lot of things and now I wonder if… if he didn’t see this. If he knew and was pre-emptively angry…” He sighed and pulled off his glasses so that he could rub his eyes. “We both loved her. I blamed him for a long time, thinking he’d abandoned her in her time of need, but Deedee said kwami couldn’t do that.”

“We wield them,” Chat Noir said. “They’re supposed to do what we say. Plagg rarely does, but… yeah. He can’t say no if I want to transform.”

“Is there…?” Gabriel squared his shoulders. “Is there any way I could talk to him before he goes back to Fu?”

Chat Noir swallowed. Twisting, he threw his legs over the bed and hunkered down to peer under the bed. “Yeah,” he said. “I think so but I’m not sure if Plagg’s going to be willing.” Reaching under, he pulled out his emergency stash of camembert and planted three wheels on the bed. “Bribery.”

Gabriel arched his eyebrow. “Ahh. That explains so much.”

Chat Noir snickered. “Claws in.”

Plagg zipped out of the ring, his eyes widening as he saw the stack of cheese wheels on the bed. “You do love me. Gimme.”

Adrien lifted a finger. “First,” he began and pointed. “Can you—”

“Nope,” Plagg said, practically drooling as he drifted closer to the cheese. “I’m destruction. Bad, all round. You want Tikki.”

Adrien glared. “Plagg,” he scolded.

“Hey, kitty,” she said, sounding breathless when she answered. “Sorry, I was downstairs. Papa and I were talking while I kicked his ass at Mecha Strike.”

“It’s okay. Listen, is it at all possible you could come over?”

“Is something wrong?” she rushed, half-panicked. “Are you okay?”

His eyes widened. “Oh! Sorry, yeah, that probably sounded bad. Sorry. No. My father’s going to return the peacock broach, but he would like to talk to Ferris first. Plagg said that was Tikki’s department.”

Marinette puffed out a relieved breath. “Oh. Okay. Sure. Open a window for me.”

Hanging up, he looked over at his father and headed for the window. “She’s on her way.”
“Does she come over often?” Gabriel asked.

“No,” Adrien said. “She’s only been here once. Well… no… but the other two times was because of an akuma.” He frowned. “Ahh. I see what you’re asking… no, we’ve only just told each other who we were.”

Gabriel didn’t look like he believed that. “Really?”

“It was… a test,” Adrien said. “To make sure we were suitable for the miraculous. A safeguard to make sure we were trustworthy.”

“I see.”

“There hasn’t been any sneaking into each other’s rooms at night or anything that would be considered an embarrassment to the family.” Not the total truth, he had snuck into Marinette’s room a few times, but there was no way he was going to tell his father that.

“Why do I have the feeling there’s an undertone of ‘yet’ in that statement?” Gabriel asked and a smile tugged at his lips.

Embarrassment burned his cheeks and Adrien refused to answer.

When Ladybug dropped through the window, his father had moved to the sofa and Plagg had sprawled out on the bed to devour his cheese.

“Hey,” Adrien said. “Thanks for coming.”

“Anytime,” she said, smiling as she detransformed. “Although, Tikki said this is going to exhaust her, so you might have to carry me home.”

“Ahh, so Plagg’s ‘it’s got to be Tikki’ is just a diversionary tactic so he gets out of work.”

Tikki giggled as she floated free. “No, it’s really easier for me to pull them from their items.” The giggle dipped to a sigh and she drifted closer to Gabriel. “Ferris is… an emotional creature. He’ll be upset.”

“I know,” Gabriel said and lifted up the comb. “Please. I just want a chance to say goodbye.”

“I’m only able to give you about five minutes.”

“More than enough time. Thank you.”

“Plagg,” Tikki called. “Stop stuffing your face and come join us.”

“But, sweets, cheese.”

“There’ll be cheese after.”

Grumbling, Plagg hauled himself away from the cheese.

“You gotta teach me that,” Adrien said, sitting on the sofa beside his father.

Smiling at Adrien, Tikki said, “I can’t give away all my secrets. Marinette, are you ready?”

“What? What’s going to happen?” Adrien asked as Marinette nodded.
“Without a bond, we cannot be active for long. To draw Ferris from his item, he needs to draw on
the bond between Marinette and myself. It will tire us both.”

“I didn’t realise. So, we’ll need to do this for Deedee too?”

Plagg laughed. “Deedee’s a special case. When we bond, we make sure we… well, think of it like a
computer. All those wires connected, most of them are me connecting to you, but there’s always one
Deedee wire. If anything happens, she can slide in and borrow what she needs. It means she can be
active without a bond. For Ferris, he’ll be trying to slot a wire in where there’s already one in place.
Like a double adapter type of deal. Doable, but tiring.”

Marinette looked at Tikki and narrowed her eyes. “That means…”

Tikki nodded. “There’s one Tikki wire in every Plagg computer too. And visa verse.”

“That makes sense,” Adrien said, thinking about the ultimate power. It explained other parts too, like
how a kwami like Nooroo could bond with Papillon, even if Papillon wasn’t suited for Nooroo. It
could never be complete, but still enough wires could connect. “Are you okay with this?” he asked
Marinette.

“It’s fine,” Marinette said and rested her hand on his upper arm. “I don’t mind.”

With a smile, Tikki placed both her paws over the peacock broach. Marinette made a soft noise,
quickly smothered, but Adrien found he couldn’t turn his eyes away from Tikki. She seemed to glow
with red sparkles for a moment before they dusted down her arms and into the broach. It shook, then
a cloud of blue sparkles rose from within the comb. It orbled and curled above the comb and
gradually the sparkles became a shape of a curled up, blue kwami with a long peacock tail.

The tail unfurled, spreading wide to reveal red dotted eyes along the feathers and Adrien felt his
nose tickle. The kwami blinked open his eyes, spotted Tikki and promptly burst into fat, wet tears.

Plagg huffed as Ferris threw himself into Tikki’s arms, but he drifted closer to pat Ferris’ back while
Tikki cuddled Ferris.

“It’s okay, Ferris,” she crooned, stroking and soothing. “It’s okay.”

“We got you, bud,” Plagg murmured.

“She’s gone,” Ferris wailed. “I felt it and she’s gone and she’s not coming back. I lost another hen
and I let her down.”

“You didn’t let her down, Ferris,” Gabriel soothed. “She loved you. She wanted to keep you safe.”

Ferris gasped and released Tikki to spin. “Gabriel!” he said, drifting up so he was level with
Gabriel’s face. Fat tears dribbled down his cheeks and disappeared into sparkles. “What happened?
Do you know?”

Gabriel shook his head. “No. But we know Antoine was involved.”

Ferris nodded and wiped at his face. “As we suspected. Did someone get him? Is he the one who
found Nooroo? I felt—”

“He did, but we’ve already fixed that. He’s in the custody of the bear and goose,” Plagg said, his
arms around Tikki to help her float.
“She left you so you’d be safe,” Gabriel said. “I… didn’t understand that for a long time.”

“She was headstrong,” Ferris murmured, settling down on Gabriel’s hand. “I am so sorry.”

Gabriel rubbed his thumb over Ferris’ head. “It’s not your fault. You did your best.”

Closing his eyes, Ferris leant into Gabriel’s touch, lifting both his little paws to hold onto Gabriel’s thumb.

Adrien couldn’t hold the sneeze in any longer, covering his nose and mouth with both hands to try and muffle it. “Sorry,” he said, sniffing as he pulled Marinette’s handkerchief from his pocket. “Sorry. Medication wore off.”

“Oh my gosh, that can’t be Adrien!” Ferris declared, delighted, and his tail fanned.

Gabriel nodded.

“He’s grown so much!” Ferris’ eyes switched from Adrien to Marinette. “And who is this?”

“That’s Marinette,” Tikki said as Marinette offered up a smile and a wave. “She’s mine.”

“Oh!” Ferris brightened and his tail quivered in excitement. “Oh, it is a joy to meet you.”

Adrien sneezed again. “Sorry,” he repeated. He stood, moving away and sat on Marinette’s other side so that he could put some distance between him and Ferris. Noticing Marinette’s hand was trembling, Adrien took it, weaving their fingers together.

“Poor thing,” Ferris said. “You grew up so handsome. Aurelie would’ve been proud.”

“Yes,” Gabriel said, pride filling his voice. “She would indeed.”

Ferris’ tail drooped and he sat back in Gabriel’s hand. He looked between Marinette and Adrien, then Tikki and Plagg and finally back to Gabriel. “This is goodbye, isn’t it?”

Gabriel nodded. “Adrien is going to return the broach to Fu in the morning. I wanted a chance to thank you for being there for Aurelie.” A small break in Gabriel’s voice almost undid him. “She loved you very much.”

Tears filled Ferris’ eyes. “It was my honour,” he said, his paw on his chest. “She was very special.”

“She was.”

“She will always be remembered,” Ferris promised. “Goodbye, Gabriel.”

Gabriel lifted his other hand and cupped it around the kwami too. “Goodbye, Ferris.”

Adrien looked away, not sure if the water filling his eyes were from the feathers or the emotion from his father and the little kwami.

A bubble of light as Ferris disappeared back into the broach. Tikki let out a soft sigh and sagged against Plagg. Marinette sagged as well, leaning heavily on Adrien.

“Goodnight,” Marinette and Adrien echoed as Gabriel walked primly to the door.

Marinette squeezed Adrien’s hand. “Are you okay?”

He nodded and swallowed the lump in his throat. He didn’t know why the goodbye affected him so much. “Are you?”

“That was… a unique experience. But I’m really tired now,” she said, extending her hand for Tikki.

“Let’s get you home.”

“What was the game you and Alya wanted to play?”

Marinette turned her head from her gaze out the bus window. “You listened to the messages.”

He smiled at her, holding onto the seat ahead of him as the bus rattled around a corner. He let the momentum of the bus pull him so he squished Marinette against the wall and window. “Yup. Last night. There were more than ‘just a few’.”

It was Sunday, exam week started tomorrow and, after a morning of intense solo cramming, Marinette and Adrien were taking an hour together to deliver Ferris to Master Fu before returning to the books. It was a lovely summer day, brisk and clear, and Adrien was looking forward to spending even a small amount of time with his girlfriend.

Marinette pushed her shoulder against him until the bus had finished its turn. “To be fair, a lot of those were added after I told you they’d be there.”

“It was… nice… hearing you say what you did. And I did like the permission to kiss you, but I really want to know about the game.”

“Nope. We still want to play it.” She poked him in the nose. “So you’ll have to wait until after exams.”

“Aww, but, my lovely yeast, I don’t want to.”

Marinette blinked at him. “Lovely yeast?”

He grinned at her. “May I say you look simply ravishing this afternoon?”

She repeated, her voice rising. “Yeast?”

“No need to be crusty,” he said. “At yeast you’re in my thoughts, all the time.”

“That has to be the least sexy nickname you’ve ever given me,” she said with a pout.

“Yeast sexy.”

“Stop.”

“Marinette is a beautiful name,” he commented. “So much potential for bread puns. I guess I’ll have to butter you up.”

She squirmed. “Your puns are stale.”

“You’re looking so sweet, you’ve got my eyes glazed.”
She mock glared at him. “Really? Is this going to be a thing now? Bread pick-up lines?”

He winked. “Be prepared, I’m really into roll play.”

Marinette went pink. “That depends on whether you can rise to the occasion.”

He blinked at her. “Did you just—?”

The pink turned scarlet and her eyes widened in horror. “No. No, I didn’t.”

Excitement coursed through him. “You did! You so did!”

“You’re hearing things,” she replied. The fact she covered her face with her hands said otherwise.

“Wow. I… I never expect that you’d make that sort of joke.”

“I didn’t! I wasn’t!”

“Nino would be so proud.”

“Stop it,” she warned, pushing the button to tell the driver to stop. Scooting over, she nudged at Adrien. “There’s our stop.”

He stood up to let her pass first. “Or what? You’ll bring on du-pain?”

“You know,” she said over her shoulder as she sauntered down the aisle, “if my name was Marinette Agreste, we wouldn’t have this problem.”

Something fizzled in Adrien’s brain. His heart gave a strange thump and his insides felt warm. His knees locked up and his hand gripped the pole and wouldn’t release.

Marinette Agreste. Oh, that sounded wonderful. The emotions which came from that thought buzzed through him, settling somewhere it probably shouldn’t considering the unintentional innuendo in her pun before.

The bus driver’s seat squeaked as the man half turned in his seat to peer back. “Kid, you getting off?”

Adrien’s mouth went dry and his eyes bugged out of his head. His pocket snickered at him.

Marinette reappeared one the step to the bus, her head tilted quizzically. “Adrien, are you coming?”

He squeaked and scurried after her.

Marinette stepped away from the bus so he could step down. “You’re acting weird,” she said and started walking toward Master Fu’s.

He fell into step beside her. His voice didn’t seem to want to work, so he shoved his hands into his pockets and stared at her while they walked.

“I hope Deedee’s able to come out today,” Marinette said. “And I can’t wait for you to read the book. New powers!” She bounced and skipped sideways, her hand curling around his elbow. “Aren’t you excited?”

He cleared his throat. “Yeah.”
“I wonder what your baton can do,” she mused. “I mean, I know it can double and extend, but, I mean, I got wings. You’ll get something just as amazing. What do you think it’ll be?”

“I like my baton the way it is.”

She lost the bounce in her step. “Huh?”

“Well, it suits my fighting style, doesn’t it?” Adrien told her. “It does everything I want it to do. It feels natural and wonderful. I can throw it, I can fight with it, I can spar with it as a staff and use it as a pole vault. It can act as a shield. Why would I want it to change? I’d have to learn how to fight with a new weapon.”

She considered that as she leant her head against his shoulder while they walked. “Oh.”

“If we made it into a spear, I’d have to relearn my style. If I made it into… I dunno, a sword, I’d cut my hands on the edges, because I use all of the baton. Your wings and shield don’t replace your yo-yo, they’re designed to be used in conjunction. I don’t want my baton replaced.”

“I see. Then what do you want?”

He lifted a hand out of his pocket. “Wouldn’t mind a set of wicked claws. The ones I have are awesome, but they don’t do much damage. But…” He fell silent as they squeezed past a flower stall spilling out into the street. Since it was Sunday, there weren’t many people on Master Fu’s street. When they were clear, he said, “I think I’d rather have more information on cataclysm.”

Marinette tilted her head in consideration. “Like what?”

“All of Paris,” he said and looked at his palm. “That’s what he said. If I concentrate, I can control the speed of something destroyed. I can rust things into a shape rather than decimating it completely. I can disrupt electronics. But what’s the scope? Could it kill someone? Could I also pick what doesn’t get destroyed? Could I put my hands on someone and destroy all the cancer cells?”

Marinette’s eyes widened. “Oooh.”

“What if I could make all of Kim’s pretty, pretty hair fall out?” he continued, with a smirk. “I want to know more about that.”

Plagg snickered. “Cataclysm to make someone bald. Kid, you’re a rare gem.”

Adrien frowned. “Assuming I’m ‘worthy’.”

“You already figured out all of the functions of your weapon on your own,” Plagg said, sounding pleased. “You’ll be surprised how many cats never get the doubling, even with the book holding their hand. Wicked claws are doable. But if you really want more info on cataclysm, I’ll give you that.”

“We can choose?” Marinette asked, surprised. “Hang on, holding their hand? Did you want us to experiment?”

Plagg shrugged. “Sure. Adrien spent ages pressing all the buttons, just to see what they did. Didn’t you?”

Marinette shook her head. “I just assumed that’s all I could do with it.”

“You wanted more versatility,” Tikki said from Marinette’s purse. “You were a little jealous of
Bumblebee’s hammer, so I showed you more functions of your yo-yo.”

“You were jealous?” Adrien teased, grinning at her.

Marinette pulled a face at him. “I’m not the one who fiddles with my baton,” she said, disgruntled.

“I’ve never had a kitten who liked to play with his baton more.”


Plagg said, “This one, he didn’t even let me finish telling him everything before he transformed. He figured out the extending on his own. And everything else to do with the baton.”

“Oh.” Even that sounded lame to Adrien.

“I like it when kittens figure things out. Means less work for me.” Plagg smirked and winked at Adrien. “What were you thinking of, Adrien?”

Adrien felt his cheeks flush. “Nothing.”

Plagg’s smirk was entirely too smug.

Master Fu’s massage shop was closed on Sunday’s so they ran his bell and waited. Adrien scuffed his shoe against the side of the pavement and Marinette sighed and leant against the wall beside the door, closing her eyes as she lifted her face to the sun.

“Tired?”

“No,” she replied. “I’ll be glad when exam week is over.”

“Me too.”

She opened her eyes. “Your schedule goes back to normal then, doesn’t it?” she said and there was a slight catch in her voice.

“It’s… in discussions,” Adrien said with a shrug. “I really don’t mind the schedule, it is hard coordinating all those photo shoots. I just want more control over my free time.”

“Summer break,” she said, dropping her eyes. “That means more shoots, too, right?”

“That’s part of the discussions.”

“I read that you normally go away? Photoshoots in Italy and places like that?”

He studied her. “Are you going to miss me, princess?”

“Of course I will.”

“I’ll think about you every day,” he said. “But it’s only for three weeks. We get the rest of summer before lycée. And who knows,” he said with a shrug. “Maybe a budding fashion designer would like to join us and see the inner workings for a few days.”

She perked up. “Really?”

He winked and laid on the charm. “I happen to know the lead designer. I may be able to pull a few strings.”
She giggled.

The door opened, stalling anything Marinette might have said. Master Fu raised his eyebrows at them and smiled. “Good afternoon.”

“Master Fu,” Marinette said, jerking away from the wall. “Sorry to drop in on you like this but—”

“No at all,” he said, stepping away from the door to allow them access. “We have been expecting you.”

Adrien waited until Marinette had stepped inside, then followed her into the foyer. “We brought Ferris—” he said and his words died in his throat.

Deedee waggled.

Chapter End Notes

*Home stretch! One more chapter to go.*

_Credit for the "Marinette Agreste" comeback goes to midnightstarlightwrites, because 'reasons' (not that she's actually reading, she's waiting for it to be done, so HELLO MUDKNIGHT!) If you guys aren't reading her fic 'Smoulder', you really, really should._

_(also, there's a reason for Marinette's disgruntled reaction to the 'yeast', poor clueless Adrien) (sorry, adult humour, I will kick myself out of the fandom now)_
What do you call a cat race?

Chapter Summary

What do you call a cat race?
A meowathon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A soft chime of bells against swaying hips. Mozart played quietly, charming strings and piano duets, the kind of music which was perfect for cuddle dancing, not bee-dancing with new outfits.

“This is amazing,” Deedee said, shaking her stinger so the tiny bells around her hips pealed. She picked up the sheer, sky blue skirt and flared it wide. “You had exams this week. How’d you have time to do all this?”

“When Adrien said you were having a sleepover here tonight,” Marinette said, helping Tikki into her little emerald green costume. “I knew I had to have these ready for you. It didn’t take long and it was nice to work on something while I studied. Adrien’s costume was more time consuming.” She picked up a tiny red vest. “Where did Plagg go?”

“Nope!” the cat kwami called from the vicinity of the bed. “Not getting me into anything that resembles a costume.”

Marinette sighed and lowered the vest. “I’m so disappointed,” she said, playing up the dejection in her voice. “I worked so hard on these for you. I even matched you and Tikki’s colours!”

“You just said it didn’t take long!” Plagg accused.

“ Doesn’t mean she didn’t work hard on them,” Tikki scolded. “Look at the embroidery! She’s amazing and—”

“Don’t wanna!”

Marinette shook her head and placed the vest back down on the sofa. “It’s okay, Tikki.”

“No, it’s not,” Tikki said, darting over to the bed. “I want to see him in it.”

They’d had a hard week. Exams and constant study and barely saying two words to each other all week and now they were done and that feeling was incredible. There was just a small graduation ceremony and they’d be ready for summer. No more classes. No more schoolwork. Just time for some relaxation and fun. And maybe a trip to Milan.

The Mayor had planned victory celebrations for Ladybug and Chat Noir. As there were so many celebrations planned, high-end events, parties charities, auctions, all sorts of things, there was no way they’d be able to attend them all. They’d decided on four personal appearances throughout the celebrations. Two with each other (the first and last events), and two solo appearances. This allowed
them to attend events with Alya and Nino and gave the people of Paris a chance to see them more.

For now, Marinette was eager to see her little creations on her kwami friends. And Adrien. While Adrien’s outfit wasn’t finished, she’d had enough of it together so he could try it on and she could check what needed to be altered. She got her notepad and tape measure out. Picking up her pencil she chewed on the end as she thought about what she needed to record.

Tikki dove for the bed. “Plagg! Come out here!”

Plagg phased through the bed and raced for the rafters. “Nope!”

“Deedee, help me catch him!”

Marinette giggled as she watched the kwami zoom around the room after each other.

“Ah, honeybug,” Adrien said from the bathroom. “Are you sure you want me to come out wearing just this?”

Marinette turned to see Adrien poking his head through the door, the rest of his body concealed behind the frame. “Of course. I need to see how it sits. Do you like it so far?”

“It looks fantastic. It’s just…” he grinned at her and winked. “I know how much trouble you have with bare shoulders and—”

She gave him a blase look. “I can handle it. You’re not that good looking,” she teased.

“They don’t call me a teen heartthrob for nothing,” he said.

“I’ve never called you that.”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

He did warn her. He really did. And she should’ve listened.

The belt of the harem pants sat snugly around his waist and yet her eyes only lingered there for a short time. The vest barely covered any of his chest and it was there her eyes decided to rest. So much skin. Belly skin. Hips and waist and slight definition in his muscles. Chest skin. Biceps. He looked good. He knew he looked good. He was a model and he worked hard on his appearance. She hadn’t been prepared and she should’ve because she designed the damn thing. What was she thinking?

Her cheeks went pink and she clicked her jaw shut so she wasn’t gaping at him.

Adrien snickered.

Marinette tilted her head and narrowed her eyes. The costume still needed work. It lacked embroidery. It lacked the bells she wanted to attach to the black vest or the green skirting she wanted to add to the edges. The belt hadn’t been finished. All the accessories need work. The vest was lopsided, not enough for anyone else to notice. Did she do that? Or was he wearing it wrong?

She prowled, circling around him as she studying her handiwork.

Above them, the kwami zipped and zoomed around the room as Tikki and Deedee chased Plagg down.

“Wow, that was quick,” Adrien said over his shoulder.
“What was?” she asked absently. His ankles were level, which was good, but she’d have to get down and check. The vest seemed to sit well on the back.

“The switch from flustered, drooling girlfriend to budding fashion designer. I was hoping for a little bit longer of flustered girlfriend.”

It could be taken in a little at the hips, which would make the harem pants sit a little higher. “Is it comfortable?” she asked, standing behind him. “If you do the hip thing.”

“Shimmy?” he asked and raised an eyebrow. “Are you sure want me to?”

“I need to make sure it won’t fall down. You still need a full range of movement.”

He rested on hand on his cocked hip. “I’m more worried if you’ll fall down. The look in your eyes is somewhat predatory.”

“I’m fine—”

He wiggled and Marinette forgot to look at how the pants sat on his hips in favour of something more enticing.

Deedee abandoned her Plagg chase. “Adrien! That looks fabulous!”

Adrien lifted his hand so Deedee could land on it. “Look at you! Marinette did an amazing job.”

Deedee preened. “She’s wonderful.”

Marinette blinked. “Huh?”

His smug smirk said he knew exactly what he did to her.

“Got you!” Tikki shrieked and a black and red ball of squirming kwami plopped onto Adrien’s bed. “Deedee! Get it!”

Plagg howled and thrashed. “I don’t want it!”

Deedee zipped away and Adrien turned to face Marinette. “It’s astonishing. I wear a skin tight suit and you’re drooling over this.”

“Am not,” she said and wiped her mouth anyway.

Adrien smiled. “So, were my measurements in those magazines of yours?”

She stepped up to him. “Can I—?” she asked and gestured his chest.

He leant toward her and drawled, “You can put your hands wherever you like.”

She blinked owlishly at him. “Really?”

His cheeks went red. “I mean. Wherever you’re comfortable. I… ahh… I mean, of course, there’s out of bounds places and—”

She lifted the edges of his vest and pulled them together, tugging him forward a little. “Looks like I’m not the only one who gets flustered.”

Adrien swallowed, his eyes following her every move.
“So,” she said, fussing with the way the vest sat. She smoothed it down at the shoulders and tugged so it no longer sat lopsided. She pinched the seam, lifting it up to see if it looked better taken in more, then dropped it. “Is it comfortable? I’ve never made anything like this before.”

“Yeah,” he said and his voice was husky.

She slid her hands down his arms to his elbows and lifted them both out, watching how the vest fell with the movement.

“Do you want me to pose?” he asked.

“I’m after natural movement,” she replied.

“Yeah, ‘cause me being a scarecrow is natural.”

“I’m sure you’ve been fitted before, Adrien.”

“Not by you,” he replied. “And don’t think I don’t feel your hands lingering.”

“What can I say,” she said, pinching his side seam. “Not everyone gets to have their hands on a teen heartthrob.”

“So you do think I’m hot.”

“I also think you’re kind, loving and sometimes tell funny jokes,” she said, reaching into her pocket for chalk. “Your so-called hotness is just a bonus.”

“Only sometimes?” he pouted and lowered his arms.

“Arms up,” she said, studying the hemming beneath his arm. “Yes, only sometimes. Your bread puns, for example, are terrible and should never again grace my ears.”

“You’re just crusty—”

“Oh Plagg, you look adorabee!” Deedee said.

Adrien and Marinette looked over toward the bed. Deedee and Tikki floated around while Plagg sulked while wearing the bright red vest Marinette had made for him. The poor kwami looked so putout by the whole affair, Marinette wondered why he hadn’t simply shredded the vest with his claws.

“I knew they’d get him eventually,” Adrien said, chortling.

“It was inevitable.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“Which one was that?”

“Are my measurements in a magazine?”

“Not… no? I don’t think so.”

“You have a good eye then.”

She made a few chalk reference marks and made sure the other side was the same, then looked
down. “And the pants?” She ran her finger underneath the hem around his waist to check tightness and Adrien squirmed and made a high-pitched burst of laughter.

Marinette giggled. “You’re not being very professional, Adrien.”

“Sorry,” he said and cleared his throat, forcing himself still. “Ticklish.”

Marinette hesitated, her fingers still inside the belt of his pants.

“What?”

“Well. Um. I… kinda wanna explore that, but the stitching is flimsy so I can alter it and I imagine you’re a squirmer.”

Adrien’s eyes blew wide. “What a shame you won’t find out.”

“Yeah.”

He lifted his hands to place them on her hips. “Are you ticklish?”

She grinned at him. “Nope.” She glanced down at the harem pants again. “I think I have everything. You can get changed.”

“You don’t want to see me dance in this?” he asked, pouting.

“No,” she replied, splaying her hands over his chest. “Flimsy stitching, remember? Go get changed and then dance for me.”

He ducked his head down and Marinette lifted her chin, her eyes closing. She rested her hand on his bare stomach as he gathered her up, his lips locked on hers. There was no prelude to the hunger in his kiss, no little pecks which slowly became deeper, he dove straight in and dragged her in with him.

He broke away to kiss his way down her jaw, whispering between kisses. “Oh, I see. Easy access vest.”

“It’s a purr-k,” she told him.

His hands gripped her hips, pulling her closer while his mouth found hers again.

A soft knock at the door interrupted them. “Adrien, do you have a minute?” Gabriel called.

Marinette yelped and danced away from Adrien, who let out a soft sigh. Arms dangling by his sides, he called, “Come in.”

Gabriel opened the door, talking as he walked into the room, “I was hoping we could— what? What are you wearing?”

Blush blooming so hard it spread down her neck, Marinette pressed her lips together. She wondered how embarrassing it would be if she hid behind the sofa.

“Deedee taught me how bees dance,” Adrien said, sounding proud. “So Marinette made costumes.”

“I don’t like mine,” Plagg announced. “I don’t want to wear it.”

Gabriel’s wide eyes flicked from Adrien, to Plagg, to Deedee and Tikki who were dancing around
each other above the pouting Plagg, then to Marinette, who decided to fiddle with her jacket rather than hide.

“Mine’s not finished,” Adrien said. “We’re just doing a fitting.”

Gabriel lifted a finger and gestured for Adrien to turn, which he did so, grinning broadly and winking at Marinette on the way around.

“They’re… just a bit of fun,” Marinette said, completely embarrassed.

Deedee and Tikki danced down, zipping around Gabriel. “Look at us!” Deedee said twirling and waggling so hard she couldn’t keep a straight path. “We’re so pretty.”

“Very nice,” Gabriel said, giving Deedee and Tikki glance as he studied Adrien’s outfit. “I assume bee dances are similar to belly dancing.”

Deedee waggled. “Yes. Adrien is very good.”

“I’m not surprised. Ferris taught Aurelie a peacock dance and I do recall her teaching Adrien when he was a toddler.”

Deedee giggled. “Oh, Ferris’ dance is amazing. His peas use their arms a lot more than my bees do, and it’s a lot slower. We even have a dance we can do together!”

“Yes,” Gabriel said, swallowing and changing the topic. “Well. Marinette, may I see the final design?”

“I… sure,” Marinette replied, rummaging through her bag for her sketchbook. She flipped through until she reached the page with her designs for Adrien’s suit on it and handed it to Gabriel.

“I tried to go for something Adrien would like,” Marinette said, feeling scrutinised.

“And the bell?”

Marinette flushed. “And… something I would like too.”

Gabriel laughed under his breath.

“It’s not meant to be a serious design, it’s meant to be—”

“Don’t sell yourself short,” Gabriel said. “Just because it’s a fun design, doesn’t mean you didn’t put equal the amount of effort into researching and designing as you would for a serious design. Hand embroidery or machine?”

“Hand,” Marinette said. “I don’t have an embroidery machine and my machine doesn’t cope with the chiffon very well.”

“Yes, that can be quite difficult. It’s an elegant outfit. You’ve never made anything like this before, have you?”

Marinette shook her head.

“You run the borderline between safe and too ambitious well. This pushes your skills without being overwhelming.” He closed the sketchbook and returned it to Marinette. “I would be interested to see the final product, once it’s complete.”
Marinette clutched her notepad to her chest while Adrien smirked at his father. “Do you want me to dance for you too?”

Gabriel snorted and clasped his hands behind his back. “No. I think I can do without that particular image. You have one of the Mayor celebrations soon, don’t you?”

Adrien glance at the time on his computer. “We have few hours. We were going to watch a movie first.”

Gabriel nodded. “Well, do not let me take up any more of your time,” he said and headed to the door. “Deedee, Tikki, you both look quite fetching.”

The two kwami giggled together.

“Hey!” Plagg demanded. “What about me?”

Smiling, Gabriel said nothing and closed the door.

“I look good!” Plagg yelled and thumped the bed in a rage. “You’re just too blind to see it!”

Marinette laughed.

Epilogue

“Welcome, citizens of Paris!” Andre Bourgeois called into the microphone. “To the first night of Ladybug and Chat Noir week! I have planned a fun-filled, action-packed week ahead of you, ready to celebrate our victory with our heroes—”

Arms folded on his chest, Chat Noir leant over and put his mouth right beside Ladybug’s ear to tell her over the noise of the crowd, “Anyone would think he defeated Papillon.”

Ladybug smiled at him weakly as Chloé hung from Ladybug’s neck and took selfies from every angle she could.

“We need one with all three of us!” Chloé announced, having captured the side of Chat Noir’s face and nothing else.

Chat Noir wasted no time sliding behind the girls so he could stick his face between them and put his hands on their shoulders to smile charmingly at Chloé’s phone. And because Ladybug knew how much Chloé meant to Chat Noir, she smiled too.

“Oh, this is perfect!” Chloé said, smiling at her phone as she stepped away from the pair. “I’m sending it to everyone I know. They’ll be so jealous.”

Chat Noir left his arm around Ladybug’s shoulders as they waited in the shadows beside the stage to this event. Nothing which indicated they were a couple, just a friend draping his arm around another friend.

Pari Roller was their first public event. The weekly Friday night roller skating event already attracted tens of thousands participants, shutting down streets in favour of the blade. It was a highly anticipated event even when Ladybug and Chat Noir weren’t leading the charge of racers. Starting beneath the Montparnasse building, its ever-changing path of eighteen miles wove through central Paris and along the Seine. On the nights it skated past Notre Dam and Collège Françoise Dupont, Alya and Nino often camped out on Marinette’s terrace to watch, so it was fortunate the event didn’t take them that route today.
“You know I’m going to kick your ass,” Chat Noir said.

Tikki and Plagg, upon hearing the first of the Ladybug and Chat Noir events around Paris, had assured their young charges the suits could be modified to include inline skates. Marinette had been sceptical at first, not being the most graceful of skaters, but as usual, with the enhancement of the suit, her ability had improved enough to give her confidence in the race.

“You’re going to try,” Ladybug retorted.

“Who’s the one with a ramp in his room?”

“Oh-huh.” She lifted her hand to grip his bell. “I say, if we were in civilian clothing, yes, you’d kick my ass, but transformed…’ she shrugged.

He smirked at her. “My ass is yours?”

She liked that phrase. “If you want to put it that way.”

He shifted closer so his chest bumped against the back of her shoulder. “At least my view from behind will be mew-nificent.”

She refused to let the light flush to her cheeks dissuade her from flirting with him. “Consolation prize. Oh, don’t forget—”

He nodded. “Alya and Nino are waiting on Pont au Change and we have to stop for a quick interview.”

“It’s for her report,” Ladybug reminded him. Alya had finally decided she was going to do her competition entry report on the defeat of Papillon, especially since she had exclusive footage of it, footage she’d been holding onto so she could use it in her report. Ladybug and Chat Noir had only decided to do a few interviews regarding the subject, and one of them was reserved for Alya, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t give her exclusive shots of them in the Pari Roller.

He nudged her. “I know. I was there. And your parents are further along, pretending to be you, so we have to let them take a picture too.”

“No showing off.”

“Yep,” he said with a grin, his breath warm on her neck. “That wasn’t part of the deal.”

Chloé clicked the button on her phone to take a picture. “You two are getting cosy,” she said, smiling coyly at them. “Anything to declare?”

Instead of pulling away like a scalding cat, Chat Noir just raised his eyebrow at her. “Yup. You’re nosy.”

“Can’t deny that,” Chloé replied. “But if I can get the scoop before Alya, I can rub her nose in it for years.”

Chat Noir laughed. “No scoop. No news. It’s hard to hear over the racket, that’s all. Ladybug and I are making bets on who’ll win.”

“Ladybug,” Chloé said with absolute certainty. “No doubt.”

Chat Noir rolled his feet forward and back on the spot. “I’m going to give her a run for her money at least.”
Ladybug twisted to face him and poked him in the chest. “You can try,” she said. Steepling her fingers, she pushed away from him, sending herself rolling out onto the stage. She waved to the sudden screaming from the crowd of skaters, setting her feet into a spread eagle as she looped around the podium Andre stood at, trying to deliver his speech.

Andre gave her a stern look and Ladybug understood that. He’d been in the middle of a big speech and she’d basically ruined it. Well, the speech was boring and she wanted to race.

Caught in her enthusiasm, Chat Noir skated out behind her, gliding around Andre in the opposite direction Ladybug circled. He waved happily to the crowd of people and winked at Ladybug. On the second revolution around the still talking Andre, Chat Noir grabbed Ladybug as she skated by him and spun them both in a circle. She eeped as his hand splayed against the small of her back and she was pressed against his chest. He lifted her hand, threading their fingers and suddenly Chat Noir and Ladybug were waltzing around the stage together instead of skating.

“This is what I meant by no showing off,” Ladybug said. “Or did you forget?”

In answer, he twirled her beneath his arm. “Gotta play the crowd.”

“You really don’t,” she said, releasing his fingers to twist away. She skated backwards around the stage, thankful there were no cords lying around and then came to a stop.

Chat Noir grinned at her and gave her a two fingered salute. Skating up to Andre, he bounced up onto the little podium and took the bendable lectern microphone, pointing it toward his mouth. “Hello, Paris! How are we this fine evening?”

Andre reached over to pry the microphone back, “How nice of you to—”

Chat Noir pulled the microphone away from Andre. “Ladybug and I have a little wager on tonight’s race,” he continued. “Care to know what that is?”

The responding scream from the crowd was enough that Andre tossed up his hands and moved away from the podium.

Ladybug crossed her arms over her chest as she looked at Chat Noir. “We do?”

He winked at her. “Now, obviously, we cannot beat the fine competitors who participate in this every week, novice skaters that we are, but we certainly can race each other. So, to make this interesting, we made a little bet, do you want to hear?” He cupped his hand around his cat ear, listening for the screams.

Ladybug raised her eyebrow at him.

Chat Noir patted both hands in the air to calm the crowd. “Okay, okay. Here’s the bet. If she wins, I promise to stop serenading, aka ‘kitty screaming’—” he used air quotes, “—whatever that is, during the night for a whole month.”

She ducked up to the microphone so she could tease him. “His version of singing really is a kitty-yowl.”

He waved her away with his hands. “Shhh, shhh, my turn.” Turning back to the microphone. “If I win, my lady is going to let me kiss her.”

“On the cheek,” she hurried, ducking past him again.
Chat Noir pouted at her. “Aww.”

She poked him in the nose, pushing him away from the microphone. “How about we get this race started?”

One of the marshals stepped forward to remind people of the rules. Chat Noir and Ladybug jumped down from the podium and into a part in the crowd of skaters. Marshals rimmed the parting, allowing Chat Noir and Ladybug to glide their way through to the starting line. Skaters held out their hands for the pair to slap on the way past. They stopped many times up the line, signing shirts or notepads. They signed as much as they could before marshals began to usher them further.

Chat Noir turned to skate sideways so he could grin at her. “Did you like that bet?”

“Good incentive for me to win,” she told him, her hands behind her back.

“You like my kitty yowling,” he said.

“Only sometimes,” she said.

The path behind them closed as marshals headed out to their appointed areas. A lot of the marshals would be skating along with the group of races to help keep order and offer first aid if necessary, but others headed to stations around Paris.

Ladybug skittered closer to Chat Noir as the crowd of skaters closed in around them. “We’re going to lose each other in the mayhem.”

Chat Noir extended his hand for her to take. “Just for the start, if it makes you feel better.”

Smiling, Ladybug scooted behind him and grabbed his tail. “I have a better idea.”

Ignoring the burst of laughter from the skaters around them, Chat Noir gave her a flat, over-the-shoulder stare. “Really?”

She wrapped the end of it around her hand. “Really.”

“Ow,” he whined.

“Don’t be a baby. It doesn’t hurt.” She gave a tug. “Mush.”

“That’s a dog, not a cat.”

“Can’t you hack it, Chat?” someone in the crowd said and Ladybug smiled as she recognised Alix’s voice.

Chat Noir’s smirk grew large. “I can hack anything my lady dishes out,” he called.

One of the marshals appeared out of the crowd to usher them beyond the starting line. “Ladybug, Chat Noir, you’re supposed to lead the charge from out there.”

Chat Noir skated forward, pulling Ladybug along with him. “We get a head start?”

“I suppose it gives people an incentive to pass us,” Ladybug said, grinning and waving cheekily to the crowd as she got a free ride.

Chat Noir grinned and pulled her into a large, looping circle around the front of the crowd. In a deft turn, he danced so he was skating backwards and drew her into his embrace. The crowd whooped
and cheered as they waltzed around the starting line.

“You are such a flirt,” Ladybug said, concentrating on her feet and moving with him. He was grace, she was an awkward bug, but he did a good job of covering that for her.

“I like dancing with you,” he said and his smile made her heartbeat stutter, then pick up the pace. “We should do more of it.”

“Bee dancing or dancing-dancing?”

“Both. Anything. As long as it’s with you.”

“You’re giddy,” she said.

Grasping her hips, he picked her up and lifted her into the air while the crowd cheered. “Papillon’s gone. Plagg’s back. Deedee’s in my pocket and I’m dancing with the love of my life. What could be more perfect than that?”

Struggling with her composure as he put her back on the ground, she chided, “You’re really not doing a good job at pretending.”

The hand on her back pulled her closer. “Maybe I was wrong about that.” Aligning their bodies so she was pressed up against him, he set them into an easy glide.

The wind carried the scent of him and the heat of his body made it hard for her to keep her head. “You weren’t,” she said. “At least for a while.”

His lips curved up to smirk at her. “Just friends.”

“Yup. The best of friends.”

“Okay,” he said, releasing her back. In a deft move, he twirled her under his arm, then shoved her back toward the crowd of skaters watching them dance and sprinted away. “Catch me if you can!”

She skidded, her arms flailing, before twisting so she could charge after him. “Chat Noir! You get back here!”

Chat Noir’s laughter filled the night air.

Chapter End Notes

Kry’s ending note:
Strictly speaking, last chapter would’ve been a perfect place to end Sting, but I couldn’t let Moon win her 29 Chapter bet. So bonus chapter of fun and romance!

Thus concludes Sting. I really hope you all have enjoyed my work, I’ve had a lot of fun writing Sting and meeting such wonderful people, and seeing old fans still following my
work! It’s amazing feeling to have such a wonderful fanbase. Thank you so much to everyone who has reviewed, kudos, faved, plugged my story to their followers, PM’ed or drawn art for Sting.

Assorted Fanarts

Interested in my original works?

Thank you for letting me share my imagination with you!
-Kry

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!