Miraculous Adventure

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Miraculous Adventure

by ChimpuKampu

Summary

Everyone's excited about the school's field trip, however, the Akuma attack left Marinette and Adrien miss the ride. Worse, their things were there, their parents thought they were there, and their teachers assumed they were there. Now they were left with no choice but to chase it...which led to a funny, fluffy and fateful adventure.

Onto the feels train!

Notes
See the end of the work for notes.
The Lycée department of Françoise Dupont organized a summer field trip not only for educational purposes but also for recreational ones. It was arranged as a consolation to the seniors before they start preparing for their le bac, and at the same time, the best distraction to unwind and enlighten those who were still in the bind.

When a black limousine parked outside the school entrance, Nino couldn't help but run towards it.

"Yo, Adrien! You're finally here!" the future DJ greeted when an obviously excited blond-haired model emerged from the vehicle. Like him, his friend was carrying a big, traveling bag full of clothes and other necessities.

"Salut, Nino!" Adrien replied with a high-five. "I thought I'll be coming here late. I only slept like four hours!"

"Mine's three, dude," he replied casually. "Wow, I'm glad your father finally agreed to give you a break. One was supposed to start working after they finished school, you know."

"I'm surprised that he allowed me to join here. He even told Natalie to clear my schedules for two weeks." the model remarked then shrugged his shoulders. "I just consider my work as some sort of helping our family business."

"Hey, guys! Over here!" Alya called them while waving her hands in the air. She was carrying a matching traveling bag with a video camera on the side.

"Salut, Alya. Seems like you're totally prepared for this trip." Adrien's greetings earned him a smirk.

"Of course, I can't miss this for the world!" she replied enthusiastically as she looked around. "But I think we might be missing one."

The trio turned their heads around when they heard a small commotion, followed by a loud squeaking sound as a petite, dark-haired girl ran towards their direction. Similarly, she has a large traveling bag but with a small rectangular box tucked on her arms.

"I'm so...sorry...I was...I forgot the time...of the meeting." Marinette huffed then handed them the box. "Papa...macarons..."

Nino and Alya squealed simultaneously as they grabbed the pastry with delight. Adrien, on the other hand, decided to help the dark-haired girl by unhooking her bag from her back.

"You're not supposed to run like that, Marinette. Your house is practically five minute's away from here." the blond cooed.

She blushed at his kind words and lost the care if such reaction was visible on her face. She was too exhausted to mind it anyways.

"Five minutes away, yeah. But she can still be late for more than five minutes." Alya commented while munching a macaron. "It's a good thing I gave her a fifteen-minute leeway for our meetup. Or else."

"Don't be too harsh on our Mari. Besides, she made it - and she even brought us some treats." Nino quipped her between bites.
Marinette gave a short laugh then glanced dreamily at her crush who was also enjoying the treats.

The designer was so excited she barely made a wink last night. She was so preoccupied imagining herself with Adrien, and probably went downhill if not for Tikki's scoldings.

Despite years of being together as friends, her stuttering mess remained the same, much to her dismay.

Alya was convincing her to end her unrequited love before their graduation. She tried deliberately, but her embarrassment and cowardice won over.

Marinette hoped that she could confess her feelings before the end of their school trip.

"All students, please gather at the Parkway for further instructions!" Miss Bustier made an announcement using a megaphone.

There were eight classes overall, and each class has an assigned bus with a designated teacher and a tour guide that will explain the routes and places that they will pass along their way.

Since Marinette's class got the third bus, they hastily left their things inside there first before they joined the assembly.

The school's head Mr. Damocles stepped to the podium and cleared his throat. "Before we begin, I would like to inform you that -"

His speech was cut short when a loud shrill sounded afar, followed by a bright light-like explosion.

Surprisingly, the situation was considered to be normal in a modern-day Paris.

All citizens knew that the said scenario means *Akuma*, which also means Ladybug and Chat Noir's appearances.

The adults conducted an evacuation procedure and securely led the students, including Alya who was ranting about her mod status in Ladyblog, back to their ride. The commotion became a perfect distraction for Adrien to slip away, as well as Marinette who took a cover behind the pillars.

Once cleared, the teens immediately called their transformations.

"*Tikki, Transforme moi!*"

"*Plagg, Transforme moi!*"

Both superheroes lurched themselves towards the plaza and suddenly became aware that they came from the same location.

"It seems that we're always in the same place at the same time, My Lady." Chat Noir smirked as he landed on the post. "Is this serendipity?"

"Hold your whiskers, Kitty." Ladybug replied as she stood on the opposite post. "We have some job to do here."

"We're so claws yet so fur."

Ladybug gave her partner a beady glare, then jerked a finger towards a big, chubby man in a black-and-pink striped jumper suit. Both hands were cuffed with silver bracelets, which matched the ones around his neck. His hair was a fizzy red afro, and his eyes have swirls of yellow and pink hues.
"I am Twiddle Doom! And I'm here to control this new dimension!"

"I cat believe I'm seeing a human time-machine." Chat Noir snorts offended the akumatized person. "Mind if I dis-claws about Physics 101?"

Twiddle Doom aimed his left palm towards the black-clad superhero then released a supersonic wave which almost knocked him unconscious, as well as Ladybug who happened to be on the sidelines.

The red heroine squinted at the damaged spot then saw the fuzzy effect. An effect that reminded her of *Pixelator*.

"Chat! Beware, he's freezing the time!"

Chat gave her a thumbs-up sign, then rolled around while dodging some hits. He witnessed how the supersonic waves hit some living objects and turned them into frozen blurs like it was being eaten by an unknown void.

Ladybug used her yo-yo to bind Twiddle Doom's hand but failed. The Akuma overpowered the yoyo's strings enough to snap it, but because of its magical essence, the strings reconnected again and bounced back to its owner.

Worried that the enemy would eventually reach her school, the heroine decided to use her trump card.

"Lucky Charm!"

And a silver platter dropped from the air.

"Erm, are we going to eat something?" Chat Noir asked while deflecting the waves with his baton. "*Claws* I have a bad feline about it!"

His partner looked around then saw the red-and-black dots as her clues.

*Now for the akumatized object...*

Ladybug didn't know the identity of the possessed person or the reason of his possession, but there was something on his necklace that caught her attention.

"Found it!"

She hastily swapped her place with Chat Noir and automatically changed as the main bait.

She ran and leaped as Twiddle Doom threw some supersonic waves towards her path. When she reached the fountain, she paused momentarily and flipped the platter like a reflector, letting the sunlight bounced towards the villain's face.

As if on cue, Chat Noir raised his arm to activate his power.

"Cataclysm!"

Twiddle Doom crossed his arms to shield his face, and the actions gave Chat Noir an easy access to reach his neck. With his black bubbling hand, he swiped the Akuma's silver necklace, as well as the two silver cuffs in one go.

The objects changed its color to gray and disintegrated into a fine dust.
A black butterfly that emerged from the damaged accessory was immediately swiped by Ladybug's yo-yo.

"No more evil-doing for you, little Akuma." she uttered as the butterfly was cleansed to white. "Time to de-evilize!"

Afterwards, she threw the Lucky Charm to the air.

"Miraculous Ladybug!"

Red ladybugs swarmed around and reverted the place back to normal. On Twiddle Doom's place was a confused middle-aged man who received an immediate medical attention.

"Bien joue!" the two superheroes celebrated their victory again with a fist bump.

They didn't wait for their Miraculous to beep this time though.

No further flirts, no additional goodbyes.

Both rushed back to the place where they hide to transform. They released their kwamis there and handed them their desired food.

Both returned to the parkway to meet with their classmates -

Only to find a deserted place.

Marinette and Adrien blinked and stared at each other for more than ten seconds before it clicked. They've been left behind.
Adrien wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry.

The bright side of having an Akuma attack was the opportunity to be with his Lady. Call him insensitive, but Papillion's ploy was something he looked forward to every day.

Any day but today.

Which was why the bad side of having an Akuma attack was the timing.

Since all villains don't live with schedules or leave clues about their attacks, Adrien began to develop a talent called bluffing.

Unfortunately, his current situation can't be resolved by a mere bluff.

He was really looking forward to his first school field trip.

It was supposed to be his so-called Freedom day, a no-bodyguard/no-paparazzi kind of day with zero obligation except to hang out with friends.

Instead, he ended up with a friend - singular - who happens to share a similar demise.

Adrien wasn't completely wrong - his friend was also looking forward to their school field trip...just to be with him.

While Marinette once wished to have an all-day alone with her crush, she never for the life of her expected that it'd be today, of all days, and with a setback.

*Au revoir*, field trip.

"Marinette, why are you -"

"Adrien, what are you -"

Both were flustered then shyly gave the other a time to finish their sentence.

"Adrien, why are you -"

"Marinette, what are you -"

The model frowned. They would never understand each other if they continued to clash their words.

"Ladies first." he offered.

She waved her hand shyly as she stuttered "Ah - no, no, no. You go first."

"No, you go first."

"I insist. You go -"

Their short debate was halted when their cellphones rang simultaneously.

The designer raised a palm halfway with I-need-to-take-this-call gesture, which earned an approval look since the model will be doing the same thing on his phone.
Adrien made a few steps away to give her some privacy.

Clicking the Answer Key button without preparation was something the blond regretted a second later.

"Where the hell are you, Adrien?!

He cringed when Nino's booming voice reverberated. "Uh...in our school campus?"

"What?! Why the hell is you there?!"

He had to yank his phone away from his ear before he replied: "Uh, because...the bus left before I could ride it?"

"Then why didn't you take a ride in the first place?"

"Because why didn't you ride the bus during the Akuma attack?"

"Because I'm on a toilet...break?"

"Wait, what?! Peeing during an Akuma attack? You?!” he bellowed as if his mental strings finally snapped. "Are you dimwit crazy?!

Adrien winced at the DJ's words. He immediately checked his phone screen if perhaps his friend's angered face would pop out there and then.

Marinette was having a similar phone conversation with Alya, with 'you're such a clumsy, air-headed girl' told in various phrases.

When all of a sudden, her line went dead.

The designer had to check her phone screen if the call got disconnected, only to see that her best friend placed the call on mute.

A minute later, the aspiring reporter returned.

"Is Adrien there with you?" she asked.

"Erm, yeah..?"

Then the call was placed on mute again.

Marinette looked back and saw Adrien mouthing 'What's going on' while waving his phone. The girl only shrugged and mouthed 'I don't know'.

She pondered if Nino was also placing his best friend's call on mute like Alya, and if he was then there's a possibility that their best friends were discussing their miserable situation.

Alya was the first to return to the conversation. "I don't know whether to be happy for you or be pissed off at you."

"Don't worry, our feelings are mutual," she remarked dryly.
"Hey, why don't you place this call on a loudspeaker so that I can also talk to Adrien?"

She managed not to freak out when the model suddenly patted her shoulder. For how long he was standing there, she got no clue.

When she activated the loudspeaker mode, she realized that their respective best friends were likely sitting beside each other.

[Hey Adrien, are you there? ] Nino's voice immediately blasted on Marinette's phone.

"Yes. I can hear you." was the blond's reply.

The DJ narrated that since all students were confirmed as present during the assembly, the faculty decided to leave the school's premises as part of their evacuation plan and instead went on to their assigned itineraries.

But because of the panic, there were some mixed-up on the bus arrangements wherein some students ended up joining a different class.

Which means that none of the staff found out that Marinette and Adrien were left behind.

Yet.

[I've heard that we'll be having a short stop at the nearest town so that the students can switch back to their assigned places and do a proper head count.] Alya explained. [I'm not sure if we can find an alibi why your seats are empty.]

[Chloe aside, but most of our classmates will notice that you two are missing.] Nino added.

[So, what's your decision?]

The ideal answer would be 'go home, report to school, then brood over the entire summer break'.

Which was fine for Marinette, she can somehow manage it begrudgingly, but not for Adrien.

Once Natalie finds out their situation, he knew that she'll revert his canceled schedules and force him to accept more pending projects. She'll swamp him with modeling gigs and private lessons enough to make him so busy he'll have no time to wallow in his classmates' summer spree.

Marinette was a bit self-centered there for a moment.

Despite the twist of events, she was happy that she was alone with Adrien. No paparazzi, no raging fans or a Jealous Chloe that could kick her away from him. She could invite him over to her house and play video games there, talk random topics, share ideas about the fashion industry, or have some fun in the bakery. And if their stars would permit, she might get a chance to have a 'date' with him.

But she wasn't that selfish.

"Alya." the designer finally talked. "How long does it takes for the class to arrive at the hotel?"

[In Normandy, you mean? Well, approximately three hours. But since we might have a shortstop, could be four hours minimum. Why you ask?]

Marinette nudged her blond classmate. "Erm, what are the things that you have there right now - aside from cellphone?"
"Just my pocket money. Why?"

The designer looked at her things. All she got was her cell phone, her purse, and her undisclosed kwami.

When she asked him about his cash, the model handed her his wallet and credit card without considering it twice.

After she checked her own pocket money then made some mental computations, she asked their friends "Do you guys know what town will be your next stop?"

[As what I've mentioned, we 'might' have a shortstop. Might. If I don't know the possibility, then, of course, I don't know the location...] Alya paused for a moment, then gasped upon realization. [Oh. Oh, my. Don't tell me...]

[What are you talking about guys?] the DJ asked in confusion. [Alya, you're scaring me.]

The brunette cut him out with a groan. [Shut up, will you? Hey girl, are you sure about this?]

"You only live once, remember?" Marinette took a deep breath then gave her companion a comforting smile. "If I may ask, have you been to Northern France?"

Adrien tapped his chin as if contemplating. "Selected places, but never stayed there for more than a day. But then, I have Geography lessons."

"Same." she nodded as she formulated a plan. "I think we can apply the lessons we learned in real life."

If they failed to reach the bus, at least they can possibly meet their friends to their final destination.
Chapter 3

Traveling from one place to another was not as easy as what they've imagined, even with the help of modern technology.

Since the teenagers failed to get an access on any private vehicles without requiring an adult's intervention or have someone who can drive a vehicle for them, the two decided to commute using a public transport as their fastest option possible.

They were planning to go to Caen by train first, then a bus ride going to the hotel. And if one of their best friends would text their next destination while they're en-route, they might do their best to meet their classmates there.

Unless the two got lost.

Relying on the map's data from their phone app and some tourist reviews they found on the internet, they realized that their itinerary was way shorter compared to their classmates.

"Seems like we'll be chasing them from the opposite way," Marinette commented while scanning the train schedules.

"It'll be tougher if we start from Paris to whatever stopover the class decides to stay in, given that we're both new to this itinerary," Adrien responded as he checked a similar schedule. "We have almost an hour disadvantage from them, and we can't tell if our transport bus can cover twice of their distance."

"I'm sorry if I dragged you along to this ridiculous plan." the girl deflated. "I should've asked your opinion first before I suggested it."

"Don't be, Marinette or I'll be sorrier here. I understand that you're doing this for me more than for yourself." he placed his hands on her shoulders. "You have no idea how thankful I am."

She blushed as a response.

Before they headed off to the train station, the teenagers decided to visit a convenience store to purchase some necessities first. They went inside separately - Adrien to the dairy section while Marinette to the delicacies shelves - without any questions asked.

Finding an empty area, Marinette opened her bag to check her enervated kwami. "Sorry in advance if I'll not be able to talk with you today."

"No worries. I don't want to act like a cat in public anymore." Tikki sighed. "But why did you come up with a solution to go to Normandy with Adrien?"

"Well, it's quite tragic that Adrien will never experience school excursion before graduation, being homeschooled three-quarters of his life and all." the girl explained. "Besides, he's the most excited among the bunch. Also, I want to go out of town too. I mean, who doesn't want to?"

The red kwami gave her an impassive look. "Why do I have a feeling that you're doing this for yourself?"

"No, I'm doing this for both of us." her charger's response only narrowed her marbled eyes. "Or not really. Well, I admit I'm doing this mainly for myself, but you got to admit it - Adrien wants to join
the field trip. And honestly, I would like to hang out with Alya before our Bac. She'll be taking up Mass Communications, and since we'll be enrolling in a different University, then that means this field trip would be our last bonding moments as classmates."

"Okay. I got it."

The pig-tailed designer blinked and ogled at her with caution. "So...you're not mad at me?"

"I don't see anything wrong with your decision. I just find it peculiar." the kwami shrugged her shoulders with a frown. "By the way, have you been to Normandy before?"

"Honestly, no."

Tikki was not the only kwami who was worried about her Chosen.

Plagg gaped indignantly when his charger told him about his temporary silent-treatment and the mere fact that the model has never been to Normandy by himself, much more commuting in public transport outside Paris.

"How about Camembert?" the black kwami asked pitifully.

One of the main reasons why Adrien was in a sleep-deprived mode was due to Plagg's incessant glee that pestered him for days. His kwami read something about a dairy farm tour from his class' catalog, which eventually led him to his poor state.

"Going out there is not part of the plan..." the model taunted him. "...initially. Once we were able to catch up with our classmates, then that's the time you will earn some wheels of camembert."

To prove his point, the blond plucked a bar of cheddar from the displays.

"Why cheddar?!"

"I don't want Marinette to get a whiff of your smelly cheese and assume that I have some sanitary issues. I had enough share with you for years, thank-you-very-much. So deal with it."

It wasn't a question why his kwami wanted to visit that town - it was the home of his favorite cheese after all. And as a self-proclaimed cheese-lover, Plagg would like to honor the place akin to what pilgrims do in Mecca.

By eating cheese.

Adrien was starting to doubt if Plagg was actually a cat and not a mouse.

Once the teenagers reached the counter and paid for their own respective bills, they headed to Gare Saint-Lazare as their next destination.

The crowd there was quite overwhelming.

Being the second busiest station in Paris, the place was swamped not only by tourists but also some Parisian vacationers for their summer break.

To avoid line hassles, Adrien went to the ticketing booth while Marinette remained in the waiting area.

The designer in her perked up as she admired the activities in the station. From floral shirts to hijabs, from mixed clothings to disaster fashion, Marinette felt like she was standing in a place where all
people of different nationalities and races gather.

On the farthest corner was a group of Japanese tourists, probably listening to their tour guide's instructions as they waved their flaglets, while on the opposite side was a rowdy family of six. She also spotted some group of friends laughing at a joke while waiting for their train, and few couples who acted like they have the world of their own.

Concerns grew when she realized that the public might react indifferently once they found out that a simpleton like her was traveling together with the world-famous Adrien Agreste without bringing any pieces of luggage. Oh, the horror! The scandal!

While scanning the crowd to kill time, she saw an elderly man walking slowly with his steel cane from afar when all of a sudden, a muscular man bumped him and left the poor man scrambled on the tiled floor.

"Hey!"

She yelled at the escaping offender while running towards the old man.

"Are you alright, Monsieur?" the pig-tailed girl asked as she addressed his possible injuries.

"I'm fine, young lady. Thank you." the elderly replied as he stood up. While tapping the specks of dust on his loose shirt, he froze. "It's gone."

Marinette was ready to hoist him up and bring him to the medical booth when he grabbed her wrist then pointed the direction where his offender went. "He took my wallet. It's gone!"

Years of being Ladybug gave her civilian self an eye speed to detect a target, and upon seeing the man's horrified face, she chased him without delay.

The thief sprinted and elbowed some bystanders to clear his way, while the girl followed his pace with ease. She had to leap on a stroller then ran on walls to avoid collision between food stalls. There were cries from those people who fell on the pavements caused by the runaway man, but that didn't divert her attention towards her prey. She just let the police and the medics do that job.

Marinette stupefied him by landing on his front. He jabbed her but she docked it with a smug, and when he flung his other knuckle as a revenge, she used his momentum to grab his wrist and collar then slam his body to the ground.

The impact stole the man's breath, and without a second wait, she twisted and bound his arms with his unbuckled belt then hastily swiped the stolen wallet from his hands.

Unfortunately, the problem didn't end there.

A burly man - twice as big as her captive - hovered behind her then raised a metal fist that glints against the light. It was a knuckler's knife.

And that was how she realized she wasn't transformed.

Everything happened so fast that the next second didn't register immediately.

_Stupid me for running without thinking about myself._

_Stupid me for not calculating that professional thieves always carry a back-up._

_Stupid me for leaving Adrien alone, even though he told me to stay in one spot._
Stupid me for not spending much time with Alya, and most of all, with my beloved parents.

Stupid me for letting Tikki down and the whole Paris, that Ladybug failed them.

She shut her eyes closed and ready to accept her fate when a rod lurched on her attacker.

The illumination that cast a shadow on her savior's back made her squint. At first, she thought he was clad in black, but after adjusting her eyesight, she immediately caught a familiar blond streak that shone against the light.

Chaton?

She was about to call him until she realized her mistake.

Her savior was a green-eyed mask-less man with an ear-less blond hair, wearing a cat-like grin that was mixed with relief and worry. On his hand was a silver cane.

Adrien finally asked, "Are you alright?"
If Marinette mistakenly took Adrien as Chat Noir, Adrien almost swore Marinette was Ladybug.

He saw how the thief pushed the old man, and almost behind Marinette when she made a chase. Her petite body, her hair and her agility - which he never knew she had - was similar to that spotted heroine.

The commotion was almost perfect for him to transform, but because Plagg being Plagg, he was still not fully-charged after eating a block of cheddar cheese.

Talk about bad luck.

So he did what a Knight would normally do to his Princess. It was a success but as a consequence...

"You're alright - er, I mean - I'm about you. Ah, no. How about alright? Urgh...I'm alright!" she stuttered, reverting her back when they were still in collége.

I scared her again, he thought glumly.

His concerns grew when she jounced on his touch then gave him some nervous stares and a flustered face.

The crowd's rowdy cheers interrupted them, especially when the security officers contained the unconscious thieves.

The blond's attention was immediately shifted to the approaching elderly, then remembered the cane on his hand.

"Thanks for letting me borrow this," Adrien said as he handed the item back to the owner.

"Thanks for beating them on my behalf." the old man accepted it then looked at his companion. "Thanks to you as well. I never thought a pretty lady like you can be that deadly."

Marinette was unsure how to take the compliment. "Ah, I just did what any concerned citizen would do once they encountered a situation. And it's my pleasure to help."

The man shook his head with a bemused expression. "No. What you did was exemplary. Same with you, young man. Dashing towards your lover like a knight in shining armor."

"We're not lovers!" they exclaimed in unison, then blushed profusely like they've been caught in a lie, which altogether seems contradictory.

Their reactions earned a chuckle. "I'm curious about the two of you. I'm hoping if you can join me for breakfast, as a payment for saving my life."

"Oh no. You don't have to do that, Monsieur..."

"Antoine, Mademoiselle. Call me Antoine."

"Yes, Antoine, Monsieur. Thanks for the invite, but we have to decline. Your gratitude is enough for
us, right?" Marinette said as she gave her companion a pleading look.

"It's your thought that counts, Monsieur Antoine. Besides, we also have matters to attend..." Adrien supported, then trailed off when he heard an announcement. "...or not."

The designer caught the changes in his expression, then followed his panic stares when he eyed the departing train. She didn't need his words to know that they were supposed to be on board at the moment.

Talk about bad luck.

When Antoine saw their paled faces, he immediately knew that their train just left them.

He knew he was to blame why the teenagers got stuck. Trying to brush his guilt, he checked his wristwatch.

"Let me tell you that the trains depart here after an hour, so don't worry if you ever missed your ride. The tickets are refundable here anyways." the old man told them. "Also, I know where I can get you two to Normandy faster."

Both looked at the man like he was an angel sent by Heaven. But before they could say something, their stomach grumbled simultaneously.

"Looks like it calls for breakfast." Antoine laughed much to their embarrassment.

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The three stopped at a nearby open cafe.

It has vintage interiors, and the authenticity of their antique designs was supported by an outdoor signage dated way back 1900s. It was a type of establishment that operates around five in the morning, probably to cater those who were out for breakfast.

Most of the customers there were middle-aged men in business casual and casual formal alike. There were women there too both in pumps and trainers. Some were leafing newspapers, mainly on current events and editorial pages, while others were scanning on their tablets. Outside the tables were people on their mobile phones and few of them on their cigarettes.

It was a place for adults that displayed a different aspect of society. And currently, their youngest customers were Adrien and Marinette.

The door was pulled open by a tall woman in white tablier. "Welcome to Hibiscus."

"Good morning, Felicia. I'll be taking the usual."

"Not a problem, M. Pohler." she smiled then eyed at the teenagers with curiosity. "So you're with your grandkids this time?"

The two caught the blush on the old man's cheek. "Yeah. I guess my usual seat was not taken?"
"Of course. Just a short moment and someone will accompany you."

One of the barista leads them to a vacant table on the left side near the windows. The remains of the morning fog were still visible, making a translucent effect on the glass as they watched the bustling streets of Paris.

Like a gentleman, Adrien pulled a chair for Marinette, in which she accepted with a blush, and did the same to Antoine. The wooden chairs creaked as they sat on it, but it was sturdy and comfy enough to recline their back.

"Their bestsellers here are their pancakes," the elderly said as he tapped the menu. "You can choose whatever you want. It's my treat."

"Then...I'll go with pancakes then. How about you, Marinette?"

"Same." she squeaked.

"Anything else?" the barista asked as he scribbled the orders. "How about drinks?"

"Uh.." the model looked at the menu again. He almost forgot Natalie and Gorilla weren't around to monitor his sugar intakes. "Then I'll take Caramel Latte."

"Mine's Americano. Make it black."

The men raised their brows incredulously except Adrien. He had the same expression the first time he caught her gulping a tall mug of sugarless black coffee after pulling an all-nighter.

"A woman who captures my heart. How fitting, Mademoiselle," the elderly chuckled.

She tried to hide her flush but failed. "I - I don't have enough sleep, that is. Need to energize."

"I see."

"Anything else?"

"Erm, do you have any chocolate chip cookies?"

"Yes, we have available packs on the counter." the barista replied then looked at Adrien for an additional order.

"How about a platter of cheese? Preferably camembert?" the blond asked.

"I apologize, but we don't serve camembert here. Will brie be alright?"

"Yes," he said then tapped his shirt subtly to hush his excited kwami.

Once the barista left, the teenagers introduced themselves then gave a brief reason why they need to rush to Caen. When Antoine asked them why they were left behind, both lied that they overslept.

The two felt like the man didn't buy it, and with his suggestive smirk, it seems like they were giving him an alibi to play hooky.

When their meal arrived, the model and the designer were awed at the thick, fluffy pancakes that were smothered in butter and honey. They tried not to moan after they took their first bite. It was as if their souls reached the gates of Heaven.
Antoine was amused by their blissful expression. "That's your reward for saving an old man like me, though if I'm going to evaluate your actions, it seems like I'm not your first case."

Adrien and Marinette eyed each other carefully.

Ladybug and Chat Noir saved several people, not only old men. However, no one knows their identity, not even their respective partners.

"Now that you've mentioned it..." the blond paused then placed his utensils on the plate. "This made me recall something."

"Same here."

Marinette just remembered the old man she saved from a running car, which coincides the day she got her Miraculous.

Adrien just remembered the old man he saved when he fell on the pavement, which coincides the day he got his Miraculous.

"I see. Are you two crime-beaters or something?"

It was Adrien who first made a reaction. "Ah, no, no, no! We're just normal kids with a normal life. I'm doing fencing, that's why. But for Marinette..."

"Ah, m - m - m - me?" she stammered. "Oh. I'm pretty good at gymnastics. In school!"

"As well as parkour?" it was the blond who made the question.

"As well as parkour. They're like best buds with gymnastics. Quite similar. You know?" she answered firmly, which only raised the model's lingering doubts.

She was being cornered by his impossibly green eyes, but she tried not to falter on his inquisitive stares. She might need to think some reasons he could buy later.

The man coughed when the mood became sour. "Alright. I get it. So...how's the food?"

That was when the teenagers realized that their plates were empty.

"The most amazing pancakes I've ever tasted." Adrien swooned.

Marinette hummed her approval. "I don't mind spending my first paycheck here."

"I'm glad to hear that." the elderly responded with a smile. "I don't think my gesture of gratitude is enough, after all the trouble that I've caused."

"Oh no, Antoine, Monsieur. It's your thought that matters. We just returned the wallet to you, and you returned us a favor of a free meal."

"No, Mademoiselle. You didn't return a mere wallet. You returned my life to me."

He opened his wallet to reveal an old photograph of a woman in her early twenties. "You see, this is my Maman. And this is the only surviving photograph that I scrapped when all of our belongings were destroyed during the World War. My only memento to the woman who bore me."

The teenagers fell silent, especially Adrien who empathized the old man's struggles. Despite his age, Antoine was still a son who misses his mother.
Just like him.

The heavy atmosphere began to shift when a loud mobile tone sounded. It was coming from Antoine, who casually pulled his phone out from his pants. He adjusted his glasses to see the caller ID, and when he recognized it, he smirked.

"Just in time," he muttered as he answered. "Hello, Pierre? Did you finally get my message? Yes...you see, there's this emergency situation that my friends need to attend...Yes...Oh, yes. Remember Gabe? Yes, his lad is a handsome one...Yeah, poor soul...Oh please don't tell anyone...Eh, with a stunning beauty...Yeah, makes me reminisce my younger years...Cinnamon rolls? What's that?...Oh, shut your trap. Back to business - they are chasing their so-called friends. I'm not sure exactly...Five minutes? Perfect...Yes, deluxe...Of course, they didn't know...Wait, what?! How could - Nah, I'll deal with it later... shush... Alright, bye."

The two looked at him like he was imposing a verdict.

"A van will going to pick you up here," he explained while slipping his phone back in his pocket. "You will be riding a public bus going to Saint-Clair, which I believe is faster to reach your destination. Lucky if you'll pass your school bus along the way."

They resisted the urge to kiss the feet of their savior, but not the impulse of giving him a heartfelt hug.

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In just fifteen minutes, the teenagers were inside their vehicle and ready to leave Paris.

Once settled, Marinette looked at Adrien who was staring blankly outside the windows.

If she didn't know the person, she wouldn't see the sadness that ebbed on his poker face.

"Adrien, are you alright?"

He didn't flinch when she felt her hand on his. Instead, he relished her warmth. "I'm fine, Marinette. I just remembered my mother."

"I know. I under - "

The vibration of her phone interrupted her. The caller ID was flashing Alya's name.

So she answered it right away.

"Hey, Alya. What's u - "

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry - "

When Adrien silently mouthed 'what's wrong', she immediately turned the loudspeaker on. "Okay, calm down. I'm not getting your point why you're sorry, Alya. Adrien's listening here."
"Oh my gosh, Adrien. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sor - \]

"Marinette and I don't get it why. Tell us."

[Okay. Breathe in, breathe out.] Alya muttered, more likely to herself. On the background, they could hear Nino's talking about something, but they couldn't decipher his words.

[Okay. I calmed down. I already said my sorry, and also on behalf of Nino. So let's get to the point - they found out.]

"Found out what?" Marinette asked.

[They freakingly found out, girl. That you two are missing! And guess who announced it? It was Chloe! That stupid, bitch Chloe!]

Oh.

Talk about bad luck.

Nino took over the conversation. [Gosh, I'm sorry for that guys. I'm - I'm holding Alya right now. Saving her from possible criminal charges like murder or something.]

"Yeah, do that."

While Marinette was busy bantering with their friends, Adrien caught a commercial ad on the bus monitor about a hair grower, which suddenly got cut and replaced by a news flash.

There was a mention of Ladybug and Chat Noir's Akuma action on the scrolls, as well as other current events like inflation, political issues, unexplained property damages, exchange rates, weather updates -

The audio wasn't loud enough to hear the entire words of the reporter, and his seatmate was discussing some evil ploys thru her phone so his attention was somewhat divided. But when a CCTV footage appeared on a screen with a supporting amateur video about the commotion that happened at a certain railway station, he stilled.

"Uh, Marinette?" he tugged her sleeve without tearing his gaze away from the monitor screen. "I think we don't need to worry if the whole school found out."

He felt her tensed reaction when she shifted her seat. A few seconds later, she spoke "Nino? Please tell Alya to spare Chloe."

It was Alya who voiced out this time [What do you mean spare Chloe?! I swear I'm going to rip her hair like a - ]

"No, save your strength this time. We have a bigger problem here."

[What do you mean by that?]

"Are all the school buses equipped with televisions that are hooked to stream news?"

[Of course, but ours is currently off. Why?]

"Because." the designer huffed. "We're on the news right now."

She didn't hear her friends' words anymore. Like Adrien, her attention was solely focused on the
"...that the former Senate President of France, Senator Antoine Pohler, was saved by two young heroes - and were not talking Ladybug and Chat Noir here - who bravely handled two criminals named Genard Rye, 28, and Karl Hemet, 35. The reason of intent was still under investigation, but according to our sources, Senator Pohler was on his personal visit alone when the criminals made an attempt to rob, which was intercepted by a Parisian couple. The Senator didn't make any comments, as well as the couple who remained anonymous. Several witnesses dropped names, and might be supported by the respondent officers who got their statements."

Talk about bad luck.

Chapter End Notes

Antoine Pohler was inspired from Alain Poher, a French politician
Chapter 5

Media was actually Ladybug's last resort if ever she wants to reveal her civilian self.

But due to unforeseen circumstances, her civilian self decided to drop the freaking bomb.

Because of this, Marinette was desperately scanning all online press releases, even social media posts, and tweets for name-drops. So far none was revealed yet.

She knew that it wouldn't take that long for the public to learn about the identities of the so-called 'Parisian couple' - a term coined much to her embarrassment - which might turn to worse if it would lead them to her alter-ego. Worst if Papillion would spot her first.

Who would've thought that they saved a prominent person - more, a highly influenced ex-politician not only in Paris but the whole country of France?

Adrien's action was understandable because he does fencing, but for Marinette, she had to bluff.

If Chat Noir was watching the news and connected the dots, he would definitely seek her to her wit's ends.

Little did she know that Chat Noir failed to connect the dots, that the said superhero was also involved in the fiasco as his civilian self, and that civilian self was currently sitting beside her.

Adrien was also panicking, but with an urge of prancing.

It must be the cat in him, or probably his habit of not staying at one place whenever he needs to think. And he couldn't do that inside of a running bus without disturbing the passengers, especially Marinette whom he had bothered the most.

He was clutching his phone like a lifeline, checking it every now and then for notifications or calls from Natalie. He even formulated several alibis in case his father saw the news and forced him to be isolated in that cold, dark mansion forever.

But none came. Yet.

Another problem were the clues that might connect him to his alter-ego, which will be a cat-astrophe if Papillion got it all.

Luckily, the infamous Ladyblog didn't make any featured article about his connection.

It might be because of the blogger, who happened to be his classmate, was on a field trip. And even though the blogger herself was aware of the news clip, and probably watched it for several times thru online streams, she decided not to post anything about it.

Marinette's action was understandable because she does gymnastics, and as a half-Chinese, she might've learned some basic martial arts, but for Adrien, he had to bluff.

Since when did fencing incorporate acrobatics into its curriculum?

If Ladybug was watching the news and found out that the cat out himself from that proverbial bag, she would definitely smack him with a yo-yo till death.

"...drien?"
This is bad, he shook his head. He could hear his Lady calling his real name.

"...ein. Adrien? Are you alright? Hey."

He turned his head towards the source of the voice and saw a mask-less, bluebell eyes looming on his face.

The mistake almost gave him a mini heart attack.

"I - I'm sorry if I startled you." he apologized quickly.

"I - I'm the one who should say that." Marinette squeaked with a blush. "I was - I was wondering if you - if you would like to have a breather outside. We - we're having a shortstop."

The blond realized that their bus already passed the toll gate and made a stopover. Looking around, he noticed that most of the passengers were already outside for a toilet break, while others were buying some snacks at a nearby convenience store.

"Why don't we - "

Both teenagers jolted when a phone vibrated. It was coming from Marinette's again, and when they checked the caller ID, both paled in horror.

It was from Miss Bustier.

The designer gulped audibly before hitting the Answer key.

"He-hello?"

"Mme. Dupain-Cheng, I was completely informed by Mme. Cesaire about your current situation, as well as M. Agreste whom I believe is with you right now."

"I'm here, Miss Bustier." Adrien professed.

And by completely informed, he strongly believed that Alya didn't rat them out by telling their teacher about the controversial news. Being caught absent during the trip was a whammy. Got involved in a civic fight instead of attending the trip would be a double whammy.

"And being exemplary students, both of you." their adviser emphasized. "You both know that the school will be held accountable if something happened during the course of the trip. That the school is liable for their student's welfare. And I know for the fact that everyone signed a waiver stating those rules. Did you two get what I'm saying here?"

"Yes, Miss Bustier." the two answered in unison.

"Now tell me, Marinette Dupain-Cheng and Adrien Agreste, what would be your valid reason why I should not suspend both of you and be removed from the list of candidates for graduation?"

That was a low blow.

It was obvious that their kind and compassionate teacher since collège was seething with anger. They couldn't blame her, but her punishment was downright unfair.

Why would she threaten their future careers just because they got left behind?

And if ever a certain villain would pick her fury, they might be ended up dealing an Akuma
candidate who can hostage their friends while they're hundreds of kilometers apart.

As much as possible, both wanted to have Ladybug and Chat Noir stayed out of the picture.

*Screw graduation*, Adrien muttered internally.

"It's my fault, Miss Bustier. Marinette's involvement was due to my selfishness," he told their teacher. "We got sidetracked, and I admit that mistake, but we never wished to be left behind. And since Marinette was there to help me, I made a suggestion to follow the class without letting anyone know our situation."

Marinette stared at her classmate in disbelief.

He was lying, of course.

She was the one who made the suggestion, not him, but he was owning it like he wanted to take the blame. He was sacrificing himself for her, and she didn't want that!

But instead of stealing his spotlight, she went the other way around.

"I'm sorry Miss Bustier, but I went along with the plan. Voluntarily." the designer interrupted him, making the model gaped incredulously.

He mouthed 'What are you doing?' voicelessly, but she raised an index finger for silence, probably to appease his anger.

His anger only doubled over.

"We panicked during the Akuma attack and got separated from the rest of the class. Then we told Alya about what happened. However, I told her to keep it as a secret." she breathed deeply before continuing. "Because as a class president, I have to ensure the safety of my fellow classmates. That letting everyone know about our current situation might cause problems and misunderstandings that may disturb those students who wished to enjoy the study trip, and a class deputy has the capacity to do that. I believe that Adrien, a fellow classmate, is also my responsibility to be part of the said study trip, being a student officer designated by the school."

The seconds of silence overwhelmed them, especially Adrien who couldn't remove his gaze from his classmate.

That witty reasoning didn't occur to him at all, and even though she sounded confident over the phone, her face told him otherwise.

"Did you inform your guardians about it?" their adviser asked.

"I will once they arrived at the convention," Marinette answered mildly then eyed her seatmate.

"Once my father touched down New York." was the blond's reply.

"I trust you both on that. And Mme. Dupain-Cheng?"

"Ye-yes, Miss Bustier?"

"We'll talk this later once you arrived at the hotel."

Then the caller hangs up.
For the first time since the fiasco, the teenagers finally sighed with relief.

"I - I never thought our teacher will buy that." Marinette uttered with disbelief.

"You pulled out a rank." Adrien pointed out. "Of course she'll buy that."

I pulled out Ladybug, she thought with a smile. Since when did Ladybug become her instinct?

"It's kinda amazing."

"You're amazing."

The designer was surprised. She didn't even know he was staring at her the whole time until she met his eyes. His familiar green orbs glimmered with amusement, and when he gave his loop sided smile, she blushed.

"Marinette." he purred. "You must be my angel sent from Heaven."

Marinette was left stunned and froze on the spot.

And that was how it dawned on the blond model - he was not wearing a mask.

Crap.

Crap.

Crap.

Since when did Chat Noir become his instinct?

"I - It was a compliment!" he babbled with a beet-red face. "I was amazed and floored and hands-down impressed!"

His words could've destroyed her weak heart, but the comical way of thrashing his arms in the air turned the tides around.

She giggled. "I know. I'm just surprised that's all."

He relaxed then remembered their initial topic. "Oh yeah. You asked me for a breather. I think I might need that."

He moved out from his seat and wondered why she didn't follow him.

"I'll stay here, looking out for our seats," she said after noting his confusion. "I'm done with my break anyways."

"Okay. Will bring some drinks then. My treat."

He immediately walked out from the bus before he could hear her refusals.

"Flirting with your girlfriend, huh?" Plagg taunted shamelessly. "First Princess, now Angel."

"Shut up, Plagg. She's not my girlfriend."

Even though the kwami was hiding inside his shirt, he could still see the phony innocence. "I didn't say, girlfriend. I said girl friend. You're jumping to conclusions."
"You pronounced them similarly."

"So you're denying that girl's not your friend?"

"Of course not. Marinette is my - "

He wasn't paying attention to see a young woman in front with a bunch of chips. Both collided, and with her nasty remarks about their fall, he winced.

"I - I'm sorry. I didn't notice you..." he apologized profusely while picking up the snacks.

"Of course you never noticed me, you dimwit." she snarled. "If you're paying attention to where you..."

The blond was alarmed when the chips he painstakingly collected and handed to the owner were immediately dropped to the ground.

"Adrien...Agreste?" the woman muttered with bewildered eyes. "Adrien - fucking - Agreste?"

He didn't want to answer. Damn, he refused to answer her, but his face gave it away.

The woman gave a shrill akin to the one that screams Akuma "Adrien Agreste is here!"

His animal instinct kicked in, but not enough to rub the hands off that held his torso. At least he was still composed not to kick a female, but hell his patience was tested when another person joined the tackle. Then another. Then another group he knew were boys.

Wait, he has male fans?!

How he wished Gorilla was there.

Marinette thought it was an Akuma attack, but when she saw a crowd - well, it was a stampede - on the store's entrance, assaulting a certain blond guy who looked like he mugged people's hearts, everything got clicked.

She forgot that her classmate was a famous begotten son of Gabriel Agreste, a world-renowned designer, who happened to be a Class-A model. A model who had his face plastered on all billboards and magazines around Paris. A celebrity that was included among the Top Ten as the Most Hottest Guy in France. A guy that was included among the Top Five as the Boy Girl's want to Have Sex With.

"Tikki," she called with a face-palm. "We need some distractions."
If it was all about distraction - or destruction, no pun intended - Chat Noir would be the best person. Not that Ladybug didn't know how to do it (because she was damn sure she can distract her partner with a mere wink), the superheroine would require some ample time to utilize her powers.

But that was for 'Akuma attacks'.

'Crazy fans' would be a different story.

Ladybug knows the feeling of having fans; Marinette knows the feeling of being a fan - so technically, the aspiring designer didn't have to rattle her brains out just to solve the problem. And yet she did.

"What am I going to do, Tikki?" she asked her hundred-year-old guardian. "Do I need to transform here or what?"

"You have the answer. You've been asking me that same question thrice already." was the stony reply.

"Urgh." the girl grunted while staring at the commotion in front of her.

She tried, really tried to get on hold of Adrien despite her disadvantages in terms of height and strength as a civilian. If she was in her superhero form, she might've flung those people out then grab the model safely back to their bus.

However, Marinette was the problem.

If she transforms into Ladybug then throw Adrien inside the bus, of course, Marinette will hide in order to de-transform but with no guarantees that she will never be left behind.

If she transforms into Ladybug, throw Adrien inside the bus, then de-transform there, Marinette's identity will be at stake.

If she transforms into Ladybug, throw Adrien inside the bus and stayed there as Ladybug, she might have lots of explanations as to why Marinette left herself behind.

If she transforms into Ladybug, throw Adrien inside the bus, then Marinette will likely hide somewhere to de-transform with a chance that she will never be left behind. But then, there will be no guarantees that some of his crazy fans were not among the passengers.

"How I wish I'm not Ladybug." her bewails earned her a pinch.

Marinette was simply joking of course, but the sight of their driver walking towards their bus only adds up to the pressure.

Tikki's frantic voice wasn't helpful either. "Hurry, Marinette! He's coming back!"

One thing for sure, she couldn't just leave Adrien there then proceed to their travel plans all by herself. Not only because she was concerned for his well-being, but because her integrity as a class officer was put on the line.

*If only I can delay that bus for a minute...*
"Tikki!" she called her transformation while wishing for Chat Noir's assistance. "Transforme moi!"

In actuality, Chat Noir was there but as a helpless civilian.

Being a master of distraction - or destruction, he mew-sed - Adrien was able to wheedle himself away from that tight situation.

Only to end up in a tight space.

He couldn't help but be happy for the invention of Men's Toilet, a place he considered his solace during Akuma attacks and fans' assault.

As of the moment, no one knew that he was there all along. Even if his fans would comb the entire place to seek him out, they would never dare to check all the toilet's cubicles without considering some people's potty time. Not to mention some gender restrictions.

This wasn't his first time to be in such situation for his two personas. He normally transforms into Chat Noir whenever Adrien was in a pinch or vice versa, provided that he could find a perfect place to hide.

Like now.

However, there was a blunder.

His Miraculous has not been taken away, but his kwami went missing.

"What am I supposed to do with this?"

After she summoned her Lucky Charm, a set of kiddie's face paint fell on Ladybug's gloved hands.

It wasn't her first time to use her powers outside Akuma attacks. Though the first 'emergency situation' was due to her jealousy, this time it was a real emergency.

Funny that both reasons were interconnected to the same person.

She looked around and saw some red and black spots around the bus' exhaust pipe, and then another on the face paint's packaging. With an idea that sparked on her head, she removed the contents hastily, crumpled the packaging into a tight ball then squeezed it firmly inside the pipe.

She clapped her spotted hands. "Now that I'm done with our vehicle problem, next would be
Adrien's.

Her Miraculous beeped, warning her about her remaining minutes till de-transformation.

The heroine looked at the face paint's contents again when something in the dumps caught her attention. Her smirk grew when another idea struck her.

*It seems like I might not need to use my last stash of cookies for another Lucky Charm.*

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It might not be the first time Plagg went missing, but this time was different - Adrien couldn't simply go out and look for him.

He wasn't that concerned if someone ever saw his kwami since Plagg could either play as a cat or a plush, unless a shiny and smelly object was involved - because he would definitely break his cover.

Which might eventually lead them to the discovery of Chat Noir's origin.

Leaving with no other choices, Adrien resorted to his backup plan: Cheese.

He was fortunate enough to snag a cube of brie after they left Hibiscus, and had to tap Plagg away from his jeans pocket before he could eat it. It wasn't as pungent as Camembert, but it was good enough to bait his lazy guardian.

He crossed his fingers and hoped for a miracle.

His prayer was answered when a black blob immediately floated towards the sink. It was obviously not a mouse or a cat, so he grabbed it before it lounged to the cheese.

"Plagg!" the blond hissed. "Where the hell did you go?!"

He was fuming when he released his grasp, only to feel sorry a second later after he saw his kwami's disheveled state.

Plagg's large green eyes blinked as he stared at his charger then hiccuped. "Adrien...it's - it's scary."

"Oh, Plagg."

He could empathize his kwami's horrible condition. Plagg probably slipped out forcibly and almost squashed by the raging fans, which resulted in his dented whiskers and sore limbs. The injuries weren't life-threatening, and his bruise seemed okay, but the event somewhat traumatized the poor guy.

Adrien scooped him gently then pinched a cheese towards his mouth. "I'm sorry I wasn't there to help you."

"I...I understand." the black god sniffled as he cradled the cheese for his dear life. "Girls are pretty scary."
"I know." the model chuckled then wiped his guardian's falling tears. "I'd prefer Akuma."

"I'd stick to cheese."

"Eat it, will you? So that we can leave this place."

Plagg nodded as he obediently ate in silence.

Adrien pulled out his phone to call Marinette but her line was busy. She might've been calling him at the same time, so he decided to send her a text message.

Adrien:

I'm sorry I got stuck. You can go without me. I'll follow later :-)  

"I'm ready." the kwami declared. "Let's get out of here."

"Plagg, Trans - "

His phone's vibration interrupted him. Marinette's caller ID was flashing so he answered it immediately.

"Where are you, Adrien?" she asked.

"I - I'm still - uh, near the store."

"Where specifically?"

"Toilet."

"Inside or outside?"

He wasn't sure if she was referring to his actual location or the toilet's location. Since he was using the service crew's toilet, which was outside the vicinity, he replied "Outside."

Then she hangs up.

"Is that Princess?"

"Yeah." the model replied as he looked at the call ended screen prompt. "She's in a hurry. Maybe she's inside the bus and about to leave?"

"Or maybe she was caught in the commotion and decided to go home."

"Well, let's find out." he sighed. "Plagg, Transform - "

BANG!

The door suddenly flew open, which jolted both occupants.
Plagg was fast enough to hide inside his shirt collar before the person noticed him, and probably rattled there as an aftereffect of his trauma.

Adrien was the only male human inside, and the only person who almost suffered a heart attack upon seeing a familiar female.

Marinette, his sweet and kind classmate, was inside the men's toilet.

Marinette, his sweet and kind classmate, was inside the men's toilet alone with him.

Marinette, his sweet and kind classmate, was inside the men's toilet alone with him, bearing a smug face and a...is that a chain on her hand?

Before he could speak, she hurriedly ran towards him then shove him inside the cubicle. He froze when he heard the door lock clicked behind her.

"Erm, Ma - Marinette?" he squeaked then began to sweat beads when he heard mumbling noises outside.

He was sitting on the toilet lid while she remained standing with a right knee in between his legs for balance. His arms were stretched on the cubicle's side wall, while hers were direct to the back wall.

She leaned forward when several steps became louder, hinting them that they were not alone anymore. Their only partition from the occupants was the thin divider of the toilet cubicle.

Both of them were in a ridiculous position, but nobody moved or mentioned it until the occupants left.

Marinette's arms were numb yet sturdy enough to support her weight not to slump on Adrien. She leaned on the cubicle's door behind her then squirmed when her sweaty back touched the toilet door's cold partition.

Similarly, Adrien was sweating and blushing, especially when he caught a whiff of her cologne that triggered some suggestive fantasies. He immediately looked away then began his mental exercises about the Periodic Table of Elements. It almost didn't work.

"So," he asked. "What are you doing here?"

She pulled out all the materials she scrapped from her pockets then peeled off her blazer.

With a devious smirk, Marinette answered: "We need some transformation."

He gulped at the sight.

*Girls are indeed pretty scary.*
"We'll go Rock," Marinette said as she removed her blazer, revealing her well-toned arms.

It was a disturbing sight for Adrien, in a very erotic level, and the knowledge that both of them were in a compact space of a Men's toilet's cubicle didn't help him at all. He focused his attention on the items dropped on his lap instead - which consist of a set of face paint, a chain and few scraps God knows where it came from.

And the sight made him more nervous.

"By Rock, you mean like Jagged Stone's rock?"

"That, or Punk, or anything you like." the pig-tailed designer suggested. "As long as it's out of your norm."

"I don't think the term 'fashion statement' has been out of my norm."

"But this involves role-playing."

Marinette has an incredible artistic skill, being an aspiring designer and all, so he trusted her judgments well. And regarding her concerns about him not comfortable with her idea was somewhat funny.

What would be her reaction if she saw him donned a black mask, black spandex with matching ears and tails while chasing a bloody hell of Akuma for breakfast?

"But really." the blond shook his head. "I haven't tried doing anything like cosplay."

"You're a professional model. Dressing up is your game."

"But not as silly as this."

"Not even Halloweens like Trick-or-Treat?" she asked while picking up the chain from his lap.

"I'm banned outdoors since I was a kid, so no."

The girl paused while feigning a pitying look. "I know you have a sad childhood, but I never imagined it to be this tragic."

"Ha-ha, very funny." Adrien scoffed then looked at the white paint. "Hey, you said I can choose anything, right?"

"Yeah. Got ideas?"

"Just a suggestion though." he toyed the lid as he considered some options. "Can I...can I try Johannes Krauser II?"

"Krauser...the one in Detroit Metal City?!!"

"Yeah. The lead singer." he was a bit unfazed by her reaction. "I didn't expect you to know them."
"You're not the only one who's into animation, nerd guy." she crossed her arms with a pursed grin. "But then, why not? First times should be memorable."

It was difficult for Marinette to move around the cubicle. She remained standing while she tried to tuck her capri pants a bit higher, same with her shirt as she plopped a button.

She smiled when she saw Adrien fiddling with the paints like a toddler who got his first coloring materials. The model in him must've taught him some tricks about cosmetics, so it wasn't a surprise how he smudged the white with black in order to achieve the smokey eyes.

She poked him about his hair, in which he nodded for approval, so she dabbed a fold of tissue papers with water from the sprinkler behind the bowl, then used it to damp his blond hair. She used her fingers to flatten the locks and parted them to the center. His hair might not be that long, but his make-up made the character alive.

"You're not cut to work in parlors," she smirked, which earned a scowl.

"I'll take note of that."

"Let's swap places." she nudged, making him stand behind the door while she sat on the toilet lid.

Another cluttering noise was heard outside, making the two teenagers fell silent again as they finished the task.

Adrien froze on his spot as Marinette altered his clothes and added some accessories to his body. Marinette, on the other hand, tried not to drool as she brushed his biceps and packed abs.

A laugh was heard in the background when one of the occupants cracked a dirty joke. It was an embarrassing topic, so the model mentally asked for forgiveness on behalf of men's population, especially towards the sole woman occupant.

He wasn't sure if she understood it since she gave him a stoic look, but when she pointed her face with a smile, he almost flipped backward.

'Do me' she voiced soundlessly.

Stupid dirty jokes and stupid male hormones - he nearly forgot she was referring to the make-up!

He gulped loudly when she closed her eyes then tilted her head towards him, giving him an access to her pale neck and a view of her cleavage.

What a fiend you are, Marinette, he groaned internally. For making me a sinner.

. . .

The next plan was to get the hell out of the toilet, which was a bit easy since they're in disguise.

It was understandable for Adrien to have one, just to conceal himself from his fans, but when he asked why Marinette had to don one, she said it was for Plan B - if they will be caught inside.
Thanks to his bad luck, it became operational.

To check if the coast was clear, he went outside the cubicle first. The glimpse of his ridiculous image from the wall mirror distracted him to notice a male crew entering the room just in time he signaled Marinette to get out.

Adrien agreed that it'll be impossible to convince one that she might be a trans - coz' she must be one hell of a trans - so she decided to stick on her real gender.

Thus, Plan B was 'act like lovers who had a romping session'

Before the male crew uttered something, Marinette slammed herself to Adrien, then acted like she was nuzzling his neck.

"Oh, darling~" she moaned. "That was a goddamn ride."

Taking it as a cue, he wrapped his arm around her exposed waist. Their skin contact made her squeak, which was not helpful because it gave him an awareness of her firm stomach and her guns. Living in a bakery made her oh-so-delicious.

"You're such a devil, babe. So wicked," he genuinely answered, trying to preserve his innocent mind. He nestled his chin on top of her head, then glared at their audience. "What the fuck are you staring at?"

His acting must be good because the man raised his hand then moved away from the door. Both didn't drop their guise as they walked lazily like drunkards towards the exit but didn't fail to see how the man eyed the cubicle they just vacated, only to use the adjacent one and muttered 'horny teenagers'

Being the tallest, Adrien got the most inquisitive stares and disgusted looks, unlike Marinette who could hide her embarrassed face on his chest. He was happy the make-up was thick enough to cover his flustered face, and his hair was able to hide the redness of his ears.

Discomfort aside, he enjoyed goofing around, spitting curses to ward off the people, something that both Adrien and Chat Noir wouldn't dare to say. Amazingly, Marinette played along.

They finally reached the parking lot and saw their bus. Looking around, both released their contact. Then broke a fit of a laugh.

"Oh gosh, that was one hell of a performance!" Marinette roared as she clutched her stomach. "I can't believe I did that! You did that! We did that!"

Adrien was teary-eyed, guffawed "That was the most ridiculous and funniest thing I've ever done in my entire life!"

"Oh crap, I can't look at face paints anymore without remembering this day!"

"You changed my outlook towards the toilet, Marinette!"

"I'll never see Adrien without recalling Death Metal!"

"Damn, my sides hurt!"

"Can't breathe here!"
The two chorused suddenly and stopped at the same time after realizing that they were doing their superhero's signature fist bump. It must be the familiarity, or probably their odd reflexes, why they almost did it.

Blue eyes met green ones.

Both were surprised but amused when they saw their fists were an inch away from contact. No one questioned the gesture - they were doing it as a 'good job' cheer to their respective best friends.

And since Adrien and Marinette were friends, and at the same time accomplices, then why not?

"Bien joue."

Unbeknownst to all, Ladybug and Chat Noir's civilian selves made a fist bump.

They were walking towards their bus when Adrien's phone vibrated. The humor was back when he saw Nino's caller ID.

"He's requesting a video call." the model told her companion, then hit the Accept key.

Marinette might not be visible on the cam, but she could see the horror on the other line's face.

"Who are you and what did you do to my best friend?!"

"Relax, Nino. It's me." Adrien rolled his eyes, then gestured Marinette to join the conversation.

"Hello, Nino. What's up?"

"Waah! Wa - wait, is that Marinette?"

"Who?"

Alya's head appeared on the screen, with squinted eyes upon seeing their appearances.

"Did the two of you went to a bar or something?"

"No, and even if we're on a legal age, we didn't" the designer replied. "Something came up here so we need to wear a disguise."

"Some people get a whiff about the mysterious Parisian Couple?"

Adrien and Marinette groaned in unison "We're not a couple."

Their best friends didn't make further comments, but their shared looks speak volumes.

"So, when are we expecting you guys to join us?" Nino asked. "We're approaching Rouen."
"Probably an hour or two, right Marinette?"

"Ri - right," she answered, then froze upon entering the bus.

The model was behind her tracks and gaped at the empty seats.

"Erm, Earth to Adrien?"

"I'm sorry, Nino, but that'll take us more than that." he uttered while following Marinette as she rushed outside for inquiries.

It didn't take them long enough to learn that their bus got some engine problems because of a sabotage, and while the perpetrator was still at large, the bus liner sent a substitute vehicle...and left a minute ago.

When the two asked about riding the next bus, they got negative answers. The probability of being a chance passenger was low due to peak season.

And about their sabotaged ride? It will be stowed somewhere for mechanical repairs.

Both Adrien and Marinette stared each other again with a horrible realization.

The two were left behind. Again.

Chapter End Notes

Detroit Metal City (or DMC for short) is a manga revolving around a singer who has a double personality. Johannes Krauser II is his pseudonymn. If you want to imagine Adrien's image, picture this: https://goo.gl/J9r7kB
Walking in an empty roadway around noon was the least among the things the teenagers wanted to do on their summer getaway.

"Why do I have a feeling that Paris loves us so much that we're not allowed to leave the place at all?" said by Marinette aka Ladybug, a beloved Parisian superhero and an idol by many.

"It might be because we woke up on a wrong side of the bed, or probably our stars predicted that today is not an ideal for us to travel." replied by Adrien aka Chat Noir, also a secret Parisian superhero well-known for his bad luck.

The designer snorted "There's no such thing like that, even if you consult a Feng Shui expert."

"Says by a Chinese girl who doesn't know how to speak basic Mandarin."

"Shut up." was her grouchy reply.

The model chuckled then gave a heavy sigh. His companion sighed too, especially in their current situation.

It was expected that the temperature would hit around 27°C minimum that day, which considered as typical for a French's summer, so both knew that the heat wave they were experiencing falls around that range.

They didn't have hats or umbrella to shield themselves from the direct sunlight, so they used their spare clothing - white shirt for him, black blazer for her - to cover their heads instead.

Each has a mineral water bottle they purchased before they left the store, which almost half-empty since a portion of it were used to remove their makeups. Their attires were returned to normal as they discarded the enhancements and accessories to someplace else.

"I think we've scared them enough." Adrien huffed as he wiped the trickling sweat from his forehead. "That they gave us wrong instructions."

"Or they assumed we're vigilantes, trying to rob a bank or an establishment God knows where. As if there's such a thing exists in the middle of nowhere."

He pursed a smile. After years of being friends with Marinette, he learned that the pig-tailed girl - though he unknowingly intimidated her most of the time - would break out from her shell once the situation demands it, reminding him of someone who became sassy once pressured.

Ladybug.

"Too bad we didn't give those people a benefit of a doubt, or rely on our GPS to check if there's actually another bus stop nearby."

"There's still no signal here, and my battery's on low," she responded after checking her phone for the seventh time then turned it off. "And besides, we're not that judgmental. We're also not stupid to see if they mislead us."

"So that means we're either on a right track, or we just followed the 'long cut'"

"If only we asked if their interpretation of nearby was similar to our vocabulary."
He cringed at the idea. "Don't tell me we'll be walking miles here under the heat of the sun."

"C'mon, let's try to enjoy the scenery, especially those empty green fields that you normally see in the countryside," she said sarcastically. "Wild animals on the side, fresh air billowing on our faces..."

"Add a Cowboy Theme music in our background and everything feels like we're in a middle of nowhere"

Both sighed again as they continued walking.

They couldn't get any available seats back in the stopover so they took their chances when one of the bus crews mentioned about a terminal for tourist and rental vehicles nearby.

And that nearby was still out of sight after road trekking for almost half an hour.

"Adrien?"

"Hmm?"

"You think we're...you know." her voice wavered a bit. "What if we're -"

"No!" he interrupted with a whimper. "Please don't say that four-letter word that starts with L!"

She bit her chapped lips to control her grin. "I'm not planning to say that L-word."

"You better not, because I refused to accept that we're...L! No! Never!"

"But what if we're actually...L?" she teased.

She couldn't help but be reminded of a certain Kitty who was whining during Jackady's attack.

"Hmm...show some leg?"

Marinette burst out laughing when Adrien wiggled his brows then flaunted his leg on the side of a deserted road with a jerked thumb pose as if waiting for a hitchhike.

He may not know it, but he was the dorkiest guy she ever known next to Chat Noir.

"Isn't it more effective if you show them some face instead?" she teased again as they went on to their tracks.

"Then our efforts of running away from that mob assault will be futile."

"Point taken," the designer wondered with a groan. "I don't think going back to Paris would be a better option."

"We do that," her companion smirked. "And this time, both of us will be swamped by media."

A grunt escaped from her mouth upon realization. "And I gave my word to Miss Bustier. And Alya. Crap."

"Natalie didn't contact me yet, so maybe Monsieur Antoine pulled a rank to block the news?" the model said as he checked his phone for the last time before turning it off to conserve battery.

"Better to be safe than sorry."

Though Marinette was greatly concerned about her parents discovering the news, the anxiety she felt
was milder compared to her worries towards her classmate and his father.

Business-wise, the blond model's involvement was a good PR for the company, but that doesn't mean it would be interpreted as positive by a mogul person like Gabriel Agreste.

She only idolized the man for his creativity, nothing more.

"I'm sorry about this mess. I should be more careful in public places." Adrien apologized with eyes on his feet.

"I didn't blame you." was her casual response. "And I understand your situation, being famous and all."

"And that's something I'm not proud of."

Marinette hummed then emptied her bottle. "If by telling you that I'm the one behind the sabotage, will that lessen your guilt?"

He paused for a moment then looked at her red, freckled face - got distracted a moment there - and asked: "How?"

"I stuffed a cardboard ball in the exhaust pipe."

This raised his brow. "Why am I not surprised?"

She gaped at his bemused expression. She was flustered not because of the scorching heat, but because of her embarrassment.

"I didn't mean to offend you." he sniggered when she suddenly caved in. "We're accomplices, remember?"

The girl nodded as she looked on the mirage projected by the dusty road. "Toilets aside, I think I'm going to have nightmares about buses."

He followed her gaze then observed the blurry images caused by the heat emitted from the concrete road. "And here I am experiencing what L people had in the desert."

"Heat stroke?"

"No." he gulped. "Hallucinations."

Marinette was feeling dizzy, but upon hearing Adrien's words perked her attention. She squinted her eyes then wiped the sweat that dripped from her brows. She looked at the Mirage again.

"Now I'm seeing a vehicle instead of an oasis."

"That's because a minivan is our oasis."

"Replacing the desire of water into a small green van?"

"With an open hood?" he supplied.

"And a floral design on its sides?" she giggled on their matching descriptions. "Funny how your imagination coincides mine."

"True. As if we're seeing the same picture..."
Both stopped in their tracks when a realization finally dawned on them. They looked at each other's faces, and after sensing a mutual agreement, they ran towards the imagery.

It was real.

Two people gradually emerged from their vision - a male standing outside the driver's seat and a female inside the vehicle near the window. Upon further inspection, they found out that it was actually a campervan.

The male and the female were quite preoccupied with their debate to notice their presence.

"Didn't I tell you to have a mechanic check it a week ago, Sean?!" the female bewailed.

"But Maman," the male named Sean replied with a huff. "I bought this to Uncle Jack three days ago, and he told me the engine works fine!"

"Your Uncle Jack is nothing but a liar! He doesn't even know how to fix his own damn tie and now he's expert on cars?!"

"Maman, your blood pressure." he reminded her. "I might end up rushing you to the hospital instead and we'll both miss Gwen's wedding."

"You can't even make this stupid thing move and now you're thinking of rushing me to the hospital?!" his furious mother spat out. "We're supposed to be in Argentan by now, and you know we can't miss the wedding!"

"If only you let Rupert take that gown to Madame Evlyn -"

"If letting the Groom see his Bride a day before their wedding is a bad omen, how about him seeing the wedding gown itself on -"

"That's baloney." Sean rolled his eyes. "If we can't give it to Gwen, then let her wear anything. Or just cancel the wedding."

"Sean!"

Marinette interrupted them with a hum, which eventually caught their attention.

"I'm sorry if we heard your discussion." Adrien apologized shyly. "It's not our intention to listen, but it seems that you're also stuck here."

Sean ogled at the two then looked at them for a vehicle but found none.

"We missed our ride." the raven-haired explained, but her focus was on the sniffling woman who was clutching a tulle. "We've been informed that there's a private bus transport somewhere around here."

"I'm sorry but we're not really familiar with this area." the man replied then flinched when his Maman groaned. "And I haven't seen any public vehicles passing this road ever since we got here."

The teenagers stiffed. They felt like their fates have been sealed up already, especially with the man's follow-up question:

"Are you two lost or something?"
The taboo L-word has been dropped unceremoniously, and Adrien had to muster his strength not to cry.

Sean noticed their crestfallen expression. "I don't know how to help you two, or you in mine since we're also in the middle of nowhere."

By hook or by crook, Marinette refused to do walkathons anymore.

"What if we can fix - "

"What if we can fix your van?" her companion finished her words.

"What?!" the three chorused, loudest was from Marinette's.

"I've been into several car engine failures, and my teacher was a grumpy driver." the blond said then gave his companion a wink, making her blushed more. "So, hitchhiking?"

She knew that Adrien was an epitome of perfection, so she didn't question his abilities. If he didn't volunteer himself, she might have taken his position by summoning a Lucky Charm.

The idea didn't occur to her until Tikki suggested it.

The poor kwami couldn't take the heat any longer, especially that she was inside her purse with a temperature akin to an oven.

*This is an emergency situation, Tikki moaned subtly. It's killing me.*

There was no question about transformation since Tikki consumed the last batch of cookies. The hurdles would be the place where Ladybug could call the Lucky Charm discreetly, and Marinette's alibi on how she got the item.

Her kwami might know how to counter those issues, but at least she was thankful that her idea became a backup.

"Where's your destination?" Sean asked them.

When the teenagers told him the list of possible places that they can be dropped off, the mother and son gave them a grim look.

"I'm sorry, but the places you two mentioned were out of our way." the man told them. "We have to go to Anet first before we enter Orne. You see, we have a wedding gown to be repaired there, and the Bride needs to have it before six today."

Marinette saw a glimpse of unaligned decors near the bodice. Seems minor to her, but she couldn't tell it without seeing the overalls.

She may or may not confident about it, but she has to do something.

"I think." the designer finally spoke then pointed the tulle. "I can fix that gown."

"Are you sure?" this time it was the mother who asked.

Good question.

Before Marinette could say something, two large hands fell on her shoulders.
"You got lucky." Adrien gave them a Chat-esque grin. "Because you're currently talking to one of the best junior designers in France."
"Let me see what we can do here" Adrien murmured while opening the van's hood, only to be greeted by a very hot smoke.

Plagg was unfortunate though - he was hiding inside his charger's collar so he inhaled most of it. Gagging, he poked his charger's flesh with his sharp nail out of spite.

The blond yelped in then hissed as he rubbed the painful spot and at the same time, squished the vengeful kwami.

Sean immediately rushed to his side "Are you alright?"

"Ye-yeah," Adrien answered. He tightened a white cloth on his head like a bandana, rolled his dark shirt's sleeves then began to work.

Marinette was inside the van, unable to remove her gaze from the side mirror which showed her the reflection of a certain hot specimen, with bulging biceps as he held a spanner. The sweat that was trickling on his brows, the scorching heat that contacted his tanned skin, and the steady eyes that were looking for answers was quite a delicious sight.

"You're salivating," the older woman said in a hushed voice which jolted the designer.

"Wa - I'm so -"

"It's alright. Can't blame you," the woman chuckled. "When I was young, I also drooled on guys like him. And that's how I met my Donald."

"Really?" the teenager's face lit up.

"Yeah. He's also a damn cute blond with a sculpted face and body like a god." the woman reminisced. "Too bad he died in his thirties."

"Oh. I'm sorry to hear that."

She laughed. "Oh, don't be sorry for him! He's not a keeper actually, and our marriage was one of my biggest regrets. That dope was a womanizer and a beater. I'm happy he conked before he entered the hospital."

"Oh." was the teenager's reply.

"But your man is more like my Bobby." the woman sighed.

"Your second husband?"

"Who's the second husband?"

The girl paled upon realizing her mistake. "I - I'm so so-sorry. I assumed he's..."

"He's my third husband." the woman stated, which made the girl cough.
Marinette didn't want to know Sean's father anymore and felt ridiculous to let the topic continue.

She began pulling out the tulle from the big box, revealing a cream-colored wedding gown. She noted the tattered eye-button stitches near the bodice and the pinned folds above the torso, probably an adjustment fit for the bearer.

"I didn't get to wear this because of my fractious youth, but I wish my daughter will be able to." the mother gave her a wistful smile. "Call me a superstitious lady, but all I want is nothing but her happiness."

"Oh."

The designer warmed upon hearing her words.

She trailed the gown's hemlines like a precious gem. Her hand stopped when she felt an embroidered signature, and when she flipped it over by her hand, her heart followed.

"Madame." she gulped audibly. "This gown came from Maison Perri's House?"

"I believe so. This dress has been passed down for centuries beginning from my maternal great-grandmother, so probably yes. I've heard it was made by a famous couturier in Normandy."

"John Palou!" the teenager gushed. "I'm holding one of John Palou's first works!"

"A big-shot?"

"Not just a big-shot. He's an all-time famous designer, not only in France but also around the world!"

"Hmm. No wonder Madame Evlyn was very possessive on this." the woman hummed matter-of-factly. "So, does that mean you can't mend it?"

Bluebell eyes bore her a stoic look. "Of course. It's my pleasure to fix this legendary dress."

"You bet you can?"

"I bet she can." a voice interjected.

Marinette squeaked when Adrien slipped into the driver's seat. He was eyeing them from the rear mirror with a smug. On his left cheek was a smudge of grease, something that the designer couldn't help but adore.

His movement was so silent like a cat that nobody noticed his presence until he announced it.

"Oh really?" the elder woman crossed her arms. "How about you? Do you think you can fix this van?"

"What's the catch?" the female teenager challenged.

"Sean will drop you two off to Evreux." the woman declared. "While I will handle your lunch."

"There goes my motivation."

"Consider your bet to be done, Madame." the blond smirked then turned the ignition on as the engine roared to life. "Because we just earned our ride."
Just like the derby hat Marinette won when she was thirteen, altering a vintage gown was a piece of cake.

She might have confidence issues, but not even once she backed out if the situation demands it - to the point wherein no one could stop her.

Not even Adrien.

"Hey, Marinette?" he called her. "Food's here."

She hummed as a reply.

The campervan was spacious enough for four persons but the young girl settled herself in the back compartment. Though the road wasn't bumpy and Sean was driving at a normal speed, the blond couldn't help but be concerned that his classmate might stab herself with needles.

Adrien already cleaned himself and helped the hosts in their food preparation, but his companion was still glued at one spot.

He could've sworn their stomachs grumbled together, but she's didn't balk for a short break.

No wonder she was always late during class; because nothing exists once she entered the 'zone'.

Seeing her blue staid eyes as she stitched knots with precision was a fascinating sight, almost equal to those stolen glimpses he had made whenever she glazed on her sketchbook, with a tongue slicked out as she cut the thread after finishing the hem.

He shouldn't let himself be distracted.

"It's almost two," he called her again.

"I know." the designer answered without tearing her gaze off from the cloth.

Her attitude somewhat irked him.

He was aware of her time limit, and as a person who grew up with a schedule, he perfectly understands the dilemma - as well as a desire to rest.

The billowing aroma of Cassoulet from the table was not enough to bait her.

"A break won't hurt," he called her for the third time.

"You can eat first, Adrien. I'll follow later."

The elder woman saw the hesitation in his eyes. "Pause for a moment there, Missy. Don't let your food turns cold."

"I'm not hungry yet."
Yes, you are, Adrien wanted to say but didn't. At that point, he knew it would be difficult to bend a hard-headed princess.

Resorting to a new tactic, the blond began to fill his plate then walked towards her with a sigh.

"Marinette."

There was something on his tone that made the designer's head twitch. She faced him with a prepared complaint but didn't expect that her mouth would meet a spoonful of meat.

It must be her hunger's reflex, or his accurate shove when her mouth formed an 'O' that made her gobble it whole.

"Delicious?"

"...

Adrien made sure that the food was not too hot for her, so why was it that her face became so red? Was the food spicy?

He pulled the spoon out from her mouth then used it to sample the food for himself. He frowned. Definitely not spicy.

He scooped for another one, blew off the steam then offered it to her again but her mouth was still full.

"Try chewing it."

She complied.

"Then swallow it."

She gulped.

"Good girl." was his praise as he fed her again then scooped another spoonful for himself. "Want some another helping?"

And that was how he realized his mistake.

Adrien dropped the spoon.

"Oh. Oh. Oh my God! I - I'm sorry! I didn't mean to meddle in your affairs! I should've asked you first!" he stammered with a flushed face just enough to beat the blazing sun.

No wonder Ladybug scolded him about his lack of awareness towards personal space.

He got an indirect kiss with Marinette and he initiated it! And he did it twice!

Poor girl she couldn't raise her head to look at her frantic crush, so she focused on her sewing task instead with a beet-red face, only to stab her finger.

She squawked, and with an ounce of sanity left, she jerked her finger out from the dress just to avoid staining it with blood.

"Give me that plate, young man." the woman leered. "So you can treat your girlfriend's wound."
"I'm not his girlfriend!"

"She's not my girlfriend!"

Both teenagers answered in unison with matching red faces, though at least one of them felt a pang of disappointment.

"Uh-huh. Though I don't think her boyfriend would like the idea that some guy was holding her hand that way."

And that was how Marinette realized that Adrien was cradling her injured hand.

Both scrambled away.

"I..."

"Uh..."

The designer shoots up then awkwardly walked towards the lavatory.

"I don't have a boyfriend," she grumbled under her breath, unaware that the occupants heard her.

Sean patted Adrien's shoulder much to the blond's embarrassment, especially when he whispered: "You got a chance."

The model's burning face went twenty shades darker "I - I don't -"

"Yeah, yeah. And that was how I popped my Sean when I was eighteen."

"Maman." said son chided but with pure delight. "They're too good for this world. Too pure."

Chapter End Notes

John Palou was inspired from Jean Patou, a couturier born in Normandy.
Eating apple tarts is one of the must-to-do things a tourist should do in Normandy.

That's why Adrien helped himself for a second slice of the said caramelized pastry as he sat on the van's roof deck. A large picnic umbrella was unfolded there to shield himself from the unbearable heat but failed to filter the wind that wafted around his body.

Not that he was complaining; the warm scent of the northern countryside was quite refreshing.

And the reason why he was outside was due to the oozing richness of melted Camembert on his saucer plate - which was also one of the things Normandy was renowned for.

If not for the kind elderly Maman, the model would gag upon getting a slice of the said stinky cheese.

She told him that Camembert cheese complemented well with apples - and she was actually right, but he refused to admit it because it would be the same as embracing Plagg's religion. He decided to hand the entire plate to his kwami instead.

Hence why they were on top of a running van.

"Oh boy, admit it. Admit it." Plagg teased with a smudge of whiteness around his mouth, and that sight made him looked like a cat that lapped some milk. "You love Camembert."

"Our feelings aren't mutual." he snorted.

The small god rolled his eyes then licked the saucer. "You know, I can scratch you for rejecting my Princess."

"Now you're calling Camembert your Princess?!"

"Why not?" he shrugged. "You're not the only one who has a Princess that's simple, goody and packed with interesting flavors."

This time it was Adrien who rolled his eyes. "I might swat you for associating Marinette with cheese."

"I never said that your Princess is like a Camembert." his kwami sneered. "One that's with you almost every day. One that you always see, touch and smell - and I can attest that - almost every day. One that you know it's good but you're still an ass to say it's not. But then again, the Nile isn't just a river in Egypt."

His charger scowled and about to spat something out but the sudden opening of the vent window jolted the two.

Plagg immediately flew towards the blond's chest pocket before the pig-tailed girl popped her head out.

"Oh. You're here." Marinette beamed as she eyed the remaining rind on his saucer. "There's no need for you to get rid of the smell. It's not that stinky."

"It's not like that," he answered, trying to control himself not to swat his laughing kwami. "I'm here to enjoy the view."
"Seeing something good?"

Adrien turned and looked straight ahead, not only to hide his guilty red face but also to distract himself before he got enamored by her freckles. "Uhm. Yeah."

The cluttering noises made him look back again, only to realize that Marinette was trying to climb up and join him. He had to extend his arms to pull her weight up, and since the area was small and the fact that the van was moving, she was cramped beside him. Both ended up shoulder-to-shoulder.

The teens were unsure if they were sweating because of the summer heat, or because of the closeness of their warm bodies.

"So." he coughed, breaking the reverie. "You're done with the gown?"

"Yes. All set." she stretched her arms, untying the muscle knots that constructed her back. "Not that complicated actually, and I'm proud that I was able to beautify one of Palou's legacy."

Adrien might be a fashion model and an heir of one of the houses that ruled the Haute Couture kingdom, his knowledge on the field was limited to understand some of Marinette's gushing.

"How's your wound?" he asked.

"Wound? Oh, you mean the finger I pricked? No, there's no cut whatsoever. See?"

She wiggled her fingers on his face, only to be grabbed gently by his hand.

"Oh. You got some callous."

"Blame needlework." she flustered when he ran his thumb over her fingertips until she felt some rough skin patches. "Hey, you got some callous too."

He let her trace her fingers to his. "Oh. Blame the heavy piano keys. And also my teacher's ruler whenever I hit off keys."

She gave him a beady glare on his pun. "And I guess your practice makes you perfect."

"I'm not perfect. I'm..."

He paused. The hitch on his voice followed by a deep sigh caught her attention.

"Adrien, are you alright?" she asked.

He simply shrugged his shoulders. "I'm just being ridiculous. Nothing to worry about."

"Try me."

The blond shook his head. How he wished Marinette didn't have that heedful radar or a mind-reading talent, but her presence was so comforting he liked it.

"This will be the last time we will get to enjoy our Lycée days," he confessed. "Afterwards, we'll be busy with exams again, university applications, career evaluations, and internships. I'm jealous."

"With what?"

"With who." he corrected her with a smile. "People like you. Like Nino. Like Alya. Friends that have goals they would like to reach. Something that I don't."
It was a common knowledge among friends how Adrien grew up under his father's control and how he lived his life with schedules created by others.

He might be a sheltered boy, but Marinette knew he has the capacity to control his own fate.

He was able to step out towards independence when Gabriel Agreste gave his permission to let him study in a public school. Another step was gaining freedom of choosing friends.

And if this melancholic golden boy was able to unclasp those heavy reins off by himself, then him deciding his own future career was not that far-fetched.

"Status aside, we're not multi-talented like you. You can play the piano. You fence. You speak Chinese, or probably other languages as well. You excel on numbers." she told him as she followed his gaze on the concrete road. "You have a broader scope and more options than us."

"Jack of all trades." he quoted her. "But a master of none."

Marinette shook her head. "I don't think they're all useless, Adrien. Those are your alternatives, an expansion of your life choices - something that Alya, Nino and I wished to have. We might have a dream, but we'll be a lost cause once we failed it. We have a passion, yes, but we didn't know if we'll succeed on it someday. We don't know anything outside of our area. Worse, we might end up with nobody."

He grimaced "That's so...morbid, coming from your mouth."

"I'm not sure about Alya and Nino - but in my case, I don't know if I will be a designer someday." the girl continued. "I don't even know if I will survive the hardships of becoming a designer. Or if I'll be able to live once I failed to become a designer. Because being a fashion designer is my only life choice."

"A choice with passion," he stated then rubbed her fingers again. "That's why your hands are calloused - an evidence of your hard work."

"How about yours? Do those mean nothing to you?"

Her question perked his brows. "I won't get them if those tasks were not shoved to me."

"So that means you're doing those out of obligation?"

"Initially. Probably yes." he considered with a wistful smile. "But that doesn't mean I hate doing it. I mean, I enjoyed playing the piano. Same with fencing. Same with modeling."

"But you don't like being reprimanded."

He nodded.

"You see..." she sighed, still focusing on the road. "Just because you don't have a choice means that you'll never love it in due time."

"Is that coming from a personal experience?"

She nodded.

Marinette couldn't tell him the story behind it, and the silence that hung between them had him understood that he shouldn't pry her more about it.
Being Ladybug was a secret, and the tales behind her struggles were something that could only be shared with her kwami and her diary.

Marinette didn't want to bear the Miraculous. She refused to accept it at first, and completely rejected it when she failed to eliminate Stoneheart. But when her best friend was in a grave danger, she immediately jumped into her spotted suit and declared her war against Hawkmoth.

If not due to the demands of the situation, she would never discover the joys of heroism and selflessness.

"I think..." the girl broke their solemn atmosphere. "Going with the flow doesn't sound so bad at all."

Adrien was starting to believe her.

Though he was pitched on a spot without any choices, Chat Noir was given a chance to reject his call. But he didn't. He immediately embraced the Miraculous without any doubts.

He got his freedom. Freedom to save the lives of many.

"I guess I'm overthinking about things." he bemused. "Graduation makes you queasy about the future."

"I still can't see myself five years from now." she chuckled.

"Likewise."

"Glad to know I'm not alone."

"Thanks, Marinette." he grinned as he looked at her relaxed expression. "How can I show you my gratitude for being my wonderful friend?"

"Why don't you play the piano for me?"

"Hmm. Not a bad bargain."

And the two sealed it with a fist bump.

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They finally reached Evreux' borders.

"Thank you for sending us all the way here," Marinette said as she held a hand with Sean then moved towards his mother.

Adrien copied the same gesture, but with an earned pat from the driver.

"An additional hour won't hurt." Sean shrugged. "You fixing my sister's wedding gown saved us a trip, plus Adrien on our vehicle. We'll be able to reach Argentan before six."

"Why don't you two come with us instead? School trips are boring anyways." the elderly woman
"As much as we would like to," Adrien replied, eyeing his beaming companion. "But we can't afford a failing grade."

"Are you sure you two are not eloping?"

Her words gave the teenagers a tremendous blush.

"Erm -"

"Urk -"

"Maman!" the son scolded his snickering mother. "Don't corrupt the minds of these innocent children!"

"Hmph, those two are sickeningly sweet like a cinnamon roll. It won't take much time for that boy to pounce her like there's no tomorrow - and it'll be miraculous if they can move out for a day. Bet a hundred on that."

That didn't help Adrien and Marinette's already-awkward atmosphere to the point that they couldn't look at each other's flustered faces.

Sean pitied their dilemma. "Don't mind my mother's teasing. She's been like that since forever. Loves to egg people and hit a nerve."

"Uh, it's o - okay. It's not that I hate it - or hate it - or I don't want it. As if I like it. But I really have to - not that it's starting to get awkward. Gah!"

"...what Marinette means is." the blond interrupted her companion's incoherent babbles. "That we're thankful for your hospitality."

It was a random reply, but at least that shifted the topic into something else.

"Oh, well. I guess this is a goodbye." the man finally said. "From here you can wait for a transport going to Saint-Clair. It normally passes Pont Audemer, but if not you can just hire a cab once you reached the terminal. Or just call your hotel for instructions how to get there."

The two gave their saviors a hug for the last time then waved a hand once their campervan left.

Marinette immediately pulled her phone out to send a brief message to Alya. "I think it's safe to assume that we can reach our destination before the end of this day."

"Of course. We're at Normandy now." Adrien said as he read the bus schedules posted on the waiting shed. "And if luck's on our side, then we'll be getting our ride in less than an hour."

"I need to look out for any Agreste fans, so we can deck them out."
"Don't speak for the devil, or else he'll come."

It was a silent town, but not eerie enough to compare with those featured in horror films. No passersby, no fellow travelers - but understandable considering that they were on a service road under a blazing afternoon sun.

Behind them was an old pub with an 'open' signage.

Marinette noticed that her phone's battery was almost 10%, and even though it was enough to handle less than two calls, she wanted to kick an additional 10% for possible emergencies. After all the troubles that they've encountered, she was starting to expect the unexpected.

"Do you think they have a charger port there?" she asked as she jerked a thumb towards the pub.

"It won't hurt if we check inside. Or ask if they can spare us a charger," he replied with a thought. "I'm also down to 15%, and I'm in my Battery Saver mode."

"I'll go inside while you wait here."

"No, we'll go together."

Her brows rose up on his interjections.

"Marinette." he huffed. "That's a liquor house."

"But it's four in the afternoon." she reasoned out.

"Not an excuse for a drunkard."

She scowled at his words. "Fine! But don't blame me if we'll miss our ride again."

"Two great talkers will not travel far together," he answered with a smirk

Unbeknownst to them, three pairs of desirous eyes were looming towards the raven-haired girl, trailing her figure like dogs in a heat. The anticipation hit them like a truck as she pushed the door and entered inside.

Thankfully, she didn't miss their beat.

Especially when one of them gave a wolf's whistle.
Chapter 11

A pair of blue and green eyes glowered towards the approaching man then hovered behind him where his two companions stayed. It didn't take much time for the teenagers to know that these strangers were bad news.

"Hi, Missy." the burly man greeted her with a wink. "Fancy meeting you here."

Adrien stepped forward but Marinette beat him first. There's no need for her to see his facial expression to know that he was pissed off with the man, and more when she blocked his way.

"Mari -"

"I didn't expect to receive such...reception from you, Monsieur," she responded to the man with a fake smile while nudging her companion to stop.

Creating another scenario was the last thing she wanted to do there.

However, Adrien didn't get her subtle warnings. She felt his hands stiffed on her shoulders, and when he insistently pushed himself forward, she was left with no choice but to whirl around...

...and tried not to flinch when she saw his green eyes darkened with slit-like pupils that rabidly locked on his prey.

"Why don't you check the counter and inquire for some spare chargers?" she told him, trying not to wince when he bolted her some dagger looks.

"What?!"

"Adrien, we need to charge our phone," she emphasized. "And our friends here want to have a chit-chat. You won't mind, right?"

Of course, he'd mind.

He didn't like those people ogling his friend like hungry wolves, and he would be more than happy to snap each of their bones like chicken drumsticks.

However, his sweet, kind, and thoughtful friend have other ideas, and he didn't like it. The suggestive murmurs from the audience didn't help him either.

Crossing his arms, he hissed "I'm not leaving."

"Who says you're leaving?" she replied warmly but with stoic eyes. "I thought you'll be checking the counter."

He's Chat Noir, damn it, and he was supposed to be on the front lines!

But then, Marinette wasn't Ladybug to know his abilities, thus he was left with no choice but to suck it up.

Adrien walked an earshot away to the counter where a perturbed owner was observing the scene. He did ask him for a charger, but with a hushed inquiry about the catcalling trio.

"What a way to manhandle your boyfriend." one of the men snickered.
"He's just considerate." the designer countered as she mustered herself not to punch his ugly face.

Not that she didn't want to clarify their misconceptions about their relationship; she didn't want to involve Adrien on a possible brawl after she led him away from the danger.

She believed that her classmate was quite capable of protecting himself. She was touched that he actually defended her, but he was outnumbered and the men were twice of his size.

Unlike him, she has an alter-ego who slug giant and feisty Akumas for breakfast.

Which was why these three burly and stinky drunkards were nothing to her, even without the aid of her Miraculous.

Pulling her superheroine's sassy confidence, Marinette asked the leader. "So...what are we talking about?"

"Uh. Oh yeah." he cleared his throat. "My friends and I would like to invite a lady like you for a drink. My treat."

The designer raised her brows, unmoved, and her apathetic gesture made the other follower tapped his leader's shoulder for a whisper. She was a bit impressed that these guys were sober enough to read signs.

"Oh, geez. My bad. I forgot to introduce myself. I'm Peter Debre, and these are my buddies Leon and Olivier. I believe you've heard my name."

"I haven't."

Peter clicked his tongue. "Maybe because you're not a local here, that's why. Lucky that you're in the presence of a Councilor's son, Miss Beautiful, whom I doubt has a name."

Her clenched fist that she hid behind her back turned into white as she suppressed her anger, especially with the knowledge that there was a filthy rich brat who would flaunt his parent's political reputations to shame. She almost lost her cool when the said brat grabbed her hand and blew a stinky mouth smell. She stopped him by palming the guy's face with a push before he could plant a kiss.

"I believe beauty." she huffed. "Is in the eye of the beer holder."

Instead of being offended, the trio only laughed like it was a ludicrous joke. When she managed to slip her hand from his grasp, the damned guy was spruced enough to grab it again and became insistent to blow a kiss.

"We should make a beer commercial." he teased. "'Coz it sounds simply intoxicating."

Her jaw slacked with mortification. This lowly drunkard brat just flirted with her with a horrible pick-up line!

Even horrible than Chat Noir's!

Well, Marinette thought for a second, at least her poor kitten was cute and creative enough to invent puns and pick-up lines that doesn't sound boring and repetitive even on insane ears.

*Unlike these guys...*

The girl smirked devilishly and realized that she could manhandle her second-rate flirter without breaking a sweat.
"Listen up, guys." she began.

Adrien was still fuming, though unreadable, despite the fact that Marinette handled the troubles in a very civilized manner.

Such scene was a reminder that his clumsy, charming and cute friend was good at dealing with her stuff, but never expected that 'animal taming' was one of her repertoires.

Chat Noir must be wary of his Princess' prowess.

A cold glass was nudged on his knuckle, and when he looked up, he met the pub owner's thin smile.

"It's just a pineapple cocktail. In the house." the owner told the model when he refused the drink then glanced at his companion. "Your girlfriend there knows how to handle her fight, eh?"

Correcting him would be futile, so the boy shrugged the idea. "I might hold her coat when things get bloody."

"Be careful with the bodyguards. They're police officers, and they can arrest anyone here in just a snap."

Adrien fervently gripped the glass then gulped half of the contents before he could slam and shatter it out of anger. The superhero in him considered bad cops and corrupt officials as a disgrace to society, much worse than Papillion who only targeted their Miraculous for certain reasons.

These scums only raised his interest in hearing the sound of their bones being snapped and pulverized by his hand.

"Oh, they're backing out." the owner's hushed words obstructed his evil thoughts.

He was mildly surprised when the tide was turned, unlike the rest who held their breaths anxiously from the time the teens were approached by the three bourgeoisie.

At the corner of his eye, the model noticed how one of the customers near the bar table relaxed when one of the bodyguards stepped back. The pub owner noticed the changes as well and probably felt that the collective tension inside the establishment gradually dispersed. He felt he was safe to assume that property damages were ticked out from the list.

But superheroes knew better.

When Adrien saw a flick on one of the bodyguard's movement, he decided to thank his friend for putting him on the sidelines.
Marinette felt the shift in the air too as if she tasted the raw emotion there. She prepped herself before Tikki chirped a warning, but never expected that a pair of lean arms would stretch out above her head, and at the same time would pull her back to a familiar, sturdy chest.

"Time's up, Princess."

Her head immediately lashed out, with eyes popped wide open after hearing Adrien's off-handed comment.

If not for the situation, she might've ended up gooey on his endearing nickname, instead of being mad on his interruption.

She was supposed to block the man's arm, but her handsome, perfect and gentleman friend captured it like a sand viper.

"You're sup - "

"Relax, I did my job well - and I'm done with it." the model replied coolly as he twined his free arm on her upper body to dangle their phones.

She grabbed it vehemently.

Adrien averted his eyes from her burning glares. He didn't want her to presume that he was making fun of her heroism despite being a petite girl. He just wants to keep her safe.

His attention was entirely focused on their offenders.

"So the boyfriend's to the rescue, huh?" one of the men smirked.

Marinette groaned. She knew it'd be a pain to explain everything on a short notice.

"Well..." the blond chuckled darkly. "I don't see a problem with it."

Again, if not for the situation, she might've squealed with delight when he decided not to refute their words, instead of face-palming.

She was inclined to believe that their current predicament will become a running gag between their friends.

Her classmate was still clutching Olivier's wrist, and despite having a bigger and more muscular structure, the man couldn't wiggle himself out from the boy's bony grasps.

"Ah. I see." Peter seethed. "A Prince then, rescuing a damsel in distress."

"I'm not a damsel." the designer quipped. "And I'm not distressed."

"I beg to differ." her companion retorted. "Though I'd rather be her Knight with a hidden armor."

The man couldn't take the pain anymore. "Release me at once, you pussy twat! Or I'll knock your pretty face off."

Leon became defensive on behalf of his partner that he threw a punch squarely on Adrien's face. Much to their demise, the boy casually dodged and blocked it by his other hand.
The gaps between two obese, drunk men to a young, athletic and clear-headed boy - minus the fact that he was a cat superhero outside the leather - were unquestionably big.

Of course, the latter has an advantage in terms of power and dominance, and boy did he mind intimidating his enemies with it.

"I'll spare you for using a feline as an insult," Adrien growled. "But try to touch my girl, and I'll crush not only your bones to pieces but also claw your flesh alive. And savor each of your tortured screams until each of you would claim death."

It must be the model's ambidextrous nature that he twisted his assailants' wrists easily without breaking it. This made the bodyguards crouched and silently yelped in pain, and with teary eyes, the two nodded to agree.

If looks could kill, then Adrien's eyes literally possessed them.

Marinette never saw him that mad - or more like, murderous - before. The sight was quite new to her, and for some unknown reasons, she wasn't scared of him at all.

In fact, she was actually scared on behalf of their aggressors.

"Calm down," she warned him. "Don't make a mess here."

The designer knew about drunk's gutter-like minds, but once she was able to control their game, she could easily bend their will.

Which was why she resorted to a civilized talk. And even though it was inevitable to avoid being physical, she preferred to deal with it using her own way.

But when her calm and composed childhood crush jumped into the scene, she was forced to change her tactics.

Grabbing Peter's lapel, Marinette whispered. "I don't mind letting him do those things to you, Monsieur Debre. And I don't mind if I'll do it either. In fact, I'd be more than happy to hear you scream 'Daddy' until you start to believe that your life has been a lie."

The Councilor's son cowered on her menacing words. "Who - who are you?!"

"We're just Parisians who promote love and peace." was her reply.

And that was how the trio saw it - the intensity of her bluebell eyes and the vigilant on his electric green ones.

Dark hair with pigtails. Messy blond hair.

Small, curvy body. Tall, lean body.

French couple outside a mask.

Ladybug and Chat Noir in the flesh.

The teenagers noticed the paleness forming on their faces, with fish-like mouth bobbing and heads thrashing as if they just saw their ancestor's ghost.

Once released, the three stepped back, and without further ado, they swiftly rushed outside with red blood-shot eyes screaming bloody murder.
There was a pin-drop silence inside the pub as they watched Peter and his bodyguards scrambled to their vehicle and left. And when the coast was cleared, a loud cheer immediately erupted.

Adrien and Marinette were confounded then looked at each other with a similar question.

"What the hell?!"
Some said that true friendship was being measured by number of 'forgives' and 'forgets'.

But of course, it all started with 'fights'.

And currently, Adrien and Marinette were having that said predicament.

"I'm so not sorry." the blond muttered as he sat at the far end of the waiting shed's bench. "Not. At. All."

His back was facing the raven-haired girl who was also sitting at the opposite end of the bench.

Between them was a bag of salted pretzels - courtesy of the pub owner - which played as their mediator.

"So am I." his companion grumbled while munching. "Because it's not even my fault."

His head lashed towards her as he grabbed another handful of treats. "So it's my fault that your friendly talk went south?!"

"I didn't say that!" she spat out with another pretzel bite.

"You didn't - you implied it!"

"Look," she growled, but the person she was growling at was not even looking. "It has been established that brawls will never happen -"

"Not until I stepped out."

"- with or without you stepping out -" her hand fist some treats. "- at all! So don't rub your ego to me like I squashed it!"

This time he growled. "Is that your roundabout way of telling me I'm a misogynist?"

"You tell me."

"Look." he turned around then miffed when she rolled her eyes away.

Do all dark-haired petite girls have these temperamental issues?

"You're outnumbered," he told her.

"Remind me why we left Paris."

"Oh, I will - as well as that armed guy."

She might be the girl behind that sassy, brilliant and tactical heroine, but damn it, why do all male blonds with green eyes she acquainted with could be a devil's advocate?

After shoving the remaining food into her mouth, Marinette reached the paper bag out for some pretzels, only to bump Adrien's knuckles with hers.

Both were too pissed off at each other that they groveled a bag of treats like famished kids, and it took them seconds to realize that they were holding the last piece.
No one bulged when the other wiggled it out.

"Adrien."

"Marinette."

"Models need to regulate their food intakes, right?"

"And I thought girls need some diet."

"I'm a growing teenager."

"Really? Because I'm not seeing any difference."

His comment took her by surprise. The slight confusion gave him an advantage, so he yanked the pretzel off from her grasp.

"Why you - " she gasped then poked his trembling side harshly. "You cheated!"

Adrien broke a fitful of laughs. It was so hearty and contagious that made Marinette reminisced the boy with a black umbrella.

Back then they were having their first fight over a piece of chewing gum.

It was one of her fondest memories in collège. She was amazed how that socially-awkward boy transitioned into a man who still bore the same sparkles and smiles as if the time never changed between them.

And just like what he did years ago, he stretched his hand to give her his peace offering - not an umbrella this time but a broken piece of pretzel.

Her eyes wavered, staring at the item and then hovered to his sombered eyes. She reached for the pretzel, touched it, then took it.

"Truce?" he asked.

Such simplified word was expounded before, and honestly, she didn't mind it. He wasn't the only one who remained unchanged throughout the years.

"Truce."

Marinette accepted it.

That moment, she knew she was doomed to live in a land called Friendzone.

"But really." the designer chuckled, trying to brush off the depressing thought. "Those were nothing but second-rate catcallers. They should try harder next time."

Her words perked something inside him. She wasn't looking at Adrien to notice his stupefied face.

Wait a minute.

"By second-rate," he spoke carefully. "Does that mean you've experienced the first-rate one?"

It was an odd tone that Marinette couldn't tell whether it was a mockery or anger.

If she'll say yes, then he might think she's a player.
If she'll say no, then he might think she has no life to get involved in a relationship.

You're treading on a very thin line here, Marinette.

"Not that - that first-rate, you mean." she sputtered as she averted her gaze. "I mean, there's social media, and then Alya, and friends who joked some pick-up lines, and he's innovative in those areas that -"

"He?!

Where is that damn shovel when she needs it to dig a grave and bury herself?

"Is he from our school?!

"No, I don't think so," she told him without meeting his inquisitive glares.

The truth of the matter is, she got no clue if Chat Noir was even a student.

"He's just a friend, Adrien. Like a nice and harmless kitten."

"But kittens can bite."

She almost concurred but reminded herself not to say anything about it. Discussing her partner to her crush was the least topic she wanted to tackle with.

"He didn't mean anything like that. They're all empty words, really."

"You might not know..." he mumbled, remembering how Nathaniel got akumatized and why his best friend Nino once begged for his help.

Adrien could run a list of males who were smitten by her charms, and he bet that those who were outside their circle and unknown to him were twice as many as he could imagine.

It's normal to be protective of your friends, right?

"You shouldn't let him do his biddings, Marinette." he scowled. "Unless this...kitten of yours must be cute for you to reject his advances."

Adrien immediately regretted his words when she squeaked and blushed profusely.

"No! No - not like that!" the girl stammered. "Not like that – at all!"

The model felt his cold gut churned, and with his bottled fury he crunched the other piece of pretzel by his palm.

Damn him, whoever that guy who can make Marinette bloom like that!

"Erm, Adrien?" she piqued. "Your food..."

He finally noticed the tiny crumbs on his hand, and with a silent grudge towards the mysterious first-rate flirty kitten, he shoved it into his mouth.

Marinette might be oblivious, but she's not dense.

"Don't tell me you're...you're jealous?"

He choked.
She gawked.

It'd be damned if her off-handed comment was true.

"Gosh, are you alright? I don't have any water here. Let me go back inside to get a drink -"

"No." he coughed, sputtered with a head shake then grabbed her wrist. "Don't - don't leave. I'm o - okay now. Swallowed it...in a wrong manner."

"O - okay." she sighed then cautiously rubbed some circles on his back.

Her question was left unanswered, and thankfully, none of them dared to pry afterward.

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The arrival of the bus a minute later shifted their atmosphere into anticipation.

They finally got lucky. The bus wasn't loaded, and it was heading directly towards their destination.

"This is it." she grinned while her companion nodded giddily.

Once seated, Adrien pulled his phone out to send Nino some updates. He had it stayed off for hours, and now with a good cell reception, he wasn't surprised to receive numerous text messages, mainly from Chloe.

There were unknown numbers on his voicemails, surmised to be from his teachers or class deputies that he failed to phonebook, so he skipped it all then scrolled down, only to find a name he wanted to see the least.

Natalie.

He was about to open one of her voice messages when his companion made a low-pitched shriek.

"Marinette?" he asked when she flinched. "What's wrong?"

Her bluebell eyes were filled with anxiety, but before he could ask further, she showed him her phone screen.

Mr. Dupain-Cheng was calling.
Chapter 13

She got three possible reasons why her parents would call her even if they were preoccupied several miles away.

First scenario: "Hi Marinette, your Maman and I saw your name on the national news as the one who knocked a man out of his wits. It was an act of self-defense, but look what happened? You've been labeled as a wanted criminal. Also, you're grounded."

Second scenario: "Hi Marinette, your Maman and I received a call from Mr. Damocles that you ditched your school's field trip and told Ms. Bustier that you'll catch up with them, but look what happened? You even lied to us. Also, you're grounded."

Third scenario: "Hi Marinette, your Maman and I was informed by Mr. Agreste about you abducting his beloved son, promising him to be with your class before the end of the day, but look what happened? Now your name was banned in the fashion world. Also, you're grounded."

One way or another, for them to call her in an untimely situation would only mean bad news.

But she couldn't hang up with them, with or without a witness. They were her parents, whom she loved most and wouldn't trade for anyone in the world, and not answering their call was very disrespectful on her part. They didn't raise her to be an ingrate daughter.

Taking a deep breath, she pressed the Accept button.

"He-hello, Papa?"

"Hello, sweetie! How are you?" Tom's jolly voice boomed. "How did you find Normandy?"

"It's..." she trailed off while staring at the view outside the bus' window. She was technically in Normandy anyways. "Good. The place is great. I thought you'll be back by tomorrow?"

"I know, but we're on a break right now, and your Maman here is enjoying her mimosa."

She swore her Papa winked there.

"Anyways," she spoke immediately to abrupt his inquiries. "How's the convention?"

"Same as usual. Rowdy bakers and superior confectioneries." her father scoffed. "Your Maman is good at telling time than me, so I believe it's already five in the afternoon there."

"Quarter to five, to be exact."

"Oh, let me tell you that I'm in a speaker mode so she's currently listening to our conversation."

She gulped audibly. "That's...good to hear."

"Oh, can we do a video call?" he suggested. "Unless you're busy."

"Bus - busy?! No, no, I'm not in a bus, erm, I'm mean busy... Why would I be busy?" his daughter stuttered while mentally slapping herself.

"Besides." she went on. "Isn't this an international call?"
"This one is free with no service cost, don't worry," Sabine assured her.

Marinette could actually say no to them. She had lied to people several times since she became Ladybug, including her parents, so this could be one of the many.

But those lies were due to a selfless conduct. Her current situation was not even related to the superheroine or someone in trouble - well, only Marinette was the 'someone in trouble', but that was different - so she couldn't think of any valid excuses.

But then, lies, regardless if they are white or black, are considered to be a lie.

The designer glanced at her companion who was fidgeting on his seat.

Bless Adrien and his pure soul - he was supportive enough to cheer his totally screwed classmate who was about to be grilled over the phone in a few moments.

Praying silently, she clicked the video icon.

The screen's brightness adjusted a bit and showed two beaming adults in their formal attire, courtesy of Marinette, then lowered a little.

Their daughter was about to compliment something about their clothes but cut short by Sabine.

"What's wrong, honey?"

Either her parents were damn psychic, or her face gave it away.

"Maman, Papa..." she began cautiously. "There's something I need to tell you. I -"

"Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Dupain-Cheng!"

Marinette almost jumped when the model squeezed himself to show his presence in the camera. She didn't mean to exclude him from the video call; she didn't want him to receive the blame.

Adrien got worried about her reaction and felt like he was intruding when he joined their conversation, even though he knew he was simply an outside party.

But then, he has a fault that merits an apology.

"Oh, hi there Adrien! What a coincidence you're with our Mari." Tom smiled then glanced at his wife with a glint in their eyes.

No wonder their daughter was acting up that way.

"Yeah, he's with me." the said daughter remarked shyly. "Listen, I think we need to tell you first before you both hear it from someone else."

"And I would like to give an explanation as well." her companion quipped, which earned a scowl.

"You didn't do anything wrong, Adrien. I'm the one who instigated it."

"But I'm the one who aggravated it."

"If you're trying to do me a favor because of the defense I did with Miss Bustier, then consider it done."
"That's not it, Mari-"

"Kids?" Tom interrupted their garbled arguments. "Is this something that will make us mad?"

The teenagers went silent, followed by a groan on the other line.

"Marinette Dupain-Cheng, what's going on there?!"

"You - you see Papa... " she stammered, breaking a cold sweat. "Adrien and I did something out of the norm, and now we're -"

"I'm sorry for taking your daughter!"

CRASH!

Whether Sabine dropped her mimosa or crushed it by bare hands, Adrien didn't want to know.

He came out too strong and so wrong in an uncalled manner that the Dupain-Chengs' blood froze.

"Wa - wait! I didn't mean like that! Marinette is safe with me, and she's the one who takes care of me, but we just left unsupervised which made everything wrong!" he explained with panic.

"Do-don't tell me." the parent hitched. "You and my daughter did -"

"NO!" the two exclaimed in unison, almost shouted that the other passengers hissed at them for silence.

"No, Papa - just no. That's not what you think it is. Geez, give me some credit." Marinette abruptly said while Adrien made some sorry gestures around. "We're not with the class right now, but we're approaching Rouen so rest assured that we'll be joining the field trip."

"We got left behind when an Akuma attack broke, so I agreed with the plan of commuting to cut the chase," Adrien added. "But because of my public crowd issues, we got some delays."

"Miss Bustier knows about our whereabouts and Alya was pitching us their locations, so yeah, we can manage."

"I didn't mean to tie your daughter up with me." Wait, that sounds horribly wrong. "Or forced her to do something for me." Bad wording, Adrien! "What I'm saying is that she wants me to join the field trip since it'll be my first and last school outing before graduation. And I'm not sure if I'll be allowed to enter University."

Tom and Sabine gave an exasperated sigh then looked at the boy warmly. He didn't sense any pity in their eyes, even on Marinette's hand that lingered on his skin.

If he'll be given a chance to choose a family, he would definitely choose them.

"We understand, Adrien. And don't worry - we're not mad at you, or even with Marinette." Sabine's words calmed their wrecked nerves. "We are proud that she's considerate of her friend. But we might appreciate if she informed us beforehand, not during the time we made a surprise call to break such news."

"My phone's battery is low." the designer confessed. "And you're out of town."

"We trust your judgment, Dear. That's why we don't really expect you to open this up. Your honesty matters us most."
"I also trust you, Adrien." this time it came from Tom. "I know you'll take care of our daughter."

"I surely will." the model nodded.

"But really, Papa, Maman. I know you want to surprise your daughter and check her well-being with that free service perks that you have, but what's the reason for this call?"

Realization finally dawned on her parents' faces "Oh yeah, we almost forgot. But it's not important right now. There's an Akuma attack according to you guys, so I know the basis of what I've heard today."

"Basis of what?"

"The bakery. You know, if it's fine and well."

Marinette's face paled.

She was sure she turned all possible outlets off that could cause fires like ovens and stoves. She secured the door locks and windows before she left. She closed the faucets for flooding the place. She cleaned the tables, threw out the trash, shut all entertainment devices off and -

"None of those sorts happened." her mother chortled, knowing how her wild imagination works. "And I can read your mind all the way here."

"You scared me, Maman!"

"What's the Akuma attack?" Adrien inquired.

The burly man shrugged "Ah, you know. The typical. Property damages. But I'm sure Ladybug and Chat Noir will save Paris and - whoops, we gotta go now! Break's over!"

"Oh. Take care, Maman, Papa!" the pig-tailed girl waved her hands while her parents made some kissy faces on the screen. She giggled.

"Have fun with your miraculous adventure!" her father teased. "And Adrien?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Always remember: women are always right."

Then the call got disconnected.

The teenagers finally relaxed and exasperatedly sighed with relief.

"Sorry about my folks." Marinette apologized with a lingering thought about the unfinished topic. At least none of her three worst scenarios had happened. "They're overbearing sometimes."

"No, it's alright. They're cool, actually."

"They are." she smiled a bit then grimaced. "You're going to finish your studies, right?"

The blond scratched his cheek. "If by entering University you mean, then I haven't discussed it with my father yet - "

"But you will be."
"I need to talk to him first -"

"You will."

Adrien finally understood the meaning behind Tom's words. So he chuckled.

"I will."

Their bus halted.

"Speaking of 'you will'" she asked while fiddling her unread messages. "Have you contacted your father about your whereabouts?"

Then he remembered Natalie.

"I - I think he has an idea." the blond replied as he hurriedly opened his voicemail box. "But I'm not sure yet."

His father's assistant left him four voice messages.

First: "Where are you? Contact me immediately once you receive this."

Second: "Adrien, where are you? Your friends told me you're fine but your phone was off. Your teachers told me you're with Miss Dupain-Cheng but her phone was off too. Explain everything once you receive this message."

Third: "Please contact me, Adrien. Don't make me report this to your father."

Fourth: "I don't know if you got my messages, or I failed to receive yours. Your bodyguard is on his way to Normandy to meet you, and before he did, please don't go with random strangers. If they approached you: run."

Before he could hit the Call button, a large man in black shirt hovered their seats while his six back-ups caged them.

That moment, the teenagers knew they were in danger.

Adrien came from a renowned family - a wealthy mother and a genius father. He was famous not only because of his lineage but because of his accomplishments as a model. Any splices of his life could lead to a media sensation.

If you want fifteen minutes of fame? Look for an Agreste.

"Adrien Agreste."

It wasn't a question.

The boy didn't answer him. He didn't even dare to glance at his small brave companion.

Let them think that she was someone he didn't know or didn't care about. He must convince them that she was not his precious friend, that she was nothing but a mere stranger.

"Someone wants to see you." the man went on.

"What if I say no?"
He channeled half-Adrien half-Chat on his reply. If it's 100% Adrien he might stammer, and if it's 100% Chat Noir he might growl.

"You don't have a choice." was the firm response.

The homeschooling. The bodyguard named Gorilla. The security lockdown on their house, the hourly monitoring of Natalie, the fencing classes and other extra-curricular activities - these were preventive measures for him to avoid such situation like this.

As if on cue, Doris Day's song was momentarily played on the bus' radio.

Whatever will be, will be.

"If you refused to cooperate." the man looked at the composed pig-tailed girl without flinching. "We'll extend our invitations to her."

Adrien stilled, and almost stopped breathing.

*Anybody but her*, he mentally screamed. *Anybody but Marinette.*

He just made a promise to Tom and Sabine minutes ago that he must take care of their daughter.

Plagued by Plagg's constant reminder, he controlled his urges to destroy. But everything is damned - human or not, he'll Cataclysm whoever dared to touch her.
Chapter 14

According to International News Safety Institute, the first step one must do during an abduction scene is 'to fight back in an attempt to gain attention and help'.

However, both Adrien and Marinette decided not to follow the said protocol.

The teenagers accepted the invitation not because their abductors were intimidating but because they weren't hostile. No gags or blindfolds, no weapons or death threats - they even ushered them meekly outside the vehicle and respected their personal space. Their silent attitudes intrigued them to meet their employer.

 Besides, Curiosity could do more things than to kill a cat.

When the model noticed the bulge on every men's jacket, he knew that challenging them would be bad. He wasn't transformed, and several civilians might be involved in a possible crossfire, particularly Marinette.

He never doubted his civilian's ability to protect her. He once saved her during Gamer's attack, but the situation gave him a chance to change as Chat Noir.

However this time, he didn't want to take a risk and leave her just to transform. This was not an Akuma attack, Ladybug was not around, and the fact that they were in a middle of nowhere was already a big disadvantage.

A lot of things could happen in just a second, and losing Marinette would be -

"Adrien."

He rapidly shook his head, refusing to acknowledge his worst fears. He even forgot how to breathe. His heart was squeezed in pains. He promised her parents, he promised himself that he'd -

"Adrien." the designer winced. "You're hurting my hand."

The boy soon realized that he was gripping her hand so tight that his knuckles became white. With a deep sigh, he relaxed his hand without releasing his grasp.

No way he would let her go.

"I'm sorry." Adrien apologized. Frustrations were starting to muddle his mind.

"It's alright. I understand." she calmly answered with a squeeze. "Nervousness can do that."

He didn't reply.

A dark tinted sedan was waiting for them on the side of the road. He didn't sense any dangers inside, and even if he failed to catch it with his civilian self, his feline kwami would immediately sniff it.

He entered the car first, eyeing the corners for traps before he led his companion inside.

One of the men who opened their door was about to assist Marinette inside, but the model glared at him viciously.

"Don't touch her," he growled.
The man stepped back then timidly closed the door behind them.

A thick silver mesh separated them from the driver and the man that occupied the front seat. The vehicle has an automatic door lock system, and probably a bullet-proof one due to its exterior finish.

Recalling Natalie's voicemails, the assistant must've caught a whiff about their abduction plan in a short notice for her to send his bodyguard 'Gorilla' immediately to Normandy. Whether she learned about his detours with Marinette or assumed that he was with his classmates in Saint-Clair, he got no idea.

What he could tell was that these men were able to know his exact whereabouts to execute the entrapment, and by the number of reinforcements and their undisclosed ammunition, they more likely thought that Gorilla was with him.

But how? What hinted them? Was it from the news clip in Gare St. Lazare? The fans assault after leaving the tollgate? The mother-son traveling to Argentan? The fiasco in a pub near Evreux?

They thought Marinette was his bodyguard?

He groaned internally.

Forget facing his father's wrath, he didn't want to go back to Paris and be christened as the walking meme of Disaster Girl and WTC Guy.

Unbeknownst to him, Marinette was thinking the same thing - minus the memes.

The designer thought that Chat Noir got her so bad that she acquired a terminal disease called 'bad luck'.

Looking at the tinted windows, she saw the indigo hues dominating the afternoon sky. Years of being Ladybug honed her observation skills and knew that every detail counts in order to formulate their escape.

These people would never hurt Adrien, she knew that. He was their objective, but not Marinette.

In a typical kidnapping scenario, she was considered a dead weight, which means the first to be disposed of, and by that, she knew they didn't know about her trump card.

If that would happen, she would transform and save themselves from their impending doom.

But first, she must know their abductors' motives.

Marinette ogled at the driver who casually peered on them through the rear mirror.

It weirded her why these men didn't take their phones or check their belongings. She could actually dial 112 while en-route to their base, but she brushed off the idea.

They didn't look stupid to her, and they have an air of professional hitmen, so there'd be a chance that they were baiting them, or probably looking for an excuse to eliminate her.

Blue eyes met green ones.

"What?" she asked, unaware that Adrien was staring at her for a long time.

"Nothing," he replied then moved his gaze towards their linked hands. Rubbing a thumb on her knuckles he mused. "You have small hands."
"That's because yours are big."

Silence overpowered them for a minute.

"Do you trust me?"

His question surprised her. The warmth that laced on his words and the caress he did on her skin was enough to turn her into a puddle of goo.

"I trust you."

Then their car stopped.

A large mansion appeared in front of them with architectural designs inspired by the Baroque era. The steel bar gates weren't worn out despite being ancient, indicating that the vast property has been preserved well. The pavements were made of graphite, same with the outdoor columns as they passed the garden.

The two were led inside the antechamber. A large chandelier was hung in the middle, with its lightings complementing the pattered floorings and the room's painted wall.

There was a cushioned sofa covered in red cashmere for guests, but not inviting enough to be seated. It might be antique, but the fabric looked so stiff enough to prick their butts.

Then the double door across the room opened.

A stout man in checkered trousers entered, followed by two dark-suited men. He was sporting a glass with round rims, and an auburn hair in high tufts. One of the dark men whispered something to him, which was acknowledged with a nod before walked towards the youngsters.

"Adrien Agreste," he stated then briefly glanced at the designer. "I always thought you're untouchable with someone around."

"She's not my bodyguard." he retorted then frowned when he sensed her giggling.

"Don't mind me." Marinette bit the side of her cheeks. "Sir."

Adrien gawked at her incredulously.

"Very well." the man was busy dismissing his assistants to notice the exchange. "Mr. Howards would like to see you."

The two followed him silently, eyeing the ornaments and various rooms for possible clues about the mysterious Mr. Howards, aside from the notion of an obviously rich bastard. Another flight of stairs and few hallways passed, they finally reached a large mahogany door of a study room. The man rapped it thrice, followed by some clicking noises, then a command 'Enter'.

When Adrien saw the man sitting at the table, he immediately knew the reason why he was brought
there.

Months ago, Gabriel Agreste got an interesting offer from a certain textile company that supplies cashmere. As a self-proclaimed top-quality distributor of the said fabrics, the company desired to have a business tie-ups with fashion houses, particularly Gabriel's. There was no speculation why the offer was called off, but there were rumors that Gabriel has a personal grudge against the company owner - and that was Mister Joseph Howards.

"It's been a while." Mr. Howards greeted him with pearly white teeth that were glinting against the lamplight. "Perhaps you can still remember me."

"Of course. If my memory serves right, we once met at a party at Le Grand Paris." the boy answered coolly.

Being the sole heir, Adrien was reared to attend social functions and entertain prospect investors, as well as refusing clients that his father deemed unproductive without giving any ideas why. He considered the act as unfair all the time, but after learning about Mr. Howards, he knew that his father made a correct decision.

No need for a feline's instinct to prove that this man was up to no-good.

"Why don't you two be seated first?" the business tycoon offered. "Tyrone, bring us some light snacks."

The stout attendant was about to comply when the boy shook his head. "I'm sorry but we have to decline your offer, Sir. Our school was expecting us to be in Saint-Clair before nightfall."

"Hmm. I'm not sure if you understand your current situation, young Agreste." Mr. Howard reclined in his chair. "Accepting my invitation means there's no turning back."

"As if you gave us a choice."

"Heroic, are we? Such youngsters brimming with confidence. Even you, young lady. Confronting a man that's twice your size?"

So they figured them out from the news' headlines.

"I didn't do anything wrong." Marinette's sass earned her snicker.

The man produced a folder. "Let's see...Marinette Dupain-Cheng, the only child of two Parisian bakers. An aspiring fashion designer. Won an intraschool fashion contest judged by Gabriel Agreste himself. Featured in a magazine as the person behind Jagged Stone's best-selling album covers. Mentioned by the said rock star himself as the one who gifted him his all-famous Eiffel shades. School standing looks normal. Grades and attendances, atypical. For a commoner status, exceptional."

"Leave her out of this!" the model snarled.

Howards raised his brow. "Oh, did I hit a nerve? Overprotective with your so-called friend yet have some guts to see an impending danger - what an Agreste-ive trait."

"At least I'm not a Howards like you."

Leave it to Adrien and he'll wage a pun war.
"Oh boy, relax will you?" the man broke a fit of laughs, but the tension in the air still remained. "You always have this air of a prick like Gabe, but I never thought you got her humor. Your hair and your eyes - I thought these were the only features that you got from her genes. Now I'm curious to know you more."

"I don't think this is a social call to discuss my mother."

His words earned him a frown. "Got temperamental issues like your Dad, huh? Too bad your Mom who has the purest smile in the world was now lost because of his failed love."

It was a low blow, Marinette knew. The tycoon was taunting Adrien in order to lose his composure.

Feeling his tensions against her hand, she squeezed his, letting him know that he was not alone, that even though he may not believe it, she'll be there to support him.

After a brief second, she felt him relaxed. His pulse rate became normal.

"Father didn't fail Mother." the boy told him.

"But then, he failed you."

"What do you want, Mr. Howards?"

"Impatient, are we?" the man bemused. "Tyrone, why don't you give him the contract?"

Adrien received a clear folder with a Memorandum of Agreement written above the first page.

He wasn't stupid. He didn't need to open and read the thick binds in order to understand the stipulations.

"You know...I don't have the power to sign this."

"But you will be, someday. Let's just say this is a preparation once you take over your father's company." Mr. Howards shrugged.

"Just because I'm his son doesn't mean I will get the company by birthright. I'm not sure if I will follow his footsteps someday, or venture in a field of business."

"Then I don't see a problem with you not signing this."

The model grimaced. This man thinks he's an idiot.

"How sure are you that this will not lead to bankruptcy?"

"Of course it won't, young man." the tycoon folded his hands. "Try to imagine how much money the Gabriel's will save if they will purchase a processed cashmere that cost half the price compared to the fabrics sold in the market."

Marinette might be a simpleton in regards to the tricks of the trade, but she wasn't that naive.

Like Adrien, she grew up in a family that was hands-on with the business - though hers was in a food category. If he was modeling to help their business, she was into manning the cashier and designing the confectioneries.

Tom & Sabine Boulangerie Patisserie has a similar concept with any business establishments, and one of them was doubting things that sound 'too good to be true'. Like cheap ingredients would mean less
expense with high revenues, however, the quality will be considered.

Unless...

"Smuggling," the designer deadpanned. "Cashmere fabrics are expensive, and if sold at a
ridiculously cheap price without any quality ordeals, and on a wholesale deal, then that means there's
a cut in between."

"I almost forgot we have a junior designer here." the man beamed. "Can you differentiate Miss
Dupain-Cheng the contrabands versus high-end goods in terms of looks?"

"There's tax evasion, Sir."

"Doing the right thing doesn't automatically bring success."

"But compromising ethics almost always leads to failure."

"Touche." Mr. Howards scoffed at her words. "Which reminds me of these two vigilantes who, ever
since they showed up in Paris, made some weird ruckus there as if they're fighting for peace."

The two teenagers froze.

"What did you say?!!"

He wasn't paying attention to see their glares. "You know, that tiny spotted weakling called a
Ladybug and her sidekick, I guess. What's his name? Ah, Chat Noir. They even coined their names
from an insect and a cabaret, and their abilities made everything mediocre. Saving Paris against a
villain, eh? What a ridiculous propaganda."

"What makes you say that?" Marinette asked with a contained anger.

Her companion was less obvious though.

"I've seen it with my two eyes, young lady. How imaginative these two are to change people
into...what's that term again, Akuma?" Mr. Howards glanced at Tyrone for confirmation. "Yeah,
sounds like a borrowed Japanese word. Sweet lord, I can't believe an off-handed comment can
change a person into something else, with those props and everything. Thanks to them, I almost lost
my head."

"Twiddle Doom. You're the reason behind his akumatization."

"Oh, the guys who made a rampage this morning? I'm a brutally honest person, and there's no way
an idiot can change the time to revert their losses." he waved his hand nonchalantly. "Business is a
gamble - you need to know your cards in order to play them well. And as I said, those were just
propaganda behind that so-called superheroes. Miracles are nothing but illusions."

That was it.

Mr. Joseph Howards has been promoted as Top One on the superheroes' Most Wanted list. Not only
he unwittingly abducted them to sign up for an illegal transaction, he even caused a fiasco that led
them to miss their ride! More than that, he even insulted their Miraculous!

"So, how's our deal?" the tycoon asked again.

"There is no deal." Adrien spat out, slamming the contract on the table. "So if you'll excuse us, we
have a bus to chase."
"This needs to be communicated with Gabriel." the man muttered with a seething fury.

What do they say about challenging your abductors? The two didn't care anymore.

"You should've said that since the beginning. You know that I don't have the power to overrule my father's wishes."

"You have, Adrien Agreste. That's why I want you to communicate with your father."

He simply frowned. "He's in New York, probably 36,000 feet above the ground."

"I know the man. We've been together in Lycée. He might be a prick, but he has a soft spot. Just like yours."

Four dark-clad men entered the room and encircled the young blond boy.

"Don't touch him!" Marinette crossed towards them, only to be intercepted by Tyrone.

Before she was a cold nozzle of a pistol aimed squarely at her forehead.

Time stopped for Adrien.

All he could see was red and almost erupted into black until a pair of bluebell eyes stopped his ferociously.

He barely heard Mr. Howard's instructions on his dismissal. The *fucker* even explained how he tried to reach his father by visiting the mansion that morning, only to receive a disappointment news from Natalie - who, unbeknownst to the said fucker, happened to discover his evil plans.

If only he let his phone open for communications. If only he wasn't an ass and contacted Natalie about his whereabouts. If only he was not boastful about his abilities as Chat...

Marinette's life would never be in peril.

"Adrien." her warm voice and the sight of her smile brimming with confidence broke his reverie.

"Just go."

His heart sunk. How could she do that to him? She was supposed to feel resentment or fear for her life.

There was a freaking gun pointed at her head!

"No -"

"I trust you," she told him firmly. "So trust me that everything will be alright."

"Please, don't do this."

Adrien wasn't begging for them.

He was begging her.

She was asking him to leave her, of all people.

The men were holding his arms now and were about to swing his knuckles when the revolver's barrel caulked, threatening to blow Marinette's head.
"You heard her. So be a good boy and obey." Tyrone threatened.

His eyes gazed at his companion carefully, lovingly, seeking for an assurance which was reciprocated by a nod. He took a deep breath.

"Chat you later, Princess."

If she got his underlying message or anyone inside the room before he was dragged out, the better. He would never let them live this down.

When the door closed behind them, Tyrone lowered the gun then tucked it back in his breast pocket.

"Drastic times calls for drastic measures." the attendant quoted unapologetically.

Marinette gave him a beady glare and then to Mr. Howards who was amused on the exchange. "Happy now?"

The tycoon smirked. "I'm not barbaric, Miss Dupain-Cheng. I hate to witness some blood spills on my carpet, much more in my beloved room. They're quite difficult to remove."

Aside from the two, there were three men inside the room. So even if she disabled the attendant, she might need to consider the other three who might've kept some weapons inside their sleeves. Also, their employer might be a combat specialist since he was an expert on egging people.

It was time to pull her trump card.

"Can - can I use a toilet?" she asked sheepishly.

"Sorry if I made you anxious, but yes, you can. Just right around that corner." the employer said as he stood up. "I need to attend some important things, so if you want some help, just call Tyrone."

Before she could open the toilet's door, Tyrone hovered near her ear and whispered. "We didn't confiscate your phones Miss Dupain-Cheng because Mr. Howards told us not to, but let me tell you that this place can block any cell receptions. So don't you ever make some undesirable escape or any calls for help, else I might spill some blood on this carpet, and probably not yours."

She gulped audibly then nodded.

Once entered, she immediately locked the door. She made sure that the man wasn't snooping outside before she slid on the tiled floors and wept.

Tikki emerged from her pocket and pawed her charger's wet face. "Oh, Marinette. I'm sorry."

The designer shook her head. "It's okay. They didn't know about my Miraculous...but...but - oh God."

"It's alright to feel fear. You're just a human being." the kwami soothed. "You've faced several
monsters before this, so I know you'll be able to get away."

"Tikki, they took Adrien!"

"I know. I was there."

She sank on the floor. "I feel so useless right now."

"Not when you're Ladybug."

After she calmed down and gathered her bearings, she stood up then looked at her reflections from the mirror. With blotched eyes and red cheeks, she was indeed a mess. But this was not an appropriate time for her to wallow.

"Tikki!" she called. "Transforme moi!"

The only word that was looping on Adrien's mind as he walked along the hallway was Marinette. He was sick and worried that he left her all alone, despite promising himself not to let her go.

He must return to her side immediately, and once he did, he would dedicate himself to be with her, even if it would take him a lifetime - whether she liked it or not.

Two men were guarding his back, and another two on his side. They didn't put any restraints on him since he would never dare to leave the place without their hostage. And if he would fight them to escape, there'd be no guarantees on Marinette's safety.

Oh, how he misses the warmth of her hands.

She trusted him, so he must get over with his pesky feelings in order to fulfill his promise.

"Can - can I use a toilet?" he meekly asked one of the men. "I - I can't hold it anymore."

The man looked at his companions, and with an affirmed nod, they went inside an empty room.

"This way." the man commanded as he opened the door. "Don't make us wait."

"Su - sure."

Upon entering inside and securing the locks, Plagg flew out from his jacket.

His kwami might be a jerk sometimes, but he wasn't insensitive.

"Just say the magic words, kid."

"Plagg!" he announced. "Transforme moi!"
Chapter 15

A rattling noise sounded inside the toilet.

"Miss Dupain-Cheng?" Tyrone called as he rapped the door. No one answered.

With a cold concern, he pulled out his keys to open the locked door. He swung it widely, surprised that the girl didn't turn on the lights. Before he could switch it on, a spotty red arm knocked him unconscious.

Two men only heard the loud thud, so they immediately headed towards the assistant. The last memory they had was a red and black blur.

Ladybug clapped her hands satisfactorily as she dragged the men into the toilet. She peeked in the study area before she went out. Once the coast was cleared, she hacked some cabled wires attached on the walls - she couldn't use the landlines to contact the authorities anyways - and used it to bind the men separately, with their hands tied behind their feet. She finished them by stuffing a crumpled paper in their mouths.

She folded her hands, silently prayed that no one would mistakenly kink shame her for a shibari, then walked outside.

"Erm, sir?" a boy's muffled voice echoed inside. "I think there's a problem with the flush."

One of the guards looked at his companions with skeptical eyes before he entered the room. He was taken aback when a baton knocked him out unconscious.

The three caught the assault, but their reaction was a bit slower compare to the dark-clad superhero who whacked their heads cold.

Chat Noir cupped their clothes to confiscate their weapons then flung it all outside the window except a silencer. It was a 9mm Maxim pistol which snugged perfectly on his fingers.

He cracked it, suppressing the feel of releasing the trigger to one of the men's head and instead aimed it at the mechanical knob. This would give those people some trouble disengaging the locks from the inside.

He might be housing a god of destruction, but he got morals to adhere.
While Ladybug rushed to the direction she believed Adrien was being brought to and Chat Noir to the room where Marinette was confined, the two didn't expect to meet their respective partners along the hallway.

"Ladybug?!"

"Chat Noir?!"

"What are you doing here?!" the two chorused, only to realize that it was not an appropriate time for them to dilly-dallying.

"Have you seen Adrien?!"

"Have you seen Marinette?!"

Then the two stopped, shocked at their partner's inquiry. But before they could ask, Chat's ears perked up at an incoming people.

They leaped and glued themselves above the ceiling as they observed a group of frantic men.

"We saw Tyrone gagged inside the toilet and found this." one of the men reported as he showed a cable wire. "That Chinese girl was missing."

Chat Noir had to control his growl and the temptation to pounce the men below. He felt Ladybug's breath hitched when the other men commented.

"I'm not seeing that blond model anywhere either. You think those two were together now?"

The superheroes eyed each other and saw dome-like shaped device hanging near their heads.

Of course, there will always be a house camera.

A communicator immediately sounded below, making both dropped themselves to the floor and caged their aggressors. With Ladybug on her yo-yo and Chat on his baton, they were able to nuke the men easily.

Since there was no need to hide the evidence, the two hurriedly ran towards the end of the hallway, only to be greeted by assault rifles.

Ladybug twirled her yo-yo to deflect the bullets as her partner leaped outside the window.

Chat Noir almost grazed by a stray one, only to determine that there was a manually operated sniper above. He threw his spare baton like a boomerang then killed the machine.

The superheroes were outnumbered, but not overpowered.

His spotted partner suddenly grabbed his tail to swing herself outside, bluffing their oppressors that the two jumped on the bushes below.

If he wasn't familiar with the maneuver, his backbone might've been snapped into two.

The two stealthily landed and rolled inside a dark, empty room above the hallway.

"I know it may sound dumb." Ladybug breathed as she eyed the closed door behind them. "But Chat, are you alright?"
Using his tail as a bungee? *Purr*-ty fine.

Using his body as a fulcrum? No *paw*-blem.

Using his tail like a retractable string and his body like a yo-yo altogether? *Meow*-velously *ow*-kay.

The feline hero didn't voice out his sarcasm while stretching his almost-dislocated spine when he fell on a carpeted floor. He got lots of things to be taken care of - and one of them was the sudden appearance of his partner.

"Why are you here, My Lady?" he asked while rubbing his back.

"Same goes with you, Kitty." she retorted. "I don't think this is an appropriate place for cats to stroll."

"I never wished that *paw*-bably on their *hiss*-pare Buggy, but one of my beloved *fur*-iends was taken here."

Ladybug froze with an ashen face.

*Adrien wasn't the only one they've kidnapped?!*

She saw how her partner's eyes grew larger, with pupils suddenly darkened into slits, and that made her realize that she uttered those words out loud.

"How did you know that Adrien was here?"

Chat Noir didn't ask her how she knew Adrien since the two formally met during Jackady's.

"I - I saw him being brought here - "

"If that's the case." he interrupted her with both hands on her shoulders. "You've seen Marinette as well, right?"

She gave him an impassive look. "How did you know Marinette was here?"

"I - I saw her." he stammered. "And she's with Adrien. Right?"

"I see." she sighed. Of course, her *Chaton* knew her civilian self. "Then we should focus on Adrien and your friend first - "

"Wa - Wa - wait a minute!" he interrupted her again but with a lashed tone. He even squeezed her shoulders tightly. "What about Marinette?!"

Ladybug rolled her eyes. "She's fine, Chat. Don't worry about her."

Chat Noir gaped at her incredulously. He couldn't believe that his Lady disregarded her Princess that way.

"I can't believe I'm hearing those nonchalant words from you, of all people!"

There were cases he got mad at her, like when she jumped into the dinosaur's mouth without any warnings. This time, it was a full-packed anger enough to make her shudder.

"Are you telling me to abandon a civilian in a dangerous place like this?!"

"That's not my point!" she grunted out of frustrations.
How will she be able to convince him that she - Marinette - was okay without jeopardizing her identity?

Their heated discussion suddenly halted when several stomps were heard outside the room, alarming them both.

Chat slipped his hands away from her then balled them into fists. He wasn't the only one who was fuming with anger though.

"I don't care what you think about her, My Lady." he hissed with a lowered voice. "But I'm going to find Marinette."

"Better look for Adrien first, and she might show up," she answered grimly.

"That's impossible, Bugaboo. She'll never find him."

The heroine sprung to grab his collar. "What do you mean?!!"

"I -"

The two immediately ducked behind a large upholstery when the door creaked and swung open.

Three shadows entered the room.

"Alpha Two to Sparrow. I've heard some voices here - like they're fighting or something." a deep voice said, followed by a short static noise.

[Did Bobby forget to turn off his telenovela again?] the communicator cracked. [I'm not seeing any movements inside, Alpha Two.]

"The lights are off here, Sparrow. Let me locate the switch."

Ladybug tapped Chat's shoulder, signaling him to deal with his right while she handled the left. Nodding, they simultaneously circled the intruders silently, then knocked them unconscious before they could give a reaction.

[Alpha Two, what happened?]

The hero casually plucked the communicator. "No problema amigo. Got tripped and fell, Sparrow."

[You better be careful, Alpha Two. We're dealing two pesky superheroes here, not to mention our hostages are on the loose.]

"Yeah, right." he snorted.

Tapping his shoulder, Ladybug pointed the house camera near the hallway. "Hey Sparrow, can you see some changes on my location?"

[Negative, Alpha Two. Still dark as a fuck.]

The superheroes saw another house camera installed inside the room.

If they weren't lucky enough to get Alpha Two before he flipped the switch on, Sparrow would be the reason why they were captured as fuck.

"How about the hallway here, Sparrow?"
He gave his smirking partner a shit-eating grin. "We have a bit of a paw-blem here, Sparrow. Seems like our system got bugged."

"Don't fret, Sparrow. I can cat-ch the bug and bring 'em to you instead." he retorted immediately. "But I forgot your location."

"Two floors below. Control room, Alpha Two."

Seems like Sparrow would never see a daylight again.

It took them two punches from Ladybug and a jab from Chat Noir to isolate the Control Room.

After disabling the original occupants, the heroine flipped her yo-yo then activated its mobile function. Tyrone might be right that all cell receptions were blocked within the vicinity, but hers was nothing but miraculous.

"We need to contact the authorities," she suggested as she dialed 112. "I don't want these people to get away easily."

"It's your call, My Lady," he answered sprightly as he toggled the monitor screens.

The mansion was definitely big, and Howards' people were aplenty, and even though they haven't summoned their Lucky Charms and Cataclysms yet, he knew there would be a point wherein one of them became exhausted and ended up sloppy.

Also, his thoughts were preoccupied with Marinette's safety.

He selected the recordings from the study room, rewinding the video from the last hour, then stopped at the middle. He barely reached the 30-minute mark when he saw the portion wherein a gun was pointed near Marinette's head.

He could still remember the bitterness and the fear as he replayed the scene.

He took a deep breath when the gun was lowered and tucked inside the assistant's jacket. He also saw Marinette's entrance towards a small room, probably a toilet, and Howards' exit together with his two bodyguards. His eyes glued completely to the lack of changes in the scenery until he saw a flicker on Tyrone's face as he headed towards the toilet. Seconds later, the men approached the room.

He froze when Ladybug went out of the toilet.

And the said Ladybug that was on the screen happened to be the same Ladybug that was currently standing behind him.

He turned around slowly and saw how her bluebell eyes grew round like saucers, with blood
completely drained out from her face.

The two were staring at each other with a pin drop silence.

Until Chat Noir finally broke it.

"Ladybug...you..."

She stopped breathing.

"...you saved Marinette?"

Ladybug felt like the world collapsed behind her, and with a stupefied expression, she exclaimed. "What?!"

"I saw you heading out from the place where Marinette entered." her partner's voice croaked, with eyes gleaming like he was about to cry. "You spotted her inside."

It took her seconds to respond "...yes?"

"Oh, My Lady!"

She was taken aback when her partner suddenly wrapped her in a warm embrace. "I'm sorry if I got mad at you a while ago! I thought you were insensitive enough not to care for her!"

Chat released her but didn't let go of her arms. "But I didn't see Marinette leaving the place. Where did you hide her?"

"I...well.." she paused for a moment. "The...windows...? Yes, the windows! There's a small window inside, so I slipped Marinette there and told her to run out of the mansion and hide. I also told her not to show up until I say so. Yeah, that's what I did!"

"I see. That's - that's claw-some!" he beamed as he rubbed his neck, a mannerism almost akin to Adrien's.

Ladybug shook her head before her mind got muddled again. "If this is not a simple worry for a civilian, I might misinterpret this as something more romantic."

She was expecting some exaggerated responses followed by his declaration of undying loyalty towards her, but none came. She couldn't help but blushed when his stern green eyes met hers.

"Have you ever feel so scared to change something because you feared that you'll lose everything?" he asked.

"I have," she answered, remembering her feelings towards her classmate and her shifting emotions towards her partner. "But then, change is inevitable."

"Indeed."

"What's the question?"

Chat swiveled his chair then faced the monitor screens again. "Ah, nothing. I'm just wondering whether I should follow my heart or the prompt of my brain."

"And what are those two tells you?"
"To confess now...or confess later." he shrugged with a smile. "But that's something I need to work on after this fiasco. You haven't told me the reason why you're here."

"Yeah, I haven't," she replied as she sat beside him. "Just like yours - they took my friend here."

"So we both need to look for our missing friends."

"Yes," she said with a nod. "And we need to secure Adrien's safety."

"Don't worry, Bugi. He's completely and absolutely safe and secured."

"How can you be so sure?"

The worry on her tone was something he couldn't help but notice.

"I saved Adrien from his oppressors, then instructed him to hide outside until I say so. He was sick and worried for his friend, so I promised him that I'll look for her. Cat's honor."

Ladybug was about to say something, but a certain image from the other screen caught her attention.

"The police will be here in a few minutes," she told him as she eyed Howards' features when one of his bodyguards approached him. It appeared like he was about to leave the mansion, but for some unknown reasons, he didn't.

"They didn't know how to disengage the lock mechanism," her partner smirked, answering her confusions. "Their system lockdown was almost similar to what my father installed in our house. Centralized, and activated by a single biometric signature. However, the downside of that strong fortress was that once tampered, everything will be completely controlled without any hassles."

It wasn't a secret between partners that Chat Noir came from a prominent family, and that he has knobs for gadgets.

"So you hacked the system."

"I tweaked it a little bit." he supplied slyly. "You said you don't want these people to get away easily."

"And we need to buy some time until the authorities get here."

With a knowing look, the two began to formulate their sweet revenge.
Chapter 16

Twenty minutes.

That was the maximum time limit for a French police to respond on an assault mission. And that countdown started after Ladybug ended the phone call.

Looking at the monitor screens and observing the commotion presented there, the superheroine mused. "You know, this reminds me of Lady Wifi."

"How so?" her feline companion asked, flexing his claws for a kill time.


She hit one of the buttons, and one of the doors near the basement auto-locked, caging some of the guards inside.

"I see your point, M'lady. But this reminds me of someone else."

"And who would that be?"

"Stormy Weather," he smirked, pulling the main switch down and all of the light inside the mansion went dead.

The only illumination they got was the orange dusk basked from the glass windows.

"You and your night vision." she awed at Chat's green sclera. "How handy."

"It's kinda sad that the mouse only plays whenever the cat is away. So why not let the Chat invite himself?"

"Yeah, yeah. Go ahead and play your own version of Hide-and-Seek."

He chuckled when she shooed him with her hand. He grabbed the said hand then planted a kiss on its back.

"I don't mind paw-ling one for you, Bugaboo. 'Claws you will be my exclusive 'it'"

She gulped, feeling her throat dry when he purred. "Let me consider that offer, Kitty."

"I'll patiently wait, even if it'll take mew forever."

Before he could open the door and left, Ladybug called him.

"Chat?"

"Yes, my Lady?"

"Are you...are you sure that Adrien is alright?"

He was glad that she didn't have night visions to see the blush that crept on his face.

"He's safe."

"I - I see." she fidgeted with a sigh. "That's good to hear."
"You know," he muttered, observing her expression intently. "You cared so much on this Agreste kid enough to hand your Miraculous over to Papillion."

"He's special, Chat. He's my friend."

"Inside or outside mask?"

"Both for me. But for him...he only sees me whenever I have my mask on. Though recently, he told me I'm his friend outside my mask."

Who are you? - an unanswered question he had for years finally made a green light, but he refused to proceed.

It was an opportunity loss, and he knew the situation was perfect to pop it again, but he wasn't mentally prepared. Not now.

As of the moment, there was someone that warrants his attention.

Marinette.

"She's fine. Don't worry." her response surprised him, unaware that he uttered his thoughts vocally.

In the dark room, he could see the smile brimming on her face.

"Let's get our friends back, Kitty." and Adrien.

"Yeah, Bug. Let's get our friends back." and Marinette.

Chat gave a two-finger salute and let himself be swallowed by darkness.

Having a legal immunity, the two superheroes were given rights by the French government to conduct civilian arrests for those who disturbed peace and order, even if it would result in violence. It was an enticing offer, but none of them tried to incapacitate their enemies beyond their physical recuperation, even if the said enemies were assholes that should not exist in the world.

Like Howards, for example.

The mansion may not like the alleys of Paris, but Chat Noir has the control of the place like a cat prancing towards his prey, and the mice were the blinded men unprepared for a scotopic vigilante.

He could clear the whole floor in just a couple of minutes, even without the aid of his heightened senses, but his partner wouldn't like it.

Ladybug timed herself before she entered the dark hallways. She may not have night visions, but like ladybugs, she knew how to camouflage and blend on her environment.

A little tap on her left, and a light kick to the right, she was a ruthless insect.

She stilled when a hand fell on her shoulder for a second then relaxed. She couldn't see his face, but her senses immediately recognized her partner.

"I'm clear. You?"

"All clear."

She felt him nodded, and with a nudge, they entered the main room where the Big Boss likely awaits
They didn't expect that the Big Boss has a Vickers with him.

"I thought he's a smuggler of fabrics!" Ladybug shouted between rounds of bullets as they ducked on a nearby wall.

"Maybe his resume was outdated?" Chat replied with the same volume. "That's why he fired us up!"

Leave it to Chat Noir and he'll find a time to shoot some puns.

"Ladybug and Chat Noir!" Howards yelled as he halted his gun. "Alas, we meet again!"

"Sorry to burst your bubble." the red-spotted heroine snorted. "But we can't remember our first meeting."

"Oh, that's too bad." the man nonchalantly replied. "Because both of you were busy beating that Akuma thing to notice me."

"We didn't expect you to be a loose cannon." the feline hero chortled. "And Howards enough to escape like a speeding bullet."

He answered them with another batch of ammunition.

Ladybug wanted to smack her partner's head, but she knew he was provoking him for distractions. Or probably it was his own way of killing the time. They still have few more minutes to spare till their back-up arrives.

"Did that young Agreste summon the two of you here? From what I've heard, you once saved his stick-ass father from an Akuma he personally triggered before."

"That's quite a low blow, considering you as the worst comparison." Chat Noir growled.

"You know the Agrestes' personally? I bet you've heard how that family dwindled down because the father failed the mother, and now the son carried the burden - or shall we say, the curse of being a loser?"

"You son of a - "

"You don't know any of the Agrestes personally!" Ladybug interrupted with a fury. "And that son you called a loser has a name - and that's Adrien Agreste!"

Chat Noir was shocked how his Lady defended his civilian self, and with his night vision, he could see the anger that puffed on her crimson face. If she wasn't jeopardizing their hiding place, she might've rushed towards the man and rammed her fist into his face.

He might even cheer her for a job well done.

"Adrien is a wonderful, amazing and a humble son. He doesn't have the attitude of a rich brat kid, he even stood up for those who are bullied. He's kind and generous and compassionate. He's a good friend. He's not a loser, much more of a failure - so you better take those words back you bastard!"

Howards laughed mockingly. "A smitten lady, I see. Well then, how will you explain about him bringing a girl alone while traveling to an uncertain place?"

Ladybug was unsure what to tell. "Uh...they were going to their school's field trip?"
"Such lies! That kid has billions of euros, with bodyguards and everything, and he can't summon a simple limousine?"

She didn't want to elaborate further, and the way their conversation goes she has a hunch about his objectives.

Also, Chat Noir went silent - or to be specific, made himself vanished. She barely detected his presence which alarmed her greatly.

What's that proverb about silent animals and still waters?

"That lowly, half-blooded, commoner girl must be an opportunistic gold-digger - "

A growl. She was definitely sure she heard a feral growl.

"- who's slutting herself to get his - "

"Cataclysm!"

"Chat Noir!" she immediately launched herself to stop him but failed. "It's a trap!"

Several bullets were fired again, drowning the manic laughter of a man, and all she could do was to duck and crawl back to her hiding place. She couldn't see things in the dark at all. She didn't know Chat's whereabouts anymore.

So she summoned her power.

"Lucky Charm!"

Despite the darkness, Ladybug was able to catch the dropped item. It was a glowing stick.

"I know its purpose, but what the hell am I supposed to do with this?" she groaned, still concerned about her partner's safety.

"Chat Noir!" she called him with a cold fear that he was wounded somewhere. "Please answer me!"

She almost made a mistake of waving the stick to the void, but when she heard a grunt few meters away, she stilled.

"Chat Noir!" she called again. "Are you al - "

"I'm going to kill you."

The superhero's threatening words were not directed at her but to Howards.

He meant it, she knew, and the tone convinced her that he was dead serious, that he'd surely use his Miraculous to murder a human scum.

All because of an insult towards Marinette.

She didn't have a clue why her partner cared so much about her civilian identity. They only met on few occasions. He barely knew her yet he was willing to kill for her.

"Chat Noir!" she called him for the third time, and with the boldness, she hollered. "Princess won't allow you do that!"
The room went silent as the firings stopped.

"Such baloney - "

"Howards is only taunting you!" the spotted heroine interrupted the tycoon's words. "He's trying to gnaw our weaknesses, and use them to defeat us!"

Still no response.

"You stupid cat! You're supposed to cool down and think before leaping - "

"Thanks."

Ladybug almost leaped, then shrieked when Chat suddenly emerged on her side. She waved the stick near his head then sighed with relief when he beamed a composed expression.

He was unscathed, she noticed much to her delight, and was tempted to hug him but couldn't because of his activated Cataclysm.

She bit her lips to control the spilling tears on her eyes. "What the hell do you think you're doing?!"

"I'm sorry, My Lady. I got sidetracked," he muttered in whispers. "I'm not thinking properly."

"Then better clear your head now so we can wrap him up!" she spat out. "And don't do that suicidal thing again!"

"Cat's honor." he raised his right hand with crossed fingers.

She patted his shoulder with an ease, a silent gesture for forgiveness and at the same time, a signal of alert.

"Cat got your tongue?" Howards said while caulking his weapon. "Did I bug you both out?"

The two didn't respond, even after they were ridiculed with another shower of deadly bullets.

"Any ideas, Bugaboo?" he asked.

She roamed her eyes in the darkness hoping for some clues and got some answers: a glow stick, a dark room, and a Cataclysm.

"Gotcha."

This might not be their usual battle, but the man and his machine gun were less compared to all the Akuma encounters they've defeated before.

"Ready, aim..." she readied herself to heave her Lucky Charm. "Fire!"

Just like what she expected, the man immediately changed his aim and fired where the stick landed, giving Chat Noir a diversion to access his blind spot.

The feline superhero sprinted towards his location then swiped the silver barrel, crumbling the weapon into dust.

Ladybug assumed that Howards has a stealth weapon, so when his reflex focused on her partner, she instantaneously flung her yo-yo and lassoed his feet. She pulled it afterward to hang him upside-down.
"No more evil-doing for you, petty motherfucker," she announced casually.

Chat smirked, seeing the evident fear in Howards' eyes "Can I say 'Bye-bye, Sonuvabitch' as a disclosure?"

"As long as you don't throw him up in the air."

"Oh, don't worry. Spilled guts are kind of difficult to be cleansed."

Two pairs of dangerous eyes loomed on the cowering man, but before they could think of something inhumane, the main door opened.

The police have finally arrived.

"Bien joue!"

Their rejoice were cut short with the simultaneous beeps from their Miraculous. It certainly dawned on them that they have a five-minute countdown till de-transformation.

"Chat, where's - "

"I'm sorry but I need to go now!" he announced as he rushed outside the mansion. "I need to find Marinette!"

Ladybug froze on then gaped at her impossible partner.

"Stupid cat!" she screamed, not only because he would never find Marinette, but because she might need his help to locate Adrien before sundown.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Check this beautiful fanart from AmyNChan taken from the previous chap!

I can't express how grateful I am to see that someone made an art on my fic. And the comments are like my fuel that continuously keep my inspirations to light up.

"Marinette!" Chat Noir bellowed with green eyes roaming around the woods. "Princess, where are you?!"

All he got was his own echo.

On the first warning of his Miraculous, the black-clad superhero immediately fled out of the mansion and trailed the path where his friend possibly trekked off.

He had reviewed all the CCTV recordings so he knew she was anywhere but inside. Also, his partner told him that she led his Princess to a window, which was why he was in a deep bushy forest located at the back of the property.

His Princess.

*It doesn't sound so bad,* he thought. To be honest, he liked the ring of it.

How fitting for a beauty who lives in a sweets castle that has an upper balcony wherein one can view the finest sceneries of Paris.

But then, she wasn't your average Princess, and Ladybug didn't know her quirks that drove him insane.

That Marinette Dupain-Cheng was a lady that doesn't stay in one spot.

Like during Evillustrator, he left her in the banks of Seine but she decided to head back to the comforts of her home all by herself. And during Gamer's attack, he had her stayed on a building's roof deck for safety but did she obey him? No!

Oh, did he also mentioned her whereabouts during Animan's rampage?

Her unforgivable action in Gare St. Lazare reminded him to scold her later. He might forgive her on the stunts she pulled at the bus stop, but he'll never forget the bashes she made in the pub in Evreux, much more on her actions back in Howards' study room.

"Marinette!" he yelled with desperation. "Please answer me!"

He was very, very frustrated. Why can't she act like a Princess who must wait for her Knight to save her?

Why must she do her own bidding and go somewhere that was out of his reach?
Marinette might be a wonderful, brave and sensible girl, but she was just like any normal girls who are vulnerable in the face of danger - unlike his Lady who knows how to handle her fights without his help.

Another beep.

Chat Noir was using his remaining minutes to utilize the power of his Miraculous. He knew that once he de-transforms, he'll be stuck as Adrien, a useless civilian who doesn't have night visions and tracking speed to locate a runaway princess unless he has a Camembert for Plagg.

And right now, the cheese was the least among his concerns.

"Adrien! Adrien, where are you?!!" Ladybug called his name for several times, searching the entire mansion but found none.

One of the police officers radioed her. [I'm sorry Ladybug, but we don't see any blonde-haired teen here.]

"It's alright, Detective Howe," the superheroine replied, eyeing the deep forest outside the windows that was darkened by dusk. "I'll just do some ground search."

[Do you want me to send you some back-ups?]

"No need. My partner and I can handle this."

[If you say so.] the Detective replied. [We don't mind returning the favor for busting Howards' ass.]

"It's our pleasure to kick a notorious criminal, even though he doesn't have a fine ass."

Ladybug couldn't tell them about Adrien. She knew that it'd be troublesome if his father or his father's assistant learned about his abduction from the authorities, and if that happens, her parents would definitely make a connection. She didn't want them to worry, and she didn't want her school to know about it either.

She'll be less miserable if that stupid cat didn't abandon her to look for her.

Her time was running out, and since she was out of cookies, she'll be stuck as Marinette throughout the course of the night. She must find Adrien before it happens.

Though she prided herself as an au fait, she couldn't deny that Chat Noir made her best.

The spotted heroine pulled out her yo-yo, flipped it to dial his number as she entered the woods.
Chat Noir immediately flipped his baton and answered the call upon hearing the first ring.

She didn't let him speak first.

"Where are you?"

"Still looking for Marinette." he huffed. "I can't find her."

"Of course you can't find her. She's not there."

His ears perked up, with agitation overwhelming him. "Where is she?!"

"She's...looking for Adrien."

"Why?!"

He didn't mean to yell her; he just finds it ludicrous. "There's no way she can find him!"

"What do you mean by that?!"

He winced when her voice boomed on his communicator. "That's because...he's looking for her."

"How did you know?!" she asked. "Where is he?!"

"You tell me, Bugaboo. He'll show up once Marinette appears."

"Tell you what, Chaton." she spat out. "Marinette is capable of handling her own self. So why don't you help me look for Adrien instead and we'll both be out of this hopeless situation!"

"..."

He went silent for a moment.

"Ladybug?"

"What?"

"Are you telling me that Adrien is less capable than Marinette?"

He heard her grumbled. "Of course not. Adrien is a perfect human being, and I can attest that, but that doesn't spare him to fall in a complicated situation."

"A very complicated situation, yes." he tried not to sound sarcastic but failed. "And I bet you've considered adding an implacable female who can be a maladroit on your checklist."

"..."

She was silent for a moment.

"Chat Noir?"

"What?"

"Did you just call Marinette clumsy?"
He sighed exasperatedly. He must convince her partner not to look for him.

"She self-proclaimed it - not that I agreed with her statement, but she has flaws like any human being."

Which makes her more adorable, he wanted to add but stopped himself.

"She might be in danger. She might be scared or trapped somewhere. I can’t let a powerless girl roam around in this big, dark forest!"

"..."

"..."

"I can't believe you're a sexist."

He gaped at her comment. A few hours ago someone accused him as misogynist.

"I'm not a -"

"I know Marinette more than you do," she stated matter-of-factly. "And she's not your damsel in distress."

Somehow her words offended him.

"I know Adrien more than you do," he stressed his words. "And he can handle himself without your help."

"..."

"..."

Both were silent as they composed themselves of not being mad at their insufferable partner.

"You know what? Fine! Do your own way and look for your Princess who will never show up at all!"

"Yeah, I'll do that - and rest assured that I can find her first before you got your Prince!"

The two simultaneously hang up.

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Ladybug was three spots down.

She couldn't believe she wasted her time debating with Chat Noir about nonsensical things.

Looking at her yoyo's screen, she remembered the other functions of her weapon.

Tikki had once joked that the power of Miraculous was blending with the technology trends. The more you utilized it, the frequent it will perform its self-upgrade.
That was why she wasn't surprised about her yoyo's GPS function when she searched for Pixelator's residence. She even mapped out Madame Chamack's location and her phone number without checking the directory during Puppeteer's havoc.

So why not use it to contact Adrien?

As far as she knows, he had his phone with him. He was able to charge its battery back in the pub just enough to answer few calls.

Unless he turned it off, or that he didn't have any cell receptions.

Worse, he lost it.

Shoving all the negative thoughts on the back of her head, Ladybug dialed his number.

She got an error.

She tapped some applications for a trace why she was bouncing back and got a signal.

She mapped it out and finally found Adrien's location.

However, he was moving fast - way too fast for a normal human being. As if...

"Someone took him." she uttered with disbelief.

Cold fear crept through her gut as she hurriedly followed the signal.

.

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Plagg said that the Miraculous transformation was similar to an illusion - it was there, but not actually there.

His spandex suit was a false appearance of Chat Noir's civilian clothes, and the mask was only a symbol of Miraculous protection against fellow holders - Ladybug included. He often called it as a superhero logic.

But when his Miraculous disappeared during Reflekta's attack, he finally understood what his lazy kwami meant.

It was there, but not actually there.

So when he felt a vibration on his right thigh, he knew it was his phone - his civilian's phone - and it wasn't a text due to its constant alert.

Someone was calling Adrien.

*Is it Natalie?* he thought. *Or perhaps, Marinette?*

Unfortunately, the phone already blended on his civilian garments, and for him to retrieve it, he had to de-transform.
He couldn't do that.

Why can't Plagg alter my pocket suit like Doraemon where I can pull my things out from nothingness?

His phone alert was non-stop, almost distracted him to notice his Miraculous beep. One claw left.

"Wait for me, Marinette." the black-clad hero muttered to himself.

He finally reached the edge of the forest. There was a cliff on the end, and with the help of his night vision, he found a concrete road on its bottom.

Cats were not like dogs who have superior sniffing abilities, though Chat Noir was granted with heightened senses compared to normal beings.

But still, it wasn't enough to locate his Princess.

He found a large ten-wheeler truck parked at the side, and with his hearing ability he sensed that the engine was on, probably the driver was on a short break after being called by nature.

The slope was low, so there'd be a probability that his friend might've slipped there - if not by accident, then likely intentional.

If Marinette reached the road, then someone must've seen her there. Unless she hitchhiked for help.

Worse, someone hit her then took her away.

He shook his head, erasing the lingering fears on his mind. Muddling his thoughts would never help his search.

Landed on the truck's roof, he roamed his eyes around for any human presence. The driver was already in his seat and about to turn the wheels.

He was about to run and leap towards the front when a whirring sounded behind him. His danger sense rose despite the presence's familiarity.

Preparing his baton, he aimed it towards the presence until he realized that it was no other than Ladybug herself.

He saw the surprise ebbed on her face when she unintentionally hauled her yo-yo towards him, and thanks to his reflex, he deflected the weapon out of his way.

Which actually a bad move because Ladybug lost her momentum.

And before he could register everything, a red light flashed and fell on top of him.
'Look out' was supposed to be the appropriate phrase one would say if a projectile was about to hit a nearby person, even if the said projectile was you.

But for some reasons, Ladybug screamed differently.

"Don't look!"

It was her warning for Chat Noir that she de-transformed as Marinette and a reminder to her that Chat Noir de-transformed as...well, whoever he was because she closed her eyes when a green light flashed before her.

And as far as her Physics goes, she went into a 'Slingshot Maneuver' and crashed to a nearby body by sheer luck.

It was one hell of an impact.

"How nice for you to drop by." said body rasped beneath her. "At least...we're not hanging out this time."

She groaned.

Falling face flat on a truck's metal roof was now added to Marinette's Clumsy List, as well as Ladybug's Unfortunate Events, and the fact that she almost killed her partner had her run some inventory on their anatomies like dislocated joints or broken limbs.

"Did you see me?" she asked him.

"No, my Lady," he answered on her implied question, then got worried. "Did you?"

"No, Kitty. I didn't."

Adrien sighed with relief. He might've been pestering her for years about her identity, but on his end, he wasn't ready yet. He was too concerned about her opinions on him, as well as her disappointments.

No one dared to move, not only because their bodies were still singing with pain, but because they were afraid that the person beneath - or on top - might see a glimpse of their unmasked face.

Besides, the sun wasn't set yet.

"I can't feel my arm." the blonde bemoaned as he moved his right that was numbed by his partner's weight.

"Chat."

"What?"

"You're groping my chest."

"Oh. Sorry," he said in an unapologetic tone.

So Marinette kicked his shin.
"Meow-ch!" he whined even though he stopped moving. "I never thought that's gonna be a tibia matter."

"Why am I regretting not to knock you out cold?"

"You hurt me, Bugaboo. Oh wait - you already did."

She squirmed. "You and your punny attitudes will lead you to death."

"Hey, don't deny this cat for his identity," he replied with a notion. "My eyes are closed for your concern, you know."

"Oh. Mine too," she assured him, now that the humor gradually mellowed.

She had to muster her strength to lift her upper left body a bit, and when he wiggled his arm out for a better blood circulation, she slumped herself back again.

If they weren't mindful of their detransformation, Adrien might've enjoyed their intimate cuddling position.

Though in reality, they were just sprawling on each other.

And speaking of detransformation...

"Tikki?" Marinette croaked, raising her head with closed eyes. "Tikki? Where are you?"

Adrien didn't know Tikki, so he presumed it was the name of Ladybug's kwami, which made him remembered his own.

"Plagg? Plagg, are you here?"

Both felt something wiggled between his shoulder blades and her neck.

"I'm here." a small, feminine voice sounded, and the way his partner sighed he knew it was her kwami. "You almost suffocate me Ma -"

"I AM SO HAPPY YOU'RE FINE, TIKKI!" her charger immediately cut her dialogue with a high-pitched tone.

Despite being lethargic, Tikki looked at Marinette first, then to Adrien with incredulity.

"You haven't seen each other yet?!"

"No, Tikki. Not yet." It was Adrien who answered her.

It was tempting to take a sneak peak on Ladybug's kwami, but he has a cat's honor to uphold.

"It's nice to see you, Chat Noir. Though I wish you could say something similar to me."

"If Bugaboo permits." he chuckled when he felt his partner huffed. "By the way...have you seen Plagg?"

Marinette squeaked, jolting Adrien beneath her. As if on cue, Plagg flew out from his squashed position.

"This - this is horrible! Your girl friend almost killed me Adri -PHMFF!"
The teenagers could tell by the sound that the kwami was choked. They didn't know that Tikki arm-locked his neck.

"Wa - what the hell, Tikki! We haven't seen each other for almost a century and now you greeted me like this?"

"Aww, I miss you too." the kwami cooed sarcastically. "If only your mouth doesn't have a tendency to blabber."

There was a pause in the air, followed by a mild gasp.

"They still don't know?!"

Tikki hummed, but for some reason, Marinette knew her kwami made an eye roll there.

"Boohoo...cheese...I want cheese..."

"I can't believe you have the audacity to say that." Adrien's eyes twitched despite the lids were closed. "Why don't you help us get out of this place so that you can get your cheese?"

"First of all, you don't necessarily need me to rouse you two up from that ridiculous position." the black kwami scoffed. "And second, I don't know how to stop a running truck."

That was how realization hit them.

When Chat Noir leaped on top of a ten-wheeler cargo, the vehicle already swiveled to move westward. He was on the roof's base so he knew the driver wouldn't see him through his side mirrors.

But before he could go to the front windows and halt the driver for a short inquiry, Ladybug took him by surprise and landed on top of him.

And unfortunately, they collided just as their transformation dropped.

Which means that their body lost the Miraculous suit that could protect them from the painful impact.

Hence, the agony.

"That wasn't a soft landing." the girl muttered. "The driver must've noticed us that we're on board."

He could've laughed on her unintentional pun, but already lost the mood. She wasn't heavy per se, but her weight was making him uncomfortable.

Plus his mind was reeling from something else.

"I think the driver was distracted to notice you two. He's playing Jagged Stone's in high volume." Tikki chirped. "Too preoccupied to notice my presence when I checked inside."

"Not even a single cheese there," Plagg added.

"Gee, thanks for that information." the boy scowled, then asked his companion. "Do you have something to feed on Tikki?"

"She eats cookies but - "

"There's nothing edible inside." her kwami supplied. "I'm sorry."
"It's alright. We'll manage. Right, My Lady?"

"Yeah," Marinette said with a gulp. "We need to stop the truck."

But first, she must get off with him.

"If you're planning to roll over without opening your eyes, then don't," Tikki interjected as if she could read her charger's mind. "The gap on each of your sides are not enough to support you."

"So...crawl then?"

There was a hum, probably a silent communication between two enervated kwamis.

"Why not?" the black kwami snickered. "My boy has finally realized one of his fantasies of being pinned down by his beloved Lady -"

Adrien grunted. "Shut the hell up, Plagg!"

"- and it's in an open area, how scandalous!"

"Plagg!"

Marinette chortled despite the boy's discomfort. "Your kwami is funny. He must be cute."

"I disagree." He miffed. "And apologies for his rude behavior."

"You two seems to have a dynamic relationship. Oh well." she shrugged, palming the metal surface of the cargo with both hands, and once she secured her balance, she pushed her upper body up again.

"Plagg, right?"

"Yes, Pri - ACK!"

"No namings!" The red kwami warned him, stomping his right foot.

"That's not even her real name!"

"But that'd clue your charger!"

"He's stupid to know that!"

"I'm here, you know." the boy inserted with a scowl. "And I can hear you."

"Okay, okay. That's enough."

Marinette was not only losing her patience, but also the strength on her arms.

"Plagg, can you assist Tikki in dictating my moves?"

"Oh sure." the black kwami replied. "I have night visions if that'll help."

"That's comforting to know." she cracked a thin smile. "And once we leave this place, we'll get you some cheese."

There was a pause, then an awed tone.
"You choose well, Tikki."

"Of course. She's a perfect Ladybug."

Adrien couldn't help but agreed on the kwami's words.

He felt how his partner shifted her body and moved according to the kwamis' instructions.

He knew that Plagg has a tendency to screw things around, being a black cat and all, but after realizing that Ladybug's kwami was sensible like her charger, he became complacent and let himself relaxed a bit.

Until he felt a hard nudge between his legs.

He yelped.

"Chat?" Marinette froze. "Are you alright, Kitty?"

"Ye-yeah."

She wasn't convinced. "You sure?"

"Paw-sitive," he told her. "Just...surprised, that's all."

"...if you say so."

As if he could tell her that she almost knelt Little Adrien's crowning jewels.

A cold sweat broke when she shuffled on top of him, following whatever the kwamis instructed her to do.

He trusted Ladybug with his entire life, and he believed that she could do anything even with handicaps. But their current position made him start doubting her. He was afraid that she might crush something that would damage his future.

Who would've thought that a blind Ladybug crawling on top of you was scary?

His nervous state was not missed by his kwami. The Jerk.

"Don't worry boy, no one's going to kink shame you."

Adrien responded him with a growl.

The designer was busy concentrating on her balance to mind the exchange.

Chat's limbs were larger than hers which was why she needed to scale her arms and legs wider, but the rumbles on the cargo's roof and the wind that wafted her face made everything difficult.

It felt like years when she finally reached the space above his head, and once she sat and settled herself, she tapped her partner to move.

She felt him getting up, with a hand on her shoulder for support, and then wobbled to sit down.

As soon as his back rested behind hers, she squinted and opened her eyes.

Before she was a frontal view of the truck's path that was leading them to nowhere.
"Oh no." Adrien moaned when he saw the darkened sky and the unfamiliar roadside. "We need to get off. Now."

"If you want to jump from fifteen feet of a running truck, then call me out," she told him. "Unless you're transformed."

"Which you know I can't."

"Likewise."

"Then what do you suggest, My Lady? Abandoning Marinette back there while I made myself safe and secure?"

She frowned. "What's with you and m - Marinette that agitates you this way?!"

Fortunately, he has the nerve to chuckle. "You know that my loyalty lies with you Bugaboo, so don't be that jealous - "

"Excuse me." she cut him. "You're letting your dreams mix up with your reality. And even if we get off right now, we'll end up lo -"

"No!" he chided. "Don't ever mention that four-letter word that starts with L!"

She frowned, but deeper this time.

Where did she hear that L-word gag again?

Tikki and Plagg were sitting on their respective charger's lap in inconspicuous silence as they listened to their antics.

"I could've said 'love'. But that doesn't matter anymore."

"Ha-ha."

She knew her partner's mannerism, as well as his subtle movements to know that he was clearly, truly agitated. She didn't need to see his face to verify that. She was working with him for years anyway.

"Marinette is here," she told him.

She felt his spine abruptly straightened, then stilled. "What makes you say that?!"

"Because." she huffed. "Adrien is here."

"...what?!"

"I think...Adrien is in this truck."

The blood immediately drained out from Adrien's face, thankful that her partner was not seeing his stupefied expression.

"Are...you sure?"

Her hair tingled his nape so he knew she was nodding. "I used my Miraculous tracker and got a faint signal coming from Adrien's phone here."
So that explains the excessive alarms he felt on his phone, and Ladybug's sudden appearance.

Except for one thing.

"What drives you to conclude that Marinette was here after knowing Adrien's location?" he asked. "Because I'm pretty sure Adrien is not with her right now."

Both kwamis rolled their eyes in unison.

"Well, you're right but..." she trailed off, then wondered. "Wait a minute - how 'pretty sure' are you that she's not with him right now?"

This time the kwamis groaned with frustration.

"That's because..."

*I'm Adrien?*

No way he'll be saying that.

But there was something in her words that throbbed his brain.

It was like a mysterious puzzle with a missing piece, and that piece was being dangled on his face as if it has been there all the time enough to be mocked by the gods.

And somehow, one of the gods was on his lap with pitiful glares that wasn't helpful at all.

Ladybug was here.

Ladybug was here because she found out that Adrien was here.

Ladybug was here because Adrien was here, thus Marinette was also here.

But he was Adrien.

She was right that Adrien was here, but got it wrong because Marinette wasn't here.

Or was she?

Ladybug was his partner and best friend for years, so he knew that she would never ever abandon a civilian alone, or even lied about their welfare.

Ladybug was sure that Marinette was here.

There were only three people - minus the kwamis - on this truck: Ladybug, Chat Noir, and the Driver.

Marinette couldn't be the Driver.

Marinette couldn't be Chat Noir.

However, Marinette could possibly be...

"Ladybug?"

"Yes?"
“What...” he breathed. "What are you doing here in Normandy?"

She didn't like the tone of his voice.

"My...my school was having a study trip." then added. "How about you? Why are you here in Normandy?"

"A study trip. My school has a study trip here."

Marinette wasn't the only one who has a perturbed feeling, an uncertainty that stirred some questions she forcibly buried on the back of her mind years ago, only to resurface after the recent debacle.

"Perhaps you..." she wanted to jump off the road for asking it. "You missed your bus after that Akuma attack?"

Adrien shut his eyes tight as he calmed his nerves. "Yes, my Lady. And I believe...same goes with you?"

"Ye-yes." her voice hitched as her heart almost leaped out from her rib cage.

She could feel some stray tears forming in her eyes. She didn't know if it was because of her guilt, her fear or bliss.

"Chat?"

"Yes?"

"You-you didn't tell me the name of your friend."

She heard him sighed exasperatedly. "You didn't tell me about yours either."

Marinette bit her lips tightly, unconcerned that her teeth would puncture her skin and drew out some blood. She would welcome the pain as an assurance that everything was real, and hoped that the pain she inflicted was enough to bury the sting that was gnawing her consciousness.

His voice disrupted her trance again.

"Ladybug?"

"Yes."

"Do you - do you have your phone with you?"

"Yeah," she answered. "Why?"

"Be-because." he choked. "I'm going to call my friend."

Suddenly, her phone vibrated.

It was on her purse, and currently, it was slumped on her back. Despite the rumbles beneath them or the billowing wind that muffled the loud engine, they could sense that it was an incoming call alert.

Marinette fished her phone and froze when she saw the caller ID.

It was Adrien Agreste.

With trembling fingers, she pressed the Answer key.
"Hello?"

[Hello?]

Her erratic breathing stopped momentarily when she heard her voice echoed behind her.

No need for her to look back in order to know that her companion activated his loudspeaker, or dare seeing the terror on his face.

"Ma - Marinette?"

"Ma - Marinette?" a familiar voice responded on the other line that matched the words of the man sitting behind her.

She can't hang up. She can't run away. She can't just stay silent and let the other person disconnect the call because she knew he won't do that.

In short, she was trapped. Trapped by their own demise.

"Ye -yes, Adrien?"

[Ye - yes, Adrien?]

After hearing those words, calling his name like a confirmation, Adrien knew that he was fucked up.

He didn't mean it at all, and as far as he knew, he wasn't the only one who was innocent on this discovery.

This was a matter of a flight-or-flight response, but then he wasn't that kind of person who would easily back down.

"Where are you?"

"Where are you?"

Marinette swore her partner was testing her, or more like baiting her if she would accept the challenge or not. It was a fight of protecting a secret that they kept for years, and it was up to her whether to accept her loss or still deny the truth.

To be honest, she was fed up with everything.

"I'm..." she sighed. "I'm with Chat Noir."

[I'm...I'm with Chat Noir.]

That was a nail in the coffin.

She knew.

She finally knew that he knew who was Ladybug. And she also knew who was Chat Noir.

She knew that he was Chat Noir.

"How about you?"

[How about you?]
He chuckled, letting a tear fell on his cheek. "I'm actually sitting beside Ladybug."

"I'm actually sitting beside Ladybug."

Marinette immediately hangs up and covered her face with both of her hands. She shuddered as tears fell down on her cheeks.

She could feel the shift of his body behind her, so she knew that he was also overwhelmed with the things that unfolded between them. Things that they've painstakingly kept from each other for quite a long time.

And not once they felt any remorse of unveiling it.

"Hey...Marinette?"

She knew it wasn't the phone talking. The person itself was actually whispering those words in her ears.

"Princess?"

She sobbed when an arm suddenly wrapped her body, with a head slumped on her shoulder and dampened her shirt.

"My Lady?"

Without further ado, she twisted her body and returned his gesture by wrapping her arms around him as she murmured his nickname.

"Kitty."

Adrien's dam broke as he tightened his hug as if the woman would disappear anytime.

He heard her chanting 'Chat' and 'Adrien' several times, so he couldn't help but respond it with several monikers he invented for her.

Everything was unbelievable.

But what happened next was more believable.

"What the hell are you two doing here?!"

Both heads jerked towards the loud booming voice of a man coming from the front cab's roof. He was holding a flashlight with its beam aimed towards them.

"Erm.."

"Uh..."

Adrien and Marinette were overwhelmed dealing with their insuppressible emotions to notice that the truck completely stopped and that the driver finally noticed their presence.

Whether it was their kwami's doing, or the fact that their drama was quite a disturbance, they didn't know.

At least they could get off from the vehicle.
The teenagers didn't get any lengthy scoldings or interrogations about how they ended up on top of his truck's cargo or the possible dangers that would happen if they fell off and the damages that would incur on the driver's records.

They empathized the man's frustrations and went silent when he scolded them for being runaway kids. It didn't matter.

What matters most was how the driver dropped them off at a non-secluded place with an intersection road.

No 'thank you's or 'good-byes', the man left the two alone all by themselves.

When the truck zoomed away, Tikki and Plagg flew out from their charger's hiding place and looked at their awkward stares.

It was Adrien who broke the silence.

"Well, My Lady," he said shyly while rubbing his neck. "I guess we can officially drop that L-word."

Marinette facepalmed.

"Looks like the cat was finally out from the bag," he added.

She groaned.

For the umpteenth time since that day, the two were left behind. Again.
Half an hour has passed and still no vehicle in sight.

Standing a meter away from each other, Adrien and Marinette were silent as they observed the starless sky, and their solace on that desolated roadside was Plagg's whiny voice.

"Adrien, Adrien...I need my Camembert." the black kwami moaned as he floated above his charger's face. "I'm dying!"

"You're not being helpful here." the blond hissed. "Why don't you shut your mouth for a moment and behave like...like Tikki."

The boy glanced at the red kwami who was sitting solemnly on her charger's shoulder. Tikki gave an understanding wink, which earned her a smile. Her fellow kwami however, rolled his eyes.

"You must be thankful to have a kind Master who handles your overbearing attitude."

"You mean, cat-itude, Sweet Tooth." Plagg corrected. "And for your information, this lowly person you termed as my Master is far more overbearing than me."

"Hey!"

A cheerful giggle sounded, which made Adrien's heart leaped from his lungs. It was a melodious music to his ears, something that he'll never get tired of hearing it. Something that he'll do everything to hear it again.

"Now I know where Chat Noir got his puns," Marinette commented. "And don't worry, we'll get you your cheese as promised."

"Princess!"

He chuckled when Plagg flew towards the designer's face with glee. He couldn't help but gushed when he saw the smile tugged on her mask-less face.

Bluebell eyes turned to meet his green and glued for a moment as both appreciated the knowledge of discovery and the fear of rejection.

Then a lightning struck.

Marinette was the first who broke the contact, much to his dismay. She chewed her bottom lip as she looked at the darkened sky.

"We need to go," she told him.

"Why?" he asked, forcing himself not to capture her wrist. "The bus might be here in a few minutes. See, the schedule post here says that the last trip will be at seven."

"And what do you think the time is now?"

"It's..." he pulled his phone out from his pocket, then looked at the time display. "Seven."

"Now you know why we need to go now."
"Maybe the bus is running...late? C'mon, Marinette." he grimaced, which raised her brows. "We're in a zone that has a zero cell reception. We don't have any ideas if there are some lodging houses or hotels somewhere that's not beyond fifty miles. Plus, it's night time."

"What's wrong with walking during night time? As if I've never done it before." she retorted, and he knew she was referring to their patrols. "Don't get me wrong, Adrien, but with that rolling thunder there? I don't want to spend a night under a summer rain."

"But hearing a thunder on a summer night is normal, as it might be caused by the rapid cooling of the hot ground."

The girl scowled. "You can quote me Science, nerdbrain, but I'm leaving."

Adrien pursed a smile. He was totally an idiot for not seeing his Lady in her.

"Did you know that good thing come to those who wait?"

His companion paused, then narrowed her eyes as she turned around. "Then how about Time waits for no one?"

This time he scowled. Indeed, no one could give such snarky remarks like his Lady.

"I know that Knowledge without action is futile," he said as he crossed his arms. "But without Knowledge, the action is futile."

"At least I did something than nothing."

The boy knew only half of Ladybug's personality, and half of Marinette's personality and both has a common variable of being stubborn. Now that he realized that these two were only one person, that just doubled her stubbornness factor.

"We can't transform," he stated. "You know that."

"I can manage myself." she quipped. "And I'm not a scaredy-cat."

An invisible string snapped inside him. It wasn't because of the cat insult. It was due to something else.

"Manage yourself? Huh, don't make me count those incidents that you failed to 'manage yourself', woman." he spat out, then looked at the red kwami. "Hey, Tikki! How many times did your Master hurts herself outside the mask?"

"Erm...too many to count?" Tikki uttered, then gave a sorry look at the glaring designer. "If you include the air trips she made at school."

"Ha!"

"Plagg!" Marinette jolted the black kwami. "You want cheese, right?"

"Uh...yes.?" he reluctantly replied, unsure if their conversation would eventually go south.

"If that's the case." she harrumphed. "Then we can't get one if we won't leave this place, right?"

"That's -"

"You're into cookies, Tikki?" Adrien cut him, still looking at the red kwami. "You think we can get
you one faster if we ride a vehicle than walking in a middle of nowhere?"

"Erm..."

Hey, Plagg!" the pig-tailed girl miffed. "Why don't you tell your Master that there's no bus, much more a vehicle, that passed here since the time we got abandoned in this place, and will never be in the next several hours!"

"Uh -"

"Why don't you tell your Master, Tikki." the blond inserted with emphasis. "That this is not Paris, a familiar territory that can be navigated even with eyes closed, and despite no soul was sighted doesn't mean it's safe!"

"Well -"

"Then why don't you tell your Master, Plagg, that he's an insufferable worrywart who thinks that civilization doesn't exist in this place!"

"I -"

"How about you tell your hard-headed Master, Tikki, that she's a -"

"ENOUGH!"

The teenagers stilled and looked at the angered red god with a flabbergasted face.

Marinette knew that Tikki was a sweet little being yet a ferocious beast once pissed. And right now, she was more than pissed.

"I'm running out of patience, and you two must resolve this pointless argument before I kick you both in the ass! And don't involve us in this mess you both created! Let's go, Plagg!" Tikki scolded the two then pulled her dumbfounded fellow who was still whining about cheese.

The teenagers were silent for a moment, still unmoved from their spot as they looked on the ground.

Their kwamis left them so that they could contemplate on their shaky relationship. Tikki was right, it was a private matter between Adrien and Marinette.

After a few heartbeats, the blond murmured. "You really despised me this much?"

The girl was taken aback by his words, almost gaped when she saw his downcasted gaze. "Despise is a strong word, Adrien."

He bit his lips hard. He knew he was nothing like Ladybug, and obviously an incompetent being, unlike Marinette. He was just a weak, inferior kid who has Daddy issues with a rotten luck. She, on the other hand, is an epitome of perfection.

"I'm not disappointed or hated you for that matter," she added much to his surprise. "In fact, I'm afraid that I ruined your expectations."

His head lashed towards her, meeting her sad, wistful eyes.

"I am nothing but an illusion."

Adrien's voice hitched, with a desire to wrap her in his arms, to assure himself that she was real, and
also to convince herself that he desired anybody but her. Only her.

"Mari - "

"I know, Chat. You - you're the noblest, kind and compassionate person I've ever known. A trustworthy ally and a benevolent friend. The most amazing person with or without a mask." she interrupted him, raising a hand to stop his words. "And I know you love Ladybug. Only Ladybug."

He was unfazed when he saw the tears streaming in her eyes, with a painful expression ebbed on her face. It was a face he didn't like to see on her the most, but for some reasons, he finds it ludicrous.

"And who's fault is that?"

Marinette blinked her watery eyes and looked at his hazy image. "Huh?"

"Who's fault..." he breathed coolly. "Who's to blame why I fell in love with Ladybug?"

"I don't - "

"You introduced yourself as Ladybug, so what would you expect to be the name I'm going to presume to the girl that's behind that magical mask? I'm not fond of inventing names, and I don't think her name is 'Chloe' either, and you were adamant about keeping the identities so I didn't pursue my yearnings to know you better. If you just told me that you're Marinette from the start, then everything might be different."

"So it's platonic."

Her innocent words insulted him greatly, which only fueled his frustrations.

He wasn't aware that he even his raised voice. "Platonic?! That's bullshit, Mari! You don't know the agony I felt every night thinking about the superhero you and the civilian you! I even think of this as a puppy love or a celebrity crush, but no! It's more than that! I was scared because I thought I have a fickle heart! And you know what, it's your fault for making me this way - for making me a foolish guy that falls with you twice! And you played with my heart without even you knowing it!"

A profused blush crept on the girl's face but Adrien was a bit frenzied to notice it.

"I'm - "

"So don't ever tell me it's platonic when you already know the sincerity of my advances!" he hissed. "Unlike your half-baked crush!"

His accusations snapped her senses. "Ha - half-baked crush?! You're telling me that those feelings I've carried for years were nothing but a half-baked crush?!"

Wait, what?!

"I - "

"Have you ever thought how difficult for an ordinary girl to approach a guy like you without stutterings? You're a goddamn model that came from a reputable family! I don't know how to control my feelings especially it's my first time to fell in love, and I have no fucking idea how to enter a romantic relationship! God bless Alya for being my supporter - she helped me gather some information about you!"

"...what?"
Marinette was very mad to mind how the blond's jaw slacked with a beet-red face enough to light up the whole region of Normandy.

"Yes - I have pictures of you on my wall, on my computer, and heck even on my cellphone! I bought all fashion magazines that have you on the cover! I also have a copy of your daily schedule because hey, I can't approach you so why not try knowing your activities so that I can learn more about you? It might be downright creepy, and you have the right to call me a stalker, but not once I never cared about you!"

"Bu-but - "

"And here comes that flirty, pun-loving and ridiculous entity called Chat Noir, who was a selfless alley cat and won't think twice to save lives! He's brave, he's lovable and he's kindhearted, and even if your days were blue, he'll find a way to make it brighter!"

"So the reason why you lost your awkwardness is that - "

"I fell in love with you again, you stupid cat!" she hollered at him. "So you're to blame for my fickle-minded self!"

The boy only stared at her in disbelief.

Marinette huffed, catching her breath after pouring all of her resentments that she bottled up for years. Once she gathered her bearings, she finally realized what she just said.

Her face became sickly white. "Did - did I just..."

"Ye-yeah," he answered as he rubbed his neck. "Well, we-we did."

Another lightning struck.

And this time, it was followed by a pouring rain.

Her mortification shifted to annoyance as she felt the first drop.

"Oh, sweet lord! I knew it! I knew it'll rain!"

Adrien lost all of his senses, except the sight of a girl drenched under a night sky, with her wet clothes clung on her toned body, and the coldness of the rain made an accent on the paleness of her freckled skin.

Eroticism aside, he was seeing a drop-dead gorgeous angel.

And then he laughed.

It was a hearty laugh he once had when he first gave her an umbrella back when they were fifteen. It was something that was full of happiness and relief that someone cared - no, scratch that - someone loved him, and it was a requited one!

However, his beloved misinterpreted it as a mockery.

"See what I'm telling you, Adrien Agreste?! If we can't find a shelter in this dreadful place, we might either die of hypothermia or pneumonia!" she growled. "Screw you and that stupid Science theory!"

Her face scrunched with a beady stare, and a pout he absolutely adored. He shouldn't be sappy when she was this angry, but he couldn't help himself.
Marinette was so damn cute.

Adrien peeled off his white overshirt and then flung it above his head. Then he wiggled his brows with a shit-eating grin.

"Why don't you come here and take a shelter with me, Princess?"

Her eyes only narrowed more. "That's not even a shelter, Kitty."

"Aww, but we can fit together here."

"No."

He was glad that she didn't retreat when he walked towards her. Both could feel the heat emitted from each other's bodies, as the rain dampened the tension that was built a few moments ago.

"Hi." he greeted her.

"Hi," she replied shyly.

"Well..." Green eyes loomed towards her blue ones. "We just confessed our love towards each other, eh?"

The designer groaned, then slumped her head on his chest. He chuckled when he saw her pinkish ears. Adorable.

"I can't believe I said that." she murmured.

"Actually, I'm glad you did."

"I was supposed to tell you during our field trip."

He chortled. "Aren't we having our own field trip?"

Small arms wrapped around his body as he nestled his chin on top of her head. He purred.

"I have something to confess," he whispered.

"We've been pouring all of our secrets in less than a day." she chuckled. "Okay, what is it?"

"Remember our first Akuma?"

"Stoneheart?"

He hummed in response. "Yeah. Remember when you were insecure about your capabilities as a superhero, then afterward you waged a war with Papillion and cleansed Ivan's Akuma? That day I vowed myself to love the girl behind the mask."

"And I bet you did."

"Indeed," he smirked. "So you see, it's your imperfections that made me fall for you."

Marinette tightened her hug.

"I have something to confess too," she muttered.

"Oh? What is it, My Lady?"
"It was a rainy day when I fell for you," she told him. "You gave me a black umbrella as a peace offering for that gum incident, then you told me that you've been homeschooled all your life and that everything was fairly new to you. So you see, your imperfections made me fall for you."

Adrien felt a sting in his eyes, and he knew the rain was not to blame.

"We're both idiots for not noticing each other." he laughed.

"And all this time you're just sitting in front of me. Literally."

"I've seen lots of hints now, and I'm so blind to see them. You've never been akumatized. Not seen together with Ladybug. The mysterious disappearances, the sleepless nights. Crap, the pigtails!"

She giggled. "There's this one time Alya showed me a photoshop of you in Chat Noir's suit, and I didn't even glance at it for more than a second!"

"Really?"

"And there's your allergies, and the knowledge about Agreste's security system, and hell, the puns."

"I know you love them."

"I don't." she deadpanned.

"So if my puns didn't give me away, then we'll all blame it to Miraculous."

She snorted. "Yeah. Blame the Miraculous."

"Hey, Marinette?"

"Hmm?"

"Will you forgive me if I'll do something with you tonight?"

She tilted her head backward. "Like what?"

"Like this."

Without further ado, he cupped her cheeks with his hands as he dipped his lips to pressed hers.

Another lightning was struck in the sky, which timed the sparks that blew out their senses as they deepen their kiss. Marinette moved her head to the side to accommodate a better position while gripping the locks near his nape. She moaned when he bit her lower lip, with a tongue asking for an entrance, in which she complied with a hum. Adrien placed his right hand on the back of her hips, pulling her closer as he savored her senselessly.

It was a precious moment between two souls, enough for them to forget their surroundings - the rain, the thunderstorm, and most of all, the incoming vehicle.

"Well, well. Look at this, Maman." Sean smirked as he rolled the van's window. "I thought we left these two in Evreux?"

The old lady on the passenger's side peaked at the two lovers who were still lapping each other. "Is that...Marinette and Adrien?!"

Her son shrugged his shoulders and reluctantly pressed the vehicle's horn.
The blaring honk jolted the teenagers, which obviously broke their spell-bounded kiss.

The two turned their heads towards the perpetrator and was surprised to see a familiar van.

"Sorry to kill the mood, kids." the man grinned on their scarlet faces. "But I think it's appropriate if you continue that somewhere...indoors."

"Se - Sean?!!"

"Maman?!!"

"Hi, sweetie." the mother beamed at them with a wink. "Why don't you and your boyfriend get in here for a joyride?"
"So." the old lady began, eyeing a cuddle pile of drenched teenagers on the backside.

They might've whisked some rain away with a towel but still not enough to combat the coldness that seeped through their bones that even a blanket and a companion's body heat couldn't stop their shivers.

"How did you two end up in Argentan?"

Adrien looked at Marinette who simply shrugged her shoulders.

As if they could tell them that some goons kidnapped them, took them in a remote mansion, made an escape by hitchhiking on top of a truck, and then dropped off to an unknown place only to be realized that it was part of Orne.

So they choose the most plausible explanation.

"We got lost." the blond said.

"Again." his companion added.

"Really?" the driver interjected with a mild humor. "Are you both idiots or what?"

Instead of being offended, Sean's words triggered an inside humor that made them giggled.

"Yeah, we're idiots."

"Not just idiots." Adrien gushed as he snuggled himself more. "But also stupid. Stupidly in love."

The mother and son were half-grinning and half-cringing in his reply.

Inside Marinette's pouch, Tikki was highly amused on the twist of events, unlike Plagg who groaned at his charger's cheesy line - and he was supposed to love cheese.

"They were crying moments ago, then got mad and began shouting at each other, only to be followed by ridiculous giggles, and now they're getting frisky!" the black kwami complained. "And the worse is, I still don't have my Camembert!"

"Why don't you stop being a self-centered doofus and admit that you're happy for them?" the red kwami swooned. "As if you haven't witnessed how teenage love works."

Plagg grimaced. "You know, I have this inkling feeling that the Guardian handed us to do matchmakings, instead of 'saving the world' purpose shits."

"It goes to show that your kittens cannot resist my bugs' charms. And vice versa!"

"You don't get it, Tikki! You're not the one who's being tortured almost every night hearing about his lovesick gushings! Now I'm so not looking forward to this new development!"

Fortunately, their chargers didn't hear his complaints else Adrien already squashed the pouch.

"I thought you two have a wedding to be attended today?" Marinette asked their saviors.
"Yes, we have. And we did." the old lady responded. "It was a smooth-sailing ceremony, thanks to you, but because of this weather, the Bride and the Groom decided to stay in the chapel together with some guests and wait till the rain stops. And since we have a vehicle running, thanks to you young man, we went ahead to the reception then detoured here due to road blockage. Who would've thought that our paths would cross again?"

"Road blockage?"

"Ah, there's an ongoing construction near the south-end which rerouting some public vehicles. Some property damages, I've heard."

So that was why there was no bus in sight.

"See? If we left the post, we might've been traveling off to Caen by now." the raven-haired girl bumped her companion's shoulder, only to get a poke on the cheek.

"If we left the post, M'lady, we wouldn't be here with them right now." he teased. "And we might've not done the things we made back there."

She blushed profusely.

The rain gradually stopped as they drove towards their destination.

"We're here," Sean announced, making the two poked their heads outside the van windows.

They gaped.

Before they revealed a chateau with cream-colored exteriors that match the roadway leading to its entrance gate. It wasn't as grandiose as the one in Versailles or those in Loire Valley, but it has a humble ambiance enough to say that the house held a lot of cultural and historical interactions.

When the copper gates opened, a garden full of roses and hanging lanterns came into view. There were several wooden tables neatly scattered on the grassy grounds, with long rectangular ones on the inclined hill.

The place was completely soaked by the rain.

It was obviously a wedding reception area, an outdoor one, and despite the unforeseen weather, the organizers were able to salvage those tangible and non-waterproof decors.

The service crews and the caterers halted their work as they gave a small bow to Sean and his mother, and then a warm welcoming smile to their young guests.

Once the four left the van, Sean excused himself as he talked with one of the organizers about reconstructing the venue, leaving the three with a uniformed maid.

"Camile." the mother instructed her. "Why don't you prepare a room for our guests in the north wing and bring them some appropriate garments for the party?"

"Yes, Madame," Camile answered, ushering the two flabbergasted teens inside.

Marinette wasn't that knowledgeable compared to Adrien in terms of castle's architectural designs since she was not the one who lives in a Palais, but she wasn't dumb not to identify the aesthetics of the building.

She felt distraught how they left some puddles of water and wet footprints on the floorboards and
carpets as they passed the halls but the maid didn't mind it. She even beamed at them when she opened their assigned room.

"Feel free to use the towels and robes inside," she told them. "As well as some clothes in the closet. I don't think Monsieur and Madame d'Eu would mind it. This is actually their suite when they were a bit...younger."

The pig-tailed girl could've sworn Camile winked at them before she closed the door and left.

"That...was weird," she muttered. Her companion nodded silently.

The realization hit them when they began to scan the entire room.

There was a wardrobe full of formal clothes for men and women, and a single bathroom with no dividers. The only furniture inside was a stool for a mirrored dressing table, and a single bed.

And currently, they were soaking wet.

Adrien could only think of one possibility to solve their problems.

"Adrien?"

"Ye-yes?" he squeaked, unable to meet the girl's inquisitive eyes.

"What's the fastest record you've made so far in taking a bath?"

A blush crept in uncontrollably as he rubbed his neck. "Uh...forty-five? No - thirty minutes? Why?"

Marinette smirked. "Mine's three."

For a student who has a reputation for tardiness, he didn't question her claims.

"O - okay."

"So I got dibs first."

He jolted when the bathroom door suddenly banged behind him.

It took him a whole minute to grasp the reason behind his Lady's question.

"Well, well, well." Plagg hovered above his face with a derpy grin. "I know you're not thinking about having a joint shower since you're both wet and you don't want her to get sick, and you're not thinking about changing together even if you'll try your best not to take a peek, because hey, you're a gentleman and you don't have weird thoughts on your beautiful and sexy girlfriend. I mean, who am I talking here?"

"Shut up." the blond scowled while rummaging some clothes inside the cabinet. "Did Marinette bring something to change inside?"

"As far as I can tell, no."

The boy froze.

And when the bathroom door opened, his eyes screwed shut with his back facing hers.

"You're next!"
"O - okay!" his pulse quickened, afraid to turn around and see something...inappropriate.

How will he be able to go inside the bathroom without opening his eyes?

"You can turn around, you know."

He coughed. Did she just bestow him a go-signal to witness her miraculous glory?

"You - you sure?"

"Kitty." she frowned. "I need to get my clothes."

Blood gradually drained out from his face as his panic grew.

Their relationship progressed so fast he couldn't handle it anymore. Not that he didn't like it, but his poor innocent heart might not take it he might die.

Adrien almost shrieked when he felt her damped hand on his right shoulder.

"Don't make me throw you in the bathtub, Agreste." he heard the threat laced on her words. "So move your ass out there so that I can get my clothes!"

"Don't do this to me, Mari," he whined, summoning all of his strength to turn around and look at her. "I might lose my..."

"Lose what?"

He realized that Marinette was wearing a long bathrobe with a towel tufted on her head. On her shoulder sat Tikki with a blanked stare. Behind them was Plagg snickering on his awkward demise.

"...my irresistible wet look?" he piped, then glared on his kwami.

"That 'wet look' will be nothing once you get sick!"

"Yeah. Sorry." the blond replied, rubbing his neck as he walked sheepishly towards the bathroom.

"Adrien?" the raven-haired called him.

"Yes?"

"Were you expecting a joint shower?"

He banged the door closed as a reply.

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Adrien was wise enough to bring his change of clothing inside, as well as some undergarments he found inside the drawing cabinet.

He immediately stripped his wet clothes and dumped them inside the laundry basket, on top of Marinette's.
When his eyes zeroed on a strip of lace that was buried underneath, he knew it was a trap formulated either by his Lady or by his evil kwami.

"Pervert." Plagg guffawed much to his charger's annoyance.

"I'm not." the blond defended, forcing himself not to swat and flush the miniature god in the toilet.

It was a tiled bathroom with modernized functions for hot and cold showers. There were a bathrobe and a towel that was hanged behind the door. Various brands of soaps, shampoos and toiletries were displayed on the wall, and even though he saw his usual brand, he selected a vanilla-scented one. A scent that likely fit for his girlfriend.

*Girlfriend,* he thought. Can he consider Marinette now as his girlfriend?

They both acknowledged that they loved each other, and the feeling was mutual, but they haven't solidified their relationship.

Of course, he wanted to establish something with Marinette and would like to label her as his girlfriend so that he could claim her as his.

The question is, will Marinette accept him as her boyfriend?

Ladybug laid some ground rules that their relationship will be nothing but professional. But how about Marinette to Adrien? Will it also be followed considering that Ladybug was Marinette and Chat Noir was Adrien?

They've already broken a barrier when they revealed themselves and destroyed more when they confessed their feelings. So why not try to shatter it completely?

Besides, no one could deny the unbreakable bonds between Ladybug and Chat Noir.

*My power is Cataclysm,* he mused. *And my guardian is a god of destruction.*

After drying himself, he slipped a navy blue denim and a lime green chino shirt. It wasn't that much of a tight fit, but he had to plop out a collar button for a breather.

For his hair, he needed a comb and a gel to manage it. He knew that raking his tousled hair by hand wouldn’t do justice at all.

He knocked on the door. "Marinette, are you done now?"

"Yes!" was her immediate reply.

Adrien almost tripped himself when he saw her sitting on a stool wearing a blue summer dress with a hair draped on her neck.

He had seen her in various hairstyles, and all of them were beautiful, but the loose one was his favorite.

He almost lost his breath when he saw her eyes gleamed as he walked towards her, making his heart somersaulted with love and adoration again.

Mine, he thought with resolution. She's mine.

"Your hair looks funny." Marinette chuckled as she stood up, but before she could touch it, he stopped her by gently holding her wrist.
"A - Adrien? What's wrong?"

He reached her other hand with his, drawing both closer to his lips as he kissed them.

He took a deep breath, and once he saw the roundness his beloved's bluebell eyes, he uttered, "Go out with me you will?"

*Wait, what?*

The designer blinked thrice, and with amusement on her face, she answered, "Of course, we have to. Actually, Maman was waiting for us outside."

"No - no, that's not what I meant!" he choked. "I - I mean we have to go out, but I'm asking you not that go out, as go outside, not that we can't go out, but I mean I want us to go out as go out. Urg! God, what's happening."

The girl laughed at his stuttering words, which reminded her of their weird interactions way back in *collège*.

"Relax, Chaton." she cooed, caressing his head to calm his nerves. "You can speak slowly. I'll listen."

"Marinette..." his voice hitched again.

"Yes?"

"Will you..."

She hummed for encouragement. Not that she was teasing him, but she wanted him to relay his desire through words. And in his eyes, she could see the motivation she rarely seen in his two personas.

"Will you go out with me? Not going outside, okay? But you and me, go out as together, not as going outside together, okay?"

"Okay...?"

"So..." he trailed off sheepishly. "Will you grant my humble request to go out with me and be my girlfriend?"

Silence.

The model braced himself for rejection, but when he felt a soft peck on his lips, he shuddered with relief.

"Yes." she gave a watery reply while nodding. "I'll be your girlfriend."

He gave his Chat-esque grin as his emotion surged out. "That's...meow-velous."

The designer had to muster herself not scowl.

"On a second thought - "

"No!" he whimpered. "You can't take it back!"

"And why not?" she sassed, only to make him press her body towards him.
"Because I'm not letting you go."

The two were about to share another kiss when a phone sounded.

"Oh. That's mine." Marinette wiggled herself out much to Adrien's dismay. "I found some spare chargers to plug our phones."

"Who's the mood killer this time?" he huffed, raking his hair with mild irritation.

She didn't answer him. Instead, she showed him the caller ID.

It was Alya.
Chapter 21

Alya Cesaire has an innate passion for seeking the truth.

An aspiring journalist who was willing to face all the dangers in the world just to deliver a fast, fresh and fascinating news for the sake of journalism, this personality was often a challenge to those people around her.

Especially Marinette.

Ever since they clicked from Day One, and later on learned about her stuttering mess with a certain model, the brunette promised her to be the World's Best BFF - which comprise of consistent teasing, daily reporting, Agreste-ive monitoring with a progressive summary about her love life.

Sometimes she wondered if Alya might venture a career in Showbiz if push comes to shove.

"You're not gonna answer it?" Adrien asked her.

She exasperatedly sighed. "Why do I have a feeling she's calling about the status of my sanity rather than my well-being?"

A knowing look twinkled on the blond's green eyes, and with a lop-sided grin, he wrapped his arms around her as he leaned himself on her back.

Resting his chin on her crown's head, he chuckled, "Then why don't we give her a taste of her own medicine?"

"What do you - oh. Oh."

"Oh."

She smirked as she looked at the video icon on her phone's screen. "Let's hope we'll not break her."

"Good luck on that."

Upon hitting the button, the screen revealed two heads - a male and a female - with undistinguished expressions. A window revealing the night sky was near their left, and with the ample illumination, it appeared that they were inside a lobby.

Nino opened his mouth first but Alya was able to beat him. "Where the frick-frack are you..."

Then a moment of silence.

Of course, the all-knowing Alya would trail off. She would even squint just to make sure her eyes were not playing tricks on her.

Because it was uncommon for Marinette not to combust whenever Adrien was intruding her personal space, as well as Adrien for having an intimate skinship with Marinette.

The image was so odd in so many ways that their best friends gaped and left speechless on the sight.

"I'm sorry, Alya, that we failed to be there as promised." the designer said, fighting back a grin. "Adrien and I were caught up in a certain circumstance that we ended up stranded in Argentan - "
"But don't worry, we're both okay!" the model interjected, and to add fuel to the fire, he fondly rubbed his cheek on hers. "Marinette is completely safe with me."

"Adrien!"

"What?"

"Stop doing that."

"Doing what?"

She was supposed to get mad at him, but his ridiculous demeanor won. So she rolled her eyes.

"C'mon. This is serious."

"But I am serious." he pouted, then gave her a short peck.

That was the straw that broke the camel's back.

"OH. OH. OH MY. OH MY FREAKING GOD!"

When the screen suddenly wobbled, then followed by a shrilling voice, they knew that they've successfully broken Alya.

"Oops."

"Guh - "

"I think we also broke Nino." Marinette mused when the upside-down screen showed a stupefied face. Adrien snorted.

"Du - dude!" the capped guy frowned. "Rude!"

Before his friend could comment, a scream made the three winced.

"My ship has finally sailed!"

"What is she doing?!" the designer asked, and was answered by a loud cheer.

"Congratulations, Marinette!" it was a yell from Rose. "Congratulations, Adrien!"

"Erm..."

"Oh, they finally hooked each other?!" it was Alix's. "Damn, I knew it why they weren't here!"

"And here I've thought that that sunny boy was an Ace!" it was Kim's.

"Pay up, Musclebrain!"

A grunt sounded in the background, then a rant from Max. "According to my calculations, there's a 5% chance that Marinette and Adrien will going to be here before the day ends, and should've been lowered since Marinette has a 90% chance to screw up things under duress, plus a 93% probability of Adrien's notorious bad luck. Combining those two will result in a negative percentage. Hence, impossible."

"Hey!" Marinette and Adrien retorted.
Nino guffawed as he adjusted the camera, and before he could utter a word, a blur shook the screen again and showed Alya's close-up face.

"You have a lot of explanations to do, young lady!" the brunette declared. "And I want all the complete and concise details - and that includes you, Agreste!"

"Uh - "

"Don't be that harsh on my man." Nino interrupted as he lightly shoves his girlfriend to fit himself on the screen. "He's just a pure cinnamon roll who's innocent in this world..."

He paused, then looked at the screen again.

It was evident that both Marinette and Adrien were wearing their not-so-usual hair, with their not-so-usual clothes, and obviously, all alone inside a bedroom.

"Dude." Nino bolted his best friend some beady looks.

"What?"

"Dude!"

"What?!"

"You sly sin-namon roll." he flashed a toothy grin. "Don't tell me you immediately hit the third base with Mari?"

"NO!" the two teenagers shrieked with mortification.

"Didn't I tell you that we caught up in a certain circumstance?" the designer explained. "So there's this wedding - "

"We - wedding?" Alya gasped.

"Can you just - "

"Oh my God, Adrien you're aiming for a home run?"

Marinette groaned face palmed. "Why do we have friends who jump to conclusions?"

"Listen up, guys." Adrien took over the phone. "We got stranded, and some Good Samaritans saved us a place. But there's this wedding celebration here and we need to show up in order to earn our keep."

"Oh." their best friends chorused.

"Yeah. Oh."

"So who caused the delay?" Alya asked. "Your fans?"

"Well...something like that."

The reporter hummed as the blond rubbed his neck. "So that might be the reason your bodyguard's here."

Realization dawned on Adrien's face and grew paler when he suddenly remembered about Natalie's
voicemail.

"Oh, crap! I need to talk to Gorilla! Is he there with you? No, scratch that, I'll call him right now!"

He immediately passed the phone back to Marinette as he dived on his own phone that was plugged into a nearby outlet. He yanked the charger out, then entered the bathroom for a more private call. Now that Marinette was left alone to deal with their friends, she couldn't help but sweat cold beads.

"So." Alya began. "Are you two...exclusives? Like boyfriend and girlfriend?"

Their friends might've been nosy, but they genuinely cared. "Ye-yeah."

"Who initiated the confession?"

"It's, uh...Adrien."

"What?!" the brunette sputtered, earning a chuckle on her companion.

"Pay up, babe."

A euro bill was exchanged between them, which raised the designer's brow.

"Nino..."

"What? Don't you know how many times I've caught my man making googly eyes on you?" her friend guffawed on her blanched expression. "Who sealed the deal afterward?"

"Me."

"What?!"

"Pay up, babe." the brunette chortled much to the DJ's dismay, especially when he returned the bill back to her. "I know that you know that your man can't resist my girl's charms."

Nino shook his head, wiping some fake tears. "I can't believe my boy's a man now."

"And look at my girl, she's becoming a woman now!"

"Alya." Marinette cut their drama. "Are you selling my love life for gambling shits?"

"Money matters, honey." Alya grinned with pure delight. "You have no idea how much blood and tears I've shed for years just to have my OTP becoming a canon."

"I thought LadyNoir is your OTP?"

"Yeah, but Adrinette is my exclusives."

"What a creepy love team name."

"Hush, woman. They're originals. Copyrighted by yours truly." she laughed, then sobered. "But seriously, I'm happy for you guys."

"Ditto, Mari. You two are made for each other."

This made Marinette smile. "Thanks."
"And seriously. You two must be here ASAP." Nino pouted. "You have no idea how many alibis we've invented just to save both of your asses here."

"I'm sorry." she apologized. "We once thought of traveling back to Paris, but we made a promise with Miss Bustier to be there - though we'll not be able to arrive on time."

"What would you expect from the Queen of Tardiness?" Alya joked. "But hey, it's okay. Better to be late than never. Besides, Miss Bustier somehow understands. She's cool."

She sighed with relief.

"And it's a good thing you two didn't go back to Paris. Not only that you'll miss the rest of your summer vacation, there's this train commotion that might've caused some traveling delays."

"What do you mean, Nino?"

"Ah, you know. Property damages. Usual things. But of course, Ladybug's there to save the day." his girlfriend responded. "Oh, gotta go now Mari! The crew's calling us for dinner."

"But wait, Alya! What do you mean by - "

"Sorry girl. Gotta go now!"

"Ah, okay. Take care."

Then the call ended.

Marinette was still staring at her phone's blank screen when Adrien finished his own call.

"You okay?" he asked as he went outside the bathroom. She hummed.

"Seems like our friends managed to save our asses from Miss Bustier's wrath," she said. "How about yours?"

"Oh. Gorilla decided not to follow us here. He'll just wait for my arrival in Saint Clair tomorrow." he answered. "He doesn't want me to go back in Paris either."

"Did he tell you the reason why?"

"No. But I know it was Natalie's orders."

Marinette had met the Agreste's personal secretary on several occasions, and even though the lady bore a stoic expression, she knew that she cared for the younger Agreste's happiness. She might've swapped her birthday gift for Adrien, but Marinette wasn't fond of indulging herself on something that happened in the past.

A loud knock sounded, and when Adrien opened the door, they were greeted by Camile.

"Madame was asking if you two were done." the maid asked. "She's waiting for you downstairs."

The blond glanced on his companion, and when she gave a brief nod, he answered: "Yes, we'll be there in a short moment."

The maid made an acknowledgment bow, then left.

"Are you ready, Princess?" he asked as he offered his hand. She accepted it.
"Yes, my dear Knight."

They were in the middle of the stairs when Adrien received a text. When he swiped his phone screen and read the message, he snorted.

"Guess who's asking for an evidence?" he asked her.

"Let me guess. Alya?"

When he showed her the content, she grimaced, especially when she saw a 'Relationship Goals' hashtag written on it.

Leave it to Alya Cesaire and she would announce the news to the world.
The rain showers stopped when Adrien and Marinette stepped outside the chateau and the dark clouds that blanketed the starry sky already dispersed and left without a trace.

The wet and deserted reception was redecorated and replaced with beautiful centerpieces and illuminations. The caterers began to organize the dishes and sugarcoated the wedding cake's choux. The live jazz band was tuning their instruments. The guests swamped the now-dry tables and settled on their designated posts.

"There they are!" a familiar voice caught the teenagers' attention. "Let me introduce to you this young lady who fixed my little Gwen's clothes."

It was a group of elderly women, and based on the pieces of jewelry draped on their body, Marinette reckoned that they were prominent and rich people.

"She's pretty!" one of them commented. "And so young!"

"Your name is Marinette, right?" another elderly asked. "As what I've heard, you're aiming to be a designer?"

"Erm, yes Madame."

"Then I must ask for your number, and a reserved appointment in the future once you get famous."

"That's kinda...far-fetched, but I'll be more than happy to work with you."

Adrien grinned how her face matched the redness of her superhero's suit, and the modesty she expressed towards the praises, but before he could say something about her 'far-fetched' assumption, he was dragged by Sean out of the circle.

"Lemme borrow you for a sec!" the man piped.

Adrien gave Marinette a tight hand squeeze before she let him go.

She might be an earshot away, but damn he was starting to miss her presence. Sean had to interrupt his attention for several times, then chuckled reminding him that his girlfriend 'won't simply go away'.

Girlfriend, he mused with a fluttery feeling in his chest. Will Marinette mind it once she learned that he was a lovesick mushy cat to his meow?

Finding an opportunity to excuse himself, he headed straight back to his Lady.

"Hi." she greeted.

"Hi," he responded, linking his fingers with hers.

She raised her brow. "Bored?"

He shook his head. "Not if I'm with you."

Her flustered cheeks proved that he wasn't alone on this new feeling.
"Ah, young love." the old lady sighed. "Why don't you two go and grab your seats while I fetch my beloved Henry?"

Marinette's eye twitched.

She didn't want to know about her Henry anymore or learn about his spouse number. She was more than happy that Adrien led her away from a possible limelight and settled on a vacant table near the front stage.

When the emcee announced the arrival of the newly-wedded couple, she immediately looked at the bridal gown with glee.

The white chiffon clung the Bride's figure well, and the tulle pinned on her veil swayed together with her movement. It has a sleeveless silk top that curled inward and then smoothed once the trail reached her torso. The stitches she made near the bodice highlighted the almost-faded embroidery, and with the gold silky thread she applied, it glittered nicely against the illuminated lights.

She halted her thoughts, then internally scolded herself for appreciating the clothes before the bearer. In all honesty, the bride was beautiful.

Her bronze make-up highlighted her cheekbones which gave her a more mature look, and her long, brown hair was dangled with big curls.

The groom was wearing a long black tux with a gold bowtie. His dark hair was swept backward which made him more intimidating like his wife.

In designer's aspect, the image was screaming 'Power Couple'.

"They were like a match made by Heaven." the model commented as he applauded with the crowd. His companion nodded.

"The white and gold motifs are perfect for night occasions, and very regal especially with this kind of reception. There's a Eurasian touch with these oriental lanterns and the chateau as the backdrop, so maybe one of them has an Asian background? Probably the groom. And have you notice the trinkets on the..."

Marinette trailed off, then paused when she noticed his gleaming green eyes leaning towards her bluebell ones. She squeaked.

"I - I'm sorry if I blabbered some nonsense here and I know they're kinda boring and - "

"Nah, it's okay. I love listening to your explanations." Adrien chuckled on her profused blush. "And they're not boring or nonsense. In fact, I find it cute."

She frowned. "You're a sap."

"But I'm your sap."

She only rolled her eyes before she could indulge her boyfriend more to speak some cheesy lines.

Boyfriend, she mused. Would she be able to get used to it?

And speaking of cheesy, she caught him glaring at the wheel of white cheese on every centerpiece tables with animosity.
"Of course there will be Camemberts here. Camemberts, Camemberts everywhere..." he muttered. "There are dragees, wines...and then Camembert."

"That's Orne for you." she chuckled when he rolled his eyes. "I don't see why you hate it."

"You don't own a kwami named Plagg. You don't have a kwami who whines and bawls for cheese."

"Tikki also whines and bawls for cookies."

"But at least they're not stinky." he retorted with a pout. "And they're delicious. And smells good. Plus, you have a bakery so no one's gonna doubt your cookie stash."

"But I earned a sweet tooth moniker because of that."

"Which is undeniable. You're too sweet." he teased which earned him a jab.

"And you're too cheesy."

Their flirty banter stopped when Sean approached their table.

"C'mere guys and let me introduce you two to Gwen and Rodney."

On the other hand, Tikki and Plagg remained on their charger's places and stealthily feasted some sweets and cheese. It seemed that the teenagers trusted them enough to act like plush toys from Japan, or a hybrid cat from the Kowar Kingdom once caught red-handed.

"Sean!" the bride squealed then hugged her brother.

He returned the gesture "Congratulations Mrs. Nguyen. Same to you, my new brother-in-law."

"Thanks, Sean." Rodney beamed.

"Oh yeah, let me introduce these two youngsters," Sean said as he nudged Adrien and Marinette.

"Oh! You're the 'Marinette'!" Gwen gushed as she hugged the pigtailed girl. "You have no idea how much I owe you for letting me wear this wonderful dress on my special day!"

"Ah - I - uh, I didn't do anything, Ma'am." she stammered. "I - I only fixed some seams."

"But they're not just seams. You fixed something that led me to my happiness."

Marinette's face went scarlet red, especially when she felt a certain blond's presence behind.

"Oh, and who's this cutie pie?" the bride eyed Adrien. "Is he your boyfriend?"

Both bore matching red faces, but the nod from Marinette confirming the status of their relationship made his color thirty degrees deeper.

"So you must be the one who fixed Uncle Jack's mistake. Adrien, right?" the groom said with a shoulder tap. "Don't worry about meeting him. Instead of lecturing you, he might even hire you."

"That's...good to know."

"Are you a mechanic? Or perhaps, and Engineering student?"

He waved his hand. "No, sir. I happened to have some knacks on those things."
"Then you better focus on those things, particularly on ones you love most."

"I - I will, sir." the boy replied with a smile.

After a brief interaction with the newlyweds, the teenagers were introduced by Sean again to other guests, probably to all townsfolk since Argentan was a small commune, and in that short period, they were known as 'Marinette the Tailor' and 'Adrien the Mechanic'

"I like this." the model finally said as they returned to their untouched seats. "The normalcy of the situation."

"Well." his companion tapped her chin. "If you're not hogged by your fans, then you're babied by Chloe. It's a bit miraculous you're not agoraphobic. Aww, poor Adrikins."

He grimaced. "You know I hate that nickname."

She only laughed.

"You know." he continued. "This is more like a family gathering than a wedding reception."

"You've never been to a wedding before?"

"Once. It was much more formal, and doesn't have a casualness like here." he shrugged. "Maybe because it's an arranged marriage?"

Her reply was a hum, but before she could add something, a loud burp sounded below their table. Adrien pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Mind your manners, Plagg."

Marinette lifted the mantle and saw their kwamis lying on the ground surrounded by cookie crumbs and cheese rinds.

She smirked as she poked Tikki's bloated belly. "They're dead to the world."

"And mine's on food coma."

The two decided to get their own food, but before they could leave their table again, a toddler passed them and fell face flat to the ground.

Instinctively, Marinette picked the child up and checked her blotched face before she could scrunch and cry.

"Shh, it's alright." she cooed while plucking the grass on her muddy dress.

The designer was thankful that the fall didn't earn her any wounds or scratches.

"But - but my dress." the child sobbed. "It's dirty."

It was a lacy white dress with a golden sash belt, and since the ground was wet, the mud smudged everywhere. She knew that wiping it would ruin it more.

Marinette learned from experience as a clumsy girl, and as a babysitter, that telling her 'it's not' would only lead to tantrums.

She could pacify her with an assurance from her parents, but the fact that the child needed to change
her clothes would be a challenge.

*Unless...*

Her Ladybug-side made her eyes roamed around for clues while her Designer-side sparked some ideas.

"Hey," she asked Adrien who was hovering behind her. "Can you please hand me that flower vase and a table napkin?"

He complied without further questions, then looked at her with fascination.

Marinette unfolded the napkin to spread it in front of the child's skirt, then tucked a portion of its end on the sash belt like an apron. She used the water on the vase to remove the dirt from the child's legs and hands, and the wildflowers were pinned on the upper laces to hide the mud. Lastly, she dabbed a little of water on her finger to draw some intricate swirls on the visible splatters.

The toddler stopped crying.

"It's beautiful." was all she could say.

"And so are you." Marinette giggled. "Be careful next time, and don't run."

The child's hair locks bobbed as she nodded with glee. "You're like my fairy godmother!"

"I am your fairy godmother." the raven-haired declared. "So be a good little princess, Cinderella, or I won't fix your dress next time."

The child squealed, and after a brief goodbye, she went to the other table where her parents were sitting. The mother glanced towards her, then mouthed a 'thank you' while waving a hand.

"Need a hand, Princess?" Adrien said, offering his hand when Marinette tried to get up. She accepted it.

"Thanks."

Using a spare table napkin he fished from the other table, he wiped the dirt that got stuck in between her fingers.

"You're good with children."

"Ah, no. Not really." she shook her head. "She's nothing like Manon - she has the world's worst temper tantrums that's why I luckily managed the situation."

"Manon? You mean the kid who joined one of my outdoor photo shoots before?"

"That, and the one who got mad because of some ragdolls."

He winced. "Ah, Puppeteer."

"Yeah." she sighed. "But she's alright, don't worry."

"You eventually gave those ragdolls to her, right?" he muttered with a smile. "Now I know where Ladybug's selflessness came from."

She raised her brow. "Having doubts about my identity, Chaton?"
"Of course not." he snorted while rolling his eyes. "It's just that...if only you're not awkward enough to show 'Adrien' this kind of attitude, then he might've connected the dots."

"I thought we're all gonna blame it for the Miraculous?"

"Oh gosh, I forgot." he clicked his tongue when she laughed.

"But that's gonna be catastrophic if he did."

He chuckled on her pun, then after cleaning her hand, he kissed it. He admired the blush that formed on her cheeks as he brushed her knuckles with his thumb.

"Purr-haps not, My Lady."

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While they were filling their plates with food, Adrien popped a question.

"What made you to pursue fashion designing?"

It was an out-of-a-blue one, but she was able to respond. "I...I love seeing people wearing my clothes."

"And?"

"I..." she breathed. "I admire seeing the happiness on people's faces whenever they wear my clothes."

"I see." he hummed, and when they were about to reach their tables, he asked again. "Then what motivates you to become Ladybug?"

She was taken aback by his question, but somehow the answer immediately flowed on her tongue. As if she had it all along.

"It's..." she blinked at his inquisitive green eyes. "Happiness. I love seeing the happiness on people's faces."

He flashed a toothy grin. "That's what I call selflessness."

He pulled her a chair, and once he was settled on his own, she asked him.

"What's with these interrogations, Kitty?"

"Nothing, really," he replied, then looked at her with endearment. "I'm just a cat who's curious to know more about his Meow."

She froze.

"Call me that nickname." she narrowed her gaze. "And you'll wonder what I can do with a silver knife. It's just an inch away from my hand."
She saw a conflict flickered in his eyes, weighing the odds of saying it and not saying it. Of course, he'd say it. There's no way he would not going to say it.

"Meow."

"You - "

"Ehem." Sean interrupted an almost-murder scene. "Mind if we join?"

"O - of course!"

The teenagers moved and gave enough space for the man and his wife who was cradling their firstborn infant.

"You know, I'm a type who only serves one Master." the man stated, then winked at his mother and his stepfather on the adjacent table. "And so is Gwen."

Nobody commented afterward.

Several funny and emotional testimonials were told. The croquembouche was sliced. The wine bottle was slashed. Goblets were clanked and kisses were shared. And finally, the most-anticipated part of the program was announced.

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"Why am I included here?" Marinette whined when she was forcibly dragged towards the center.

"'Coz you're at a marriageable age!" Sean's mother yelled shamelessly, and much to her embarrassment, Adrien was clutching his stomach as he gasped for air to breathe.

The stupid mangy tomcat has the audacity to roll on his chair laughing with teary eyes.

Before she was a crowd of big and determined women of various ages glaring at the item that was held by a smiling bride like hungry wolves on its prey.

Who would've thought that throwing a bouquet means bloody war?

This is just a freaking tradition, she moaned silently with resignation.

With or without spots, Marinette wouldn't mind waving a white flag on this kind of battle. Too young for domestic responsibilities yet, with dreams that need to be fulfilled.

Someday, she pondered, she'll have her own moments wearing a white gown and a bouquet as she marched towards the altar.

Of course, it'll definitely happen in the future, right?

Right?

Right.
"Don't tell me you're videoing this for Alya." she glowered when she saw Adrien holding his phone.

"Okay. I'm not gonna tell you that I'm videoing this for Alya," he smirked.

"Adrien!"

"C'mon, this is your first flower catching, Princess! There's no way we'll miss this for the world - hey, get ready! Focus! Focus!"

He laughed more when she stomped her feet. "Don't make me grab that phone and throw it out!"

"Ooh...is that a threat, Buginette?"

"I'm warning you - OOMPH!"

She stilled when something fell - or slammed, depending on the eyewitnesses - on her face, then slipped down to her grasp.

Only to find out it was a flower bouquet.

She caught a wedding bouquet!

She caught a fucking wedding bouquet without her knowing it!

And to make the situation more comical, Adrien was able to record everything, including the crowd's loud cheers and Sean's not-so-subtle words.

"You know what's gonna happen, right?"

He gulped.

"You're next."

So when all the bachelors were called for the garter, there was no doubt that Adrien would catch it.

A tradition has an expectation that needs to be met, right?
"Have you ever heard the word limitations?" Marinette huffed when Adrien nuzzled her neck. Why he was doing it, she has a slight idea.

A certain cat was trying his best to pacify her anger. Unfortunately, she didn't find him cute.

"It's just an eight meownce, my Lady."

"My ass. A glass won't make a person this drunk."

"I'm not drunk." he defended with a pout. "Just dizzy."

She cupped his red face and slapped a damp cloth on his forehead. The coldness made him squirm.

"You're so cold, Princess!" he yelped.

"Coz bad kitties must be punished."

"Ooh, that sounds so kinky~"

She felt his brows wiggled against the cloth, and when he purred his words, she nudged his head backward. He groused on her harshness, but she wasn't sorry for her actions.

Besides, he deserved it.

"Pinot Meow," he grumbled as she wiped his face. "There must be a catnip on Pinot Meow."

"Of course there is, and before you say anything - yes, I know that it's real."

He smirked, recalling a certain memory. "I bought a bottle for Plagg once, just for a heck of it. And the fact that, you know, cheese and wine are partners in crime. And guess what happened?"

"As much as I would like to know the rest of it, and I bet I'm going to end up rolling on the floor laughing," she stated with a beady glare. "But no, I'm not interested. You're stalling, you're not admitting that Sean cohort you - and I don't like it. You're making me mad."

He gave her a dopey smile.

"You're supposed to say no if you can't tolerate alcohol," she muttered without stopping her ministrations. "I thought someone smacked you down when I saw you slumping on your chair. And I was gone for less than five minutes."

"I'm not drunk." he defended again. "And Sean was considerate."

"Uh-huh, and I'm Chat Noir."

Half-lidded eyes glowered. "Why do women always want to win the argument?"

"That's because we have an evidence, and you," she emphasized. "Don't have an alibi."

He mumbled something about Tom and women's rights, but she didn't pry into it further.

The noticeable red patches on his skin began to dissipate, so she knew that the medicine she acquired from Celia has finally kicked in.
"Okay, I admit I'm drunk." he breathed with a lop-sided grin. "Drunk in love."

Rolling her eyes, she covered his entire face with a cloth.

"Wipe that damn smirk off, tomcat." she miffed when he gave a hearty laugh. "I think you're fine now since you're starting to goof around."

He removed the cloth, then frowned. "Meow-ch. You wound me, Princess."

The two were sitting near the chateau's small fountain located relatively far from the reception area. They might be away from the joyous crowd, but they could still hear the music in the air.

"You know, everything is first for me," he told her. "Spending a night under a starry sky with the most beautiful girl, in a beautiful town of Normandy, outside my beautiful mask, and now I'm starting to feel so damn lucky."

He was rewarded with a pinkish blush, and an adorable squeak when he planted a kiss on her hand.

"Is it the cat talking?" she asked, drowning herself in his glowing green eyes. "Or the wine?"

"It's from the a-meow-sing purr-ty boy named Adrien Agreste."

Her giggles made his heart leaped out, and her smile turned his knees to jelly. "Now that's Chat Noir who's talking."

He was a lost cause. He was too much in love with her, so much that he gave her the power to control his entire soul. That a mere snap of her fingers and he'd bow down like a puppet to his Master.

He told her about it once during Puppeteer, so she knew. She definitely knew.

"Whatever. Both were hot anyway."

"Ah." she deadpanned. "That's the wine talking."

He chuckled.

A familiar melody was played, perking both their attention to the tenor as he sung the lyrics fluently in English. Still holding her hand, he stood up.

"May I have this dance, My Lady?"

Her brows rose, eyeing his complexion. "Are you sure you're not dizzy?"

"Not if you're dazzling me with your beauty."

She exasperatedly sighed on his romances, then finally surrendered. "I've got two left feet. I don't know how to dance."

"It's alright - just follow my lead."

She complied.

Adrien pulled her closer, his left hand pressing her back while his right on her left palm. His cheek was on her head, inhaling her sweet scent with a mixture of vanilla and midnight dew.
Since he was a head taller, Marinette had to lean on his shoulder as they swayed on the rhythm. Then she chuckled when he muttered the first line of the song.

"Wise men say only fools rush in, but I can't help falling in love with you."

*Why does this man have to be so perfect?* she thought.

Perfect face, perfect body, perfect personality, and even a perfect voice enough to soothe her nerves.

And why, of all people, he chose her?

"Shall I stay, would it be a sin."

"If I can't help falling in love with you."

"Is there anything in this world that you can't do, M. Agreste?" she murmured with closed eyes.

"Oh, a lot, Mme. Dupain-Cheng. One of them is scaling rooftops with a yo-yo."

She snorted.

He kissed her forehead.

In that cold summer night, despite wearing a thin sleeveless dress, her body was warmed by Adrien's embrace. If her thirteen-year-old self-was there, she would combust and faint on the spot, and probably squeal on their skinship. But her current self-had been intimate with him in spandex, and with the knowledge of his identity, she was able to relax in his presence.

"Like a river flows surely to the sea."

"Darling so it goes, some things were meant to be."

"Mari?"

"Hmm?"

"Do you remember the topic we've discussed while we're en-route to Evreux?"

"Which one?" she asked. "Go with the flow?"

"Seeing ourselves five years from now."

"Oh, you have an answer now?"

"Actually, a wish." there was a hesitation in his voice. "If we...well, if we can still do these sort of things even after five years. If we can be like this - or stay like this for more than five years. Or forever. If...if that's okay with you."

Marinette tilted her head and met his eyes. His green orbs were filled with worry. If he wasn't holding her for a slow dance, he might've done that nervous tick of neck rubbings.

Adrien bit his lip, prepping his heart for her rejection, but nobody came.

"Well." the girl smiled. "If you'll be a good kitty then I don't mind."

Relief swamped his senses. Her bluebell eyes pored his soul, convincing him that everything would be alright. That they would be alright.

Oh, how he wanted to kiss her.
"Take my hand, take my whole life too. Cause I can't help falling in love with you."

Unable to remove his gaze from hers, he asked "Mari?"

"Yes?"

The song has ended, and an encore cheer was prompted, but the two didn't tear themselves off from each other.

"Can I..." he gulped. "Can I ki - "

Suddenly, a blob whirled on his face.

"Adrien! Adrien! This is horrible, Adrien! There's a - ACK!"

Plagg's loud yelp sounded when Tikki hand-chopped his enormous head.

"Plagg!" she scolded when the black kwami rushed towards their chargers. "Try to read the atmosphere, will you?"

He crudely rubbed the painful spot with his nubs. "The hell with that atmosphere reading! This is an emergency!"

"I know! But there's a timing for everything!"

"Let's hear it then." Adrien huffed at the flying kwamis, but his eyes were solely darted towards Plagg. "And I'm going to drown you in a fountain right now if this is about your cheese."

"C'mon, there's nothing as important as cheese." the black kwami rolled his eyes, earning a threatening growl. "But listen - there's a - "

"I think." the red kwami interjected. "It's better if we show it to them."

"What's wrong, Tikki?"

She met her charger's inquisitive gaze, and sensing her apprehension, she bowed her head apologetically. "I'm sorry, Marinette, but we need to go back."

"Why?"

Plagg mumbled something incoherently, but Tikki didn't mind him.

"You need to see this."

It must be the superhero in them, or probably their unbreakable bonds to their little gods, that they immediately sensed a brewing trouble.

Without further questions, the teenagers followed their distressed kwamis.

They opened a door leading to a back kitchen, and on its counter was a small television.

Since the place was deserted with nobody to ask for permission, Marinette simply pressed the power on the appliance and flipped the channel immediately to TVi.

Everyone held their breath as they watched Nadja Chamack's face on the screen, and a LIVE sign projected on the bottom scrolls. The volume was low, but they could still hear the urgency as she
repeated Ladybug and Chat Noir’s name like a plea.

Adrien and Marinette knew why.

Because behind her was a city engulfed in flames.
"Another arson attack occurred at Palais Garnier around..." the newscaster began. "...firefighters were able to respond, however, just like the other four cases, the fire spread in less than a minute and consumed the entire building. No deaths or injuries were reported yet, but the authorities still plastered some safety warnings to the public. So far, there were ten reported incidents related to property damages happened solely in Paris, and fifteen of its nearby departments. The Parisian Mayor, Mayor Bourgeois, released a statement about these consecutive attacks, announcing that the suspect was still at large, and finally declared it as something related to an Akuma. No statement has been made from Ladybug and Chat Noir..."

"I messed up." Marinette continuously chanted, even after she was ushered into the room silently by Adrien and their kwamis. Once he closed the door behind them, she broke.

"I fucking messed things up."

"Mari-"

"Don't." she raised her hand, stopping her partner when he attempted to hug her. "Don't lie to me. Please don't lie to me and tell me that everything's in control even though it's not."

He stood straightly and gaped at her ridiculousness. "What shall we do then - blame each other because we happened to have a life outside the mask?"

"That's not what - "

"Is this something we'll going to fight over later on?" he said without any madness or hints of frustrations. "A strain on our relationship? A crack on our solid foundation? Marinette -"

"No." she shuddered, shaking her head. "God, no - no, Adrien. I'm sorry..."

She welcomed his heat when he pulled and drawn her into an embrace. It pained him to see her cry.

He wiped the stray tears with his thumb, then kissed the tip of her nose. "Do you trust me when I said that everything will be alright?"

"As If I have a choice." she croaked with a smile. "I'm sorry. I tend to overreact to things."

"Don't worry - there's nothing unbeatable for a calm and collected Ladybug."

She nestled her head in the crook of his neck. "You're reminding me of Stoneheart again. Comforting me with your own ways despite my carelessness."

"You're just responsible."

"I'm not. I even removed my Miraculous and secretly slipped them on Alya's, only to take them back when she got trapped by two destroyed cars," she muttered. "So I think you're the best of the bunch."

He sighed on her head. "Let me tell you how I jumped on the situation without debriefing myself about the Miraculous origins because I'm too excited to escape from my dull, meaningless life."

"We're both ignorant doofus."
"That's why we're made for each other."

"What shall we do, Adrien?" she asked, drawing them back to the reality.

"I think." he answered, "We need a plan."

Formulating a plan wasn't easy even with four brains combined - considering that kwamis have that particular organ, though Adrien refused to concur on Plagg - which probably due to exhaustion and limited access.

"It says here that the 'attack' started around eight," Adrien said as he read a random news post after spending minutes waiting for a page to load on a mobile browser.

"We're en-route to Gare Saint-Lazare that time." Marinette pondered. "But why is it we haven't heard anything about it?"

"We sorta have - or maybe, I have," he answered as he looked at her grimly. "Before they flashed the news about the train fiasco, a clip about some property damages caused by an unidentified source was reported. It was so brief I didn't make any importance on it."

"Property damages. Dad mentioned something like that during their call. Alya also mentioned that too, but she cut me off before I could ask further." she brushed her face with her hands. "And both mentioned Ladybug."

"There's an ongoing road construction near south that caused some reroutes on public vehicles according to Sean. It can be a landslide but...you think there might be a connection?"

She was tempted to go and visit the site, but that would mean asking people about it, which likely raise some suspicions. To them, they were only tourists who didn't snoop unless guilty, and not superheroes investigating a possible Akuma attack.

They could also leave discreetly and transform, in which they could freely ask any townsfolk, but it might end up a town away or two. Or probably in a different region.

Besides, their bodies were screaming 'rest' it was purely miraculous they were able to sit and think after all the troubles they've encountered physically and mentally in less than a day.

"Regardless of its connection to an Akuma, we still need to go back to Paris."

"Which I don't think you must do it right now," Tikki interjected as she floated towards her charger. "Not only you guys have to wait for the first trip, your bodies need a good night sleep. Exhausted superheroes would only lead to disaster."

"Can't argue with that." the blond hummed. "You know...there's something on this Akuma that makes everything weird."

"How so?"

He scratched his chin. "First is the media. It's not peculiar for Papillon to send more than one Akuma in a day - take Vanisher and Antibug for example - but they didn't connect the incidents until later on. Maybe they thought it was a terrorist attack? Dunno. Second is the Akuma's identity. There's no reported 'appearance' but it left several 'damages' as an evidence. The third is the reported time of 'attack'. Like any Miraculous holders, Papillon needs to recharge before he can use his powers again. So if he sent another after Twiddle Doom, then that won't match the reports - unless the Miraculous Cure failed."
"Or Papillion summoned it with Twidle Doom simultaneously," Plagg responded nonchalantly, earning a jaw-slacked expression from the two. "C'mon, there's no way the Miraculous Cure failed, or else Sweet Tooth here will inform us. And her kid was able to capture and purified the Akuma, so having it multiplied like what happened with Stoneheart is out of the list. Besides, the Butterfly Miraculous can grant a group of Champions if they're attuned to each other. Collective thinking, I may say."

"Tha - that's a strange feat."

"It's not, Adrien. The Butterfly Miraculous was once held by a Pythia and used it to possess the Greeks in winning battles," the red kwami explained. "A Champion doesn't mean a single person. It can be a superior group that has a common goal overwhelmed by a shared emotion and depending on the scenario, they can be combined as one entity or they'll have correlated abilities as individuals."

Marinette couldn't believe what she was hearing. "Are you telling me that Twiddle Doom has a partner?"

"Or partners, we don't know." Adrien cringed, then looked at his munching kwami. "If that's the case, then how come we haven't encountered it?"

"He either chickened out or refused Papillion's call."

This raised his brow. "Is that possible?"

"Of course, kid. But you need to have a strong conviction or a motivation. Fear, for example." he explained, pawing another wheel of Camembert. "A Champion has an option to obey or reject its call, but there will be a toll on the person both physically and mentally. Sometimes they would lose their control, worse it'd burst out their bodies and bam! Bye-bye, little butterfly."

"Wow. Your euphemism never failed to astound me."

"Just like Evillustrator. Nath was able to keep his emotions at bay." the girl commented. "There's this instance wherein he stiffed and barely controlled his hand."

As if forcing a girl on a date can be considered as something who keeps his emotions at bay, Adrien wanted to grumble but didn't.

"So let's just say this Akuma was trying to reject Papillion - which seems plausible since there were no direct threats or calls towards Ladybug and Chat Noir - then why property damages? Arson, demolition, stolen objects...these weird phenomena that are happening inside and outside Paris are what, a result of his uncontrollable power?"

"The Akuma might want to change something," he concluded. "Whatever that is, and if Plagg is correct, it must be something related to Twiddle Doom."

"There's nothing as dangerous as an Akuma on a loose." the red kwami quoted. "And only Ladybug can free them from evil."

Her charger cradled her head. "Urgh, I wanna go home now."

"Don't fur-et, My Lady. Be-claws I, your Knight in shining leather, will deli-fur you to your sweet Haven safe and sound." the blond told her. "But before that, we need to plan our sleeping arrangement."

The teenagers roamed their eyes around their assigned room with a blush.
The only furniture aside from the single bed was a stool, which would be a damn hard sleeping material. They once heard from Celia that all guest rooms were occupied, so they couldn't simply ask for another one.

If the duvet will be laid on the floor, and with spare pillows, one could...

"Oh, geez. Why don't you two share the bed? That way it'll be easier." Plagg suggested. "As if you're both innocent and never once dreamed of sleeping together."

Two heads lashed towards the snickering kwami with a burning face.

"PLAGG!"
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Somewhere in Paris, a figure was looming around the dark corners of Avenue des Ternes. Wearing a pink-and-black striped jumper suit, the person wobbled on the pavements as he cradled his head.

A purple mask illuminated his eyes, followed by a piercing scream.

"Leave me alone!" he yelled to an empty space. "Please, let me go!"

The voice told him no.

A building behind him collapsed, which jolted him from his bearings. He knew that in a few moments, the police would arrive and investigate the scene. He hurriedly left the place, but the voice inside his head didn't.

The brothers made a mistake.

They knew that Joseph Howards was in Paris with an objective to approach the Agrestes, but before they let him reach the mansion, they intercepted him for a negotiation. Said bastard accepted it and made a discussion on a nearby park.

They wanted to retrieve the property that was used as a collateral on a business they later on learned as illegal.

It was an act of good faith why they signed a partnership contract with him, but because of their naivety, they were conned. They were forced to believe that everything was okay, until such time they found out about the contraband and other hidden paraphernalia inside the warehouse, and that they will be used as a scapegoat if things went south.

They wanted to cancel the agreement.

Howards told them no.

So when a voice offered them a power to change everything, they immediately accepted it.

How wrong they were.
He witnessed how his brother was defeated and saved by two vigilant heroes.

The voice inside his head told him to fight, but the sight of his brother being cleansed told him otherwise.

They were born and raised in a family of faith, so they were aware that resentments would bear nothing but emptiness.

They might've made a mistake, but it was up to him to correct it. If only he knew how.

If only Twiddle Gain knew how.

"Please help me..." the Akuma pleaded as the pain shot him again, knocking him out unconscious. "Ladybug."
Adrien's consciousness was fighting between sleep and reality when he heard two faint voices.

"They still haven't figured it out yet, Plagg."

“We already told them last night, Tikki. Give them time and they'll work things out. I mean, they discovered each other's identity yesterday, and look what happened?"

“This is not a simple matter of secret identity - and you know that."

"Relax, Sweet Tooth. They're too exhausted with yesterday's events to have a sound mind. Just wait once your bug and my kit crack the puzzle."

A heavy sigh sounded. "I don't want to see her sad anymore."

"You think I don't feel the same way with my charge?"

"Huh. You're getting mellow now, Cheeseball."

"Shh, don't ever tell him that, else it'll go over his head."

He grunted, and when he slowly opened his eyes, a soft glow of dawn greeted him from the dewy glass window. Two blurry creatures - one was black and the other was red - must've noticed his awakening, so they floated towards his eye view.

It's been forever since he last felt this relaxed as if he slept for weeks even though it was less than six hours. Summer mornings have never been this warm for him, and when he gazed the bundle molded perfectly on his side, he got warmer.

This is not a dream, he mused. This is a reality.

Marinette was using his arm as a head pillow, with hands on his chest as she fist ed his shirt. Their legs were intertwined together in a flawless fit, covered by a blanket that reached her bare shoulders. Her mouth was slightly opened, breathing evenly with the same rhythm as his.

He parted her loose raven hair from her face and tucked them gently behind her ear.

If only he could freeze the time just to watch on a sleeping beauty beside him forever he'd do it. He wanted to wake up next to her every morning and to sleep together with her every night.

Her lashes fluttered, followed by the world's most adorable groan and a breathtaking marble blue eyes.

Marinette thought she was in Heaven.

In front of her was a gorgeous angel with a sandy blond hair roused by sunlight, and his emerald green eyes lit up charmingly against it, which matched his cute dimpled smile.

"Good Morning, Beautiful." a deep, husky voice greeted.
She blinked slowly. Why would he say something so preposterous? He should've looked in the mirror to check himself.

She stretched and unconsciously nuzzled his neck. A bubbly laugh rumbled on his chest, nudging her closer so he could inhale her scent.

His kiss on her temples pulled her back to reality.

"EEEEEEPPPP!" she squeaked, almost hitting Adrien's jaw as she jolted and ended up falling on the bedside.

"Mari?!" he sat up immediately. "Princess, are you alright?!

Her jaw slackened with mortification.

She was starting to recall everything, and with a flustered face, she whined, hiding her red face behind her hands out of embarrassment.

She couldn't believe that they shared a bed last night.

They were debating about their sleeping arrangements when he suddenly threw her a pun. So she threw him a pillow and bulls-eyed his face. He theatrically slumped on the bed and told her bleary how fluffy the bed was. Tempted, she tried and convinced that indeed, the bed was genuinely fluffy and cozy.

She swore she closed her eyes for just six seconds - and lo and behold, it became hours.

Adrien panicked at first, afraid that he did something that scared her, or that he hurt her, but when he saw her uncovered pink ears, he sighed with relief. Then laughed.

"There's nothing to be ashamed of, Buginette." he teased while gently plucking her fingers. "You have my fur permission to check meow-t."

This earned him a disgruntling huff and an eye roll.

She finally removed her hands but still stayed on the floor. So instead of picking her up, he decided to slide down and fall on top of her.

"Chaton!" she scolded between giggles.

He hummed, rubbing his cheek on hers. She tried to wiggle out but his weight pinned her down.

"No~" he whimpered. "You're so warm...and comfy..."

"Stop it!"

"Don't wanna!"

A loud cough interrupted their cuddling session.

"Hope you two noticed that we're still here." Tikki chirped, making the teenagers scrambled out from their glued position.

"This frisky business suffocates me like a hairball." Plagg harrumphed. "Geez, such disgusting sight spoiled my appetite."
"Since when did your stomach got churned from cheese?"

While their kwamis were busy bantering with nonsensical things, their blushing chargers eyed each other. Then began to remember their Objectives for the Day

Ditch the school trip.

Go back to Paris.

Capture the Akuma, and if lucky enough, defeat Papillion.

But before anything else, they need to save their dignity first from Alya and Nino's wrath.

"You know...a day will come wherein we'll be both torn between two identities, and left without a choice but to choose the other." Adrien grimaced at the thought. "Because we ran out of ideas in inventing alibis."

"There's this saying that goes 'two heads are better than one', so I know we can manage it." she simply shrugged. "Let's hope it's not going to be a recurring issue."

He nodded, then jerked his thumb at the bathroom's doorway. "So, who's gonna go there first?"

"I had my first turn yesterday, so today's yours."

"Okay." he stood up, collecting his washed clothes placed near the entrance, probably by Celia before they retired last night.

Before he could enter inside, he poked his upper body out to taunt his girlfriend with wiggled brows. "Care to join me, My Lady?"

She responded him with a flying pillow, which he dodged successfully by slamming the door behind him. He even broke a silly laugh.

"That's my cue." Plagg excused himself and followed his charger.

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Marinette has never been this alone with Tikki since post-reveal for some pep-talk, she realized, so she looked at her kwami and squealed all of her bottled emotions.

"Oh my God, Tikki! Adrien is Chat Noir! And Chat Noir is Adrien!" she ranted while flailing her hands in the air. "My childhood crush is actually my heroic best friend! And - and he loves me, and I told him to love him!"

"Yeah, I'm so happy for you, Marinette."

"And - and...we kissed! And we danced last night! And we slept together - not that sleeping together, but sleeping beside each other!"

"Yeah."
"He's my boyfriend now, Tikki! And I'm his girlfriend! How miraculous is that!"

"Yeah."

Despite her enthusiasms, she couldn't help but notice her kwami's enervated state. She dropped her hands and looked at Tikki with worry, leading her to their current issue.

"I'm sorry for being insensitive, Tikki." the designer bowed, with eyes trailing on the carpet's patterns. "I should've thought better than anyone else...that I should be more rational and sensible, especially now that we have an Akuma on the loose."

The red kwami was taken aback. "Oh no, that's not - Marinette, I'm so happy for you and Adrien. I've been rooting for him since the day you had a crush on him! I don't think he's a distraction for you. I'm just...I'm just concerned about the...the events."

"Yeah, you're right." she sighed. "We didn't know its name. The only clues that we have were its correlation with Twiddle Doom and the oddity of its destructive power - that unlike other attacks, this Akuma was affecting not only Paris but some regions in France. If its akumatization was simultaneous with Twiddle Doom, then that means both shared the same goal and power. So if Twiddle Doom was controlling the dimension, then this..."

Tikki observed how her charger's expression gradually paled and froze on the spot. She could hear the gears turning on her head, probably deciphering the critical factor of their current dilemma. She was proud that her Ladybug was wise enough to solve the puzzle, but couldn't express her happiness since the answer derived her to a painful truth.

"Tikki..." her charger's voice hitched. "Is this something similar with Timebreaker?"

Her silence answered her assumptions.

Marinette remembered the feeling how Chat vanished as she embraced him, and the exhilaration when she got dragged to the past and met her other self.

Both Ladybugs used their Miraculous Cure, and before she transported back to her timeline, she saw that Alix' watch was fixed. But on hers, it wasn't.

She wasn't sure if Marinette or Ladybug from the other side might remember the dilemma of seeing her partner disappeared, but when she asked Chat if he remembered seeing two Ladybugs, he just swooned and started to babble his dreams and fantasies about her until she forcibly shut him up.

Do people's memories from the other timestream can be transferred to their current one? She wasn't sure anymore.

"I think some people call that phenomena de ja vu," Tikki replied, unaware that she spoke her thoughts audibly. "Or epiphanies. But if there's a Miraculous involvement, then there might be a breakthrough -."

"What if there isn't?" Marinette shoot up and began to pace around. "What if after Ladybug fixes everything, it also resets something?"

"This is not like Timebreaker - "

"Of course it isn't Timebreaker, or Pixelator, or an Akuma that shoots out energy beam to transport its enemy back to the past or future!" the girl halted, with fat tears on her eyes. "Our enemy has the power to twiddle Reality, Tikki."
The red kwami was silent again.

"You told us last night that multiple Champions has the same power. Plagg told us last night that Twiddle Doom has a runaway partner who can't control his powers." the girl continued her pacings. "Twiddle Doom freezes time. This unknown Akuma? If he's not changing it, then probably he's destroying it. And you know what that means?"

"Marinette?"

Both jolted upon hearing Adrien's voice.

He was wearing his yesterday's clothes, and the paleness on his face clearly showed that it was not due to the cold shower.

"My Lady, I - "

Marinette entered the bathroom without sparing him a glance, then shut the door locked.

Tikki hovered above him with empathy, then looked at the fellow kwami who was sitting on top of his charger's crown.

"You're bug is wise, Tikki. She cracked the puzzle." Plagg said.

"Same with your kitten, Plagg," she answered, then glanced at the boy. "Don't worry, Adrien. She needs time to compose herself."

The blond gave a short nod.

When Tikki entered the bathroom, she saw her charger crouching on the wet tiles with tears streaming like the water that showered on her naked back. It pained her to see her charger so hurt, and so broken. And the only way to console her was to stay with her and listen to her cries.

Adrien felt that the kwamis planned to have a one-on-one pep talk with their chargers separately since a similar situation happened to him inside the bathroom.

Like Marinette, he figured out things immediately, and the possible price associated with it.

So what if this mysterious Akuma was destroying their timestream? Ladybug would fix that.

What if everything reset and returned to what it should've been yesterday? They could redo things, no problem.

What if the memories of their adventures disappeared? What if they'll be back to yesterday, a day wherein they haven't revealed their identities? A day in which their confessions never happened at all?

"We can restart all over again." the model muttered while clenching his fist. "We can make memories again, right? Me telling her that I'm Chat Noir and her telling me she's Ladybug...and then I will tell
her again how much I loved her."

Plagg only eyed him while chewing a cheese.

"We might recreate everything...but it'll not be the same - OMPHFF!"

"Calm down and eat some Camembert, will you?" the black kwami snitted as he shoved a cube of cheese on his charger's mouth, much to the latter's chagrin. "I have no idea how human's mind works, and I don't have any desires to know them, but I've been living for several centuries with them to know the way they lived through success and downfall. Your problem and that bug's issues are nothing compared to other Miraculous bearers we handled. Repairing a damaged dimension? Easy peasy."

The boy reluctantly swallowed the smelly food. "But Plagg, we're talking about wiping our memories back to yesterday's events! It's as if this whole fiasco thing doesn't exist!"

"But you just mentioned you're cool with making memories again, right?"

Truth to be told, the words that Marinette uttered yesterday night as she revealed her insecurities haunted him.

'I am nothing but an illusion'  

He'd do everything to deny that. Hell, he had told her that he would love the girl behind the mask, so he knew he would.

So if he was able to find her on this Akuma-corrupted dimension, then he'd definitely find her again on a fixed dimension.

No matter how long it'd take, or challenges they'd take, deep inside he believed they would discover each other. They were soulmates - a Yin to his Yang.

"Cheer up, kid. Your mopey face is far more disgusting than your dopey one." his kwami pawed him. "Go kiss the girl, and tell her everything. Privately. For the love of cheese, I don't wanna see some of your rituals, okay?"

A sudden thought entered his mind. "Plagg?"

"Yes?"

"The property damages that incurred outside Paris...is that something related to our out-of-town trip?"

"Probably," he answered while ruffling another wheel of cheese God knows where in the world he acquired it. "It's likely that this unknown Akuma doesn't know your identities, but because he can also manipulate Reality, he was sending out destructive forces near your locations subconsciously to catch your attention. He was seeking you guys out - if not for your Miraculous, then probably for his salvation."

"The way you told me these things feels like you've experienced these before."

Plagg looked at him with mild surprise, and with a slight frown, he turned his back to face the windows. "Long time ago, a certain Shogun possessed both the Butterfly and the Cat Miraculous. He would send out a swarm of butterflies to control his samurai warriors, and cataclysm those who revoked his rules. Those who pledged their loyalties couldn't oppose him at all, and for them to be
freed from his control, they either be killed or do the kill. That’s how Seppukku came from, and the legend about seeing a white butterfly related to a departed soul."

"I’m sorry to hear that." the boy murmured, saddened that he didn’t know some things about his kwami’s origins. "I didn’t mean to - "

"It’s okay, kid. Past is past," the black kwami interjected stoically as he flew back to his charger. "We have Tikki who can turn the tides unlike before. And as a god of destruction, we might be able to cancel the aftereffects of the Cure."

Adrien extended his index finger to rub his kwami’s head, earning a mirthful purr.

"Plagg?"

"Mrrw?"

"Thanks."

When the bathroom door opened, they saw Marinette in her usual clothes and her usual pig tails. There were still traces of sadness lingered in her eyes, but not as blotched like before.

The blond patted a spot on his side, gesturing her to sit on the duvet. "Come here."

She walked towards him and hugged him tightly instead.

"Two heads are better than one, right?" he reminded her as he wrapped his arms around her waist. "So I know we’ll manage everything."

"Yeah."

The teenagers were done from their crying stage, so they decided to enjoy each other’s warmth for a moment.

Adrien was the first who broke the contact, only to cup Marinette’s face and plant a chaste kiss on her lips. She frowned.

"Did you eat a Camembert, Kitty?"

"Well, what can I say?" he shrugged his shoulders and eyed his pouting kwami. "That’s my comfort food."

She sat beside him with intertwined fingers.

Looking at their kwamis, she said. "We have to go home now."

They agreed silently.

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Adrien and Marinette walked outside the chateau and saw Sean sitting near the patio. Spotting them,
he waved his hand.

"Why don't you two join me for breakfast?" the man told them.

"Ah, no. It's okay. We'll grab some food along the way. We need to ride the first train back to Paris."
Adrien answered, earning a raised brow.

"Paris? I thought you're going to Saint-Clair?"

"Uh...there's an emergency at home, so we have no choice but to go back," Marinette responded.

The man hummed. Whether he read their lies or accepted their words as truths, he didn't mention it.

"We would like to express our gratitude for your hospitality again, Sean." the blond smiled, then looked around the premise. "And perhaps, we could extend our thanks to Madame as well."

He waved his hand nonchalantly. "Ah, don't worry about my mother. She's with some folks today doing the Chiverie, and that notorious chamber pot."

The teenagers couldn't help but grimaced at the thought, and at the same time pitied the newlyweds. Poor Gwen and Rodney.

"Once you two get married, better to have your honeymoon be somewhere outside France, like Venice for example. That way you'll be able to escape from your friends and family's pranks."

Horror engulfed the girl's face, but before she could say anything, her boyfriend spoke. "We'll take your suggestion as a future reference."

She squeaked, especially when he wrapped her arms around her shoulders.

Are her childhood dreams of marrying Adrien and lived in a house with their three kids and a dog - no, a hamster - scratch that, a cat, will come true?

Alya might have a field day.

"I can get you a lift if you want." the man suggested, then called one of the helpers who was cleaning last night's affairs. "Hey, Jacques! C'mere!"

A stout man around mid-twenties jogged towards them. "Yes, Monsieur?"

"Why don't you take our pickup, then drive these kids off to the train station?"

"As much as we would like to take your offer..." Marinette interrupted. "...but we're planning to drop by somewhere first before we take the train."

"Oh, I see. A souvenir." Sean commented, then looked at his helper. "Jacques?"

"As long as it's along our way, I don't mind," Jacques said. "So, where do you want to go first?"

The two eyed each other, then looked at their assigned driver with mixed expressions.

"Camembert."
If you've noticed my featured akumas, they were inspired from Alice in Wonderland's notable twin brothers.

It might be vague here, but I would like to point out that I'll be using the Alpha timeline. Remember Timebreaker/Chronogirl episode? We have a timeline that 'Chat got vanished' (Alpha) and 'Two Ladybugs' (Beta), and the latter was used as a canon. We have no idea what happened on Alix's watch on Alpha timeline since it was damaged before Hawkmoth interfered. However in Beta timeline, we saw that the watch was fixed by Miraculous Cure despite damaged the same way in Alpha timeline. My theory is that any damages that involves an akuma's interference can be fixed by Ladybug. Since Beta timeline has been corrupted by Timebreaker already, the broken watch was fixed.

Timetraveling is an adventure with several forms, y'know.

El Psy Congroo.
"Are we there yet?" Plagg asked his charger with excitement.

"No."

A few minutes later, he asked again. "Are we there yet?"

"No."

Another minute has passed. "Are we there yet?"

"Plagg," Adrien growled, then looked at his flying kwami. "Ask me again, I swear, and I'll have this vehicle swivel around you're not going to see that place called Camembert."

"Impossible." the black kwami crossed his small arms. "There's no way you can turn this pickup around. This is a one-way narrow road surrounded by muddy grounds."

"Oh yes, I can. Or I can tell Jacques to go straight ahead to the train station."

"You can't do that!"

"Guys, calm down." Marinette giggled at the banters. "Don't tease your kwami that much, Kitty. And Plagg - relax, will you? Want some cookies?"

"Eew! No thanks!"

"Plagg." Tikki scowled. "Don't you ever say 'eew' to cookies. Show some respect."

The teenagers gave an exasperated laugh as they munched their meal. They were thankful that Sean's household packed them some butter cookies and a thermos of hot cocoa even though they initially refused the offer. A free ride towards their destination was enough already, however, the man felt like the gesture wasn't enough to pay all the deeds that they made to save his sister's wedding.

Currently, the two were sitting in the back rear of the truck where the cargoes were loaded. Jacques didn't question the two why they opted to stay there, or even concerned about their safety. He somewhat knew that urbanites like them tend to enjoy the dewy mornings of the French countryside.

Travelling to Camembert was fairly easy. It took them less than thirty minutes to reach the small commune, and since their guide was a local, they were able to enter one of the dairy farms there without further negotiations.

"Oh, the cheese...I can smell the cheese in the air!"

The three only groaned in unison upon witnessing the black kwami's antics.

He squealed when the pickup stopped at an unknown orchard, then flew inside his charger's shirt pocket. Adrien only rolled his eyes while Marinette chuckled as Tikki slipped inside her purse.

Before they could touch the ground, a burly man around sixties walked towards the driver's area - probably another local who knew Jacques - then eyed the two with curiosity.

"They're the buyers." their guide introduced them.
"I'm Devon, the owner of this humble mill." the man greeted. "And welcome to Camembert."

While Jacques decided to park the vehicle, the teenagers followed Devon as he led them to his vast property.

A Normande cattle of black-pied cows were grazing almost everywhere. They weren't hostile, but the two couldn't help but be wary in case an unexpected 'stampede' occurred and victimized them.

Sensing their worries, the man laughed "Oh kids, they might be big but they're harmless like babies."

His light-hearted words failed to convince them.

Upon approaching the barn's entrance, Marinette halted her steps.

"Uh, Adrien?" she muttered, fidgeting the hem of her overcoat. "I'll wait for you here. Outside."

"I concur!" a faint voice from her purse seconded.

Green eyes grew like saucers as he stopped, with paled face knowing that the love of his life - and her kwami - was abandoning him alone. Alone inside a barn full of moldy cheese.

"I thought you love me. From the moon to the back," he uttered, flashing her a betrayal look. "Why are you leaving me?"

"I love you. From the moon to the back," she answered sheepishly. "But my love for you was not enough to numb my sense of smell."

"Traitor."

She laughed when he pouted his lips, something that made him so irresistible she had to peck it with a kiss. He smirked.

"Just because you're a beauty I'm going to tolerate this kind of relationship."

"Nah, you're doing this because you love me."

"That you do."

A fake cough interrupted the two, making them look at the flustered owner who was standing near the doorway.

Unaware that he was intruding her personal space, Adrien stepped back, but before he could apologize to the man and follow inside, he flicked his girlfriend's forehead with his index. Marinette responded with a venomous glare.

"Your lady seems to be a playful type," Devon commented.

"I think it's the other way around, Sir." the blond shrugged. "She's just putting up with me."

"Must be a keeper, then."

"Absolutely."

It was his first time to enter a cheese factory, so he didn't know that visitors had to wear face masks. He was more than happy that they gave him a spare, but the gear wasn't enough to filter the pungent smell that began to assault his senses.
"Heaven." Plagg sighed inside his pocket.

"Hell." he deadpanned.

The odor was slightly muted when they got in the stock area. Inside were boxes full of cheese wheels, segregated depending on the production date and the type.

Devon's barn was just one of the small-scale businesses in the country that fermented authentic camembert cheese, but Adrien couldn't help but be awed on the number of products it housed and the places they distributed.

Absently, he began to mutter the budget he normally allocates for Plagg's consumption versus the volume he might get if he purchased them from the direct source. It was a no-brainer to know about the savings, but he had to take into consideration the transport cost if everything would be feasible or not.

He sighed, realized how Plagg was running him out of money since Day One. Litter-ally, that black cat was nothing but a mini-god of misfortune.

"I can give you a discount, like €1 each." the owner told him. "Depending on how much you're going to take."

It was an interesting offer, a cheap deal if he'd compare it to the retail price in the market. But he was an Agreste, a sole heir born and raised to rule a certain business empire in the future. And the fact that crunching numbers was his forte, then bidding would be a piece of cake.

Wishing that he brought his lucky charm (and not left it with his belongings), he began to name his price.

"I think I'm starting to agree with Plagg," Tikki said as she nestled on her charger's shoulder. "That this post-revel would bring nothing but troubles."

"What do you mean?"

"First - you two are disgustingly sweet," she answered stoically. "Such tooth-rotting sight enough to bring me cavities - which lead me to Number Two. Distractions."

Marinette was apprehensive. "So it's a bad thing that we - "

The kwami shook her head, then landed on her palms. "That's not it, Marinette. You and Adrien are not the only Ladybug and Black Cat who engaged in romances. The truth of the matter is, the more you two bond together, the stronger your powers will be. Like Yin and Yang. Two halves combined into one. However, knowing each other means another weakness that can be utilized by enemies, especially Papillion."

The girl was silent as she listened to her kwami.

"It's like a double-edged sword. You knowing Chat's identity can be your strength and at the same
time your weakness. And vice versa. Sometimes it can muddle your thoughts, or make you focus on
the plan."

"Tikki," she interjected. "Are you telling me that Adrien might leave me someday?"

The red kwami made a brief pause. "I don't know, Marinette. I'm not a seer or a god that has an
ability to predict things. But I've been living for centuries enough to witness how many times my
chargers got abandoned, hurt and died. You know the reason why I forbid you to reveal yourself,
and the reason why I condoned it. I don't know Adrien as much as I know you - not that I have trust
issues with Plagg's judgment - but I want you to know that your happiness is my top priority."

"Oh, Tikki..."

"I'm sorry if things ended up this way," she confessed with a sniff. "If only I was attentive enough to
sense the second Akuma, maybe these uneventful things would never happen. You and Adrien
might've been able to attend your school's field trip with your friends, and perhaps you two
confessed your feelings to each other like what you've done yesterday. Then lived happily ever after.
Not... not like this."

Marinette didn't say anything. She just cuddled her kwami then wiped some fat tears that began to
spill on her blue eyes.

She never thought that Tikki was carrying such baggage that was way heavier than hers, and that
knowledge only strengthened her resolution not to cry anymore. As a Ladybug and a protector of
Paris, she must be an exemplary and a solid rock among those who were losing their hopes from an
adversary.

"It's okay, Tikki. No one's to blame but Papillion." she soothed.

"I'm the one who's supposed comfort you - not the other way around."

"I don't mind having our roles reversed."

Then the two laughed in unison.

A few heartbeats later, and after sensing her kwami's calmed nerves, the girl asked her again.

"Tikki?"

"Hmm?"

"What's the difference between defeating Twiddle Doom and his partner versus Twiddle Doom
alone?"

"Utilization," Tikki answered. "There's always a correlation between Champions, and even each has
their own independent powers, they couldn't use it as effective without the other. A group would be
stronger once together, but weaker once dwindled and separated to one another. A rogue Champion,
however, is a different story."

Adrien had told her about Plagg's experiences during Edo period, and the horrible realization gave
her a cold-wrenching fear that shivered to her core.

"Every human body has a living soul. An Akuma is artificial with a corrupted soul. It's like an illness
that once it enters your body, it'll become a catalyst and infects your purity. The longer it stays there,
the harder it'll be cured. Remember this, Marinette - defeating an Akuma doesn't mean you're only
"saving the citizen of Paris; you're also saving the sanity of an inflicted soul."

"Tha - that's..." the pig-tailed girl bit her lip. "That's kinda...heavy responsibility, eh?"

The kwami shook her head with a smile. "It's not. It actually serves as your motivation to do your best and follow the things you ought was right."

She nuzzled her cheek, grateful how this little god chose her to be the embodiment of Lady Luck.

Marinette was a bit surprised when Adrien went out from the barn carrying a duffel bag, and if her hunch was correct, full of camembert cheese.

"How's it going there?" she asked, noticing the sweat that beaded on his forehead. "Are you okay?"

"Ye-yeah," he answered with neck rubs.

She didn't buy it, and of course, he knew it.

"It was...fairly well." he began - complete understatement of the century. "You know, we better head back to the truck. Jacques must be bored waiting for us, and God knows if he has some tasks waiting for him in the chateau. And don't worry about Monsieur Devon - I already bid him farewell on your behalf. We must head back to Paris immediately, and once we got there can we drop off at your house first? Not that there's a problem or whatsoever but I want to have these cheese be taken care of? And I would like to speak with your parents first, well your father specifically, because - "

"Hey, Adrien!"

The blond winced upon hearing his name called by the mill owner. He was practically dragging Marinette out from the vicinity by the arm, and the confused girl was allowing him despite knowing that he was sputtering bullshits.

"Hey, you forgot your receipt!"

Felt like it was impolite not to respond, the boy paused on his tracks then looked back with his model-like smile.

"Oh, yes Sir. I'm sorry I thought I grabbed it before I left. I'm so forgetful, ha-ha-ha, coz' I'm so excited going home and bring these things as gifts - EEEEEPPP!"

Marinette had to pinch his back just to stop his ramblings. He was showing his fake expressions again, and she didn't know why.

Devon was brimming her his toothy smiles. "You never told me you're Tommy's daughter!"

"...Tommy?"

"Yeah, Thomas Dupain? Tom? You're his Marinette, right?"
She was surprised when the man shook her hand. "Ye-yeah! My name's Marinette Dupain-Cheng! Yeah...?"

"You really looked like Sabine. Maybe 40% Sabine, coz' the rest was more like Tom's." he said, still shaking her hand. "It's been years since I last met your Papa. We're in the same circle during Uni days, Tom and I. He was dating your Maman that time. Guy's got head over heels in love with her. You're also like that, hun?"

"Uhh..."

"If your husband didn't tell me about his father-in-law, I might've not recognized you! Wow, look how time flies...your father finally got his dream bakery, and I bet you two would take over the business later on!"

She gurgled incoherently while her proverbial husband only shuddered in response.

"These cheese must be for the Patisserie's supplies, huh? No wonder you were trying to buy in bulks. Don't worry, I'll send you some supplies if needed - and because you're my friend's children, I'll give you half the price." the man patted their shoulders, then hovered near their ears. "So when are we going to see the buns in the oven?"

The two froze and paled on the spot as he guffawed.

"Oh kids, there's no need to be ashamed on that! Don't care if you're too young - as what the saying goes, Love knows no bounds!"

Nobody answered.

"Oh, and you're going back to Paris, right? Geez, I've been holding up your time. Why don't you two come back here and visit my farm sometimes? I'm also extending my invitation to your parents, hun. Your Papa and I have lots to catch up, you know. I might introduce to you to my grandkids - that way they'll befriend your kids someday."

Still, nobody answered.

"Gotta go back inside now. Jacques! See that these kids arrived at their destination safely and well." Devon called their guide, then hugged the stunned teenagers. "Have a safe trip!"

The two nodded, then gave a stiff wave.

Without further ado, they immediately climbed the pickup's backside and left the place without any qualms.

It took them five minutes to recover their thoughts and organize the chain of events.

"Adrien Agreste."

He never thought she could utter his name like it was synonymous with a death sentence.

"What in the world did you do?!"

Her cold-blooded voice lashed his entire being, numbing his brain cells and blood veins. If he was transformed right now, his ears would flatten out with a tail dangled between his legs.

He had experienced Ladybug's wrath before, being the receiving end, but never on a sweet and cute Marinette. But hell, her seething anger was so eminent he couldn't get any oxygen in the air.
"I didn't do anything!" he squeaked.

Her silence was a torture.

Musterling all of his strength and willpower to meet her piercing gaze, he bawled. "I'm sorry I didn't know why it ended up that way! We're just talking about cheese and pastries, then suddenly he talked about his childhood days, then it snowballed into your father! And here I was rambling about how I know you and your Papa and your Maman, then he was talking about something and stupid me I wasn't listening but I said 'yes' and 'yes' and 'yes' until I realized I hypothetically married you! And now I have to talk to your father and ask for forgiveness for tainting his daughter's reputation and at the same time for using your bakery as a proxy on my cheese shopping spree!"

"Wow." was all she could say.

"Forgive me, My Lady, for I revealed my intention in advance and now I have to buy you a ring and arrange for a Mayor's appointment and a chapel and the - "

"Whoa, whoa...hold your whiskers there, Kitty." she interrupted by raising her hand out. "Don't stress yourself about something petty, okay?"

"It's not something petty." he whimpered. "I tainted you."

"You never tainted me." she cleared out.

"But I introduced myself as your father's son-in-law."

"Are you?"

"Eventually...?"

She deadpanned. "Your confidence never failed to astound me."

"It's inevitable." he declared. "And I'm going to prove that once I've talked to your parents."

"Adrien." she sighed, massaging her temples. "Have you ever realized what's going to happen after we finished this Akuma ordeal?"

"What?"

"Everything will be back from the beginning. So whatever nonsense you've spouted back there, or negotiations you never intended to keep, will poof. Vanish. So chill out, will you?"

He stared at her in silence, unnerving her. "What?"

"I'm still going to talk with your parents." he insisted with a beaming face. "Regardless if this world will reset or not, I'm still going to treat the events today as something that will affect my tomorrow, and so on and so forth. This might be a dream...or a harsh nightmare...I still want to know the conclusion of this journey."

"Even if we're going to forget everything?" she croaked, with eyes starting to water.

"Even if we're going to forget everything."

Adrien pulled her into a tight embrace as she leaned her face against his chest. They stayed in that position for a minute until he remembered something.
"Princess?"

"Hmm?"

"We forgot to do something that was supposed to be done by most people during their travels."

"And what is it?"

"A selfie."

She broke a fitful of laughs.

Standing on the train's platform, Marinette decided to dial her best friend's number. It took her nine rings to get an answer.

"What time are you going to arrive here?" Alya's groggy voice sounded.

No greetings, no 'hi's' or 'hello's'. The pig-tailed girl smiled at the aspiring reporter's straightforwardness. So she returned the gesture.

"Actually, we're going back to Paris."

There was a ruffling noise in the background, followed by a shriek.

"WHAT?!"

"I'm sorry, Alya. It was something important - "

"Important enough to sacrifice your chance to graduate?!"

She already weighted everything down before she derived a conclusion. Adrien was right - a time will come wherein they'll be torn between choosing their civilian selves and superhero selves.

But along that journey, both knew they weren't alone.

"Yes," she answered.

"How about Adrien?"

"He'll be doing the same."

"No offense Girl, but Adrien's a rich kid with a prominent family. A diploma is unnecessary for him to survive in this society," her friend said solemnly. "But you? Marinette, you have a bright future. This is your childhood dream. You worked hard for it, and you earned it. You're on your way towards the spotlight of becoming a renowned fashion designer. And now you're dumping the opportunity out like a garbage? What gives?"

"Alya - "
"Can you tell me more about this 'important' thing?"

Marinette looked at the other side of the platform. "I can't."

"You can't? Why?"

"I'm sorry, Alya."

It pained her how she couldn't tell her best friend about it. She couldn't count how many lies she fabricated just to hide the fact about her alter ego. Not that she was doing some bad deeds; she had to keep her identity for the sake of her loved one's safety.

"Mari?"

"Yes?"

"I bet you've heard about the rampaging Akuma. And about Ladybug and Chat Noir being MIA" she said. "Does this 'important' thing related to that?"

It was a tricky question with a simple answer, and even though she has the opportunity to lie, she decided not to. This time.

"Yes."

A short pause, then a deep sigh. "Mari?"

"Yes?"

"How can I help?"

She didn't expect that. "Maybe...pacifying Miss Bustier? I know it'll be difficult but - "

"No worries. We'll take care of that." Alya scoffed. "Nino will cover Adrien's back - that is if that Golden Rod would insist."

"That's so rude." she giggled. "I'll let him know, though."

"Mari?"

"Hmm?"

"Take care, okay?"

It was vague, but she couldn't help but be touched by her words.

"Okay."

Then she hangs up.

Marinette didn't realize the tears that leaked on her eyes until Adrien wiped them off.

"You okay?" he asked, tracing her cheeks with his thumbs. She nodded.

"Yeah. Just...some words can get you sometimes."

He smiled, locking her other hand with his. Following her empty gaze, he sighed.
"This station summed up our lives," he told her. "This platform leads us to the path of Miraculous, and the opposite platform is our lives as an ordinary self. Interconnected, but with a different destination."

"I can't believe you're poetic, Chaton." she jeered. "I thought you're only into puns."

"I'm a man of many talents, My Lady."

The arrival of their train has finally announced. Minutes later, their train showed up and opened its sliding doors for the passengers. Eyeing each other, they stepped together inside and immediately settled to their designated seat.

And for the first time, unlike yesterday, they weren't left behind.
"You know." Marinette eyed a pile across her table. "Your plate is abnormally plenty for a topnotch model."

"They're just a regular healthy amount, Princess." Adrien retorted as he forked his linguine. "For a young man who grew up with croutons as a staple food."

"Croutons are not even a staple food, you bourgeoise."

"Says by a person who inhales golden macarons 24/7, hypocrite."

She deadpanned. "That's because I lived in a bakery."

"Which makes you have no right to incriminate my diet," he answered, almost swiping a sleek hand that wormed its way to his quiche. "Hey!"

The designer laughed when she got caught red-handed, but instead of returning it, she took a bite shamelessly. And to add fuel to the fire, she placed the half-consumed pastry back to its owner's plate.

Said owner narrowed his gaze. "Are you still holding that grudge about the pretzel yesterday?"

"No. I'm just concerned about my favorite model ruining my favorite designer's clothes."

He harrumphed, patting his stomach. "Don't fret, my Lady, for I, Adrien Agreste, am not fat."

"Tell that to me once you reach the thirties."

He smiled at the thought - not about his physical state (God help him, he wasn't overweight!) but the fact that she was looking forward seeing him in the future. Her future. Their future.

"Hey, Kitty." she prodded, sensing his worries. "What's wrong?"

He shook his head, then looked at the terrain views for distraction.

One thing that he hated most about himself was his transparency towards his Lady and his vulnerability towards his Princess.

Small hands began to nudge his fingers. She didn't have to hear his explanations to know his sentiments. Words became unnecessary for Ladybug and Chat Noir - a trait that was now possessed by Marinette and Adrien.

"Once it's over..." he told her. "Can we revisit these places?"

"Without getting that L-word?"

He chortled, flushing all of his worries in the dumps. Leave it to Marinette and she'll make the world a better place.

"I think your Lady Luck can stabilize the Black Cat's curse."

"Of course."
"Of claws."

She glowered when he smirked.

He surprised her when he bought two first-class tickets going to Paris. She was very insistent to pay for her own fare, but his gentleman side won the argument. So she moped when they reached their seats, and more when he got them a breakfast 'fit for a King' (not a Princess, because no Princess can gobble a tower of pancakes).

Her broodings immediately vanished the moment he cracked a pun...which ended them to their current light-hearted banters.

After clearing their plates, thanks to their extraordinary metabolism, the two decided to take a short nap.

Marinette leaned her head on Adrien's crooked neck as he placed his own on top of her crown. Both snuggled, with hands linked together as they enjoyed the comfort and peace of each other's warmth. Sighing with contentment, they indulged themselves before they arrived in Paris.

It was a two-hour travel anyways.

Their consciousness went on full alert when the train abruptly stopped.

Looking around, they noticed that they were the sole occupants of the train's cabin - not surprising initially because they were on a first-class seat and that most French were vacationing 'out' of Paris.

No announcement about the inconvenience was made. No visible staffs to check the passenger's safety. No panic screams or frustrated wails. And for some unforeseen circumstance, their transport stopped somewhere that wasn't part of a train station.

"The Akuma's here." Adrien hissed.

All of the lights shut off, followed by the window blinds as if an invisible wind wafted them to intimidate the occupants inside.

The teenagers jumped out from their seats, ready to pounce their unknown enemy.

"Adrien, I - "

"Marinette, I - "

Before they could give their companions an excuse to transform, they paused.

They blinked at each other.

And almost smacked themselves for blanking out the fact that they knew each other's identities.

"Tikki, Transforme moi!"
"Plagg, Transforme moi!"

Red and green light burst out of their places, almost illuminating the darkened cabin, and transformed their clothes into their uniform tight spandex. The regular teenagers were gone and replaced by two Parisian superheroes who were prepping for battle.

"Get ready, Hot Stuff." Ladybug said as she untangled her yo-yo from her waist. "And keep your night vision available for..."

She paused when she saw his gobsmacked face.

"What?"

"You are Ladybug." a lop-sided grin got stuck on Chat Noir's blushing face.

"Okay...? I think we've already established that" she answered stoically. "Got a problem?"

"Oh, no no no no! Of claws No! Ne-fur!" he shook his head at an incredible speed. "I'm just...feline purr-ty good. Meow-velously good. Happy that I cat my dreams come true. Be-claws my Lady is you."

Despite the lame puns, she snorted, then sauntered towards him to flick his bell.

"Don't get cute on me if you got distracted in the game."

He bit the side of his cheek to control his smug.

She couldn't blame him. This was their first time seeing each other's transformation, which nailed the coffin about Adrien being Chat Noir and Marinette being Ladybug.

She might've been calm on the ordeal, but her spotted mask failed to conceal the rush of delight over the fact. He wasn't the only one who wears a heart on a sleeve anyway.

"A-paw-logize in advance, My Lady." he purred with a glint. "I'll try not to lose my train of thoughts."

His words finally earned him a gobsmacked face.

"I can't believe this." she uttered. "Am I going to suffer more of your puns?"

"Hey, puns about monorails always make for decent one-liners."

Before she could react, a strong cold wind coming from the end of the cabin almost pushed them away, as if their enemy was taunting them of its presence.

"This Akuma must have a high self-esteem," the black-clad superhero commented, extending his baton for possible projectiles. "That he can derail us from our standing position."

"Tell me about it." his companion rolled her eyes, maintaining her alertness in their surroundings.

Ladybug noticed a flicker on the farthest end, and with the minimal light coming from the blinds' gaps, she barely identified the silhouette as something from a child's. She didn't have night visions, but the way her partner's breath hitched confirmed her sight, and at the same time supported her hunch.

This child was not their usual Akuma.
Typically, Akumas would launch themselves with demands about them surrendering their Miraculous. This time, however, was different. It felt like they were facing an empty vessel.

"I am Twiddle Gain." the child announced in an eerie baritone-like voice. "And you failed to meet my expectations."

"Expectations on what?" the spotted heroine asked.

"Expectations to save me."

The ground shook underneath, throwing them out of balance but enough to steady themselves with the help of their weapons.

The darkened walls suddenly collapsed and replaced by wooden walls with unsecured bolts. The windows were flipped open and stripped the blinds down. The leather cushioned seats were gone and was substituted with crates and soot-filled bundles. And as they went closer, the bundles began to move, unveiling themselves as humans - one that was bony and angry.

"This is an illusion," she muttered with spite. "The Akuma must have pulled this out from a different timeline."

"I can see that." he grimaced. "And it's something that happened in the past."

She nodded as he pressed his back against hers. While she was busy facing the emerging shabby enemies affront, he eyed the lumps behind them, and much to his chagrin, they were all humans made of stick and bones.

"I'm starting to be a-freight, Buginette." she heard his whimpers. "They might skin the cat in me alive."

They were obviously outnumbered, and they didn't know if these mangy fellows were actually weak based on their appearances. Their hollow eyes mirrored the child's emotion, but with a mixture of hunger and fatigue.

"We're finally here to save you." Ladybug said without breaking the child's gaze.

"Too late, Ladybug." the eerie voice chuckled darkly. "Too late."

"Wait, let us do some - "

The heroine stepped forward, but the child immediately retreated and enveloped himself in the darkness. The lingering laugh that bounced inside the cabin wasn't innocent but ominous, and that was the signal for his dummies to attack.

Chat Noir twirled his staff when some of the bony people sprung towards them. He cringed when he heard some snaps as he tumbled the attackers off and flung them to the walls. Ladybug shared the foulness when she hit their skulls with a yo-yo, but instead knocking them out cold, the act only urged them to attack more.

In between struggles, the superheroes caught some murmurs like 'save us' and 'kill us', which freaking their wits out.

"I don't know how to express my displeasure, My Lady."

"Cover me, Chaton." she nudged him as she threw her weapon in the air. "Lucky Charm!"
And a can of soda fell on her hands.

"What am I supposed to do..." she trailed off, then groaned. "Oh, crap."

Her tone made him leaned back, almost missing a tackle on his arm. "What's the matter?"

She didn't have to think deeper about how to use the Charm, and when she shoved the item on her partner's grasp, she didn't have to explain it further. His scowling face answered it all.

"Why do I have to do this?" he whined.

"Because you're the only one capable of doing it." she pleaded.

Despite his reluctance, he summoned his trump card.

"Cataclysm!"

Shaking the soda, he transferred it to his bubbling hand and promptly threw the item to their attackers.

The liquid disintegrated, creating a fizz and a smokey pop that made the people inside screamed for help. And in just a matter of minutes, they all limped out and died.

Ladybug and Chat Noir were unmoved for a moment to collect their bearings, as well as their confidence to move and chase their target.

"This is...the most loco-motive we've ever done." the black-clad deadpanned. "So far."

"Don't remind me."

When their first Miraculous warning beeped, they hurriedly ran towards the path were the Akuma's vessel went. It didn't take them awhile to search for the child, as he was waiting for them on the other side of the empty cabin.

There, he was sprawling on the floor with both hands on his face, and basing on the sniffles and hiccups, it was obvious that he was crying.

Ladybug stretched her hand to touch the kid, only to be stopped by Chat. He shook his head no, making his partner obliged and retreated.

Crouching down in a fair distance, she asked: "What can we do to help you?"

The child gradually slipped his hand out, revealing his blood-shot eyes and grimy face. Normally, a purple-colored butterfly mask would appear on the Akuma's face for instructions. This time, it didn't.

"Will you be able to free me, Ladybug?"

The sincerity in his odd voice clenched her heart. She nodded with a smile.

"Yes."

"Then...find me. Please."

The spotted heroine glanced at her partner with a questioned look. He simply shrugged his shoulders, then looked at the child like a jigsaw puzzle, which earned him a melancholic smile.
Then he recalled the fizz bomb.

"Save me, Ladybug and Chat Noir."

Without further ado, the feline superhero raised his baton and lightly tapped the child's shoulder. His body irradiated like a mini beam, wilting gradually until he vanished into the thin air. And in his place left a black butterfly.

Ladybug swiped the insect with her yo-yo, then pressed the middle button to release the purified version.

"Bye-bye, Little Butterfly." she murmured.

Their third Miraculous warning beeped.

Chat offered his hand for her to stand up, in which she gratefully accepted. Green sclera measured her bluebell eyes as he searched for depression. He was thankful he found none.

He handed her the remnants of the soda can, and with a silent nod, she threw it in the air.

"Miraculous Ladybug!"

Small ladybugs encircled the entire train, returning everything to its original place.

Seconds later, their transformation dropped.

"Cheese..." Plagg moaned as he fell on his charger's shoulder.

Adrien plucked him off nonchalantly as he stealthily walked back to their cabin. Afterwards, Marinette followed him with an enervated Tikki.

An announcement sounded on the speakers, assuring the passengers that the train would resume its normal operation.

Once the teens settled back to their seats, Adrien probed. "What the hell was that?!"

"I thought you figured it out, boy." the black kwami answered between cheese bites. "That it was something from World War II. Remnants of the past. People who were sent out to the concentration camps. That's why your girlfriend made you do a spoof akin to a tear gas. To scare their wits out."

"Which I don't like the idea. At all." Marinette miffed, but relaxed when she felt her kwami's nubs on her finger.

"But you have to, Bug. Besides, it's just an illusion. They're dead people associated with this railroad's past, and unfortunately, the Akuma used it against you."

"Which led me back to my question: What the hell was that?!" the blond interjected.
"I think...Twiddle Gain's power was to ruin the timestream by influencing iconic places and infrastructures from the past - and probably the future, too." the pig-tailed girl stated. "What I don't understand is why it creates an illusion. Why now? I know it's impossible he acquired it from Twiddle Doom because he freezes the time, but - "

"The 'illusion' part was Akuma's defense mechanism, being Papillion's cohorts and everything, and if my gut is correct, only Ladybug and Chat Noir can sense it."

"Since when did your cheesy gut fail you?" his chosen huffed with sarcasm.

"For non-Miraculous holder, what they could see was only physical damages." Tikki supplied. "Unlike you two, you could see the fragments - both past and future - once you entered the affected areas. Using the situation earlier, people might've seen the train transformed into a 1940s vehicle but not the ghosts that lingered on it."

"Safe to others." Plagg quoted. "But dangerous to some."

"How can you explain the black butterfly I captured?" the girl asked. "And the child?"

"It's like Stoneheart, Marinette. It multiplies if left unattended. You can cleanse them, but not as effective as aiming the main source." her kwami chirped. "That child was one of Twiddle Gain's subconsciousness. He lost his control, that's why he was seeking for your help."

The two teenagers eyed each other as they came up to a conclusion: they must go and speak with the Guardian.

However, when they reached Paris and arrived at his house, they were greeted with a demise.

Mr. Fu was nowhere to be found.
Chapter 28

Most people would call him Mr. Fu, but for the Miraculous wielders, they called him Master Fu. Sometimes they referred him as The Guardian...unless the situation would demerit such claims.

"That geezer." Adrien hissed after reading the note that was stuck on the doorstep.

■ The shop will be closed until next month for further renovations

-Mr. Fu-

"Renovations, my ass. He must've left somewhere around the world to bask himself under the sun! Again!"

A burst of cackles made him look at his partner in question.

"I can't believe...I'll be hearing you...Adrien Agreste...of all people...a perfect gentlemanly human being...with a pedigree lineage...fussing over an elderly!" Marinette laughed while clutching her stomach.

Pouting over her words, he jabbed her sides with his index, which earned him a squeal.

"Don't tell me you're okay with this, Princess."

"Of course not." she chuckled as she wiped her tears. "I'm still trying to incorporate Chat Noir's image with a certain ludicrous you."

"I thought I'm a perfect gentlemanly human being."

"Only a ludicrous person would use that logic to me."

He crossed his arms with a smug. "Hey, those words didn't come from my mouth."

She stuck her tongue out, then focused her gaze on the plastered note again.

"I think I'm going to agree with you calling him a geezer." she sighed. "He left us to deal everything on our own. Again."

Ever since Tikki reintroduced him as a fellow Chosen who could interpret the Miraculous' ancient book, her easygoing impression towards him never changed nor improved.

Train up a child in the way he should go, he quoted to them once, but they only interpreted it as a sort of negligence. Whenever a strange Akuma show up in Paris, Master Fu would leave them to fend all by themselves. Oftentimes, they would find him unreachable.

"What do you think?" her partner nudged. "Shall we break and enter his premise for clues?"

"I think he went on vacation before Twiddle Gain and Twiddle Doom appeared in the city," she responded. "So even if we welcome ourselves inside, and say, we got a clue about his whereabouts, that doesn’t mean we can leave here just to track him down. He might say 'just do it' without batting an eye on us anyways."

"What's the purpose of him being a 'guardian' if he's unavailable for 'guidance'?" he grumbled.
"That means he trusted you enough." Tikki considered while poking her head out of the purse. "That you two are capable of solving things without his help."

"This is not a matter of capabilities and competence. We badly need his help. Tikki." Marinette groaned. "We cannot wig everything out."

"If that geezer only has a cell phone, everything would be easier." Adrien scowled. "I mean, who doesn't own a cell phone nowadays?"

"Then let's break and enter the place!" Plagg suggested, but before the three intercepted him, he immediately flew through the door. With a clicking sound, the lock went unlatched.

The black kwami poked his head "Are you two going to stand there or what?"

Throwing a nervous gaze, the teenagers entered inside.

Fu was sleeping soundly when the phone rang. Thinking it was from the hotel's desk, he immediately plucked it out and muttered, "One more hour."

"This discussion will take us less than an hour, Master."

An unexpected yet familiar voice washed all of his drowsiness away.

His room phone has a built-in screen installed for a video call, so he navigated the functions and accepted the request. He didn't expect to see two mask-less teenagers there.

"Oh?" the elderly cracked a smile. "You disturbed my beauty sleep for a love counsel?"

"We don't need you for a love counsel." the blond deadpanned.

"Interesting. So, how did you two learned about each other?"

"Aren't you interested to know how we learned about your whereabouts?"

He stifled a yawn as he scrunched his bleary eyes. "Okay, I'll humor you. How?"

"We found a hotel pamphlet in Costa Rica, so we called their number. The receptionist connected the call to you." the raven-haired said. "Sorry if we interrupted your sleep, Master."

"Nah, it's alright Ladybug. I'm about to get up for breakfast anyway." he scoffed. "Humor me this time."

"Well, we...we got lost as our civilian selves, then one thing led to another until we found out each other's identities. It's a long story."

"You gave me a good synopsis." he beamed. Even with the static images, he didn't miss the blush forming on their faces. "I don't think this is the reason why you two seek for my counsel."
A pair of blue and green eyes looked at him with seriousness.

"Papillion sent two Akumas simultaneously." Marinette began. "And one of them became a rogue."

The elderly observed the fuzziness as the teenagers narrated the issues. He interrupted them twice for clarifications, eyeing Wayzz as he nodded, then let the two continued their story.

Once finished, he breathed out heavily. "This is the first time I'll be experiencing it first-hand, though I've heard several tales about it from my predecessors. It was at the time when the ladybug's Miraculous hasn't awaken yet that the other bearers had to take the matters in hand - by killing."

He heads their gasps audibly on the other line, which prompted him to continue. "True that this Twiddle Gain was only doing property damages, transposing the old to new and vice versa, and very harmless to non-Miraculous users, but that doesn't mean he will not going to do the things that Twiddle Doom did before his purification. We don't know what he'll do to endanger some innocent civilians or teleport them to a different dimension."

"How about the person behind Twiddle Doom? We've captured the Akuma and reverted his damages back prior to Twiddle Gain's discovery. Do you think he'll be corrupted again like what happened with our classmate Ivan?"

"Likely if his partner searched for his assistance. But based on what you've encountered way back in the train, Twiddle Gain was only seeking Ladybug and Chat Noir's audience, so having Twiddle Doom - or the person himself - would be irrelevant."

"I see." Adrien hummed. "But why is it that Twiddle Gain can't tell us his location? That way we can go straight ahead and purify him. End of story."

"Papillion," Fu answered matter-of-factly. "He was torturing his disobedient Champion by prolonging his agony, until such time the person would succumb to his Master's command. This is the reason why the poor man spread out several 'wormholes' all over the country to lure your civilian selves out so that he can let his 'vessel' relay his cryptic message. But beware - for Papillion might send out another henchman and use such demise to his advantage."

"What do you mean by that?"

The elderly glanced at the girl. "You summoned two Lucky Charms before, right?"

"You mean way back when I summoned a suit and a parachute during Stoneheart, and..." she paused, remembering Bubbler's incident how she called out a disk and a spanner for different reasons, but both disappeared after using the Miraculous Cure. "Wait, don't tell me...Papillion might summon another Akuma?!!"

Fu nodded. "The Butterfly Miraculous has the same usage as us wielders. Whenever he sends out an Akuma, his kwami will require regeneration before he summons another Champion - and probably someone capable of ambushing you two while you're busy with Twiddle Gain's traps."

"If only I can give Papillion a piece of his mind."

"We must locate and cleanse Twiddle Gain, My Lady." the boy groaned. "Before everything become a catastrophe."

The girl groaned, but for a different reason.

"I suggest you two look for the man behind Twiddle Doom." the elderly said as he sat up. "He must
be the one who triggered Twiddle Gain's fears of conquering the entire Paris, and probably has an idea about his whereabouts."

"Yeah, we'll do that."

"And Ladybug?"

"Yes, Master?"

"What's the time there in Paris?"

"It's...quarter to ten."

"I see," he mumbled, then looked at the hotel's digital clock. 9:45 AM Costa Rican time.

"I must not waste your time, then," he told them, feigning his anxiety. "I need to talk to Wayzz about this unexpected revelations."

"Are you going back to Paris, Master?" Adrien asked.

"Not yet, Chat," he replied immediately. "I believe you two can resolve this problem without warranting my attention. I'll stay here on the sidelines, and let myself available in case you would want to reach me again."

The blond gave him an analytical look but brushed it off afterward. "If you say so."

Their call ended without him telling the teenagers about their critical situation.

"I didn't anticipate this turn of events, Wayzz." the elderly huffed, looking at his floating kwami with sadness. "That those youngsters will face an enemy that's altering their very own existence. Letting them know the true essence of 'reset' after Miraculous Cure would only dampen the mood."

"Let Plagg and Tikki handle it, Master. They must've felt the shift of their Chosen's fate, and probably aware how their bonds were blurred and tampered by the Akuma." the green blob soothed. "I still believe that Marinette and Adrien were born for each other, no matter what situation they ended up with."

"I lied by omission, that's the issue."

"You've done what you believe is right, Master."

Eyeing his kwami, Fu stood up to call his transformation.

"You think Master Fu was hiding something?"

"So he's Master Fu now?" Marinette mused, earning a beady glare. "Well, I don't know. I didn't feel any bad vibes there. Why?"
"Beats me," Adrien muttered as he opened the door for her. "Maybe I'm just anxious."

"Maybe." she pondered, and after securing the lock, they exited the place.

Their kwamis were silent during the conversation and remained nestled inside her purse. She didn't pry into their enervated state and assumed that they were apprehensive about their pending battle.

Glancing at her partner's bag, she offered "Why don't we drop that thing off at my place first before we look for Twiddle Doom's location? I have no question about yours, but I need to replenish my cookie stash."

"Sounds reasonable, Buginette. Shall we hail for a cab, or just transform for a faster travel?"

*Good question*, she thought. "Let's just stick to normalcy. We haven't mapped out the places where Twiddle Gain set his wormholes, and since he was altering properties, there's a high chance you might land a wrong roof."

"I'm going to pretend I didn't hear how you indirectly told me I'm careless."

She giggled as he looked around for a taxi stand. When he spotted one, he promptly held her left hand since her right was preoccupied with her cellphone, then dragged her towards the destination.

She was busy scrolling for messages that she missed how the pavements changed into metal ones. If she didn't bump his back when he abruptly stopped, she wouldn't look up and notice the illuminating skyscrapers and flying cars.

Such scenery has not been introduced in the 21st Century yet unless they were seeing something in the future - say, 31st Century.

A shriek caught their attention, making them witness how a man in a gas mask threw a blue canister up in the air as it emitted black smoke. The crowd dispersed immediately, and those who were unfortunate enough to inhale the toxic fell on the ground. They didn't seem to be dead, but more like fainted on the spot.

"I am Twiddle Gain!" the man yelled as he pointed their way. "And you two are nothing but useless!"

Marinette immediately lashed her head, then glared an accusatory look towards a certain blond male who was sheepishly scratching his neck.

"Oops."
Paris was not only renowned as the City of Love, but also a place filled with rich history. May it be the Hundred Year's War, the French Revolution, or L'exposition Universelle - these events were embedded in every foundation that made the place romanticized by people worldwide.

Such aspects were the reason why Marinette and Adrien were proud to be Parisians, and the thought itself fueled their heroism, but after dealing with Twiddle Gain's antics, these French duos were starting to have some second thoughts.

Who would've thought that their summer field trip could be this educational?

Because even a cobblestone has a story and being a tangible object, the Akuma was able to use it as an advantage to create a 'wormhole' for Ladybug and Chat Noir - a ploy to witness some snippets from the past and future in the sickest way possible.

After defeating Twiddle Gain's vessel in the future and fixed a taxi stand in the present, the teenagers accidentally tripped on a scorched pedestrian lane, which led them to the Storming of Bastille. They even fought a beak-headed Plague Doctor when they entered the Police Station and a spandex-suited guy with laser beams after they left the premise. Because of these, they decided to head off to Dupain-Cheng's Boulangerie Pâtisserie after visiting Twiddle Gain and Twiddle Doom's residence, for a fear that they might witness the Nazi Occupation on the alleys.

Along the way, Ladybug and Chat Noir saw Paris in six different eras.

"Can this be considered as time-traveling?" the feline hero bemoaned as they stood in front of an apartment door. "Because this butterfly effect must stop."

"I don't know whether to compliment you or to punch you for that insensitive pun." his spotted girlfriend peeved. "I doubt we've seen the actual future because the past was obviously a farce. There's nothing in our history books that mentioned about Marie Antoinette's head jumped and chased the crowd while screaming 'Freedom!'"

Her boyfriend shuddered.

Marinette knew that both Tikki and Plagg were exhausted to maintain their transformation, but they have to be on their superhero suits to conduct the interview. Their civilian counterparts didn't have the power to intimidate the akumatized victim, and authority to perform such actions in the public.

Locks began to disengage when the spotted heroine rapped the door. It creaked, and a head poked out from the gaps, eyeing the two superheroes.

"La - Ladybug?" the man uttered with disbelief. "And Cha - Chat Noir?"

"Hello, Monsieur." the superhero greeted. "My partner and I would like to ask for your assistance about your missing brother."

He disengaged the locks completely, then ushered his guests inside. Before the two entered the premise, they asked the man first if he had any antique objects or something that got unintentionally ruined due to an Akuma. Thankfully, he didn't.

The last thing they would like to see was a humanoid version of Napoleon Bonaparte.
It was a two-room style unit with few but necessary furniture. They were led to a cozy living room with a small sofa. On its corner was long desk filled with parchment-like papers, writing materials and a whiteboard with mathematical equations. There was a kitchenette with almost-empty cupboards, and when the man opened his fridge, the compartments were unfilled with grocers.

When their host returned with refreshments, he asked them. "Are you going to arrest me?"

Ladybug shook her head. "We've come here for your help, Monsieur, and not to incriminate you for being Twiddle Doom. You're innocent. You've done nothing wrong there. You were victimized by Papillion, and he manipulated your weaknesses for his selfish ego."

"Felipe, call me Felipe, Miss Ladybug," the man corrected her, then breathed deeply. "And yes, I've been told by the social workers about it. They quoted it as CSB, I believe. But no, I'm past that blaming stage. I decided to move forward and forgive myself for the evil deeds that I've done. I also offered my apologies to those that I've hurt while I'm under the spell."

"You're amazing, Felipe. Not all people can do that." Chat Noir commented.

"Thanks, Mr. Noir." the man smiled. "I'm praying that Marcelo can also redeem himself as well."

"He will. Why don't you tell us more about your brother?"

"Marcelo - he's my twin, the youngest - is my last remaining family. When our Mamma died when we're ten, and our father five years later, Marcelo and I decided to continue our farm business." he began, then glanced at the paper piled on top of the long table. "My brother has a dream to become a physicist, aiming to work with CERN someday, so who am I to stop him?"

The superheroes remained silent and let the man continued his story.

"I don't have the brains like him, but I know that God has a plan for us. As his elder brother, I supported him. I handled the business while he continued his studies. Unfortunately, our finances weren't enough to sustain his University fees, and the mere fact that we need a new tractor and some machinery, we were left with no choice but to sacrifice something. Then here comes Mister Joseph Howards."

Chat's faux ears twitched.

Felipe fingered his beady necklace. "When he learned about our situation, he offered an assistance in exchange for using our mill as his warehouse extension. Being an ignorant fool with a desperate brother, we immediately accepted his proposal. What we didn't know was that he was using our property for his illegal acts, and when we confronted him about it, he scoffed and shoved us a signed document about him owning our property. A property he never bought by a single dime. A property that was passed to us by generations. He conned us."

"Mr. Howards has been taken into custody last night." Ladybug informed him. "Rest assured that justice will be served properly, and at the end of the day, he'll going to pay for it behind bars."

"The news hasn't reached here yet, probably delayed due to this Akuma business." he confided. "I apologize on behalf of my brother, for the damages he caused in this city. He's not a lost cause, is he?"

"That's why we're here, Felipe. We're going to save Marcelo. He currently called himself as Twiddle Gain. He was trying to free himself from Papillion's reins, but being an Akuma, he couldn't do it without my Miraculous Cleanse. Because of that, he couldn't control his power, which resulted in some random property alterations. Fortunately, he hasn't hurt any civilians yet, but his damages
created some time-warps only Miraculous holders could access. Your brother is a brave and strong man, and he was our first rogue Akuma."

"How can I help?" the man asked again.

"Tell us the places where Marcelo often stayed during his downtime. Locations where he felt safe and secure." Chat responded. "He must've witnessed how you reverted from being Twiddle Doom, which triggered him to control his urges and reject Papillion's taunts to attack us. The destruction he incurred in Paris was his SOS to us Miraculous wielders, but we're having some difficulty cracking his whereabouts."

"My brother is a school-and-house sort of person, Mr. Noir. He rarely joins social events due to our monetary problems. He often stays in libraries but..." the man scratched his stubble cheek as if he was trying to recall something. "Church. We came from a pious family. If one of us were in a bind, we always go there. Sometimes we enter the confessional."

"What church specifically?"

"Sacré-Cœur, but most of the time Notre-Dame."

"He must be claiming sanctuary."

Ladybug wanted to say something but stopped herself. She'd rather discuss it with her partner in private

"Thank you for your help, Felipe." the spotted heroine said as she stood up, followed by Chat Noir.

"It's my pleasure, Miss Ladybug. Though I didn't help you that much, really."

"You've provided us an information way better than other people. We really appreciate your cooperation."

"Anytime for our superheroes." the man answered, and when he opened the door for them, he added. "You might be an embodiment of Luck, and saying 'Good Luck' sounds appropriate, but as a religious person, I'd rather bid you 'God Bless.'"

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Ladybug and Chat Noir were able to exit the apartment safely without encountering Twiddle Gain's traps, so they decided to drop their transformation.

"It must be difficult for those akumatized victims to cope up with the aftermaths," Marinette muttered while standing under the awning. "Alya might've blogged her experiences as Lady Wifi, but she skipped some details like disorientation and nightmares. It was horrible for me, but she managed to recover herself in less than three days."

"Nino often mentioned some things he remembered as the Bubbler, and I swear soap bubbles became his traditional gag gifts during birthdays."

The thought made her chuckled. "I'm glad that our best friends are ridiculously true fighters."
"Both are peas in a pod." Adrien looked at the clear skies. "Actually, most of our friends are. 98% of the class were akumatized, and all of them were chill about it. Even Chloe."

"Felipe was exceptional. How I wish I had a sibling like him." she mused as they left the building. "Being a single kid, I often got jealous of those kids accompanied by their brothers or their sisters. Despite hearing Alya's constant complaints about her 'little devils', I still want to have a bigger family."

"Me too. That's why I want to have more than one kid once I got my own family."

"Mine's three."

She didn't mean to say it audibly.

His brows shot up, followed by a wolfish grin especially when he saw her red cheeks enough to rival her suit. "Oh? Then that can be arranged."

"Shut up, you stupid cat." she slapped his arm. "You're not supposed to hear that!"

"Why not? I don't see any problem with Family Planning. We can work on the age gaps. Can't let our Junior be lonely all the time."

"As if I'm going to name my child Junior!"

"Does that mean you have names for our children?" the blond wiggled his brows. "Pray do tell me."

"No." she miffed, then glowered at his lopsided grin. "Wipe that smug off your face, or I'm going to use a doormat here to remove it."

"That's claw-ful, My Lady! You wouldn't want to have my mini-me's be that ugly it's not kitten anymore."

She wasn't supposed to laugh, but damn him his horrible pun broke her a fit of a laugh, much to her boyfriend's disgruntlement.

The two were busy with their banters they barely realized that they've reached the Gottlieb Street miraculously without any untoward incidents.

Marinette used the spare key hidden beneath their potted plants since her own duplicate was left among her belongings. Before she could enter it through the keyhole, a hand stopped her.

"We need to make sure that there are no 'wormholes' inside." Adrien proposed. "What if we'll be greeted by a droideka, or maybe Charles VI's ghost?"

"Minou." she deadpanned. "My house is not a castle in the past, a mental institute, or anything connected to cemeteries. And if we'll going to be transported to an alien spaceship, then brace yourself for the worse."

He whimpered when the raven-haired girl turned the knobs, and when she swung the bakery door open, nothing happened.

The teenagers exasperatedly sighed with relief.

"The coast is clear." he whooped.

His declaration earned him a pinch.
Eyeing her companion's belongings, she told him "Why don't you bring your bag upstairs while I prepare for Tikki's cookies? I have a Paris map on my desk, and some markers that we can use to plot our trail."

"Aye, aye." he gave a two-finger salute then marched towards her room.

Tikki flew out from her purse when her charger headed straight to the pantry. After she reheated some cookie batches in the oven, she nuzzled the girl's cheek.

"Marinette?" the red kwami asked. "Did you forget something?"

She clapped her hands to remove the dustings. "Hmm...I don't think so. Why?"

"Adrien is inside your room."

"So? He's going to bring the map here anyways."

Tikki pursed her smirk. "Who's inside your room again?"

"Adrien?" her charger answered nonchalantly. "Who else?"

"And what's inside your room?"

"As I've said, the map is in..." Marinette paused when a realization dawned her. "Oh shit!"
Chapter 30

Adrien wasn't much of a stranger in Dupain-Cheng's household. After that Ultimate Mecha Strike III practice he had with Marinette way back in troisième, he often visited the place both in civilian and superhero selves.

So he wasn't that much surprised to see the shocking pink painted on her room's walls, but not after he was greeted by a poster.

Correction, posters.

Not just an ordinary posters, but posters of himself.

Himself as the model in various poses, starting from his collège days up to lycée. Magazine pin-ups, newspaper clips that featured his runways. And was that a copy of his schedule?!

"Someone has an obsessive crush~" Plagg floated out from his charger's pocket, then gave him a smug after seeing the blond's shocking pink state.

"Shu - shut up!" the boy stammered, trying to whack his snickering kwami but his aim accidentally fell on the desktop mouse. The darkened screen lit up, revealing a made-up collage of him set as wallpaper.

His shocking pink became a blazing red.

Wait, didn't she confess to him about her stalkerish activities yesterday?

She did, he recalled. He didn't expect that it'd be this extensive.

A scream downstairs snapped him from his reverie. He first thought it was an Akuma attack, and about to rush for Marinette's aid when he heard a thumping step, followed by a flying trap door and a flustered girlfriend.

"What's wro - OOF!"

He was taken aback when his said girlfriend suddenly grappled his arm then flung his body for a back throw.

"Nooooooo!" she wailed, unaware how his boyfriend painfully wheezed for air. "Don't look!"

Too late.

She bolted towards her wall to remove the posters, but before she could grab one, a pair of strong arms pulled her down to the floor. It was a heavy fall, but her head was protected by something soft.

"Falling for me, My Lady?" he rasped.

She squealed with defeat, more when her tongue couldn't spat back because his pun was so spot-on literally and figuratively. All she could do was to squeeze her eyes shut, curl and cover her face with both hands.

"You're not supposed to see...those."

"Why not?" he retorted with a grin. "There's nothing to be embarrassed about it."
"There is!" she whimpered, still unable to look at him.

He nuded his nose in between her finger gaps. "Hey, you told me about this yesterday. Besides, nobody has ever done something like this to me before."

"You have no idea," she muttered with an eye roll behind her palms. "These are nothing compare to your avid fan's collections."

"Not as interesting as Buginette's though."

Marinette was about to retort back when a warm liquid suddenly contacted her hand. It greatly alarmed her, especially when she caught him sniffling. She immediately cupped his face, wiping the stray tears with her thumbs and pored at his bleary green eyes with confusion.

"Hey, what's wrong?"

Instead of answering, Adrien dropped his head on the crook of her neck and whispered. "What did I do to deserve your affection?"

"Shouldn't it be the other way around?" she sighed as she gently raked his blond locks. "Shouldn't I be the one who does the crying here because you've found out my excessive crush?"

"You were attracted to my faked self, rather than my real self."

"Now you're stealing my words from my mouth. Aren't you attracted to Ladybug first before Marinette?"

She felt his smile forming on her skin. "But that's just logical, My Lady. Ladybug gave me an initial impression of maladroit, but she redeemed herself as a kickass. Marinette, on the other hand, made me fear her on our first meeting, and when I thought I was able to redeem myself, she started to fear me. You got me worried there, Princess. I thought your accusations about me being a 'Second Chloe' was real."

"Now that you know the real reason - "

"Now that I know the real reason," he interjected, burying his face more. "Plus the fact that I've seen your sides outside Adrien's point of view, and you being Ladybug, it made everything about you so damn perfect."

She frowned but didn't stop her ministrations. "How did Badass Ladybug and Coward Marinette became perfect in your equation?"

"First, you got a wrong description. Second, I'd rather associate Sweet than Coward. Don't get me wrong - Ladybug might be kind towards everybody, but not as sweet as Marinette. Unlike me..." he paused as fresh batches of tears leaked out. "I'm a fake both inside and outside of the mask. I might've said that being Chat Noir was my truest self, but at the end of the day, he would still be an insecure boy who didn't know how to make personal decisions. Or whenever he decided one, it always ended either with bad results or garnered disappointments. I'm just a Momma's boy with Daddy's issues, and I'm using my Miraculous as an excuse for temporary freedom."

The designer cupped his face again so that she could see him eye to eye. And there she finally saw the face of the person she'd been looking for since that rainy day.

"The real reason why I have all of your pictures, and yeah, your daily schedules Alya probably hacked from Natalie's file, was because I want to see a glimpse of your self again. Your pure self,"
she confessed with a smile. "You weren't wearing a mask literally as Adrien, and figuratively as Chat, but a separate fragment of the boy I fell in love with. And it's logical to begin my search in Adrien because it wasn't Chat who gave me an umbrella."

"Mari -"

"You're not a fake, Adrien. You're real. Didn't I tell you that your imperfections made me love you?"

Adrien breathed as he beamed at her.

Both of them have insecurities, but their imperfections made them found each other. Yin and yang. Two peas in a pod. Two lost souls that miraculously discovered one another by fate.

"But you're only like this with Adrien." he pouted childishly. "How about Chat Noir?"

She was tempted to shove her diary on his face, and read her entry about choosing Chat if Adrien wasn't around, but he might misinterpret that his other half was a consolation, so she chose the most obvious route.

She already embarrassed herself anyways.

"Uhm, remember that Chat Noir doll?"

Of course, he remembered. Now that she mentioned it, he didn't see it among the pile of dolls on her side table. It was only Ladybug and a battalion of miniature Akumas.

So where...

"My bedside," she said sheepishly as if she could hear his thoughts. "And there's -"

"HOLEY MOLEY CHEESE! ADRIEN, YOU GOTTA SEE THIS!" Plagg's yell interrupted her. "SOMEONE RIVALED YOUR LADYBUG'S COLLECTION!"

Without further ado, the blond rose up and climbed towards Marinette's bed, much to the girl's horror. There he witnessed how Tikki flung his kwami for 'ruining the moment', but not enough to distract him from seeing the cat-themed pillows, blankets, PJs in black and green motifs, and in the midst of it rested a Chat Noir doll.

"You don't have my permission to climb he - OOF!"

Adrien cut her complaints by pinning her down again, but this time it was in her bed. Her Chat Noir themed bed.

"You love me!" he chortled while pressing wet kisses sloppily around her face. "You love both sides of me!"

"Sorry to burst your bubble but I do. Now I'm regretting it." she laughed while squirming on his attacks.

"Nuh - uh. You're stuck with me forever."

"Stop it, Adrien. Or else I'm going to -"

He silenced her by pressing his lips to her. It was supposed to be chaste, but the electricity that shot within them urged them to go deeper. He trailed lower, making her moan for more, then moved to her pulsing neck, but stopped when a burning smell permeated the air.
"You smell nice, Buginette." he sniffed. "But I'm starting to smell...something different."

She copied the same gesture, then paled when she remembered the cookies.

"Oh crap!"

She had to push him away and leaped a flight of stairs akin to her superhero counterpart.

Panicking, she ran towards the kitchen and greeted by a smoking oven. It must be her trained reflex that she unknowingly wrapped her hands in mitts before opening the door and pulled the tray of charcoaled cookies, else she'd be suffering from a second-degree burn.

"Oh no, poor cookies!" Tikki lamented.

"Yeah, poor cookies." Plagg deadpanned.

"Indeed." the third voice added, and on his tone, she knew that the cheekily bastard was highly amused. "Poor cookies."

Marinette looked at her audience with a death glare.

"Utter another cookie word." she snarled. "And I'm going to bake someone here in this oven."

"What a teff decision, Princess." Adrien gave a Cheshire smile. "Dough I nut mind that to be crummy wheat you."

"You and your stupid puns!" she huffed jabbing his chest with her index, only to be grabbed and kissed boldly. "You-you're distracting me!"

"Hey, It's not my fault I find you so hot we almost burn this house on fire."

Innuendos or not, his words gave her a profused blush she had to smother it with a slap on his arm. He chuckled.

"Listen, you tomcat. You better grab that bag of flour, sugar, chocolate chips and some pounds of butter in the pantry, or else we'll face a wrath of a god."

"Roger that."

In a typical action-adventure scenario, the protagonists would prepare their ammunition in the form of bullets, guns, grenade and high-class gadgets before they face the enemies. But in Ladybug and Chat Noir's case, they would use a slab of cheese, a pack of cookies, a rapier wit and a strong conviction that they could save the day from Papillion's aide.

"What do you think?" Adrien asked after he finished crossing some landmarks surrounding Sacré-Cœur and Notre Dame.

The Paris map was laid flatly on the dining table as the teenagers waited for the cookies to bake.
"Nearest from here is Notre Dame, so obviously we go from there first. The route's quite hard if we'll skip Le Jardin but risky if not. We're lucky Catacombs is out of our way, but that doesn't mean Twiddle Gain spared Île de la Cité from 'wormholes'"

"It'll be a job well done if the Akuma is actually in there," Marinette responded, breaking a croissant into two then shared the half to her partner. "But what if it's in Sacré-Cœur? Aside from crossing the Seine, going to the right means passing Pompidou or go beyond Bataclan. Going to the left means passing Pont des Arts."

"You have the key to my heart if you know what I mean."

"Anyways." she brushed him off nonchalantly, which earned her a sullen face. "If we head straight to Sacré-Cœur first, then we can swivel Le Grand Paris and the 9th arrondissement without passing many monuments. If Twiddle Gain is not there, then that'll be a wasted effort."

The teenagers looked at their kwamis for assistance. Unfortunately, Plagg was snoring audibly on top of the fridge while Tikki shook her head with sadness.

"I'm sorry, but we kwamis don't have that ability to sense nearby akumas. If we did, then both of you won't struggle this much since the day you got your Miraculous."

"Point taken."

"I think Twiddle Gain is in Notre Dame." Marinette declared, encircling the landmark with a red pen.

"Is that a wild guess, My Lady? Or with a supporting proof?"

"The Rosary," she told him. "Remember the object where the Akuma resided with Twiddle Doom? It's in his necklace, which turned out to be a Rosary. Felipe was wearing it during our visit and likely held it with importance. Probably a gift from Marcelo, basing on the way he touched it whenever he mentioned his brother's name. The crucifix was a True Cross, and the center engraved the Crown of Thorns. Where do you think these relic symbols are located?"

"I was blindsided to notice such details." he shook his head with awe. "If Marcelo was the one who gave Felix the rosary, and being twin brothers, does that mean he might have a matching pair?"

"I guess so."

Adrien stood up. "Twins. Rosary. Twiddle Doom Akuma was in his rosary. Twiddle Doom has a power to destroy dimensions. Twiddle Gain has a power to alter dimensions. If Twiddle gain has a matching rosary, then that means the Akuma might be in there?"

"We don't know, mon Minou. Not until we find Twiddle Gain."

"Then Notre Dame we'll be," he muttered, then looked at the encircled landmark. "He must be claiming a sanctuary there."

"You're watching too much Disney films, Chaton." She teased.

"Hey, the Hunchback of Notre Dame was originally a novel by Victor Hugo." he defended with crossed arms. "Disney only mellowed the settings for kid's sake."

"As well as yours."
A loud ping sounded, telling them that the cookies were finished and ready for Tikki's consumption.

As Marinette placed the cookies on the rack for cooling, Adrien went back upstairs for the cheese. Checking the inventory, he sighed with relief that his kwami didn't finish the entire bag.

He sized up the pink room again with glee and made a mental note to send her a monthly cover of his photo shoots to add to her growing collection. All with his autographs.

That, if both of them would still remember.

Heading downstairs, he saw her packing the final batches of cookies in a slim container and slipped them inside a pink knapsack. He met her bluebell eyes, and when she saw his knowing grin, she scowled.

"Did my shrine stoked your ego, Kitty?"

"Not as much as knowing you're mine, Lovebug," he snickered, then shook his head. "I can't believe I'm so dumb not to see those posters when I first enter your room."

"I removed them when you first went here as Adrien," she answered matter-of-factly. "But not during Puppeteer as Chat. Imagine my horror when you deflected Lady Wifi's attacks and hit your face."

"Yep. I'm a dumb."

"I'd rather call it as a 'tunnel-vision'." she chuckled, then sauntered towards him with a nose poke. "You're too focused on a goal that you failed to notice the things around you. But on a positive note, you're not a type that can be easily distracted."

"You have no idea," he mused with a wink. "How distracting your beautiful smile could be on my ill-fainted heart."

She rolled her eyes. "Then we better suit up, Hot Shot. Before your tunnel vision kicked in."

The two called their transformation, leaving Ladybug and Chat Noir in their respective places.

"Buginette?" the feline superhero reached his partner's hand, then drifted his own upwards to cup her masked face. "Thank you."

"For what?" she blinked, puzzled on his serious demeanor.

"For loving me," he responded with a smug. "For letting me love you."

"Oh, Chat." she breathed as she drew their bodies closer.

He kissed her languidly, tilting her head to access her lips more which she complied happily. Ladybug didn't mind doing it for a greater period of time, probably forever, but they need to stop or else...

A loud crash jolted the two superheroes from their activities, and on that brief seconds of breathing and logical thinking, they turned their heads towards the sound and witnessed how Sabine's jaw slackened as she held the door open while Tom dropped the paper bag on the floor.

Seems like the two broke the Dupain-Cheng's couple.

"Oops."
Chapter 31

What would you do if you caught two French superheroes french-kissing inside your french bakery that was supposed to be closed because you're a French who attended an event outside France?

Or rather...

What French parents should do on their half-French daughter french-kissing a full-blooded French man inside the french bakery that was supposed to be closed while they were donned as French superheroes?

Ladybug didn't know the answer. She remained on the spot as she looked at her bewildered parents who froze completely in their doorway.

The Dupain-Chengs - the father, the mother and the child - were having a staring contest with a pin-drop silence, probably on the verge of absorbing the ludicrous situation, until an Agreste destroyed it.

"We - welcome back!" the feline hero squeaked.

And to obliterate it further, his father answered.

"Thanks!"

Then followed by her mother.

"We're home!"

Which led the spotted heroine to slap her forehead with her spandex-covered hand. At that moment, she mustered all of her willpower not to skin a certain mangy cat.

Normally, owners would interrogate unwelcomed strangers who infiltrated their locked house with animosity; much more if these strangers touched and took some things without permission.

Well, the girl thought. I lived here technically.

But then, her parents didn't know that. She didn't even know if she could qualify herself as a thief, let alone breaking and entering her own home in disguise, and consider such actions as a crime.

Her rational mind stopped working as soon as the duo was led to the dining room with a cup of tea and a plate of crackers. The setup reminded her how parents do 'The Talk' to their prepubescent kids, like how to control raging hormones and relationship stuff, but their conversation didn't go that route.

Because in reality, Tom and Sabine didn't know that Marinette was Ladybug and Adrien was Chat Noir.

"I believe 'congratulations' is appropriate." the burly husband wiggled his brows as he sat on the edge of the table. "Considering the sight that we've seen earlier."

The superheroes blushed, and when Chat Noir acknowledged it with a neck scratch and a nod, Ladybug couldn't help but kicked his leg. She had to control herself not to think about how she could skin a mangy cat.

"We don't mind knowing the reasons why you've borrowed our kitchen." the petite wife supplied as if she could read the superheroine's anxiety, then eyed the cookie pouches inside her daughter's
'knapsack. "Though I didn't peg you to be a baker."

"Ah, that's because my parents taught me how to bake since I was young."

"I see."

Her intuitions affirmed that her mom was about to add something, but stopped herself instead. Whatever the reason behind her reluctance, she didn't know. She decided not to probe further.

"We would like to apologize for our intrusion." the heroine bowed. "We need to recharge our Miraculous, and it so happened that your house was near and accessible from our location."

"Marinette allowed us to use your oven." her feline partner defended, which was technically true. "Rest assured that everything was cleaned and returned to their proper places, and we didn't steal anything here...except for some flours, eggs, sugar, butter and chocolate chips. We'll pay you for all the ingredients we've used and whatever supplies we've borrowed."

"Oh, you don't have to, Chat Noir. All Parisian superheroes are welcome to this humble home." Tom waved his hand. "Like what my wife mentioned before, we really don't mind knowing your business. I guess that defeats the purpose of having secret identities."

"It's quite unfair if we'll just leave without giving a proper explanation. We're not that ungrateful."

"As what we've mentioned, it's fine." her father beamed as if he could see her behind the mask. Then he continued.

"We're not surprised that you were both acquainted with my daughter. After all, you've saved her at least once from an Akuma."

"You're right. Marinette seems to be a magnet for disaster." the feline hero pondered smugly while glancing at his scowling partner.

Tom only laughed. "I can't blame you to reach on that assumption. See, she's not that clumsy if she can make her head to think straight. Her imaginations are somewhat wild, which I believe is a great component as an artist, and very melodramatic like it's the end of the world. She tends to overthink things."

"She's just perfectionist," Sabine added. "And her body coordination wasn't that bad. Remember that we enlisted her for ballet class?"

"Marinette did a ballet?!" Chat exclaimed, making his partner squirmed in her seat.

"Yeah, she was as graceful as a swan. Then stopped one day because she preferred making tutus rather than wearing them."

"I think that's her turning point to follow her calling." the man scratched his beard with a hum. "Spending her allowances for linens, collecting fashion magazines, watching project runways...I think that's where she knew about Adrien."

"You're wrong, Hon. She only learned about Adrien's existence when they were in troisième."

"Ah, yeah. Such a good kid. Do you think our dream to have green-eyed grandchildren will come true?"

"I think so. I mean, she's doing her best to seduce him by her sweetness."
"Mon Dieu." Ladybug groaned with full-blown mortification, trying not to be rude to her parents and at the same time, trying not to strangle her bemused boyfriend.

"Oh, I'm sorry Ladybug! We didn't mean to rant some snippets about our daughter's lives! Not that we're not proud with her, because we are very much proud of her, and we love her so very much, it's just that...well, I think it's not a secret that she has a crush on that Agreste kid. Everybody knows about it, I think, except the person himself."

"I think Adrien already knows, M. and Mme. Dupain-Cheng," the feline hero smirked. "Only an idiotic blind guy will fail to notice your daughter's stunning beauty, compassion, bravery, and kindness that even a mere dictionary can't describe her awesomeness."

"If that's the case Chat Noir, then why did it take him years before he made a move on my daughter?"

"Because he's an idiotic, blind and scaredy-cat guy...?"

Fortunately, the parents failed to notice how the hero winced when Ladybug hit his shin. But that didn't mean they failed to note his praises.

"Do you have a crush on my Marinette?" Tom gave him a beady, murderous stare. "Because I swear I'm going to snap the bones of those who would woo my daughter yet flirted with the other."

Chat shrunk as he paled with horror. "Oh, no, no, no, no, Mr. Dupain-Cheng! I'm just a cat that serves one Master! Rii - right, M'Lady?"

His Lady answered him with dagger looks. He gulped audibly.

"You're scaring him, Tom. You're threatening a superhero," Sabine chuckled then looked at the teens. "It's innate for us parents to be overprotective with our kids. All parents only want the best for them, regardless of age and mindsets. That whatever failures they've faced, or success they've made, there will always be us who will support and tap their backs for a job well done."

Chat Noir was awed with a pang of jealousy on how doting Marinette's parents were. Such familial love was something he always craved since he was young. An affection he barely remembered from his father, and a lingering memory he felt from his mother. It was a kind of love he wished he could obtain in the present.

On the other hand, Ladybug was assaulted with guilt and shame. She was lying in front of her parents - in fact, she was keeping secrets under their nose, and to make the matter worse, she couldn't tell them at all. Yet despite her shortcomings and impertinence, they didn't mind declaring their unconditional love towards their daughter. Towards Marinette. Towards her.

"Ladybug, are you alright?"

Sabine's concerned voice shook her from her stupor, and when a leather-covered hand brushed her cheek, she realized that she was crying.

"I - I'm sorry," the heroine apologized and almost broke her dam when Chat squeezed her hand. "I didn't mean to make things weird here, but...I just - I just recalled my parents. I'm sorry."

"It's alright, sweetie," the woman said, placing her hand on top of theirs. "Though we didn't know you two, and this might sound awkward, but we are always here to take care of you."

"You have no idea how much we appreciate all the heroism and efforts you've made in our city." the
man interjected as he copied his wife's gestures. "That by every blow and wound you two get was equal to the number of innocent lives you both saved."

"Do they know? Your parents?"

Ladybug and Chat Noir shook her heads.

Of course, none of their parents knows about their secret identities.

"I see."

Silence overpowered the room.

A few heartbeats later, Ladybug broke the contact. "I think we need to leave now."

"Ah, yes. There's an Akuma on the loose." Tom nodded then responded them with a smile. "Seems like we're holding you two up for your tasks."

"It's alright, Mr. Dupain-Cheng. A little pick me up won't hurt." Chat said. "And thanks for your guiding hands."

"I don't mind giving you a hand since we know we're on your good hands."

"Don't worry - we got the upper hand in this battle."

"Let us know firsthand if you guys won against Papillion - though it'll be obvious hands down victory."

"Chat - "

"Huh. As if we'll hand him our Miraculous."

"Chat Noir - "

"Don't overplay with your hands, son, or else the situation might get out of hand."

"I'm not a type that would get my hands dirty Monsieur, but - "

"Chat Noir, damn it!" the spotted heroine bellowed out of frustrations. "Stop this puns right now or I might use these hands literally to skin you alive!"

"Meow-ch, Buginette!"

Sabine snorted at their ridiculousness and the heavy tension that was present in the air dissipated and replaced by a raucous laughter. All the worries, doubts and fears the superheroes felt awhile back were gone as if their serious discussion never happened at all.

"Though we enjoyed bug-ging around here and chat." the feline hero said, wiping some happy tears on his eyes. "But we must leave now."

"Thank you for your hospitality and understanding." his partner looked at the couple with glee. "And for giving us a motivation despite the havoc that we've made here."

"No worries there, young Lady." Tom sighed then glanced at her partner. "And look out for her, young Knight."
"I will, Monsieur!"

Before the two activated their respective weapons to flee, the mother stopped them in a tight hug. They were taken aback when the father followed, wrapping them like they were a bunch of pillows.

"Zhù nǐ hǎo-yùn." her words were immediately understood by Chat, as well as Ladybug despite having a limited knowledge of her mother’s tongue.

The youngsters responded their appreciations with a tighter hug.

"Ladybug?"

"Hmm?"

The superheroes were scaling rooftops when Chat Noir suddenly asked his partner.

"What is it, Kitty?"

"Do you have a video in a tutu?"

She answered him with a yo-yo hit.

"Tom?"

"Hmm?"

The couple was looking at the windows, still staring at the direction where the superheroes leaped and swallowed by skyscrapers.

"You owe me a hundred." the wife smirked. "And a massage."

The husband only grunted with defeat.
"For the record." Adrien moaned while sprawling near the banks of Seine. "Twiddle Gain finally nabbed the Most Annoying Akuma award from Jackady."

Marinette hummed as she rolled near his side. "Watching your father doing a Butterfly Dance in a live television must be a traumatic sight."

"Tell me more about it."

It was high noon yet the teenagers didn't budge an inch to spare their exposed skin from the pricking hot rays. They were too exhausted to move, and sunburns were the least among their concerns.

"We've battled forty-two clones, My Lady." the boy moaned again. "Forty-two pesky clones of nothing but an Akuma vessel - and we barely covered a single arrondissement."

"Are we going to play that blame game again, Kitty?" his companion slurred. "Because I was damn sure I warned you about that wormhole in the dumpster."

He sniffed. "Who would've thought TARDIS can be anything aside from telephone booths?!"

"Sometimes I forgot you're a nerd." the girl responded, raising her head a bit to check their sheltered kwamis.

Adrien's duffel bag was slightly zipped open on its side, revealing a grumpy-looking Plagg and an enervated Tikki.

"You guys okay there?" she probed.

"Ask me that again when you're not imposing a gavage." the black kwami groused between cheese bites.

"I thought tubes are unnecessary." his charger scoffed. "For a glutton like you."

The red kwami groaned, unsure if she was supporting his claim, or simply defending her counterpart.

Even though the Miraculous boosted their strength and protected them from harm, Marinette and Adrien would still need a sound mind and a stamina to endure lengthy battles. True that their powers could alleviate their pains, but not the fatigues and stresses that usually crept inside their bodies.

The kwamis weren't spared either.

In every Lucky Charm drops and Cataclysm hits, Tikki and Plagg would always exhaust themselves till de-transformation. They might be able to regenerate themselves by eating cookies and camemberts, but they also need recuperation - or according to Plagg's terms, savor the moment - else they would lose their control enough to endanger both the wielder and the Bestower. This might be the reason why nudging them to eat faster made them cranky.

"Think like we're batteries - for the sake of your geek mind." his kwami once explained. "We're stable if charged normally. We'll go haywire if charged forcefully, or charged in a wrong port. Continuous usage without charging, or barely charging, or charging in less than the minimal requirement, would be deadly. We'll electrocute you and smoke ourselves till both of us will never see the daylights again."
He thought it was pure baloney he even laughed on Plagg's face. Now that he was experiencing the severity of their situation, he couldn't help but feel remorse.

Marinette was informed by her kwami about the effect of constant transformation even before Bubbler's battle, as well as the Vanisher and Anti-Bug's. She also witnessed how a frazzled Tikki slept on her untouched cookie tower throughout the night.

This led her charger to be afraid that one day, the kwami might enter hibernation.

Thinking about it, she couldn't imagine the strains Papillion suffered on the ordeal.

Serves him right, she wanted to say but didn't have the heart to declare it.

Because at the end of the day, whether it was a good or a bad karma, all Miraculous holders must face the consequences of the each other's actions.

"We're set now." Tikki finally announced after licking the crumbs on her nubs. She never gobbles two cookies in one gulp, despite being a binge eater, but today was an exception.

"Plagg?"

"Mhmp - hmph." he responded, then eyed the teenagers. "Make sure to make this as your last transformation. Both of you are beyond the daily quota."

"We're very much aware on that." Marinette gave him a timid smile, then poked her partner. "Adrien?"

"Yeah, yeah." he made a cat-like stretch, much to her amusement, then sat up to look at the flying buttress of Notre Dame de Paris.

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The Gothic-styled cathedral has been erected in the 12th century was named after the Virgin Mary, also known as Our Lady, and renowned not only as one of the finest architectural buildings in Paris but also the main setting of Victor Hugo's famous novel.

Standing on the Point Zero, Ladybug and Chat Noir could sense the menace yielded by the gargoyles, as if they were being warded off like evil spirits - or probably they were being warned for an unknown threat.

"Feels like the Akuma is here." the feline hero said, followed by the toll of the north tower bells. Another hour has passed without them knowing again.

"Chat?"

"Hmm?"

"I think I overlooked something important."

The concerned laced in her voice made his faux ears twitch. "What is it?"
"Why Twiddle Gain chose Notre Dame as his sanctuary." the spotted heroine pondered. "All Akumas have powers associated with their desires, and while Twiddle Doom, his brother, can destroy reality, then it's a given that Twiddle Gain can alter it. And now that he went rogue, then that means he didn't want such changes."

She paused, then gave him an impassive look. "Where do you think is the ideal place to announce his plea?"

"One that has a historical reputation of changes and alteration. Renovations and restorations." her partner answered as he looked at the portal of the Last Judgement. "Definitely a modern-day Quasimodo - a monster by chance and not by choice. Yep, he's here."

Their eyes roamed around and noticed the lack of damages in the vicinity, as well as the absence of tourists despite being one of the most popular spots in the city.

"Seriously, we're walking straight to his trap." she confessed.

"Legends said that a kiss of true love while stepping on this plate would lead you to the right path." he commented while tapping the bronze piece of the platform with his pawed shoe. "As French would say, all roads lead to Paris."

She snorted, but that didn't mellow the mood. "Sometimes I forgot you're a dork."

"What can I say, Bugaboo." he wiggled his brows. "I am purr-ty cat-astic."

"Pray do tell the number of times we got lost because of that catastic attitude."

"You know, that's the rudest remark I've ever got from you today." his childish pouts successfully mellowed the mood.

They walked towards the entrance of the cathedral. Concerns grew when they noticed that the doors were closed, and wouldn't prod a bit when they pushed it. It was locked.

"I have a bad feeling about this."

"The owl goes not into the nest of the lark." he quoted. "But there are moments when the hands of a woman possess superhuman force."

She didn't know whether to huff with frustrations or to sigh with admiration. "Sometimes I forgot you're a nerd."

"I'd rather call it as brilliance, My Lady." he corrected. "With all the histories about shotgun marriages, and other shootings that befall on this place as we speak, what's the worst thing that can happen?"

She didn't answer him, and when he looked back, he found none.

Ladybug was gone.
"CHAT?!" Ladybug exclaimed when a dark garb fell and draped her vision. 

Squinting, she flailed her arms until her sight recovered.

She was still standing in front of Notre Dame, but not alone anymore. She couldn't find her feline partner, and the bypassers were giving her some quaint eyes. Of course, they would be, because a tight-fitting spandex outfit was considered scandalous during the early 19th century, especially for women.

"Excuse me!" she called, grabbing one of the men by his tunic. He flinched upon contact but didn't brush her hands off.

"I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but can you bring me to your Master?"

The man gave her a confused look. She knew he wasn't a commoner based on the clothes, and very likely a bourgeoisie, so asking him that way must be an insult. But then, Ladybug and Chat Noir had encountered several warped timelines to know the flow of the situation. The faster she could locate Twiddle Gain's vessel, the quicker she could return to her partner.

"I apologize young lady, but I have no idea on that statement." the man said while scratching his white beard, then looked around. "Oh, Henry!"

A similarly aged man but in more humble clothes walked towards them. "Yes, Monsieur Hugo?"

"This young lady here was asking for my Master, and I have no answer to that."

"Well, then." Henry gave her an inquisitive look. "Let me bring you to Trajin, as he might have an answer to your question."

She followed him when he entered the cathedral. He has a British accent, Ladybug noticed, and likely a foreman since he was carrying a toolbox of chisels and little hammers. Before he could lead her to the spiral staircase, a figure caught his attention.

"Trajin! Monsieur Trajin!" the Englishman waved his colleague, who stopped momentarily on his call. "Someone was looking for the Master."

"He's upstairs, Monsieur Sibson." Trajin stated matter-of-factly. "Chattering with Laverne, as usual."

Henry sighed, and then glanced at the heroine. "Monsieur Le Bossu was on top of the tower. His quarter was at the south near Emmanuel, but if he's not there then likely he's in the other tower with Denise-David. Don't fret - he might be intimidating, but he's kind. He's just too scrupulous for a professional carver."

Ladybug nodded, then began climbing the 387 stairs as she unhooked her yo-yo. Twiddle Gain's vessels were fond of surprise attacks, and since this was the first time she got separated with Chat, she was anxious about the pending danger that awaits her.

Once she reached the highest floor, she got a glimpse of a hunchbacked man leaning on a balcony next to a stoned Strix. His brows were creased as he looked at the astonishing view of old Paris.

She didn't need a verbal confirmation to know that she was sometime around the 1820s, the era wherein the government gave Notre Dame back to the Catholic church, leaving the institution to handle the repairs caused by the French Revolution.
"LADYBUG?!!" Chat exclaimed when a sudden air whooshed and creaked the cathedral doors open, revealing a crowded nave.

Several people in extravagant clothes were sitting in the pews, and each aisle was decorated with intricate flower arrangements. A familiar floral scent permeated the air, in which the feline hero considered as associated to the red rose petals that were fluttered by the wind.

The organist played one of Wagner's notable pieces, but when he looked around, he saw that the bride was already near the altar.

Despite her face was covered by a thin veil, he could still identify her from afar, especially the groom whom he had an estranged relationship since he was young. The bride's blonde hair was neatly pinned by a feathered brooch, which shone brightly against the light, and her green eyes were gleaming towards the tall man in a tux.

As far as Adrien remembered, the groom never sported such heart-warming expression, not even towards his son, so seeing him like that was quite refreshing.

He was clearly young, probably around mid-twenties or early thirties, with his ash blond hair combed neatly on his back. He wasn't wearing his usual black-framed silver glasses, and his blue eyes weren't dead.

The couple was obviously happy, and undeniably in love with each other. They were wearing an affectionate smile, and they were looking at each other as if nothing exists in the room.

Not even their child.

He didn't need a verbal confirmation to know that he was sometime around the late '90s, the year when Gabriel married a beautiful woman who became Mrs. Agreste.

"Monsieur Le Bossu?" Ladybug said as she walked towards the hunchbacked man.

He glanced at her with disinterest, then focused his attention back to the skyline. "What do you want?"

"Twiddle Gain." she declared. "Unless it was you."

Bossu scoffed, then turned his body around to face her. "What is it for you then, if I were Twiddle Gain?"

"I'm going to release you from your sufferings." she answered, earning a snort.
"Lies!" he laughed maniacally. "Pure lies! You're spouting nothing but lies! Lies! Lies!"

"But I am not - "

"Liar!" the man growled, then gave her an accusatory look. "You told us that you're going to defeat Papillion, but look what happened?"

She was taken aback. "I am, but - "

"No buts! I won't listen to a liar like you! All of you are liars! Liars! Liars!"

The heroine eyed the hunchback when he patted one of the carved chimeras. "Do you know these gargoyles? These monsters...and those stone creatures there? They were all made by me! By yours truly! But look what happened - have you seen my signature placed on them? No! They were all removed and claimed by Le Duc!"

She traced the bat signature stamped on one of the stone carvings with her covered fingers, then looked at the man with unpretentious sadness.

As a fellow artist, she couldn't imagine the struggles and the anguish one felt whenever someone stole their ideas or discredited their works, much more if these were forged and selfishly declared as someone's property. She had experienced it with Chloe before when she copied her hat design, but she was able to turn the tables around when her classmate also copied her signature.

Unfortunately, on Bossu's case, he failed to do a comeback.

"Was it because of my deformities?" the man muttered then gloomed at the spotted heroine. "Was it because I am a hunchback?"

She shook her head. "No, I don't think - "

"If these people realized that a mere hunchback carved these stones that overlooked their city, would they still care for this church?" he brushed her off. "If they learned about the person behind Ladybug, would they still respect you?"

She was silent.

"A clumsy and shy as a superheroine? Huh, you think people would still praise you? Like you? Worship you? No!"

A cold fear began to form in her gut as flashbacks of failures and disappointments assaulted her mind. Her breathing hitched, her body shivered, and her knees wobbled and weakened until she collapsed on the floor.

"Do you think your beloved parents would still love you once they learned about your identity? How about your friends? You have no idea how much they would loathe you, mock you, and of course, they would incriminate your imperfections. Because you destroyed their hopes and dreams for being a superhero."

She couldn't say anything to the man because she knew deep inside he was right.

"You, Ladybug, are nothing but a failure."
"Mother?" Chat Noir said as he walked towards the couple. "Father?"

The bride looked at the groom with apprehension, and with a nod, she greeted the hero with a bone-crushing hug.

"Are you...are you my son?"

Chat nodded, returning the same gesture, unaware how tears began to spill from his eyes. His childhood memories resurfaced again as he recalled the times his mother hugged him this tight as if she didn't want him to let go.

Young Gabriel looked at him with a pursed smile. "You called me your...your Fa-Father?"

Never in his dreams, he ever encountered a stammering Gabriel Agreste or wished to see him wearing a delightful smile as he wrapped his arms around him. It was something impossible to happen in his Reality, but at least the warped timeline offered him such treat.

Even though the said treat was short-lived.

Seconds later, he realized that the couple was actually trying to crush his bones forcefully. When he pushed them back, he could see the madness and anger swarming in their eyes. It was a terrifying sight.

"Why are you here?" the groom demanded. "You shouldn't be here."

"Father, let me explain - "

He clicked his tongue. "You're a disappointment."

He froze. It wasn't the first time Gabriel expressed his dissatisfaction towards him, but the sting that embedded on his tone was still there. Hearing it again was quite painful for him to bear.

Whenever he earned a B-mark, he would say 'you could've done better.' then walked away. If it was A-mark, he wouldn't spare it a glance then walked away. After photo shoots, he would look at his modeled pictures briefly without any encouragements or a simple remark like 'good job'. Such stoic attitude was also prominent even in his extra-curricular activities like fencing, piano and Mandarin lessons, and even though he did everything to meet up with his expectations, he still couldn't satisfy him.

His father was very hard to please.

But what he didn't expect was his mother raising her hand against him.

He knew it was coming but decided not to dodge it. Her slender hand hit the side of his cheek, and the contact made him flinch.

He couldn't believe that his sweet beloved mother was capable of slapping him. He cupped the spot with his clawed hands, then looked at the person with bleary eyes.

"Why, Mother?" he uttered as he met her murderous green eyes. "Why are you doing this to me?"

"I don't want a child to begin with. I don't want you to begin with. You're not supposed to exist in
"This world." she told him. "I can't believe I bore a son who's a pathetic loser."

He was silent.

"You think being a superhero could save your reputation? No! In fact, you're just a second-rate one!" she scoffed with a glare. "Nobody loves you. No one. Not even us. Not even your Lady."

"No, you're wrong. She's - "

"She's a liar, my dear. She was doing it out of pity. All the people whom you associated with were doing these out of pity. You're unloved."

He stepped back, trying to control his sobs as his body quivered with anxiety. He had a history of panic attacks, and most of the time he was able to pacify himself with the help of Plagg. Unfortunately, the charm didn't work.

"Those pathetic human beings that you saved before? They'll hurt you once they learned about your identity. They will condemn you. They will chase you and blame you for their misfortunes."

"If your parents never loved you, then how much more the people that surround you?" the groom added. "Do you think your friends would be so proud of you? Of course, the answer is no."

Smirking, his mother grabbed a fistful of his blond hair, then whispered a terrifying revelation.

"You, Chat Noir, are nothing but a failure."

"No, you're wrong." Ladybug declared as she recovered from her stupor. "I am not a failure."

Tikki's voice prodded her mind, reminding her of the illusions and mind games caused by Twiddle Gain. And most of all, her beloved Kitty.

"I might be clumsy and shy and totally opposite from my civilian self, and I do admit that I have flaws and imperfections, but I am not a loser. True that my counterpart wasn't as interesting as my masked self, but I am not that naive to be manipulated by someone like you!"

Bossu cocked his brows with a bemused grin. "Oh really? Then prove it."

Recovering her focus, she spun her yo-yo, prepping herself once the man rammed his body towards her direction. Unfortunately, it was the stoned chimera that was rammed towards her direction.

She did a barrel roll and dodged it successfully, however, the fragments grazed her suit and ripped its surface. Some bits flew on her exposed skin, causing some thin cuts. Before she could regain her balance, another chimera flew and attacked her.

So she flipped and ran inside the hall.

"Coward!" the hunchback bellowed. "You were running away again!"
"I'm not!" she shouted, which taunted her attackers to be more brute.

*Think, Marinette! Think!* she cursed mentally. *Think how to outwit that hunchback!*

She was calculating that Twiddle Gain would utilize the gargoyles purposely, and probably the facade later on. But after hearing some loud creaks and heavy footings beneath the floor, she knew that the latter became operational.

A small bird monster zoomed past her, and with the aid of her yo-yo, she hit the bird's head out of spite, making the monster crumbled into stone fragments. She observed and waited for a few seconds in case the fragments would assemble and revive themselves. Nothing happened.

"Too brittle!" she realized with a huff, then smashed another monster. And another. And another one.

"Where's the sledgehammer when I need one?!"

The enemies weren't as sturdy as Stoneheart, but she was outnumbered. And despite being easy opponents, she was more than happy to have some reinforcements.

*Where are you, Adrien?*

She was unsure whether her partner was teleported to another dimension, or probably remained unharmed in the reality. If that would be the case, then likely he was doing his best to retrieve her. If not, then she must corner Twiddle Gain's vessel head-on in order to get back and save her partner.

To do so, she must call her trump card.

"*Lucky Charm!*"

. . .

"No, you're wrong." Chat Noir declared as he recovered from his stupor. "I am not a failure."

Plagg's voice prodded his mind, reminding him of the illusions and mind games caused by Twiddle Gain. And most of all, his beloved Lady.

"I might be a symbol of destruction and bad omens, but I didn't use my power to inflict harm, much more on destroying people's lives. I admit I am weak, and a sucker for social pressures, but that doesn't mean I am a loser. True that I am different from my masked self, that I am more raucous and wild, but I am not that stupid to be manipulated by someone like you!"

The bride dropped him with raised brows. "Did you know that mothers know best?"

"You're not my mother." the feline chuckled darkly with a mocked glare. "You have her image, but you are not my mother. Even you, Stick Man. My real father has more angst and venom than you."

"How dare you." the groom growled with fury.

"You're not my parents, both of you. You're not my mother." his attention focused back again to the
white woman as he wiped the wet smears using his leather-covered hand. "Because my mother never
denies my existence. My mother never hits me, nor curses me, and most of all she never glares at me.
She loves me so much, and if she ever meets my Lady, she'll definitely wish nothing more but my
happiness."

Where are you, Marinette?

He knew she was transported to a different dimension, and even though she was capable of winning
her own battles, he couldn't help himself but fear for her safety. But as her brave Knight, he must
focus on his own battles first before dealing with other matters. No one could simply rescue a
Princess without killing a Dragon.

Or in his case, Dragons.

Clearing his thoughts, he raised his hand to summon his destructive power, which caught everyone's
attention. A collective gasp from the audience sounded, followed by the couple who cowered
towards the altar.

"You-you can't do this." the groom paled, stepping back. "You can't kill us."

"You're a monster!" the bride accused him.

"I am not a monster, and you are not my mother." he retorted with full conviction. "And you know
what gives?"

It pained him to see how the woman shivered as she pleaded to spare her life, and how the man
wrapped his arms around her like his real Father should do to his real Mother.

"Wha- what?"

"Because my mother...my real mother..." he emphasized stoically. "Never calls me Chat Noir."

The hero called, wishing that a single blow was enough to eliminate the hollow faces of two people
he cherished most of the world.

"Cataclysm!"
Grandfather paradox.

It was an age-old argument of preventing your birth by killing your grandparents. A hypothetical situation in which a person goes back in time to kill his grandfather at a time before he met his grandmother, and by doing so his father would never be born, and neither would the person himself.

It was simply an auto-suicide.

Chat Noir was facing a similar predicament, but with his hypothetical parents. Both the bride and the groom were huddled together, hiding beneath the church tabernacle as his black bubbling hands hovered above their heads. He hasn't aimed his Cataclysm intentionally to a person before or dreamed of using it out of defense or simply got curious to see the result if a living soul took it.

According to Plagg, the reason why he was chosen to bear the Cat Miraculous was due to the fact that he has high morals not to use the power of destruction for selfish gains. But was he?

Because right now he was trying to commit a parricide.

He knew that these people were fabricated by Twiddle Gain using his personal memories about Notre Dame. The Akuma didn't use any historical references associated with the church like the persecution of the Huguenots or the Festival of Reason he already learned from school, or even the marriages of certain monarchies he was familiar with, but instead he chose a single memory from his childhood that weighed more than those mentioned prior - and that'd be the wedding of his own parents.

Do Papillion finally learned about his identity? He doubted it.

If he touched one of his hypothetical parents with Cataclysm, his hypothetical self in that timeline would cease to exist. His real self would not, however, but the impact of his actions on the distorted timeline would cause some undesirable guilt.

He knew the reason why he was brought there in the first place, and the only way to escape the realm was to destroy something...or someone there. Sadly, he couldn't.

Because even though these two people were not real, he couldn't fathom to kill the image of his own parents.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, more likely towards himself. "I can't do this."

He lowered his arm with a clenched fist. He was so screwed, with sheer regrets about succumbing to his weakness and interfering the course of events because he was a deprived child who terribly missed his mother.

Right now he was on the verge of creating his own paradox on that twisted dimension, and by doing so he could either save Ladybug or destroy himself.

His last resort was to run away.
Ladybug gave the spotted item a deadpan look.

"Sweet Jesus, Mary, and Joseph." she hollered. "All I ask is a hammer...and here you gave me a nail?!"

*What the frick-frack am I supposed to do with this?!* the heroine screamed mentally while dodging her stone-figured assailants. *Use this to shut my own coffin?!!*

Her Lucky Charms were starting to become random that sometimes it would take her hours to utilize it. It was a challenge to her, and challenges often provoked her, but this time it made her extremely annoyed.

It took her ounce of will and patience to stop and concentrate on how to save herself using a piece of metal. She wasn't a type that would put herself in a situation without a concrete plan. But then, life has full of surprises.

"Liar!" Le Bossu - or Twiddle Gain's vessel, she presumed - wailed below. "Coward!"

"Try not to chase me with that killing intent." she yelped. "And I'll prove you wrong."

The heroine never thought that her words would hit a nerve enough to have him declare his murderous desires. Usually, it was her partner who does the baiting, diverting their enemies' attention while she executes their course of action.

She was more of a range-type combatant as projectile defenses were nothing to her with the help of her yo-yo. Though she could manage to deflect direct attacks, regardless of her opponent's strength and agility, she had to reconsider her physique.

Like the insect itself, Ladybug was biologically small.

But then, smalls were often the terrible ones.

*Just wait for me, Adrien!* the spotted heroine thought as she ran towards the west side while decking an Angel, then leaped on the balustrade. *I'm coming there to save you!*

As if he'd run away.

That thought has never been his option, to begin with. He would rather lose a limb and die than to leave his partner. Besides, what kind of Knight he'd be if he abandoned his Princess for a measly Akuma?

*A scaredy cat,* he mused. But then, he has other ideas.

He wasn't a type that does tactical defenses - that was more like his Lady. He was more of a head-on
type, a melee strategist that usually pisses their enemies off to buy some time for his partner to execute the plan.

And what would be the best way to piss the enemy off other than to run away from the scene?

*Just wait for me, Marinette!* the feline hero thought as he rushed towards the exit. *I'm on my way to save you!*

"Go!" Le Bossu commanded the remaining facade on the horizontal frieze to chase Ladybug. She was still clasping her Lucky Charm while fighting with the stoned minions, obviously from the Gallery of the Kings.

Some of them used their scepters as clubs, while others used their crowns as spikes. She even swore when others plucked their own heads and rolled it like a pinball.

How many Jesus Christs she had cussed while breaking some saints' faces?

The heroine has no idea how many stone figures and statues the cathedral housed during that era. Their numbers were too much for her, so she decided to stop counting in the middle. Knowing the figures of her enemies wouldn't change the tide anyway.

If this wasn't considered as Tribulation, then she didn't know how to describe the scenario.

True that she was able to defeat more than one villain all by herself before, like Puppeteer for example, and they weren't as easy as the figurines that she was facing at the moment, but the overwhelming feeling she had for her enemies, plus the anxiety about her survival and her partner's well-being were pressuring her.

There were cuts and bruises all over her body, and her left leg was bothering her whenever she moved around. She might be sporting a simple sprain there, or probably a broken bone. It didn't seem that she was bleeding internally, but the trauma was painful enough to distract her focus.

Three more spots left and she got no clue what to do on her Lucky Charm.

*This must be a nail in my coffin,* she bemoaned silently.

She whirled her weapon for an escape, then leaped towards the northern bell tower. There she caught a glimpse of the hunchback walking near Emmanuel, with a small entrance door behind it.

Looking at her Lucky Charm again, she finally saw a red and black highlighted on the door, the giant bell's rope and the pillars surrounding the tower. Then it clicked.

Two more spots left and she finally got the answer to her dilemma.

"Found you~" the heroine announced, then landed behind the small door.

Le Bossu was taken aback, surprised by her appearance, but before he could call his reinforcements, Ladybug immediately slammed the door closed, then slipped the nail on the barrel lock as a bolt.
To secure that the entire tower would be isolated and protected from unwanted infiltration, she unwound her yo-yo then flung it like a boomerang around the pillars, making the strings weaved on space gaps just enough to form a strong net barrier.

She was weapon-less with no partner to rely on that moment, so she was left with no choice but to run straight towards the enemy. It wasn't a suicidal act or an impulse move; she decided to rely on her physical strength and her Lady Luck to overpower him.

Le Bossu didn't cower. He aimed his fist at her face, but she was nimble to dodge it. She was still favoring her left leg, which became her oppressor's advantage, but that wasn't a problem. Once she had his protruding back slumped on the bell, she immediately grabbed the dangling rope, then used her entire weight to lurch towards him.

Using her stable right foot, she kicked the hunchback on his chest squarely, and with his loud cries a burst of light flashed and enveloped his entire body. She fell and rolled on the floorboards, then holstered herself with the help of the stone walls.

Her yo-yo was still wrapped around the pillars and remained sturdy despite the gnaws and gashes from the flying chimeras. But when the black butterfly emerged from the vanishing Akuma vessel, those stone figures that caged the tower froze and crumbled mid-air.

To unwind her weapon, Ladybug plucked the red string by a finger to detract and wrap on its spotted disk. Once caught, she drew a line on the disk’s surface to unlock its cleansing mechanism, and with a precise hit the device captured and swallowed the butterfly.

"No more evil-doing for you, little Akuma," she muttered between breaths. "Time to de-evilize!"

A white butterfly emerged from her weapon, and without further ado, she squirmed towards the small door to retrieve her Lucky Charm.

She threw it in the air.

"Miraculous Ladybug!"

Her entire body was enveloped by small red ladybugs, repairing not only the damaged timeline but also returning her back to the reality. She knew that her Cleansing power would only cover the physical aspect, so even though the wounds she acquired were healed, the pain that lingered on her skin would still remain.

*I'm almost there, Adrien!*

...

...

...

"No!" a loud shriek sounded from above, and there on the second story Chat Noir saw a big, chubby man wearing a black-and-pink striped jumper suit.

His hair was fizzy red and his eyes were decorated with yellow and pink swirl hues. Like Twiddle Doom, he has silver bracelets cuffed on each of his wrists, and a matching necklace which likely housed the corrupted Akuma.
He immediately knew that the man wasn't a vessel, but an Akuma itself.

"Found you!" the hero exclaimed triumphantly. "Twiddle Gain!"

The Akuma jolted, but instead of appreciating his discovery, he was utterly furious.

"You coward!" he bellowed. "Running away without giving a fight! You're a lying hero!"

"Me? You're calling me a liar?" Chat raised his voice with incredulity, then scoffed. "Why don't you go down here and I'll prove you wrong!"

He didn't, so he extended his baton upwards and landed himself on the balcony. While he was expecting Twiddle Gain there for a match, he was greeted by a furious crowd instead.

Little did he know that the Akuma manipulated the ceremony and transformed the place to be his burial site. Those attendees in formal gowns and suits became cold-blooded executioners, and the crews on that story became his hunters.

"I don't want to exchange my death vows here." the feline hero stepped back, calculating the moves of his enemies.

He barely heard his Miraculous beeping because on its first warning, the people began to rush to pounce him.

Chat Noir was extremely outnumbered.

He was knocking the people out cold single-handed. He realized he couldn't keep the pace up anymore unless he let go of his Cataclysm. He was supposed to aim it to Twiddle Gain's necklace, but the bastard chicken out and vanished into nothingness.

*Is this part of Akuma's distorted reality?* he wondered with disbelief. *Or Papillion's manipulations?*

He believed it was the latter.

Because he knew that Twiddle Gain desired nothing but freedom.

While he busied himself from defeating his overwhelming oppressors, a sabre suddenly jabbed his right shoulder. The blade pierced his flesh deeply, twisted, then pulled out unceremoniously, and the action earned him a loud cry. The hero fell and stumbled on the pillar, which he accidentally touched by his Cataclysm, and ended it up crumbled and destroyed.

Such powerful skill to be wasted on a worthless object because he was preoccupied. Oh, how he wanted to punch himself for such idiocy.

Chat scrambled to gain his footing. He was down to two paws, and even though he has a cheese stashed on his pocket, and more on his bag somewhere - probably below, near the entrance door - he couldn't easily de-transform there. Doing that would mean surrendering his identity to Papillion, and he didn't want that.

Somehow, the destroyed pillar affected the supporting walls of the cathedral that shook the entire floor. This caused a commotion, prompting his attackers to flee to save their lives. However, the one who stabbed him remained in place with a raging fury emitted from his glares.

The person was standing near the Rose Window where the central medallion of Our Lady and her Child was depicted. The light from the stained glass cast a shadow of a tall, lean man, with a poise of
a seasoned fencer. The sword on his hand gave him an imitation of a cane, and the dark bow tie on his tux reminded him of a black butterfly.

If he didn't know the face of Gabriel Agreste, he could've sworn he was seeing Papillon.

"Father." he uttered with disbelief, cursing himself for addressing the man that way.

"I am not your father." the man replied. "And you are not my son."

"Well, you stole my pop's face." Chat shrugged as he hoisted himself using his baton.

His right side was totally numb. He was losing a lot of blood from his stabbed wound, not to mention he has a minute remaining until his de-transformation.

"I have to defeat you before you can hurt the love of my life," he told him.

"What a coincidence - I have to defeat you too!" the hero declared with confidence, preparing his stance. "So that I can save the love of my life."

Blade clashed with a Baton.

Chat Noir was in a bad shape. He was fumbling on his balance, but so far he was able to deflect his blows using his weapon. He knew he couldn't remain offensive for that long, and surrendering himself was out of the equation. Killing his father's image was something he didn't want to do, but letting him kill himself would do him no good.

_İ have to finish this_, he muttered internally. _Marinette is waiting for me._

All of a sudden, the flooring quivered, making Gabriel lost his foot. He yelped. Large chunks of debris fell in between them, creating a massive smoke that blurred their eyesight.

The feline hero didn't know what happened to his imaginary father, but he was sure he wasn't buried among the rubbles.

He lost the sensation of his other half, and his right arm was currently soaked with his own blood. Some of the dust entered his lungs, suffocating him enough to make him stumbled backward. He writhed towards the balustrade, hacking and waiting for his demise until the supporting rail fell and dragged him down.

_I guess this is my end_, Chat thought grimly. _I'm sorry I failed you, Marinette._

A red string suddenly shot out and encircled his left wrist, preventing his fall. This took him by surprise, and when he looked up, he was greeted by a masked face with watery blue eyes.

"Chat!" Ladybug's frantic voice broke his stupor. "I got you. Oh, God, I got you! Hang on tight there, Chat! Chat Noir!"

The hero had to blink thrice to realize that it was all real, that he wasn't hallucinating. Ladybug was alive and safe. He broke a small grin.

"Well, my Lady." he croaked. "You know, this is not an ideal place to hang out with."

"Stupid cat, this is not a time for jokes!"

He knew that, but at least he wanted to see a glimpse of her smile before he took his last breath.
His eyes might be bleary, but he could see that his partner was down to one spot. Both of them have few more seconds to go until their de-transformation.

"Give me your hand!" she demanded as she extended hers. He fumbled, then failed.

"I can't. I can't move it," he confessed.

He heard how her voice hitched when he attempted to move his right side. She might've seen the deep gash on his arm, and probably the paleness of his face. His entire body was numb already, and he was starting to lose his consciousness.

"Don't you dare give up on me, Chaton!"

"I'm not, Bugaboo. I'm trying not to...but then..." he sighed. "I saw my mother."

The only noises that he could hear were the rumbles from the ground and Ladybug's erratic breathing. She didn't stop though - she was very persistent of pulling him up, and he could feel her grunts and tugs from the string, but still no avail.

"I saw my mother here, my Lady. She was marrying my father," he was trying to distract her. "I made an attempt to kill her, so my father stabbed me."

"You didn't kill them." was her firm reply, still trying to pull him up.

"I didn't. I'm fucking weak for not doing my job. So here I am."

"Don't you dare fucking tell me you're weak - because you're not! So give me that damn hand of yours so we can clean up this mess!"

"But I am Ladybug. I am weak." he chuckled darkly until he saw the agony in her eyes.

It pained him to see her sadness, her desperation, her frustrations towards a low-life like him. He didn't deserve someone like her. She deserves better.

"Let me go, my Lady."

"No!" she exclaimed between sobs. "Don't do this to me, Kitty. Please."

"I'm out of commission, I'm holding you up here, and you could've captured Twiddle Gain - "

"No!"

"I can't be your handicap - "

"No!"

"Leave me alone - "

"No!"

"Ma - "

"No! No! No!"

Her fat tears were falling on his cheeks like rain, and its saltiness was mixing together with his own tears and blood as it dropped a hundred feet below the ground.
"You can do it, mon minou. We can do this together. I beg you, please."

He shook his head, then smiled. "It's alright. We're down to seconds now, Bug. You have an enemy
to capture, and a city to save."

"I don't care a damn about - "

"Marinette!" he gave her a steely look, didn't care if his scolding made her flinched. "You were
granted with a Miraculous power to save the lives of many. You have a responsibility to uphold. So
set your priorities straight. Everybody needs you, and you know that."

"But I don't want to sacrifice your life in exchange for - "

"We're in a distorted timeline." he reminded her. "Everything will return to normal once you use
your Miraculous Cleanse. You're the only one who can do that."

"What if I can't?! What if I failed to fix everything?! What if I lost you?" she shuddered as she wept.
"I can't lose you. I can't do anything without you. I can't live without you."

"You can do it," he answered with a grin. "Believe me, my love. Because I believe in you."

"Adri - "

Five.

"Go, my Lady. Paris is waiting for their hero."

Four.

"I can't, I - "

Three.

"I love you."

Two.

This broke her dam of tears. "Oh, Adrien, I - "

One.

"Goodbye, Marinette."

His tender words cued the red strings to dissolve in a faint red light, followed by a burst of green that
wrapped his body, stripping his leather suit mid-air as he fell.
It was *Ladybug* who witnessed how Chat Noir vanished into nothingness when he protected her from Timebreaker's power.

It was *Ladybug* who saw how Adrien was suspended mercilessly by Volpina, despite being a clone, which almost cost her Miraculous.

Two boys. Two important boys in her life who happened to be one at the same was on the brink of death again, and Ladybug was there on the sidelines watching the event helplessly again.

*Ladybug*, not *Marinette*.

If one would think about it, who was *Marinette* compared to *Ladybug*?

*Marinette* was nothing like the superheroine in terms of power, strength, popularity, and graces.

*Marinette* was more of an invisible, clumsy and erratic teenager who could barely save herself from tardiness.

Comparing *Marinette* to *Ladybug* was like holding a candle on a deep sea to a vast sky.

But was *Marinette* really that inferior?

Because it was *Marinette* who rushed to save themselves from Madame Chamack's wrath then went back for her clone's backup.

It was also *Marinette* who befriended Lila and felt sorry for her alter-ego's unjust attitude.

*Marinette*, not *Ladybug*.

The one who cowered when Stoneheart multiplied himself because she failed to cleanse the Akuma, and the one who misjudged Chloe that caused her to become Anti-Bug.

Two girls. Two faces of a girl who believed that the first was better than the other, which was entirely not true.

Because *Ladybug* was imperfect like *Marinette*.

Because both personalities were built to support each other.

Because the girl would be incomplete without the identity of the other.

'A mask doesn't define who you are'

So when *Ladybug* disappeared, *Marinette* immediately jumped into action.

It felt like the time was shifted into a slower motion. A split-second decision, like when she rescued Alya from being crushed by a car, and she knew it was a dare-devilish move.

In fact, it was the craziest decision she ever made next to leaping inside an Akuma's mouth.

The girl behind the mask dived mid-air.

Everything happened so fast she barely registered yanking Adrien's wrist where her yo-yo once
clung around, and how she almost missed grabbing the edge of the flooring where the two slipped and fell off.

"Marinette!" Tikki frantically bellowed from above. "I - I'm coming - "

"Just - just focus on your cookies!" her charger stuttered while calming her nerves on that near-death stunt. She was sure her purse dropped there somewhere. "I can - I can manage this!"

It was an understatement and considered to be a lie since her hands were sweaty as she gripped the cornice, and her partner's weight was dragging them down to their demise. Disregarding the lingering pain she acquired from Le Bossu, and the gash when a protruding joist scraped her left forearm, a bone fracture was nothing compared to a loss of her beloved.

Thus, both teenagers were currently suspended from a 200-feet height and apparently hanging for their lives.

"Are you out of your mind?" the blond rasped underneath. "You're getting us killed!"

"Be that way!"

He flinched not only on his wound but also on her words.

"Try it. Try it again, Agreste." she threatened with a growl. "Try to drop yourself and I swear I'm going to drop myself till we both end up more than six feet below the ground."

He might've congratulated her for that pun if not for the situation.

"This is a suicide." he huffed with irritation.

"You should've known that." there was a spite on her tone, and so un-Marinette. "That I'm not a type that would abandon my comrade, much more a family. You didn't trust me."

"I never said that!"

"You implied it!" she retorted with fury. "You fucking implied it and you fucking slapped it in my face by doing that selfish sacrifice again! You didn't trust me!"

Adrien was gobsmacked when fresh tears began to fall on her blood-shot eyes.

"You didn't trust me. Not at all," she repeated again. "Was it because of my identity? Was it because the hero you worshipped was nothing but a clumsy poor-looking unknown me?"

"You know it wasn't," he answered with a piercing green orb that showed his utmost sincerity. "You know I have high regards with you, both in and out of the mask. I loved you for you, Marinette, and you know that."

"Then why are you hurting me this way?" she sniffed, still not averting her gaze. "Did you know that every wound you got was a stab in my heart?"

"I -"

"You know." a small voice interrupted her. "This isn't a time for such mundane talk."

Both looked at the haggard-looking kwami that popped out from Adrien's pants. "Plagg!"

His green scleras were bleary, and some of his whiskers were already dented. Cheese crumbs were
falling on his mouth that he nonchalantly wiped it with his nubs.

"Adrien." the black kwami hobbled as he flew towards his charger's face. "You almost dropped me."

"I'm sorry." was his reply.

"If I didn't claw myself when you de-clawed, I might've fallen down and gone."

"I'm sorry."

"You're the most idiotic human being I've ever selected as a Black Cat."

"I'm sorry."

"You're not a gentleman if you're making your lady cry."

"I'm sorry."

"If you're planning to make amends," he expressed with resignation. "Then say the magic words, dumbass."

Adrien took a deep breath "Plagg, Transforme moi."

Marinette squinted when a burst of green light enveloped her partner's body, and faintly registered how his skin transformed into leather.

Once fully transformed, Chat Noir bent his knees to kick the strapped baton he once lost after his duel with Gabriel, then have it rolled and clipped by his boots. Twisting and touching the pawed button, the baton extended and planted firmly on the cathedral's sturdy wall. This became his leverage when the pig-tailed girl released her hand from the cornice, then leaped towards the second story while carrying her in a bridal-style.

Twiddle Gain's army was gone, and so was the Akuma himself.

His Cataclysm almost destroyed half of Notre Dame's foundation, and when he looked around, he noticed some blurs and pixelated cracks in the surroundings, hinting him that the dimension was partially damaged as well.

The girl's eyes remained closed when he knelt down and placed her gently on the cathedral's niche. His entire right arm was completely numb, and the rest were singing with pains, but he had to get up to finish their job.

Before he could do it, a pair of strong, lithe arms enveloped him and trembled around his body. He could smell vanilla and cookies, and the warmth that was offered reminded him that he almost lost her for eternity.

That realization and the fact that he would never see his beloved again was like a cold punch in his gut. So he surrendered himself and cried.

"I'm sorry, Marinette." he sobbed. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for hurting you, Princess."

She was mindful not to brush his wounds when she released him. His suit might be repaired and mended back to its original state, but she knew that inside his flesh was bleeding. At least the leather helped him to cover his opened wounds.

Cupping his masked face, she whispered. "Don't do that again, Kitty."
He nodded profusely, letting her wiped his stray tears.

"I can't bear to lose you either." the hero confessed. "I'd rather kill myself than to see you die."

"I know," she answered with a peck on his cheek. "But try to put yourself in my shoe."

He chewed his lower lip as he mulled over. "I tried...but it won't fit my size."

With a stony glare, she boldly poked his tendered skin, earning her a painful grunt. "Cheeky cat. Let me remind you that your sins have not been forgiven."

"Me-ouch! I was trying to mellow the mood." he cringed, then pored inquisitively at her bluebell hues. "Was it bad?"

She nodded. "I was wondering if you still have some serious bones inside your body, or if you have one in the first place. I don't know why I considered you as my boyfriend even though we haven't had our first date yet."

This made him smile. "Consider it done after we finish this mess."

"You almost lost that opportunity."

"I'm sorry." he bowed guiltily.

"I forgive you." she hugged him again, then murmured. "Don't you ever say 'goodbye' if you didn't mean it, okay?"

"This will be the last," he promised.

"Say it again, and we're breaking up."

She felt his smile growing on her neck. He kissed that pulsing spot before he moved his head, tilting hers to place a chaste one on her lips. Both sighed as they relinquished their companion's fervency before they decided to shift out.

"Can you move?" she asked him, earning a nod. "Can you feel your arms now?"

"Negative on my right," he answered, then winced as he helped himself standing straight using the column as a support. "How about you?"

"Thankfully, my legs aren't wobbly. Some lingering pains on my upper body, but I can manage it."

The two spotted a red blob floating towards their location.

"I'm glad you're both alright," Tikki said, and the way she nuzzled her charger's cheek told them that the kwami was at her limit. "I don't think I can manage another transformation after this, Marinette."

"It's okay, Tikki. This will be the last for today, I promise."

"You scared me to death - especially you, Adrien. Please don't do such foolish decision again."

"I must express my utmost apologies, Tikki. After this," he answered earnestly.

"You have to. Plagg will never forgive himself if you got yourself killed."

"Will never happen again. I promise."
The red kwami blinked her blue orbs with acknowledgment, then looked at the pig-tailed girl. "Ready?"

"Ready," she responded, then called in. "Tikki, Transforme moi!"

Red light burst around her body, altering her civilian clothes into a spotted tight-skinned latex one, and once again she became Ladybug.

Chat Noir gave her a shit-eating grin.

"It's such a turn on to see you transformed. I don't think I'll ever get used to it." her feline partner bemused as he checked her out from head to foot. "There's this...appeal to see you in red, even though you're pretty in pink. You're confusing this cat, My Lady"

The heroine rolled her eyes. "Keep your paws off, Chaton. This is not a time for your kinky games."

"Oh?" his brows shot up, then wiggled. "Then when can we play these so-called games I believed I am championed with?"

"In due time, Kitty." she teased with a flick of his bell. "That is if you can beat me."

"Ooh, a challenge. I like it. Count me in."

Abandoning their worries, their humorous banter was back.

The superheroes were treading the stairs carefully, still mindful of their respective partner's well-being.

Chat Noir had to wrap his left arm around Ladybug's shoulder as she assisted his steps. The ground was unsteady and would give slight tremors, so there were some cases the two would stumble down then struggled to get up again.

Both could've used their weapons for a faster journey but since their limbs were unreliable, they decided to do what normal humans do.

They walked.

"Where do you think Twiddle Gain went?" the spotted heroine asked.

"Last time I've checked he was on the balcony." her partner answered with a huff. "I don't think he climbed above the rooftops or went to one of the towers like your Quasimodo-looking enemy from the other timeline did. And with this earthquake, I don't think he's upstairs."

"So our best shot would be downstairs, huh."

They knew they'd be at a loss if Papillon would manipulate Twiddle Gain to summon another Akuma vessel against them. Both were terribly exhausted, and could barely maintain their balance, so another attack would mean their worst bloody battle. If their luck was not on their side, then that
might be their last.

Upon reaching the ground floor, Chat was surprised that their surroundings have been altered. No more flowers on the aisles, or hints about the imagery he saw from his parent's wedding. It wasn't also a scene from the post-war era, or anything futuristic. Everything seemed like the usual cathedral they normally knew.

They were at the present-day Notre Dame.

The halls were empty, and the only sound they could hear was their footsteps that echoed as they walked towards the altar. There were various pixelated cracks and blurry images on the walls, and while they were attentive to their surroundings, they almost missed the heavy groans that came from nowhere.

The two stopped, then noticed a fluttering dark air at the cathedral's corner.

"That's a Confessional." Ladybug whispered. "Do you think Twiddle Gain was hiding there?"

"Looks paw-sitive to me, My Lady." Chat answered sternly. "Shall we take a look?"

Another quake occurred, making the two wobbled and slumped on the pews. It took them minutes to recover their posture.

They walked towards the questioned area, but the dark air was giving off a sinister aura enough to make goosebumps on their skins.

They have to be cautious about the effects if one of them inhaled the miasma.

"I don't think we can get through on this without breathing." the feline hero asserted. "And we have no idea what would happen if we contacted it."

"It's not like it's the end of the world yet, Kitty," she told him, summoning their last hope. "Lucky Charm!"

A portable vacuum cleaner fell on her hands.

"You know." she scowled as the two stared at the spotted item. "It feels like my Lucky Charms were mocking us. Sometimes they were no-brainers, but most cases they were mind-boggling shits. Tikki must have a hidden grudge in me."

"Does this means you have an idea what to do with that?" he smirked.

She gave him a stoic look. "Would you like to do the honors, Chat?"

He raised both of his hands as if surrendering. "I don't think I can bag him. I suck on that."

She simply rolled her eyes and decided not to comment on his ridiculous pun as she powered on the device. The vacuum's nozzle did wonders on absorbing the dark air that enveloped the stall, and in less than a minute it was entirely gone.

Like the olden times, the cathedral's confessional has a small steel gate placed in an earshot away from possible usurpers. The structure was made of furnished wood and designed to be isolated from the crowd.

Both compartments were fully opened, and on the penitent's box was their subject in question.
They finally found Twiddle Gain.

When the possessed Akuma glanced at the superheroes, they could see the stress evident in his swirled eyes. His skin was completely blotched with black and purple, which probably a side-effect of rejecting Papillion's demands, and his large body was quivering due to mental tortures.

Instinctively, Ladybug stepped forward - only to be stopped by Chat.

"Be careful," he warned her as he grasped her wrist. "He's not restrained, and we're unsure if he'll make a havoc once we approached him. We don't know this might be a trap."

Her Miraculous beeped again but discarded. "Do you feel an entrapment vibe here?"

"No."

He gently nudged her behind when Twiddle Gain gradually turned his head and gave them a blanked look.

"Ladybug." the Akuma slurred. "And Chat Noir."

Both froze when a butterfly-like mask hovered on his face and knew that Papillion was doing everything to convince him. They were taken aback when the man screamed like a slaughtered animal, jolting on his seat as he cradled his head.

"Stop it, stop it, stop it, stop it, stop it, stop it, stop it!" he cried like a mantra. "I refused to obey your biddings, you evil entity! Stop it! Stop it!"

Unable to bear the sight of tortures, Chat immediately summoned his power. Trap or not, they must do something to save the person.

"Cataclysm!"

"Be careful." Ladybug breathed, and with a nod, her partner discreetly approached Twiddle Gain.

The butterfly mask vanished as the possessed Akuma instantly recognized his presence. With a jerk, he looked at the hero with pleading eyes, like a man before his executioner.

"Help me." he bemoaned. "Destroy the binds that captured me."

"By all means." Chat answered promptly, touching the silver necklace with his bubbling hand.

The item disintegrated, and from its powdered form a black butterfly emerged. Without further ado, Ladybug's yo-yo immediately captured it in one swoop.

"No more evil-doings for you, little Akuma." she said, opening her weapon's cleansing portal. "Time to de-evilize!"

The white butterfly flew out from the light, followed by a crumbling image of Twiddle Gain as he turned into a pious man named Marcelo.

"Where - where am I?" the man rasped, and when he saw the superheroes pitiful state, he immediately understood. "I - I got akumatized?"

"Yes." the hero answered, assisting the man to stand but failed.

Ladybug had to rush towards them to regain their balance.
"You refused to work with Papillion." the heroine told the man. "Your faith has saved you."

"Bu-but...you two looked like - "

"It's fine. You did nothing wrong. All of these were caused by Papillion." Chat interjected.

"Bu-but I..."

"Don't mind us." Ladybug smiled weakly. "We'll take care of everything here. There's someone waiting for you outside."

"A-are you sure?"

"Paw-sitive." her partner answered. "Go."

Marcelo gulped and hesitantly marched outside.

"Another job well done, My Lady." Chat commented as he reclined his back on the wooden pillar, then raised his fist. "Shall we?"

Ladybug looked at it, then bumped it with her own.

"Bien joue!"

Their Miraculous beeped simultaneously, warning them of their pending de-transformation, and at the same time, the awareness that their miraculous adventure has finally ended.

"Chat Noir." she said, handing him the Lucky Charm. "Why don't we do this together, partner?"

His masked green eyes failed to hide his bewilderment then returned her gaze. "Ca-can I - "

"I think my bone snapped." she lied. "When I pulled you up from the balcony. So you have to make amends."

He chuckled then sauntered near her with his infamous grin. He reached for it but didn't entirely accept it.

"Then teach me thy ways, partner."

"You're such a dork." she deadpanned.

He shrugged his shoulder, then held the vacuum's handle. "So we'll just throw it and that's it?"

She nodded with a grin.

"On a count to three?"

"One."

"Two."

"Three."

"Miraculous Cleanse!" the two chorused as they thrust the Lucky Charm up.

The item began to dissolve in the air. Red and green light burst all around the place, repairing all the damages caused by Twiddle Gain.
Both admired the magical effect that they activated together, and when they looked at each other's
gaze for approval, they finally realized that the magic has mended their bodies.

And by mending, their bodies were starting to disappear.

Green masked eyes locked with a blue masked one.

"My Lady?" Chat asked with a beam. "This is not a goodbye, right?"

Ladybug buried all of her doubts, fearing that her partner would see it evidently in her eyes. She was
assaulted by an overwhelming feeling, and instead of answering him, her words turned into sobs.

"I owe you a date." he reminded her. "So you better prepare yourself."

She nodded, then finally croaked. "I'll look forward to it."

His smile grew. "Don't forget it, okay?"

I won't, she wanted to reply. I'll try my best not to forget you.

She barely registered how her partner strode towards her to capture her lips for the last time, and how
their tears mixed with a promise that their feelings would remain the same.

Reset be damned.

He finally released her, and with his forehead resting on hers, he breathed.

"See you later, Marinette."

His last words reverberated before the magic stole her consciousness, rewinding their time back
before Twiddle Doom and Twiddle Gain destroyed their original timeline.

Before their adventure took place.

And before they were left behind.
The Lycée department of Françoise Dupont organized a summer field trip not only for educational purposes but also for recreational ones. It was arranged as a consolation to the seniors before they start preparing for their le bac, and at the same time, the best distraction to unwind and enlighten those who were still in the bind.

When a black limousine parked outside the school entrance, Nino couldn't help but run towards it.

"Yo, Adrien! You're finally here!" the future DJ greeted when an obviously excited blond-haired model emerged from the vehicle. Like him, his friend was carrying a big, traveling bag full of clothes and other necessities.

"Salut, Nino!" Adrien replied with a high-five. "Have you seen Marinette?"

His bespectacled friend blinked. It wasn't odd for the model to be thoughtful on his friends, but he wasn't a type that would single-out a person's name before his bro. And the way his addled eyes loomed around the place told him that something wasn't right.

"No. Not yet," he answered, curiosity all over his face. "Why?"

Green eyes enlarged, and with a hand on his neck he replied. "Ah, no. It's nothing. Sorry, I only slept like four hours."

"Mine's three, dude." Nino gave him a stony look. "But that doesn't mean I'm going to start picking up on Alya."

"I told you it's nothing." his friend groaned, crossing his arms in defense.

The DJ shrugged. "Whatever you say, dude."

Adrien exasperatedly sighed. For some unknown reasons, he woke up thinking about Marinette. It wasn't the first time his mind got preoccupied with a girl, but those were always about Ladybug. He had no idea how his Princess entered the scene.

*His Princess*, he mused. How fitting.

"Don't give me that face. You're creeping me out." Nino commented with feigned shudders.

"Oh, shut up." he rolled his eyes, then lightly punched his shoulder. "You know, I thought I'll be late."

"I'm glad your father finally agreed to give you a break. One was supposed to start working after they finished school, you know."

"I'm surprised that he allowed me to join here. He even told Natalie to clear my schedules for two weeks." the model remarked then shrugged his shoulders. "I just consider my work as some sort of helping our family business."

"Hey, guys! Over here!" Alya called them while waving her hands in the air. She was carrying a matching traveling bag with a video camera on the side.

"Salut, Alya. Seems like you're totally prepared for this trip." Adrien's greetings earned him a smirk.
"Of course, I can't miss this for the world!" she replied enthusiastically as she looked around. "But I think we might be missing one."

That moment, Adrien was expecting to see a petite, dark-haired girl running towards them, carrying a large traveling bag with a small box tucked in her arms. But none showed up.

Not even a slight commotion.

"She's late," he muttered, unable to conceal his worries.

"Geez, It's okay, Adrien. I've been expecting this, that's why I gave her a fifteen-minute leeway for our meetup." she began fiddling her inbox. "Since when did Marinette arrives on time?"

"My dude here was so concerned he immediately asked me about her whereabouts."

The brunette's brows shoot up with knowing eyes glinting behind her glasses. "Oh? The sunshine boy was scared of leaving our Sweet Mari behind?"

"O - of course!" the blond stammered. Mon dieu, why am I so nervous?!

He could feel Plagg's sneers inside his shirt pocket, provoking him to swat the god with two hands.

He didn't appreciate the early teases that he received not only from his kwami but also from his friends. Not that it was uncomfortable, but he couldn't see the malice of having a concerned feeling towards a friend.

Friend.

Marinette.

Two words he felt paled with each other.

His subconsciousness told him that Marinette was more than just a friend.

I need to see Marinette.

"All students, please gather at the Parkway for further instructions!" Miss Bustier made an announcement using a megaphone.

Everything felt like a déjà vu as if he already knew what would happen next. Or was it jamais vu? That it was something that happened already but he couldn't remember?

Impossible, he thought. He was starting to incline towards presque vu. That his answers were on the tip of his tongue.

I need to see Marinette.

The school's head Mr. Damocles stepped to the podium and cleared his throat. "Before we begin, I would like to inform you that -"

Everything was starting to fall into places. It was all familiar. He had heard it before. He knew that an Akuma -

" - this educational trip was arranged because not all lessons can be learned inside the classroom."

His mind blanked out.
"Wait, what?!"

"That we are expecting you to..."

He couldn't hear the entire speech anymore. He felt like his world swirled and swallowed by a large sinkhole, and that his entire soul was dragged into the deepest pit of Hell.

He knew something was wrong. He had told Plagg about it, but the god wasn't helpful. It wasn't a surprise though - because deep inside he knew he wasn't making any sense.

"It's just a dream, Adrien." the kwami consoled him. "All but an elusive dream."

If that was true, then he should've stayed asleep.

*I need to see Marinette.*

"Are you okay?" his best friend grasped his shoulder. "You looked like you've seen a ghost."

He gulped, clearing his parched throat. "Nino, I -"

"I have a water here. Drink." Alya said as she handed him a bottle.

He never realized how clammy his hands were, and how his body trembled until he accepted the item. With a gratitude, he unscrewed the cap and emptied the contents.

"Take a deep breath, Adrien. Okay, inhale, exhale."

"Just tell me if you need to go to the infirmary."

"I'm fine, guys. No worries." he waved his hand, thankful that Alya's back rubs eased his breathing patterns. "I must've eaten something, but not bad enough to upset my stomach."

"Aww poor child, you must eat proper meals other than sandwiches or salads. Just wait until Marinette arrives here with some snacks."

His hope perked up upon hearing the word 'Marinette'.

"You think you caught a bug?"

"I'm not sick..." he trailed off then began to ponder on his friend's words.

Marinette.

Bug.

Buginette.

Maribug.

What a per - no, purr-fect name.

"..but I think I caught a Bug." his toothy grin made his friends paled with mortification.

"Oh shit, are you burning with fever?! Wait - you're not." Alya withdrew her hands after touching the model's forehead. "Feeling chills? Sweaty? Dizzy?"

"Maybe it's a sort that inflames internally?" Nino freaked out then gave his best friend an
apprehensive look. "You shouldn't work yourself out, dude. I know this is your first field trip, but c'mon!"

"And here I thought only babies get sick due to over-excitement."

"What do you think of this man?"

"Hmm, definitely considered a baby." her sneers earned an offended look.

"Why am I friends with you again?" Adrien pouted with crossed arms.

"Seriously, man. We're worried." the DJ replied. "If you're that concerned about Marinette not making it - "

"All students, please go to your respective vehicles now." their teacher announced again.

" - Crap."

"We'll be leaving shortly."

The trio froze up realizing that their missing friend might not be able to make it.

*I need to see Marinette*, Adrien chanted in his head.

*I need to see my Princess.*

*I need to see my Lady.*

"WAIT!"

Adrien instantly caught a familiar voice, and when he turned his head around, he saw the raven-haired girl in pigtails running towards their location. Despite her disheveled look as she carried her large traveling bag and a pastry box alone, she was still angelic and gorgeous in his eyes.

His heart skipped a beat.

But when he finally met her bluebell eyes, everything crashed down.

This wasn't the world wherein Marinette and him got left behind.

A world wherein they fought the bad guys in Gare St. Lazare and the drunkards in a pub somewhere in Evreux.

A world wherein they met a mother and son stranded on a road and led them to a wedding in Argentan.

A world wherein they became ridiculous cosplayers and fought on a piece of pretzel.

A world wherein he almost lost her when a gun was aimed at her head, and again when he fell over the tower of Notre Dame.

And the worst of all -

This wasn't the world wherein Marinette was Ladybug.

That was the world of fantasy.
This was the world of reality.
Nino was still eyeing his distraught friend as he reclined in his seat. "Are you okay? If you want to barf or something, just tell me. I have lots of paper bags here. I think I have dizzy meds packed by Maman, in case I got motion sickness. Or we can ask for a nurse's assista - "

"I'm okay, Nino. Relax." Adrien huffed for the umpteenth time, forcing himself to enjoy the view outside the bus windows. Not only he got a worrywart seatmate, his mind was drifting towards the girl who was sitting - this was new - on their front row.

Too bad the backrest of their chairs were too high to take a peek.

"You're as white as a toilet paper a while ago. If you want to poop or - "

"Lahiffe."

"Okay, okay. Chill." the DJ raised his palms up when the model glowered viciously. "I'm concerned, man. Especially when Mari - "

An adorable squeak sounded, followed by a peering bluebell eyes as the person in question checked her back seat.

His jaw slacked at her ethereal beauty.

"A - Ad - Adrien?"

"Ye-yeah? Yes?" he immediately sat bolt upright.

"I - I have ma - macarons told Alya. I mean, Alya told me you're not fine, even though you're fine, and I have macarons, even though they're not as fine as you, but Alya told me to share it with you, which is cool, despite you're cool enough, and I'm rambling so I'm going to shut up now. "

Her words failed to register on his mind. All he did was gawking at her with a crimson-red face, unaware that his friends were waiting for his response. If Nino didn't snap his fingers in front of his face, the blond will not break from his reverie.

"Cute."

And there was silence.

_Oh shit._

Abort mission. I repeat, abort mission!

"I mean the macarons!" he corrected himself. "Cute, I mean - the macarons! Not that you're cute, I mean you're cute, but the macarons also are cute, like you, and I like you, like the macarons I like, and I'm rambling so I'm going to shut up now."

_Whoa, wait -_

Did he just tell her that he liked her?

He did.
Nino and Alya ogled at their respective best friends who were commencing their very own Blushing Fest™ with bafflement. What happened between these two ridiculously cute cinnamon buns why they couldn't string a sentence like retards?

"So..." Adrien continued timorously. "Can I have somemacarons?"

"YES!" she shrieked that jolted her three friends, but not enough to frazzle the other passengers. He beamed before the angel who was offering him a box of treats when suddenly, the bus driver stepped on the brakes. All of the entire contents slammed directly on the poor blond's face.

"Urk -"

His angel gasped with mortification.

"PFFFFFFFFFFFFFFT -"

Their best friends guffawed at the sight of a disheveled and stupefied Adrien and became louder when Marinette lurched from her seat and bowed profusely on the mess. Some of the macarons got split and stuck on the model's hair, while the crumbs and buttercreams dripped down on his face.

"I'm so - so - so - sorry! I didn't mean to dump it on you -"

"Hey, it's fine Mari -"

" - and now I became a nuisance instead of being helpful!"

"How sweet of you." he mused, brushing the tacky meringues from his skin. "For giving me this sugar rush."

She froze on his pun.

"What the fuck did you do to my Adrikins, you Maritrash -"

"We're having a stopover, students." their tour guide interrupted the furious blonde. "So please be mindful of your belongings before leaving the vehicle."

Using the distraction as an advantage, Adrien immediately rushed outside to look for a nearby toilet. The place was so oddly familiar he even located the men's comfort room in less than a minute.

"Your Chat Noir is showing, Loverboy." Plagg snickered much on his charger's embarrassment.

"Don't remind me. I'm about to kill myself and -"

He almost slammed the toilet's door on someone who was wearing a death metal suit, heavy white makeup with a Kanji written on his forehead he swore it meant 'Destroy'.

Much to his surprise, a woman with a similarly themed outfit was clinging to the man's arms and moaned, "Oh, darling, that was a goddamn ride."

Was he on a wrong toilet?

"You're such a devil, babe. So wicked." was her companion's reply, then glared at the stumped boy.
"What the fuck are you staring at?"

Adrien raised his arms and stepped aside, giving the two a way to pass. The couple was walking like drunkards, wobbling, and cursing as they stumbled with other bypassers.

"Horny teenagers," Plagg muttered under his breath as he flew out from his charger's shirt pocket then rested himself near the sink.

Adrien didn't answer. He simply eyed the cubicle that the couple just vacated, then shrugged his shoulders.

As if those two used it to do some illicit things.

Brushing off another familiar sensation, the boy eyed his macaron-covered reflection. He pulled a wad of tissues to wet it then began wiping the sugar residues.

Once he felt less tacky, an idea struck him again.

"Plagg?"

The kwami perked his head from the faucet. "Hmm?"

"If I told you that Marinette is Ladybug," he breathed deeply. "Will you believe me?"

"On what basis?" Plagg tilted his head. "Your illicit dreams?"

"It wasn't illicit." he defended with crimson cheeks then balled the wet tissues. His aim almost missed the trash bin.

"Why don't you approach her?"

"What?"

"Ask your Princess if she's your Lady," he suggested nonchalantly. "Problem solved."

"What if she's not?"

"Then she's not. Simple as that."

Somehow, the blond felt betrayed. "You don't believe me, do you?"

"I neither confirmed nor denied that," he answered between cheese bites. "We kwamis vowed not to disclose the identities of our Miraculous wielder for certain reasons, and just let you humans do it by yourself."

He raked his blond locks out of frustrations, then sighed with defeat.

This can't be. Everything feels so off. So wrong.

"Let's say the things that you confessed to me this morning were real - that dream." the kwami continued. "Then there must be an explanation why you're the only one who remembers it."

The last thing Adrien wanted to do was to examine his sanity.

Looking in the mirror for the last time, he pocketed the grumpy god of destruction then walked outside.
He immediately recalled the fiasco in the bus and the poor sweet macarons that he crushed. Believing that a bag of junk foods and a can of soda were sufficient enough to evade his friends' wrath, he decided to check the convenient store for a purchase.

Only to remember what would happen next.

He was about to go back when he collided with a certain body. Several bags of chips fell on the ground, and that moment he knew his fate was sealed for damnation.

"I - I'm sorry. I didn't notice you..." he apologized without staring at the person.

The blond was too focused on gathering the foods. He mentally prepared himself for a possible outpouring of curses, nasty remarks, or shouts about his celebrity status, but none came.

"It's okay, Adrien." a familiar voice said.

He straightened his back with a lightning speed. He was surprised that of all people, he bumped Marinette and ruined her snacks again.

The shock made him drop the chips.

"Oh shi - "

The budding designer giggled when he scrambled to pick it up.

"I apologize, I didn't mean to drop them." he clutched the chips on his arms again with shame. "I'm so sorry."

If he was currently transformed, his faux ears would flatten on his head and his leather tail would swing sadly between his legs.

"It's fine. Actually, I was looking for you." she chuckled as she held the chip bags by her lithe arms. "I thought you might need some help to deck your fans agai - "

Chips fell down again when Marinette accidentally dropped them.

"Merde, I'm sorry I slipped - my hands slipped, I mean!" she stammered with a flustered face.

"You shouldn't be." he answered, picking up the bags for the third time. "About my fans. Really, I need that kind of protection."

He winked.

She dropped the chips again.

Both crouched down to collect the items when their foreheads bumped together. They blushed when they unknowingly reached a similar bag of chips. Static jolted the two when their hands brushed each other, so they scrambled away and sputtered with several apologies.

"I'm sorry, Pri - "

"I'm sorry, Cha - "

"What are you two doing out there?!" Miss Bustier hollered.

Their homeroom teacher was tapping her foot vehemently while eyeing her students near the driver's
window panel. If they happened to look around, they might've noticed that they were the only ones remained outside and that the entire student body - not only their class - were observing the mess from their respective seat windows.

"M. Agreste and Mme. Dupain-Cheng, do you want us to left you two behind?"

Trying not to give an answer, the teenagers made a beeline towards their bus while averting their gaze from their classmate's inquisitive stares. Once they settled on their own seats, the two were immediately interrogated by their best friends.

"Really, dude?" Nino adjusted his glasses. "If you just tell me you wanted to hog a certain girl's attention all by yourself, I'd be more than happy to swap seats."

"It's not what it seems like!" he revolted, and the way the front seats were creating their own inaudible hushing sounds, he knew that Marinette was facing the same predicament.

"Uh - huh, and the Nile ain't the only river in Egypt."

"It's not like that!" he hissed, but his bespectacled friend was not convinced.

"I know you love me, and our feelings are mutual, and I do understand if you'll going to choose her - " Nino jerked his thumb towards their front seats much to his friend's chagrin. " - over me. But you have to control yourself, dude. I've been there before, and I know how badly one would get if they were bulls-eyed by her charms. Yours was the worse."

"Bu - bu - but I have - "

"If you're telling me that crap about Ladybug, then let go of Marinette."

His words were like a lance that stabbed his heart.

"I can't," he muttered as he held back his frustrations. "But I don't know what to do."

The DJ's expression softened "Aww, my poor baby boy. So confused. Let Daddy Nino give you a hug."

"Ew."

Adrien punched his shoulder lightly, which erupted a small laugh.

"Go away, you gross creature. Do whatever you want to do."

"If you say so."

The blond caught him texting someone, probably Alya based on his shit-eating grin, but he couldn't make out the content since his arm blocked his peripheral view.

Their bus left the stopover and about to enter Normandy's borders.

The scenery outside failed to distract Adrien's thoughts.

Deep inside he knew he loved Ladybug, but he also loved Marinette. And his dream about Marinette being Ladybug had him confused more. Was it a prophetic dream, a vision of a future, or a delusion of his desire that these two girls were one at the same?

What if Marinette is not Ladybug?
He must be a fickle-minded boy.

*What if Marinette is Ladybug?*

He closed his eyes and reminisced his dreams again.

It was so vivid, so real to be considered as a product of imagination, and the details about the rogue Akuma was quite conclusive.

Whether it was his subconsciousness talking, or a result of an Akuma attack, his dreams held the proof of his connection between his Lady and his Princess.

But first, he must gather some relevant clues.

Adrien opened his eyes and glanced at the scenery outside again. It was almost noon, and the blazing rays of the summer sun cast a shadow that served as a window shade. The shade gave him his own facial reflection, as well as his seatmate's bored face.

His classmate that was sitting in front of him.

He saw the melancholy on Marinette's expression. Every blink of her eyelids and movement of her lips were a sight to him in a not-so-subtle stalkerish way.

"Enjoying the view?" Nino asked, referring the nature.

"Very much." Adrien sighed with a smug, referring to a certain pig-tailed girl's reflection. "Best view ever."
Chapter 37

Adrien was trying to fight his drowsiness but the murmuring voices of his classmates were only lulling him to sleep.

"I have no idea why..."

"...no way to check my blog."

"...see that green van. They must have an engine failure..."

"...stranded in the middle of nowhere..."

"Mari, you're right! There's a train havoc in..."

Squeezing his eyes closed, his consciousness flitted towards a strange yet familiar place.

The sky was getting darker, and a thunder just rolled somewhere nearby. Tall luscious trees were everywhere, but the concrete road and the Bus Stop signage hinted him that the area wasn't entirely isolated.

And there he saw Marinette.

She was wearing her usual white shirt over her black-sleeved coat, with capri pants and pink doll shoes. Exhaustion was all over her face, and her enamored bluebell eyes were filled with sadness.

It was a heart-breaking sight.

"Despise is a strong word, Adrien," she told him. "I'm not disappointed or hated you for that matter. In fact, I'm afraid that I ruined your expectations."

Ruined his expectations? She didn't at all - in fact, she far more exceeded his expectations. He was clear on that.

But why was it she was still crying?

"I am nothing but an illusion."

"NO!"

Adrien immediately pounced, only to bump his nose on the passenger's backseat. The pain jolted him back to reality.

Marinette was nowhere to be found, which caused him some slight panic, same with their other classmate - except Nino who was staring at him with incredulity.

"Dude," his friend deadpanned. "I'd rather much prefer the comfort of our hotel bed than the seats here."

The model looked around, barely recovering from his nightmare. "We - where are they?"
"Outside. Basking in the summer sun." was his reply.

"I see." he sighed, feeling clammy as he brushed his face with his palms. "Thanks."

"No problem." Nino shrugged, with both shoulders strapped by his knapsack. "I've been trying to wake you for minutes but you're in a deep slumber, man. You even have the audacity to snore."

Adrien cautiously looked at his classmate. "Don't tell me Marinette saw me drooling."

"I won't tell you that Marinette saw you drooling."

He gasped "Ni - NO!"

"Chill, dude." the DJ guffawed at his mortification. "Why don't you get up there and do something to redeem your honor?"

"I swear I'm going to do something to humiliate you. And I'm going to tell Alya all about it." the blond grumbled then followed his best friend outside the bus.

The hotel that their Lycée contracted in Saint-Clair has a magnificent view not only of the Canal de Caen à la Mer but also the bluish horizon of the English Channel.

Most of all, the hotel offered quarters ideal for group accommodations.

"Dibs on the window side!" Kim hollered as he rushed into the room.

"That's unfair, dude." Max scowled, dropping his large bag on the doorway. "We should draw some lots."

"Yeah. Totally unfair." Ivan added.

"Don't mind me. I'll just choose near the entrance." Nathanael muttered as he claimed the left bed.

"Hey, guys. You do realize that we're sharing a bed, right?"

The boys paused and looked at each other.

"I'm fine sleeping beside this sunshine boy," Nino suggested which earned a hiss from Adrien. "And since Kim and Max want to hog the window side, let them share the bed there. I guess you're fine with Nath, Ivan?"

The large teen glanced at the red-head with a shrug.

"Yeah."

"Cool. Now that everything's settled, we -"

"Let's go to the seaside!" the athlete yelled when he ran on the balcony area.
His classmates followed suit then gasped at the areas where the notable D-Day beaches were located.

"I can taste the oysters in the air." one of them expired. "Oysters and scallops are a must on a beach."

"One of the precious things I like outside Paris."

"Mmmmm, yes."

Everyone nodded dreamily.

"Oh, Seafood. My love."

"I sea now why Vikings tried to clam and bit us up on this palate."

All eyes twitched at the model's words. None of them were baited by his pun.

"Hi guys~" a sultry feminine voice greeted from the lower terrace, only to realize it was from Lila.

"Hi," they answered in unison.

A familiar explosion of pinkish hair poked out then shrieked."Oh shit, the boys are on the other side!"

Their other female classmates appeared at the adjacent balcony with surprised faces - and one of them was from a certain raven-haired girl in pigtails.

When her bluebell hues met a certain blond's green ones, the two resumed their Blushing Fest™ again.

"Adrikins!" Chloe waved her hands near the railings. "We finally have our rendezvous for a balcony sce-MPH!"

"Will you stop buzzing around? Your voice irritates me." the Italian beauty admonished.

The offended blondie slapped her ebony arms away. "Want to fight, you minx - "

"Language!" Alya threatened. "Don't tempt me to push you two from this 18th floor."

The two only rolled their eyes with harrumphed.

"O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?" Rose wailed dramatically. "Deny thy father and refuse thy name; or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love and I'll no longer be a Capulet."

Max jerked a thumb with a deadpan voice. "Shall I hear no more, or shall I speak at this?"

"'Tis but thy name that is my enemy." she snickered. "Thou - "

"Thou I must halt these theatrics." Miss Bustier interrupted. "And speaketh that thy meals hath been served below."

The students went into a drop-dead silence then burst out laughing once their homeroom teacher left the premise.
While Nino and Adrien were waiting for their other classmates to fill in the hotel’s dining area, some female students from different classes attempted to catch their attention.

Especially the famous Gabriel model.

"I'm taken already, and I have a girlfriend who has a prowess of a wild feisty banshee." the bespectacled mused. "Unlike you."

"I will not date someone just to be my fan's scapegoat." the blond scowled with crossed arms.

"Hmm. You're getting better at refusing female's advances for a sheltered boy, eh?"

This raised his brow. "Is that supposed to be a compliment?"

"I believe so. I mean, you're such a pure white fluffy marshmallow years ago, letting yourself be dragged by anyone, if not by random people."

"I'm not that naive." he defended.

"Yes, you are. Santa Claus?"

Adrien sputtered with a beet-red face. "Tha - that was a - "

"Yeah, yeah." his best friend patted his shoulder. "And your dear old man even exploited the Alerte-Enlèvement."

"Urk - "

"Why are you bullying our Sunshine Pretty Boy?" Alya countered as she flung an arm around the blond's neck. "Would you like me to call Ladybug and Chat Noir?"

"Oh, I'm just teaching my boy how to rebel."

"Really? That's wonderful!"

"You guys are bad influences."

The brunette sniggered when Adrien pushed them away but before he could give a snarky comment, Marinette suddenly appeared behind them.

He almost choked his spit.

"What's up?" she asked, but after meeting his green gaze she blushed. "H – Hi."

"H – Hi." he croaked while rubbing his neck. "Ho-how are you?"

He didn't miss his best friend muffled grunt 'here we go again' as well as his girlfriend's exasperated sigh.

"I – I'm fine! How a – about you?"

"I'm fi – fine too!"
The two meekly glanced at their respective best friends who were giving them stinky glares.

Once they finished filing their food trays, they settled on a four-seated table near the windows.

A bowl of tripes was shoved on the model's plate.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Good food." The DJ replied. "You're here to destroy your diet regimen, right?"

"Made of cow's stomach linings. One of Caen's best dishes." the Ladyblogger explained. "Good food."

Adrien poked the meat with his fork, then looked at the other girl who was sitting on the opposite side. Marinette looked like she was puzzled as she looked at his plate – or probably his hands.

"Norman tarts are the must-to eat, though. Or any desserts with apples." Alya continued as she pulled out their class pamphlet. "Let's see...oh, we'll be visiting Rouen tomorrow. An apple cider's factory."

"Don't forget the town was also famous for their roulettes, as well as almond macaroons. Oh apologies, Marinette – my loyalty still lies in your bakery."

The designer chuckled. "It's alright. I, as a baker's daughter, won't deny that the fouaces here are great."

"It's a good thing your parents aren't adamant with souvenirs. Mine's persistent, forcing me to bring some calvados. Calvados, of all freaking things!"

"You can't beat my beloved Maman. She's requesting me to buy her a fresh cow's milk. A fresh cow's milk from Normande cattle."

"She might've read our itineraries of visiting Cheese Museum in Orne." the model commented then frowned when the idea fluttered his heart. "And a dairy farm in Camembert."

"I bet you'll buy tons of cheese wheels there as a gift to your Father, eh?" Nino smirk earned an eye roll.

"Camembert is good once you paired it with apples. Especially Apple Tarts." Marinette told them, and when she met Adrien's eye, he simply nodded.

"Yeah."

"Haven't tried it, but yeah, we'll try that." her best friend responded. "And speaking of Orne, we are going to visit some chateaus there on the southern part, like this one in Argentan."

Her other bespectacled friend squealed with delight. "Ooh, croquettes! Their croquettes there are – "

"Butter cookies." the designer interjected, still maintaining her eye contact. "Butter cookies in Argentan are great, more if paired with hot cocoa. Right, Adrien?"

There was that prodding feeling again. It was as if the girl was speaking riddles he once heard somewhere before, but couldn't remember when.

"Yeah."
He was taken aback when Marinette stood up slowly with downcast eyes then excused herself for a toilet.

And that was how he caught her staring – not on his hand, but on his ring.

"Her parents were out of the country for an annual convention, so she probably misses her folks," Alya explained with apologies. "She'll be fine, don't worry."

Adrien hummed, recalling some snippets of his eerie dreams while watching her departure. It pained him to see the same facial expression he had seen in his dream, the one wherein she was standing on an unknown road.

The glint from his friend's ear studs as she walked away broke his reverie.

"What must I do to make her happy?" he whispered solemnly as he looked at his plate.

Maybe he should start learning more about pastries.

Chapter End Notes

Alerte-Enlèvement is France's Amber Alert. I believe Adrien was still a minor during Christmas Special ep, and there's no way Gabriel didn't use it to alert the police.
Once her charger frantically secured the toilet's lock, Tikki flew out from the purse with a concerned expression.

"What's wrong - "

"Chat Noir is Adrien!" Marinette began as she gesticulated. "And Adrien is Chat Noir!"

The red kwami only tilted her head sideways as if it was a question.

The designer's arms suddenly dropped, deflated. "You don't believe me, do you?"

"I neither confirmed nor denied that," Tikki replied with a sigh. "We kwamis vowed not to disclose our respective wielders' identities for certain reasons, and just let your fates do the judgment."

"So my dreams were nothing but - "

"I don't have a clue, Marinette. I'm sorry," the kwami shook her head, then shrugged. "But then, there are lots of unexplained things that occurred in this world that even I, as a god, don't have the answer."

Her charger leaned towards the sink and gripped its edges woefully.

It wasn't unusual for Marinette to have lengthy dreams about akumas and even reckoned that Twiddle Gain and Twiddle Doom were products of her wild imagination.

At first.

But for some unknown reasons, she pushed her logical mind away and followed the hunch of her heart instead. Transforming as Ladybug, she hurriedly ran towards the park, then waited for someone's akumatization.

No one showed up.

Her heart sank plaintively, and more when she realized the time.

Hence the reason why she was almost late for the field trip assembly and about to be left behind.

"I'm surprised when you suddenly called me the first thing you woke up this morning." Tikki continued as she pawed her charger's cheek. "Your nightmares must've got you again."

"It wasn't a nightmare." the girl protested then squeezed her eyes shut. "It was...an elusive dream."

Because there it was revealed that her partner and her childhood crush were one at the same.

"Is it bad if Chat Noir is actually Adrien?"

"Of course not," she answered with certainty. "In fact, everything will make sense now. The struttings, the puns, the physical structure...gosh Tikki, he's just right there in front of me!"

"You weren't actively searching for him, that's why." she bemused, which earned a crestfallen face.

"Does that mean I don't know my partner that well?"
"You know that there are thousands of boys in Paris who has the same physique and personality as Chat Noir, right?"

"But not his bravery." the designer winced. "Or his puns."

Marinette suddenly realized that she explicitly admitted that Adrien's jokes were incorrigible.

"But why elusive?" Tikki asked her again.

"Because in my dreams he accepted me for who I am." was her solemn reply. "Chat Noir and Adrien adore Ladybug, and if those boys are indeed the same person, who later on learned that I'm the one behind the Parisian superheroine then...I don't know. I can't bear to lose them, Tikki."

"Do you think he's really a shallow person? That he won't like you for being you? Disappointed of you?" the kwami yawped at her incredulously. "Marinette, you deserve better than him if that's the case."

"He's not like that. Adrien's not a shallow person." she defended with crossed arms. "It's just that in my dreams...it confuses me. I saw two akumas there, and then I'm with Adrien who turned out to be Chat...and then, he told me - he told me that he loved me."

The gleam in her bluebell eyes made the god of Luck smiled.

"What if that was a prophetic dream?" Tikki speculated, much to the girl's astonishment. "And if there was an Akuma intervention then maybe it was something that happened before?"

"Like Timebreaker?" the designer piped, recalling how she was transported to another dimension and met her double.

"But I asked Chat about it, and he told me he couldn't remember anything about him seeing two Ladybugs." she continued blabbering as she pranced around. "Also, there are some things that don't make any sense to me, like something is missing. Like I only got half of the actual events. And if your theory is correct, then how come I'm the only one who remembers it?"

"I suggest you talk to Adrien. Ask him then."

Marinette looked at her kwami like she just sprouted a second head. "You know I can't do that! Stammerings aside, I can't tell him that I'm Ladybug! What if I'm wrong - that he's not Chat?"

"But what if you're right?"

She was about to utter something but decided to shut her mouth.

In all honesty, she didn't want her partner to get mad at her for knowing his identity before they revealed themselves. It was like breaching someone's privacy. And if by any chance she was correct about Adrien being Chat Noir, then how will she able to explain everything to him about her dreams that an immortal god can't even decipher?

Hey Adrien, I found out that you're Chat Noir because I saw you in my nightmares.

The hell she'll say that.

Ladybug's partnership with Chat Noir and Marinette's budding friendship with Adrien were something she didn't want to lose. She treasured both boys, and she was fully contented with whatever relationship she had with them.
"I don't know, Tikki." she cradled her head miserably. "I don't know."

When Marinette walked out from the premise, she immediately saw Adrien's worried glances and his sheepish smile as she returned to her seat.

He didn't ask her if she was alright or became curious about her demeanor. His silence only showed that he respected her boundaries.

Marinette decided not to tell him at all.

The Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux was only half an hour away from Caen. Located in one of Calvados area, the museum housed a medieval tapestry which contained the story of William the Conqueror and Harold Godwinson that later on led to the Battle of Hastings.

"This Bayeux Tapestry is nearly 70 meters length and 50 centimeters height - which almost occupied this entire building," the class' tour guide explained, referring them to the linen behind the glass. "Though called as a tapestry, technically this is actually an embroidered art. Do you know the difference between a tapestry and an embroidery?"

Surprisingly, no one answered - even Marinette who was well-versed with sewing terms.

"Tapestry was a term applied to the fabric with a design woven into it, while Embroidery was the ornamentation sewn on a fabric using a needle and thread." their tour guide continued without expecting any response. "Occasionally, we called this as La Tapisserie de la Reine Mathilde, basing on the legend that it was commissioned by William the Conqueror's wife, Queen Matilda. However, there were speculations that this was commissioned by William's half-brother, Bishop Odo. Other theories suggested Edward the Confessor's wife, Edith of Wessex. Even the construction on how it was made was under controversy - if this was made by English nuns or by French courtesans."

"Mari, are you okay?" Alya asked her best friend with a hush as she eyed their group being led to another section. "You're so silent today."

"I'm fine, don't worry." Marinette shook her head nonchalantly. "I'm quite interested in these...detailed designs here. They said that it was made by amateurs, but these were so neat and so intricate..."

The bespectacled blogger was not convinced. "Don't spout some bullshits there, young lady. And for your information, you're just staring blankly into the air. Now tell me what's the problem and I'll leave you alone."

Marinette loved her best friend - she really does, but her over protectiveness was quite unnerving.

Taking a deep breath, she answered reluctantly. "It's something that doesn't concern you or anybody for this matter."

"But Mari -"
"I'm sorry Alya." she bowed glumly. "I'm really sorry, but I can't tell you. Not...now."

Despite being a persistent reporter, Alya was not a disrespectful type. So when she saw the seriousness in her bluebell eyes, she decided not to pry further.

"Remember that I'm here to listen, okay?" the Ladyblogger reached and squeezed her friend's hand, expressing her concerns. "Tell me when you're ready. Okay?"

"I will." she cracked a smile. "Thanks."

"Don't mention it."

The pigtailed girl was trailing off as the entire class went to the upper floor. The most enthusiasts among the group were Nathanael who was quoting that the tapestry was like an ancient comic strip, and Max due to the Tapestry’s internet memes.

"What's that?" Tikki suddenly chirped as she poked out from the purse, pointing at the embroidered sun with a root-like tail. "That looks like a Miraculous."

"A Miraculous?" she stopped her tracks to look on the image. "How so?"

The kwami glanced at her with a shrug, much to her charger's confusion.

So she read the catalog. "Hrm. It was indicated here as a comet. Comets were considered as bad omens during Middle Ages, and its appearance happened to coincide with - "

"The beginning of Norman's invasions." a familiar masculine voice interjected, making the girl almost leaped with surprise.

"A - Adrien?!"

Marinette was glad that her kwami immediately slipped inside her pouch, though unsure if she was fast enough not to be noticed by green inquisitive eyes. But the way his classmate gave her a guilty look, she realized that he didn't. And that made her sighed with relief.

"You're the only one missing in the group, so I tried to find you." the blond explained while rubbing his nape. "You're being left behind again."

"Oh."

"Ye-yeah." he gave her a sheepish grin. "So...are you alright?"

Damn it, Alya, Marinette cursed mentally. She was torn between kissing her best friend's feet or murdering her with a blunt skewer.

"I - I'm fine!" she squeaked. "Uhm, wh - why you ask?"

"You - you looked troubled. A - and you're not with yourself. You seemed to be so...unhappy."

Seeing his doleful green eyes, the girl had to muster her strength not to hug her Kitty and kiss him in public.

Waving her hand carelessly, she told him. "I - I was absorbed in the various embroideries here. And the needlework. You know, designers and textiles and stuff."

"Oh."
"Ye-yeah." she chuckled then tore her gaze away to focus on the tapestry. "Like...this one."

Adrien checked where her index was pointing to, then frowned. "Halley's comet?"

The way she cutely tilted her head was meant that she wasn't listening entirely to the lecture, much to his amusement.

"There were several records about its appearance sometime around the year Harold II died in the Battle of Hastings, not only on this tapestry." he narrated then tapped the panel. "And being a short-period comet that showed up every 76 years, and one that was visible to the naked eye, the historians were able to match the notion that it was indeed Halley's."

Marinette hummed in acknowledgment until she remembered her kwami's words.

"Do you think that it might be a...Miraculous?"

"...a Miraculous?"

He rolled the word like it was foreign to his tongue.

"I know this might sound crazy." she jabbered shyly. "But the invasions...and the battles...and these red and black horses there...you think there might be some magical intervention or - "

"Lucky Charm. Must be a Lucky Charm." he awed as he traced the embroidery with his finger. "The head was round, like Ladybug's yo-yo. And I believe there's a woman in the other panel with a red head garb - you think she's an ancient Ladybug?"

"You think so?" she returned his question with raised brows. "I don't think so. I mean, I'm not seeing any spots in the sun."

"But there are spots in the sun." he retaliated. "In science, we call it as Sunspots."

Somehow, the designer was trying not to scowl on his lame pun. Really trying, but failed.

"Ha - ha. Very punny."

Her classmate gave her a familiar cheeky grin.

"But I don't think Ladybug was behind this all." she went on, still maintaining her deadpanned look. "Because I know a feline that only Cataclysm cat create this kind of catastrophe."

"Ha-ha. Very punny."

Before she could turn around to follow their classmate's trail, she swore she saw his wolfish grin.

"But seriously, Marinette. Are you alright?"

She paused for a moment to meet his green inquisitive orbs again.

"I understand if you won't tell me about it, and I respect your decision." the boy told her. "But always remember that I am here to lend you an ear, and a shoulder to lean on."

"Thanks, Adrien." her smile was not persuasive enough. "It was something mundane, really. Nothing to be distressed about. I just...I missed my parents."

"Oh."
It wasn't a lie though. "I used to see them physically whenever I left for a school field trip, and this was the first. It was an awkward morning for me."

"I - I see."

The designer immediately scolded herself for her insensitive words, for making Adrien remember his father and their indifferent relationship.

"Don't worry, Marinette." he snorted at her unwarranted remorse. "I'd be a liar if I told you I don't like your parents. Or wished to have a family like yours."

She bowed her head. "I'm sorry."

"I bet they feel the same way too." the model stared at her as if he wanted to add something but stopped himself. "They might even give you an overseas phone call."

True to his words, her parents called her.

The class has just arrived at their hotel and about to unload from the bus when Tom's caller ID flashed on Marinette's phone screen.

"Hello, sweetie! How are you?" her father's cheerful voice reverberated. "How did you find Normandy?"

"It's..." she paused when saw Adrien looking at her way with a two-thumbs-up sign.

"Marinette?"

"Ah, So - sorry. We - we just docked out from Bayeux." she sputtered with mild confusion. "I thought you'll be back by tomorrow?"

"I know, but we're on a break right now, and your Maman here is enjoying her mimosa."

"I see." she rolled her eyes knowing that her Papa winked there. "Anyways, how's the convention?"

"Same as usual. Rowdy bakers and superior confectioneries." Tom snickered. "Your Maman is good at telling time, so I believe it's already five in the afternoon there."

"Quarter to five, to be exact."

"Oh, Let me tell you that I'm in a speaker mode so she's currently listening to our conversation."

"That's...good to hear...?"

Marinette swore she had a conversation like this with them before.

"Oh, can we do a video call?" her father suggested. "Unless you're busy."

"W - Why would I be busy?" was her baffled reply. "Besides, isn't this an international call?"

"This one is free with no service cost, don't worry." Sabine suddenly interjected.

Upon clicking the video icon, the designer saw her parents wearing her designed formal attire. Their beaming smiles gradually turned into sour.
"What's wrong, honey?"

Either her parents were damn psychic, or her confounded face gave it away.

"Maman, Papa..." she began. "Have we ever talked -"

"Hello M. and Mme. Dupain-Cheng!"

Marinette jerked when someone squeezed her side. It was Alya.

"Oh, hi there Alya! Having some good time there?"

It was a brief yet light-hearted conversation that lasted until her parents' break was over.

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Later that night, while everybody was sleeping tightly, Marinette was assaulted by nightmares again.

Ladybug was standing at the balustrade of a half-ruined Notre Dame de Paris. She had her yo-yo flung out to wrap her partner who almost fell down to meet his demise.

It was evident that Chat Noir was losing a significant amount of blood. His skin was pale, and his leather costume failed to conceal the large wound that was gashed deeply from his shoulder and down to his torso.

She heard a familiar beep and realized that both of them were down with one spot.

She was yelling like a mad person, heaving his body with a single arm while the other was extended for him to reach out. Her partner shook his head, much to her frustrations.

"Let me go, my Lady."

She was sobbing uncontrollably, and very adamant about refusing his request. Damn her if she will let him go.

"I'm out of commission, I'm holding you up here, and you could've captured Twiddle Gain -"

No!

"I can't be your handicap -"

No!

"Leave me alone -"

No!

"Ma -"

No! No! No!
She pleaded and begged him to work with her, encouraged him to fight for her. He just smiled weakly.

"It's alright. We're down to seconds now, Bug. You have an enemy to capture, and a city to save."

She burst out her anger and about to spew some sensible words but he crossed her.

"Marinette!" his icy glares broke her reverie. "You were granted with a Miraculous power to save the lives of many. You have a responsibility to uphold. So set your priorities straight. Everybody needs you, and you know that."

As if she would sacrifice him for the sake of many. She didn't want to lose him. She couldn't do anything without him, or live his life without him.

"We're in a distorted timeline." he told her. "Everything will return to normal once you use your Miraculous Cleanse. You're the only one who can do that."

Now that confused her. What is he talking about?

"You can do it. Believe me, my love. Because I believe in you."

And there she saw that familiar smile again, and with a prodding feeling on her chest she was transported back to that fateful rainy day.

Adrien.

"Go, my Lady. Paris is waiting for their hero." Chat - no, Adrien - said, fully aware that in a few seconds they will de-transform. "I love you."

His last words had her roused back to reality.

"Goodbye, Marinette."

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"MARINETTE, WAKE UP!"

The designer instantaneously fluttered her eyes open, and there she saw her best friend towering above her head.

"Alya..."

"You were fidgeting while sleeping." the bespectacled female uttered anxiously. "You must be having a night - "

Small lithe arms suddenly wrapped around her while her raven-haired head slumped on her shoulder.

"Alya."

"Shh, Mari. It's okay." she cradled the weeping girl who was clutching her body like it was her
lifeline. "It's just a bad dream. Everything will be alright."

What they didn't know was that a certain someone was also being stirred up by nightmares.

And it was about Marinette being threatened to be gunned point-blank in the head.
"What's wrong with Adrien?" Alya poked Nino. "He doesn't look so sunny today."

"Ah. Night terrors. There were light thunderstorms last night, so he's a bit disturbed." he responded. "How about Mari? She seems off."

"Bad dreams." the brunette sighed glumly. "It was normal for her to move around, so I never thought she was having a nightmare after I heard her whimpers."

"That bad, huh?" he muttered, then ogled at the notifications that continuously popping out from her phone screen. "Whoa. Is that something from Ladyblog?"

"Uh-huh. This was yesterday's news about the fiasco in Gare St. Lazare - a couple who saved a political figure - which converted as a media campaign just today of why people got inspired to become 'heroes' of their own. And to quote Chat Noir: It was Paw-sitive-~." she squealed while firing rapid words on the keypads. "So now my blog was blasted due to high traffic, and I'm forced to announce system maintenance or else it'd crash - which kind of unfair to my loyal followers who were insisting for a one-on-one interview with our resident superheroes. Just wait till LadyNoir becomes a canon and I bet my rep that this website will fall down. RIP."

The DJ only patted her shoulder. "Good luck on that."

"Wait a second." she halted her tracks. "Where are our dorks again?"

Her boyfriend just shrugged his shoulders and led her casually to an open house café.

The class was spending their early morning tour at the Place du Vieux-Marché in Rouen. Since their teachers gave them few hours to freely roam around the marketplace, most of the students rushed to the souvenir shops and began their shopping spree.

One of them was Chloe Bourgeois.

"Adrikins! What do you think?" the blondie taunted as she twirled a floral lemon dress around her childhood friend. "I'm so pretty, right?"

Adrien hummed indifferently.

It wasn't because of animosity or that he didn't find window shopping interesting, but Chloe has a self-centered demeanor that she preferred not to care about other's opinions. Especially if that opinion was clashing her beliefs.

They've been hopping from one boutique to another while carrying a human tower of tote bags.

Sabrina must either be a masochist or a blind martyr for tolerating her best friend.

The model sighed exasperatedly.

He was so bored and so weary he was chanting demonic curses to Nino for abandoning him alone with companions he preferred the least - hey, he was an embodiment of Misfortune so it should work. He must bestow a miraculous punishment against that four-eyed Pogo stick he considered as his best friend for ditching his bro and choose the love of his life.

Speaking of the love of his life...
Adrien was unable to look at Marinette without shedding a tear or two during their morning assembly. A mere glimpse of her had him reminisced a painful dream that haunted his sleep.

In his dreams, he witnessed how a man named Tyrone aimed a pistol straight at her head while Joseph Howards was grinning maniacally in the background.

He couldn't do anything for his Princess. He was a weakling, a helpless, a shame for all Miraculous wielders. All he could do was to plea for their captors. He was unfit to be considered her hero. Her knight.

But what hurt him most was how her bluebell eyes stare at him with high regards while telling him to leave her.

Marinette was telling him to go.

Thanks to his cowardice again, he didn't ask her out during their pit stop. He even allowed himself be dragged out by Chloe and her minion.

*Marinette didn't deserve a spineless scaredy cat like me.* he soughed dejectedly.

A sight of a certain raven-haired girl in pigtails bobbing outside the store glass caught his attention.

She was all by herself, with her bright angelic smiles he finds susceptible to Casanovas, Don Juans, Romeos, and Lotharios, but the bundle she was clutching in her arms piqued him most.

It was a bouquet of red fleurs-de-lis.

Adrien immediately rushed outside.

"Stalker." Plagg snickered much to his peevving charger.

"I'm not." he hissed as he stealthily docked on a signage. "I'm just guarding my friend."

"Yeah, and the Nile 'ain't the only river in Egypt."

It didn't take him that long to know her destination.

On a small grassy mound surrounded by the short fence was a placard that scribed 'Le Bucher'.

The location where Joan of Arc was burnt on May 30th, 1431.

"Hey."

Marinette shrieked when a hand landed on her shoulder. Reflex taught her to grapple the forceps, twist it upwards then chop the nape but the person was able to evade it.

So she threw an uppercut.

"OOFF!" a familiar voice yowled in pains.

"What the - foutre - ADRIEN?!"

The girl knelt down to check the blond who was cupping his jaw as he sprawled limply on the ground.

"I'm so, so, so sorry! I didn't mean it! Did I break something? Mon dieu, did I damage your face?!
Am I going to be jailed for an assault?! Adrien, please tell me..." she apologized profusely and almost on the verge of crying when he groaned.

"Geez, you really know how to make a drop dead gorgeous guy fall."

She felt her blood ran cold and froze when he gave her a wink.

"I should've dropped you to death." she deadpanned.

Adrien winced when he tried to smile. His jaw was slightly tendered but not swollen enough to require an ice pack. When he stood up and wobbled a bit, his classmate swiftly held his arm for balance.

"I'm sorry, it's my fault for catching you off guard," he told her meekly once settled. "I was curious why you're alone...and where did you get that bouquet?"

"Oh. You mean this?" she showed him the fresh flowers. "I actually bought this as an homage. For Sainte Jeanne."

Once he steadied himself, the designer stepped forward then laid the bouquet near the placard.

"A dear friend of mine was a fan of Jeanne d'Arc. She looks up at her and really admired her heroism. When she learned about my itineraries in Rouen, she made a request to bring her some flowers on her behalf. So here I am."

"Have you visited L'église Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc?" he asked with a suggestion.

"I did." was her solemn reply, unable to hide her sorrow. "Though...to be honest, she deserves more than these."

"It's the thought that counts, Marinette."

She shook her head then mumbled. "It wasn't enough, after all the sacrifices she did for our country. After she received an unjust punishment and called as a heretic. She too young to die, Adrien."

"She was an epitome of a hero." the boy responded.

When he realized the irony of his self-depreciation, he smiled. "Sainte Jeanne reminds me of Ladybug in terms of bravery and selflessness. Both lived for justice and equality. I bet she'd be the Lady Luck of Orléans if she has the Miraculous - and if she did, well, I couldn't imagine how the tides would turn if her Chat Noir was there."

"I've heard they found some remnants of a black cat among her ashes." his companion told him. "Her partner was there. Her Chat Noir even stayed with her till the end."

"Just like our current Chat Noir to his Lady."

"She was unfair to him, our current Ladybug. Chat Noir deserved someone better than his Lady." "What makes you say that?"

He knew something was going on with Marinette, especially when she averted her gaze. She was looking on the memorial again.

"Because she will never admit anything even though she knows her partner's identity," she muttered with a blanked face. "What will you do if the best friend that you trusted most with your life kept
something like that? What if that person lied to you all along?"

Adrien was taken aback how her words pierced him with guilt. "Just because my best friend lied to me doesn't mean I have the right to incriminate them. I might've done something similar, or probably worse, which gives me no right to impose such judgment."

"Sometimes," he went on. "We tend to hide our real selves because we don't want to disappoint those people we loved the most."

The teenagers were unaware that their bodies moved close enough for them to hear their attuned heartbeats. It felt like their entire surroundings disappeared and stopped to exist.

Until a loud shrill broke it.

"ADRIEN!"

Two heads simultaneously jerked and saw a red-faced Chloe storming towards them with a balled fist.

"Back off, you Maritrash!" the blondie spat as she grabbed Adrien's wrist, in which he immediately shrugged it off.

"What's the matter with you, Chloe?" he asked with a borderline irritation. "You shouldn't treat Marinette this way."

The mayor's daughter gaped at him incredulously.

Ever since his childhood friend entered public school, he began to learn how to stand up for himself and many other things - in which she was glad, to be honest - but she didn't expect that she'll be treated indifferently someday.

Her Adrikins started to change when he befriended her archenemy, Marinette Dupain-Cheng.

And now that she was witnessing their mutual affections, she felt disheartened.

More like dumbfounded.

"Why shouldn't I?" Chloe crossed her arms proudly. "I am better than her. I know you better than her. You're nothing but a stranger to her, and so you are to her - so you don't have the right to ask the way I treated her!"

"Excuse me?!"

Both Adrien and Marinette exclaimed in unison.

"You don't know about my feelings towards Ma - "

"You don't know about my feelings towards Adrien!" the designer miffed propulsive, unaware of the boy's astonishment. "So shut your trap, Chloe, since you don't have any rights to incriminate me!"

"Oh yeah? As if you can take Adrikins away from me."

Marinette was furious but decided not to fire back.

If Chloe really knows Adrien way better than her, then she should've realized that he doesn't like public commotion, much more if it was something about him. That he doesn't want to be treated like
a prized possession or an image trophy like what he had witnessed from his raging fans and the media.

She doesn't want to stoop that low just to prove something for Chloe.

But that doesn't mean she can't do something to slap on her face.

"Oh really?" the designer smirked devilishly. "Watch me."

Without further ado, Marinette immediately grabbed Adrien's hand and pulled him to run away.

The action took him by surprise yet he allowed himself to be hauled by the pig-tailed girl who was flashing him a victorious smile. She was a fast sprinter, and he was thankful for his long legs to cope up with her speed.

The two ran as they laughed at their ridiculousness, drowning the strings of curses that gradually vanished as they tread another alley.

Along their way, they passed several locals and tourists who were amused at the beautiful couple who were having the time of their lives.

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Marinette released her grasp upon reaching a corner, much to his disappointment.

"Let's...just...stop here." she rasped. "Need...breathe..."

Adrien slumped his back on the post. "Mouse-ly she can't...cat-ch us."

The designer choked, then giggled mirthfully despite his lame pun as she shoved the boy away with a light force.

"That...was...horrible!"

"It's not!" the model retorted between breaths.

"Adrien no!"

"Adrien yes!" he guffawed while wiping his stray tears. "You litter-ally swept my feet off, ma Purr-incess."

Then the two suddenly froze up.

"I mean I'm Purr-incess! PRINCESS, I mean! Princess! I am a Princess!" he sputtered, flailing his arms wildly. "Like a Princess, you know, not a Purr-incess because Princesses don't purr? I mean why would I purr? I mean, I must stop rambling now before I choked myself to death."

"Okay." she chuckled, amused how her crush was acting like he has an actual crush on her. "Princess."
He pouted indignantly.

"Now that we've escaped from the Evil Queen's hive..." the girl wavered, then looked around.

They were in a small children's park with a small fountain and few bistros surrounding the area. It was a place that was almost residential, and quite unfamiliar.

"Please don't mention that four-letter word that starts with L.," he told her with disgruntlement.

*I could've said 'love',* she thought with an odd familiarity. Where the hell did she hear that L-word gag again?

"How am I supposed to say it then?"

Placing his hands on her shoulders, Adrien gave her a stony look. "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

Marinette snorted.

The teenagers knew the consequences of their actions. That once they failed to locate their classmates and return to their designated station in less than an hour, their bus would definitely leave them behind.

And for some unknown reasons, getting lost together has never been this appealing.
Since the ancient times, Communication has been the greatest tool mankind has ever made to survive in a foreign land. This very thought was the single reason why the teenagers were so lenient to the fact that they were actually lost.

...not only to each other but still.

They assumed that being a French citizen in a French soil would mean that the people would speak French there.

They forgot to consider the other factor:

Dialects.

It wasn't a big deal. The eu-s, eud-s, euq-s, and eul-s were much appreciated, but everything became awkward once the locals responded with jé-s, dé-s, qué-s and lé-s - not that they minded it. Accents weren't much of a barrier since the people were very accommodating.

"Are you sure we're on the right track this time?" Marinette asked. She could've sworn they passed the same alley thrice already.

"peut-être ben que oui, peut-être ben que non" her companion uttered idly.

She was grateful that Adrien was a polyglot, and even though she was head over heels for him, that doesn't mean she would spare him from her murderous intentions.

Because that beautiful ball of sunshine that was too good for this damned world was only affluent with puns.

His lack of social interactions might've been the factor of such ludicrous attitude, which she totally empathized by the way, and she couldn't blame him that he never applied his diverse language lessons into day-to-day conversations as often as he could, except during her Uncle Cheng's visitations. But that was not a valid excuse for him not to be condemned.

"Adrien," she called him again but with accentuated voice. "We've been seeing the same row of timber houses for the last thirty minutes and we still haven't reached that place called 'nearby'."

"I Normandy don't say this but..." the blond mulled over while chewing his lower lip. "I Caen tell Eure mood was kinda Rouen-ed."

He didn't miss how her eye twitched there.

"Unfair," she grumbled under her breath. "Why must you be so sinfully adorkable?"

"I'm sorry, what did you say?"

She cursed incoherently.

"Marinette?" he failed to decipher her words. "Mari?"

Another groan followed.

"Hey, are you alright?"
"I should've stayed in Paris instead." the pig-tailed girl sighed exasperatedly. "Because you're driving me in Seine."

She knew it was so bad she had an urge of facepalming herself, but his toothy smiles that beamed at her won over.

"I know you have it in you, Princess!"

There he goes his 'Princess' again.

Marinette didn't mention about that moniker after his first blunder. She doubted it since he was calling her the same way as Chat Noir did for several times without bothering to correct himself anymore. It was either he was unaware of it, or probably he was aware but decided not mind it at all, or he decided to christen her of an endearing nickname he thought was original.

That, or he wanted to give himself away.

As she thinks about it, Adrien was perfectly fit for that dark-clad feline hero's bill. True that there were thousands of blond males in Paris, she couldn't imagine anyone but him. From the physical semblance down to personality - including the horrible sense of humor - he totally nailed everything.

Maybe for once, her luck has finally endowed her love life.

"Why don't we stop here for a while," she suggested. "And ask some people who can help us instead."

By some people, she might or might not have referred him to their best friends who may or may not be in the middle of a romantic date.

Sitting on a bench, Adrien pulled his phone out and dialed Nino's number. It took him five rings before the call was answered.

"Dude." was the abrupt greeting, and it was evident in the tone that he was pissed.

"I know, I know. Sorry." the model muttered while rubbing his nape. "This is an important issue."

"Pray do tell why this important issue cannot be discussed through text?"

"Because..." he glanced his companion grimly. "We got a-strayed...?"

A chuckle sounded on the other line. "What, you and Chloe got lost?"

"I'm not with Chloe." he sighed. "I'm with Marinette."

Nino placed him on mute. A few seconds later, Marinette's phone rang with Alya's caller ID flashing on the screen.

The pigtailed girl immediately hit the Answer Key "Hi Al - "

"YOU'RE WITH ADRIEN?!!"

She had to yank her phone away from her ears before responding. "Uh, yes...?"

Her call went on mute for a minute, probably for her best friend to vent out her squealing mess, before returning to the conversation. But this time, her tone was full of anger.
"AND YOU TWO GOT LOST?!!"

"Erm, something like that...?"

"ARE YOU, WHAT, A KINDERGARTEN?!!"

She felt overly insulted.

When Alya placed her on mute again, Nino went back to Adrien.

"Not only you two were damn oblivious, you both got no sense of direction." the DJ mused much to the blond's disgruntlement. "Now why don't you tell Daddy Nino and Mommy Alya where the fuck you two ended up instead."

After they painstakingly described the landmarks they've passed while utilizing the wonders of GPS, the four friends finally mapped their locations and where they should go to their class' meeting place.

The friends decided to end their discussion and hang up.

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The two haven't found the location yet

"Adrien." Marinette huffed. "Are you sure you know where the hell are we are going, or you're just doing this to get us lost?"

She was expecting him to reprimand her for stating that L-word. Instead, he gave her a phony bewilderment.

"How did you know?" he gasped as he clutched his chest.

She rolled her eyes, but before she could spout something back, her companion stopped his tracks. She saw his invisible kitty ears perked up on top of his head, and without any warnings, he grabbed her hand.

"Hey, Mari! Mari! Let's go there!" Adrien dragged her languidly without noticing her flusters. "C'mon!"

"Wa - wait! That's not the right way!"

"But there's something I want there to see." he glanced at like a cat that was kicked out in the rain. "Please?"

Her mouth quivered. Why can't she say no to his infamous Kitty Eyes™?

She took a deep breath. "Okay."

Flashing a Cheshire grin, the model held her hand as they rushed towards a musical sound wherein a small crowd began to form. A Street piano painted in red with black spots was being played by a man who, based on his attire, was more like a physician than a musician.
"Look, look! It's a Ladybug's Piano!" the blond hollered like a kid who got a candy, and his enthusiasm grew when the man began to play Chopsticks.

It was a renowned upbeat piece that most of the audience, including the foreigners, clapped their hands to the rhythm. The crowd was too hype when he made a ragtime impromptu. Some kids ran to the center and began to dance.

"You're such a toddler," she bemused at her companion's childish behavior. "No wonder we're going circles because you're so easy to distract."

"I'd rather call it as a tunnel-vision," he winked at her teasing. "Besides, your beauty was more than enough to keep me distracted."

The way she blushed really stroked his ego. He didn't even give her any chances to recover when he nudged her for a dance.

"Adrien!" she blurted with a beet-red face. "I have two left feet!"

"Follow my lead then!" he offered with glee.

It was a silly dance because all they did was laughing and turning around. How many times they stumbled and fell on the ground, they didn't know. Nobody even cared.

They stopped dancing when the song was ended with an encore. They clapped their hands and realized that the crowd was applauding them for their strange performance, especially when the pianist extended his arms to their direction.

Much to her surprise, Adrien waved and curtseyed.

**Curtseyed!**

So she was obliged to do the same.

"That was a fabulous dance." the pianist congratulate the flustered teens.

"Sa - same goes to you, Monsieur..."

"Marcelo. Call me Marcelo."

"You must be a professional pianist, Marcelo," Adrien commented as he looked at the upright. "And that must be a fine piano too."

"I'm not a pianist, though. It just so happened that my hobby is playing the piano," he replied with a sheepish grin. "And that is a free-to-all piano. Anybody can use it. Care to try?"

"Really?!"

Marinette was quite tempted to remind Adrien about their class meetup but decided to hold back after seeing his smile.

The blond was able to sense her worries though. "As much as I would like to, but my friend and I got separated from our class, and we need to find our bus stop."

"Friend?" Marcelo's brows perked up with confusion. "Not girlfriend?"

Both shook their heads despite their mutual desire to make it real.
"I see." the man gave a short laugh. "If you're looking for the place where most of the tour bus stay, then just follow this road."

The teens looked straight ahead and saw the landmark that they were looking for.

"Sometimes you don't need to look around for the answer - you just need to look forward." the man told them. "You never know, the answer is just right in front of you."

Adrien and Marinette looked at each other as they gave the man a knowing look. They were sure they've seen him before...

"Marcelo!" a voice bellowed nearby. "Let's go! Attorney Dubois is here!"

"Whoops. I have to leave you, kiddos. My brother Felipe is here." the pianist hoisted his suitcase then patted their shoulders. "Saying 'Good Luck' sounds appropriate, but as a religious person, I'd rather bid you 'God Bless.'"

The teenagers waved their hands as the man left the premise.

Marinette cleared her throat. "Since we're just a few meters away from our bus stop, and obviously our classmates are not yet there, then why don't you play the piano?"

She immediately retracted her words when she saw the surprise that ebbed on his face.

"You - you don't have to oblige yourself to play the piano for me, but you were so excited back then and I don't want you to be sad because you can't play and..."

"It's fine, Marinette. I understand." he chuckled at her adorable stutters. "Besides, I made a promise to play the piano for you right?"

Did he?

The blond held her hand again as they walked towards the newly-vacated piano. He pulled the small bench for her, but she settled for a small space on the edge so that they could share a seat.

Their elbows didn't brush when he sat down beside her. He positioned his long fingers on top of the ivory keys, and with a deep breath, he struck the first note.

It was an Elvis Presley's song.

The people began to gather again as they sang the lyrics with a melancholic hymn.

Marinette might not be musically inclined, but she was very familiar with songs, even if it was released during the '60s.

"Wise men say only fools rush in, but I can't help falling in love with you."

Who doesn't know the King of Rock and Roll? And who doesn't recognize something that was featured in several films with various renditions made by several artists?

"Shall I stay? Would it be a sin if I can't help falling in love with you?"

It wasn't because of that, she thought as she squeezed her eyes. She was trying to keep her emotions at bay.

"Like a river flows surely to the sea. Darling, so it goes some things are meant to be."
She remembered.

She finally remembered everything.

Everything from the time they fought Twiddle Doom to the part wherein they cleansed Twiddle Gain.

She finally remembered the moment they were left behind.

The one wherein they fought the bad guys in Gare St. Lazare and the drunkards in a pub somewhere in Evreux.

The one wherein they met a mother and son stranded on a road and led them to a wedding in Argentan.

The one wherein they became ridiculous cosplayers and fought on a piece of pretzel.

The one wherein he almost lost her when a gun was aimed at her head, and again when he fell over the tower of Notre Dame.

And most of all -

The one wherein she found out that Adrien was Chat Noir.

"Take my hand, take my whole life, too. For I can't help falling in love with you"

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When Adrien finished the song, he looked at his companion with fervor. And while he was expecting some reactions there, he ended up with *none*.

In fact, the space beside him was *empty*.

Not only he was alone, his beloved abandoned him and left.

Marinette was gone.
Chapter 41

When Adrien touched the piano keys, his first thought was 'I need to tell Marinette.'

He couldn't tell it verbally. Words weren't enough to express the overwhelming feeling he had felt for that wonderful girl.

Despite not remembering some scenes in his dreams or the possibility that he may not be able to retrieve his missing memories anymore, as long as that single memory fragment that left him to tears was real -

The memory of Marinette swaying on a rhythm of Elvis Presley's ballad under the starry sky.

He'll be fine.

The song was supposed to be his dedication and at the same time a statement that 'hey, I had a dream about us having a Miraculous Adventure.' That the song would clear out the confusion he had within - that Marinette being Ladybug was not an illusion. That their feelings were mutual.

He didn't expect her walkout.

Bolting out from the piano stool, the blond began to search for the love of his life.

*Congratulations Adrien Agreste,* he cursed internally. *What are the chances that you'll never fuck this up again?*

He knew that he was bad with words due to his sheltered environment, but his mother once praised him for his innate talent of expressing himself through songs. His piano mentor often told him that music was a language for romance. These two people he trusted most were the reason why he remained exploring his musical repertoire, that he could romance someone through his piano.

Was he able to communicate his feelings? Was he that transparent?

Then why did she run away?

*Oh my God, did I scare her again?*

Upon reaching a deserted corner, he finally saw her figure stooping underneath a tree.

He had to remind himself to calm down and clear his thoughts on negative things, that he must analyze the situation thoroughly first before making an impulsive decision.

There were two routes he could think of as to why Marinette abandoned him.

**Route A:** "Adrien I'm so sorry I got overwhelmed by my feelings. I finally realized that I loved you for the longest time I'm so happy to be the girl in your dreams. So take me and be my boyfriend." Good End.

**Route B:** "Adrien, I'm so sorry I got overwhelmed by your feelings. I didn't love you and I'm not the girl in your dreams. So leave me alone you creep and I don't want you to be my boyfriend." Bad End.

When Marinette felt his approach and turned around, he immediately shut his eyes closed to prepare himself for the worst.
He was taken aback when she punched him squarely in the shoulder.

"Wha - what-what was that for?!” he yelped.

"What was that for?!" the pig-tailed girl chuckled darkly then shrieked. "What was that for?! All this time you didn't tell me you fucking remembered!"

"Of course I fucking reme - " he paused for a bit. His eyes went round like saucers. "Wait a damn minute, you fucking remembered too?!!"

"Too?! What do you mean 'too'?! I've been dropping hints about me, your resident superheroine, knowing you, my superhero partner, for days now!" she ranted while flailing her arms wildly.

"What do you mean 'dropping hints'?! Because I swear I can't spot them enough to connect the dots!"

"That's because you're obliviously blind!"

"Right back at you!"

Instead of shouting back, she knelt down and cradled her head muttering "Mon dieu, mon dieu, mon dieu, mon dieu, mon dieu, mon dieu, mon dieu..."

His rage was immediately replaced by concern. "Hey, Marinette?"

"I'd say." Plagg flew out from his charger's shirt pocket smugly. "The cat has finally out from the bag."

The girl's bluebell eyes almost popped out from its socket as she sped up her mantra "MonDieuMonDieuMonDieuMonDieuMonDieuMonDieuMonDieuMonDieuMonDieuMonDieuMonDieu...

"Plagg!"

"What?"

"I've been saving that pun for years!"

The kwami looked at his ludicrous charger with a frown. "But you've already said it when you were stranded in - "

Both humans lashed their heads towards him with bewilderment.

There's no way for him to say something like that unless he knows everything, right?

"YOU FUCKING REMEMBERED?!" the two yelled in unison.

"Oops."

"Plagg!" a red kwami emerged from Marinette's purse with crossed arms. "What did I tell you about letting the kids handle everything?"

"But they're getting ridiculous, Tikki. Yours might be bugging out but mine's a pussyfoot." he bemoaned. "And I badly need my Camembert. Now."

"Why?" Marinette glared at her kwami and her counterpart with befuddlement. "Why didn't you tell us? That you two remembered?"
"We neither confirmed nor deny that." they chorused in monotone. "We kwamis vowed to protect our wielders for certain reasons."

Everything clicked.

"I can't believe this." the blond groaned and slid himself beside the raven-haired girl. "All this time our kwamis conned and played our feelings."

Marinette shook her head in disbelief "I can't believe that Tikki can do this to me. That my sweet and adorable kwami can do this to me. That my sweet and adorable Tikki is capable to do such things to me. All but my Tikki..."

"Geez, you didn't reveal your true colors, Sweet Tooth?" Plagg bemused. "Must be a trauma to your Master."

"She knows, actually." his counterpart replied casually. "She just refused to acknowledge it."

"Ooh. Brutal."

When their human groused in unison, the gods laughed mirthfully with a fist bump.

"Bien joue!"

"Mon dieu. Tikki must've been a flying mouse all along. And Chat's kwami was a rat." she berated while glaring at her slightly amused yet confused companion. "So that means Chat Noir was actually a rodent, and Adrien Agreste was a toddler trapped in a teenager's body. Merde, my life is nothing but a lie!"

"Don't worry, Adrien. She's just having a meltdown." Tikki consoled him as they watched the girl gesticulate incoherently. "She'll recover eventually. Don't worry."

"O - okay...?"

"I'll leave her to you. I know you can do it." the red kwami pawed his cheek then flitted away. "Hey Cheeseball, let's give these kids some privacy!"

"As you wish." was Plagg's grumbled reply.

Adrien remained beside Marinette and waited silently until she began to calm her nerves.

"Are you disappointed?" he asked her.

She dropped her hands in her lap. "About what?"

"About me being the actual superhero? The one behind Chat Noir?"

"Not that," she answered promptly then mulled over. "I'd rather say I'm disappointed on how we failed to figure everything out until now. Now that we know everything for the second time."

"If you're going to ask me, I'm not surprised that you're Ladybug." he grinned.

She flashed him a coy smile. "I'm not surprised you're Chat Noir either."

"We're obliviously blind, aren't we My Lady?"

She snorted indignantly. "Right back at you, Kitty."
"Marinette?"

"Hmm?"

"What are the things that you can still remember?" he asked her again.


"Same with yours. Probably those that you've forgotten. It seems like we are sending mixed signals - you on the things that I don't remember while I on the things that you don't remember - that's why we never figured everything out."

"Yeah. Now that you mentioned it..."

"Hey, Princess?"

"Hmm?"

"Do you remember the question that I asked back in Argentan?"

Blue eyes met his green ones.

"Is my proposal still stands?"

Instead of answering, the girl asked "How about the one that you told me at the roadside? Are those words still true?"

"You're nothing but perfect to me, Marinette." he smiled as he moved closer. "I fell with the same girl not only twice, but thrice this time, and likely multiple times if we are going to consider the other timeline. And I bet if we're going to be reincarnated, my consciousness will still find you."

"I never thought I'd be falling with the same guy all over again." she sighed while resting her forehead on his.

"Marinette?"

"What is it, Adrien?"

"My Lady?"

"Yes, Chaton?"

She must've seen it coming because when the blond was about to press his lips to hers, he got her index finger instead.

"Not so fast, Hot Shot." the pig-tailed girl smirked much to his chagrin. "Want me to remind you about our talk in the confessional?"

He groaned inwardly.

"You owe me a date."

"That can be arranged." he sighed with a pout. "So that means we're not yet official?"
"Depends on how you considered 'us'," she replied nonchalantly then stood up.

Offering her hand, Adrien held it as he followed suit then planted a kiss longingly on its back. Seeing the blush that crept on her face only gave a boost to his ego.

"You're a-meow-singly purr-fect, ma Purr-incesse."

This earned him a frown. "I knew it, the cat puns are back."

"Oh? I'm saury I trout you like it."

"Fish?!"

Adrien chortled when she furiously slapped his arms. With a huff, she began to look around.

"Where are our kwamis anyways?"

"Let me call mine," he suggested then whistled a short flat tune.

"Really?" Marinette's brows perked up with amusement. "You're whistling Plagg like a pet?"

"Why not? It's very effective."

Suddenly, a familiar black blob whooshed towards his face with a fury. "How dare you treated me like a lowly domestic animal!"

"Ouch." his charger rubbed his nose then glanced at his companion cheekily. "See? Very effective."

Her melodious giggles have never been an old to him, and would always strike his heartstrings whenever he heard the sound of her voice. With her sparkling blue eyes and pinkish cheeks in bright smiles, it became his life mission to make his Lady happy.

"Oh yeah, let me reintroduce you my grumpy kwami, Plagg. Plagg, meet Marinette Dupain-Cheng."

"Nice to meet you again, Plagg." the girl offered his finger to shake the kwami's paw.

"Nice to meet you again, Bug. Though, I would like to express my utmost condolences for putting up on my Master's strange behavior."

"Plagg!" Adrien scolded him.

"It seems like you've finally talked to each other." Tikki hovered above her charger's head as she settled on her shoulder. "I'm glad."

"Yeah." Marinette nodded then looked at the boy. "Adrien, meet my kwami Tikki. Tikki, meet Adrien Agreste."

"Hi Tikki. Glad to see you again." he greeted.

"Glad to see you again too, Adrien." the red kwami smiled. "I've heard lots of things about you."

"Are you talking about the me in her bed, or the me on her walls?"

The pig-tailed girl's face grew pale with mortification. "You remembered those?!"

"That, and the information about a certain Princess wearing tutus during her adorable days." he winked.
She facepalmed.

"We apologized if we didn't tell you." Tikki floated between them then bowed. "Both of you are not supposed to remember everything. We don't even know the reason why some memory fragments from the rogue Akuma has been retained within your bodies."

"Does that mean the Miraculous Cleanse failed?"

The red kwami shook her head at her charger's question.

"That," Plagg interjected then glanced at his charger. "Or Cataclysm interfered it. Remember what happened when we were trapped in a portrait twice?"

"You mean during Pixelator?" Adrien said, recalling how he used his power on the white floor to escape from the confined dimension. "But Ladybug was able to fix everything."

"How about the time when you Cataclysm-ed the '90s Notre Dame?" the black kwami sighed when his charger furrowed his brows. "Thought so. You don't remember, do you? How about you, Bug?"

"I recalled seeing some pixelated cracks, but that was already existing after I got teleported from the '20s Notre Dame. Then everything became a blur." Marinette offered.

"The theory that your memories overlapped with each other seems plausible."

"How come these things happened, Tikki?" she asked them. "Why do we have an incomplete recollection?"

"I'm also wondering that too." her companion supported. "And why we only got half of the whole."

The kwamis eyed each other briefly before Tikki could utter. "What we can tell is that the Miraculous Cleanse was a success, and there's no way it would do an incomplete repair. It was either a complete memory swipe or unaltered memory retention. Same with Cataclysm, it was either a complete destruction or none. Everything is predetermined, and no Miraculous wielders have ever been exempted from this rule before. Until now."

"So what made us exempted from that rule?"

"If only we have an answer, kid," Plagg responded glumly. "We're a manifestation of an infused ancient magic, an immortal being considered as a god, so we're quite immune to magical phenomena. You two are just mortals yet able to destroy the Balance no one has ever done before. Maybe because you're both emotionally invested, or unknowingly bonded in a special way possible."

"Sounds like the odds are in our favor, My Lady." the blond commented as the girl hummed to agree.

"The most important here is that everything is back to normal." Tikki chirped.

When they saw their assigned tour bus' arrival, they decided to abandon the topic for a moment and start walking to the parkway.

"Can I stay inside your purse instead, Princess?" the black kwami spoke. "Tikki said yours was cool and comfy. Mine was sweaty and smelly."

"I'm not sweaty and smelly!" Adrien scowled.

"Your armpits are."
"My armpits are not sweaty and smelly!" the blond defended then looked at Marinette. "Try to check my armpits, Princess."

She swatted him when he raised his arm. "Ew, go away you gross creature."

"But I need to have a witness that can attest that my armpits are clean and not sweaty. Check it now, my Lady. Smell it."

"Don't be a ridiculous being, Kitty! Stop! Stop it! Stop it you, dork!"

"I must do this or else my dignity will be soiled forever. Check my armpits, Mari. Check it! Smell it! SMELL!"

She was tackled when she tried to escape from his clutches. Strong arms trapped her as he wrapped it around her body.

She leaned towards him then sighed blissfully when he planted a kiss on her temple.

"Is this all real, Marinette?" the blond murmured. "We're not living in a fantasy, right?"

His deep voice sent shivers through her body. "I believe so, yes."

His hugs became tighter. "If this is all but a dream, I swear I'm going to sleep forever."

"If this is all but a dream," she nuzzled her nose on his chin. "Our reality must be a nightmare."

None of their classmates mentioned how close they were as they entered the bus together.

They may or may not have observed the way their hands linked, with eyes that sparkled and actions as if they were alone in the world.

They may or may have not noticed the absence of her stutters, and the abundance of his puns.

And most of all -

They may or may not have wondered how the hell Adrien and Marinette transformed from an awkward cinnamon rolls to an overly domesticated love birds in less than a day.

Unsurprisingly, two pairs of bespectacled eyes were looming towards them with an expression that screams bloody murder.
Chapter 42

Tomorrow will be the last day of their school trip yet nobody knows, even their respective best friends, what's the real score between Adrien and Marinette.

Their flirty banter and touchy feels were nonexistent before they left Rouen, only to become a norm the next day after they visited Le Havre and few towns in Orne. Not to mention how they shut Chloe Bourgeois up with just a hand kiss and a nose poke scenario - like how Ladybug brushed off Chat Noir's advances - leaving the mayor's daughter stupefied and floored with animosity.

If one would exclude a certain model's shopping spree in Camembert town, Adrien and Marinette's newfound relationship was ranked as the most controversial thing that happened throughout the trip. As if their casual friendship for years was nothing but a cover-up of their actual romance.

"Spill." Alya declared as she slammed the cubicle's door that jolted some of the female occupants. "I've been holding myself back for days, observing your dilly dances with your love of your life, and I'm on my wits end now so tell me what the hell happened between you and Adrien or else - "

"As what I've told you, we talked. That's it." Marinette replied nonchalantly as she ribboned her top suit. "You can ask Adrien about it."

"Ask him what, if he told you how he adored you and if he knew that you've been in love with him all along?!" the brunette's voice hitched. "Young lady, we're talking Adrien fucking Agreste here! Sunshine boy, remember? Your first love? C'mon Mari, you got to have a better reaction than - than this!"

The raven-haired paused for a moment then glanced at her best friend with an exasperated sigh. "I'm sorry Alya if I'm not going crazy right now, jumping around and screaming 'Oh my God Adrien finally noticed me' or something like that. Or doing something that would meet your expectations. I...I just told him, okay? And he happened to, well, reciprocate my feelings, but that's it. We decided to talk about this after the school trip."

"Am I speaking to a Diplomat Marinette? As much as I love that side of yours, you're making this situation quite frustrating for both parties."

"Are we talking about our parties or your parties?" she grinned much to her friend's disgruntlement. "I may have or may not have heard about your ongoing bets, Alya. Tell me - whose hands got the pot?"

"Max." the bespectacled girl pouted with crossed arms. "Just to let you know, my money's on Adrien."

Marinette rolled her eyes then applied some sunblock. "I can't believe you placed a bet on him instead of me, despite the fact that you know my feelings well."

"Not only your feelings but your entire personality, my beloved child Marinette. You're belittling yourself too much because you're a terrible perfectionist. You're underestimating your charms. No wonder you never realized how Adrien sees you."

"Huh." was all she could say.

She knew Chat Noir was enamored with Ladybug, but with Marinette? He boasted, flirted a little, and rescued her like any other civilians as always. Even as Adrien too, he was a gentleman as usual.
There wasn't any special treatment involved - or was there something she wasn't aware of?

"Anyways." Alya twirled her around after she capped her lotion then inspected their swimsuits reflected on the wall mirror. "Why don't we get out of here and kill our boys?"

The class decided to indulge their summer getaway by visiting one of Normandy's famous beaches. It was on those shores wherein one of the bloodiest battles of human history took place, an encounter wherein the Allied forces pitted their lives against the Nazis to take over France that finally resulted to the liberation of Europe.

It was called Operation D-Day.

Such historical event was yet to be unfolded again for Adrien and Nino's case, not until they turned around and saw their ladies in their swimwear. It was like World War II all over again.

Because, *bombs*.

In front of them stood Alya wearing an orange and white stringed bikini suit and Marinette in her designed two-piece pink polka dots with a halter neck top.

"Salut, boys." the brunette's greetings that made her boyfriend sputtered incoherently.

"H - H -Hi."

Adrien, on the other hand, marched towards his Lady then pulled his buttoned white shirt to cover her upper body, much to her surprise.

"Adri -"


Marinette stared at him with incredulity, only to notice the blush that crept down to his chest. His hand was rubbing his nape like a tick, with averted gaze to likely hide his embarrassment. She couldn't help but chuckled when she saw his blazing red ears.

Always a gentleman.

"Chat got your tongue?" she teased cheekily as she clung to his free arm. He squeaked.

Guilty as charged.

Despite the heat of the sun, Adrien finds her warmth quite soothing and very welcoming. He had to control his illicit thoughts and not to think about the seductress beside him with a cute pink bikini frills in white polka dots that highlighted her porcelain skin with toned muscles and curves that -

*Stop it, Adrien! Bad Adrien, Bad!*

"Hey, can you bow down a little bit?" she asked him.

He was taken aback yet complied without any questions asked. She leaned forward - he blushed madly when his face dipped squarely into her chest - to bunch his hair towards his nape then snapped it with a rubber band.

"Your hair needs to be trimmed now, Kitty." she mused as she straightened her back. "It's long enough to cover your neck. Did you maintain it for an upcoming shoot?"
When he raised his head and met her bewitching eyes, he knew he got it bad. He got it so bad he might lose his self-control.

"I'll be lending you my hair tie in exchange for your shirt." the girl bounced giddily. "Isn't it amazing we're both in ponytails?"

The world seemed to stop for him, as well as his ability to breathe. All he could see was Marinette being an adorable beauty in her new hairstyle, wearing his over-sized shirt that only doubled her cuteness. Her gorgeous bluebell eyes and pretty freckles that dusted her flawless skin, and her pink pouty lips that tantalized his sense -

"DON'T YOU DARE EAT OUR PRECIOUS MARINETTE ALIVE THERE, AGRESTE!" Kim hollered as he spurted a water gun on his bare back.

The blond lashed his head angrily towards him and yelled. "I'M NOT!"

"You do!" Alix inserted while spurring water at Kim's face. "Hah! Take that!"

The athlete gurgled then began to pursue his petite classmate with a spite.

"HO - HOW DARE YOU!"

While the entire class laughed at their ridiculous chase, the raven-haired girl used the distraction to check out the person beside her.

Chat Noir's dark leather suit might've left some imaginations, but seeing the actual flesh and his defined muscles didn't do any justice. Adrien was lean, but not bulgy. He was more of a hunk, with a height and face blessed by Heavens, and the way he wore his Gabriel's trunks and his sandy blond hair that was swept towards the back, he was like redoing his last year's summer shoot.

_Don't drool, Marinette._

"Like what you see?" he wiggled his brows when he caught her ogling.

She groaned at his cheekiness then slapped his arm. "Shu - shut up, you mangy cat."

Adrien chuckled heartily, and while holding her hand he led her to a refreshment booth.

There were few open restaurants on the seaside with vacant seats shaded by large umbrellas. Since it was summertime, the entire place was quite busy, especially those diners that sells ice shave.

Spotting their best friends, the two decided to join their table.

"Urgh, they're here." Nino groaned as he covered his face. "They're here to torture us with their sickeningly sweet fluffy PDA. Again."

"Aww, you poor cupcake. Just bear with them for a while until we cracked their shells. They haven't confessed anything." Alya cooed while maintaining her staid glares at their feigned innocence looks.

The bastards.

"You know, I did not sign up for this." the DJ went on. "I joined your heroic mission because I pitied this extinct sunball creature I foolishly claimed as my best friend, as well as your unicorn best friend. But look what happened - these guys are burning my eyes! They're making me barfed multiple rainbows per minute!"
"Excuse me, we're here to eat." Marinette defended. "And there's nothing to be confessed here, Alya. We already told you everything."

"Uh - huh. Like I'm going to accept that explanation 'I confessed, he confessed, but we haven't had our first date yet'. My gut tells me something's missing. It's like you're keeping a scoop away from me, and I know this occurred sometime before or during the trip. But if we're talking about the Sunny Boy who didn't know the difference between East and West until yesterday - "

"Hey!"

"Ehem." the service crew coughed. "Shall I take your orders now, Monsieur? Mademoiselle?"

"Oh. Yeah, I'll be having your Mango Pudding sundae and a bowl of potato fries," said Nino.

"Potatoes again?" his girlfriend snorted indignantly then began reading the menu. "Uhm...mine's Chocolate Banana Split."

"Noted. How about you, Mademoiselle?"

Adrien didn't like how the man zeroed out Marinette, and when he winked at her he couldn't control the rumble on his throat anymore. So he lifted the girl from her seat and deposited her on his lap.

Said girl shrieked. "Adrien!"

"We're taking your Strawberry Vanilla sundae, the biggest one that's good for two people. A pack of chocolate chip cookies, a cheese sandwich and a glass of water. What do you think, Princess?" the blond flashed a toothy smile much to the crew's mortification.

Marinette was confused and left with no choice but to nod.

"Uh, yes. Ri - right away, Monsieur!"

Once the man scrambled and entered inside, Adrien caught their friends' baffled faces as they controlled their snickers. He blushed with mortification and buried his face in Marinette's shirt's collar - technically his shirt's collar - out of embarrassment.

Then their bespectacled best friends burst out laughing.

"Uhm, Adrien?" Marinette whispered, still confused. "What's the problem, Kitty?"

He hummed as he nuzzled her neck.

"Hey, Adrien? Hey."

He began to grumble about his idiocy.

"Tha - that was a big aim to his ego!" Alya guffawed while slamming the table repetitively. "Poor cinnamon kid, he can't contain his jealousy back there!"

"Je - jealousy?!"

"Aww, my baby Adrien. He finally got some rude awakening and made one shed some manly skin." Nino wiped some faked tears that earned a beady stare.

"Shu - shut up, guys." the blond growled, still clutching a confused raven-haired girl.
Marinette remained on Adrien's lap even after their food was served. He didn't move or nudge her back to her seat, and he was constantly rubbing his head on her neck like a cat marking his territory, much to their friends' gratification.

"Hey, Alya! We need your help!" Alix stormed towards their table. "Marinette too - hey, Adrien! Stop hogging our class president!"

Instead of stopping, it only prompted him to continue.

"Adrien. Let me go." Marinette scolded him when he didn't release her, and the way he adamantly shook his head tickled her more.

She squealed.

"Adrien!"

"Okay, let those lovebirds do their own business." Alya huffed with utmost annoyance. "What's the situation, Kubdel?"

Their classmate simply jerked her thumb. "Well, the girls in Lila's class challenged us for a volleyball game."

Alya stood upright then slammed their table with her hands "Holy shit - RELEASE MY BEST FRIEND AT ONCE, AGRESTE!"

The brunette tried to yank her best friend but the boy refused to give in.

"Nooo~" he whined.

"Don't make me pour this ice cold water and splash it all over your head!" Alya threatened.

"Rude!"

"Let me go, mon minou." Marinette made a serious tone while prodding his arms away. "We have a match to settle."

"Yeah!" Alix added. "And we need the Dupain-Cheng's prowess to knock 'em all!"

Adrien flashed his Kitty Eyes that almost faltered her resolution. "Bu-but...we haven't finished our ice cream."

"I'll be back, okay?"

Resigned, Adrien unwrapped his arms with a childish pout. She giggled and was about to unbutton the shirt when an idea struck her.

"Hmm. might as well wear this." she spared him a conspiratorial wink. "So that everyone would know that, well, I'm yours?"

Boy did he know she could turn his tan to a bloody red in just a matter of seconds.

The three girls laughed at his reaction, while his best friend ridiculed him further after he recovered his bearings.

"You got it bad, my friend." Nino patted his shoulder when the girls headed to the volley area. "You got it bad."
He was proven correct when Adrien saw how Marinette clumsily fell flatly on the water when she saved the ball that wetted his white shirt. Said shirt became transparent as it clings to her toned curvatures, revealing her pink polka dot bikini again.

He was so jealous of his white shirt.

If your enemies ended up with Ten points and your team got Fifteen points, it wasn't just a good game. It was a great game.

"Congrats, Mari! Nice serves." Nino cheered as he gave her two high fives then another to Alya. "Same with you, babe."

"Are we talking at my volleyed balls babe, or on my different balls?" the brunette bounced her chest, making the DJ choked his spit.

"Stop with those innuendos, you two!" the raven-haired scowled then kicked some sand on their feet. "And get a room!"

She rolled her eyes. "Look who's talking."

Both Adrien and Marinette blushed profusely.

"Why don't we leave these innocent cinnamon buns and make some other plans instead?" her suggestion earned an inward groan.

"As if I have any choices."

Once the couple left, Marinette asked her companion "Want to go for a swim, Chaton?"

"I'd rather not burn my skin more, Princess. Father's orders." Adrien shrugged nonchalantly. "Besides, I've been babysitting a bug and a cat God knows where the two went. I know Plagg is somewhere in those trash bins, but I don't know about Tikki."

"Probably with Plagg. She might be complaining about his whiny cat - itude." she chuckled at her lame pun. "But they're inseparable."

"Just like their Masters." his flirty wink earned an eye roll.

"So, are you not going to swim?" she asked him again. "Is it really because you're afraid of sunburns, or afraid of water?"

Once he heard her taunting tone, she knew it was something he couldn't help but bite. She wasn't the only one who has a competitive streak.

"Is that a challenge, My Lady?"

She placed a finger under her chin. "Hmm, maybe? Or maybe an inkling thought that cats didn't like water. Why, are you a scaredy cat, mon minou?"
He immediately chased her when she ran away.

It wasn't a similar chase like what they did on the Parisian rooftops while wearing a spandex suit, or on pavements and alleyways for their civilian and masked selves. Running and chasing each other on the sand requires more effort, but it wasn't much of a problem for two people that have stronger limbs and good cardio.

Marinette finally surrendered, and let herself be tackled and slumped on the shore by Adrien.

"Got you!" the blond declared triumphantly, but his grasp wasn't strong enough to stop her from slipping away.

"Oh no, you don't!" she giggled as she met the waves and swam further. "Cat-ch me if you can!"

There were two things that he finds irresistible in life. First is his Lady. Next is puns.

He flashed his devilish grin. "Oh yeah, I will!"

He finally got her.

But before he could claim his prize, something caught their attention.

"What's this?" Marinette muttered as she plucked a shiny object that she stepped from the bottom. "A ring?"

"Looks like an expensive ring. Gold band, small diamonds lined in the center." Adrien inspected when she passed the object. "A wedding ring."

"What gives?"

He showed her the engraved words behind the band, letting her finger traced the scriptings.

"Jusqu'à ce que la mort nous sépare. Till death do us part. Oh, and there is something inscribed here."


Why do those names sound familiar?

They looked around for some possible clues of the owner. As they walked back to the shore to approach the lifeguard, a loud distress call captured their attention.

A few meters away from them was a bawling female and a frightened male who was trying to console her and at the same, trying to move her away from the sea.

The couple was too preoccupied to notice their approach.

"Let's apply something to that wound first before we can go back and look for it, Gwen." the man pleaded.

"I have to find it, Rodney! I have to find my wedding ring!" the woman sobbed on his shoulder. "I only wore it for days, just three days and now it was gone!"

"It's just a ring, merde! You're bleeding and -"

"It's not 'just a ring', it's our wedding ring! It's a symbol of our union - that you're my husband and
I'm your wife!"

He groaned. "I don't want to debate with you, okay? We'll look for that later, and I promise you we'll find it. But first, we need to apply something on your foot to avoid infections."

Gwen nodded with a sniffle. "I should've left it in our room instead of wearing it during our swim."

"No one's blaming you, mon Coeur."

"Uhm, excuse me, Monsieur. Madame." Marinette finally nabbed a timing to speak yet felt embarrassed by her sudden interruption. "I'm sorry if we heard your private discussions about your missing ring. My companion and I might be able to help you find it. If you don't mind asking, what does it look like?"

The couple eyed each other briefly before they gave a description - from the ring's color to the band's ebbed words which perfectly matched the jewelry that they found.

Adrien showed it to them. "Perhaps, this is the ring that you're looking for?"

Seconds later, Gwen immediately leaped and gave the blond a bone-crushing hug.

"Mon dieu, you found my ring! My wedding ring! Thank you for finding my ring!" the woman wept much to the boy's surprise.

"I - I - I'm sorry! I - I - I'm not the one who originally found it!" he sputtered then pointed his companion. "It's her!"

Marinette squeaked when the woman leaped at her to give her a similar gesture.

"You have no idea how much I owe you for retrieving something that's so precious to me." Gwen sobbed then hugged the mortified girl with abandon.

"Ah - I - uh, I didn't do anything, Madame." the girl squeaked. "I - I only returned an item that I simply found by accident."

"But it's not just an item. You found something that symbolizes my happiness." she released her as she wiped her tears. "And there's no such thing as an accident. Everything happens for a reason."

Then it clicked.

"What's your name, young lady?" Rodney asked after assisting his wife. "And yours, young man?"

After the teens introducing themselves, he added. "Well then, Marinette and Adrien, why don't you both accompany me to our suite, and after I fix my hard-headed woman here I'll treat you to dinner?"

Both shook their heads.

"We're sorry, but we have a curfew on our hotel." the girl explained sadly. "We're on a school field trip actually, with a designated faculty that monitors our attendance."

"And she's our class president." the blond inserted, which earned him an elbow jab.

"Right now we have like, an hour remaining for our assembly time then we'll return to our hotel."

The husband frowned. "How about tomorrow?"
"We'll be traveling back to Paris tomorrow," she answered despondently.

"How about this." Gwen adjusted her stance, abandoning the pain that shoots on her foot. "Why don't you get our contact numbers, and once you visited Normandy again, you can call us so that we'll arrange for your transport immediately?"

"Uhh..."

"Normandy is a small region. The communes are accessible either by a bus or a train." the woman explained. "We're located in Argentan, and Chateau d'Eu is my ancestral home. My brother Sean is the caretaker there, but once you introduced yourselves to him, he'll be more than happy to accommodate you."

After they received their numbers and bid farewell, the teenagers decided to head back to their class venue.

"We might've missed their wedding," Adrien stated. "But someone must've made it possible."

"And we got a connection with them again."

"Exactly."

"Everything was predetermined. An occurrence that was destined to happen." Marinette muttered as she looked on the horizon. "Yet someone was able to fill in the gaps to replace us."

She felt how his fingers interlaced with hers. "It just so happened that someone was on the right place at the right time. They're not replacing us, Princess. They just did it on our behalf."

Realization dawned on them that it was all about temporal paradox again.

"It left me wondering: what if I didn't open that small box years ago? What if I didn't discover Tikki, or even learn about the Miraculous? What if I actually gave up my Miraculous? What if Alya found the earrings and became Ladybug instead?"

He halted their tracks. "Marinette..."

"What if..." she stared at his green hues. "What if you didn't become Chat Noir and we didn't meet at all?"

"Hey." Adrien cupped her face lovingly as he tried to wash all of her worries away. "We both conquered Fate and we've won the battle. We got lost yet we found each other again. We've traveled multiple dimensions but we're still here, still trying to get back together."

"We're not talking about being a Miraculous wielder, or you being the Lady Luck and me being the Black Cat." he continued. "Yin and Yang. Two souls merged into one. This is about you, Marinette Dupain-Cheng, and me, Adrien Agreste. Whatever life may bring us, at the end of the road we stayed together."

She chuckled as she squeezed his hand. "You really know the way with words, mon Minou."

"Destroying your doubts and fears are just some of my expertise, Bugaboo." he kissed her forehead. "you know, this got me thinking - we might have recognized each other unconsciously since the beginning."

She tilted her head. "Hmm. Maybe...?"
"I'm searching for you, you know, wondering about you and your identity. Imagine my surprise when I realized that you're just a meter away sitting behind me!" he chortled indignantly. "Maybe it's because of our Miraculous glamour, or because my logical mind said that there's one over a thousand chances for you to be someone nearby."

"Or probably," she drawled then pecked his lips. "You being someone I already know is too good to be true."

They found Plagg inside the trash bin near the restaurant while Tikki was snuggling a coconut hull.

"Wakey wakey, sleepy heads." Marinette cooed as Adrien extended his arms to reach them. "We have to go now."

"Adrien? Marinette?" a voice alerted them, and when they looked back warily, they realized that it was from their adviser.

"Yes, Miss Bustier?"

"Thank goodness you haven't left yet." the teacher sighed with relief. "We're looking ten volunteers for a clean-up drive here but we lacked two people. Mind if you two can fill the slot?"

They saw eight students from a different class, and based on their crestfallen faces they seemed to be like forced tributes.

"Uhm, where are the others?" the blond looked around for any familiar faces but found none.

"Oh, haven't you heard the announcement? Your classmates already left and went back to the hotel."
"Hear ye, hear ye." A silver utensil was tapped on a glass goblet's surface repetitively, and the sound that reverberated inside the room gradually appeased the loud commotion.

"This is your Captain Cesaire speaking." Alya introduced herself with a grin, then contentedly placed the items on the table. "We have gathered here today to celebrate, and to congratulate every one of you for all the efforts and dedications that you've done on this fleet, that despite those tragic years of patience and frustrations, we can safely assume that our sacrifices were paid off. That everything was worth the wait because our vessel, the S.S. Adrinette, has finally sailed!"

The audience responded with a collective cheer, high pitched whistles, and an uninviting grunt. The brunette coughed in silence.

"Like any other newly emerged ships, the S.S. Adrinette doesn't have a base yet. It doesn't have a mission either, or any plans to explore other territories. It is a vessel that sails in no direction. Being one of its loyal crew members as well as the pioneer of this fleet, it is my life mission to set our beloved ship to still waters, averting it from horrendous storms and icebergs that might destroy and sink it like the infamous Titanic."

"I don't want Marinette and Adrien end up like Rose and Jack." their pixie blonde classmate sniffled. "I don't want their love story to become a tragedy."

Juleka patted her head for comfort.

"You've heard Ensign Lavillant, mates. The time has come for the tides to be turned." Alya pumped her fist in the air. "We pledged to the flagship of S.S Adrinette that we will protect their purity for the world, by hook or by crook, that's why we declared this operation as SOS - also known as operation Save our Sanity!"

Thunderous claps roared with enthusiasm.

"Admiral Lahiffe, the floor is yours."

Nino stepped forward, adjusted his cap then spoke. "Years ago, a certain species named Adrien Agreste came to our world brimming with confidence and sunshine smiles. His sainthood was misunderstood by many at first, and one of them goes by the name of Marinette Dupain-Cheng, who bashfully threw some spitballs of fire to the poor boy. But alas! The table was turned the next day when she became a stuttering mess in his presence. And that's how the Agreste Curse was born."

"Little did he know that the lady he infected with his graces transmitted him a poison, a mysterious agent acquired by 85% of Françoise Dupont's male population, including yours truly - until I met my antidote," he said while reaching Alya's hand and kissed it. She batted her lashes dramatically. "A poison that underwent dormancy due to the boy's oblivious nature, and his obsessive crush towards Ladybug muddled his insights about infatuation and love. It was all first for him so he was simply confused."

"It took years, years mates, for the poison to be triggered. Unfortunately, it was all too late - the poison already infused into his bloodstream and destroyed his immune system without knowing it. Thus Adrien Agreste, our sunshine child, was diagnosed with a terminal stage of Marinette's Charms."

"More like Marinette's Syndrome." Kim snorts earned an elbow jab from Alix.
"Before we proceed to our agenda, I'm giving the honors to Lieutenant Kante on cascading our proceeds."

"Greetings, my fellow shipmates." Max began. "As of 15:25 we have eight open betting pools for post-reveal Adrinette, which obviously nullified all pre-reveal pools such as 'Adrinette will never, ever, gonna be together' that garnered €200 over €950 stakes, and 'Chlorien is a canon' that garnered €10 over €500."

"Sounds like a detergent." Nino snickers earned him a kick in the shin.

Their bespectacled classmate went on. "However, all bets related to the canonization of Adrinette are placed on hold due to some undisclosed information, and the fact that the two confirmed that they aren't dating yet. Everything will probably be validated in an indefinite time frame."

"I have my full respects on Adrien for being a gentleman," Ivan commented while wrapping his arms around Mylene then asked. "How much is the overall money pot, Lieutenant?"

All eyes popped widely with slacked jaws when they saw the amount on the paper stuck on the wall.

"I can't believe I'm here," Chloe grumbled. "Listening to these peasants as they sell my Adrikins' soul to the devil."

"Excuse me; the devil you're referring to is my best friend." Alya crossed her arms. "And for your information, everyone here agrees that Marinette is nothing like a devil, except you who creates Akuma like it's your lifetime job.

The mayor's daughter was about to launch herself from the chair if not for Sabrina. "Why you..."

"While Chlorinette sounds like you're doing a laundry." their capped classmate mused. "Chlolya sounds like an intestinal disease."

Two female heads lashed simultaneously. "Ni - NO!"

"I knew it." Nathanael sighed exasperatedly. "This plan will never be going to work."

"SHUT UP, ASPIRANT!" the girls chorused.

The boy changed from sickly white to tomato red. Did they just insult him with a pun?

"You're going to have your own ship someday, mate." Kim consoled him. "Don't worry."


While in the midst of a heated debate whether Mont St. Michel should be part of Brittany or not, Alya's phone rang. It was Marinette.

The brunette hushed her classmates before answering the call.

"Hello, Mari?"
"Don't you 'Hello, Mari' me, Alya." her best friend growled on the other line. "Where the foutre did you all go?! You left us here to do all the community works that should be done by the whole class!"

"And here I thought you like doing community service." Alya feigned an innocent tone. "If you're working, then why are you calling me? Oh my gosh, don't tell me you and Adrien are playing hooky?"

"Don't you dare change the subject!"

"My, my. Am I getting on your nerves girl?"

There was a pregnant pause.

"That's it. We're going back to the hotel."

This made Alya's face grew pale. "Oh no, no, no, NO! Don't! Marinette!"

She could see the sly grin forming on her best friend's face. "Oh? And why not?"

"Because...because..."

Nino saw her distress, and after he understood her frantic hand signals, he dialed Adrien's number. He immediately picked it up.

"Salut, Nino. I'm surprised you called me." was his best friend's obviously faked greetings.

"Dude, where are you? Still at the beach, or on your way back to the hotel?"

"Hmm, I don't know. Why don't you tell me?" his voice was laced with sarcasm. "You're in the hotel, right?"

"Bu - bu - but you shouldn't be here! Not yet!" the DJ sputtered, especially when he saw his frenzied girlfriend. "You must stop Marinette from coming here!"

"Dude, you know Marinette. She's a force to be reckoned with."

"Please don't let her go here. I'm begging you!" he pleaded.

Adrien's calm demeanor was simply a facade for those who didn't know the guy well, but as his best friend for years he knew that behind those words was a seething anger.

"I'm sorry Nino, but I'm not a type of a Knight who can defile my Princess' orders. Besides, I am fully supporting her decisions." the model chuckled. "Get ready to be Marirekt."

He groaned. "That was bad, dude. Horrible."

"It's payback time, Nino. Au revoir~"

"NO! No, no, no, Adrien! Don't you dare hang up on me!"

"Try me."

"Listen to me, dude. LISTEN! You must stop Marinette from coming here! By all means!"

He could see Adrien's cunning smile grew. "And why is that?"
"Because...because..." he trailed off. "Because we're replanning your first date with Marinette today to settle the bets!"

"...wait, what?!"

Alya smacked his head.

"OW!"

"You dingus! Why did you tell him?" his girlfriend hissed.

"I panicked!"

"Hey Mari!" the boy hollered on the other line. "Guess what, Nino said that - "

The brunette immediately grabbed his phone. "Spill it, Agreste. Spill it and your intestines will follow."

Her death threat earned her a choke and an audible gulp.

They could hear Marinette's infuriated ramblings in the background, likely because Alya placed her on a brief hold, while Adrien was telling her to let him handle the negotiations.

Surprisingly, she was pacified.

"Okay, I'll bite. What am I going to do then?" he asked them.

"Did you place this in a speaker mode?"

"Uh, no?"

"Good." Alya took a deep breath. "Don't you ever, ever, let Marinette go here until I say so, okay? Don't ask me 'why not' or 'how long' - just don't make her go back here in the hotel. Not now."

"She'll skin you alive, you know," Adrien confessed. "Actually, she's planning it right now. And how she can barbecue you both in a campfire."

The couple shivered at the thought. "Let's just skip the morbid details. We have to settle these things up first before we deal the consequences."

"Let me remind you that Marinette has a mind of her own, and I'm not a kind of person who would force her to do things without her consent."

"That's why you're too good for this world." Alya smiled then went serious. "We need your assistance, Sunny Boy. Distract her from all we care. Use your incorrigible puns. She loves it."

"She admits that?"

The brunette rolled her eyes while her boyfriend blanched. "Of course, dude. I'm her best friend. I know all of her secrets."

Adrien laughed.

"Try to ask some things you don't know about her. Personal things." she went on. "Emma, for example, her favorite romance book by Bronte, that same author who also wrote Wuthering Heights. Or about Hugo, an iconic French writer of the Romantic Movement. Or you can discuss Louis. You
"Know the Sun King?"

"Why do I have a feeling that you just gave me some sort of a code to launch a nuclear bomb?"

"Because that's the way it should be," she stated matter-of-factly.

"Fine," he sighed. "Let's say I agreed, then what is it for me?"

Alya and Nino looked at each other with a shit-eating grin.

"You'll earn a date."

As they contemplated between red and pink - and yellow, Chloe suggested, because why not? - for Marinette's dress, Sabrina began to ponder.

"What do you think those two are doing right now?"

"Probably trapped in their own world again." Chloe grimaced while clipping her nails.

"I can imagine them chasing each other along the beach shores, with a sunset view on the side," Rose sighed dreamily. "Marinette laughing at her heart's content then Adrien runs behind her with loving stares."

"Knowing Marinette, she will trip and faceplant herself on the sand," Alya muttered.

"Knowing Adrien, he will rush towards her then faceplant himself in the process," Nino added.

"Then they will laugh and look at each other with stars in their eyes."

"Then Adrien will wipe the sand off from Marinette's face with a caress."

"Then someone will have a bleeding nose, and the other will kiss the boo-boo away."

"Oh my God, what did we do to deserve such disgusting best friends?" the DJ groaned as he clutched his head. "I can see it all happening, Captain! Oh no, my...my eyes...I can't take their sickeningly sweet gestures! My head, ouch, my head! And my teeth, they're starting to all rot down because of constant toothaches!"

His theatrics earned a deadpan stare. "Aww, you poor salty person. Why don't you take your insulin?"
An hour later, the only idea that they've got was an 'Outdoor Date'.

I knew it." Nathanael grumbled. "This plan will never be going to work."

"This is the dumbest meeting I have ever attended." Chloe miffed. "Aren't we all pointing out the obvious?"

"Why don't you take a chill pill and buzz off, Matelor?" Alix smirked, much to the blondie disgruntlement.

"Why am I a Matelot while you're a Major?!"

"Do you want to be a Peintre de la Marine instead?"

"That should be Tomato Head's rank instead!"

"Hey!" Nathanael scowled.

"Kids, kids." Alya cut them. "Can we just set aside our pride for a moment and focus on our current dilemma instead?"

"She's somewhat correct, Captain." Max interfered. "We still don't have any concrete idea about the 'what' and the 'where'. Not that we're all amateurs to the dating scenes."

"Maybe because we're all used to have our class rep do the brainstorming," Juleka commented.

Mylene nodded. "Marinette can come up with something out of nothing."

The entire class sighed.

"So...what shall we do then?" Rose asked meekly. "Asking Marinette about her plans for her first date defeats the purpose, right?"

Silence fell in the room for a moment until Kim broke it.

"If I were in Adrien's shoes," he sighed dreamily while looking at the view outside the window. "I will bring my girl to the most romantic spot in Normandy. I will rent a vehicle and drive her all the way from here to our destination while passing some astonishing sights. I will let her enjoy how the sky turned from indigo to black, with stars and the moon shining through the sea. That way, she will never forget the beauty outside Paris and at the same time, she will never forget the person who bequeathed her such happiness...why are you all giving me that look?!"

"Mates." Alya began. "Let's all give Ensign Le Chien a big round of hugs!"

"Wa - wa - wa - wa - wait a damn mi - ACK!"

Everyone was too excited and thrilled to crush Kim that they missed out the most important factor...
...only to remember it after they revealed the plans to Adrien.

"We forgot we have curfews." Nino groaned while the other boys face-palmed.

"I told you." Nathanael nudged them for the umpteenth time. "This plan will never be going to work."

A school memo was circulated among the hotel staffs stating that all students will never be allowed to leave the building - even if their surnames are Bourgeoisie - after nine. Those who are caught or failed to return before the said time will be suspended - which is bad considering that they were all graduating students.

"Mont St. Michel is approximately two hours away from Caen. If Marinette and Adrien will leave here after dinner, they can still watch the Poetic Night but they’ll never make it here before curfew," said Max. "If before dinner, we will need to have the best alibi why they missed the headcount. Unless..."

"Dude, do you have a driver's license?" Nino asked.

Adrien flashed his Cheshire grin. "I thought you will never ask."

All eyes looked at Max but he shook his head.

"Didn't I tell you this will – "

"Try to finish that sentence again, Nath, and we'll shove you out from the balcony," Kim growled.

Nathanael decided to shut his mouth.

"Curfew aside, how can we make Marinette and Adrien leave this place without being caught?" Ivan asked.

"As if you didn't know these two." the DJ bemused. "They have notorious attendance issues ever since collège, with unexplained disappearances like this dude who has a bodyguard that nabs him every time there's an Akuma – even if it was located two arrondissements away."

"I think I have an idea." the model declared with his mischievous green orbs. "I know someone who can help us."

Later that night, while the boys were waiting in their room – except Adrien who had left them half an hour ago - Nino's phone popped a notification sound.

Alya: Is Adrien ok?

Nino: Left us God knows where. Maybe calling reinforcements for an inside job?

How's Marinette?
Alya: Sunny Boy will probably die once he sees my child.

Few minutes after Nino sent a text message to his best friend, Alya sent him an attachment.

Alya: Damn, your boy really upped his game!

Guess who's Adrien's wingman?

It was a picture of Chat Noir.
When Marinette finally stepped into the hotel's lobby, the first thing that entered her mind was to kill Alya.

The designer realized her mistake after she let Adrien handled the negotiations. She knew that he was bad at handling peer pressures, but her unwavering trust towards him blindsided her, believing that her partner would do anything for his Lady.

She forgot to consider his weakness against bribes.

Not that she didn't like his company - because she actually loved every second of it – she was getting antsy not knowing their friends' devious plans. The uncertainty was making her anxious and scared to whatever concoctions their classmates were brewing for them.

The cryptic assurances she received from Adrien didn't help her nerves either.

No matter how many times she interrogated him, accused him of dishonesty and threatened him to be skinned alive, the guy didn't budge a bit. His 'Cat's Honor' mantra was something she didn't understand at all because cats and honors never mix together. Besides, cats were notorious for being fickle-minded pets with questionable loyalty.

"Not this Chat, ma Purr-ince" the model defended as he kissed her hand.

It dawned on her that Alya must've promised him something like the moon and the stars enough to become one of her cohorts. And apparently, that promise was related to her.

Bottling her fury, the pig-tailed designer punched their floor number in the elevator as she abandoned her partner's cries. When she reached the hallway, she marched hastily towards their room number then rapped the door.

It took her three knocks before the door swung open, and when she was about to spew some insults, three pairs of arms pulled her in a swift motion.

"What the actual foutre -"

"Strip," Alya commanded as she secured the door locks.

Nobody gave Marinette a single chance to respond.

Everything happened so fast the designer barely recalled how her classmates removed her garments unceremoniously and dived her into a tub full of lathered water.

Her reaction was late again when Chloe emerged somewhere and slapped something on her face.

"It's a honey gunk." the blondie explained as she smothered another goo on her other cheek. "Good for exfoliation and - mon dieu, you should've applied a higher SPF lotion for these freckles! What kind of cheap brands are you using?!

Talking about her skin care was the least topic she wanted to discuss there.

When a hand tried to lift her bare leg, she finally recovered her bearings and snapped "WA - WA - WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU ALL DOING WITH ME?!"
Her female classmates paused momentarily then looked at her like she just announced she was Ladybug.

"We're preparing you for your first date," Alix told her casually.

"Fi - fi - fi -first date?!"

"With Adrien, of course." Rose grinned as she uncapped a shampoo.

"Bu - bu - bu - bu - but why?!"

"Because we are your friends," Alya answered matter-of-factly while leaning on the sink. "And don't you dare give me that glare, Mademoiselle Dupain-Cheng, because we're all doing this to help you attain your happiness."

"Happiness, my ass!" her best friend snarled. "No way this can be considered as something friendly!"

"Not me," Chloe interjected with a huff. "And will you quit giving me that stupid look because I'm not your friend - over my dead body - and I'm doing this for my Adrikins, okay?"

Everyone's attention fell on the mayor's daughter much to her chagrin.

"Fine! I admit it! Adrien liked, no, adored you more than anyone in the world! And as his one true best friend, I'm not allowing him to go out with someone that will make him looked so pathetic!"

Her outburst earned an adorable 'awwws'.

"Chloe..." Marinette was surprised yet managed to break a small grin. "I don't know whether to feel insulted or take them as a compliment."

"Thank me later." she flashed an uncanny smile, one that reminded her of their collège days. "Sabrina?"

With a snap of her fingers, their bespectacled classmate yanked Marinette's leg again from the tub, then stuck a peel-off waxing patch.

"Do it."

They were thankful that their hotel room was sound-proofed else people might think someone was being murdered based on Marinette's painful wails.

.".

.".

.".

.".

"I have never been so violated like this in my entire life." Marinette shuddered with her arms wrapping around her body.

She was sitting helplessly in front of a large mirror while her female classmates applied their finishing touches.
"It's okay, Marinette. You looked so beautiful tonight." Juleka consoled as she ironed her loose raven-haired locks.

"I beg to differ." the designer sniffled.

"But you are!" Alix gasped, slipping her a short-sleeved coat. "You're so dashing right now. Adrien must be blind if he failed to see it!"

"Yeah, yeah."

"How I wish I have your flawless skin, and your toned body - with that killer abs and pecs." Mylene soothed. "And to think that you're living in a bakery."

"Carrying tons of flour bags must've compensated all the carbs she consumed per day." Chloe snorts earned her a scowl.

"This is the highest level of bullying." The designer puffed her cheeks. "This is harassment."

The blondie rolled her eyes. "Yet you didn't reject us. Willingness is not part of the harassment."

"You threatened to shave my head if I made any protests!"

"Oh Mari, Mari, Mari." Alya sighed, cupping her best friend's face gently without smudging the makeup she painstakingly applied. "If we're not going to take these matters into our hands, God forbid if this ridiculous tango you both danced for years will ever stop."

Her classmates hummed to agree.

"Adrien might be an old soul, and you have this conservative nature that came from your Asian blood, but these were going on since troisième. Now we're about to enter terminale." she clasped her hands. "Taking things slowly is fine, but remember that moments like these are hard to come by. Time is precious, Girl. It waits for no one."

Marinette began to recall her dreams, those dreadful dreams she encountered as a side-effect of an Akuma.

"You're right, Alya. We must live our life to the fullest." the designer sighed then mulled over. "But...am I really beautiful tonight?"

"That's an understatement of the century," Rose replied unabashedly. "Believe it or not, I'm super gay with you right now."

She laughed.

"Let's cut this drama, girls." the brunette said as she straightened her back then pulled out her phone. "I bet the Prince already sent his henchman to fetch his Princess."

While they were waiting for a knock on the door, they didn't expect to hear one on the windows.

"What's that?" Sabrina whispered.

All eyes loomed as their pink-haired classmate courageously parted the curtains aside, revealing a clawed dark hand with glowing green eyes.

The girls - except Marinette - screamed.
"Shh! Shhh! It's just me! Me!" the feline hero emerged from the shadows as he frantically waved his arms for silence.

That made the scream turned into a shriek.

"Oh my God, it's Chat Noir!"

"Merde, it's Chat Noir!"

"Chat Noir is that you?!"

"What is Chat Noir doing here?!"

"Wait, where's Ladybug?"

"Girls, calm down." the visitor chuckled, somewhat pleased that no one heard the ruckus from the outside and called the authorities. "I believe my Lady is well, and the reason why I'm here is due to my Master's request. He sent me, the finest Knight of the land, to accompany his fair..."

He first saw red polished nails in an apostle sandals, with white porcelain legs against a knee-length summer dress.

"...in..."

She was wearing a red piece with a two-layered skirt. The thin chiffon has black imprinted swirls that would appear like dots if checked from afar and blended well on the inner scarlet silk. Minus the accessory leather belt, the torso has swirl-like laces that hugged like a corset, making the wearer's figure so eminent.

"...ces..."

Its box neck style accentuated her breast but modest enough not to display the cleavage. And despite being a thin-strapped garment, the dark bolero with a Chinese collar made it perfect for cold outdoors.

"...se..."

His eyes began to trail on her loose midnight hair with side braids that displayed the black studs on her ears. Her kissable lips were tinted with pink, light skin foundation that revealed her natural blush, and her bluebell eyes shone well against smokey hues.

"Chat Noir."

"Hi." was his dumb reply.

All his life he had never seen a scowl so appealing like Marinette's.

"Hey, hey, Chat Noir." Rose nudged, moving the charmed hero in front of his subject. "Care to tell our friend here that she's too beautiful tonight, that Adrien might render speechless and lose himself once he sees her?"

Chat Noir couldn't speak, let alone say beautiful to his Princess, because he suddenly got tongue-tied at her presence and almost lost his self-control enough to forget that he was Adrien.

He barely registered the words of his classmates or cared how his mouth gaped like a dehydrated fish until Chloe broke his reverie.
"Where's Adrien?"

"A - Adrien? Who - you mean, where? Ah, he's outside. Waiting. You know. For...me?" he stammered without averting his gaze from his scowling Princess.

"Chat Noir." Alya crossed her arms when the hero paid him no attention. "Do you have some hots with my best friend?"

The designer choked her spit.

"Alya!"

The superhero finally broke his reverie with a blush. He was considered to be guilty beyond reasonable doubt as he chewed his lower lip. He was having a hard time how not to lie on such question. So instead of giving denial thoughts, he covered his face with his gloved hands then hunched down to the floor.

"Pretty." he whimpered with his red-hued human ears and a swash-buckling leather tail. "She's too pretty. It's so unfair she's too pretty."

His honesty earned a raucous laughter much to Marinette's embarrassment.

Never in her life had she once dreamed seeing her partner being riled by her classmates because he finds her pretty.

"Okay, let's not bully our superhero." the brunette snickered, and the way she ruffled his blond hair made his faux ears twitch. "Can we just give this guy a benefit of a doubt? If we trusted him with our lives, perhaps Adrien trusted him with his Lady's safety. Am I right, Kitty?"

As if he didn't notice her underlying words that he, Chat Noir, will be skinned alive if he'll abduct Marinette.

Was he really that unreliable?

"Don't fur-ret, wonder-fur ladies!" the feline hero shoots up then patted his chest to control his nerves. "Fur I, Chat Noir, will deli-fur this fair Purr-incess to her charming Purr-ince safe and sound!"

He didn't miss how Marinette cringed on his puns.

"Though I admit I got cat-tivated by Purr-incess' beauty." he went on. "But I am a loyal feline that serves one Lady."

That wasn't a lie though.

"Well, Adrien was enamored by Ladybug's beauty before," Alix commented with a smirk. "So it's very likely to have someone experience the other way around."

"Gah! I refused to believe that this lowly peasant was on par with glorious Ladybug!" Chloe crossed her arms. "She's nothing but a -"

"Oh wow, the amazing Chat Noir is going to be my guardian for tonight?" Marinette interjected to avoid possible disasters. "Such a great honor to be in your presence!"

"Likewise, thy lovely Purr-incess." he bowed dramatically. "You have no idea what kind of grandeur your handsome Purr-ince has prepared for you as a surprise."
"You showing up here was already a surprise."

Sensing the dripping sarcasm, he flashed her a toothy grin. "If only you knew."

"But how will you able to bring me to my Prince safe and sound, Monsieur Noir?" she asked then sauntered towards the flustered superhero. "By pole-vaulting?"

Under normal circumstances, Chat would give his mocked defense with an innuendo.

He couldn't do that at the moment, unfortunately, much more in front of the Ladyblogger who was drilling some holes on his skull. Wrong move and he might dig his own unmarked grave.

"Do not underestimate the weapon of my Miraculous, fair Purr-incess!" he boasted as he pulled his silver baton. "This was equipped with several features - from slaying a dragon to a simple mode of transportation."

To demonstrate, he walked towards the balcony railings then pushed a paw button to extend it to the ground. Then he proudly wiggled his brows.

While the girls awed - including Alya who was recording the entire scene - Marinette was highly amused.

"But I am wearing a dress," she complained theatrically. "My skirt will flip!"

Chat Noir felt his brain made a flip.

"Unless you will carry me in a style fit for a Princess," she added with a wink.

The feline hero tried not to growl on her partner's boldness. She was a tease and a downright cheater, and the poor him was lured to her trap so easily. Damn.

He must redeem himself and get his sweet revenge.

*Two can play a game, My Lady.*

"Of claws," he bowed then spread his arms wide.

Trying not to show some familiarity, the designer wrapped her arms around his neck, clumsily at first, as he tucked her securely by hoisting her legs and supporting her spine. It was an easy feat, but very difficult for his gentlemanly side not to cop a feel, especially after contacting her smooth skin, her delicious scent of honey and vanilla, her warm breath...oh yeah, his soul was doomed to be thrown in the pits of Hell.

Did he also mention that Alya was recording everything?

"Aww, how I wish someone can carry me in a bridal style!"

"Carry me too, Chat Noir!"

"Good luck, Marinette! Take her well, Chat Noir!"

"I wanto try that!"

"Have fun with your date, Marinette!"

"Send my regards to Adrien!"
"Hey, Chat Noir?" Alya beamed, still aiming her phone towards their way. "Please take care of my best friend, okay?"

The feline hero glanced at his seductress hastily before he made an affirmed nod. "I will."

The 18th-story building was nothing to Marinette if she was transformed as Ladybug. Despite the height seemed scary outside the mask, she couldn't help but feel safe knowing that her partner was the one beside her. She maintained her relaxed posture when he stepped on the edge of the balcony railings.

"Want to try falling for me?" Chat whispered in her ear.

She rolled her eyes subtly "Oh Kitty, I'm already falling..."

She trailed off when she saw his shit-eating grin and that familiar twinkle on his sclera that normally appears whenever he wanted to try something reckless.

"You fucking *punster,*" she growled.

He winked.

All the blood drained out from Marinette's face when she realized that they were free-falling.

"Goddamn it, you stupid ChaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAATTTTTTTT!"

Her grip tightened as they were about to meet the ground, only to leap a hundred meters higher enough to see the horizon.

Then another free fall.

"**Just wait until I KIIIIIIIIIIIIIIILLLLLLLLL YOOOOOOOUUUUUUUU!**"

It was supposed to be a romantic sight of a young couple flying under a starry sky, if not for the horrified screams and maniacal laughs that failed to be drowned by the summer wind...followed by a yowl.

"Oh, Marinette punched Chat Noir in the face."
Having a date with Adrien Agreste was one of Marinette’s childhood fantasies.

She imagined herself meeting the teenage model at her doorsteps, clad in his crisped designer suit and a bouquet of roses that would greet her together with his sunshine smiles. He would fluster seeing her in a matching self-designed dress, and more when she thanked him with a kiss - that, if she didn't melt into a puddle of goo first before she met his emerald orbs.

Hundreds of gratuitous daydreams flashed in her scandalous mind throughout her early Lycée years. May it be an ice cream date, a movie date, a picnic or a stroll in a park date, as long as Adrien accompanied her, she'll be happy.

But she never, for the life of her, ever imagined that it would happen eventually, and catastrophically.

Not only because Adrien was Chat Noir...

"Did I make you feel breathless?" a certain blond asked her, still donned in his feline suit.

"Breathless?" her voice hitched before she erupted. "It's more like suffocated!"

...but because her expectation exceeded her reality.

Marinette was so glad her knees didn't wobble as they safely landed on the ground. Thanks to that, she was able to deliver another fitful of blows to her offender.

"You were trying to plummet us to the ground!" the designer complaints only earned a chortle.

"But we didn't, Princess. In fact, you still looked regal as ever." he chided, somewhat pleased that he was still wearing his Miraculous uniform else she'll leave him bruised the next day.

He made sure that her hair will not be ruffled by the cold wind during their free fall, and somewhat satisfied that her dress remained unwrinkled. His action wasn't an over-the-top teasing - he simply did it to ease her nervousness.

He didn't expect that it'd be so exhilarating.

"Wipe that smug off, you mangy cat. I'm so mad at you right now!"

"Aww, Bugaboo." he chuckled again, but this time he reached out her hand to kiss it. "I'm also mad at you. Madly in love."

It was cheesy yet she blushed profusely on his line, and the sound of his delighted purr told her that her reaction was obvious in his night vision. Her stupid Kitty was so proud of his stoked ego.

Unfair, she grumbled mentally. Her heart was still overwhelmed by her two favorite boys being one at the same. And when he dropped his transformation, she knew she'd be a goner.

"Cat got your tongue, My Lady?"

Adrien was wearing his slicked blond hair with an apple green Polo that was slightly tucked in his designer jeans. A latest Gabriel leather belt and his short boots gave him a perfect casual look, and with his short-sleeved shirt, it displayed his well-ripped biceps. On his wrist, he tied her beaded lucky
charm - the one that she gave to him when they were in collège - like a bracelet, and on his hand was a single red chrysanthemum.

In floriography, it means 'I love you.'

"Unfair," she grumbled audibly, unabashed on his blushed face. "Showing your dorky nature moments ago, then all of a sudden you flipped into this ridiculous Cat-sanova? Are you trying to give me a heart attack?"

"Can't blame a man for romancing his woman." he slipped the flower behind her ear. "Forgive me?"

"Isn't this...kinda direct?" she gulped with her anxious eyes focused on her sandals for a fear to meet his dejected face. "Li-like you...and me... and I understand that taking things slowly was not our forte. But - "

"Marinette." the seriousness of his tone halted her thoughts, especially when he tilted her chin to meet his gaze. "I love you. We might be too young in everyone's eyes, but we're not just ordinary youngsters - we got far more experiences than an average adult. We've faced a bunch of enemies that are more dangerous than notorious criminals and witnessed deaths like undertakers on cemeteries. Hell, we're both magical superheroes with unusual familiars!"

Her giggles lit a fire that burned his chest.

"I don't want to repeat the same mistakes." he went on. "Letting our emotions and insecurities rule over our happiness. I don't want to lose you again."

Small hands reached and cupped his cheek. "You will never lose me, Chaton. I'm forever yours."

"Marinette."

"Adrien."

As their lips drew closer, a voice suddenly shrieked. "Is that a Camembert I smell?"

"PLAGG!" the red kwami thwarted his head. "What did I tell you about ruining the mood?!"

"But Tikki." the black kwami bemoaned with insolence. "I'm a god of destruction. 'Ruining' is always my game."

Adrien had to muster all of his strength not to bury his kwami alive.

Sensing the shift in the atmosphere, Marinette feigned a cough.

"So." she began. "I've heard from this dashing Knight of the land that my Purr-ince prepared a grandeur surprise for me."

"Oh, ma Purr-incesse." he clasped her hands dramatically and placed it on his chest. "You have no idea how my henchmen prepared our dwelling place for us to enjoy the night."

"Oh? And these henchmen of yours happened to be enrolled in Francoise Dupont's?" she teased, letting herself be led to a place.

"Loyal peers, those people. In fact, they were the ones who planned the itineraries and everything!"

"Including a To-Do list?"
"Yeah, that too." he grimaced at the idea. "They somewhat pitied my abilities to woo a lady, despite the fact that most of them are singles."

The kwamis guffawed as they flew towards the vehicle's compartment.

"Where are we goi - Adrien." Marinette stopped dead in her tracks.

In front of them was a black Peugeot Speedfight in Chat Noir's colors.

"I was supposed to rent a white horse or a carriage, but given the limited time and resources, I opted for a modern yet classic approach," he explained sheepishly. "There are lots of rental vehicles in Caen that accepts student driver's license, as long as it met the requirements."

The designer looked at him with disbelief.

"Oh, don't worry My Lady. I drove a motorcycle before. Once." he supplied, but the silence made him think otherwise. "And this is the latest, and one of the safest Peugeot released in the market."

"Kitty -"

"It has a SmartMotion engine of 135mpg with an increased Economy by ACG. It has more Power available as it worked with Synerjet single-indirect fuel injection."

"Minou -"

"This is a liquid-cooled type, Princess. Its management disables the flywheel during acceleration and deceleration when the battery is sufficiently charged - not to mention its SynchoBraking concept, making it accident-free!"

"Chaton -"

"Most of all, look at its features! Not only it has digital dials and 100% LED lighting, there's a built-in GPS that assures you that we'll arrive at our destination at no time. And look at the black and neon green finish, and three-clawed design here, doesn't it reminds you of a Cataclysm right?"

"Adrien." she gave him an impassive look. "I don't have any issues with the specs. My issue is this."

On the side was a quote 'Attire goes in the Wheel' stuck in neon reflectors.

"It's wheely tyre-riffic." he beamed.

"It's wheely tyre-ribble." she deadpanned. "And don't give me that Kitty Eyes™, or that foul mouth you have for puns because I'm not going to ride any vehicles that mashed Fashion and Motors into destruction!"

"But it's veer-inspiring!"

"No."

In the end, she rode the motorcycle.

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"Oh no," Rose murmured when she saw a broken mirror.

When Sabrina accidentally dropped Chloe's compact, it erupted a nonsensical commotion.

"See?! Even Rose agreed that this is a grave situation!" the mayor's daughter exclaimed as she refused her bespectacled friend's fervent apologies.

"She wasn't referring to your damaged make-up, Chloe," Juleka interjected calmly. "Rose was concerned on the mirror."

"It symbolizes bad omen." Max supplied. "According to the ancient Romans, breaking a mirror means seven years of bad luck. Sometimes, a message of someone's misfortune."

The students shuddered at the idea.

Alya's thoughts flew immediately to her best friend. She grabbed her phone to send her a message but stopped herself.

The brunette sighed exasperatedly. She didn't want to interrupt her precious date because of her nosiness.

"Hope Adrien and Marinette are okay."

They weren't okay.

When Adrien secured themselves and whirred the engine to life, their motorcycle wobbled and stopped. He had to turn the knob multiple times to make it work since it was an Automatic with no pedals, but for some unknown reasons, the motorcycle would stop after covering a certain distance.

"Are you sure you can manage it?"

There wasn't any malice on Marinette's words, but it was evident in the tone that she was worried.

"Fret not, my Lady," he assured her. "I might be out of practice, but we can manage it. Unless your weight is the reason."

He snorted when she slapped his arm.

The summer wind was able to penetrate their helmets, and with its clear visor, the designer could see the glittering stars in the sky.

"This is nice." she sighed, wrapping her arms around her companion as she rested her chin on his shoulder blades. "The stars are brighter here compare to the ones we often see on Eiffel."

A large hand squeezed hers, making the skinship a bit intimate. "It's the pollution that makes a difference. You can even feel the breeze in the air."
She hummed to agree. "Aren't we getting late, mon Minou?"

"Poetic Night ends at eleven. And tonight's a half moon, so we don't have to worry about the tides. The highest we might get is nineteen meters, and that would be around ten o'clock. Besides, there's a causeway and a dam that regulates the sea level."

"Aren't our friends sweet? They're giving us free passes to one of the most romantic destinations in Normandy."

"I'm not surprised if one of them snagged an entrance ticket to Mont Saint Michel," he smirked, doubtful if it was Alya or Chloe who did the negotiations. "And I bet the potluck money they're waging must be far greater than our current expenses."

"What are they betting again, Kitty? Is it about 'who will ask first'?"

"I think it's 'who will get more kisses', Buginette."

"Dream on, stupid cat." she rolled her eyes. "Though I'd rather say it's 'who will land to the hospital first'."

The boy gasped indignantly. "You're questioning my ability towards safety precautions?"

"I'm talking to an embodiment of Bad Luck here," she remarked.

"And I'm talking to an embodiment of Good Luck here." he retorted.

"Smartass. Why don't you finish your job making this motorcycle work so that we can leave this place?"

"As you wish, my Lady."

Turning the engine on again, Adrien maneuvered their vehicle easily as they fast approached Avranches.

"Uh - oh." Alix uttered when she saw the broken glass.

When Kim recklessly shoved his plate after he commenced a binge eating contest, his water glass fell and shattered on the floor.

Of course, Miss Bustier reprimanded him in public.

"Is he going to be cursed or something?" Mylene asked, referring to the destroyed item.

"It's actually the opposite," Juleka replied with a smile. "In Indian tradition, breaking a glass by accident means good omen."

Nino eyed his phone. He was tempted to send his bro a message but decided not to. Curiosity aside, he doesn't want to interrupt the two, especially if they're in a middle of something private.
"Hope Marinette and Adrien are okay."

They weren't okay.

Their motor failed them again in the middle of the road, so the two had to drag their vehicle under a street light.

Marinette didn't say anything as she observed her companion fiddling something on a small toolbox. The way his brow creased deeper with sweat dripping on his temples told her that he was getting frustrated.

Adrien's 'perfect son' image taught him how to compose himself in a stressful situation, which was carried over by his superhero self every time they encountered a difficult Akuma. She knew both sides of him, and by simply merging these personalities into one, she understood completely why he was doing such mundane things, despite their abilities to transform and travel in a faster pace using their Miraculous.

"I'm not being rude," Tikki told her. "But I don't think it's an abuse of power if you and Adrien will transform in order to arrive there on time. Same with you summoning your Lucky Charm."

Plagg has a different opinion but decided not to voice it out.

"I'm sorry." Adrien apologized with sober eyes on the engine. "I should've prepared properly. I was too lenient that I forgot to make a contingency plan. Why did I choose a motorcycle even though there's a chauffeured car available?"

"Adrien - "

"All I want is a perfect date with you." he couldn't stop his blabbers, likely due to his desire to vent out. "A - and our friends made an effort to make everything possible, but I failed them, especially you, and I - "

"Why don't you shut up for a minute, Kitty."

He did. He barely registered how near her face was and how warm her lips were when she pressed it on his.

It was chaste yet sweet.

When Marinette fluttered her eyes open, she was taken aback when she saw the tears flowing from his eyes.

She paled with mortification. "I - I'm sorry, Adrien! I didn't mean to surprise you with something unpleasant! It was uncalled for, and I should've asked permission, but - "

"Unfair." was his sniffled reply. "I want to kiss you more, but you moved away, and I can't pull you back because my hands are dirty, and I don't want to sully you, especially your clothes, because you're too pretty tonight."
She rolled her eyes. Why am I in love with this dork?

"I want to kiss you again. Can I kiss you again?"

She kissed him again.

It was longer, giving him the reins to domineer the kiss since her poor Kitty needs some solace. When she wrapped her arms around his neck to adjust their angle, he purred for approval.

He gave a dissatisfied growl when they separated.

"We're not supposed to make out outside, you know." she pointed out.

"Don't care."

She pecked him. "Happy now?"

Adrien scrunched his nose with a thought "Hmm, a few more probably, and we'll call it even."

The designer scoffed at his wolfish grin. The nerve. But before she could comply with his request again, a vehicle suddenly honked behind them.

"Please tell me it's not another crap who wants to ask for directions or someone who wants to flirt with you again." the model groaned begrudgingly.

She wanted to yell 'fuck off' on the stranger but swallowed her words after they recognized the driver.

"Care for a joyride, kids?" Master Fu asked.
"How is it going, Mister Fu?" Adrien greeted, flashing his toothy smile as he buckled the seatbelts.

"You know." the driver in floral shirt tapped the steering wheel with a bemused expression. "For someone who was born and raised in a well-endowed elite family, aren't you a bit crude?"

Marinette rolled her eyes then hand-chopped her companion's head lightly. "Bad Kitty."

Said Kitty stuck his tongue out.

After they loaded the Peugeot in the open rear of the Ford pickup, the teenagers settled themselves in the backseat while their kwamis occupied the front compartment where their treats were being handed by Wayzz.

"I believe 'Congratulations' is appropriate, given to that...obscenity I've witnessed awhile ago."

"Urk - "

"Eep - "

Fu tried not to cackle at their flustered face.

"Stop teasing them, Master." the green blob chided then bowed at the two apologetically. "Sorry about his teasing behavior, Mme Ladybug and M. Noir. Master was just happy that you two are finally together again."

"So you knew." the girl reclined her back as she gave the kwami and his Master an impassive eye. "What else would you be here?"

"Of course. I am your Teacher." Fu answered, swiveling the wheels on the other side of the road. "Besides, my vacation bliss has been ruined already. Did you remember the call you two made in Costa Rica?"

The teenagers eyed each other for a moment before her companion responded. "I somewhat recalled something about going back to Paris to visit you..."

"But your shop was empty, and there's a note stuck on the door." she supplied. "It was dubious how we were able to enter inside though."

"You showed me a hotel pamphlet." he mulled over. "I think."

The raven-haired girl tapped her chin in confusion. "I believe it's you who found it."

"Really?"

"Interesting." the elderly hummed. "So your memories overlapped with each other, eh."

"Tikki said we're not supposed to remember anything."

"Miraculous powers are not always absolute, Ladybug. Same with your Miraculous Cleanse. Same
with his Cataclysm." he adjusted the rear mirror. "Though mine was securing the Balance like the legendary turtle that carried the weight of the world, that doesn't mean I can protect everything. I'm getting old and already beyond the retirement age if you put it bluntly."

"Are you saying that we committed a blunder?"

Fu shook his head. "It's not like that, Chat Noir. There have been no records about wielders losing their Miraculous powers, but there are contributing factors as to why they failed to control it. Have you ever wondered why the Akuma became a rogue?"

The teenagers eyed each other.

"The victim has a mind of steel?"

"Strong will?"

"Not really." their Master chuckled. "The power of Miraculous relies on its bearer's compatibility. True that anybody can use it, but only a handful can amplify it to its maximum - and rare are those who have the potential to unlock its hidden abilities."

"Papillion is not a Chosen One, and will never be." he went on. "That's why he doesn't have the ability like any other Butterfly wielders had. He can send one Champion, yes, but multiple? He must divide the strength of one to several entities."

"So that means Twiddle Gain and Twiddle Doom have 50% control each?"

"Exactly."

"Is it similar to the case wherein I time traveled and fought two Akumas?" she asked again.

"Non."

Adrien didn't remember anything after he was hit by Timebreaker's powers. According to his partner, he was absorbed and his soul fueled Timebreaker's power to time-travel - though, in actuality, she just leaped to another timeline with a rewind setting, like, few seconds before Alix' watch got destroyed.

She, as Ladybug, was also transported there, only to be confronted by her own self, as Marinette, there.

Long story short; there were two Ladybugs with one swooned Chat Noir, two Timebreakers, two simultaneous Lucky Charm summons and Miraculous Cleanses, and a restored timeline.

His Ladybug returned unscathed, her civilian classmates showed up as normal, and a penalty for abandoning an errand.

When she asked Tikki about the conclusion of the second timeline, her kwami told her that the second Marinette might've arrived in the bakery to give Miss Chamak's cake on time, went back as the second Ladybug to assist her, the first Ladybug, and once the Miraculous Cleanses were triggered, all vanished beings on both timelines were restored.

Unlike their timeline, Alix' watch on the second timeline got fixed.

"If we didn't commit any mistakes then how come we retained some memories, unlike Timebreaker? And why is it I have a partial memory while the rest went to Mari's?" the blond asked.
"That, and some alterations."

A pin-drop silence hung in the air before the realization dawned them.

"The timeline." Marinette gasped then looked at her stupefied companion. "We - remember the incident at the bus stop?"

"Of course." he nodded fervently. "I - I met a couple inside the toilet in a cheap DMC cosplay, and I bumped you instead of someone who ratted me as Adrien Agreste."

"I - I saw a news about a fiasco in Gare St. Lazare, and I think our bus passed a green minivan when we're en-route to Evreux..." she trailed off. "And my parents called me. You even clued me on it!"

He pinched the bridge of his nose. "I thought it was all de ja vu."

"I even got myself late during our first assembly because I rushed to the park as Ladybug, believing that an Akuma will appear there just like in my dreams."

"Like a sixth sense, huh."

"Mon dieu. The piano man Marcelo and his brother Felix."

"JOSEPH HOWARDS!" both almost jumped on their seats as they exclaimed in unison.

"Relax, kids." Fu laughed with eyes remained on the road. "Justice has been served, don't worry, and he will stay behind bars in order to pay for his crimes."

"Bu-but how?! And w - why? Wa - what happened - "

Their questions were answered immediately after they loaded a recent news article online. Skimming the posts through their mobile apps, it was reported that DGSE busted the tycoon's smuggling activities days ago and raided one of his mansions to capture the man alive, that currently, he was facing several cases of Estafa with a court hiring for no bail.

"Rewriting history." Marinette gaped, still shell-shocked. "You have an ability to alter reality?!"

"I don't have the power to do such extent, Ladybug, but I can make things more logical," he replied solemnly. "Let me give you a clue: Joan of Arc."

The teenagers froze as they fell into a deep silence.

"Mudekudeku. Hippolyta. Hercules. Cernunnos. Tomoe." the man enumerated. "You've seen the Egyptian scrolls and the previous holders from Ancient China through the Miraculous Spellbook, right?"

The two nodded as Fu went on.

"See, nobody would believe that the Black Cat was the reason behind the Black Plague. Nobody would think that a certain Fox made an illusion in Hameln. Same with Lucky Charm summons during the siege of Orleans, or the birth of the Champions during the first Olympics. It is my task to overseer everything, to be the protector of the Balance and the wielder's guide, and not to influence the flow of time."

"What is the truth then?" Adrien asked. "What is the reason why we have some memory fragments, and why the events were altered, substituting us with other people without destroying the flow of time? If this is not a mistake on our part or a malfunction of our Miraculous, then what is this?"
"A Miracle."

It was Tikki who gave the answer as she hovered towards their view. "This is the result of combining the powers of Ladybug and Cat Miraculous, granting your innermost wishes to something unimaginable. A product that defiles logical reasoning."

"Bu-but we didn't combine them!" her charger squeaked then glanced at her perturbed partner. "We're on the verge of de-transformation. Besides, its ultimate power only works for one, not for two people!"

"I like your Chosen, Tikki." Plagg emerged with a sigh. "I really do. But boy she can really be this dense."

"Look who's the pot calling the kettle black." the red kwami retorted.

"Miraculous powers are not always absolute, Ladybug." Fu quoted her airily. "And using the ultimate power is not necessarily forbidden except for selfish needs. What happened back there was something you both did unconsciously, and as what Tikki mentioned, it granted your innermost wishes - hence, the reasons for your incomplete memories. The unwavering trust you had for each other incited it. You believed that your partner will never forget you, as so was him."

An illuminated monastery of Mont St Michel became apparent as he embarked on the causeway. Fu pulled over when they reached the parking lot, but the teenagers somehow lost their desire to get out. They were quite glued to their seats as they waited for his explanations.

"It happened once before, several centuries ago, in Ancient China under a different circumstance," he told them. "The feat that you two did was rare that even I as your Guardian finds it strange - in a good way, actually - to execute it. And I highly doubt it if your successors can replicate it. Unless..."

"Unless what, Master?"

A knowing smile formed on the elderly's face.

"Unless they were soulmates."

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After hauling the fixed Peugeot out and left the two flabbergasted teenagers at the entrance, Fu turned the ignition on and drove back to Paris.

"Hey, Wayzz?"

The green kwami perked up. "Yes, Master?"

"I can see what's happening." he hummed.

"What?"

"And they don't have a clue."
"Who?"

"They'd fall in love, but here's the bottom line." the elderly snickered. "The four squares down to two."

Wayzz couldn't help but cringe. "Urgh."

Chapter End Notes

Before you stab me with a blunt knife, let me tell you that the setting I've used on this story is the plothole in Timebreaker/Chronogirl episode. So whatever revelation that will happen in S2 onwards will obviously deviate in here.
Chapter 47

Adrien knew there was something more on the Sacred Castle by the Sea that meets the eye.

It wasn't because Mont St. Michel was acknowledged as a symbol of French national identity due to its unpenetrated fortress during wars or that it became a UNESCO World Heritage site for its medieval-aged structures and historical values.

It wasn't also because it was considered as one of the most romantic spots in France or that the island was popularly used as an inspiration in arts, novels, movies, and games.

It was because of the said holy place, which originally named as Monte Tombe, was actually a pilgrimage built by a saint who was a victim of Cataclysm.

"I can't believe that I'm currently standing on a religious land made by my predecessor's stupidity." the blond scowled at Plagg after he shared some snippets of the past. "And to think that you allowed your wielder - and I don't care if this Michael is an archangel or a poser anymore - to use his Miraculous against a human being!"

"You know that we kwamis are taking our Master's orders as absolute." the black kwami crossed his arms. "Besides, that Aubert deserved it. He was lucky he only got a hole in his skull - and he became famous because of it!"

"That was bad, Plagg. It's like premeditated murder. You shouldn't condone your Master's behavior." Marinette admonished. "I'm surprised the gods didn't smite you for hurting a bishop."

"I am a god, you self-righteous Bug. No other gods can smite me!"

"Oh yeah? Watch me." Tikki announced then hit her counterpart with her paw.

The three laughed when the kwami yowled in pains as he slipped at his charger's shirt with a growl.

The Poetic Night was a most sought activity in Abbey du Saint Michel that only occurs around July and August. It was an activity filled with aesthetic lights and live classical sounds displaying the mystical past of the monastery up to the current age.

The teenagers received an optional pass to join a tour with a guide but they decided not to since they preferred to explore and get lost in the old town.

Besides, their wanderlust attitudes would eventually kick them out from the group.

"I don't know why our friends wasted an opportunity to see these magnificent sights by themselves." the designer sighed, admiring the beautiful glass windows and puzzled mazes projected on the ancient walls. "In exchange for their ridiculous bets."

"Those greedy people. Why are we still considering them as our friends, Kitty?"

"Because despite their evil intentions, they just want us to be together," he kissed her wrinkled nose. "That's why we're going to enjoy our date to make them happy."

Her beet-red cheeks earned a mirthful laugh.

It was a bit arduous for tourists to climb multiple steps to the next chamber, but not for the part-time superheroes who reached the top casually without breaking a sweat.
They were astonished how the old bricked walls reverberated the sound of a cello as the musician played a solemn Bach piece under the dim light. The atmosphere was quite eerie in a good way and the swirls of lights in the background brought the music to life.

While admiring the animated Earth core pulsed some hot lava, an inspiration struck Marinette. It was one of those times wherein she wished she had her sketchbook with her to update her rough drafts for her next portfolio.

Then she heard a click.

"Kitty." she glared at the owner's phone camera aimed at her face. "Don't tell me you're sending that picture to Alya."

"I'm not going to tell you that I'm sending this picture to Alya."

"Adrien!"

He snorted indignantly when she crossed her arms and stomped her feet. She tried to snatch his phone but her companion used his height advantage, which frustrates her more.

"Aww, Bugaboo. You're so cute when you're so jumpy." he teased, raising the item above his head.

"Using your grabby hands at me."

She realized her efforts were futile, so she changed her strategy by tackling the blond to the ground with tickle attacks.

Tourists and patrons alike gave the two a beady stare, but they were outside the hallway anyways so their rowdy noises weren't that disturbing to other onlookers.

"Oh - hahaha - sto - stop it, Bugi - ahahahaha - okay I quit! I quit - gahahahaha - stop! Stop!"

Marinette swiped his phone hastily from his limped hands then unlocked it - how she could guess his password, Adrien got no clue - to view the image gallery.

The designer didn't expect to see a folder about her.

Her old solo pictures, stolen shots way back collège days up to their current school trip, and some amateur selfies he probably snagged from other classmates. The recent picture was taken while she was busy looking at the maze walls, with pink and blue lights illuminating half of her face, and the shadows that cast on her pale skin made her features quite prominent.

"Adrien." she breathed, unable to avert her gaze on the screen wherein a picture of her sleeping reflection from the bus windows was displayed. "These are beautiful. I love it."

"I love you."

She squeaked when he planted a kiss on her cheek as he took his phone away from her hands.

"I don't want to regret not saying those words again." the blond confessed as he hoisted her up. "I lost my chance during Dark Cupid when he struck me his arrow. Then Twiddle Doom and Twiddle Gain came that almost reset our memories. So before a similar scenario occurs again, I'm going to say it multiple times to make up those moments that I've lost."

"Your feelings are well-received." she tiptoed to peck his cheek. "And I love you too."

His flustered face almost rivaled Ladybug's red uniform.
Am I considered to be his girlfriend? the girl pondered mentally as they walked to the next display room. Or him as my boyfriend?

They sealed their relationship during Akuma's involvement, and now that they were back on their own time stream, she didn't know if they should start from the beginning or not. She wasn't sure if everything back there will be carried over to the present.

What she could tell was that despite it all, their feelings remained intact. They agreed that everything will be handled properly once they returned to Paris. But they've talked with Master Fu about their issues already, which was their first agenda, before discussing their current predicament -

"You know, my promise still stands, My Lady," Adrien muttered with sober eyes directed to the garden. "I'm going to ask your parents' approval to formally date you."

"Oh." was her reply.

"I want to show them my sincerity since they are the most important people of the person I adore most, and to earn their utmost support."

"Oh, Chaton." she sighed, cupping his face to meet the insecurities showed in his green hues. "My parents are quite fond of you, and this gesture will only double your winning favors. Not that I don't like your idea, but -"

"How can I show them that I'm serious with you?" he reasoned then motioned his hand. "Your father is big. Like, really big. And your mother - she might be small, but she can make me regret something that I've done in my childhood."

"Well, how about your father who happened to be my idol? Do you think he'll approve me?"

His expression went serious. "He will. And I assure you, once he sees your portfolio, he'll going to regret not offering you an internship in our company."

"I'm not going to date you because of my career path." she winced when she remembered his fans. "And there's this public image that you need to consider also."

"I don't care what people think." he chuckled, wrapping his hand around hers. "What matters most is you."

Marinette wondered if it was possible to fall harder on this guy more than what she felt right now.

"So, back to Paris then." she hummed.

"Yeah. Back to Paris."

"Back to Paris," she repeated then gave him a devious smirk. "But before that, we need to get back to our friends."
The lights in the quarters occupied by Parisian students were turned off for their bedtime when suddenly, all of their phones lit up.

Everyone grabbed their devices lazily and groggily as they opened the notification to see the attachments sent by Adrien. And that was how the pandemonium broke.

"From Nino, he sent 'What the fuck, dude! This is uncalled for!'" Adrien chortled while reading the messages that blasted on his screen. "Then here's from Kim 'I never peg you to be a Lady's man, but good luck not to be Marirekt later.' Max also sent a text 'This is a breach of our agreement, Agreste.' Well, I did not. Oh, and Nathanael texted me that he can finally court you - the hell I am allowing that! Chloe says she's going to fight me, and Rose sent the same thing but only because I dumped you - in which I didn't."

"Guess what Alya messaged me?" Marinette giggled as she scrolled her notifications. "'Girl, where are you?' 'Mari?' 'Marinette?' 'Don't tell me Chat Noir didn't do the end of the bargain?' 'Mon dieu, I'm going to post something on the Ladyblog that you're missing if you won't respond!' 'I'm going to skin that mangy cat alive if he kidnaps you!'"

"Excuse me, I am not mangy!"
"Yes you are, mon Minou." she ruffled his hair much to his chagrin.

They didn't expect to receive hilarious reactions when Adrien sent a Snapchat selfie together with Ladybug with a caption 'If only Marinette is here' to their classmates.

It was an innocent pose wherein both cheeks were squished together but with evident blushes. Another was a picture of Ladybug kissing a smiling Adrien on the cheek with a similar tagline, then a picture of his bare hand intertwined together with her spotted gloved fingers.

He also sent a shot to his head resting on the superheroine's shoulder and a similar angle but with her kissing his crown. There was a bird's head on their background, a featured mythical creature, indicating that the two were able to finish the Poetic Night tour.

"Shall we respond to their messages, my Lady? Because my phone won't stop buzzing for incoming texts."

"Nah, let their imaginations run wild. Besides, you're not the only one who's receiving an inconvenient amount of messages."

"But I want to clear Chat Noir's dignity! Alya threatened him to be skinned alive!"

"Since when did you have a dignity, Chaton?"
The blond gasped. "That's a slander, my Lady! Horrible! What if someone heard you?"
"Oh shut up, you." the girl chuckled until a notification caught her attention. "Oh, Chloe sent me a message. It says 'You and Chat Noir are perfect for each other since you're both losers.' Losers, my ass. Let me show you who the loser is."

After she sent a lengthy message defending her partner, her phone chimed for an incoming call.

"*Merde, Alya's calling!*" she laughed. "Do all of our classmates stay in one room? I bet they are."

"I believe so. At least Nino is only pestering me through texts," he responded. "Why don't you answer that call to humor ourselves?"

Marinette rolled her eyes before punching the key. "Hello, Alya?"

*[Where in the foutre are you, Mari?! Your beau is having a date with Ladybug!]*

"Really?" she feigned a flabbergasted expression. "I have no idea!"

Adrien snickered while covering his mouth.

*[He is now, woman. So you better hurry or else Ladrien will be going to be a thing!]*

Tell me more about it, the raven-haired girl mused.

*[And where the foutre is that phony 'Knight' in a catsuit now?! He was supposed to bring you over to Adrien, not to steal you away!]*

"What would be his gains if he abducts me?"

The blond mouthed 'A lot'.

*[C'mon, Marinette. As if you never noticed how he ogled and drooled at you like you're a canary!]*

"Such euphemism." She eyed her partner who was purring on her lap.

[Did he hurt you? Threatened you?]

"No, Alya. He didn't hurt me or threatened me." she snorted. "Chat Noir is currently...unwell."

Which was true.

They didn't expect that the monk's old refectory has a cloud of bird's feathers which happened to be a symbol of St. Michael's angelic wings.

And it was too late for the teenagers to realize how Adrien's allergies could affect his body.

Marinette was glad to find a small shop that sells medicines near the monastery. It was a bit pricey for a single tablet, but she couldn't risk Adrien to have a sneezing fit.

*[Why? Is he hurt?] Concern was laced on her best friend's tone. [Don't tell me there's an Akuma rampage in Normandy?]*

"Relax. There's no Akuma rampage, Alya." she tutted. "What Chat is having right now was caused by his own recklessness."

Well, entering a room filled with bird's feathers was considered to be a reckless behavior.

*[If that's the case, then why am I hearing some ocean waves in the background? Are you somewhere*
Damn her hearing skills. They weren't on a beach per se, but near the docks. The stone benches near the abbey walls was a perfect spot for them to rest and enjoy the sea breeze.

"Actually, we're in...we're in a..."

Before she could supply an alibi, the model swiftly grabbed the phone from her hands. "Purr-incess is kind of busy with me right meow, so call her back later. Bye~"

Then he pressed End Call.

"Chaton!"

"What?"

"Alya will skin you alive for ruining her OTP!"

The blond snorted then turned his head around to nuzzle her belly. He drew her closer when he wrapped his arms around her waist then sighed with relief when her fingers began to scratch his scalp again.

"Feeling okay now?" she asked.

He shook his head, pressing himself more against her body. "Can we stay like this forever?"

"You know that we can't." her answers earned her a pout. "We both have social obligations not only as Marinette and Adrien but also as Ladybug and Chat Noir."

"Urgh. I hate it when you're right."

Her giggles made his heart flutter. "Hey, Princess?"

"Hmm?"

"If Marinette and Adrien will start dating, does that mean Ladybug and Chat Noir will follow too?"

"It depends on the situation, Kitty," she muttered as she looked at the skies. "People are pinning us to end up together since our public debut, but we have to consider Papillion and his potential reactions once he learned the news. He can use it to his advantage to target you in order to get me and vice versa, or become his disadvantage since we're together now."

"Soulmates."

Her fourteen-year-old self might've swooned on that statement alone, but her current self had questioned its credibility. This mindset was the reason why she was believed that a perfect being like Adrien Agreste didn't deserve someone who has flaws like Marinette Dupain-Cheng.

Tikki was right - she was too harsh to be considered a realist.

Their encounters with a rouge Akuma gave her some insights and open-mindedness about relationship and life. She realized that it wasn't bad to become a romanticist, and it wasn't selfish to admit your desires.
Marinette might be destined to become Ladybug, but she had chances not to be in the past. She could have stowed the earrings away or handed it to someone else.

In the end, her convictions won over. She decided to choose her destiny to rectify her mistake.

And Adrien as her soulmate? That was the icing on the cake.

Actually, that seemed logical.

Because Ladybug and Black Cat were made for each other.

Seeing the break of dawn on the horizon, her partner sat up. "Let's go back, Marinette."

"Yeah. Let's."

Nobody noticed the teenager's arrival as they landed and de-transformed in their respective hotel rooms. Their classmates were all dozed off God knows what hype they did last night.

After changing their clothes, both took a few hours nap before they faced the interrogation. They must conserve their energy since they will be grilled mercilessly by those people who had lost the bet.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Bonjour, kids!" the tour guide greeted them as she stood beside the bus driver.

"Bonjour, Madame!"

"Did you enjoy your week-long trip to Normandy?"

"Oui!"

"That's good to hear." the tour guide chuckled. "Anybody here wants to share their learnings and experiences?"

Juleka raised her hand. "I've learned that there are lots of World War II monuments and cemeteries in Normandy that must be treated with respect."

"Thank you, Mme. Couffaine. How about you, M. Kurtzberg?"

"I've learned that Normandy is a land of art. From the Tapestry in Bayeux to the House of Monet in Giverny, this region has been an inspiration to many modern-day artists."

"I agree. Normandy was even believed to be the birthplace of Impressionism." the tour guide saw another hand. "Yes, Mme. Raincomprix?"

"Normandy has lots of beautiful beaches!"

"Yeah." Rose swooned. "Not only beautiful, but also romantic."

"You're right, Mme. Lavillant." Chloë scoffed. "I beg to differ. Papa's resort in Marseille is better!"

"Better, huh?" Alya adjusted her glasses with a smirk. "If your Papa's resort is better, then why am I seeing tans all over your body?"

All of their classmates laughed much to the blondie's disgruntlement. Nobody bats an eye when she pulled out her phone and dialed the Mayor. They were too used to her childish behavior.

"How about the food? Their pastries here are superb." Nino said. "Especially their apple pies. No one can ever beat Normandy's special apple pies."

"Not even Tom and Sabine Boulangerie Patisserie's apple pies?" Adrien inserted as he wrapped an arm around Marinette's shoulder.

The DJ scowled. "Look who's talking, Cheesy Boy."

"I'm not a Cheesy Boy!"

"Yes you are," the designer cooed as she ruffled his blond hair. "You and your cheesy pickup lines."

There was a collective 'ooh' in the background.
"But you gouda admit it." he pulled her closer to kiss her nose. "My cheese puns are grate."

She groaned with a deadpan stare. "You're incorrigible."

"You mean un-brie-lievable."

"Quit the puns, Agreste!" Kim threw a popcorn on his way while the other boys used a crumpled paper.

"Alright. That's enough for now." Miss Bustier stopped the commotion. "Now that everyone was able to learn a lot from this field trip, I expect that all of you will have your written reports ready by Monday."

There was a collective 'no way' in the background.

"And no more deadline extension."

Their cries became louder.

"Why am I going to submit a written report," Chloe lamented with crossed arms. "If there's nothing that interests me here?"

"Then why don't you try to write something extraordinary that happened on this trip, Mme. Bourgeoise." their adviser suggested.

"Extraordinary? You mean a report about what happened with these two idiots?"

All eyes fell on Adrien and Marinette.

"Urk - "

"Eeep - "

The class snickered at their beet-red faces.

Nobody knows how the two teenagers returned to their hotel without alarming the faculty and staff. They might be sound asleep to notice their arrival, but the rooms were securely locked and bolted from the inside so there's no way for them to enter without knocking the door.

Unless Ladybug and Chat Noir accompanied them and accessed the windows.

"So..." Alya drawled when she cornered her best friend back in the lobby. "How's your date with Adrien?"

Marinette tapped her chin as if contemplating "Hmm, it was...great. It went well."

"Just 'great', that's it? Can you elaborate it?"

"Well..." the designer began to twirl her thumbs. "He treated me like a princess...?"

"And?"

"We ate...an omelette?"

"An omelette?!"

Marinette's brows furrowed. "Did you know that the souffléed omelette at La Mère Poulard is one of
the well-sought food in the world?"

"I don't want the details about the food! What I want are the details of your activities!" she hissed.

"But I'm already giving you the details!"

"I want the highlights of your date!"

"Eating is one of the highlights of the date!"

Alya's patience was tested to its limits that morning not only by Marinette but also by Adrien. Every time she asked them for a direct question, they would always redirect the conversation to something else. No one, not even Nino, was able to crack the couple's mask and learn their secrets.

What frustrates her most was the fact that no one won the bet.

"Didn't I tell you that gambling is bad?" the raven-haired said as she slipped to her assigned seat.

"I don't gamble." she retorted. "I plan. And according to my plan, you and your beau were supposed to be together."

Marinette looked at the said beau then gave him a flirtatious wink. "We're still together."

"I meant last night." the brunette huffed. "If only Chat Noir didn't crash it."

"And Ladybug," Adrien added with a frown when his friends gave him an odd stare. "What? She took me for a date!"

"And you allowed her, you snowflake!"

C'mon Cesaire, how can you say 'no' to a beautiful lady like Ladybug?"

"Hmm. Fair point."

"Beautiful, huh?"

"Jealous much, Princess?" the blond reached for her hand then kissed her knuckles. "Just to let you know, you're the most beautiful lady in the world."

She pinched his cheek fondly. "Aww, you're so sweet~"

Nino yanked his ball cap then slapped it on his best friend's face, separating the two. "Enough with these flirtations, both of you. You're giving me cavities!"

Adrien and Marinette laughed as they separated and returned to their seats.

"But you know, Alya." the designer spoke as their bus began to move. "We really don't mind telling you everything if you just asked us nicely."

The brunette's eyes lit up. "Really?"

Her best friend nodded.

"You're going to tell me everything with the cherries on top, Mari?"

"I don't see why not."
Alya squealed enthusiastically. "I love you so, so much! So, how did it all begin?"

Marinette eyed her partner for a moment, and when he gave her a subtle nod, she said: "I'm going to tell you a story about our miraculous adventure."

- FIN -

Chapter End Notes

Salut, Je m'appelle Chimpukampu.

I would like to thank everyone for all the support, comments, likes and kudos! Without you guys, I don't think I'll be motivated enough to continue this story - or even write this story.

For those who are wondering, I wrote this fanfic during S1. That time, the latest episode that was released was Timebreaker (hence, the main focus of the plot). Others mentioned that the story was similar to Code Lyoko, and I can't really say that because I haven't watched Code Lyoko yet. The nearest inspiration so far that I could think of while writing this fanfic is 'Utsuro no Hako to Zero no Maria', especially its first volume. It's a light novel by the way.

Apologies if I published the chapters initially with lots of auto-corrects and grammar errors. English being my third language is not the best excuse, I know, but sometimes when you're too tired to proofread you just post it and just let the readers point out the errors through comments then fix it the next day. I'm just new to this fandom, and to be honest I don't have close online friends who can beta my work.

Now that my current job was cutting me some slacks, I'll be able to update my other works and publish newer ones - especially that we have S2 eps on air.

I have a Tumblr account under similar username (chimpukampu.tumblr.com) for those who want to add me.

End Notes

This is a cross-post from FF and Wattpad:
https://www.fanfiction.net/s/11843073/1/Miraculous-Adventure
and
https://www.wattpad.com/story/66920081-miraculous-adventure-a-miraculous-ladybug-fanfic
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