Chat's Out of the Bag

by IntrovertedJo

Summary

After an Akuma reveals the true identity of Chat Noir to Paris, Adrien now must deal with the ramifications.
What will his friends think?
What will his Lady think?
What will his father do?
Hello everyone, this is my first Miraculous Fan Fiction so I hope you guys like it.

Thank you for reading

~Jo
Chapter 1

It was just another day in Paris. The sky was blue, the city was quiet, and there seemed to be another poor soul seeking revenge with gifted superpowers.

Yeah, this was pretty normal around here.

Lady Fisher, the newest victim of Hawkmoth’s control, was a woman who had been catfished by some co-workers who wanted to gather embarrassing details of her life for a laugh. Now, with her new found ability, she was wreaking havoc for the citizens, catching them with her fishing net and revealing them as "who they really were" as she put it.

Ladybug and Chat Noir were at the scene in only a few minutes, quickly surveying the situation from the safety of a rooftop. "What do you think could of have her reeling like this?" Chat asked his lady, who ignored his pun and just shook her head, "Whatever it was, we need to made sure we don't get caught in that net." As she spoke, another Parisian was unveiled by the net, causing them to change from his business attire to something akin to someone who hadn't left their room in weeks.

"Yeah, I've kind of grown attached to this look." Chat quipped. He wanted to add "Don't you think it suits me?", but decided against it. Ladybug had made her desire to keep their relationship platonic clear, and he promised to try his best, even if it meant not saying what he really felt. Or missing out on some amazing punchlines.

"We have to get closer." Ladybug said, readying her yo-yo and swinging herself to a valance and rolling off of it onto the ground with ease and grace. Chat stopped his staring and extended his staff, twirling down it like a fireman’s pole to the street below.

The two of them approached Lady Fisher from behind and, after a quick nod to each other, started to engage in combat. The two worked in tandem, combining their tactics together to keep the super-villain on her toes.

Eventually, the super duo managed to get the net out of her hands, allowing it to slide across the pavement. Both Ladybug and Lady Fisher ran for it, but Fisher reached it just seconds before Ladybug. She grabbed it and raised it over the spotted heroine. "Let's see who you really are, Ladybug." Fisher threatened. Ladybug tried to step back, but she was cornered between two buildings. She protected her face with her arms and braced for what seemed inevitable.

That was until she felt someone push her out of the way while getting themselves caught in the process.

Chat.

He knew that the net would not hurt Ladybug, as the others that had fallen under it had seemed unfazed, though wildly confused at their change of appearance. But it would do the second worst thing she could imagine; reveal her civilian form. Her identity was so precious to her that she kept it hidden from everyone, even her own partner. He wouldn't let that privacy be stolen away from her. Not if he could protect her.

He was right about the net not hurting. It didn't feel like anything at all and, when it was raised back over his head, he wondered if Fisher's net even worked on him, but when his lady looked at him from her place on the street, a look that bordered between shock and worry on her face, he knew it must have worked.
"A-Adrien? Adrien Agreste?" she questioned, her surprise evident on every feature. He had imagined many times about how he would reveal his identity to his love, how she would react to him. Being revealed by being caught in a fishing net was not one of those situations. He tried to make the best of it, "Surprised, Milady?"

Ladybug stuttered a little more, but before she could say anything fully, Lady Fisher gave a laugh. "The great Chat Noir reduced to nothing but a schoolboy in a costume, trying to play hero." Adrien frowned but kept his gaze on the Akuma, ready to strike.

Fisher went to make her next move, but suddenly stopped and a purple mask covered her face; Hawkmoth was giving her new instructions.

This worried Adrien. Hawkmoth was a simple man; fight the duo, get the Miraculous, rule the world or whatever villains wanted nowadays. What could he possibly want differently now?

"Adrien," he heard Ladybug stage-whisper, as to not catch Fisher (or Hawkmoth's) attention, "You need to get out of here." "I'm not leaving you here to fight him on your own." he told her, staying firmly in his place. "But, you're not Chat Noir anymore." She told him, "I can't risk you-a civilian getting hurt."

"But, my lady-"

"Go." She directed him, pushing him with one arm towards an alleyway, and readying her yo-yo in the other. He stumbled into a run, doing as Ladybug instructed. Perhaps she had a plan? He could hear Ladybug taunting Lady Fisher from behind him, telling something along the lines of her being a fish out of water. Under normal circumstances, he would smile at how his humor was starting to rub off on his partner, but now they had bigger fish to fry.

Fighting the urge to turn back and assist Ladybug, Adrien turned the corner into an alleyway and slumped to the ground. He turned his head to get a glimpse of what was happening. Lady Fisher took chase after Ladybug, who was swinging through the air, trying to move frequently enough to not get trapped. She couldn't hold on like that alone for long. He had to help her.

"Plagg, what's happening?" he asked, but his kwami didn't give any reply. He looked around, in his pockets, and even glanced back at when he had transformed. Plagg was nowhere to be seen. What came as a secondary shock was when Adrien looked at his miraculous. Instead of it being its usual, subtle silver band, it looked black with a green paw print, just as it was when he was suited up and bonded with Plagg to become Chat Noir.

It was like he was suited up, but instead looked like himself, well his civilian-self. He thought back to exactly what Fisher had said about her powers.

She took away the deceitful appearance and showed what they really looked like.

"Sure, I'm Adrien, but I'm just as much Chat Noir." He said though he wasn't sure if he was to think his situation aloud or merely to reassure himself of that fact. To tell himself he wasn't just some schoolboy playing dress-up; that he was part of the best superhero duo Paris has ever seen. Not even stripping him of his anonymity could change that.

But, what exactly did that mean if he wanted to help out Ladybug? Since the transformation, he had lost his staff, and since he no longer had cat ears, he figured he didn't have his cat-like powers either. Was he really just reduced to Adrien?

"Lucky Charm!" he heard Ladybug yell, and he looked over to see the item in question. It looked like a long cylinder. A staff? Could it be that the lucky charm was meant for him?
Ladybug may have thought the same way, because she looked back towards the alleyway, catching his eyes before going back to protecting herself from Lady Fisher. He took that as enough of a confirmation to get back in there. He had helped Ladybug as Adrien before, and he could do it again. As he dashed towards Lady Fisher, he kept telling himself, "I am Chat Noir. I don't need a mask to prove that."

When he was close enough, he called to Ladybug to toss him the staff. She did so, and he caught it with a less ease than he would have if he was suited up.

"Hey Fisher. I'm usually a pacifist, but I can't let you hurt my lady over there."

He used his staff to trip the woman, causing her to fall on her back. "You mean you could have done that forever ago and we would have been done?" Ladybug asked, finally saying a sentence without oddly tripping over it. "I honestly didn't think it would be that easy." He replied teasingly, before Lady Fisher made her way back up, backhanding Adrien's spotted staff out of his hand. She took a step towards him as he took a step backward, trying to keep some space. Then, Lady Fisher stopped suddenly and turned her attention back to Ladybug. That was odd. Perhaps Hawkmoth thought transforming him rendered the miraculous null? Perhaps it did.

With Lady Fisher's attention off him, Adrien dive-rolled towards Lady Fisher's net. He looked back up towards the enemy, just as Ladybug used her yo-yo to tie up her up and render her immobile. "Excellent work, my lady." He said with a bow, net still in hand, "I would say this battle went swimmingly." She gave a giggle, effectively stunning him for a moment.

Ladybug gave a giggle to his pun. A cute little giggle that made his heart skip a beat. She had never laughed at his jokes before, at least, not the stupid ones. (Which was most of them, though he wouldn't admit that).

Speaking of stupid; "Let me try something before we fix everything..." When Ladybug didn't object, he called out, "Cataclysm!"

He looked at his right hand, expecting it to not work, but instead, it glowed with the black energy that always accompanied his special move. He looked up at Ladybug, who had a look that probably mirrored his own surprise that his dumb plan actually worked. "I guess I can still be handy when I need to be." he smirked, releasing the energy onto the net, causing it to disintegrate and releasing a black and purple butterfly.

Ladybug released Lady Fisher and captured the Akuma, effectively purified it and releasing it back into the skies of Paris. Chat walked over to her and handed the staff back, "This staff is nice and all, but I'd rather have my own back, thanks." She gave a smile, and threw it up in the air with a "Miraculous Ladybug!"

The red magic flooded the streets, returning people back to their preferred appearance. When it surrounded Chat, he looked down at his leather-like suit and twitched his cat-like ears. He was back.

"Nice to be back in the old Chat suit." He commented, before looking back at Ladybug, who was now watching him with a puzzled expression.

At that moment, while Paris was in peace again, it truly dawned on him what had happened under that net. His partner now knew who he was, that he was Adrien Agreste, and was just trying to match the pieces in her brain. Probably, trying to match the face of the model on the body of a pun-spewing black cat.

"So..." he started, but the rest of the sentence was lost to him. What was he supposed to say? What
was going through her mind? The only emotions he could read were confusion and a small dash of panic. The confusion was expected, but the panic had him worried. Was the idea that he was Adrien that worrisome for her?

Ladybug seemed to also lack the words to speak, only really repeating his sentence starter, "So..." Finally adding, "...you-you're really Adrien Agreste, aren't you?" Her words came out both hurried and stunted, the surprise clearly showing in every syllable. "The one and only." He replied, adding a bow and trying to shoot her his trademark smile, if not to comfort her nerves, to comfort his own. It was a weird feeling having a mask on but having someone address him by his real name. Especially since that person was his lady.

Suddenly, her earrings gave a warning beep, warning her that her identity was still at risk. "I-I have to go." She said, using her yo-yo out and pulling herself away, without another word.

He took a deep breath and exhaled; that wouldn't be an issue for him anymore.

When Adrien made it home, he changed back and was relieved to see Plagg again.

"Hey Adrien. Where the camembert? I'm starving."

Well, partly.

He handed his kwami a piece of his preferred stinking cheese, which Plagg took greedily, before Adrien collapsed on his bed, looking up at the ceiling of his room and processing what had happened.

Ladybug knew his face, his name. What would that mean for them? Their teamwork? Their lives, if they intertwined at all? Did she know him in her personal life or did she just know him from his pictures all over the city? Even with his mask removed, he still was no closer to knowing who his lovely lady was.

"You know, you need to be more careful with what you do to protect Ladybug." Plagg told him, though it seemed oddly casual between bites. He would have assumed that he would be scolded for revealing himself, but then again, he was never told he couldn't tell his partner who he was. Or maybe Plagg just didn't care. Either way, it didn't seem to matter at this point anyway.

Suddenly, Adrien heard a reporter on his TV. Right, he was watching TV when word of Lady Fisher got out and he left to the scene without shutting it off. He went to turn the device off when he heard "... discovered Chat Noir's real identity."

Oh no.

He hurried to the couch and sat down, watching the report rollout.

"It seems like one half of the superhero duo, maybe none other than Adrien Agreste, teen model and son of Gabriel Agreste, designer and owner of Agreste Fashion. This footage was recorded at the scene..."

The footage in question was the moment he had pushed Ladybug out of the way of Fisher's net. In goes Chat Noir, out pops Adrien Agreste.

Adrien shifted nervously in his seat. He didn't see any reporters at the scene, but he should have known they were there. Heck, the footage was probably Alya's since she always seemed to be able to get the best footage. A knot of anxiety formed in his stomach; his friends, they now knew
who he was. And since this being broadcasted, it was only a matter of time until his father found out. The knot got bigger.

His father. He may have been out of the city for business, but that was bound to change when he heard. Adrien knew just how his father would react. He would be just as cold and closed off as always, yet raise his voice, scolding him for taking risks and saving people instead of doing his studies (or whatever activity his father put above saving the city). He would pull him from school and take away his friends, the first friends he had ever really had. He would be trapped in his room again, unable to be himself, unable to breathe.

He didn't realize he was slowing curling into a ball until Plagg snapped him out of it; "Hey Kid. Relax."

Relax? How was he supposed to relax? He was just getting a taste of what normality and freedom felt like, and now it was going to be stolen away from him. "Plagg, what am I going to do?" The little kwami shrugged, "Have some Camembert?" Adrien signed; he should have known that Plagg would be of no real help.

He jumped at the sound of his phone ringing. He pulled out the device and braved himself to speak to his father, but physically relaxed when he saw that it was Nino. He must have seen the news. Well, at least, it wasn't his father. Adrien answered the phone as casually as he could, "Hello?" "Adrien. Is it true? Are you really Chat Noir?" Nino's voice was three times louder and twice as concerned than usual. He bit his lip; maybe he could play it off? "Whoa, Nino. Calm down, what's going on?"

Nino took a breath before restarting; "Alya was doing her normal thing. You know, following leads on Akuma attacks for footage of Ladybug and Chat Noir for her blog. Well, she saw Chat Noir get trapped in the Akuma's net and when it was picked up, Chat was you. Or well, looked like you. I guess, if you don't know what I'm talking about, then it wasn't you and it was just an allusion or trick of the light or something…” He trailed off, his voice still filled with concern. It made Adrien's heart ache to have someone care that much, or at least showed that they cared. He couldn't lie to Nino, not to his best friend.

"Well, actually Nino…” he started, but didn't know how to finish. 'I really am Chat Noir, one half of Paris' unstoppable superhero duo' seemed too casual to follow up Nino's concern. Yet, he also didn't want to escalate anything either.

"Nah, man. I'm sorry for calling so panicked." Nino said, cutting off Adrien's thoughts, "I was just concerned. I mean, you're my best friend and if you were putting yourself in harm's way… I don't know." The ache gripped at Adrien again; he had to be honest.

"Nino, I am Chat Noir."

He said it fast so he couldn't change his mind, and at first, he wondered if Nino even understood him, but after a couple seconds of silence, a soft chuckle was heard; "You know… That makes your disappearances make more sense, and the times you didn't answer your phone." Another sigh, "It's scary, you know. Some of those akumas are no joke and you and LB take them on every other day. I know that it's part of the superhero thing, and that super noble and all, but…”

Adrien could tell where this was going. "I'm careful, Nino. Ladybug and I have each other's backs. Everything is totally fine."

"But, what if it isn't." Nino replied, the care strengthening in his voice, "What if you get hurt? What if your seat is empty at school because something bad happened to you? What if…” Nino stopped himself from continuing, but Adrien knew what his next point was meant to be.
"Look, I only care because you're my best friend, Adrien. You're the best friend I've had in a long
time. I just don't want you to get hurt."

"I won't." Adrien reassured, but his own voice failed him at the end. It was a promise all heroes
make, but can never keep. He tried to lighten it up a bit, "The suit is mostly indestructible, and I
am one of Paris' greatest heroes so you can't get rid of me that easily." Part of his response
sounded more like Chat Noir than Adrien, but he needed to channel more Chat in this. He needed
to act more confident than he really felt.

It paid off when Nino gave a chuckle on the other end, "Yeah, you're right. You've been saving
Paris for about as long as I've known you, and you've been fine so far."

There was another bout of silence, both boys unsure how to continue the conversation.

"Oh, just so you know, Alya is going to call you demanding an interview as soon as she gets off
the phone with Marinette."

"Marinette?" Adrien asked, and Nino made a humming sound; "I guess Alya needed to vent her
frustration to someone. I mean, reporting everything Ladybug and Chat Noir related is her life,
and she's kicking herself for not realizing that Chat Noir has been sitting in front of her every day
in class." He gave a short chuckle, "Well, at least you aren't Ladybug or she would have called
you before I could." Adrien did his best to chuckle back, but the knot in his stomach lingered.

"Yeah, I'll do what I can." Adrien told him, revealing a little too much of his own uncertainty of
how much freedom he could have left when his father inevitably reached out to him about his
secret double life.

Nino gasped, and Adrien thought he had caught the emotions he was trying to hide, but then,
when Nino chuckled, he knew it had to be something else; "Oh my gosh, I just realized that I
made you had to fight me on your birthday because I got akumatized because your dad wouldn't
let you have a party."

Adrien gave a chuckle at his best friend's expense; "Yeah, that was a turn of events that I couldn't
have seen coming. Though, despite the akuma part, I really did appreciate the thought."
"Anything for my best bro." Nino replied, paused a bit, and then continued more timidly,
"Though, speaking of your dad, what did he say? You know, when he found out that you're Chat
Noir." Adrien gave a shrug that his friend couldn't see; "I don't know. I haven't heard from him
yet. Though I'm not sure how long it will be until he says something."

The silence returned.

"Well, maybe he will understand that it was for the good of Paris. That perhaps missing things
here and there are for the best because, you know, you're saving the city and everything."

Yeah, like saving the city was something his dad would find as a proper excuse.

Despite his own thoughts on his father's reaction, Adrien thanked Nino for his support and
concern. "It's no big deal, Adrien." Nino replied, "and if you ever need anything, just let me know
and I'll make it happen." Adrien smiled, "Thanks, Nino."

"I'll see you tomorrow, Dude."

If he went to school tomorrow…

He hung up and tossed the phone aside. He ran a hand through his hair and let a sigh pass through
his lips. Plagg lingered nearby, his face starting to show concern with the situation his holder was dealing with. "So, what are you going to do, Kid?"

Adrien stood up and walked towards the window, looking out over the city streets. The sun was just starting to set, causing the sky to be tinted with purples and pinks. "Well, if this is the last day I have before my life changes," he said, looking out over the city he loved, "I might as well make the most of it."
Marinette stood on her balcony, watching the moon rise as her best friend spoke hurriedly over the phone. She should have known that Alya would have been there, streaming everything onto the Ladyblog. She always was. And as surprised as Alya was by the reveal of Chat Noir’s real identity, Marinette’s confusion was at least doubled.

Alya had only worked with Chat Noir once, but Ladybug worked with him every day, and knowing that the person under that cocky, flirtatious, spontaneous catsuit was the reserved, love of her life was a little hard to swallow. Not to mention the fact that it had been Adrien flirting with her relentlessly for so long, and she told him there was someone else. Which was **himself**.

It was a mess in her head that would take days to unravel.


"That's crazy…” Marinette said, stating the understatement of the century. She had been working alongside her crush all this time. She had kissed him to bring him back to his senses. She had kissed Adrien!

Her face warmed up, as Alya continued to ramble; "Tell me about it; I almost dropped my phone when I saw it! I've been so close to him this whole time. I wonder if he knows who Ladybug is? Could it be that she's been that close to me too? Gosh, I'm a failure of a reporter.” Marinette chuckled lightly, "Don't be so hard on yourself. None of us could have guessed it."

"But, I guessed it!” an annoyed wail came from the other end, "I have a picture on my phone with Adrien in Chat's suit, and commented how similar they looked! I can't believe this. I must be the blindest reporter to ever exist."

"Maybe the suits are magic and help disguise the wearer." Marinette suggested, trying to comfort her friend (and excuse her own blindness), "And hey, at least, you know where to go if you need something for the Ladyblog."

"That's true… I'll have to ask him the suit thing when we talk again. Speaking of, I should go and ask him for an exclusive interview.” "Please don't rough on him, Alya.” She told her, but Alya had already said hurried goodbyes and hung up.

Marinette sighed and looked at her kwami, who had been floating nearby during the call; "I can't believe it, Tikki. The same boy that I've been admiring all this time is the partner I fight akumas..."
"Is that such a bad thing, Marinette?" Tikki asked, and she shook her head, "No, it's not bad. Just confusing..."

She looked out over the cityscape. It was darker now with the street lights being the main source of light for the random Parisians that were making their ways home for the night. The air was nice and warm, though storm clouds were in the distance. But, for now, it was the perfect weather for thinking through her rather complicated situation.

Suddenly, the red kwami flew down into Marinette's open trapdoor into her room, meaning that someone was approaching. From the outside. Marinette surveyed her surroundings, before spotting the silhouette of someone on her roof. Chat-er-Adrien?

Marinette shook her head perplexed and the silhouette came closer, revealing themselves to be the same masked hero she had just been thinking of. It was weird seeing him after knowing who was under the costume.

"Hey, Princess." he greeted, moving on all fours across the railing as he often did when he visited. "C-Chat Noir..." she said, finding that to be the easier of the names to use with his current appearance, "W-what are you doing here?"

He stopped and balanced himself in a sitting position. "You don't have to humor me; I know you know who I am under the mask." He said, his face looking bare without the usual smirk that rested under the mask, "And, as for why I'm here, I was patrolling the area and thought I should stop by. Come say hi. Maybe we could talk." "Talk?" she asked, quizzically and he nodded, "I mean, my identity has been revealed thanks to that Akuma earlier, and I know Alya had to have mentioned it to you so... I figured that you may have questions for me or... I don't know..."

She shifted herself slightly so she could stand closer to Chat. She could tell by his tone that 'patrolling nearby' wasn't his only reason for stopping in. Sure, she didn't know her partner's real identity until that afternoon, but working so closely with someone allowed her to know most everything else about him.

"What's wrong, Kitty?" she asked, the pet name slipping out before she gave it more thought, causing her to blush in the dark. Lucky for her, he was still looking over the city; "Nothing. I'm just... Getting used to the idea of people knowing, I guess..." He looked down at her, "I guess, I thought being here could make that transition a little easier to swallow."

"Here?" Marinette echoed, and he nodded, "You're the only person that knows me both inside this suit and out. You know in your head that I'm Adrien, but your eyes still see Chat Noir." He smiled wistfully, "That's why you still call me, Kitty or Chat. It's a reflex." He looked back at the view around them, "I guess, I wanted to feel like just Chat Noir for just a little longer."

Marinette looked at him in silence; she never really had time through her own processing of the event to give a lot of thought to just how much this reveal must have been for him. It wasn't revealed on his own terms, to just the people he trusted. Everyone in the city now knew who was under that mask. Chat Noir would now be synonymous with Adrien Agreste. And, all because he had saved Ladybug of that fate.

"But, if that's too much to ask for," Chat said, cutting off her thought, "I can just leave you to process everything."

He turned to leave but Marinette instinctively grabbed his tail, keeping him in his place, "No, stay. Stay as long as you need to."
He rocked back on his heels and looked over his shoulder at the girl; "See, that's what I mean about reflex."

She noticed what she had done and pulled her hand back, but Chat was quicker. He spun and grabbed her hand in his, and gave it a kiss like he often did. Marinette blushed, causing him to give a smile dripping with bittersweet nostalgia. "It was too much to hope for, wasn't it? That I could come here, call you Princess, and we just pretend that you don't sit behind me every day in school." He let go of her hand and sat back down on the railing, looking out once again.

She gave a sigh at the same time as he. She was trying her best, but he was right. It wasn't the same. This wasn't her pretending to not be his partner; this was pretending that he wasn't her partner and the boy she had fallen for. The casual flirting and banter were different because she actually knew who was saying it. However, she was proud of how composed she acted. At least, she wasn't tripping over her every word like usual. Perhaps, he was right about the mask helping a bit.

"Why, me?" Marinette asked, causing her masked friend to look at her, "Pardon?"

"You said that I'm the only person that knows you with and without the mask. How come?" she asked, quickly adding, "I don't mean that you planned that or anything. It's just an odd bout of chance, isn't it?" So much for not tripping over her words.

He chuckled again, though this time she thought it may have had something to do with her stumbling over her phrasing, and looked away; "That's the overall question, isn't it? If I have all of Paris as my playground, and a mask to keep my identity hidden, why spend my time with a girl I could just as easily see without my mask. Why befriend you as Chat Noir when you were already one of my closest friends?" He gave her a sideways glance, "The first few times I came to your rescue were by chance of course, but I kept coming back because honestly I just like being here with you. You have always treated me, Chat Noir, like a person. Not like a hero, not like a celebrity. You've always seen me as another human being. Plus, it was nice to be able to talk to you without all the stumbling." He gave her a playful wink, and the girl blushed, though she wondered if she would have regardless of her new knowledge.

He held her, Marinette, in such a high regard that he chose to spend time with her between his patrols. It made her heart swell, but she tried to hide it. Now was not the time to confess her long-lasting feelings. He had so many things going on in his mind already. "You're one of my best friends too, Chat Noir." she told him, causing him to smile. "You can call me Adrien if you want to get used to that." "Okay, Adrien…" she replied, trying to match the name with the suit.

To her surprise, it wasn't as hard to do as she had first thought. There were differences between the two identities to be sure, but they both had similarities that were hard to ignore. Loyalty to those closest to him being the most obvious. The kindness in his eyes was next. Not to mention the physical resemblances. She had zeroed into Adrien so much, that she ignored all the clues that he was Chat Noir. She really had been blind.

There was a moment of comfortable silence between the pair as they looked back over the city. Until the first few drops of rain started to fall around them. "I should go." the boy said, turning and leaping onto the roof, facing her. He took her hand and gave a bow, kissing it in a way similar to the first day they had met like this when he protected her from Evillustrator. Unlike then, his cat-like eyes weren't filled with their usual flirty playfulness; they were dulled due to heavy thoughts weighing hard in his mind. Something was wrong.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked, as he released her hand and stood up so their eyes were almost level for the first time since he had arrived. He ran a hand through his hair, and tried to hide the dullness with a smile; "Nothing you should worry yourself with, Princess. I'll see you
soon."

He turned away from her and readied himself to leave, but Marinette couldn't bear to see him leave like that. "Adrien, wait."

The sound of his proper name caused him to stop and glance back at her. "You know, you can tell me anything. Like you said, I know both Chat and Adrien. I know something is upsetting you. Please let me help." He gave a short chuckle, but it wasn't from amusement; "There isn't anything to help."

She thought he would leave, but instead, he just stood there as the rain began to fall faster onto them.

They stood in silence, until Adrien abruptly said, "Have you ever wanted something so badly that you could taste it? And, when you finally had it, you couldn't help but enjoy every second of it?"

She hadn't experienced it first-hand, but she could gather what that must be like. Pounding heart, adrenaline racing through your veins, a smile that you couldn't remove no matter how hard you try.

"But," he continued, his back still to her, "you know that it's about to be taken away from you again; you just don't know when. So, there's this panicking ache in the pit of your stomach as you try to grab every moment before they are stolen away?"

That's when he turned to her, his cat-like eyes looking like his suit, damp and getting wetter by the second; "That's how I feel right now."

"Oh, Chat..." she said, "Everything will be okay."

He didn't say anything. He merely bit his lip and shook his head. Marinette looked at him, wondering what had gotten him so upset? Had Master Fu demanded his miraculous back? Or was he talking about something else entirely?

In all the time Marinette had known Adrien, or Chat Noir, she had never seen either of his sides this emotionally vulnerable. He was usually either reserved and kind, or flirtatious and carefree. The only time she had seen him upset was after Ladybug told him that she only saw Chat Noir as a friend. But, even that didn't include dampened eyes and a look of hopelessness. It made her heart sink to see him that upset.

In two steps and without a single thought, she wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him into a comforting hug. She hoped he wouldn't feel her increased heart rate as she held him. Her feelings meant nothing right now. This was a friend comforting a friend who was scared of something, who was near tears. She couldn't let him suffer like that alone, no matter what name he went by.

Adrien stood there for a couple seconds, obviously stunned by her quick response, but he soon wrapped his arms around her shoulders, burying his face in her neck. The rain continued to pour on the duo, but neither of them wanted to move.

For Marinette, this was comfortable, natural almost, but for him, it felt like home should. Warm, safe, loving.

That's when he started to lose control, the tears falling down his face into Marinette's hair. He couldn't help it; he was so scared of losing this. Losing the ability to visit his friends, to go to school, to have the freedom to do whatever he wanted to do and not what his father said he must.
Marinette didn't know any of this, however; she just held him as he cried for reasons unknown to her, the sounds of such an optimistic person breaking apart filled her ears and broke her own heart.

The rain shot down on them, soaking them from head to toe. They pulled each other closer for both comfort and warmth until the sound of thunder was heard in the distance. Marinette could hear sniffs, as Adrien's tried to gather his composure once again. When he pulled away, even the fast drops of rain dripping from his long blond hair couldn't hide the tear trails that rested where his mask stopped. His eyes were still green but had minor tint of red that she only noticed because they were standing so close together.

They just looked at each other, arms still wrapped around until the second thunder sounded, this time louder than before.

"M-maybe, we should go inside." Marinette suggested, become more in tune with their situation and looking towards the sound of thunder (and away from Adrien's eyes), "We- you can figure out what you want to do after the storm passes."

She looked back at Chat, who gave her a small smile despite the tears that were still surrounding his eyes; "I think that would be wise."

Even though neither of them wanted to be the first to let go, Marinette eventually slipped her arms off, remembering that she had to somehow alert Tikki to stay hidden. Adrien had enough going on in his mind; he didn't need to know about her secret too.

She motioned with her head towards the skylight. "Come on. That storm sounds close." As if to emphasize Marinette's point, the thunder rumbled again.

"Alright, lead the way."

Marinette turned to the already open skylight, cursing herself for not paying more attention to the weather, and slipped onto her bed below, her eyes looking for the red kwami. She couldn't see her so she decided saying something out loud would have to be enough to warn her. As Chat Noir slipped in behind her, closing the latch to prevent any more rain to fall onto the damp bed they were on, Marinette started down the steps; "You can sit over there if you'd like." she said, gesturing to the chaise.

When she reached the floor, she did a quick scan of her room, making sure that the coast was clear.

"Just make yourself comfortable. I'll be right back."

She made her way to the main floor and saw her parents, Tom was sitting on the couch watching a repeat of the news footage, while her mother was cooking dinner. She tried to sneak around them to get the supplies she wanted, but that was thrown out the window when she reached the floor, and they both looked at her.

"Hey, Mari. Have you seen this?" her father asked, gesturing to the tv, "They've discovered the identity of Chat Noir." "Poor kid." Her mother mused, and Marinette sighed her agreement.

As the reported continued with the name of the unmasked cat, she saw her father perk a little, "Wait a minute, isn't that the boy that you-"

"Papa…" she said quickly, trying to silence him.

Her trap door was still open, and, even without Chat's keen hearing, she was sure Adrien could be listening if he really wanted to be. That's when Sabrine noticed how soaked her daughter was.
"Honey, what happened to you?"

"Oh, I-uh- was on the roof, and-um- got stuck in the rain." Marinette tried to explain, leaving out the part about the boy who sat in her room. "Ah, well you should get a towel and some dry clothes before dinner." Her mother said, turning back to her work. "I was about to do that," she said quickly, but when she turned her back, Tom added, "Ask if he wants to stay for dinner."

Marinette froze in place; "W-Who?" "Adrien. That's who's upstairs, right?" Marinette discovered that Chat wasn't the only one with good hearing. She blushed, and words started to spill out of her mouth; "It's not what you think. He just came over to talk and then it started to rain and-" "Just go get him, Mari." Her mother prompted, kindly, "That poor boy has gone through a lot today and probably would like something to eat."

Marinette sheepishly did as she was told.

Chapter End Notes

My Marichat Shipper feels while writing this were going crazy...

Thank you so much for reading this chapter. If you have any questions or predictions, just comment them to me.

I love you all

~Jo
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Dinner with the Dupain-Chengs and some Family angst.
Oh and Adrienette, but no one cares about that ;)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Adrien sat criss-cross on Marinette's chaise, detransformed, and staring at the hands in his lap. He could hear Marinette talking with her parents, but didn't focus on the words. His thoughts were far louder.

He shouldn't have lost composure like that. He should have been strong enough to say goodbye and fall apart at home in his room, curled in his bed; just like he had done more times than he wanted to admit.

But, Marinette had looked at him with such concern for him and his wellbeing, and he was quickly becoming more aware of his weakness around people that weren't afraid to show emotions like that. They seemed to help with the ache he had felt since his mother had disappeared, though he couldn't identify what the ache was to begin with.

Loneliness?

A need for the affection he never got from his father?

A combination of both?

Whatever it was, the second he was enveloped in that hug, something so warm and inviting, he felt safe enough to let himself go. Thankfully, she didn't seem to mind.

"Adrien, I'm hungry!" Plagg complained, much louder than Adrien liked, and he shushed him. "Do you want everyone to know you're here?" "It doesn't matter if they give me food." Plagg replied though Adrien knew that wasn't really the case. Or at least, he figured as much when Plagg flew into his jacket as Marinette came back up her stairs. She didn't start speaking at first, and he noticed her face was a little redder than it was before.

"Um, Adrien." She started, making just as much eye contact with the floor than with him, "My -um- parents -um- wanted to know if you wanted to stay for -uh- dinner…” Under normal circumstances, he found her stammering charming or -dare he say it- sort of cute, but it was why she was stammering that caused him to find nervousness in his own voice; "They know I'm here…” "Yeah, they must have heard me talking to you before I came downstairs…” she replied, continuing to split her eye contact between him and the floor. He could hear Plagg's chuckle in his inside pocket.

"Am I- I mean, are they-"

"No. They aren't upset or anything." Marinette quickly told him, causing him to relax some. "Well, if I'm not intruding…” "No, you wouldn't be intruding." She assured him, causing a little
smile to curl the corner of his lip, "I'd love to stay for dinner. It's not like I had other plans at the moment."

The thunder boomed, almost like it was right outside, signaling that he made the wise call. He may have been a little reckless at times, but he wasn't stupid enough to run around outside with a metal pole in a thunderstorm.

Marinette looked at him, something in her blue irises that reminded him of his lady's. He didn't have more time to think of that, when she spoke; "Oh, I'm glad. I mean- they'll be glad. I mean-" She simply shook her head, a mild look of frustration on her face, and he couldn't help his smile.

Okay, yeah; the stutter was cute.

Wait, what?

"Thank you, Marinette." He told her, trying to ease the conversation away from whatever was making her stammer, for both their sakes. Marinette shifted from side to side; "It wasn't me. My mom just wanted to make sure that you had eaten and-" "That's not what I meant." He told her, walking over while trying to find the words to express his gratitude to the bluenette. How could he express to her how much her kindness meant to him?

She seemed to understand him without the need of words, though. "It's fine, Adrien. Chat-er- you have saved my life more times than I'd like to admit…"

He knit his brows together; he didn't really remember protecting her more than a handful of times. Maybe, she was counting all the times she's almost fallen down the stairs…

"Anyway," she continued, causing his eyes to meet hers, "being here for you when you needed me more is the least I could do for you -er, I mean, the hero of Paris." He could feel his cheeks warm up, and this time he didn't have a mask to hide behind. He rubbed the back of his neck; "Well, I have a great partner that always has my back, so, I really can't take all the credit."

There was a moment of silence, and he could swear that Marinette was just as red then as she was when she came upstairs. Was she feeling well?

Before he had a chance to ask, she met his eyes and spoke in a way that scared away the silence; "Anyway, you should go downstairs. Dinner should be ready and I need to change out of- you know?" He looked at her, properly realizing just how wet her clothing was. He was thankful that when he detransformed, his normal clothing was dry. He had forgotten that she didn't have such a luxury. "Oh, right." He said, his voice just as awkward as hers had been.

They passed each other, but when he reached the stairs, he turned back at the girl; "Marinette?"

"Do they know Chat's here or Adrien?"

She gave a sigh, "Both? They know about the incident, so…"

"Oh, right." He said, trying to not show the disappointment in his voice; of course, they knew. Everyone knew.

So, why hadn't he heard from his father or Nathalie? The only people to contact him since the reveal was Nino and dozens of texts from Alya. He would get to those when he knew how to answer them.

But first, he had to get past dinner. It wasn't that he wanted to refuse the Dupain-Cheng's
hospitality, or that he wasn't hungry- the ache in his stomach reminded him that he hadn't eaten since the akuma attack. It was just that, well, he didn't really know what to say to them. About the reveal or the fact that he had entered their home from their daughter's skylight. Socializing with parents’ of friends was never his strongest suit.

His super suit was.

Smirking at the joke even Chat Noir would be too embarrassed to say out loud, he made his way downstairs.

The first thing Adrien noticed was the smell of dinner coming to greet him. It smelled amazing, just like anything that seemed to come from here. The second thing he noticed was Tom and Sabine watching him, with gazes he was too nervous to read.

"Hello." He tried to say as casually as he could, then he met their eyes, seeing expressions he didn't expect. Tom had a look of thankfulness, while Sabine looked at him with what could only be described as motherly concern.

"Hello, Adrien." Tom greeted, reaching out a hand for him to shake, "So, it's true about what the reports have been saying." Adrien accepted the hand, and have a tentative nod. Before he had a chance to release the handshake, he was pulled into a bear hug by the larger man; "Thank you for everything you've done for Paris."

Adrien could tell instantly where Marinette got her hugs and kindness from, and if he hadn't already ridiculed himself for losing himself the first time, he may have been tempted to fall into that one as well.

When he was let go, Sabine gave him a much more dainty hug; "If you ever need anything all, just let us know. You're always welcome here." Adrien had to blink the moisture away from his eyes; this family was gonna be the death of his composure. "Thank you, Mr. & Mrs. Dupain-Cheng." He replied, unsure what else to say. Tom waved his concern away; "Don't mention it. Now, let's eat."

Just as everyone surrounded the table, Marinette quickly started down the stairs. She was dressed much more casually than Adrien had ever seen her; she was wearing light pink joggers and a matching sweater over a polka-dotted shirt, and her damp hair was down for the first time that he had seen. "Ah, there she is." Tom greeted, causing her to smile sheepishly, as she sat down across from Adrien.

The dinner was quiet at first. It was obvious that no one really knew how to address the reveal from earlier that day, yet the silence was comfortable between them. "This is really good." Adrien said, finally breaking the silence, "Thank you, Ms. Cheng." Sabine smiled and Tom made a joke about that being the reason he had married her, which caused an affectionate hit on his arm from his wife.

Adrien couldn't help the smile that formed in the corner of his mouth. He had never eaten dinner in such warm company. Even when his mother was around, his father was still busy, leaving it just the two of them, making small talk but not really talking at all. Seeing such open teasing and affection made him a little jealous that, even when he was at his happiest, he still never had this.

Well, until then.

He looked at Marinette, who was watching her parents with a comfortable smile. "I don't think I've seen your hair down before." he mentioned, causing her to meet his eyes.
She blushed lightly, and gave a shy smile; "Oh, yeah. Well, I don't have it down much anymore. I mean, I used to when I was younger, but I don't really anymore. It gets in the way too much."

"I think it looks nice." He complimented, looking back at his plate. He could hear a cute little giggle from the girl across the table.

He mentally told himself to stop using the word 'cute' to describe Marinette. She was a very close friend, and close friends aren't meant to be 'cute'.

"So, how are you doing, after what happened earlier?" Sabine asked, that motherly care Adrien had noted before coming into her question.

He looked up at her and shrugged; "Fine, I guess. I mean, I don't really like the fact that it's being broadcast across Paris…"

The knot in his stomach gripped him, reminding him that it wasn't just hunger that had been bothering him all this time. There were still so many reproductions of what happened that he hadn't faced yet; he didn't even know how to face them. He just wished he could go back before everyone knew who Chat Noir was; when his secret was safe.

Yet, there was a part of him that told him that it was going to be fine, somehow. Besides, he was currently having dinner with the most welcoming family he had ever known. That had to account for something. And, even if it didn't…

"But, if I didn't do it, it would have been Ladybug going through all of this. And, if given the choice again, I'd still do it to protect her identity." 

"How did she take the news of who you are?" Tom asked, throwing his question into the pile.

Adrien only shrugged; "We didn't really have time to talk about it after we took down Lady Fisher. I was hoping to run into her on a patrol, but then the storm started." He looked down at his plate, thinking 'I only hope she's not disappointed with me'. When he looked up, he saw multiple looks of sympathy looking back at him.

Did he say that out loud, or was his worry just that evident?

No one had a chance to confirm or deny anything as his phone started to ring. He glanced down and noticed Nathalie's name on his screen.

So, it began.

"I'm sorry. This is Father's assistant. I should take it."

"No problem." Marinette said, "You can take it in my room if you need privacy."

He smiled at her and tapped her shoulder once in thanks as he passed her to go back up the stairs.

Well, he had prolonged the inevitable long enough.

He answered the phone with a hello, and instantly was greeted with a curt greeting back, "Hello, Adrien. I'm sure you've seen the news." He gave a sigh, "Yes, Nathalie." A sigh came from the other side of the phone, as Nathalie told him, "I had to call your father."
The knot tightened enough to make him feel sick.

"He's on his way home and should be here in the morning." She hesitated in a way that made Adrien nervous, "He wants to talk to you as soon as he's home."

'Wants to'. More like 'demands to'. His father never wanted to talk to him; not unless he had done something unbefitting the Agreste name and was about to be reprimanded for it.

Nathalie continued with a question, "Where are you? I'm sending the car to get you."

Adrien bit his lip, "I was taking a walk to clear my head, but I got caught in the rain. I ducked in for cover at the Dupain-Cheng Bakery. I understand that I have to get home, but please, just let me stay a little longer."

He could hear the plea in his own voice, just like he had pleaded to be allowed to go to school, to try to be normal.

"You have twenty minutes, Adrien."

Click.

Twenty minutes. That was a little longer than the drive was supposed to take, meaning she had let him stay a little longer. Maybe she sympathized with him, like with his schooling. Perhaps, it was just because his father wasn't home yet and wouldn't know the difference. Either way, it didn't matter. He would be thankful for the little time he had left.

He composed himself again and walked down the stairs. Marinette and her parents were talking around the table but seemed to casually stop their topic once he came in.

"Is everything okay." Sabine asked, and Adrien nodded, hiding his fear of the unknown behind the same smile he had used to mask himself every day; "Yeah. Nathalie needed to know where I was so they could come get me in twenty minutes or so."

The four finished their dinner in the same style they had begun. Well, the Dupain-Chengs' anyway. They continued to talk about school, and Marinette's projects, and how the bakery was doing. Adrien nodded along, adding what he could while keeping himself quiet as he looked out the window. The rain continued to hammer down, yet the thunder seemed to be going farther and farther away. In some ways, the weather matched the storm inside of him. As the thunder crept away, so did his ability to ever enjoy anything like dinner with the Dupain-Chengs again.

He couldn't have this anyway. His father was never this open, and his mother… Well, where ever she was, she didn't seem to be coming back anytime soon. He would have to get used to being an outsider of these kinds of things, no matter how much he wanted to be welcomed in. He wasn't lucky enough for that.

Marinette noticed the change in Adrien's temperament immediately. At the beginning of dinner, Adrien was so involved, so present. But after he had gotten off the phone, he was distant, aloof.

What had happened? Was something at home the reason he had come to her roof all along?

She continued to engage with her parents' conversation, but she couldn't stop watching the blond, who kept his face out the window and a smile as false as photoshop on his lips as he talked.

He was right all along about one thing about her: she knew both Adrien and Chat Noir like the back of her hand, both as a partner and a friend, and the way he was acting meant there was something wrong.
"Adrien," she prompted, when dinner was at its end, "I'm not sure how much time you have left before your ride gets here, but I was wondering if you wanted to go play some UMS III, to help get your mind off everything that happened today."

He looked at her, and shot her that faux smile, "Sure, Marinette."

The game was set up in her room, from the night before when she had been playing -strike that-destroying Alya at it, and, after an excuse to her parents about why they couldn't bother to reset it back in the living room due to time constraints, she and Adrien made their way back to her room.

It wasn't that she was trying to get alone time with him. Oh, who was she kidding; of course she was. But it had nothing to do with her feeling for him. She just figured he would be more open to talking to her alone than with her parents shadowing them.

Once they were seated in front of her monitor, she handed him a remote; "I have that lucky charm you gave me for my birthday; let's see if it works."

He looked at her, one eyebrow cocked in a way that reminded her of Chat Noir; "You seem to have forgotten that I still have yours." He fished it out of his pocket to prove his point, "So, at best, we're even."

Oh, had he challenged her abilities? This may have been meant as a distraction from whatever was bothering him, but now it was war.

"I also seem to remember winning without any lucky charm, so if anything, you've just made me more powerful."

He dropped his head and she was about to claim her victory, but then he looked up in a way that reminded her of her partner; "Or maybe I jinxed you with that charm, waiting for the perfect time to best you."

She could feel head face warm and she looked away; she could take that mischievous look from Chat Noir, but not eye to eye with Adrien Agreste.

He had won that round.

As they started to play, it was clear that the distraction was beginning to work for Adrien. When he would get a good hit on the opponent, she could hear him mutter a pun. If they hit him back, he would make a bantering comment to her about letting him down in his time of need. There was even a moment where she could have sworn that he called her 'Princess' again, though that could have just been imagined. Regardless, it was playing with a good friend, the relationship he claimed to want for them all this time.

It was amazing how much more comfortable he was with her, and her with him, now that the secret was out. That she had no reason to stutter around him, because at heart, Adrien was just a dork that had a love for puns and bantering at the wrong time.

Realizing both sides of the guy she really liked had to be one good thing to come out of this mess.

When the match was up, Adrien reached for his phone and his smile faded. "They're here." He looked at her and managed to smile again; "Thank you, Marinette. It's been fun."

"I'll walk you down." She said, putting her remote on the desk.

He went to argue and she cut him off, "No arguments, Chat."
That comment seemed to flip a switch in him. "But, that's the thing I'm good at." He teased, bumping her slightly with his hip.

Though, being Marinette, she started to fumble around. She managed to stay upright, if for no other reason than Adrien's arms on her shoulder to keep her there.

"Sorry, Princess."

"It's fine." She told him, properly noting that she didn't imagine the pet name this time, "B-but, we should go before you get into trouble with -uh- your dad or Nathalie."

He gave a nod, and they both made their way down the stairs, her heart bouncing off her ribcage. Having your flirty best friend mixed with your die-hard crush was gonna be a lot harder than she originally hoped.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I REALLY wanted to write about Tom and Sabrine because they are parent-goals all the way, and I love them and I just want Adrien to have a happy family......

*Deep Breath*

Anyway, I hope you like Adrienette fluff because there's more where that came from ;)

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

This is the fluff before the angst, so enjoy it you nerds :)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After The Dupain-Chengs and Adrien had exchanged their quick goodbyes and thank yous, both of which made Adrien long to stay, he followed Marinette down the stairway that led to the main door. He kept his arms, clasped behind his back and a plastic bag of cookies Sabrine had insisted he take home in his pocket. His thoughts were all jumbled in his mind, begging to be sorted out again.

In the forefront was his anxiety about what was to await him at home. What would Nathalie say? What would happen the next day when his father was pulled home early due to his actions as Chat Noir?

The next pressing matter was his fate as Chat Noir. Even if his father let him continue his life as the cat of the night, what would happen? Would the city still trust him as their protector? Would Ladybug know that he still had her back; that he would sacrifice his life to protect her. Or, would his recklessness with his identity cause him to lose his miraculous to whoever had given it to him in the first place?

Lastly, there was this minor thread of consciousness that was focused on the girl he was following. He had been concerned that she would feel betrayed that he had been seeing her behind a mask for so long, but she seemed open to it. Thankful for it almost. She, and her family, had welcomed him, secret and all, into their home with open arms. And it felt like home. Or at least, it felt like the way people in movies described Home. Warm. Inviting. Safe. Plus, the ever-present smell of cookies helped to seal that mental image. It was a place where his Chat side, his real side, could thrive.

But, no. That wasn’t what home was for him. His home was cold, echoing, lonely. He had to go back because that’s where Adrien Agreste belonged. And, for all intents and purposes, that Chat Noir didn’t exist anymore.

Marinette glanced back at the boy who followed her; his face flashing with the thoughts that plagued his mind. She wanted to help him, but there was only so much that a small baker’s daughter could do. But, there was something that Ladybug could do.

She had forgotten that in her haste to do her mental decompressing as far away from her partner as possible, that she had left him alone. Wondering if he had done something wrong. If he was wrong.

But, he wasn’t. He was perfect. The perfect partner, the perfect friend, the perfect-

She cut her thoughts off there. Now was not the time to focus on those thoughts. She had already
been so focused on herself that she missed the bigger picture. She couldn’t do that again.

That was the reason she held him so tight in the pouring rain. Because if Ladybug had let him down, Marinette would be there to pick up her slack.

However, Ladybug still had a chance to make things right again.

They reached the ground floor without either of them speaking a word and it seemed to surprise both parties that their journey had ended. “Well, I guess I’ll see you in school?” Marinette offered, trying to find a way to properly say goodbye, but also have enough time to execute her plan. Adrien just shrugged; “Honestly, I’m not sure about that. I mean, you know how mad he got over a stupid book. How do you think he’s gonna take me evading his orders and spending my time as Chat Noir?”

Her heart plummeted; it was home he was so broken about. It was fear of what would happen when his father got home.

She didn’t know much about Adrien’s home life, mainly because he avoided talking about it in detail, but from the comments she had picked up from both school and her adventures with Chat, it wasn’t as warm and loving as hers was.

“I’m sorry…” she replied, gently kicking the floor under her foot. “Don’t be, Marinette.” He replied, moving his hands on her shoulders, “In fact, I have to thank you.” She looked at him, “For what?” She could see him looking for the words to say, and he seemed to settle with, “For inviting me to stay inside out of the rain.”

She didn’t have much thought to any deeper meaning to his comment before he pulled her into a hug. It was similar to the one she had given him before, but with one large difference.

Adrien was the one who started it.

When she got over her surprise, she hugged him back, forcing herself to not think about the fact that Adrien Agreste was hugging her, holding her in a tight embrace for the second time that night. She commanded her heart to start beating normally again.

When he pulled away, he had an apologetic smile on his lips; “Sorry. I shouldn’t get so emotional.”

‘No, I like it,’ was undoubtedly not the right thing to say, there it was, slipping out of her mouth before her conscious could keep up with it. Her eyes grew wide, “I mean, It’s normal to have emotions and it’s okay to show them. Not that you don’t show emotions normally. It’s just nice to see you display them more like Chat. I mean, being Adrien is fine-”

Her rambling was put to a sudden stop when he felt his fingers on her lips. He had never stopped her rambling before, but she didn’t mind that it was stopped like that. Not when it’s followed up with a lopsided, Chat-like smile; “I understand.”

Then, it was as if he remembered he didn’t have a mask on anymore and looked down, his smile slipping into one of embarrassment that didn’t help Marinette’s heart rate one bit. “Sorry. I just didn’t want you to feel like you had to excuse yourself.” He cleared his throat and looked up to meet her eyes; “I’ll see you soon?” After she gave a small nod, he made his leave.
Adrien didn’t know why he acted that way around Marinette, smirking at her, touching her lips like that. Sure, he didn’t want to leave her floundering with her own words, but at the same time, they were-

“‘Just very good friends’, huh?” his kwami taunted from his pocket. He didn’t have time for this; not while his own mind was searching for an answer of his own. “Shut it, Plagg.” He hissed has his driver slid into his seat.

It seemed that Adrien had gotten himself from one mind-scrambling situation to another all day, and frankly, he didn’t know when that would end. All he knew that placing his fingers on her lips wasn’t his first instinct, and that was what made the thread of thoughts about Marinette into a web of confusing feelings.

Marinette wasn’t faring any better. He had left her immobilized, just as he did when he lent her his umbrella on the first day they had met. Only this time, there was history and comments, jokes and pick-up lines, all wrapping around in her mind, linking her to Adrien Agreste: school crush by day, superhero partner by night. And, at that moment, Marinette knew for sure that her control over her emotions was in danger. How was she going to see him in class without spazzing out more than usual? How was Ladybug supposed to fight alongside Chat Noir if his decorum continued like that?

If the revelation was just to her, he would have rushed to him, put her spots on, and confessed her feelings to him there and then.

But, the reveal wasn’t to her. It was to the world. And, Adrien had so many fears in his mind, so many emotions that he had bottled up, that she couldn’t give him one more complication situation to worry about. No, her feeling for him was her cross to bear and her secret to keep. At least, until things calmed down again. Besides, if he knew who was under Ladybug’s mask, would it change his love for her?

She shook her head. She couldn’t think about it. Instead, she had to follow through with her plan.

When she made it back to the apartment, her parents were already on their way to bed. With a kiss on the cheek for both of them, she started back up her stairs. She closed her trap door for the night and gave a sigh. “Tikki.” She called into the darkness, and she could soon make out the figure of her red friend. “So, how did it go with Adrien?” she asked, drawing out his name slightly. Marinette blushed slightly, but frowned, “He’s taking it really hard, Tikki. I feel really bad for him.” The kwami nodded; “There have been a few times that Miraculous holders’ identities get revealed to a group of people, but it’s the first time that the entire area knew at once.” “I can’t imagine it.” Marinette mused, moving to collapse on her chaise, “I can’t believe that stupid cat risked everything for me, again.”

Or that ‘that stupid cat’ was Adrien the entire time. She moved her face into a pillow to hide the blush; nope, not going there.

She could hear Tikki flutter closer; “Well, Chat Noir always tries to protect you. Why would this be any different?”

“Because he had so much more to lose than I do…” Marinette replied, her face still in the soft fabric; “Adrien was so anxious about going home because of how his dad may react. Chat Noir is more than a duty for him; it’s an outlet…” She sat up and looked at her kwami, “I need to go tell
him that this wasn’t in vain. Tikki, spots on.”

The ride home for Adrien was just as quiet as usual, with the exception of his continuously loud thoughts. He couldn’t let go of what happened at Marinette’s. If he was still Chat Noir, even with a blown identity, he could have blamed it on habit.

But, he was himself. He couldn’t blame his actions on his mask. He had to have a reason, but he couldn’t even begin to process what that reason was. Marinette was a friend, one of his best friends. So, why was his first thought about how to stop her rambling was to kiss her?

Perhaps it was the fact that he hadn’t had real friends until recently, and the way most people shut up others in movies and shows was to preoccupy their mouth in another way.

That excuse seemed to settle him enough to try to focus on the far more pressing events than a fleeting thought at the sight of his rambling classmate.

Pressing matters like his immediate future that he was rolling up to. His stomach lurched as the limo came to its stop. The rain was still pouring down as he made his way out off the vehicle and up the slick steps into the house.

It had always seemed hollow since his mother passed, but at that moment, the sounds his sneakers made on the tile floor seemed to echo forever, like there was just endless nothing in the space. Like he was the only person in the building. But, he knew he wasn’t. Nathalie stood in front of him, her professional demeanor overcoming any personal emotions she may or may not have had.

“Your father instructed me to make sure you had eaten and had gone to bed. Your schedule has been cleared so he could talk to you when he gets home.”

Cleared. Father never cleared his schedule. That could only be bad.

“Am I allowed to go to school tomorrow?” he asked, dreading that he already knew the answer. The woman dropped her gaze and said, “Your father would be furious. You know that.” “He already is, isn’t he?” Adrien replied, “He’s always mad at me for something. Sometimes I wish…”

He couldn’t finish that. How could he?

He may have felt anger towards his father, but at the end of it all, he was still his father. He still loved him and wanted him to be proud of him, even if that was an impossible task. Besides, he was all he had left.

Instead, Adrien walked to his room, mumbling a good night to Nathalie. It wasn’t her fault either. She was just doing her job.

He closed the door to his room and placed the plastic bag on his bed. “Ooh, what’s in there?” Plagg asked, free to come out of hiding. “Cookies,” he replied, without an enthusiasm, “Chocolate chip from the looks of it.” Plagg dove into the bag, and rummaged a bit, muttering something about the fact that there weren’t any cheese ones. Adrien ignored him, just plopping down on the bed.

He didn’t know what to think, what to feel. He needed to sleep, to shut down for a couple hours, but his thoughts kept racing causing him to realize that that wasn’t likely to happen. “I’m gonna shower.” He announced to no one as he pushed himself off the bed, hoping that doing something would, if nothing else, give him something else to think about for a while.
Ladybug flew through the rain, being careful to make sure her yo-yo and her footing were sure enough to not lose grip on the slick buildings of Paris. She used the extra time to try to formulate what to say. Regardless of her feelings, in that suit, she was Chat’s partner first and foremost. She had to push aside the last two hours as Marinette from her mind, so she could stay professional. Yet, she was also his friend.

The mental acrobatics rivaled her physical ones as she made her last leap into a rooftop of the Agreste mansion, near Adrien’s room. She peeked in; the lights were on, but Adrien didn’t seem to be in sight. She went to knock on the glass when she noticed that one of the windows was open. The stupid cat must have left it open and forgotten to close it before the rain started if the puddle on the floor was any indicator.

Not that you have anything to judge him on, her thoughts scolded, reminding her of her more than the damp bed at home from the same mistake.

She shook her head and slipped into the room, making sure to make adequate noise to alert him to her presence if he was nearby. The only sound that greeted her was rummaging on the other side of the room. She walked over to inspect and was surprised when a large black bug flew up at her. No, not a bug. It was much too big, and it looked a little like a cat.

Chat’s kwami?

“Hello?” she greeted it, as it looked at her. “Hey, Ladybug,” it greeted nonchalantly, before shoving the end of a wedge of cheese in its mouth. This little guy seemed less formal than Tikki and more hungry. “I was looking for Chat.” She told him, looking around the room, “is he here?” “He’s in there,” it told her, gesturing to the not-quite-shut door across the room, a smile on his face before he flew elsewhere in the room. She made her way over to the door, opening it slightly, “Chat?”

He was there, drying his hair with a towel and wearing just a pair of red polka-dotted pajama pants. Ladybug gave a sound that only she could make and closed the door suddenly.

On the other side of the room, she could hear the kwami laughing at the exchange. She had just been pranked by a thousand-year-old god.

“Ladybug?” he heard Adrien’s voice from the other side of the door. “Um, yeah. That’s me. I -uh- just wanted to make sure you were okay after- er- what happened earlier…”

The door behind her moved, and she turned to see Adrien behind her, now wearing a shirt and a surprised look. She noted the blush on his cheeks, and figured under her mask, she looked the same.

“Er, yeah. I’m fine.” He said, rubbing the back of his neck, “I mean, Alya from the Ladyblog has been texting me non-stop, but otherwise, everything seems normal enough.”

Ladybug tried to hide her confusion; just minutes ago, he was anxious about his ride home and now, he was acting normal, though a little embarrassed due to their unfortunate way of meeting.

“Oh, okay. I just wanted to stop by. I know, we didn’t really talk after the Akuma purification.” “You were on a clock.” He reminded her, and she nodded, “I should have made time for you- uh, for this. I mean, you revealed your secret identity protecting me. And, I didn’t even talk to you about it. Not really something a good partner would do, or a good friend for that matter.” She turned away, but watched Adrien in the corner of her eye go over to his bed; “It’s fine, Bugaboo.
Come sit.” She did as she was directed, and he continued, “I understand that it must have been a lot to take in at the moment. I assume you would never have pegged Chat Noir as the model whose pictures seem to be everywhere in Paris.”

That was an understatement.

“Believe me, I had a way better idea of how I was going to reveal myself to you, and it didn’t involve a five foot woman in a yellow raincoat.” She chuckled a little; even with a thick layer of blush where his mask should have been, he was still trying to charm her. And, as much as she tried to ignore it, it was working.

“Always the romantic, Chat Noir?” she swiped the part of his chest where his bell would have laid had he been suited up, trying to keep the playful relationship between the Chat and his lady. “Adrien.” He corrected, “I mean if you want to call me by my real name since I’m not, you know, Chat right now.”

“Adrien,” she repeated, noticing the way his eyes lit up as she used it. He wasn’t lying to her before; he was head over heels for Ladybug. If only he knew who was behind the mask. She looked away, trying to get herself in check. Keep it professional, she repeated to herself before looking back at him and noticing his expression had changed. “What’s wrong?” she asked, and it was his turn to avoid her eyes, “I’m sorry if I disappointed you, m’lady.”

Disappointed? Was he serious? He was Adrien Agreste, right?

The boy she had been crushing on for as long as they had known each other?

The super hot teen model?

The kind and caring friend for both Marinette and Ladybug?

The noble, protective superhero partner she didn’t deserve by was so thankful to have?

What part of that was supposed to be disappointing to her?

“Why would I be disappointed?” she said, genuinely confused. “Well,” he started, “I may not have been what you hoped I would be.” She bit her lip, “Well, you weren’t what I expected, but that isn’t a bad thing at all. You’re—”

My partner?

My best friend?

The boy who sits in front of me in class?

“Amazing.” She concluded, “Not just anyone would be able to do the things you do on a daily basis. I can barely handle school, and here you are saving Paris between photo shoots.” Adrien blushed and smiled nervously; “Aw, well, it’s nothing. I love what we do; saving the day, trying to take down Hawkmoth. Just being Chat Noir has added so much to my life.” “Yeah.” She agreed; being Ladybug had the same effect on her and she couldn’t imagine her life without it.

“Have you heard from The Guardian yet?” she asked, receiving a perplexed look from her unmasked comrade, “Who?” “Your kwami never took you to him?” she asked, looking off into the direction she had last seen the small black cat. “Plagg. What is she talking about?” he called, causing the creature to them, “The Guardian is the guy that gave you your miraculous.” “And you didn’t think that was important to bring up because…?” he asked, seemingly exasperated with Plagg. Ladybug assumed that this was normal between them.
“It never came up.” Plagg replied with a shrug, “But, your girlfriend is right. You should meet him, especially after what happened.” “She’s not my girlfriend.” Adrien combated, shooting a look at his Kwami that she recognized immediately as ‘shut up’ as his face reddened. “Fine. Fine,” The kwami said thoroughly unconvinced, “Just don’t come to me for any more feedback on your sappy poems.”

Beside her, Adrien looked like he wanted to die from embarrassment, brought down on him by his tiny roommate. If Chat-like Adrien had driven Marinette’s heart to beat faster, flustered Adrien would have killed her. Thankfully, she had a mask to hide most of her blush and a well-placed hand to hide her smile.

“He’s making that up.” Adrien excused, his voice flaking. “Sure.” She replied, with a tone she hoped conveyed her unbelief in that statement. It did if his diminishing posture had anything to say about it. She wanted so badly to thoroughly enjoy this newfound side of him, but she knew her heart wouldn’t be able to handle it.

She glanced at a clock; “It’s getting late. I should finish my patrol and head home for the night. Tomorrow’s a school day.” “Yeah…” Adrien replied, without any excitement, causing her to turn back to him, “Are you sure you’re okay?” He nodded and gave her a smile that barely rang true; “I’m fine, m’lady. Just not a fan of school.”

Marinette knew that to be a lie, but Ladybug wasn’t supposed to be the wiser, so she dismissed it. “If you say so.” “I do,” he replied, “Do you need help with your patrol?” She shook her head, “No, I have this. Just get some sleep, Kitty. I’ll see you soon.” She stood up and made her way through the open window. Adrien followed and watched her slip away into the night. As she faded from sight, the comfort of her visit started to fade too.

It was easy to pretend that everything was fine around Ladybug because it always seemed fine around her. She made his life so much brighter, clearer. But, when he was back in the room alone, all his insecurities and fears came back into focus. Adrien gave a deep sigh and closed the window, not that it mattered that much since the rain had stopped already. Then, he made his way into his bed, eager to accept the sweet release of sleep to take him away and silence his swimming mind.

Chapter End Notes

Whoo!
How about that Adrienette?
And we got some Ladrien up in this house!
As the summary says, this is the fluff before the angst gets turned up, so I hope you guys liked it :)

As always, thank you for reading, and if you have any questions or predictions, just let me know. I love reading all your ideas and thoughts.

Love you all
~Jo
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Adrien has his meeting with his dad, and it goes as well as you’d expect.

Meanwhile, Marinette, Alya, and Nino try to adjust to the reveal at school.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Marinette had a restless night. She was too concerned about Adrien that she couldn’t drift off and, when she did, she would have dreams that ranged from nightmares where she was in battle as Ladybug and almost got killed because Chat Noir had been captured and wasn’t around to help her, to scenes where she told Adrien that she was Ladybug and they lived happily ever after.

Both were just as ‘plausible’.

So, when Marinette’s alarm went off for school, she gave a groan. After stumbling around her room, trying to gather everything she needed for her day, she made her way down the stairs. Her mother was standing in the kitchen, drinking a mug of green tea while her gaze lingered out the window. “Hi, Honey. Rough night?” she asked, turning to her daughter.

Marinette nodded, “Something like that.”

She went running off to school so she wouldn’t be late, but her mom stopped her mid-stride. “Oh, your father made extra danishes this morning for your friends.” She handed her daughter a paper bag, and Marinette took it thankfully. “Thanks, Mom.” She kissed her on the cheek and made her way out the door.

Once Marinette made it to the school, she noticed Alya waiting for her.

“Hey, Girl.” Her best friend greeted, pulling her in for a hug, before noticing the paper bag, “Ooo, Have I ever told you how much I love your parents.”

She went to grab a danish out of the bag, but Marinette pulled it away, “Hey, what about me?”

“You’re my sister; you don’t count.” Alya replied, before reaching over and snatching the bag, looking over the contents.

“Leave the Strawberry one for Adrien.” Marinette told her. She knew strawberry was his favorite due to the amount of time Chat would beg her to bring some when they would patrol together, or when he’d visit Marinette’s rooftop.

Alya pulled out her preferred flavor and raised an eyebrow. “Oh, you trying to win over his heart with a pastry?”

“No.” She replied, quickly, pulling the bag back into her possession, “I just… Hoped that it could make him feel better after what happened yesterday.” Marinette knew she didn’t have to be vague about the reveal; she could tell just by her walk to school that Paris was buzzing about it. She could only imagine how active the topic would be in their class.
“Yeah. I feel awful for it.” Alya admitted, ”After the initial shock wore off, and since he wasn’t replying to my messages, I couldn’t help but feel guilty.”

“But, it was a live stream.” Marinette reassured her, “You had no idea what was gonna happen.”

“I guess…” Alya said, unsure, and her best friend placed a hand on her shoulder, “Alya, I’m sure Adrien doesn’t blame you for getting his identity revealed. If I was him, I wouldn’t.”

Alya met her eyes, and gave her a weak smile; “Thanks, Marinette.” The girls shared a hug, trying to not squish the pastry bag, and then, started inside the school.

“So, has Nino talked to him at all?” Marinette asked, trying to change the subject away from Alya’s conscience.

“Yeah, Nino called Adrien when the news first broke. He seemed to be taking it better than I ever would have- I mean if I had a secret that got revealed all over Paris.”

Marinette nodded, but something started to dawn on her. Adrien had talked to Nino, his best friend, over the phone and yet, went to her house to talk to her in person. She knew what he had said about wanting to stay Chat for a little longer, and it could have just been that, but that didn’t stop the faint blush that rose to her cheeks.

She walked past Alya, hoping she wouldn’t notice, “Yeah, I bet it’s still a bit surreal for him. Just like it is for the rest of us.”

“I’ll say.” her friend agreed, “Plus, You have to come to terms with the fact that you’ve had a crush on Chat Noir this whole time.”

Mariette’s blush deepened as she tried to silence her friend; “Alya!”

“What? Don’t pretend that that little detail slipped your mind while we talked.” Alya teased, the light returning to her eyes, “You sure know how to pick them.”

“Yeah. You mean, super unavailable and out of my league?”

They continued to walk to their classroom, before noticing a group of people, talking about the news report. Most of the voices were mixed together, but one shrill very-recognizable voice came through; “I just can’t believe my Adrikins had been out there, risking life and limb for this city. And, has he been rewarded for it? No. I’m gonna call Daddy and have him fix this abhorrent oversight at once.”

Marinette shook her head, “Chloe didn’t even care about Chat Noir until she knew his identity. This is ridiculous.”

Alya nodded, “I’d figure she’s not the only one to be singing a different tune about Chat Noir.”

She nudged the bluenette, who pushed back gently; “Hey, I always loved what Chat Noir has done for this city. He’s Ladybug’s partner, and she couldn’t do what she does without him.”

“But, it doesn’t hurt that he’s also the cute guy that sits in front of us in class.” Alya mentioned.

“Yeah, the guy that’s head-over-heels for Ladybug. I can’t compete with that.” Marinette reminded her, trying to discourage her friend, while it had an opposite reaction inside her.
Adrien was Chat.
Chat liked Ladybug.
And she was Ladybug.
Meaning that Adrien liked her.
Just in a really complicated love-square or something…

They made their way into the classroom which, as Marinette had predicted, was filled with conversation with the same name on everyone’s lips. The girls slid into their seats, noticing that Nino was sitting alone. Alya leaned over to her boyfriend and started to ask about Adrien, but he just shrugged. Marinette figured they may have all came to the same conclusion she had.

Adrien wasn’t coming to school.

Their assumptions weren’t unfounded, considering that it was completely true. Adrien was leaning against his window, wishing that he could just go out there.

He had considered sneaking out and making his way to school without someone noticing, but then he had thought about how hard it was to sneak out under normal circumstances being a model and all. Add in the fact that the biggest news story in a long time had just broke, and everyone would want to ask him anything they could.

In the end, he knew it would have been a hopeless mission and would just get him in more trouble than before.

It wasn’t worth the risk, and he couldn’t bring himself to do it.

So there he stood, gazing out the window longingly. A chime from the other side of the room caught his attention, and he walked back to his nightstand where his phone laid. It was a text from Nino.

“Old man got you on house arrest?”

He plopped on the bed, bothering Plagg from his cheese-induced nap, and typed a reply.

“Yeah. Something like that.”

“You know. I don’t understand you, Kid.” Plagg commented, “Most kids would love to stay in a place like this with a day off of school.”

“It doesn’t matter how fancy it is,” Adrien started, staring at his ceiling, “if you can’t leave, it’s still a prison cell.”

The kwami seemed to understand that, or at least decided not to press the issue further, which Adrien appreciated. He was still trying to figure out what he was going to say when his father wanted to speak with him.
Gabriel had arrived much earlier that morning when Paris was still asleep. Adrien knew this because he wasn’t.

Adrien was never a good sleeper, but the thoughts that preoccupied his mind had made it nearly impossible to relax enough to let sleep take him. So now, he was anxious and tired.

Another chime.

“You’re missing out. Marinette brought breakfast.”

Nino had replied, attaching an image of his class seat with a strawberry danish on his desk. He loved the Dupain-Cheng’s strawberry danishes, and his stomach rumbled in agreement.

He hadn’t eaten since he had left Marinette’s the night before, mainly because he hadn’t left his room (and he was too nervous to risk the chocolate chip cookies for breakfast). He rarely ever crossed paths with Gabriel in the large house, but it would have been just Adrien’s luck to have it happen the one day he was actively avoiding him.

Perhaps his strategy of prolonging the inevitable was just causing more damage. He knew it didn’t matter how long he stayed in his room, worrying himself into a hungry restless mess, his father was still going to believe whatever he was going to believe about him. It was probably best to rip the bandage off.

He pushed himself into a sitting position, just as his phone sounded again. He expected another message from his best friend, but instead, it was from Nathalie.

“Your father wants to see you in his office.”

The walk from Adrien’s room to Gabriel’s office felt like an eternity, but eventually, Adrien was standing in front of his father’s desk, hands clasped behind him and standing up straight, trying to fake the confidence he didn’t feel.

Gabriel was looking out the window, not even turning to acknowledge his son’s presence. It was a power move, one meant to unnerve the other person without even needing to speak. It would have worked if Adrien had any nerves left to lose.

“So, you’re Chat Noir.” Gabriel’s voice came through, suddenly breaking the silence with the same unnerving force of a whip crack, turning to face him with an expression that was as unreadable as his tone.

Adrien gave a nod, trying his hardest to not cower. He had been able to stand up to super-villains on a daily basis, so why was it that his own father was the one person that could truly scare him?

“So, even though I allowed you to go to school, to spend time with your friends,” Adrien could feel the venom attached to the word friends; “That still wasn’t enough for you. You had to continuously disappear from school and abandon your duties so you could go play hero.”

The icy tone that Gabriel used caused a shiver to crawl up Adrien’s spine. His father was using the same words the Akuma had used when he was revealed.

“Just a schoolboy in costume, trying to play hero.”

When Adrien didn’t reply quick enough for his liking, Gabriel continued with his cool tones;
“Perhaps, I was too lenient with you.”

He walked closer to his son, his gaze still just as harsh as steel. “If you don’t appreciate the opportunities I have given you, I’m going to take them back again.” He turned away, though he continued to speak; “Nathalie will proceed with your education here at home and will be overseeing you to ensure that you maintain your rigorous schedule.”

Adrien bit his lip and glanced at Nathalie, who didn’t seem to pick a side either way. He didn’t blame her; he didn’t want to be on the side opposing his father either, yet here he was.

“Now, about your Miraculous…”

Adrien’s focus snapped back to his father, who had continued to look out the window. Hearing Gabriel use the word caused him to shift the grip of his linked hands to secure his ring. Sure, their Miraculous wasn’t a secret; Alya has figured out the basics of how they worked within a month of The Ladyblog’s activity. It was more of the way it was used that caused the tremors inside him. So casual, yet there felt like this dark shadow that had made its appearance at its mention.

“I will need to have it to make sure you won’t be tempted to use it.”

Adrien’s stomach plummeted to the ground. He wouldn’t do that. He couldn’t. The Miraculous was his to preserve, to keep out of the hands of Hawkmoth or anyone else that would want to abuse its power. He wasn’t just going to hand it over.

His father started to walk towards him, and Adrien took a step back, surprising both Gabriel and himself.

“I can’t do that, Father. I was chosen to protect Paris from Hawkmoth and those who want to cause damage.”

His father’s eyes narrowed, showing his distaste for his son refusing his order, and Adrien felt the guilt of his rebellion.

“I’ll only use it in battle.” Gabriel looked at him with suspicion; he obviously didn’t know he ever used it out of battle. Adrien had to try again.

“I won’t use it unless Ladybug needs my help.” His father took another step, showing that Adrien’s pleas were falling on deaf ears.

He didn’t have any other choices.

“I won’t use it at all.”

That seemed to stop his father long enough to continue; “I can’t hand the ring over to anyone, but I won’t use it. I’ll stop being Chat Noir.”

His father eyed him over, looking for a trace of deceit in the boy. Adrien was too scared to be lying.

“You promise to never be Chat Noir again?” His father questioned, his gaze burning holes into Adrien.

Adrien didn’t use the word ‘promise’ flippantly. His mother had instilled in him his entire life that promises always meant something. They were intended to be unbreakable bonds. Adrien had
never broken a promise. And his father knew that.

The blond stood up as straight as he could muster, resolved to do the only thing that could keep
the miraculous safe, even if it meant losing a side of him for good.

“I promise, Father.”

The lunch bell sounded, and the trio got up from their desks. Nino hadn’t heard from Adrien since
the Danish text, so the trio figured he had finally been confronted by his father.

“I still can’t believe that golden-boy Adrien Agreste was able to do all of this under his father’s
nose this long.” Alya said, “Isn’t he like this control-freak type guy?”

Nino shrugged; “I don’t know, but however he could, I’m glad he figured it out. That kid needs to
get out of that house and experience life.”

“Yeah well -thanks to all the cameras and reports- the charade seems to be up.” Alya returned,
“And, I sure don’t envy whatever Adrien is going through because of that.”

Marinette gave a nod. If Adrien’s actions last night were any indication, his father would be far
less than pleased with being blind-sighted by the reveal. And, even though Gabriel Agreste was
one of her biggest inspirations in regards to her dreams of being a fashion designer, she couldn’t
deny that there was something about him that unnerved her.

They stepped outside, and Nino said; “Perhaps we should go visit the prison and see how he’s
doing.” The girls both stopped in place, causing him to take two steps before noticing and turning
back.

“You want to go over there?” Alya asked him, hands on her hips, “Didn’t you just hear what I just
said about his father?”

“Yeah, but what’s the worst his dad could do to us? Kick us out?” Nino asked, his tone reminding
them that he already had been removed from the Agreste mansion, and wasn’t scared of it
happening again; “Besides, we can’t let his Danish go to waste.”

Marinette looked at the bag in her hand that still held the strawberry pastry. She had been fighting
off everyone in her class who wanted to take it. They eventually stopped when she promised to
bring more the next morning.

She looked up at Nino, “Yeah. I protected it all morning. It would be a shame if it was in vain.”

She and Nino looked at Alya who just sighed defeatedly; “Fine. You win. But just because I don’t
want either of you to get akumatized if something bad happens.”

Nino laughed his girlfriend’s comment off; wrapping an arm around her shoulder as they walked.

Marinette trailed behind, her stomach knotting up inside. She hadn’t even thought about someone
getting akumatized over this, but that was a very real possibility. She hoped that Adrien’s
miraculous would protect him enough to make sure he was okay.

Adrien was just leaving his father’s office after the worst twenty minutes of his life. After making
him give his word that he would never become Chat Noir again, Gabriel had dismissed Nathalie
and kept Adrien there in silence for several minutes before questioning him about where he had
gotten his new rebellious behavior. When Adrien failed to give an answer, Gabriel took his
chance to go after his friends, calling them ‘bad influences’ and ‘not befitting the required
standards of his company’. Adrien knew what he meant.

His father was saying his friends were below him, that they were making him into a real person
instead of some sort of god among men. He hated whenever strangers would look at him like that;
like he was better than them just because he was a model for his father’s company. He couldn’t
stand the special treatment that came with his last name. Yet, that’s exactly what his father wanted
him to have. Not friends, but reputation.

Adrien wanted to argue, but after fighting so hard just moments before, he couldn’t find it in
himself to fight anything at all. Gabriel took his defeated silence as a clear sign of who had the
power in their relationship and dismissed him without another word.

No lie about doing all this for his benefit.

No assurance that ‘one day’ he would understand.

No comments of being proud that, even for a short while, he was a superhero, someone that did
something great.

No affection at all.

Just dismissal of him like he was just another employee, not a son.

Adrien glanced up at Nathalie, who had was at her desk and had looked his way when the door
had opened. She continued to keep her air of professional detachment that he wished he could
have in that moment. Instead, he let the door close behind him, brushing his eyes to deter the tears
that were seconds away from falling. He heard the buzz, meaning that someone is at the gate.
Perhaps it was a reporter trying to interview Chat Noir, or someone looking for his father.

Adrien turned to walk away until a very familiar voice comes through the speaker.

“Hi. Um, we are Adrien’s friends from-um- school and we wanted to come over and make sure
he’s okay since he -uh- wasn’t at school today…”

He looked at the secretary with begging eyes, the only part of him that could even bother fighting
anymore. His father would say no instantly, especially following their discussion, but Adrien
needed to try somehow. He needed something to save him from the despair that was creeping in.

“Adrien is very busy today.” Nathalie said, into her microphone to Marinette. Then, she made a
glance at his father’s office door in a way that Adrien only noticed because he was mentally
pleading for any reason to have hope in his chances.

“However, he can spare a couple minutes.” Nathalie continued, “He’ll meet you at the gate.” She
let go of the mic button and must have seen Adrien’s expression of gratitude because she gave a
slight smile. Just slight.

“We have fifteen minutes before you start class.”

“Thank you, Nathalie.” He said, before briskly making his way to the gate. He didn’t have much
time, but he could take all the time he could if it would take away some of his aching.
Marinette fidgeted at the gate, looking at her other friends; “Why was I the one voted to talk?”

“Because you’re the only person that has been here and hasn’t been kicked out.” Alya told her, looking at Nino, who shrugged completely unaffected, but added, “And you have the Danish.”

“Will you stop with the Danish thing?” Alya told him.

“But, that danish this morning was so good. I’m gonna be upset if this one goes to waste just because Adrien’s old man is mad that his son is a hero.” Nino countered, conveying that the fate of the pastry wasn’t the only thing on his mind.

Marinette couldn’t help but agree. Adrien was being punished for being a hero. Most parents would be proud, but then again, everyone knew Gabriel wasn’t like most parents.

She jumped as she heard the gate opening up. Adrien was coming up to them at a quick pace. He had a smile on his face, but as he got closer, Marinette could see spots on his cheeks where the sun made tear trails slightly visible.

“You guys have no idea how glad I am to see you.” He told them, stopping just outside the boundaries of the fence. “Yeah, we’re just glad you could make it outside,” Nino said, as he and Adrien exchanged their habitual handshake.

He seemed to nod in agreement before turning to Alya, “Look, I’m sorry for not answering back-”

“No. Don’t worry about it.” She told him, placing her hand on his shoulder, “I’m sorry that I contributed to your identity getting blown.”

Adrien shook his head, giving a look that bore no hard feelings; “It wasn’t your fault. I was a bit too slow and got caught. Besides, if my identity was gonna get blown somehow, it makes perfect sense that it would have been on a LadyBlog live stream. It is the number one place to find anything about Ladybug and Chat Noir.”

He added a wink for good measure, causing Alya to laugh. “Oh gosh. You really are Chat Noir, aren’t you?”

“That’s what everyone is saying.” Adrien said, but his expression seemed to flash an expression that Marinette couldn’t identify before being replaced with his smile.

Then he turned to her, a little bit of pink forming in his cheek.

Oh, right. The last time he had seen Marinette was at her home when she was rambling on about his emotions, and he placed his fingers on her-

Flustered, she pushed the bag towards him; “Danish.”

He looked at the bag that was thrust into his arms and gave a chuckle; “Thanks. I missed breakfast.” He took a bite and tilted his head to enjoy the flavor. She had seen him do the same so many times as Chat Noir, and it helped to connect the two identities as one person in her mind.

“It’s really good.” Adrien said, voicing his actions, “Oh, and thank your parents again for last night.”

“I will,” Marinette told him, noticing Alya looking at her with surprise.
Due to it raising more questions that she would have liked to answer, Marinette never told Alya about Adrien’s visit or any of her previous encounters with Chat Noir. But, Adrien just outed them so it was impossible to back out now.

“So, what did your dad say about you being Chat Noir?” Nino asked, changing the subject to something that they all really wanted to know.

Adrien took another bite of the Danish, clearly using the time to formulate what he wanted to say about their meeting. Marinette remembered how concerned he was about coming home, about having that meeting. She couldn’t help worrying about what had been said.

“Just the usual stuff.” Adrien admitted when he had concluded his pastry, “Reminding me that I can’t be reckless, that I have a modeling career to keep.”

Marinette noticed how Adrien’s gaze never once met any of his friends as he talked. Was he lying to them? Why would he lie?

“Sounds like you got off easy then.” Nino told him, “Does that mean you’re coming to school again?”

Adrien’s eyes softened, and he shook his head; “No. My father wants me to stay home, where he can know I’m safe. Especially since Hawkmoth probably knows who I am by now.”

“So, he’s keeping you locked up for your own protection?” Alya asked, “He does know your Chat Noir, right? That kicking butt is what you do?”

Adrien gave a chuckle, but it sounded forced, “Yeah, I know. But, he’s my father. I can understand his concern.”

Marinette wanted to trust that Adrien was telling the truth, but she had known him too long, too well, to believe it. He gave too many clues that he was hiding something, something personal, painful. She wanted to hug him like the night before, to beg him to be honest with her so she could help, but she couldn’t do that to him.

Not in front of his other friends.

Not as Marinette.

So she just watched him with a fake smile on his face, trying to tell them that everything was fine, all while he fidgeted with the silver ring on his right hand.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone.

So, here’s one of the most painful scenes for me to write. And this is only chapter 5...

Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed it. If you have anything you'd like to say (questions, theories, predictions), let me know in the comments. I love reading through the messages

Claws in
~Jo
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Mainly friendship stuff in this chapter...

Oh, and the appearance of my favorite underappreciated classmate...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Fifteen minutes went by in what felt like seconds, and before Adrien knew it, Nathalie was texting him to return inside.

“Well, it’s looking like my break is up,” he said, as casually as he could muster. He had to let them believe that everything was fine, that his father hadn’t taken almost everything from him. To them, he had to stay the same Adrien they had always known.

The shock of the reveal was enough for them to adjust to. He didn’t want them to worry about the fate of Chat Noir or the hollowness that threatened to consume him from the inside out. He had to play the good son act again, even though he hated it.

“That sucks.” Nino stated, “Are you sure you can’t spare a couple more minutes?”

Adrien laughed, and he hoped it didn’t sound as fake as it seemed; “I’d love to, but you know how Father is with schedules.”

“Yeah, it’s probably a good idea to stay on his good side for now.” Alya agreed, “You never know when you’ll have to sneak out again to fight an Akuma.”

Oh, how he hoped that time wouldn’t come before he had figured out what to do. He had made a promise, given his word, but only because it was that, or giving his miraculous away. He couldn’t do the latter.

He had more questions than answers and fears than comfort, but he did his best to push the thoughts out of the forefront of his mind. He needed to get through the goodbyes, then he could lose himself in thought.

“Adrien,” Marinette started, causing him to look at her. She had her arms crossed over herself, looking just as nervous as he felt. “Can you promise me something?”

He flinched at the word choice, though he wasn’t sure if it was physically or just emotionally. He really didn’t want to make any more promises, but this was Marinette. He trusted her.

“What is it?”

Marinette pressed her lips together like she was looking for words; “Promise me that if something
happens, and you worry that you may get akumatized, that you’ll call Nino, or Alya, or me.” She added herself quieter than the others, like she was reluctant to add herself to the list of people he would trust enough to call in that moment. Did she not remember the last night that he was crying in her arms, showing his more vulnerable-self to her?

“Don’t worry about me,” he told her, before forcing a chat-like grin, “I still have my miraculous, and my Marinette Lucky Charm, so I think I’ll be just fine.”

He waited for her to smile, to relax at all, but her blue eyes stayed very serious, like she could tell the smiles were fake and was begging for the truth. Maybe he could-

He forced himself to look away. No. He wouldn’t burden her with his problems any more. Not from a lack of trust, but for her own sake. For all of their sakes.

“Promise me.” echoed in his mind, and he wasn’t sure if she had repeated herself, or his brain was pleading for him to let someone in.

“But, if I do, you’ll be the first one I’ll call.” he told her, looking back at meeting her gaze. He watched relief wash in the blue hues, and he knew he couldn’t back out now. Regardless of any unknown connections that may or may not have tied them together, she trusted him far too much for him to stay completely silent. He only hoped it wouldn’t come to that.

“Hey, you’d call me too right.” Nino said, partly teasing, but with seriousness all to present.

Marinette tore her eyes away from the melancholy green eyes she had been so focused on, when Adrien looked away. “Of course I would.” He walked over to Nino and gave him an affectionate pat on the back.

Marinette could tell by his tone that he was being guarded, yet wasn’t lying when he said he would call them if he was ever at the risk of akumatization. That put her mind at rest. His safety was all she wanted for him.

For now.

“Alright. Sorry to break up the bromance here;” Alya said, a teasing smile on her lips, “But, we should get to school before class starts.”

“Fine.” Nino conceded, before turning back to Adrien, “You had better keep good on that promise.”

Adrien fished out his phone. “I have you on speed-dial.”

Nino seemed content with that answer because he started to follow his girlfriend, who gave a parting wave back at Adrien.

Marinette started to follow, but then met eyes with Adrien. She could still see something wrong in them, so she gave him what she hoped was a comforting smile.

“Don’t worry, Princess.” he said, his tone just quiet enough to not be heard over the couple, “I’ve still got luck on my side.” He proved his point by pulling out the aforementioned charm -he really did bring it everywhere- and a wink.
Feeling the heat rush to her cheeks, she turned away and followed her friends.

Adrien watched them turn the corner, before letting his smile drop. He may have gone a tad overboard, but he wanted to reassure Marinette the best he could. She couldn’t be worrying about him, or she may get akumatized.

“Can I come out now?” Plagg grumbled from his pocket, and Adrien let the Kwami out. Since Plagg hadn’t spoken since the meeting with his father, the blond figured he’d have plenty to say.

“Alright Plagg. You can say it.”

“Say what?” Plagg asked, feigning innocence.

Adrien looked at him, “Really? You have nothing to say about my meeting with Father.”

“I’m not going to say anything that you don’t already know.” he replied, crossing his tiny arms, “However, I am curious if you were serious about that promise thing.”

Adrien sighed and started towards his house, “I only said it to keep my miraculous, but now I’m stuck in a corner.”

“How come?” the kwami questioned, “Just use it if you need to and, if he ever asks, just say you crossed your fingers or whatever you humans do to break promises.”

“But, I don’t break promises.” Adrien replied, adamantly, “I just need to figure out how to still help without Chat Noir.”

Plagg looked at him skeptical, but before he could speak, he flew into Adrien’s shirt again just as Nathalie approached them.

“Come along, Adrien. It’s time for class.” she said, regaining her detached demeanor, and he followed her, continuing to ponder his last statement.

As soon as the trio rounded to corner, Alya turned to Marinette; “Okay spill it.”

“Spill what?” Marinette asked. Had she heard Adrien’s passing words?

Alya crossed her arms; “Um, About you and Adrien? What is he talking about thanking your parents?”

“Oh yeah, that.” she replied, running her hand over her hair, “Well, basically. He was patrolling the area as Chat, and stopped by to talk and-”

“And.” Alya prodded.

“And, it started to rain. So, we went inside, and he had dinner with my parents.”

“Oh, gotten to the point of ‘dinner with the parents’, huh?” Alya asked, using air quotes to emphasize her point.

“Alya.” Marinette scolded, glancing at Nino. If he hadn’t picked up on her feeling for Adrien, he knew them now.
Nino only walked on, seeming unphased by his girlfriend’s comments. He either knew already or wasn’t listening. She didn’t know which was worse.

“But, for real though.” Alya continued, “Adrien was giving you a weird look.”

“ Weird? Like I’m weird?”

“No. like-” Alya shook her head, “Let’s just say, you may have a better chance with ‘Chat Noir’ than you think.”

Marinette shook her head in denial, blush warming her cheeks. Not a chance. Adrien had far more on his mind than any feeling he may or may not have for her. Alya was just sniffing for clues to support her theories. Then again, Alya had rarely been wrong with those theories.

No. This wasn’t the time or the way to entertain thoughts about that. She kept telling herself that as Alya continued to bait Marinette’s hope.

The rest of the school day went by uneventful for Marinette. Well, as eventlessly as it could be when your entire class is buzzing about your crush being a superhero, while you try to figure out how to act like that wasn’t a life-shattering revelation. Add in her previous discussion with Alya, and you have yourself the headspace Marinette was trying to listen to her teacher in.

She was lucky if her notes were anything worth looking over later.

When the final bell went off, she started to gather her things into her bag. As the students started to leave for the day, there was no denying whose voice was complaining in the front of the room. She glanced over to the door, where Chloe was badgering someone who was just trying to go home. Farther inspection proved it to be Nathaniel clutching his bag to his chest as Chloe waved a piece of paper around.

“You still think that Ladybug is the better of the two?” Chloe taunted, as the ginger tried to get his drawing back.

“Chloe, just give it back.”

Marinette had heard enough; “Chloe, leave him alone.”

The two looked at Marinette as she spoke to them, but Chloe seemed to be the only one who wanted to talk.

“This loser thinks that Ladybug is more amazing than Chat Noir, who is Adrien, I might add.” She looked at the red-head, “How could you go against your own classmate like that?”

“I have my reasons.” Nathaniel replied, avoiding the gazes of the couple classmates who were still in the room.

“Is it because you have a crush on her, like you did for Marinette?” Chloe asked, examining at the picture, “Scared you’ll have to compete for her affection?”

Nathaniel didn’t reply, but the color on his face gave him away.

Marinette couldn’t take it anymore. Chloe was sliding into her comfortable role as class bully, and
now that Adrien wasn’t here to try and tone her down, she was making up for the lost time.

“Chloe, stop it.” she demanded, but the blonde ignored her, instead looking at Nathaniel. “Considering that your competing with Adrien of all people, I think it’s safe to assume that you’ve lost.”

With that, she ripped the picture, much to both Nathaniel and Marinette’s horror. Chloe just laughed as she left the classroom.

Marinette went over to her classmate, who was gathering up his ruined sketch. “I’m sorry, Nathaniel.” she said, but he didn’t look at her. Instead, he wordlessly got up, shoved the ripped scraps into his bag, and walked out of the room.

Marinette wanted to follow him, to try to make sure he wouldn’t be Hawkmoth’s next target, but then she remembered that Chloe specifically reminded Nath of the last time he had been called out over his feeling for Marinette.

She felt less than qualified to try to ease the artist, considering if her presence may have made the encounter worse.

“I’ll check on him.” Alya said, from behind her, as if she could read Marinette’s mind and she was thankful that she had.

Hawkmoth wouldn’t have anyone to akumatized if Chloe just stopped being so… Chloe.

The bluenette sighed and started to make her way towards the door out of school. Speaking of akumas-

She pulled out her phone from her purse, and Tikki looked up at her.

“What are you doing?” she asked, in her usual quiet voice.

Marinette unlocked the phone, and scrolled into the message application. “I’m sending a message for Adrien.” she replied, “If Alya is unable to calm down Nathaniel, I should warn him that Nath may go after Chat Noir.”

She typed out the message, but her finger just hovered over the send button, unable to press down. She glanced at her Kwami; “That’s the right thing to do, right? It won’t just put him on edge over something that will never come, increasing the negative emotions he’s already feeling, putting him at risk of akumatization, right?”

Tikki just blinked at her with her large blue eyes; “Marinette, you know Adrien. What do you think?”

Marinette took a breath and pressed send. If the roles were reversed, she would have wanted him to warn her. She only hoped she had made the right choice for him.

Adrien sat at the dining room table, listening to what Nathalie was teaching on. Well, he was trying to. It was hard to focus on her, so he had resorted to trying to untangle the mess in his mind.

Just then, the buzz of his phone jolted him into reality. He looked down at the face and saw a text from an unknown number. He pulled it up and quickly read it.
“Hey, It’s Marinette. I just wanted to let you know that Chloe embarrassed Nath really badly after class. It sounds like he may also have a vendetta against Chat Noir. Stay safe.

-M”

He felt a smile tug at his lip, appreciating the concern, before processing what that meant. Depending on how that exchange went down, he may have a unwelcome visitor looking for him. He shook his head. Why did Chloe have to be so- Chloe?

sending a quick thank-you to Marinette for the heads up, Adrien looked up at Nathalie, waiting for the proper time to interject.

“Nathalie, can I please get up and use the restroom.”

After he was excused and out of sight of his tutor, Adrien pulled up Chloe’s contact information. He couldn’t have her helping Hawkmoth, while Chat Noir was out of commission.

The phone rang three times, before he was greeted with her usual, “Hello, Adrikins.”

“Hey, Chloe. I need to talk to you for a minute.”

“Of course.” she replied, “Anything for you.”

Adrien shivered with discomfort. She needed to read the definition of “platonic” some time. “Did you harass Nathaniel at school?” he asked; he didn’t really have time to beat around the bush.

“Who told you that?” she asked, defensively, “I did no such thing.”

Adrien gave a sigh, “Chloe, I’ve known you for a very long time-”

“I didn’t harass anyone.” she repeated, “I just told him the truth.”

“The truth? The truth about what, Chloe?”

She made a smacking sound like she was applying lipstick; “I told him that he doesn’t have a chance with Ladybug, because he would have to compete with you.”

Ladybug? Really? Was Chloe now poking her nose in his superhero life too?

Of course she was.

“Chloe,” he started, rubbing his free hand over his face, “Look, I appreciate the thought but-”

“Of course you do.” Chloe interrupted, “Besides, he was also sure that Ladybug was more amazing than you. Ha. I set him in his place for that.”

Adrien rolled his eyes; this wasn’t going to go anywhere.

“Chloe, I have to go. But, can you please tone it down your defense of me.” He pleaded, hoping that if he didn’t argue, she would at least consider what he said.

She gave a sigh, “Fine. But, only because you’re my oldest and dearest friend.”

That was high praise from her.

“Thanks. Have a great day.” He said, about to hang up, “oh, and Chlo. Ladybug is more amazing than me. Trust me on that.”
He could hear her confused stuttering as he hung up.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys. I hope you like the story so far.

I'm sorry that this chapter isn't as exciting as the others have been. I was trying to get out of the grey area between my outline bullet points and it produced this LOL.

Don't worry. The drama will amp up in the next one.

Bug Out
~Jo
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Did Nathaniel get Akumatized?
Will Marinette stop worrying about her partner?
Will Adrien turn into Chat Noir?
These and more ahead...

AKA: I'm bad at summarizing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thankfully, Marinette had retained enough information through her scattered thoughts to be able to complete her homework without too much of a difficulty.

The real challenge was in her concentration. She could only go so far without checking her phone. Alya has texted Marinette, saying that she tried to talk to Nathaniel, but he really wanted to be left alone. That concerned Marinette, and she kept looking at the screen, waiting for an alert of an Akuma sighting.

Finally, Tikki had to take the device to the other side of the room so her chosen could just focus, reassuring her that nothing would happen in the amount of time it took for her to finish her classwork. Marinette wasn’t convinced, but she appreciated her kwami’s concern so she didn’t fight it.

Two hours later, she had finally been able to finish her assignments but wasn’t any less anxious about the possibility of an attack that night. She turned to Tikki, standing up; “Perhaps, I should do a patrol. Make sure everything is okay.”

“You can’t continue worrying like this. If someone is going to be upset, that’s up to them. And, you have done everything you could do to help. There’s no point in spending all of your time worrying about it. You have other responsibilities than just being Ladybug.”

Marinette looked at her kwami: she was right, of course.

“Sorry. I’m just on edge. Hawkmoth hasn’t taken any action since Adrien’s identity was revealed. What if he’s planning something really big? And, if Nathaniel already has something against Chat Noir, he would be the perfect target for akumatization...”

She shifted uncomfortably in her chair, “I don’t want Adrien to get hurt because he pushed me out of the way of Lady Fisher’s stupid net.”

She rested her head on the back of her chair with enough force to make her chair spin a little,
while Tikki just watched her.

Sure, the kwami had seen previous Ladybugs dealing with similar emotions after discovering their partner’s identity, but only very few actually knew their partner was well as Marinette knew Adrien. Most of the pairing had been Work-based and only slipped into unmasked life after they revealed themselves to their partner.

Chat knew Marinette, and Ladybug saved Adrien. Adrien and Marinette were classmates, and Chat and Ladybug were loyal partners. It was completely understandable why Marinette was worried for Adrien’s safety since it wasn’t just Chat Noir she was protecting.

But, it wouldn’t do Adrien, herself, or Paris, any good if Marinette was this paranoid that an Akuma would *eventually* attack.

Unfortunately, they were still at war with Hawkmoth, and he definitely wasn’t going to let up just because Chat Noir’s identity was revealed. Tikki decided to keep that last bit to herself.

“Perhaps, we should take a trip to The Guardian. Maybe he would know how to handle this.” Tikki suggested, pulling Marinette’s attention out of whatever black hole of stress she was being sucked into. Honestly, part of her was suggesting this because even though she had been around a long time, she still didn’t fully understand how human reactions worked. Master Fu would be far more suited to guide her in that way.

Marinette looked at Tikki, and gave a nod; “Well, it couldn’t hurt, I guess. Tikki, spots-“

A chime on her phone stopped Marinette mid-phrase and she scrambled to her bed where Tikki had transported her phone.

“*Warning: Akuma sighting at The Louvre. People are cautioned to stay indoors.*”

“*That trip will have to wait,”* Marinette told her kwami, before transforming and taking off.

Adrien sat on his bed; he rarely had a “day off”, and he had no idea what to do. If he could transform, he would patrol, or visit Marinette, or… something

But, no. He couldn’t do that.

He just sat in his room that was far too big, feeling just as trapped as if he was in a cardboard box.

Suddenly, his phone let out a very distinctive chime. His stomach lurched; that sound only meant one thing. There had been an Akuma sighting.

He moved to his computer and pulled up the Ladyblog. Plagg hovered nearby, but Adrien stayed focused on the live stream that was rolling out.

Alya seemed to be outside, barricaded by police trying to keep Parisians safe. That didn’t stop her
from reporting what she knew; “The Akuma looks like he got his style from Chat Noir. And his powers too. Could this be the work of another imposter or something else?”

Adrien bit his lip. Marinette mentioned that Nathaniel had some form of vendetta for the cat hero, but Adrien couldn’t for the life of him think why.

After messing up so badly with that sculptor and making a whole mess of people’s feelings, Adrien had been very careful to keep any aggravating comments to himself so he wouldn’t cause another Akuma.

Plus, what had Chat ever done to the red-haired artist? He had crashed his and Marinette’s “date” when he was the Evillustrator, but he shouldn’t have held that against him, or even remembered it.

That’s when what Chloe had told him sunk in.

She told Nathaniel he had no chance with Ladybug because of Chat Noir, because of him. He was copying Chat because he liked his lady.

Adrien stood up and started to pace. Trying to figure out what to do. He wanted to go out and protect Ladybug,

“So, are we going out there?” Plagg asked, leisurely hovering next to Adrien’s much more tense strides.

He wanted to. Oh, how he wanted to.

“How can’t I, Plagg?” He asked, though it was far more a question for himself, “I’m trapped in my own house, and Chat Noir is out of commission. How could I possibly help Ladybug as just me?”

He stopped in his place as he remembered the latter end of their battle with Lady Fisher. He was Adrien then too. He was Adrien and he was still every bit as Chat Noir as he would have been with the mask. He had to do that again. But how?

Ladybug was at the museum in a matter of moments, but it looked like the akuma had already left. There was a line of police officers keeping the media and citizens away from the building.

She made her landing and easily assessed the room where the akumatization must have occurred.

At a painting that she knew was Nathaniel’s favorite, there was a pile of ash on the ground.

Cataclysm? Had Adrien been there without her? Her stomach knotted at the thought, but she shook it away. He wasn’t just Adrien; he was Chat Noir, and she knew Chat was more than capable of taking care of himself.

She needed to do what Tikki had said and get a handle on her emotions and think logically again.

In the mess of wood and ash that used to be fine art, there were claw marks etched into the wall making a jagged heart with the letters “LB + NK” inside it,
Akumas didn’t use their real names. They used titles given to them by Hawk Moth as a sign of their loyalty to him. But, the initials were too coincidental otherwise. And, if Hawk Moth did let Nathaniel use his real name, why?

She figured she would only get answers from the Akuma himself, so she made her way outside and grabbed her yo-yo. Suddenly, one voice in the crowd pulled her attention to the row of citizens. Alya was in the front, trying to wave over Ladybug.

Marinette knew Alya was probably one of the last people to see Nathaniel before the switch so maybe she had some answers so she quickly made her way over to the reporter.

“Alya. Were you here when it happened?” The spotted hero asked; Ladybug had seen Alya enough that she figured dropping her first name wasn’t gonna be that out of place.

The reporter only nodded, “Yeah, I came over with Nathaniel from school. He was bullied over something and I was trying to help him vent it out healthily. But, when we got here, he asked me to leave him alone. That he just wanted to be alone with the one thing that comforted him. I couldn’t argue with that, so I started to leave, but I came back as soon as he started to destroy the paintings.”

Ladybug nodded; honestly, she had figured as much. “Did he have any people that he may be targeting or looking for?”

“He had been muttering about Chat Noir a lot.” Alya admitted, her reporter objectivity wavering slightly, “Plus, it was made pretty clear that he was willing to fight him for your affection.”

That’s what she was worried about.

“So you know where he might be heading?” Ladybug asked, hoping to get to the redhead before he could get to Adrien.

Alya only shook her head; “I don’t. Sorry.”

A sigh escaped her lips; this wasn’t the first Akuma to target Chat to get to her. They had fought this sort of thing before, she would do it again.

She thanked Alya for her help, and turned to swing away, but felt a hand on her wrist from her best friend.

“Please be careful, Ladybug. Adrien- well, he’s one of my close friends- and I just…”

“I totally understand.” the spotted hero told her, giving a smile to hide her own fear at the situation, “He’s one of my best friends too. Don’t worry. Everything will be fine.”

And with that, she pulled herself away from the crowd and towards the only lead she could think of.
Adrien had stopped his pacing when he had heard his name of the live stream. His real name. It was voiced by Alya, who was worried about him, and Ladybug offered reassurance, before heading away. Alya followed the hero with her camera, before starting to follow.

Adrien recognized the direction they were heading. It was towards his house.

He looked out the window to see if he could make out their approach when they, or Nathaniel, got there.

Adrien was startled by the sound of his kwami next to him; “So, what are we gonna do, Adrien?”

“Well, if the party is going to head here?” he started, looking at the god of destruction, “I guess, we should play the good host and make sure it’s gonna be a heck of a time.”

There was a bit of silence before Plagg replied with a snarky; “You don’t have a plan, do you?”

He was right. Adrien didn’t really have a plan. He didn’t really come up with plans. He just worked with instincts and hoped for the best. But, now, his animal hunches were annoyingly quiet, All he knew was that Ladybug, and probably Nathaniel, was going to be there at any minute, whether he had a plan or not.

All he knew was that he couldn’t stay there and do nothing.

Then, a realization hit him like a bag of bricks to the stomach. He could look out the windows. Meaning the security system hasn’t been activated. He would have expected his father to have activated the security as soon as there was a whiff that he may be in danger, but then again, he knew he shouldn’t have been that surprised. The man didn’t even trigger it when his own life was in danger, and it wasn’t like his father had shown a desire to protect his son more than himself.

He forcibly shook his head as if to shake those thoughts out of his mind. Of course, his dad wanted to protect him. It was his father after all. It wasn’t like he would want to put him in danger.

But, he wasn’t the only one in danger, was he?

He booked it out of the room, kwami on his tail, looking for his father, Nathalie, or anyone else that may have been in danger with an impending Akuma on its way. The moment he left his room, the house feels cold, empty, more so than usual. Pushing aside that feeling, he ran towards his father’s office. The door was closed, and Adrien hesitantly knocked on it. He listened for his father’s voice, but only silence returned to him. He knocked again, asking for his father. When his second attempt was ignored, he hesitantly opened the door and looked inside. He half expected to see his father, looking at him disapprovingly for or some proof that he had been there, but instead, he saw an empty room. It almost looked like his father hadn’t stepped foot inside all day.

He backed out and continued to comb through the large house, looking for any sign of life.
Ladybug rounded her trajectory, keeping herself low enough to the city streets to be able to spot akumatized Nathaniel if she was to pass him. She figured that he would have been heading towards Adrien’s house to settle whatever score he felt slighted in. Perhaps, she could catch the troubled artist before he reached the mansion and try to defuse the situation with the only damage being a couple paintings.

She finally spotted a familiar head of red hair pivoting from rooftop to rooftop, and brought herself to the street just as he finished his final leap, allowing her to take in his akumatized form.

Since this was the first case of repeated akumatization, she had expected to see the Evillustrator again, but that wasn’t who was in front of her. The form before her looked far more like Chat Noir; tight leather suit, solid black mask, black cat-like ears that twitched as he smiled. Yet, it was also far more like the original host than any Akuma she had seen. He still had Nathaniel’s bright red hair and turquoise eyes, though they were slightly more cat-like. It was almost like he dressed in a costume more than just copying her partner.

“Ladybug.” he finally said, a level of surprised excitement in his voice, “I was hoping you would find me.” He placed the baton on his back, showing that he didn’t mean to attack the heroine, causing her to relax a little. She would have to play this safe if she didn’t want him to dash to the mansion behind them and cause havoc.

“Me?” she asked, “Why were you looking for me?” She knew the answer to that very well, but it was a safe enough topic she figured to distract him as she looked for the akuma.

“Why wouldn’t I look for you?” he asked, his voice sounding so much like the way the Evillustrator had spoken to Marinette and her stomach knotted.

Why did she have to do this same dance with the same classmate, just with different masks?

“You’re beautiful and clever and brave.” he continued, “You’ve done so many amazing things, and…” He shifted side to side nervously, “honestly, I’ve always wanted to be your partner. To just admire the things you do up close, to...”

He stepped closer to her, and she forced herself to stand still, telling herself that she was still standing in the way of Adrien and an Akuma, an Akuma that didn’t want to hurt her.

Nathaniel stopped only close enough to reach a tentative hand forward to meet her cheek; “To see you up close, to confess my feelings for you.”

Ladybug kept her eyes trained on his, reading a level of desperateness in his eyes. They were the eyes of someone who had been rejected before and were scared that that heartbreak may happen again.

It hurt her to know that they were right.

“Nathaniel, you shouldn’t need to change who you are for someone.”

“But, I didn’t.” he claimed, “I’m still me. I just… I’m more like someone you’d be into. I mean, I couldn’t even get with a girl in my class; how could I attract a Superhero like you?”

Ladybug’s heart sank as she looked at her classmate with pity; “I’m sure you’re a great guy. And,
someone is going to notice it one day.”

He shook his head, his cat ears dropping; “I don’t want just someone. I want you. I want to be your partner, and save the city with you, and-”

His ears perked, and his hand dropped to his sides, balling into fists as his face twisted with contempt.

“I want to be him.”

Ladybug looked behind her to see Adrien exiting his house, armed with nothing but a face of determination. She turned back to Nathaniel, who had started to shift angrily in his place.

“Please,” was all she was able to get out before his gaze snapped to her, rendering her speechless. His eyes looked damp and his head was tilted just slightly in a questioning way.

“It’s not Chat you want, is it?” he asked, a rumble in his voice that sounded nothing like her shy classmate; “You want Adrien Agreste. Fine, I can do that.”

He ran his left hand over his leather suit, transforming it into Adrien’s black t-shirt and jeans. Then, he ran the same hand through his hair, losing the cat ears and turning his straight hair into waves that were an auburn mirror of the models.

The only part of him that didn’t shift to resemble Adrien was his eyes.

“Am I good enough now?” he asked, his voice cracking with emotion, “Could you possibly look at me like you look at him?”

Ladybug pressed her lips together, unsure what she could possibly say to him.

She didn’t feel that way about him.

She didn’t feel that way as Marinette.

She didn’t feel that way as Ladybug.

She couldn’t make herself feel that way even if she wanted to.

She met his eyes, but they looked harder than she had ever seen them.

“Why won’t you love me?” he asked, “What’s wrong with me?” An idea flashed before his eyes as he looked back at Adrien; “Of course. His Miraculous. If I have that, I can be both Adrien and Chat Noir. You’d love me for sure then.”

Nathaniel’s eyes filled with a jealous rage, and Ladybug grabbed her yo-yo, ready to strike. But, before she had a chance, Nathaniel had shifted to faux Chat once again. Without a word, he put his hand on the ground, effectively creating a pitted trap that pulled Ladybug into the ground.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, looking down at the spotted heroine at the bottom, “But, I have to take
care of some unfinished business.”

Adrien stood there, taking in the situation. His lady was trapped in a pit, and an Akuma that looked like unbridled fury was running towards him.

This was not good.

“Transform,” Plagg instructed from his pocket, but instead, Adrien rolled out of the way of Nathaniel’s warpath.

“I can’t” he reminded the kwami, “Besides if I have a chance to defuse this, it will have to come from Adrien.” He didn’t need to see Plagg to know the expression of confusion he must have given in response to his -admittedly insane- logic.

His father had left him abandoned, unable to protect himself with either the high-security system or the borrowed power of the god of destruction. Yet, there was just a shred of morality in him that kept him from going back on his word.

Nathaniel started to twirl his staff into a fighting stance, “Fight me, Adrien. Fight me for her affection.”

“I’m not going to fight you, Nathaniel,” Adrien told him.

Nathaniel leveled his gaze in a way that said, so be it, and Adrien reached down to throw whatever he could towards the Akuma to distract him.

It was a rock in the shin.

Nathaniel yelped in pain, and Adrien took cover behind the car.

“Fighting each other won’t gain Ladybug’s affection.” Adrien tried to reason, “She’s able to give that to anyone she deems worthy of it.”

“Someone like you?” Nathaniel fired back, the venom of his words palatable in the air, “Let’s face facts Agreste. It’s not a competition you’re competing with perfection.”

Adrien could feel the car disintegrating behind him and he jumped back to face his opponent.

“You think my life is perfect?” Adrien asked him, trying to appeal to the classmate under the mask of heightened emotions that akumas caused, “You want to live my life? You don’t know how badly I wish I didn’t.”

He dodged another assault, landing hard on his ankle causing him to hiss in pain as he looked at Nathaniel, who merely chuckled; “Oh, yeah. It must be so hard for you. A pretty rich boy who lives as a model by day, and a superhero by night. You may not notice it because you’re so used to it, but people treat you differently than they treat people like me. You say one word and you’re able to win the hearts of classmates and partners alike with an ease that guys like me dream of having.”

He gave a growl that sounded almost animalistic in nature, “I’d kill to have your life.”

Adrien didn’t doubt the meaning in that, pulling himself up against the fence and using it to
support the structure to keep off his bad leg. He couldn’t stop the laugh at the irony that was unfolding.

“You want my life that badly? You want to have a father that doesn’t care enough about you to protect you from an Akuma, many different akumas, and instead threatens to take away the one way you have to protect yourself?

“You want to be trapped in your own house by schedule and rules that you have no control over, losing one by one the things that matter to you as a punishment for being a hero?

“You want to spend day after day with the most amazing girl you’ve ever met, only to get rejected when she admits to having feelings for someone else, and the worst part is, you don’t even know who it is or why she chose them over you?

“If that’s the life you want Nathaniel, you can have it! Because I’d rather take whatever you’re trading for it.”

The Akuma seemed stunned by the blond’s sudden burst of honesty, and the way he continued to laugh like this was just some cruel joke that life had played on him. Adrien laughed and laughed, each breath giving a more broken and almost maniacal sound.

Finally, the thin veil of ‘humor’ was replaced with tears, the breakdown of a failed superhero and a broken son, as he slid back down the wall, crying into his arms.

He didn’t want to fight his emotions anymore. Fight to stay composed, to be the perfect son. He was done fighting.

He was just done.

Nathaniel seemed to come back to himself, and demanded the miraculous, not believing the broken boy, or just fulfilling Hawkmoth’s demands. It didn’t matter anymore.

Before Adrien had a chance to respond, he could hear the whirl of Ladybug’s yo-yo, “I’m sorry, Nathaniel, but I can’t let you do that.”

One quick tug and the Akuma was on the ground being pulled to the spotted heroine, who bound the victim with a pair of spotted handcuffs. A quick search through his pockets and a ripped paper later, a black and purple butterfly was released. “No more evil doing for you, little Akuma.” She said, catching it in her yo-yo, “It’s time to de-evilize.”

After she had purified it, and set off her Miraculous cure, she walked over to Adrien, who still sat slumped against the wall.

If Ladybug was to describe how Adrien looked in that moment, she would choose Broken. This whole ordeal had broken her partner. Broken his emotions, broken his soul. Turned her carefree cat to a sobbing mess at the life he was forced to live. She knew it had been bad, but she would never have guessed it was like this.

“Adrien,” she said, as softly as she could to not upset his emotions further, and the blond looked up at her, the red in his eyes bringing out the green that much more.

“I’m sorry, M’Lady.” He said with a quaking voice, “I never wanted you to see me like this.”
“Shh…” She soothed, pulling him to her like she had the night before on her Balcony. Her fingers brushed through his messy hair, and he buried his face in her neck, letting the remainder of his tears fall against her suit.

She had seen him at his most vulnerable twice in as many days, and as honored as that felt, it also broke her heart to see him hurting so much. She wanted to pull away from her mask and tell him that one thing had gone right in his life; that his love wasn’t unrequited. That the other person who had her heart had been him all along, but she couldn’t get the words to form.

After her earring had given three warning beeps, Adrien pulled himself out of the warmth of her embrace. “Go, M’Lady. You’re about to timeout.”

“But, Chat…” She started and he shook his head.

“I can’t have you lose what I’ve lost.”

She bit her lip and did as he asked, readying her yo-yo to leave, but she looked back at her partner for one last moment; “Keep your window open.”

Then, she was gone from sight.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys. I’m sorry it took so long. I’m not the best on getting from Point A to Point B so it took me a while to figure out how I wanted this chapter to roll out.

So, this is the last chapter before Season 2 comes out in the USA and I’m stoked! Finally, my little hints to the bits I’ve seen of YT will be understood by all LOL

But, yeah. Let me know what you think so far and any predictions you may have.

Love you all,
~Jo
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Ladybug comes to comfort a broken Adrien and we get some hurt/comfort fluff

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Adrien sat at his desk, still reeling over what was captured in the Ladyblog’s live stream of the earlier battle, though truthfully there wasn’t really much to see. Most of the footage seemed to be either Alya trying to make her way to his house or help Ladybug out of Nathaniel’s pit-trap, or Alya’s phone ‘accidentally running out of battery’ mid-way through his half-intelligible confession. (It was fairly clear that Alya was trying to protect whatever remained of Adrien Agreste’s reputation, and he appreciated it highly.)

Hearing his own words come out of his mouth still gripped him in a way that struck him with guilt and shame, even hours later. Sure, it wasn’t a lie of any form, but it also wasn’t anything he had wanted to admit.

He hadn’t even told his closest friends those kinds of things, but if the texts from the three were to be trusted, they didn’t need to make out the entire confession to know that ‘Father locked me up for my protection’ wasn’t the truth.

He had hated lying to them, but how could he have told them? Any of it?

*Hey, my father is punishing me for saving Paris multiple times and is trying to take away my Miraculous…*

A feeling started to nag at Adrien: suspicion.

Ladybug’s early suspicion of his father as being Hawkmoth was never something to which he wanted to give any weight, yet…

If his father wasn’t Hawkmoth, why would he want to take the black cat ring from him?

Where had he been during the attack?

As much as he hated to admit it, there were too many things pointing that way to not be wary.

The guilt that ate at him grew. How could he suspect his father of being Hawkmoth, a cruel villain who took advantage of people’s pain for his own benefit, who had jeopardized the lives of so many people, himself included?

What kind of son suspected his father of such a heinous thing? His father was far from a saint, but he wouldn’t go so far as to risk Adrien’s life (knowingly, considering akumatizing people like Kagami and Nathaniel that were *targeting* him).

No.

His father couldn’t be Hawkmoth.
There had to be another explanation. Perhaps, his father was just emotionally distant and neglectful, or maybe he wanted to maintain control of his son’s life. Even though those ideas frustrated Adrien, they were better than the alternative answer, so he would take it.

Suddenly, he could hear a light knock behind him. He turned his chair to see Ladybug at his window. Since she had asked him to keep a window opened, he figured she would come.

He felt his heart sag at the sight of her. She looked just as beautiful and amazing as ever, only illuminated by the light from his computer screen. He could only imagine the mess looking back at her. He had been nervously toying with his hair for hours until it was a chaotic mess between Adrien and Chat. The physical manifestation of his internal struggle.

Ladybug slid her body into the room with ease, gently hitting the floor with a light thud. The entire room was dark, the only light coming from Adrien’s computer, and she noticed it was open to the Ladyblog.

She could only imagine what was going through his head. It had only been two days and everything he had grown to expect and cherish was going torn from him. She wished there was something she could do, but even Ladybug couldn’t fix everything.

“Hey, Adrien.” she greeted his silhouette, trying to keep her tone even and casual. She didn’t want to say or do something that could make him feel any worse.

“Hello, M’lady…” he replied, his voice lacking all the charisma that always accompanied that nickname.

No matter which name he went by, Adrien was always consistent in one way: whether it was happiness, flirtation, or just serenity, his words always had emotions tangible within them. Now, he just sounded…numb.

This wasn’t him; either side of him.

“I wanted to check on you,” she told him, bypassing any questions of him being okay. Anyone that knew him at all could tell he wasn’t. Adrien gave a smile that seemed as forced as his greeting.

“I appreciate that. Thank you.”

“It’s not a problem.” she told him, as she made her way closer to him, “Is there anything in particular that you want to talk about?”

He shook his head quickly.

“Is it okay if we try to forget that I broke down in front of an Akuma, my partner, and a livestream of the battle?” He gave a weak chuckle.

It was painful for her to watch her usually optimistic classmate and partner lack any humor in his laugh, but that’s what happened. However, Ladybug agreed to his request.

“Just know that I’m here for you if you ever do want to talk about anything.” she told him, placing her hand on his shoulder in a comforting way, “You’re my partner, you know, and I’d do anything for you.”
“I know, M’lady.” he replied, looking up at her with a flicker of admiration in his eyes, “Thank you.”

They stood in silence for a few moments, neither one sure how to talk to the other. Finally, it was Ladybug who broke the silence.

“Actually, I have one question about today.” Adrien looked at her, and she quickly added, “but, if you don’t want to answer it, I totally understand. I don’t want to make you uncomfortable-”

“What is it?” He asked without any hesitation. Ladybug bit her lip, carefully picking her words.

“While Nathaniel was coming after you, why didn’t you transform into Chat Noir?”

Adrien let out a loud sigh, looking away from her, allowing the little light they had cast shadows on his grim expression.

She predicted the answer of her question took her to the edge of a topic he never talked in depth about with anyone, and she didn’t want to use his undying desire to connect with Ladybug as a way to pry. She would never do something like that to him.

“Like, I said, if you don’t want to talk about it, we don’t have-”

“It was a promise I made to my father.” He said, his voice finally showing a single emotion: regret. “He cornered me, demanding me to give him my Miraculous, and I had to say something to keep him from taking it.” Recounting the situation out loud, Gabriel was sounding more and more like their butterfly-themed enemy. He forced that idea aside and continued, “I have never broken a promise in my life, and he knew having me give my word would keep me from using it.” He gave another chuckle, trying to hide the cracks in his voice. “I assume he didn’t expect me to do something as stupid as going out without my armor.”

“It wasn’t-” Ladybug started to console him, but he cut her off.

“It was, Lady. I couldn’t sit on sidelines so I went out unprepared and tempted fate. It was reckless and impulsive. But, isn’t that how I’ve always been? Running into combat half-cocked, only making it out okay because you’re there?”

Ladybug’s lips formed a line. Watching Adrien describe himself as ‘reckless’ and ‘impulsive’ was so strange, but when he was under the mask, they was words that she herself had used to describe her partner in the past. However, now knowing what he went through at home explained why he liked to leap first and ask questions later. It seemed less like acts of impulse and more fighting for freedom. It must have felt devastating to have his controlling father take that away by using his personal convictions against him.

She went to answer but caught him twirling his miraculous in his fingers.

“Maybe I’m not cut out to be Chat Noir anymore. I mean, I can’t use my powers anyway. And, if today was an indication, I’m not able to handle the pressure this job requires of me.”

And, my father wants to take it from me.

She placed her hand on his, effectively stopping the twirling motion.

“Don’t you dare.”

He kept his gaze on their hands, and she continued.
“The one thing you’ve proven again and again in this whole mess is that Chat Noir isn’t the reason you’re a hero. Chat’s a hero because of you.”

She knelt down a bit so she could meet Adrien’s eyes, commanding herself not to get lost in the forest of green.

“You’ve continuously proved yourself as brave, and clever, and kind. All of those are traits that make you a hero. Perhaps you could have had a plan, but you did what your heart told you was right.” She placed her hand on his chest for emphasis. “And, you have a good heart, Adrien Agreste. That’s why you were chosen in the first place. We will make it through this together. Just Ladybug and Chat Noir, heroes of Paris. Please, don’t ever see yourself as just a reckless sidekick, because I sure don’t.”

Her gaze turned far more serious.

“And don’t you dare act like I don’t need you. You told me that I could do this our first battle, that Paris would one day see us for the heroes that we would be. And now it’s my turn to return the favor. Paris still needs us. They need you. And, even if you’re no longer wearing the black mask, you are my partner, and I will have your back just like you’ve always had mine.”

He just looked at her, his heart beating spasticity under her hand. She seemed so sure of her words, of who he was.

People had always told him who he was.

An heir to a fashion empire.

A wealthy teenage boy.

A heartthrob model.

A disappointment.

The Chosen.

But, this was the first time he actually wanted to believe what someone had told him. Ladybug looked at him with such pure intentions that he didn’t want to ever let her down.

Instead, he engulfed her in a hug. She seemed startled at first but easily conformed herself to fit in his arms. The exchange wasn’t nearly as desperate for comfort as their previous ones had been. It was just an embrace of affection between the two. A promise that, no matter what happened next, they had each other.

It was all he needed from her, and all she ever asked of him.

After a few minutes, it was Adrien who pulled away.

“Thank you, M’Lady. You don’t know how badly I needed that.”

“Well, I’m glad to help,” She told him, placing a hand on his cheek, causing the boy to close his eyes and nuzzle in like a love-starved kitten. It hurt to see him so unsure of himself, especially after feeling like she had finally unmasked and truly knew the boy she had admired for so long.

They needed to figure this out; to revive the optimistic Adrien and confident Chat that she had
“Adrien,” she started, giving him time to open his eyes and look at her, “we should go see The Guardian tonight. He may know what to do. How to go from here.”

He gave a sigh, not daring to look in her eyes, but unable to move from her touch. He had been open to visiting the mysterious Guardian the day before, but what if he had seen Alya’s live stream? What if he knew what a mess he had been? Would he look at Adrien as a mistake? Did he regret giving Adrien his powers?

He didn’t even realize he had lost himself in a spiral of self-doubt until he felt a gloved hand grounding him back into reality with a gentle brush of his cheek with her thumb.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have brought it up. I just figured you’d like another opinion, but I had forgotten that you haven’t even met him yet. I’d be with you every step of the way, but I know just how worried I was when Tikki brought me to him the first time, and—“

“No, we need to go.” he told her, gently cutting her off, “I have questions, and perhaps he’ll have the answers. But,” He hesitated slightly, “can we just stay here like this… just a little longer?”

The curl of her lip was only caught slightly by the dim light.

“Of course, Kitty.”

In a couple quick motions that Adrien’s mind was unable to make out in it’s overwhelmed state, Ladybug switched their positions so that she was sitting on his bed with him sitting on her lap.

If he was in any state to care, he may have thought about how weak, helpless, or, dare he say it, broken he looked curled in her lap like a lost cat. But, lucky for the remaining shreds of dignity, he didn’t care.

He did, however, have enough awareness to see an opportunity when he saw one.

“Well gee, M’Lady. Had I known that all I needed to do to be in your arms was ask, I would have done that a long time ago.”

Ladybug tried her best to look annoyed, but her eyes gave her fondness away.

“Hush or I’ll push you on the floor.”

“Meouch,” he muttered, but otherwise did as she asked, and curled himself into the warm embrace of his lady, taking full advantage of having her support. One arm laid around his back with the other running through his hair, gently separating the strands, and scratching just like she did when his more feline tendencies came through. One of such tendencies decided to make an appearance as a low rumble from his throat.

His eyes opened in surprise, and he looked up and met amusement in her blue irises.

“I didn’t know you could purr out of costume.”

“Neither did I…”

Ladybug gave a laugh that Adrien could feel due to still being in her embrace.
“Oh my goodness. I can’t believe that you’re literally just a giant cat.”

He gave a pout, but it was just for show considering just how much he loved hearing her laugh, even if it was at his expense.

“Hey. I’m just as human as you.”

“Perhaps,” she said, her laughter turning more mischievous, “but, I’m curious just how many qualities have imprinted themselves on your civilian form.”

Before Adrien had any chance to protest, Ladybug moved one hand to his chin and started lightly dragging her nails against the skin, bringing back the uncontrollable purr.

“Ladybug,” he complained, his voice coming out rumbly between the vibrations in his throat, “Why must you tease me in this way?”

“Revenge,” she replied, matter-of-factly, her fingertips ghosting his ear, causing him to twitch.
(Due to an unfortunate instance on a patrol a couple weeks prior, he knew if it was his cat-ears, only they would have flickered under her touch.)

“For what?” he asked.

She gave a chuckle.

“Where should I start? The insistent use of puns.”

She drug her fingers through his hair, causing the boy to close his eyes and push into her touch.

“Your need to drop terrible pickup lines at the worst times.”

Another ghost-touch caused his body to twitch again, and his lady continued.

“I guess you could call it revenge for you being you.”

He couldn’t reply; he just let his purr win out and lost himself in the affection that he craved, though he wasn’t sure if it was just because of his cat-side.

“However,” Ladybug said, her voice not much more than a whisper that barely carried over the engine sound Adrien was producing, “I wouldn’t trade my dorky partner for anything.”

He opened his eyes and was met with blue, a beautiful sea of adoration from his best friend, his partner, his lady.

Man, he loved her so much.

“Geez. Just kiss already and get it over with. You guys are disgusting.”

Ladybug quickly looked away, and Adrien shot a death glare to his kwami, who had apparently woken from his cat nap and just felt the need to ruin the moment the duo was experiencing.

Now, they would have to return to reality, to the swimming doubts and fears that had been silenced by her inane ability to bring him to a state of ease.

He wasn’t used to being emotional transparent. There wasn’t really anyone in his life he could be so vulnerable with.
His father only ever expected silent obedience from him and would lash out if Adrien so much as expressed an emotion aside from compliance.

His mother, though far more feeling that his father, instructed him to be less like herself in that aspect and more like his seemingly emotionless father.

His modeling career was all about faking expressions to market, to sell something. It wasn’t a bad thing, per say, but there wasn’t anything real about it.

And, even though he knew he had friends like Nino, Marinette, Alya, and even Chloe if he was desperate, he never really felt like he could open up to them. Would they still accept him if they knew all the ugly parts of his past, all the blemishes in his personality? He was too scared to be alone again to take that risk.

But, here he was in Ladybug’s arms, wondering if this is what true acceptance felt like. He had been afraid when she realized who he was, that she would think less of him now that he was revealed. But, she had been by his side, watching him spiral into insecurity and fear, and instead of running away, she was pulling him as close as she could. If he had to lose the facade to know just how good it felt to be in her embrace, to be in her arms, then it was worth it.

He looked back to Ladybug, who had blush appearing under her mask in a shade of pink that complimented her suit.

“Um… You feeling better now?”

Adrien gave a nod, forcing himself to stand up. His legs were a tad wobbly at first, though he wasn’t sure if it was because he was just vibrating uncontrollably or because felt more relaxed than he had ever in his life. Either way, when he regained his composure, he turned to help Ladybug up off his bed.

“I’m glad,” she told him, as she got up and stood next to him.

The first thing Adrien noticed was that Ladybug looked so much smaller now that they were standing; the second was that she hadn’t let go of his hand the second she stood up. She just let their hands lightly hold each other, almost like a reminder that she was still there for him.

“Are you ready to go?”

And, despite the blush that he could feel warming his face, he gave a little smile, bringing her hand to his lips.

“I’m always ready to follow you, M’lady.”

Chapter End Notes

Hewwo Guys,

Sorry for these updates taking so long. I just started a new job and it’s cutting into my writing time.
Good News Though: I have proofreaders now, so thank you to Billy, Jen, and "Moo" for their help with this chapter. I’m a fan of it and I hope you all liked it too.

If you have any comments or ideas for where this story is going, just let me know. It
makes my day when I get to read what you have to say :)

Until then,
Peace out, Scouts

-
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Ladybug takes Adrien to meet The Guardian, and the three discuss the future...

Side Note: Protective Ladybug is the Best Ladybug

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Soaring through the Paris night air always felt like such an unreal sensation to Ladybug. Feeling the wind push her pigtails back as she ran across rooftops or was pulled by the string of her yo-yo, the smells of nighttime surrounding her with its calming aroma, adrenaline pumping through her veins with every leap and bound.

And it was all heightened as she held Adrien.

She had carried him across rooftops to safety before, but it was so different now. Being near him was different. She had seen him at his most vulnerable, most genuine self, and he let her in, clinging to her like she was the only real thing to him.

Perhaps, she was.

Now, she hated her mask more than ever.

Ladybug felt like she had learned so much more about her partner in the last two days than she could have ever learned with his secret identity intact, and she wanted to be just as honest and exposed to him too. To hear him call her by her real name while she drew the content purrs from him.

Ladybug chastised herself. She couldn’t let her emotions cloud what needed to be done. The fight against Hawkmoth had gone on long enough that she couldn’t risk putting her partner, her love, in more danger than he already was in, not when they were so close to ending this.

They had to be close by now, right?

The duo turned landed on a rooftop, and she gently brought them to the ground in front of Master Fu’s building. She was thankful that she didn’t need Tikki to direct her there anymore.

“Come on.” She told Adrien, heading towards the door.

Adrien instinctively grabbed onto his lady’s hand, and she looked back at him. The night was dark, but she could make out his nervous smile. She tried to comfort him by smiling in return and tightening her grip on his hand in hers, before giving a knock on the door.

A gentle “come in” was offered and the two walked in. Inside was a small man, with grey hair and goatee, a Hawaiian patterned shirt, and a cup of what looked like tea, sitting cross-legged on a large cushion that took up most of the room, and his eyes closed.

Insecurity surged through Adrien, finally in the presence of the one who had given him the
Miraculous. The longer he looked at the stranger, the more familiar he became, though he couldn’t pinpoint an exact meeting or moment. It was almost like a face in a dream that you recognize at the time, but can’t determine why. Was that because of the ring, or was Adrien just being paranoid? He wasn’t sure, and ultimately, he didn’t want to know. It seemed to matter very little behind all the other pressing issues that were bubbling under the surface.

The man opened his eyes and gave a warm smile.

“Ah, Ladybug. Chat Noir.” he greeted as casually as though they had met many times before and those aliases were their true names.

“I’m sorry to bring him here so late.” Ladybug apologized, bowing slightly out of respect, but the man only waved away her concern.

“We were expecting you to come,”

Adrien couldn’t hold back his question: “We?”

Just then, a blur of green came from its hiding place and hovered by the man’s head. It was a turtle-like kwami he learned because as soon as the blur had stopped, Plagg flew from his pocket and hugged the turtle. Honestly, it was the first time Adrien had seen Plagg so affectionate to something that wasn’t cheese.

“Wayzz, it’s been so long.” Plagg moaned, “I missed you. I missed being here. I missed Master Fu’s amazing cheese!”

Adrien fought to not roll his eyes; of course, this somehow linked back to the kwami’s addiction. The man, Master Fu, didn’t seem surprised, however.

“Wayzz will show you where it is. I had some made in case you would visit.”

“Yes! This is why you’re my favorite human!”

“Hey,” Adrien replied, slightly offended that he was being disregarded so quickly. The black cat seemed as unapologetic as ever when the two kwamis flew off to another room, leaving the three humans to discuss what had brought the teens there in the middle of the night.

Master Fu gestured for them to have a seat across from him. As Ladybug sat on her legs and Adrien sat criss-crossed, they were asked if they wanted some tea.

Adrien accepted if only to have something else to do with his hands and mind. Being in this space, sitting with the man that had chosen him to be Chat Noir was already giving him far more questions and very few answers. His head was swimming enough as it was.

“Master,” Ladybug started, once the three were all situated, “I’m sure you’ve heard the news by now.”

“Of course,” he replied as calmly as he had greeted them, “Even though the reveal of a Miraculous user is very dangerous, it is not as uncommon as we would hope. Especially when the black cat is protecting their partner.”

He didn’t sound condemning, but Adrien felt a sting from the words anyway. If he hadn’t been so reckless, so protective, this wouldn’t have happened. He took a long sip from his cup, letting the hot liquid give him time to reconstruct the mask of emotional detachment that he had worn for years. If it worked through the disappearance of his mother, through the isolation of his father, it would work now.
Right?

“So what should we do now?” Ladybug asked, fidgeting in her place. Adrien had worked alongside her long enough that she got antsy if she didn’t have a plan in place. Normally, he could calm her down with a bad joke, but considering the circumstance, he was just as unsettled. However, Ladybug and Chat Noir always got through things all right in the end, and he didn’t want to believe that this would be the exception.

“What do *you* think you should do?” the old man asked, almost philosophically, looking at Adrien, who felt like the least qualified person to answer. He didn’t come up with plans. He never did. How was he supposed to know how to deal with something like this?

“What did the others do?” Adrien asked, his eyes not leaving his tea.

The Master gave a hum before answering, “Many different things. Some went into hiding, only using their powers under the cover of night. Others became more daring, using their loss of identity to their advantage for as long as it was needed.”

“What would they do if they couldn’t use their powers at all?” he asked in a voice so soft, it shouldn’t have been heard. Yet, the man before him seemed to have more abilities than he appeared.

“They would go into retirement, passing on their abilities to someone that could finish the fight they had started,” he replied, sipping his tea before continuing, “Is something stopping you from using your Miraculous?”

Adrien bit his lip. How was he going to explain that his father had such a grip on him that he had successfully rendered him powerless? What kind of chosen was that weak?

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and he turned to see Ladybug, concern clouding her eyes.

“It’s all right, Adrien. You can tell him.”

He took a deep breath, before telling that man what had happened, how his father was controlling and restricted his movements after the news came through. How he had made a promise to not use the ring in exchange for it not being taken away from him. By the end, he was biting back the tears that were crawling up his throat.

“I’m supposed to be Ladybug’s partner, but I’m useless if I can’t fight alongside her because I ‘gave my word’. And, the only reason we’re in this mess is that I was reckless enough to get caught... I should you give back the ring, and give her a fighting chance to have a partner that isn’t going to screw up.”

He didn’t even have a chance to finish before Ladybug was on her feet; “No! I need you, Adrien. I don’t want a different partner because you’re the best partner I could have ever had. You have my back and I have yours, and together, we are unstoppable. We complete each other. Isn’t that what the cat and ladybug are supposed to be?”

She looked at the Master, but he only tilted his head and continued his gaze on Adrien.

“There’s something else causing you to question your possession of the Miraculous, isn’t there?” Adrien could tell by the tone used that there wasn’t any point of pretending that there wasn’t.

“Yes, Master,” he said, a tear making its way to his eye and down his cheek. Ladybug knelt at his
side, eyes trained on his face, but he couldn’t look at anything but the mug in his hands. He couldn’t keep lying to himself.

“I shouldn’t have the Miraculous in my house anymore.”

“Why not?” Ladybug asked him, her voice lacking any of the harshness that had appeared when she had lashed out in his defense just seconds before. He took a deep breath and forced himself to look at her.

“You were right, Ladybug. I think… I believe that my father is Hawk Moth.”

Being right was the last thing Ladybug wanted to be in that moment. Not when she was accusing her partner’s father of being their sworn enemy.

Back when she had first posed her theory that Gabriel Agreste may be Hawk Moth, she didn’t understand why Chat had been so abrasive to the idea, but now that she knew what she did, she wished she had been more gentle in her accusations.

“Are you sure?”

“No,” he replied honestly, “but, it’s too big a risk to take. If my father isn’t Hawk Moth, I’ll damage any relationship my father and I still had. But, if I’m right…”

Adrien shook his head, looking away from Ladybug.

“What makes you suspect him?” she asked him. Adrien gave another of his humorless chuckles, looking down at his cup.

“Other than the fact that he outright demanded my miraculous the first time he saw me after my cover was blown?”

He pressed his lips in a tight line, trying to keep himself together.

“That he’s never once asked about my safety after countless akumas attack my school or come after me directly? That after I leapt from that building and almost fell to my death, he never held me or told me how scared he was to lose me? He only told me to be more honest and to not keep secrets from him.”

He laughed, obviously pushing back the tears that threatened to fall.

“What a hypocrite, right? He’s got more secrets than Pandora’s box, yet it’s me- his son that only snuck out because I wasn’t allowed to ask permission to see a movie that my missing mother starred in, because he wouldn’t speak to me without an appointment- that I’m the one keeping secrets and fracturing whatever relationship we have between us.”

He gave a sniffle, causing Ladybug’s heart to break. She knew he was at his breaking point. so she wrapped her around around him to try to lend any comfort she could.

The only other emotion she could feel other than empathy for her partner, was anger at his father. She knew Gabriel was cold and unemotional, but before today, she never would have guessed it was that bad. Now she had seen her best friend, the one person that could always make her smile in one form of the other, fall completely apart three times in one day. His father had done this to him: made him feel so guilty to have emotions that he had kept them bottled up until so many things piled together that it broke him. And, if that man, that monster, was their enemy, the one
that had been manipulating her friends and family, as well as innocent people that she had sworn to protect, she would have no problems taking him down in the name of every person he had abused to get where he was.

Her eyes met Master Fu’s, who gave her a look that she had deemed the ‘Tikki disapproval’ look; at least now she knew where her kwami had gotten it from. She forced herself to breathe. She would be no help to Adrien or Paris if she was riled up and susceptible to akumatization herself.

Just then, her partner continued to speak from his place on her shoulder: she hadn’t even realized he had moved there.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry I didn’t see this coming, that I was so weak and scared that I made a deal with the devil. I’m sorry-”

She pulled him closer to herself, holding him in her arms.

“Don’t you dare apologize, Adrien. You are not weak. You are the strongest person I’ve ever met and having emotions other than contentment isn’t a sign of weakness. Don’t ever let anyone ever tell you otherwise. And, don’t apologize for trying to see the good in someone; that’s the one thing I’ve always loved about you.”

She didn’t mean to say the “L” word, and she only hoped that it passed by with as little suspicion as possible, at least until she could confess properly.

Her gaze flickered back to Master Fu, who had a knowing look in his eyes. This whole time he knew that Adrien was Chat Noir, that she liked him enough to hide the truth about evidence she had found before to protect him, and yet kept those well-guarded secrets to himself. As nice as that would have been to know when she worked that the book had been Adrien’s, but she had respect for the confidence of identities, even now.

Speaking of the book-

“Gabriel was the one you found the book from, wasn’t he, Ladybug?”

She gave a nod, while Adrien lifted his head from her shoulder.

“What book?” his voice was just as small as before, but for once, there was a different emotion than just sadness coming through. Master Fu nodded.

“There was a book of Miraculous Holders that Ladybug had recovered from your father’s safe, one that was taken from your possession, if my memory serves me.”

“Y-yes,” she confirmed, blush lightly dusting her cheeks, “I found it and brought it here for Master Fu to look at. We had suspected that whoever had the book may have been… Behind this. But, when your father became The Collector, we dismissed the lead.”

Adrien slowly nodded, remembering the battle well. How he believed that he had hurt his father enough for losing his book of inspiration that he let Hawk Moth get to him. He remembered the look on his father’s face, hoping that Adrien was alright after supposedly being akumatized.

He had been so happy to have some reason to doubt his lady’s theory that he jumped on his father’s akumatization as proof that she was wrong.

But, she wasn’t wrong. He was the Miraculous holder of Bad Luck. Of course, his father of all people would be their enemy.
And, he had been playing them as fools this whole time. Then again, he had always been his father’s puppet anyway; what made Chat Noir any different?

“Adrien.” a gentle voice pulled him back to Master Fu’s home. At first, he figured it had been Ladybug to bring him back, but he later realized that it had been The Guardian himself that called him by true name.

Adrien looked at him in question, and the man only sipped his tea before speaking.

“I know that, if our theory holds true, the defeat of Hawk Moth will be bittersweet. I understand why that may not be a burden that you’re willing to bare. However,”

He lifted his gaze to look the young man in the eyes.

“you were the correct choice for the black cat.”

Adrien tilted his head in confusion. How could he have been the right choice? He was the son of Hawk Moth; he had lost his secret in front of all of Paris. How could Master Fu still stand behind giving him the ring?

Obviously noting the boy’s confusion, the master continued.

“At our first meeting, I could tell you were the kind of person that would always help others, even if it brought harm to yourself. That kind of selflessness is a trait that is necessary for someone who wields a power as great as destruction. It shows that they will never use it to hurt others, only to remove what needs to be torn down. For only when something ends can new things begin.”

Adrien sat in silence, taking in what he was told.

Ladybug did the same. She knew that Chat Noir’s powers were the counter of hers, the ying to her yang, but she never really thought about how destructive abilities were intended to be used. How dangerous they could be in the wrong hands. They had always been good. Because Adrien was good.

She looked at her partner, who was gazing into his tea, soaking in The Master’s confirmation that Chat Noir had been doing the right thing.

“Even now,” the Master continued suddenly, causing the teens to look at him, “you question what would be better for Paris and your partner, without regarding your own emotions.”

Ladybug saw Adrien flinch slightly, noting that Fu had been correct in his evaluation.

“Remember, Chat Noir, that your feelings and your duty aren’t always exclusive. You can do the right thing and be happy.”

Adrien looked back at his tea, his brows furrowed in thought, missing the glance Fu gave Ladybug, like it was a message she needed to hear too.

He was busy contemplating what he was to do now. He couldn’t tell if The Guardian was a mind reader or if his doubts were that obvious. Either way, he had a lot to think about.

What did Adrien want?

Not the puppet his father had created.

Not the unmasked hero of Paris.
The teenager that loved the freedom Chat Noir had granted him. He enjoyed having someone to talk to in Plagg—even if he was almost as annoying as he was helpful. He lived for the way his lady looked at him after a long battle, like they could do anything because they had each other.

But, what would his father do if he saw him using the ring. He had made a promise to… to…

He had made a promise to his father, not to Hawk Moth.

And it had been Hawk Moth in his father’s office yesterday, hadn’t it? Threatening and making demands for his Miraculous, finding pleasure in destroying Chat Noir.

And, if it was Hawk Moth, what stopped him from stealing the ring in his sleep or demanding it as his father, continuing to take and take until his opponent broke, just like he did with his Akumas?

Adrien fought with his mind, going back and forth through pros and cons.

After several minutes of quiet, Ladybug spoke his name.

“Adrien, I should take you home before your father or Nathalie discovers you’re missing.”

He gave a nod, finishing the contents of his glass. With the last swallow, the last puzzle piece clicked in his mind and decision flashed in his eyes.

The Master must have seen it.

“Do you know what you want to do?”

“I believe so, Master,” Adrien replied, twirling his ring around his finger.

Chapter End Notes

*Throws hands up to protect me*

Don’t get mad at the cliff-hanger. I just needed a little more time to figure out how I plan to have the rest of the fic play out.
If you have any ideas or suggestions, let me know :)

I’ve already started chapter 10 and I hope to have it uploading in a week or so :)

Thank you for all the kudos and comments. They honestly make my day <3
~Spots Off
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

What did Adrien decide? And how will that affect the LadyNoir team?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ladybug held Adrien as they rushed through the air. His mind dealing with the choice he had just made, and her mind reeling with the consequences of their discussion with Master Fu.
If Adrien’s father was Hawkmoth, she was now dropping her partner off at his doorstep, leaving him to be eaten alive. Even though she trusted her partner with her life, she couldn’t help but feel uneasy about their whole plan.

The two landed inside his bedroom, the room completely bathed in darkness. If anyone had tried to look for him, they would have assumed the young model was long asleep.
“Here we are,” Ladybug announced into the dark, letting go of her partner’s waist. He didn’t step back very far, only to the wall to turn the knob that brought up the lights enough to see each other, but not blind them with bright lights.
“Here we are,” he repeated, meeting her gaze. His green eyes seemed to glow in the dim lighting, like his time as Chat Noir had permanently aided his night vision. Or maybe, it was just because of how intense the situation felt.
“Are you going to be okay?” she asked, crossing closer to him.
Adrien just shrugged.
“There’s only so much Father can do now that I don’t have what he wants.”
He lifted his right hand for emphasis, revealing the ringless finger. She had never seen Adrien without the silver band, and now knowing that what it had been, what he now lacked, it scared her more than she wanted to admit.
“Are you sure you want to do this?” she asked before she could put the question under scrutiny; the last thing she wanted to do was make Adrien feel worse than he already did. He took a deep breath.
“I will be far more helpful to you as an insider without the ring, than a Chat Noir that can’t fight. Besides, it makes me feel much better knowing that it’s no longer in Hawkmoth’s reach.”
She bit her lips.
“That doesn’t really make me worry about you any less…” she quietly admitted, more to herself than to him. Regardless, he heard her concern loud and clear.
“Hey,” he said gently, “we’re still partners, remember?” She nodded, crossing her arms over her chest.
“Of course we are, Kitty.”
A smile curled his lips but didn’t quite make it to his eyes.
“Then, trust me.”
She forced her eyes to lock on his, hoping that even though her fear, her loyalty to their partnership was clearly visible.
“I always do.”
His expression of relief washed over the both of them. She watched him reach out to her, hesitating for a moment, and then, grab her gloved hand in his.
“We will defeat Hawkmoth, My Lady. Together. Like we always do.”
He brought her hand to his lips and kissed her knuckles, an action he had done so many times, but
felt so different when he looked at her like she was the only person in the world. She forced herself to look back towards Paris, in an attempt to not get lost in the forest of fondness he had for her.

He was right. They were so close to the end, but they had the hardest battle of all in front of them. When Paris was finally safe, then, she could let herself get lost, to fall headfirst into the time wasted between them. Master Fu’s words echoed in her mind.

*Your feelings and your duty aren’t always exclusive. You can do the right thing and be happy.*

Even if that applied here, wasn’t her feelings what was making it so hard to go home and prepare for what tomorrow would bring?

“Ladybug?” he asked, pulling her from her internal debate, “May I ask you a question?”

“Sure,” she condoned, looking back at him, “What is it?”

“The book,” he started, pulling his hand away to rub his neck, “The Master said he got the book from you, who took it from me. But, when did that happen? I don’t remember even showing you the book.”

“I may have stolen it…” she replied nervously, causing the blond to tilt his head like his namesake. She shook her head.

“I had a good reason, I swear. I saw you and Lila with it, and my kwami, Tikki, told me that the book was important, that we needed to get our hands on it. Lila stole it from you first, and I tried to get it back. Then, she threw it in the garbage can so you wouldn’t know she had it, and I fished it out while you two were talking about Volpina. I swear I’m not some thief that steals things.”

By the time she had finished, Ladybug was rambling in a very Marinette way, and she bit her lip to stop the flow of words. If she wasn’t careful, she wouldn’t need to take off her mask to reveal herself.

Adrien didn’t seem to pick up on the similarity, instead opting to go a more familiar route.

“Well, you did steal my heart, so there’s that.” he mused, a smirk curling his lips while his eyes met hers for just long enough for her to process his words. She couldn’t hold back her scoff, even if the robbery was mutual.

“That explains how you happened to be in the park when you told her off…” he continued, causing Ladybug to blush. Of course, he would remember her lashing out and causing an akuma.

“Yeah… I’m not so proud of that part though.”

“It’s alright, My Lady. I’ve done plenty that I’m not proud of either,” he admitted, and she could only wonder what kind of choices he had to make that now remained as skeletons in his closet.

“Yeah. Well, after we defeated Volpina, I delivered the book to the Master, who has been using it to reveal new abilities. Like our aquatic transformations.”

Adrien nodded, remembering the multi-colored camembert sitting in his book bag, part of the cheese stash that he no longer needed. He barely held back his sigh, before he continued.

“But, if Master Fu had the book, how did Father get it back?”

His eyes grew wide.

“He doesn’t know about The Guardian, right?”

Ladybug shook her head.

“No, nothing like that,” she assured him, toying with her lip between her teeth. There was no way to word that that wouldn’t out her identity. But, she couldn’t deceive him, not after everything they had been through and would have to do before this was over. She owed it to him as her partner and her best friend to tell him honestly.

“Like I had mentioned, after he turned into The Collector, we had ruled him out as a threat.”

“But, we both know that was a lie,” Adrien interjected under his breath, his fingers seeking out the comfort item that used to belong on his finger. Ladybug chose to dismiss his action for the sake of finishing her explanation before losing her nerve.

“I asked Master Fu if I could return the book because I knew you had gotten into so much trouble for losing it. So, he took pictures of the pages so we could return the original to your father while keeping the valuable information. I went as my civilian self and pretended to be one of your fans, claiming that I had stolen the book, so you wouldn’t be blamed for losing it, and your father
She looked at her hands that were fidgeting as much as his were. Did she say too much? Did he connect the dots? And, why did that fill her with as much excitement as fear for his safety?

“You did that for me?” he asked, causing her to meet his eyes. There was a look of confusion, like he never thought someone would do something like that for him. Then, it dawned on her. She had done it for Adrien Agreste, not Chat Noir. The masked girl he admired so much had done something for the version of himself that he felt like very few people really cared about. And, that put her in a group of very few people. Reassuring herself that he deserved the untainted truth, she nodded.

“Thank you,” he told her, gratitude clear in his tone, “There isn’t very many people that would’ve done that for me.”

“Trust me,” she told him, “People care about you, Adrien. They want to be there for you.” People like me.

He gave a slow nod as his reply, before she watched the realization click in his mind.

“Wait. You came here, to my house. You knew I was pulled from school.”

He looked at her, curiosity eclipsing any other emotion that could have debuted in his eyes.

“We go to the same school, don’t we? We could have talked outside of the mask without even knowing it. My Lady, have we actually known each other this whole time?” It was the first time he had asked that question since he had been unmasked, and it was so much harder to wave the notion off when she knew he had been right the whole time.

Taking a deep breath, she avoided his gaze.

“Like I said, people care about you. They want to help. Myself included.”

She met his eyes through her lashes.

“Both sides of me.”

Adrien gave a gasp, soft and awestruck.

“All this time, we’ve been so close. And, we had no idea. Who are you, Ladybug?”

She opened her mouth, willing to answer, but at the last second her lips betrayed her.

“I… I can’t tell you. I don’t want to put you in any more danger. We’re so close, Adrien, and I promise, as soon as this is all over, I’ll tell you everything. I just…”

The way Adrien’s shoulders slumped hurt more than his deflated response could.

“Yes, I understand. Knowing your identity would be just as valuable to my father as having the miraculous…”

The air between them grew thick and heavy with unspoken disappointments. It hurt more than she ever thought it would to be so close to the end. Especially without her partner masked in black beside her.

Adrien was instead trying to hide his emotions behind a different sort of mask, the mask of being okay no matter how badly the pain he was in made him want to react, the mask of superficial feelings that his father made him wear, the mask that she had come to hate the moment she realized how beautiful the boy underneath truly was.

“Well, you should go, Ladybug,” he prompted, “The sooner we end this, the sooner I can take you on a proper date.”

His humor only scratched his words, and his smile was almost partly genuine, but it was clear that he was trying.

She didn’t want him to try to be happy.

She needed him to be truly happy.

You can do the right thing and be happy.

They deserved to be happy, and there was one thing she could do that didn’t involve removing her mask.

She channeled all of the confidence and bravery she used when challenging akumas into her motions as she pulled onto her tiptoes. It was unassuming. A quick tap of her lips on his that only
lingered enough to show it was intentional before she landed on her heels again.

Adrien’s eyes were wide, struggling to process what she had done. Had she just kissed him? The blush showing from under her mask proved she had. His right hand brushed against her face of its own volition, and she melted into his touch. Was this a dream? If it was, he didn’t want to wake up. Not yet. Not with her so close.

He didn’t even realize he was leaning in until he could feel her breath on his face. She smelled of croissants and strawberries. Had she eaten something at Master Fu’s place? Or did she always smell so amazing?

“Adrien,” she whispered, causing him to realize just how close she was, “Just kiss me, you silly kitty.”

“As you wish, My Lady,” he replied, quickly closing what little space that was left between them.

It wasn’t as understated as hers had been. Where hers had been like a gentle breeze on a summer day, this was a thunderstorm. Unbridled enthusiasm and electrifying intention. It was awkward at times -like when they missed each other’s lips in their excitement- but full of little promises in every single action.

With each touch of their lips, he poured in how dedicated he was to her, whoever she was. When she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him close, she apologized for the last secret. The arms on her waist whispered protection, while the fingers in his hair were promises that this was only the beginning.

It was like their relationship; perfectly imperfect and filled with communication that only they could understand.

When the pair pulled away, pulling air back into their lungs, Adrien rested his forehead on hers. “That was…” he started, his voice ragged from the lack of breath but coated in affection.

“Miraculous.” she agreed, her voice bearing many of the same traits.

Adrien started to chuckle, causing Ladybug to meet his eyes in question.

“You make a joke, My Lady,” he told her, humor weaving through his breaths.

She thought back at her word choice, before groaning and resting her head against his chest, causing him to continue to laugh.

“Only you…” she muttered, but she left it unfinished, realizing there were far too many ways to say how she felt.

Only you would notice a joke after something like that.

Only you would make that joke.

Only you could make me fall in love with such a dork.

Only you.

Adrien placed a kiss on her crown, revealing in the warmth and acceptance he felt in her arms.

“Only you,” he repeated.

Their time together felt like an eternity, yet it also felt like it wasn’t long enough. As much as she didn’t want to, Ladybug eventually pulled out of Adrien’s embrace.

“I should go home. Tomorrow is going to be...” she trailed off, unsure how to continue her thoughts. Thankfully, he seemed to get the idea.

“Right,” he replied, taking a step back, as she walked over to the window once more. She hopped onto the ledge, before looking back and meeting his eyes, noticing the newfound love and adoration that shone in the irises.

“Call your friends, Adrien. We’ll be there for you, even when I can’t be.”

With that, she blew him one last kiss before swinging away into the night. Adrien ‘caught’ the motion, and pulled it to his chest with a sigh. She had kissed him. No akumas, no mind control. It was her choice. She chose him. But, then again, she had always chosen him, hadn’t she? She had been protecting Adrien for who knows how long, even without knowing he was Chat Noir.

There was a boy, she had said. Considering how she talked to him since the reveal on his part, could it be that the boy was him all along? An elated chuckle escaped him as he thought about it. Even with all the negative emotions rolling around inside him and the threat that he wasn’t going
to get any sleep, for the first time since his life had been flipped upside down, he knew he was no Akuma risk that night.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you like the fluff. It was long due and hopefully will make up for the problems that will come next *Evil Laugher*

But, for real, what are you thinking about the story so far? What're your favorite parts? Things you'd like to see happen? Any predictions?

Let me know in the comments. I reply to each and every one and I love hearing what my readers are thinking.

~Claws In~

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!