

## Little Louis Dupain-Cheng

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/13888119) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/13888119>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">F/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Miraculous Ladybug</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Adrien Agreste/Marinette Dupain-Cheng</a> , <a href="#">Alya Césaire/Nino Lahiffe</a> , <a href="#">Sabine Cheng/Tom Dupain</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Marinette Dupain-Cheng</a> , <a href="#">Adrien Agreste</a> , <a href="#">Alya Césaire</a> , <a href="#">Nino Lahiffe</a> , <a href="#">Chloé Bourgeois</a> , <a href="#">Ivan Bruel</a> , <a href="#">Mylène Haprèle</a> , <a href="#">Tom Dupain</a> , <a href="#">Lê Chiến Kim</a> , <a href="#">Alix Kubdel</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">It's the old Marinette is a Single Parent Trope</a> , <a href="#">Aged-Up Character(s)</a> , <a href="#">Twenty-Five Years Old</a> , <a href="#">No prizes for guessing who the father is</a> , <a href="#">Post-Hawk Moth Defeat</a> , <a href="#">OT5 Friendship</a> , <a href="#">They Had To Give Back Their Miraculouses</a> , <a href="#">Fluff and Angst</a> , <a href="#">Angst with a Happy Ending</a> , <a href="#">Post-Reveal Adrien Agreste/Marinette Dupain-Cheng</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2018-03-06 Completed: 2018-04-07 Words: 33,291 Chapters: 18/18

# Little Louis Dupain-Cheng

by [HariWrites](#)

## Summary

In the seven years since Hawk Moth's defeat, much has changed. Adrien Agreste PhD returns to Paris and is reunited with his friends. Marinette has a degree in Fashion Design, a thriving boutique and a son, six-year-old Louis. Louis is like his mother in many ways, except for green eyes and a familiar smile... Will Adrien do the maths?

# Prologue

Hawk Moth had been defeated.

For weeks, he'd been quiet. Chat Noir and Ladybug dared to dream that he'd given up, but in reality, they knew it was unlikely.

He had merely been preserving his energy.

When Hawk Moth finally met Ladybug and Chat Noir face to face, he did it with an army of every one of his previously akumatized victims. Friends, allies, acquaintances and strangers, all of them ready to fight for Hawk Moth.

Three were notably missing. Lady Wifi, Bubbler and Anti-Bug. They were protected by their miraculoses, like Ladybug and Chat Noir had been for four years. And so, five teenage superheroes stood against one adult supervillain and a horde of his minions. The odds were against them.

It was their greatest challenge and one that they'd relive in their nightmares for decades to come. Finally, they wrestled Hawk Moth's miraculous from him to reveal Gabriel Agreste, broken and remorseful.

As the Gendarmerie took Gabriel away, Ladybug's miraculous magic restored the akumatized army to their normal forms and everyone walked away as if nothing happened. Everyone, except Ladybug, Rena Rouge, Carapace, Queen Bee and Chat Noir.

Especially Chat Noir.

He took Ladybug's hand and led her to an alleyway, out of sight from the others, and dropped his transformation.

She took one look at Adrien, shaken and tearful, and wrapped her arms around him. He sobbed into the crook of her neck while she held him. Neither spoke a word, nobody noticed her earrings sound the final warning beep. When Adrien had cried himself out, they finally separated.

They stood, speechless, staring at each other. For four years, they had fought alongside each other, protected by masks and magic, always wondering who was under the costume. Now, they were revealed and the thrill of discovering their true identities was overwhelmed by relief, sadness and fatigue.

"Adrien? We need to take the Butterfly miraculous to Master Fu." She told him, her voice barely a whisper.

He nodded.

"The book, Adrien," his kwami said, "We should take it too."

“I need to go to the mansion, Marinette. There’s something in the safe we should collect.” Adrien croaked, voice hoarse with emotion.

“Do you want me to come with you?” She asked.

“Please.”

The stresses of the battle were sinking in and they moved stiffly, muscles tense. His face was drained and his hands were trembling. She took his arm and they walked uncertainly into the street. The normality of it all was jarring. Marinette expected to find a city in celebration. Meanwhile, her friend was in mourning.

The Agreste Mansion was never a particularly homely place, but today it felt echoingly unwelcoming. Adrien lead them through the empty halls like he was on autopilot. They entered Gabriel’s study and Plagg phased through the portrait of Mrs Agreste. Marinette was reminded that Adrien was, to all intents and purposes, now an orphan and her heart broke for him once again. She gasped as the portrait swung forwards to reveal a safe containing the Ancient Miraculous Spellbook and...

“The peacock miraculous!” Tikki squeaked.

The peacock-shaped brooch glinted in the light and Adrien reached out for it. With shaking hands, he placed it in his pocket next to the butterfly pin. Marinette took the book and pushed the portrait to. Adrien placed his hand on the image of his mother, lingering there.

“Goodbye, mum. I’m sorry.” He said as a single tear fell down his cheek.

Marinette held her hand out to him and he took it. They walked in silence to Master Fu’s.

Deep down, they knew he would ask for their miraculouses too. Knew that now their enemy was defeated, they were not needed as Ladybug and Chat Noir. Now that Hawk Moth wasn’t creating supervillains, Paris didn’t require superheroes. The three others had already delivered their miraculouses to Master Fu.

Removing the earrings was like tearing out a part of her heart. Saying goodbye to Tikki was the hardest thing she ever had to do. She could tell by looking at Adrien that he felt the same about Plagg.

“I’ll never forget you, Marinette,” Tikki told her, hugging her cheek. “You have been my most surprising, unpredictable, endearing and talented Ladybug. I love you.”

“I love you too, Tikki.” The tears wouldn’t stop falling and Marinette felt as though her chest was caving in. “You changed my life, as my kwami and my friend. I will never forget you either.”

Master Fu bowed solemnly to each of them.

“I’m sorry it had to be this way, but it is the burden I carry as the Guardian of the Miraculous. Thank you both for your sacrifices, Paris owes you a debt. As do I.” He said.

»»★««

Marinette couldn't remember how they got to her home. In a haze of grief, she led Adrien up the stairs to her apartment.

Her parents jumped from the sofa and ran to them. Seeing Adrien's broken, exhausted expression, Sabine threw her arms around him and hugged him like he was her own son. Tom pulled his daughter towards him and held her tight. Soon, the whole family were embracing, Adrien too. More tears flowed. Tom and Sabine spoke words of relief that the pair were safe, their knowledge of the teenagers' secret identities ( *ex-secret identities* ) implicit. They offered condolences to Adrien, acknowledging the shock and pain he must be feeling.

Much of the evening was spent in silence. Dinner was mostly untouched. Sabine made the teenagers hot chocolate before she and Tom went to bed. She placed the mugs in front of them and reminded them to go to bed. The pair were physically drained, but she knew their minds were running at 100 miles an hour.

Before she left, she told Adrien that he was welcome to stay with them as long as he wished. Nobody expected him to return to the mansion.

»»★««

"Your father has had what we call a Psychotic Break, Master Agreste. Basically, the emotional trauma of being exposed as Hawk Moth and, we assume, the trauma that led him to become Hawk Moth in the first place, has caused him to become removed from reality. His brain is no longer able to process that stress in his life and has become overloaded." The doctor explained patiently.

"Will he get better?" Adrien asked.

"In time, with the right therapy." The doctor said. "At the moment, his condition is severe. He is uncommunicative and has essentially retreated into himself. He is unwilling to feed himself or take care of himself at all. I am recommending that his trial be deferred until he is fit to testify. He will remain here so that we can help him."

Adrien stared at the doctor as he disappeared down the corridor. He had been told that to visit his father might be upsetting for both parties, but he wasn't sure he wanted to face the man, even if he could. The damage Gabriel had done by becoming Hawk Moth, the lives he's affected, the trauma he'd enacted on others... and now, he was unlikely to face justice for any of it.

Adrien knew that to move on from his father's toxic parenting and tainted legacy, he had to draw a line under this part of his life. He had to go away.

He was 18 years old and had access to his trust fund. His mother had insisted on setting it up the year before she disappeared. He had more money than he would ever require, he could live comfortably on the interest his trust fund accrued.

He would never need to work a day in his life.

»»★««

“I’m going to Cambridge University, in England. They have an excellent Physics department there, so I’m getting out of Paris for a while.” He explained. “I applied ages ago, just to see if I could get in and was accepted. I knew father would never let me go but now...”

“I understand,” Marinette said sadly, “but I’m going to miss you like crazy.”

She knew it was for the best. That Adrien needed to get out from under the shadow his father cast over the city. He could return in a few years when the people of Paris had time to forget the spectre of Gabriel Agreste’s reign of terror. Besides, Adrien had been controlled by the man for his whole life so far.

Distance was exactly what he needed to heal.

# Une fille comme les autres

## Chapter Summary

Were still prologuing here.

Marinette was a normal girl with a normal life.

She missed Tikki like crazy and often found herself checking her purse in the vague hope that she'd find the kwami there. The exhilaration of running over rooftops as Ladybug and the feeling of freedom was hard to replace, but the burden of being Ladybug had also been lifted. She was free from the worry of when and where Hawk Moth would strike again. She was able to start her life all over again.

Adrien's absence in her life loomed large. She missed her partner and friend. She and Chloe bonded over their mutual pining for him. They both loved him, both had complicated histories with him and unique bonds to him. Together, they counselled each other through the gaps he left in their lives. She knew that the others video called him regularly, but she and he couldn't get their schedules to match up. Instead, she emailed him. He always replied within a day and they found that this communication worked for them. It was easier to be honest in an email.

She and Chloe, Nino and Alya met often. They supported each other to deal with the aftermath of their battle with Hawk Moth. They toasted their kwamis and talked openly about their feelings. It helped, but she never stopped missing her other half.

»»★««

Fashion school was everything Marinette dreamed and more. She felt more inspired in the first few months at ESMOD than she'd been in the entire time she'd spent at lycée. There was so much around her to spark her creativity and she felt energised. She made new friends, shared ideas and sketches with classmates, and appreciated how her tutors spoke to her like they valued her opinion.

If this was adulthood, she liked it.

November began and the class were preparing for their first big project, a Christmas fashion show. All of them were working long hours, nobody more so than Marinette. She helped her parents in the bakery three mornings a week before school and worked on alterations and commissions in the evenings on top of school work. She was constantly exhausted.

It came as no surprise to anyone when she fainted in class.

“Mademoiselle, may I ask, when was your last period?” The doctor said, looking at something in his notes.

“Um, I can’t remember. August, I think. Middle-ish of the month? I don’t know, sorry.”  
Marinette had so much on her plate that she hadn’t even noticed that she’d skipped a couple of periods. If she had, she’d have put it down to stress of her new course and not eating properly. She had been feeling nauseated and tired since term started and she knew she hadn’t been taking care of herself like she should.

The doctor ran a few more tests. He came back into the room with a serious expression on his face. Marinette was worried.

“Am I ill, doctor?” She asked.

“No, not ill.” He said, “but I do have some news. You’re pregnant.”

“What?” She managed to say.

“You are roughly three months pregnant.” The doctor repeated.

“Oh. Shit.”

This was too much adulthood.

»»★««

*“Vous êtes en état de grossesse, mademoiselle... Vous êtes enceinte de trois mois.”*

The words the doctor spoke ran on a loop in her mind. If she was focussing on the positives, it had replaced the memory of that final battle with Hawk Moth in her nightmares and overwhelming panic had replaced the memory of the sorrow she felt when she saw Adrien’s face after his father was arrested.

It was difficult to be optimistic.

She had to go to the clinic for a scan to show how the baby was growing and to confirm the due date. She hadn’t known she was pregnant and now she was worried that she’d unwittingly harmed her baby.

Meanwhile, she had to decide how she was going to break the news to her parents and which of her friends she could trust with this knowledge.

Until the scan, it didn’t feel real. She didn’t *feel* pregnant, didn’t even know what pregnant was meant to feel like. The moment it struck her that she was growing a life in her belly



happened as she lay on an exam table, bladder full to bursting, with cold gel on her stomach while a sonographer pressed an ultrasound probe over her, occasionally tapping on a keyboard or dragging a cursor over the screen.

“Here.” She pressed a few buttons on the keyboard. “This is your baby’s heartbeat.”

It was quick and strong. *Her baby’s heartbeat.* Her own heart stood still as she listened to the sound. Tears filled her eyes and she knew she was going to do everything she could to protect this tiny human being.

“You’ll be glad to know that the fetus is normal and healthy, maman,” The sonographer smiled. “Bébé is growing in line with your expected due date so you’re going to meet this little guy or girl around 17th May next year.”

She left the clinic, clutching her declaration de grossesse and scan photos like they were the most precious artefacts in the world. To her, they were. She arrived for her ultrasound a scared girl and left as a proud mother-to-be.

She needn’t have worried about telling her parents. They loved her unconditionally and were thrilled about becoming grandparents. They didn’t ask who the father was, but told her that she could talk about him when she was ready. She could see the disappointment in their eyes, and she knew they weren’t disappointed in her actions, but in the opportunities she might lose as a result of this new path her life was taking. They had sacrificed so much for her and she knew her tuition fees at ESMOD were a financial strain on them. She wasn’t going to let this baby be the end of their dreams for their daughter.

Her friends were equally as supportive, if less calm about it all.

Alya was ready to kill the father and refused to believe that Marinette didn’t know who he was. That was when she knew she made the right decision to shelter him from this. He might have been the biological father of her baby, but he had his own life to live and she had no right to throw this at him.

Chloe shrieked so loudly that Marinette wondered if the baby heard her. According to the baby book Nino bought her, the fetus starts to hear sounds at 18 weeks and this little bug was closer to 12, but Chloe was so shrill, Marinette thought it might be its first memory.

“You’re PREGNANT?!” Chloe wasn’t calming down any time soon.

“Yes, Chloe. And I need you to keep the news to yourself, please.” Marinette pleaded, “You know as well as I do that Adrien would come back to Paris if he found out I was knocked up.”

“But, you’re saying he’s not the father,” Chloe asked.

“Do you think that would stop him?” Marinette arched an eyebrow.

“No.” Chloe conceded. “He’s always had a bleeding heart. He would absolutely come back. Damn it. I hate lying to him, but I’m doing this to protect him, right?”

“Right.” Marinette agreed.

“Ok, now that’s cleared up, when can we go shopping for maternity clothes?” Chloe reached for her purse.

“We have to invite Alya,” Marinette warned her, “She’ll kill us both if she misses out on a baby-related shopping trip.”

»»★««

“I’m going to see Adrien next week, to take all his Christmas presents to him.” Nino told her at the start of December. “He’s going to show me around Cambridge and give me a tour of Cavendish Laboratory where he’s studying, apparently it’s really cool. Is there anything you want me to pass on from you?” “Sure. I knitted him a sweater. I can drop it to yours tomorrow if that suits?” Marinette checked her schedule.

“I was actually talking about mini-Marinette.” He rubbed her stomach. She was just starting to show and Nino was fascinated by her belly.

“No.” Marinette said, “Please, Nino. He’s doing so well over there, I can’t have him feeling like he needs to come and check on me.”

“Well, it’s not like he’s the father... is it?” Nino asked.

“If he was, would you be more or less likely to want him to know?” Marinette asked.

“Huh.” Nino thought deeply, “Less, I guess. You’re right, he’d drop everything, including his education, to be here and support you. Plus, it would bring up a whole mess of crap about his relationship with his own father, I’m sure.

“So, we don’t tell him, ok? Besides, I told you already, I don’t know who the father is. I was caught up in the post-Hawk-Moth-defeat-celebrations and got drunk. I couldn’t pick the guy out of a lineup. Just, don’t worry Adrien, please?” She repeated.

It felt like everyone she knew was most concerned with the identity of the father and unwilling to accept her insistence that she didn’t want anyone to know who he was so she’d formulated a story. She kept it vague and refused to give details, but nobody was buying it.

Nino definitely wasn’t convinced. He was 90% sure that Adrien was the father. Adrien was the only person that Marinette wanted to be around after the business with Hawk Moth/Gabriel went down. The pair were inseparable for the last two weeks of August. Marinette hadn’t been caught up in any celebrations that he knew of. If anything, she had been in mourning.

As Adrien’s best friend, he wanted to tell him, but Marinette was right, it would do more harm than good right now, especially since he didn’t know for sure. He knew he’d have to

brace himself for repercussions when the truth finally did come out, but for now, he and Alya would be there for their friend and support her all they could as she entered the scary world of single parenthood.

She had distanced herself from most of her lycée friends, only keeping in touch with Alya, Nino and Chloe. All three were sworn to secrecy about her pregnancy and she knew she could trust each of them. They had practice in keeping secrets after all.

»»★««

Her tutors at ESMOD were amazing. It helped that she was top of her class and known to be a hard worker, but she knew she was lucky to get the support she did. She was permitted to turn in her final collection, stylebook and completed outfit early which meant she would be able to continue her course in the next academic year. She would have time off from when her baby was born in May until the start of September to bond with her baby and figure out her childcare situation before the next term began.

Her classmates were less supportive. The stigma of being a teenage parent was multiplied by the stigma of being a single parent and the majority of her class felt entitled to judge her harshly. Her ‘special treatment’ in finishing the year early added to the resentment many felt. She had a small group of friends who stood up for her, but even with them by her side, she could feel the judgement aimed at her from all sides.

These classmates thought they could bring her down, make her quit. They were the same classmates who were jealous of her position at top of the class. They had misjudged her. They didn’t know they were dealing with Ladybug.

It simply made her more determined.

»»★««

Mme. Coquet called her into her office on the last day before Christmas break.

“Miss Dupain-Cheng, I’m sure you know how much work you’ve got ahead of you next term so I want you to relax and enjoy your Christmas.” She told the student.

“Thank you, madame.” Marinette squeaked. She found the woman intimidating. Not in a scary-Gabriel-Agrete way, but in a this-woman-is-so stylish-and-talented-it-hurts way.

“I also wanted to let you know that I have pre-registered your child with an excellent creche a few streets from here. My children went there and I highly recommend it.” Mme. Coquet continued.

“That’s so kind of you, but I don’t know if I can afford it...” Marinette started.

“Nonsense.” Her tutor interrupted. “You have immense promise, Marinette, and if I have to pay the fees myself, I will. However, you will find that most of the costs will be paid by the local authorities.”

“Wow. I don’t know how to thank you.” Marinette could feel tears welling up. *Damn these pregnancy hormones!*

“You can thank me by graduating this course with honours and starting your own world-changing fashion line. Okay?” the tutor smiled.

Marinette nodded. She was determined to pay this woman’s faith back to her in every way she could.

»»★««

On 25th May, one week and one day after her due date, Louis Thomas Dupain-Cheng was born. He weighed 2.8kg, had a scrunched up face, tiny hands and he was perfect.

As soon as Marinette held him in her arms, she knew he was going to change the world.

He had already changed hers for the better.

She felt the most overwhelming protective surge, greater than any she encountered as Ladybug. She wanted to give this little being everything she had. She stared into her son’s face, seeing herself and his father reflected in it. More than that, though, she saw the man he might become and all the opportunities she wanted to give him.

He was only a few minutes old and he had already stolen her heart.

She looked up at the scared and delighted faces of Nino and Alya. The pair had been with her in the delivery room for the birth; Nino held her hand and shouted encouraging words, while Marinette tried to stop Alya from getting in the midwife’s way as she filmed the birth. Three eighteen-year-olds had just successfully delivered a baby (with the help of a few medical professionals) and they were all falling in love with that baby.

“Can I?” Nino held out his arms.

“Of course, Uncle Nino.” Marinette carefully passed Louis to him, still covered in streaks of blood and whitish stuff that none of them wanted to know what it was.

“Hi, Louis, I’m your Uncle Nino.” He spoke gently. “I’m going to be here for you whenever you need me, ok? Me and Auntie Alya are going to be the coolest uncle and aunt you could wish for.”

“I’m sorry to interrupt, papa, but may I take your baby for weighing and I can get him cleaned up?” The midwife asked.

“Oh, I’m not... um, yeah, here you are.” He handed Louis to the midwife.

Nobody mentioned her mistake, they knew it was going to happen countless times over the years. The father was something they’d stopped discussing. Suddenly, he wasn’t important, Louis was.

Until.

»»★««

Marinette confessed all to Nino when the post-birth hormones hit. He happened to walk into the hospital room as she rained tears onto her son’s head.

“I’m sorry, Louis.” She repeated over and over.

“Mari! What’s wrong?” Nino asked, full of concern.

“He’s going to grow up without his father because of me.” She wept. “I chose to keep him out of the loop.”

“Oh, Marinette.” He stroked her hair, “You don’t have to, but do you want to tell me who he is?”

She looked at him, tearful, but resolute. She knew she could trust him, he was one of her oldest and most enduring friends. She had to unburden herself and although she knew she was just sharing the secret, it felt like a load was lifted to tell him the truth.

Nino went to the Mairie for the Déclaration de Naissance. The father’s name was compulsory and he was the only other person who had been at the birth who knew the truth about the father’s identity. He would have to make a declaration to establish paternity, should he wish to be recognised in the future, but Marinette was relieved that his name was at least on the birth certificate.

Marinette knew the next few years would be tough. She’d be juggling motherhood, a fashion design degree and internships. She had plans to launch her own business afterwards. She was going to have to work hard to achieve her dreams and she was glad she had such wonderful parents and friends to support her.

Louis was all the motivation she needed to pursue her future will determination.

She was doing it all for him now.

# But in the night, she's all I think about

## Chapter Summary

I'm getting the band back together!

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He was ready. After four years at Cambridge University working towards his Master's Degree, he'd spent three years in Milan getting his PhD.

Now, he was missing Paris and ready to go home.

He'd changed since he was last there, he knew. He enjoyed a certain amount of privacy in England, that he had never known in Paris. The tabloids didn't know where he was and his university did their utmost to ensure it stayed that way. He registered as Adrien Agreste, but asked that he be known only by his first and middle name, Adrien Hugo. Most of the students called him 'Ade' and had no idea about his complicated past.

Even if the paparazzi knew where to find him, he wasn't sure they'd recognise him anymore. In Cambridge, he let his hair grow out a little and didn't bother to style it. In Milan, his skin became more tanned and his blonde locks lightened in the sun. His jaw squared off and his shoulders broadened, he wasn't the willowy boy who left Paris, seven years ago.

He was more reserved and introspective now, too. When he spoke about topics that interested him he became animated and passionate, and in front of a class he could certainly hold their attention, but generally, he was happy to let others take the spotlight. His modelling years were unquestionably behind him; the idea of being in front of a lens made him cringe.

His style had changed. Gone were the skinny jeans and t-shirts. Designer brands no longer dominated his wardrobe. His friends in Milan described his look as 'professor chic'. Chinos and casual jeans were paired with shirts and his trusty tweed blazer. His trainers had been swapped for brown leather Oxfords. He hadn't gone as far as sewing leather patches on the elbows of his favourite cardigans yet, but he knew it would be tempting when they started to wear.

He was less naive these days, life had forced him to be. He didn't trust as easily and had made few friends in the last few years.

His therapist in Cambridge had helped him to grieve for his lost childhood and his missing mother. He was able to forgive his father but refused to let him back in his life. Gabriel's lawyer contacted him when he first moved to Milan to tell him that Gabriel was more lucid

and wanted to see him. Adrien replied to inform him that he wanted nothing more to do with Gabriel; that was the last he heard from him.

He was ready to return to Paris, ready to reunite with his friends, ready to build a life in his hometown.

He'd missed his friends. Nino had visited him twice a year while he was in the UK, but once he graduated film school, he struggled to find free time so he'd only managed to come out twice while he was in Italy. Fortunately, Max was in grad school at Università degli Studi di Milano, too, studying for his Masters in Computer Science so there was a friendly face to turn to for two years. He video chatted with Alya, Nino and Chloe often and Marinette emailed him regularly, but it wasn't the same as being physically in their presence.

Alya said she would throw him a Welcome Home party and he was happy to let her. He still didn't like too much attention, but he knew she'd only invite the people he really wanted to see. Marinette's last email confirmed as much.

*Dear Adrien,*

*I can't believe you're coming back to Paris! How exciting!*

*I must warn you, much has changed, but we're all so pleased that you're coming home.*

*Alya is planning a party for you, did you know? It's going to be a smallish affair, I know Ivan and Mylene will be there with their baby girl (Claudine, she's adorbs), Alix is coming, plus Kim, Juleka, Rose, Nathaniel and Sabrina. Obviously, Alya and Nino will be there, and Chloe. My mum and dad wanted to drop by too, if that's ok? M. Damocles (who is still roaming the streets as The Owl, btw) is going to pop in as well. Does 18 count as a smallish party?*

*...Chloe is insisting we hold it in a suite at the hotel. She said, "there's no point in being the manager of an exclusive boutique hotel if you can't use the penthouse for parties." So, brace yourself!*

*You should check out the website for her hotel if you haven't already, it's beautiful. I advised on some of the interior design choices so I'm a little biased, but I think you'll love it. I hear you're staying there while you find an apartment?*

*I'm not sure what else I can tell you just now, you're going to be back to hear all the gossip first-hand soon enough :)*

*We should meet when you're back to catch up properly. Let me know when you're free?*

*See you soon,*

*Marinette xx*

He counted and recounted the names and reached 17, including baby Claudine, every time. Marinette must have counted someone twice. It's the sort of thing she'd do.



“Chloe, it’s your job to make sure Marinette actually comes to this party, ok?” Alya said.

“Fine. But if she holds me up and I miss out on Adrikins-time, I’ll be pissed off.” Chloe huffed.

“You’re always pissed off, how will know the difference?” Alya teased.

“Is Nino at least going to prepare him for meeting little Louis?” Chloe arched an eyebrow, “because, I know Marinette has *somehow* neglected to mention that detail of her life.”

Alya sighed. It was a bone of contention between her and her best friend. Marinette insisted that Adrien would come back to Paris to help her regardless of who the boy’s father was, and she hated to admit that, initially at least, she was right. He was the sort of honourable person who would step up and look after a friend in trouble. After Louis reached three years old and Adrien had completed his Masters, Alya felt it was time to tell him. Then, he announced he was going to Milan for his doctorate and Marinette continued to insist on silence on the matter of her little boy.

“Look, Tom and Sabine are bringing Louis and said they’d take him home at bedtime so Marinette is free all night. Just get her dressed and drag her out.” Alya insisted. “She closes the boutique at 7pm and your hotel is a ten-minute walk. You can do this.”

“Sometimes, you have too much faith in me.” Chloe groaned.



Alya started checking her watch every two minutes from 7.10pm. The act was making Adrien nervous.

“Are you worried that nobody is going to come?” He asked.

“Not exactly. I just sent Chloe on an errand and I’m wondering if it’s been successful.” Alya explained.

Whatever the errand was, Adrien never found out. Before he had a chance to ask, Ivan and Mylene arrived with their baby girl, followed by Alix, Kim, Rose and Juleka. The room was soon buzzing with chatter and laughter. Adrien was content to listen to everyone else talk, he wanted to learn what everyone had done with their lives since he last saw them. He left Paris as each of them were on the cusp of adult life and he wanted to catch up on the past seven years.

Alix and Kim were still as competitive as ever and they trained together in the park every morning. They invited Adrien to join them.



“Ivan and Nino join us sometimes,” Alix told him, “but I seem to remember you were pretty fit back in lyc é e so it’ll be nice to train with someone who knows what they’re doing.” She winked at Nino and Ivan, teasing them.

Sabrina arrived next, hugging everyone before she settled on the sofa. Now a climatology researcher for the European Climate Foundation, she had returned from Brussels that morning and was happy to relax while the others entertained Adrien. She was closely followed by Nathanael. He apologised for his lateness, a smudge of charcoal on his cheek betraying his reasons for his tardiness. Adrien was holding baby Claudine when Chloe finally arrived, dragging someone behind her.

Marinette.

She looked exactly as he remembered her. She was a little older, her hair was a tied into a low bun instead of her old pigtails and her blue shift dress was a more elegant choice than her old pink jeans and floral t-shirt combo. For all the little changes, her eyes still sparkled and smile dazzled like it always had.

“Oh, look!” Chloe cooed, “He’s here ten minutes and he’s already cuddling the baby, how cute.” She appeared to be talking to Marinette, not him, so he didn’t respond.

Marinette smiled shyly at him, and he returned it with a similarly bashful grin. He dearly wanted to talk to her. Seeing her here, in person, for the first time in seven years reminded him of how much he’d missed her.

When he eventually managed to get Marinette alone. They didn’t know how to greet each other. La bise? A hug? In the end, they exchanged an awkward half-hug and single, lingering cheek kiss. He was trying to play it cool, but their embarrassing greeting threw him and his first question was, ‘is there anyone special in your life?’.

*Way to be casual, Ade .*

“Well, there is a boy who has my heart,” Marinette said. “He stole it from me just over six years ago and I let him keep it.”

“Oh?” Adrien said. He tried not to let disappointment show on his face. He didn’t expect Marinette to wait for him, but by the sounds of it, there were about nine months between him leaving Paris and her giving her love to someone else.

“I wanted to tell you about him sooner, but it’s complicated.” Marinette continued, “You needed time and space for yourself and I didn’t want you to worry about me.”

She wasn’t making sense now. What did her new boyfriend have to do with his time away from Paris?

The door opened and Tom and Sabine came into the party. Between them was a dark-haired boy, maybe six-years-old who looked a lot like...

“Mama!” he called out and ran to Marinette. She scooped him up and kissed his cheeks.

“Louis, mon chatounet!” She looked to Adrien. His jaw had dropped open he realised, and forced it to close. She put the child down and held him by the shoulders, crouching down to his level. “Adrien, this is Louis, my son.”

The little boy looked at him through messy brown hair. His smile was familiar, as were his eyes. His green eyes.

“Hello, Louis,” He said as his mind raced. He shook his hand. “Nice to meet you.”

“You too, monsieur.” The boy replied. He was so like his mother.

“Adrien!” A voice boomed. Tom and Sabine approached.

Adrien looked at Tom and noticed with some relief that his eyes were green. Not the same shade as Louis’, but it meant the colour was a family trait. Not...

Sabine hugged him and Tom followed suit.

“Monsieur Adrien?” Louis asked, “Do you know my mamie and papy?”

“I do, Louis,” Adrien said. “I actually went to school with your mama. Your grandparents were always very kind to me.”

“Oh,” Louis was thoughtful. “Did you know Uncle Nino and Auntie Alya too? And Auntie Chloe?”

“I did,” Adrien smiled.

“How many times do I have to tell you, mon loulou? Don’t call me ‘auntie’, it ages me.” Chloe appeared at Adrien’s shoulder. “Kisses for Chloe, please.”

She leaned her face towards the child, who kissed each cheek twice before Chloe grabbed him and blew raspberries into his neck. The boy squealed and giggled with joy at his auntie. His laugh was infectious and soon Adrien felt a grin spreading across his own face.

“Hey, don’t hog the Louis-kisses!” Alya called out as she and Nino joined the group.

Chloe looked at Alya and stuck her tongue out at her. Adrien could hardly believe his eyes. When he left for Cambridge, Alya and Chloe barely tolerated each other and Chloe would never stick her tongue out at anyone, she’d think that kind of behaviour childish and beneath her.

“A lot has changed, huh?” Nino said, gesturing to him that they should go elsewhere.

Adrien followed Nino to the makeshift bar and his friend poured two glasses of wine. He handed one to Adrien and they clinked them together.

“Santé!” Nino and Adrien said in unison.

“It’s nice to have someone to drink with these days.” Nino wiggled his eyebrows as he sipped his wine.

“Does that mean...?” Adrien asked,

“We’re pregnant!” Nino told his friend with a smile.

“Congratulations!” Adrien was genuinely happy for his friends, “You’re going to be great parents.”

“Well, Marinette makes it look easy, I’m not kidding myself that I’ll be as natural as her.” Nino said, watching Alya and Chloe chatting and giggling with Louis as Marinette looked on.

Adrien turned to watch, too. Alya was trying to teach him a complicated handshake that reminded Adrien of Chat Noir and Rena Rouge’s post-victory celebration. “Yeah, about that. Why did nobody tell me that Marinette had a child?”

“Oh, well, it was all of our decision.” Nino looked nervous. “When Mari found out she was pregnant, we all wanted to tell you, her included, but we knew you’d drop everything to come and take care of her. She was doing it alone and we knew you’d want to help.”

“Surely that was my decision to make?” Adrien asked.

“Yes and no.” Nino looked serious. “You had just escaped the shadow of everything your father had done to you and the city. For your own good, you needed distance. It seems crappy now, but we wanted to protect you from your own bleeding heart.”

“Shit. You’re right. I hate that you’re right, but it’s true. I would have rushed back for her.” Adrien rubbed the back of his neck. “So, who is the father?”

“That’s a conversation to have with Marinette,” Nino said. “She refuses to tell anyone and it’s not my secret to tell. I’ll say this though, the father’s name is on the birth certificate.”

Adrien had more questions than he started with, but before he could ask Nino any of them, Alya caught their attention.

“Guys, Tom and Sabine are leaving. Come say goodbye.” She said, waving them over.

Adrien shook Tom’s hand and hugged Sabine, assuring her that he would, of course, come by for dinner one night this week. He turned to see Nino hanging Louis upside down by his ankles while the boy laughed heartily.

“Ok, ok.” Marinette intervened. “Louis is going home with his mamie and papy and you, Uncle Nino, are winding him up too close to bedtime.”

“Sorry, mama.” Nino, Alya, Chloe and Louis all chimed together. Adrien laughed aloud at the penitent looks on their faces. It was a scene he could imagine happened regularly. Marinette barely contained her giggles as she hugged her son.

“Je t’aime mon petit chatounet,” She told him. “Listen to mamie and papy, ok?”

“Yes, mama,” Louis replied, “Thank you for having me, Auntie Chloe.”

“Any time kiddo,” Chloe ruffled his already scruffy hair. “Love you, loulou.”

“He’s a great kid,” Adrien told Marinette.

“I think so too,” she smiled gently. “I know everyone credits me with that, but my parents, Alya, Nino and Chloe are all just as responsible. We’ll all bringing him up.”

“You’re too modest,” Adrien said, seriously. “How did you do it? How did you finish your studies and start a business *and* raise such a wonderful child?”

“I had help. One of my tutors at ESMOD helped me to find a brilliant creche near school and gave me some leeway in my first year final collection. My internships took a bit of juggling, but I managed.” Marinette explained. “I’ve had to be strict with myself about when I work so I can spend time with Louis, though. It’s not easy, but I wouldn’t change it.”

Adrien couldn’t help feeling pride in his friend. She had always been a prolific multitasker. Juggling schoolwork, being class president and Ladybug without showing the strain to her classmates. When he broke away from his embrace with Ladybug, all those years ago, he wasn’t surprised to see Marinette standing in her place. In retrospect, it couldn’t have been anyone else.

“Enough about me, though,” Marinette interrupted his thoughts when she placed a hand on his arm. “How are you? Is it odd, being back in Paris?”

“Not as weird as I thought it would be.” He said, subconsciously running his thumb over his fourth finger, still feeling the ring’s absence. “The place definitely has memories, but most of them are good. Some of them are even better than good,” he stroked his fingers over her hand as it continued to rest on his arm.

He felt sparks. Seven years after he’d seen her last, she still made his stomach do somersaults.

Seven years...

Minus nine months...

Made...

»»★««

Kim walked her home from the party. It was 1am and they didn’t want to wait for a taxi. He lived nearby so it suited them both. All the way back from Chloe’s hotel, Kim teased her for the awkward way she greeted Adrien after so many years. He was recounting all the Adrien-induced klutzy moments from her teens and tears ran down his face as he laughed at her discomfort.

“I’m glad my pain is so amusing.” She huffed. He was lucky they were such good friends.

“It’s just good to see that some things never change, Mar,” Kim said, pulling her towards him for a hug. He ruffled her hair.

“Dude. You’re messing up my bun.” She complained.

“We’re going home. Chill out.” He laughed.

They fell into an easy silence as they wandered down Rue de Lobau. It was a warm night and neither felt any need to hurry. They reached the bakery and Kim waited with Marinette while she found her keys.

“Are you going to tell him?” Kim asked suddenly.

“Tell him what?” She fiddled with her house keys, anticipating the question.

“That you still love him.” He said.

“Oh, I don’t know.” She sighed, “It’s been seven years, maybe we missed our chance.”

Kim put his hands on her shoulders, looking seriously at her.

“Mar, please. This is you and Adrien, you’re meant to be. You have a son. Just take the chance.” He told her.

“Kim?” She called to him before she closed the door. He turned to her and smiled.

“I know, I don’t know that for sure and I’m not going to tell him anything. But for what it’s worth, I think he’d be a great dad.”

Marinette crept into the bedroom, careful not to make too much noise. She heard the soft breathing from the single bed under her loft bed that confirmed that Louis was asleep.

When she told her parents she was expecting, Tom and Nino renovated her room to make space for a crib. They put the single bed in so that Marinette didn’t have to climb the ladder when she was heavily pregnant. She appreciated it too in the weeks immediately following the birth. Chloe insisted on buying an exquisite cot-bed that would last Louis until he was ready to move into the bed for himself.

The area under the loft-bed was his. A small bookcase was jammed with books about dinosaurs, space and robots, while a toy box overflowed with jigsaws and model rockets. A book lay on the floor next to his bed. He must have been reading it when he dropped off. It was *The Tales of Ladybug and Chat Noir*, the book Alya wrote following Hawk Moth’s defeat.

She smiled to herself as she picked the book off the floor and placed it on his bedside table. Louis loved all the characters in the story, but Chat Noir was his favourite. He thought he was brave and funny. Marinette felt the same way.

Pushing his wild hair off his face, she kissed her son's forehead.

"Sweet dreams, my little kitten."

She climbed into bed and pulled the blankets up to her neck, wrapping herself in their comfort. It was a warm August night and the attic room was the hottest room in the building, after the bakery kitchen, but she couldn't sleep without covers over her.

Her mind was racing. Adrien was back in Paris, he knew about Louis and he seemed to have understood her reasons for not telling him sooner. She knew Nino would have explained the situation better than she could (he told her that he shared the responsibility for the decision with all four of them) and she was glad Adrien finally knew everything.

Almost everything.

She felt a thrill of attraction when she touched his arm earlier. He ran his fingertips over her knuckles, acknowledging her touch and she felt like she was fourteen again. Butterflies somersaulted in her stomach and her heart flipped.

She dared to dream that there might be a future for them. He was home and there was nothing in their way, except her fear.



*They slept together in Marinette's bed. Neither one wanted to sleep alone, each needed the reassurance of the other when they woke from their nightmares. Their nights were punctuated with Marinette and Adrien taking it turns to wake up with a cry. They would hold each other in the darkness until exhaustion took hold once more,*

*That night... The Night... Marinette was reliving the moment Hawk Moth revealed himself, seeing the horror in his son's eyes.*

*"Chat! Adrien! No!"*

*"Mari. Mari, wake up." Adrien called and her eyes opened to meet his.*

*"Sorry, was I shouting again?" She asked.*

*"It was your turn." He shrugged.*

*Adrien shuffled across the bed towards her and wrapped his arms around her. She rested her head on his chest and snuggled in to him.*

*"Are these nightmares ever going to stop?" She asked.*

*"Eventually, they have to, right?" Adrien stroked her hair. "I'm glad I've got you to help me through this."*

“Same here.” She looked up, seeking the comfort of his green eyes once more.

*Adrien met her gaze and for the first time in ten days, she felt something other than grief or sadness. She felt cherished and reassured.*

*She doesn't recall who kissed whom, just remembers the softness of his lips, the gentleness of his embrace. His hands tangled in her hair, hers cupping his cheeks. Their legs tangled and bodies moved over each other. Nightclothes were shed and she revelled in the feeling of his body against hers.*

*They adored each other. As friends, as partners, and now as lovers. Their bond as Ladybug and Chat Noir might have been removed from them, but they would always be soulmates.*

Even now, though mercifully rare these days, when those nightmares came, she still woke up and reached for him.



Her phone buzzed and she checked the screen. A text from Adrien.

***Coffee? Monday morning? I want to catch up properly x***

She replied to confirm before she set her alarm. She didn't open the shop until midday on Sundays, but she liked to have the morning with her family before going to work.

A reply came through and she couldn't help but check it.

***Great /ˌ.ː ʌ Can't wait to see you again x***

Monday couldn't come soon enough.

## Chapter End Notes

Quick definitions:

Mamie = granny

Papy = grandpa

Chatounet = a diminutive/pet name form of kitten/Chaton

## **I feel so strong, when she's around**

“Where’s Louis?” Adrien asked as Marinette approached.

“Oh, Chloe has taken him shopping,” Marinette said. “Apparently, I’m not cool enough to choose a school bag and shoes.”

“According to Louis?” Adrien didn’t think that sounded like the boy he’d met.

“No, according to Chloe.” Marinette smiled.

That made more sense. Adrien was pleased to see how much Chloe had changed and how her friendships with Marinette, Alya and Nino had strengthened over the years, but it was somehow reassuring to know the old Chloe was still in there.

Marinette closed her boutique on Mondays to allow herself a break after the busy weekend and Adrien had been looking forward to catching up with her properly. They ordered coffee and found a cosy corner of the cafe. Marinette had a large latte while Adrien had an espresso. He joked about the difference in the size of their cups.

“Ah, that’s because you’ve been in Italy for three years so appreciate the quality of your coffee. Meanwhile, I’ve been a mother for six years so I appreciate the quantity of caffeine.” She grinned.

They talked about the past few years. Adrien was keen to hear more about Marinette’s boutique. He heard about the launch from Chloe, who organised it, and Alya had sent him the press release and a couple of society magazines that featured it, but he wanted to know all the details. The reviews were good. He had scant few friends left in the fashion industry, but those he did have talked positively about Marinette and her talents. She was making her mark on the fashion industry in her own unique way.

“It’s an astonishing achievement to have your own boutique so young, but to do it as a single parent is extra amazing, Mari. It’s a real accomplishment.”

“Oh, really, Doctor Agreste? You have a PhD in particle physics and you think owning a shop is impressive?” Marinette teased.

“I do.” He was serious. “You’ve always been an inspiration to me.”

She blushed, “Well, I didn’t do it alone. Chloe and Mme. Coquet invested in the boutique and shared their business know-how, and the Dean let me use the sewing rooms at ESMOD to work on my inventory before I found the right space. Plus, Alya helped get the word out. It was a team effort.”

Adrien stared at her. He wanted to tell her she was being too modest, that she inspired loyalty in others and that’s why she had so many supporters. He wanted to hug her and tell her he was proud of her.



“Anyway,” Marinette continued, unaware of Adrien’s inner monologue, “The timing was right. I signed the lease the day after Louis started école maternelle so had the time to put into the business.”

Louis. He was starting school in September so he was six years old. Which would mean...

“What are your plans now?” Marinette asked, derailing his train of thought.

“I actually have an interview with the faculty of physics at Sorbonne this week,” Adrien said. “I’m hopeful they’ll take me on as a teacher-researcher.”

“That would be amazing, you’ll be a great teacher.” Marinette smiled over her coffee. Her enthusiasm sparkled in her eyes.

“Well, I was going to take a similar position at Università degli Studi di Milano, but I got homesick. I know Sorbonne have a vacancy. Milan have given me excellent recommendations and I don’t have a notice period to work so it’s looking positive.” Adrien met her excited gaze.

“I like when you speak Italian.” She said peering over the top of her coffee cup, “It’s kinda sexy.”

Adrien blushed. “Grazie mille.”

“So, if you get the job, you’ll be sticking around?” Marinette asked.

“Yes. Even if I don’t, I’m staying.” Adrien assured her. “I don’t really need to work, I can live off my trust fund... Eugh, that’s a spoiled rich-kid thing to say, isn’t it?”

“A little.” Marinette winced.

“Huh, speaking of, look who’s here.” Adrien nodded to the doorway where Chloe and Louis were looking around for a familiar face.

“You may laugh, but she’s changed beyond recognition, Adrien. Honestly, I sometimes have to pinch myself when I think that Chloe Bourgeois is one of my closest friends. I don’t know what I would have done without her these past years.” Marinette waved to the pair at the door.

“Mama!” Louis ran to Marinette, “Chloe got me the best school bag!”

She looked at the blonde making her way towards them, burdened by shopping bags.

“That’s great, mon chatounet, I hope you thanked her?” Marinette asked.

Chloe waved her hand noncommittally. “Please, I’m happy to. I love spending time with my little Louis. Refills?”

Adrien and Marinette both nodded and Chloe took Louis to the counter to choose a cake to go with his hot chocolate. Adrien watched as Chloe lifted him up so see the contents of the

counter. When he looked back at Marinette, she was regarding the scene with misty eyes.

“Sorry,” She said when she caught him looking, “They’re so sweet with each other, it makes me all emotional.”

Adrien wanted to ask her more, wanted to know everything about her, even the things nobody else knew, but he couldn’t. Not when he’d been away for so long. What right did he have? Nino was right, if he’d known back then that Marinette was pregnant and alone, he’d have been on the next train back to Paris and he’d never have dealt with his own father issues. He owed Marinette his gratitude for protecting him from that eventuality. She gave him time to grieve, space to find himself and opportunities to grow as a person.

Besides, she wasn’t alone. Chloe was proof of that. Alya and Nino were there for her, too. And, of course, Tom and Sabine were wonderfully supportive parents. He didn’t need to feel regret or worry he’d let her down, she was surrounded by people who love her.

He was a better, happier, more balanced person now and it was possible because Marinette was still looking out for him, even after their partnership ended. Maybe now, he could be a part of her life. Now that he was ready. And if she trusted him enough, maybe he could be part of Louis’ life too.

Chloe placed a tray on the table and settled into a chair. Louis shuffled onto a stool in a space between Marinette and Adrien.

“Monsieur Adrien?” Louis asked him, “Would you like to see my new school bag? It has a rocket on it.”

“I’d love to see it, Louis,” Adrien was captivated by his enthusiasm, “And, you can call me uncle Adrien, if you’d prefer?” Adrien looked to Marinette for confirmation. She smiled and nodded.

“Ok, *uncle* Adrien.” Adrien liked how that sounded. Louis smiled his familiar smile and took his new backpack from its bag.

“Wow.” Adrien said, “It’s very nice. I love that rocket.”

“I love everything about outer space,” Louis told him excitedly.

Adrien grinned, “You know, Louis, I have photographs of Paris, taken from the international space station. Would you like to see them sometime?”

“You do? That’s amazing!”

“Yes, I had them on my wall in my flat in Milan. It helped me feel less homesick.” Adrien explained.

“Mama! Did you hear uncle Adrien? He has pictures from ISS! How cool is that?” Louis tugged on his mother’s sleeve.

“He’s a very cool guy, chatounet.” Marinette said smiling at Adrien.

“You know, Louis, uncle Adrien might be starting school in September too,” Marinette said. “He’s hoping to get a job as a teacher at a university here in Paris.”

“Woah, that’s amazing.” Louis gaped, green eyes wide in amazement.

Louis was excellent for Adrien’s self-esteem.

“Can I show uncle Adrien how to play Snap, please, mama?” Marinette reached into her bag and pulled out a deck of cards with a picture of a satellite on the front. “Will you play snap with me?” He asked Adrien.

“I’d love to,” Adrien said.

The snap cards all had pictures of planets, satellites and rockets on them and Louis took pleasure in telling Adrien everything he knew about all of the items. It was clear that he was passionate about the topic.

If he got the job, Adrien promised himself he’d celebrate by bringing Marinette and Louis to the astronomy tower at Sorbonne one night. Louis would love that.

»»★««

Marinette and Louis waved one last time before they rounded the corner. Adrien turned to Chloe and elbowed her in the ribs.

“You ok, auntie Chlo?” He grinned.

“Hey! Don’t call me auntie!” She replied.

“I’ve never seen you like this before.” He admitted, “So… maternal.”

There was a time when the one person Chloe cared about was Chloe. Even Adrien was only considered in relation to how he made Chloe appear. The logic was that if she was friends with the famous Adrien Agreste, she must be awesome, too. Her friendships were designed around what she could get out of them and more than once, Adrien wondered if it was worth it. Now, though, she was generous and fun, he was glad she was in his life.

“I will end your life if you call me maternal ever again.” She growled.

Adrien laughed, “It wasn’t an insult, Chlo. You really care about Louis and he clearly loves you too. It’s a good thing.”

“He is a great kid,” She conceded. “He reminds me of you in many ways. He sort of filled the friendship void you left behind. Is that weird?”

“No, I think I understand what you mean,” Adrien said. “He’s a sweet kid. I’ve only met him twice and I already feel like there’s a familiarity there.”

Chloe’s eyes had a strange blank, glassy look, like she was rebooting for a moment. Maybe she hadn’t been listening to him, because her question came at a tangent.

“So, when are you asking Marinette out?” Chloe asked.

“What? I don’t... I mean...” He stuttered.

“Please Adrikins, I know you, and I know you never stopped loving Ladybug. I also happen to know that she never stopped loving you.” Chloe winked.

“Wait... Ladybug? You know?” He gasped.

He and Marinette had worked hard to keep their identities safe. When he left Paris the only people to know who Ladybug and Chat Noir were could be counted on one hand. He guessed he’d need the other hand now that Chloe had joined the list with him, Marinette, Tom, Sabine and Master Fu.

“Oh, please. I know all manner of secrets.” She smiled thinly.

Adrien could sense there was more she wasn’t telling him. As much as Chloe loved having secrets, she loved telling them more and he knew it wouldn’t take much to break her.

“Did Marinette date Louis’ father for long? Is he still in their lives? Because, everyone I’ve asked so far gets temporary amnesia when I approach the topic. I don’t know anything about him.” Adrien raised one eyebrow and looked deep into Chloe’s eyes.

“Stop looking at me like that,” Chloe shook her head. “It’s not my place to tell. Just... Oh, Adrien, you’re such a cinnamon roll.”

She didn’t call him ‘Adrikins’ so he knew she was serious. He didn’t push it, but he still felt sure there was more to this that met the eye.

# Quand elle vit son destin

## Chapter Summary

\*\*\*Warning! Contains v mild Gorizilla spoilers!\*\*\*

## Chapter Notes

Yeah, so my posting schedule has fallen to pieces, but work is throwing things out right now. I'll still post twice (maybe three times) a week, but the days are gonna vary. Anyhoo, enjoy!

The department at Università degli Studi di Milano gave him a glowing reference and his interview at Université Paris-Sorbonne was more like an orientation session. The job was his and he would start work in the week before term began.

Everything was slotting into place and it felt like a sign that he was right to move back to Paris.

Now, he needed somewhere to live. Chloe's hotel was great, but he missed having his own space. He especially missed having his own kitchen. He'd become a passable cook over the past years and found therapy in his time spent cooking. Besides, hotel living wasn't for him, he needed somewhere of his own.

He had a job, next on the list was a home.

But, first, he was going to visit Marinette's boutique.

Bugaboo Boutique was near Rue de Rivoli between a trendy vintage clothing store and an upmarket chocolatier. The name was obviously a private joke with herself, but he couldn't help but wonder if there was any other reason she chose Chat Noir's pet name for Ladybug for her store.

He tried not to think about his life as Chat Noir. Handing back his miraculous and saying goodbye to Plagg was the hardest thing he ever had to do. That little black cat stank of cheese and annoyed the hell out of him, but he was also his closest friend and confidante. Being Chat Noir had given him freedom and escape from his father's tyranny. The ultimate irony that his father was the very reason he needed to be Chat Noir in the first place was not lost on him. When he was living away, there was nobody he could talk to who would understand, although he and Marinette had broached it occasionally via email.

He pushed the door open and the bell sounded a familiar chime. Looking up, he saw that it was the same type of bell he'd worn on his collar as Chat Noir.

Marinette looked up from the counter and a smile spread across her face.

“Adrien! You came!”

“Of course I did. I had to see the greatest kidswear boutique in Paris for myself. Nice name, by the way.” He winked.

She blushed.

He took in his surroundings. Neat rows of babygrows took up half of the largest wall. The bright patterns drew his eye. There were a range of sizes of unisex designs depicting ladybugs, cats, foxes, turtles and bees. He picked up a cat babygrow to inspect it and felt a warm glow as he examined the detail; little green paw prints, cute black cats and a collar with a bell on it repeated across the fabric. In green script, the word ‘paw-some’ wove in and out of the images.

When he looked up, tears shone in his eyes.

“Did you design this?” He asked.

Marinette nodded shyly. “It was my way of being close to Chat... you, when I couldn’t physically be near you... Geographically, I mean.”

‘It’s amazing.’ His tried to say, but there was a lump in his throat. Instead, he made a vaguely positive-sounding noise.

In addition to the nod to her superhero friends were designs featuring dinosaurs, cars, robots, a nautical theme and even one with croissants, cakes and cookies on it. Each were in bold colours and were as eye-catching as the next.

The patterns had been made into leggings, rompers and t-shirts, too. Cute dungarees, trousers, skirts and pinafores in bright, hard wearing fabrics filled another wall. The remaining space was dedicated to more formal outfits; party dresses, smart shirts, tailored trousers, little blazers and woollen peacoats were arranged on rails.

His friend had real talent and he was more proud of her than he could put into words. She had taken her talent in fashion design and sudden need for children’s clothing and combined them to make a truly remarkable collection.

“This place is extraordinary, Marinette.” He finally found his voice.

“Thank you.” She was blushing again. “It’s still early days, but I’m really pleased with how it’s going so far. It’s hard work, though.”

“Do you have help?” He asked.

“I have a Saturday girl.” She nodded, “Alya and Chloe have been known to pull a shift when I’ve got sewing to do, and Mme. Coquet sends me the occasional intern, too.”

The shop’s bell rang and Adrien made a mental note to ask about that later. Alya and Nino walked through the door.

“Hey girl!” Alya called out, “We just had our first scan.”

“Ooh, show me!” Marinette squealed.

Alya pulled a strip of paper from her bag and laid it on the counter. Before Marinette and Alya crowded around it, squee-ing, Adrien could make out the vaguely wavy shape of a baby, or maybe a butter bean, in black and white. He turned to Nino who was wearing a dazed expression. He looked like he’d just gotten off a particularly fast roundabout.

“You ok, man?” Adrien asked.

“I am.” Nino assured him, “It’s just crazy, seeing your own kid for real like that. I’m kinda mindblown right now.”

“I’m so happy for you,” Adrien grinned,

The four friends spent a fun half hour taking bets on the sex of Alya and Nino’s baby and joking about which personality traits each parent would bestow on their child. All the while, Adrien couldn’t help but wonder what it was like for Marinette to go through these stages alone.

She had her friends around her, he reminded himself.

Alya and Nino were readying to leave, they still had to show the scan photos to their parents and Alya’s sisters had been texting her in shifts to beg her to come home and share the news. Alya placed the photos between the pages of her diary to keep them safe.

“It’s this Monday that Louis starts school, right?” She asked.

Marinette nodded, “Where did my baby go?” She made a comedy sobbing sound.

“What time do you want us?” Nino asked as he zipped up his jacket.

“Is 7 o’clock too early? If we want to have breakfast and take photos before we leave, we’ll need the time.” Marinette replied.

Alya pulled a face. “You’re lucky I love that kid, I wouldn’t wake up so early for anyone else.”

“I can vouch for that,” Nino laughed.

“You’re welcome, too, Adrien, if you’re free? I was going to ask you about it later tonight, but since Alya brought it up…” Marinette looked nervous for some reason.

“Oh, yeah? ‘Later tonight’? What’s happening tonight?” Ayla smirked.

“Adrien is coming for dinner. With my parents. And my son.” Marinette said, rolling her eyes at her best friend. She glanced towards Adrien, aware he hadn’t answered her question yet.

“I’ll be there. I don’t start work for another couple of weeks so I’m free.” He assured her. Marinette beamed at him.

“Thanks. I’m pretty sure I’ll be an emotional wreck so I’m going to need a shoulder or two to cry on once he’s in class.” She smiled weakly.

Marinette kissed their friends goodbye. Adrien kissed Alya before giving his best friend a hug. He lingered, browsing the rails some more, after they left. A number of customers were browsing the store and Adrien didn’t want to interrupt Marinette while she served them.

At 7pm, Marinette locked the door and turned the sign to ‘Closed’. Adrien swept the floor while she tidied the clothing and cashed up the till. The money went in the safe until the banks opened tomorrow. She explained that Kim worked as a personal trainer nearby and he often escorted her to the bank in the mornings, on his way back from his first client of the day.

Lights off, alarm set and shutters down, the pair finally set off down the street, back to Marinette’s home for dinner.

»»★««

Dinner at the Dupain-Cheng’s was, as usual, a delight. Tom and Sabine were still the most welcoming people he knew and it didn’t matter that he hadn’t been in their home for seven years. It felt like he’d never been away.

Sabine had cooked a feast for dinner and Tom and Louis were claiming responsibility for dessert. Dishes of pot stickers, broccoli beef, sesame chicken, noodles and rice almost filled the counter. There was only just enough space for four adults and Louis to sit around the table and eat. Adrien marvelled at the boy’s skill at using chopsticks and commented on his excellent table manners.

Tom drew him into a conversation about living in England and Italy and he talked fondly about his life there. Tom, it turned out, had travelled to Italy regularly as a child as his mother was Italian. It was gratifying to talk to someone with experience of the places he had lived. Somehow, they ended up talking about cooking, which ended with Sabine offering to give him some Chinese cookery lessons.

“Uncle Adrien?” Louis asked. “Would you like to see my rocket toys after dinner? I have a model Lunar Module and a Discovery Shuttle that papa helped me build.”

Adrien looked at his excited grin and wide eyes and felt his heart grow three sizes. “I’d love to see them, thank you.”



Marinette smiled at them both, and Adrien caught the moment it faltered into a brief look of concern. He wondered what had bothered her, hoped she would confide in him soon.

Dessert was an enormous pile of profiteroles. They were wonky and some were odd sizes, but both Tom and Louis looked immensely proud of them. Grandfather and grandson watched intently as Adrien took his first bite. The shared look on their faces was so comical Adrien almost laughed into the choux pastry.

“Louis, papa! Let him eat in peace!” Marinette laughed. “He’ll give you his verdict when you two let him taste it without staring at him.”

The profiteroles were delicious and he told Louis and Tom so. At the compliment, Louis climbed into his grandfather’s lap and the two shared a fist bump.

“Papy and Louis style. Booyah!” They said in unison.

“Can Uncle Adrien come for dinner every night?” Louis asked.

“Well, I assume he has other places to be, honey,” Sabine said, laughing. “But he is welcome anytime.”

With dinner finished, Louis insisted on dragging Adrien upstairs to show him his model shuttle and lunar module. Adrien was impressed that he was able to make them himself. Although he really had no idea what sort of skill level a six-year-old would normally have, he felt sure Louis was advanced for his age.

He noticed a book on his bedside table and picked it up.

“You like Ladybug?” He asked the boy.

“Yes, but Chat Noir is the best,” Louis said seriously. “He’s so brave and funny.”

“Really?” Adrien felt a swell of pride, even after all this time it was heartening to meet a Chat Noir fan.

They talked about the stories in the book. Adrien had his own copy, Alya had sent him one when it was published. Louis liked the chapters where Ladybug and Chat Noir showed the most teamwork, like Antibug and Kung Food, and Adrien couldn’t help but agree. Casting his mind back, he remembered the times where Ladybug demonstrated her total trust in him. The episode with Copycat, or Gorizilla; *did he really throw himself off a building because Ladybug told him so?!* He was lost in his memories so it took him a moment to realise Louis was addressing him.

“Uncle Adrien?” Louis tapped his arm, “Uncle Adrien?”

“Yes, sorry Louis.”

“Were... *you* Chat Noir?” The boy’s face was solemn, this wasn’t a joke.

“Uh, why do you ask.” Adrien was surprised by the question.

“Mama shouts your name in her sleep sometimes. When she has nightmares. She shouts yours and Chat Noir’s. And, well, it’s like she calling for the same person.” He explained.

“Does she have nightmares often?” Adrien asked.

“Not anymore. Papy said it happened lots before I was born, but it’s not so bad now. It started again, though, when you came back so I guess I wondered if...” Louis trailed off, leaving the rest of his question unasked.

“Does that mean you know...” Apparently, half-asked questions were the theme of the evening.

“That mama was Ladybug? Yes. Papy says it’s a secret though so I haven’t told anyone.” Louis said earnestly. “I’ll keep your secret, too, uncle Adrien.”

“Thanks, Louis, you’re a good kid.” Adrien held out his fist and Louis bumped it.

Adrien was going to have to get used to the idea that Chat Noir wasn’t his secret anymore.

## **Another day, I'm back at school**

Louis' first day at school was, as Marinette predicted, an emotional one.

Alya blamed pregnancy hormones for her tearful outpourings of pride for Louis, and Nino seemed to develop 'allergies' and a lump in his throat when Louis walked through the school gates, stopping to wave back at his cheerleaders before entering the building.

Louis for his part, handled the whole experience in a calm manner. It helped that he already had friends from nursery school amongst his classmates, and he knew and liked his teacher. Rose, Maîtresse Lavillant to her class, was a kind and patient teacher and Louis was excited to learn from her. He grew quiet the closer they got to the school gates, but that was the only sign that he was feeling nervous. Adrien felt his own swell of emotion as he watched Louis walk away from the group.

Marinette was allowed to escort Louis to his classroom and help him get settled in. She composed herself until she was walking back out the gates towards her waiting friends.

"My baby!" She sobbed. "He's so grown up and taking this all in his stride; he doesn't need me anymore!"

"Yes, he does. It's a good thing that he's growing up, though, Mari," Alya assured her. "It means you're doing a good job."

"Thank you," Marinette sniffed, wiping tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand. "I'm really am proud of him."

Heaving sobs followed and Marinette was surrounded by her three closest friends, all hugging her tight and reassuring her that Louis was going to have a great day, and that in spite of how grown up he was, he still needed his maman.

"I don't know about you, but this seems like the perfect morning for a fried egg sandwich and cup of builder's tea," Adrien said.

Three pairs of eyes regarded him with confusion and surprise.

"A who and a what, now?" Alya asked.

"It's the best comfort food I know," Adrien explained, "I was introduced to it during brunches at Cambridge. Come on, I know a place near here that serves it."

He put his arm around Marinette and led her and the still perplexed Alya and Nino to the British pub a couple of blocks from Louis' school. It was quiet, Monday mornings weren't usually peak hours for pubs.

He couldn't help but laugh at the expressions of disgust mingled with wonderment as his friends read the menu.

They ordered and slipped into easy conversation while they waited for their breakfasts. Adrien was so grateful that in spite of the time he'd been away, Nino, Alya and Marinette had resumed his friendship like he'd never been absent. They laughed and talked, always making sure to fill Adrien in on any inside jokes he might have missed.

When the food arrived, they fell quiet as they tucked in. Adrien and Marinette had fried egg sandwiches and Nino had a bacon sandwich. He moaned in delight as he bit into it; Adrien introduced him to them when he visited him at university and he'd forgotten how good it was. Alya had opted for American pancakes with bacon and syrup and the joy on her face made Adrien laugh out loud.

"You've been back for over a week, Sunshine, why am I just learning about this place?!" Alya demanded through a mouthful of pancakes.

"I was waiting for a situation like this one," Adrien said, "You've got to be hungover or in serious need of comfort to properly appreciate a breakfast like this."

"It's exactly what I needed." Marinette agreed, licking egg yolk from her thumb.

"Hmmmhmmm." Nino said, a piece of bacon hanging out his mouth.

"And you all doubted me." He shook his head and poured tea into his cup.

He was pleased to see Marinette smiling again, even happier that it was his idea that cheered her up. He hadn't been sure why she invited him to take Louis to his first day of school, he didn't know the boy as well as plenty of her other friends, but he felt like he'd earned his place by providing emotional support.

They managed to stretch their meal out for two hours with the help of additional pots of tea and Alya ordering a second helping of pancakes. Adrien and Nino snickered at the eager way she bounced in her seat in anticipation of another huge plateful of pancakes and bacon.

"I see you laughing at me, Agreste, but you should have seen this one eat when she was pregnant," Alya pointed her menu towards Marinette.

"How rude!" Marinette countered. "I wasn't that bad."

"Mari, you came round to my house and ate all the cheese. Every other day. I seriously considered buying shares in Coeur de Lion." Alya laughed.

"And when you weren't eating cheese, you were stuffing your face with chocolate chip cookies. It's lucky you live above a bakery." Nino added.

"I forget why I'm friends with you guys." Marinette pretended to huff.

Adrien chuckled at the mental image of Marinette raiding her friend's fridge for cheese while her parents doubled their cookie production. He thought briefly of Plagg and his infuriating cheese obsession; Marinette would never be as bad as he was, surely?

Marinette was trying to steal one of Alya's pancakes, while Alya was accusing her of stealing food out her baby's mouth and coming dangerously close to stabbing her best friend with a fork. Eventually, Nino grabbed the top of the stack and tossed it onto Marinette's plate while his girlfriend was distracted before stealing a slice of bacon for himself while Marinette taunted her with her pilfered pancake.

Adrien didn't want to leave, but Louis was only in school until 11.30 for his first week and Marinette needed to collect him. Alya and Nino needed to get some work done, too. Alya and Nino were both freelancers, she was a writer and he was a sound editor, so could set their own hours but they liked to get most of their work done in the day so they could relax together in the evenings.

"OT5 at ours on Sunday night?" Alya asked, readying to leave.

"Always," Marinette smiled. "I'll have to double-check with my parents and see if they can look after Louis, but it should be ok."

"If it's not, you know Louis is always welcome at ours. He can crash on our bed." Nino said.

"Sunshine? Will you be joining us?" Alya looked to Adrien.

"OT5? What's that?" Adrien questioned.

"Once a month or so, Ladybug, Queen Bee, Carapace and I get together. Marinette started it as a kind of support group, after the battle with Hawk Moth. Now it's just nice to reminisce and remember our kwamis." She explained. "Now that Chat Noir's back in Paris, do you want to join us?"

That was a lot to process. He knew Nino was Carapace, he was the one who chose him to receive his miraculous, and of course, he knew that Marinette was Ladybug. He'd had no idea that Alya had been Rena Rouge. That they knew he was Chat Noir came as a surprise. First Chloe, then Louis, now Alya and Nino... He was finally enjoying anonymity in Paris, he hated the idea of too many people knowing about his past.

"Um, yeah?" He said, still not really sure what was going on.

"Yay!" Marinette clapped her hands. "We've always been OT5 minus one. It'll be so great to get the old band back together."

They parted ways with Alya and Nino when they reached Arts et Métiers Metro station, Marinette and Adrien continuing on foot towards the school. Marinette had linked her arm through Adrien's at some point, he realised. It felt right.

After so many years away from Paris, he had been drawn home. He had been drawn to her. Home was where Marinette was. Where her kind and loving family happily received him into their folds without judgement. Where Louis enthusiastically wanted to share his interests with him. He was happy.

"Who's picking Louis up for the rest of the week?" Adrien asked.

“Maman is doing it Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and Chloe is doing Friday,” Marinette said, “I don’t have anyone to cover the boutique or I’d do it myself.”

“Your mum is picking him up? Isn’t the bakery busy at that time?” Adrien knew the pre-lunch rush was always a hectic time at the Tom & Sabine Boulangerie Patisserie.

“It is,” Marinette wrinkled her nose, “But it’s only for a few days. I don’t have another option.”

“I’ll do it.” He offered, “I can pick Louis up, then take him somewhere for lunch before I drop him off with your parents, if that helps.”

“That would be amazingly helpful, Adrien. You have no idea.” Marinette smiled. “Are you sure?”

“Positive. We can swing by the boutique and bring you lunch, too.” He suggested.

“Marry me.” Marinette said, absentmindedly.

*‘Gladly,’* Adrien thought.

## Mon coeur aime Adrien

Adrien was just getting his head around the fact that Alya had been a miraculous holder when he arrived at her and Nino's place, only to find Chloe waiting at the door. At least that explained why she knew about his and Marinette's identities.

"Trixx." A glass was held aloft.

"Pollen." Another joined it.

"Wayzz." A third glass.

"Tikki." Marinette added hers.

"Erm, uh, Plagg?" Adrien added, lifting his glass to the others.

Alya, Chloe, Nino, Marinette and Adrien clinked their glasses together and drank deeply.

Marinette had arrived last. She was reading Louis a bedtime story before she left her house and, apparently, he'd chosen a particularly long one. Adrien chuckled at that, he used to do the same thing with his mother. She was perched on the arm of the sofa next to him and, now, she squeezed his hand. Her look was pure concern.

"Is this ok?" She asked.

"I guess so?" He replied. "To be honest, there's so much to take in that I'm not sure how I feel yet. "

"You know we always included Plagg in our toasts? Even when you weren't here." Marinette said.

"She's not kidding, dude. We had to have a plate with some Camembert on it at the table every time we met. It stunk the place out, but Mari claims it was a perfect tribute." Nino shook his head.

Adrien grinned at the memory. "He would have loved it."

In the weeks following Hawk Moth's defeat, Marinette had noticed her friends showing signs of stress. The same sort of stress she was feeling. She recognised her emotional turmoil reflected in Alya, Nino and Chloe. She already knew who wore the fox miraculous, and now that she knew Chat Noir's identity, it wasn't difficult to figure out who he'd trust enough to wear the turtle bracelet. A visit to Master Fu revealed Queen Bee.

Marinette asked Fu if it was safe for her to know the citizens behind the superheroes. She explained that she strongly suspected that her friends were suffering from the same post-traumatic stress that she was and wanted to support them through it. She started the OT5 (-1) gatherings as a form of talking therapy.

“It worked,” Chloe admitted. “Knowing we weren’t alone through it all.”

“And it gave us an outlet. We could shout and cry, or bitch and laugh and it was okay. It brought us through the hardest times.” Alya explained.

“And now?” Adrien asked.

“Mostly, we toast our kwamis, then eat Alya’s world-famous Jambalaya while watching reruns of Le Bachelor,” Nino admitted.

“Hey, don’t judge us!” Marinette laughed, seeing Adrien’s amused expression. “It’s still a sort of therapy.”

»»★««

“Thank you.” Adrien squeezed Marinette’s hand as they left Nino and Alya’s apartment building.

“What for?” Marinette looked at him, her blue eyes searching his face.

“For keeping everyone together when it all ended, for arranging group therapy sessions for the others.” He said, waving his hand in the general direction of the apartment. “You kept on being Ladybug, even after you gave your miraculous back.”

She smiled sadly. He knew the aching gap in his life left when he said goodbye to Plagg and knew the feeling of constantly missing his kwami. He had weekly visits to an expensive psychiatrist to help him deal with the loss. Now, he wanted to take away the grief she felt, help her the way she helped the others.

“The nightmares are back?” He asked, already knowing the answer. “Louis told me.”

Marinette snorted through her nose, “What else did he tell you?”

“Don’t be upset with him, he was only interested in the man whose name you shout in your sleep.” He said.

Marinette’s head dropped, “Oh, God. Can I die now, please?” She groaned.

He laughed and wrapped his arms around her shoulders. “No, My Lady! Don’t do that, I’ve just got you back in my life.”

“The nightmares started back after I saw you at your welcome home party,” Marinette said from behind her hands. “I don’t know why, but I’m reliving the fight again. The fear comes back to me and you... your reaction when we took the butterfly miraculous from Hawk Moth. I’m sorry. You shouldn’t have to hear this.” She shook her head.

“I spent four years in therapy to get over that moment and many others. I can talk about it.” Adrien reassured her, “I’m worried that you spent the past seven years making sure everyone else was coping and nobody was looking after you.”



“I’m okay, Adrien, I promise.” Marinette rested her head against him. “Thank you for caring, though.”

They walked on in silence, unasked questions swirling around Adrien’s head. He wanted to help her, but she was so used to looking after that others that he wasn’t sure she could ever accept his assistance. He saw it all too often as Chat Noir; Ladybug had the weight of Paris on her shoulders. She felt personally responsible for every last citizen and cared deeply about each of them.

“This is me.” They had reached the hotel. “Are you sure I can’t see you home?”

“Ever the gentleman,” She giggled, “Honestly, I’m fine, it’s not far.”

He didn’t want her to go, was already missing her touch even though she was less than a metre from him.

“Why don’t you come up to my room and have a drink with me, then I’ll call a taxi for you. Deal?” He tried to be casual, grateful that Chloe had somewhere else to be after they left Nino and Alya’s.

“That’s fair.” She smiled, “Lead the way, kitty.”

»»★««

Once they reached his room, a knock at the door distracted Adrien so Marinette took in her surroundings.

Chloe had done a great job on the rooms, she thought. The furnishings were luxurious without being ostentatious (she talked Chloe out of garish gold and black Brocade curtains and convinced her that a mocha Damask would match the mink satin wallpaper far better). The room came with an espresso machine, phone speaker dock, bureau and two plush tub chairs and a low coffee table. It was cosy and she could see how Adrien was able to live here long term.

“Monsieur, Miss Chloe instructed me to bring this to you,” A male voice spoke, but Marinette couldn’t see who it belonged to.

“Oh, wow. Tell Chloe, thank you.” Adrien sounded pleased.

“And, ahem, Miss Chloe also said if you ever brought the dark-haired girl to your room, to give you this.” The other voice sounded uncomfortable.

“I… Tell Chloe, I hate her,” Adrien said seriously.

“I apologise, monsieur, I am just doing what I’m told.” The door closed.

Adrien returned, cheeks pink, carrying a tray containing a bottle of whisky and two crystal glasses. Marinette raised a quizzical eyebrow.

“A gift from Chloe.” He explained.

He set the tray on the coffee table before palming something small into the drawer of his bedside table. Marinette didn't ask.

"I got into whisky while I was in Cambridge. One of the guys in my halls of residence, his father owned a distillery and he educated us on it. This," He gestured to the bottle on the table, "Is Chloe's way of showing off. It's a fifteen-year-old Islay single malt that must cost at least €150."

"She's incredibly generous, isn't she? Has she always been that way?" She asked, wondering if Chloe's generosity was a newfound trait.

"She's always bought gifts, but it used to be more proprietorial, I guess. It was like she was marking her territory if she gave you a present, telling you that you belonged to her. So, I don't know, I suppose the selfless gift-giving is a new thing." Adrien said.

He poured two generous measures of whisky into the glasses and added a splash of bottled water into each. He passed one to Marinette and put his nose in his, inhaling deeply. She did the same, unsure what she was smelling for. Adrien looked at her expectantly so she closed her eyes, blocking out one sense to focus on another.

"It smells like a bonfire on the beach." She said.

He smiled in encouragement. "You have a good nose."

He took a sip so she followed. She winced at how strong it was and the way it burned her throat when she swallowed. It wasn't unpleasant, though, so she took another drink.

"It's smooth," She noted, "Sweet, a little spicy and... woody?"

He clinked his glass against hers, eyes twinkling. "You're practically a connoisseur already."

She liked it when he was animated like this. Since his return from Milan, she noticed that he was more restrained than usual. Never aloof, but he was definitely more guarded. Talking about whisky, in this moment, she saw a twinkle in his eye that she recognised from all the times she saw it behind a black mask. This was his freedom, pursuing simple pleasures, finding joy in the little things.

Her phone trilled and she flexed her fingers in response.

"Do you need to check that?" He asked.

"Sorry, I texted maman to let her know I'd be later than I thought. Do you mind?" She reached for her mobile.

He settled on his bed, curling his legs under him. Marinette checked her messages.

***Maman: Of course, dear. Louis is fast asleep and your papa and I are off to bed too. Stay out as late as you like, just don't be too noisy when you come home! Have fun x***

She grinned and switched her phone to silent, slipping it into her bag. She perched on the bed, next to Adrien. He might not be a model any more, but he retained the effortlessly perfect posture from those days. There was a cat-like grace about him that was relaxed and accessible. These days, he was the perfect mixture of Adrien and Chat Noir; charismatic and flirtatious, but thoughtful, reserved. His fun side showed when he was with friends and it made his face glow. If possible, she loved him more now than she did in her teens.

His hair was lighter now, with flecks of grey just beginning to show and the cool tones in his hair made his eyes seem even more piercing than before. His green eyes searched her face and she felt him look into her soul. It was disconcerting.

“They’re not all nightmares.” She heard herself say. *Where did that come from?!*

“They’re not?” Adrien looked surprised at this outburst of honesty.

“No,” She cringed internally, *why was she telling him this?* His eyes were acting like truth serum on her as the effects of the alcohol hit and she couldn’t help herself. “I have... other... dreams that feature you.”

“Other... dreams?” His jaw dropped a little at this.

She chewed her bottom lip nervously, then swallowed more whisky for courage. She looked straight into his eyes.

“Other memories. More... pleasurable memories. Some... fantasies.” She prompted him.

“That leave you shouting my name? ...Oh!” He got it. He took a large gulp of whisky, too, and Marinette figured he was buying time to consider his response.

Wordlessly, he took her glass from her and set both on the dressing table. He sat closer to her now and cupped her cheek in his hand, stroking her face with his thumb. His gaze had become so intense, Marinette was worried she might melt into a puddle under it. Like the sun, it wasn’t wise to look directly at it.

“I have those dreams, too.” He was close enough that his breath warmed her face, it smelled sweet and smoky, like the whisky. “And... fantasies... about you.”

“You do?” She whispered.

Marinette tilted her face towards his, lips slightly parted as she felt him draw closer. Their mouths met hungrily and her eyes closed, once more blocking out one sense to focus on another. Their tongues clashed insistently. His hands raked through her hair, tugging slightly, pulling her into him. Urgency grew within her and she climbed into his lap, trailing kisses along his jaw until she reached his ear. She nibbled his earlobe and heard him sigh breathily.

“Wait,” He put his hands on her shoulders and pulled back.

“What’s wrong?” She bit her lip, worried that she had done something to upset him. Had she gone too far?

“Nothing,” He moved his hands to her face, “I want this. It’s just that, I need you to know how I feel. I still love you Marinette. This isn’t a fling. I want to have a relationship with you, if you’ll have me.”

“I love you too, Adrien,” She smiled at his earnest expression, “I want you in my life.”

Adrien grinned at that, his face looked younger and brighter when he did and she felt another swell of affection for him.

“Marinette Dupain-Cheng, would you like to be my girlfriend?” He asked, cheeks flushing a little as he did. It was adorable.

“More than you know, yes.” She couldn’t stop a happy giggle from slipping out.

He leaned back on to his elbows and she followed, resuming their kiss. It was less urgent than before and, somehow, more intense. In saying the things they’d been wanting to since Adrien returned to Paris, they were able to relax and enjoy each other.

One of his hands moved to her waist and the other cradled the back of her head. His kisses paused for just a beat as he flipped her so she was laying on the bed and he was on top of her. His tongue traced her collarbone, hands unfastened the buttons of her blouse, hips ground into her. She sighed and the sound came out as a moan. She pulled his shirt from his waistband and pushed her hands underneath, running her nails down his back.

They broke apart momentarily to remove their shirts and Adrien unclasped her bra, slipping it reverently from her arms.

“Adrien, wait. I don’t have any protection.” She said, putting her hand on his chest. The realisation arrived with a healthy dose of disappointment. Adrien, however, looked sheepish.

He reached over to the drawer of his bedside cabinet and yanked it open. A small blue square box sat in the otherwise empty drawer, the words ‘Extra-Safe’ emblazoned in bold. Condoms.

“Another gift from Chloe.” He grimaced.

## He's got me spinning round

This was the apartment.

After viewing more flats than he cared to count, he finally found one that was in the right location, was spacious and that actually felt like home.

Now that he was able to look Chloe in the eye without blushing madly after her dubious generosity a few weeks back, he had agreed to bring her house-hunting. Admittedly, he and Marinette had put her gifts to good use, but he cringed internally every time he saw Chloe afterwards. The insufferably smug expression on her face when she heard that Adrien and Marinette were an item didn't help much, either.

"It's great, Adrikins," Chloe puffed out her cheeks, "but it's very *homely*, no?"

Adrien shrugged. "You say that like it's a bad thing."

Wooden beams, antique tiles and a stone fireplace lent a cosiness to the clean white walls. A large open plan living-dining room led to a quaint kitchen with a window overlooking the courtyard. Up a wooden spiral staircase were three bedrooms, a bathroom and an open hallway with space for a desk.

He figured he could make one bedroom into a guest room or reading nook, and the other... Was it strange that he was considering turning it into a playroom for Louis? He and Marinette were bound to visit and he wanted the boy to feel welcome.

He was drawn to Louis. He saw himself in him, probably because he had the same interests when he was that age. Louis was very much like Marinette in his mannerisms, but there were certain facial expressions that came from somewhere else. Somewhere familiar.

He was twenty-five now and his friends were starting families. Ivan and Mylene had a baby, Nino and Alya were expecting one, Marinette had Louis. He'd had a couple of brief romantic relationships in Madrid, but he was too busy studying to make any of them last. Certainly, there had been nothing that he could imagine leading to children. In Cambridge, there had been a few flings, but he was concentrating on himself and healing from Gabriel's coercive parenting methods. Back then, the idea of being a parent would have terrified him. Now, though... with Marinette..?

"I'm going to sign the contract today," Adrien said. "This is the place."

»»★««

"Wow! Adrien, it's beautiful." Marinette gasped and twirled around to take in the whole room. "Whoa, look at the size of this kitchen!"

Adrien couldn't help but smile at her enthusiasm. "So, you like it?"

“Um, yes!” Marinette said.

“Good, because I just bought it.” Adrien smiled.

“You bought it?! Outright?” Marinette’s jaw dropped. “This must be worth a million euros.”

“Plus €50,000 in fees, yes.”

“Huh. And here I am sharing in the bedroom I grew up in with a six-year-old.” Marinette laughed.

“Move in here.” He said it without thinking.

“What?!” Marinette’s shocked face told him he probably should have thought it through.

“I mean. If you guys need the space, there’s plenty here. And, I’d like the company.” He said. “I knew we’ve only been dating for a few weeks and I don’t want to rush things, but... if you want to?”

“Wow. Um, that’s so generous.” Marinette looked at the floor and chewed her bottom lip. Adrien knew she only did that when she had something on her mind.

“Hey,” He took her face in his hands, guiding her to look at him. “It’s an open invitation. You don’t have to decide anything now. Ok?”

“Thanks, Adrien. I’ll definitely give it some thought.”

»»★««

“Adrien bought an apartment,” Marinette told her mother. “It’s gorgeous; on two floors, three bedrooms, big windows and wooden beams.”

“That sounds lovely, chérie,” Sabine said, placing a cup of tea in front of her daughter and settling into the seat next to her.

“He asked me to move in with him.” She wrinkled her nose.

“Did he?” Sabine asked.

Her mother had a habit of not offering advice when Marinette wanted it. Instead, she’d wait patiently for her daughter to tell her everything that was bothering her, usually coming up with her own solution along the way. Marinette always wanted Sabine to tell her what the right and wrong answers to her current situation were, but since that was never forthcoming, she started to speak.

“He said it was an open invitation, it’s not like he wants me to move in right now, but... I actually liked the idea. I mean, it’s too soon, we haven’t been dating for long and I need to know that it’s the right thing for Louis before I do anything. It’s just... I love him and I feel like I’ve known him for lifetimes before this one. And, I love living with you and papa, but

I'm sure you never expected me to still be here, let alone me and your grandchild. ..Oh, I... My head hurts." She rubbed her temples.

"Marinette, dear, calm down and collect your thoughts. You're all over the place." Sabine put her hand on Marinette's knee. "Would you like to move in with Adrien?"

"Yes."

"Is there anything you need to resolve before you did that?" Her mother tilted her head, thoughtfully.

"It would need to be right for Louis, too. I'd need to know that he's ready to move, that he'd be safe and happy there. I'd need to see that his and Adrien's relationship is strong enough for them to live under the same roof..." Marinette considered.

"And?" Sabine prompted.

"And, I'd have to tell Adrien the truth about Louis' father." Marinette put her face in her hands.

Sabine smiled. "You got used to keeping secrets as Ladybug to keep your dad and me safe, but this one is a secret that gets more dangerous the longer you keep it. Talk to him. Soon."

»»★««

He had freaked her out, of course he had. The suggestion to move in was impromptu and he hadn't thought through any consequences. Marinette couldn't uproot her son on an unconfirmed offer of a place to stay. She needed certainty and stability for Louis.

His offer might have been spontaneous, but on reflection, he had no regrets. He wanted to share his home with her, wanted to be her family. Adrien had to show her that he was serious about staying in Paris, let her see that he was there for her and Louis. Then, he'd ask her again.

He walked into the inviting warmth of the bakery, the sweet scent of vanilla and butter was an olfactory welcome mat. This place was a second home to him now and the patisserie's smells evoked an almost Pavlovian response, sending his heart fluttering in anticipation of seeing Marinette. Except, he wasn't here to see her, but Sabine, and he wasn't sure if Marinette would want to see him after his bombshell earlier.

Tom looked up from the counter and smiled. His mouth was hidden under a bushy moustache but his eyes crinkled and sparkled to show he was happy to see Adrien.

"Hi, son. Go on up, Sabine is expecting you." Tom said.

"Thanks... is?" Adrien started to ask.

"She's out, picking up Louis." Tom read his mind. "They won't be long."

He climbed the stairs to the apartment and turned his thoughts to the cookery lesson he was having with Sabine. He was learning so much from her and couldn't wait to get into his new apartment to start practising everything he'd learned. Perhaps he could invite her and Tom for dinner at his place once he was settled?

"I thought we'd make wontons," Sabine said. "Once you can make the wrappers, you can use the same recipe for pot stickers and spring rolls so it's versatile. Besides, it's one of Louis' favourites so we'll have an extra pair of hands when he gets home from school."

They got to work, mixing and kneading the dough before leaving it to rest. Sabine showed him how to mix the dough with chopsticks and how to tell when the dough was the right consistency. She was a good teacher, explaining every step well and she was patient with Adrien while he learned. While they were chopping ingredients for the filling, Adrien decided to ask Sabine for advice.

"Did Marinette tell you I bought a flat?" He asked.

"She did. It sounds lovely and it's nearby?" She didn't take her eyes off the contents of her chopping board as she spoke.

"Yes, it's two streets from here." He paused. "I asked Mari to move in with me. Did she tell you?"

Sabine put her knife down and looked at him kindly. "She did. It was very generous of you."

"But?" He prompted.

"No buts," She smiled, "I know she'd be very happy to live with you, I'm sure Louis would, too. I think she needs a little more time to get used to the idea, though."

"Really?!" Adrien was relieved, he was sure she'd be panicking.

"She loves you," Sabine stated matter-of-factly. "I think Marinette would move in tomorrow if it wasn't for Louis, but he's her first priority. Louis thinks you're marvellous, Adrien, I'm sure it won't be long before she sees that the move would be good for him, too. Spend some more time with him, get to know him better and I'm sure Marinette will come round."

"Thanks," He said, "You give good advice."

"Don't tell Marinette that," Sabine grinned, "She's not very good at taking advice, too strong-willed, so I let her figure things out for herself. She'd be furious to know you got special treatment."

He laughed, "Does that mean I'm your favourite?"

Her eyes sparkled with good humour, "Sorry, dear, Louis holds the top spot in my heart."

"Hang on, have I been demoted to third place?!" Marinette stood at the apartment door, Louis waved to the pair in the kitchen before running upstairs to change from his school uniform. "I'm an only child, how is this possible?"



Sabine laughed, "You're my favourite daughter."

"That feels," Marinette kissed her mother's cheek, "very much like an award for participation."

"Maybe you got complacent?" Adrien teased.

A well-aimed garlic clove bounced off his head. Marinette ducked behind her mother as Adrien caught the errant allium and aimed it back at her.

Sabine rolled her eyes. "Stop! And you two wonder why Louis is number one."

"Sorry maman, it's Adrien, he's a bad influence." Marinette stuck her tongue out at Adrien, still sheltering behind Sabine.

Louis came back downstairs, now dressed in one of Marinette's designs; a Chat Noir t-shirt and green chinos. He washed his hands and clambered onto a stool at the kitchen counter.

"What are we making today, mamie?" he asked.

"Your favourite," Sabine winked. "Uncle Adrien is here to help too"

Louis looked at Adrien appraisingly, shrugged and rolled his sleeves up to help.

Marinette began to climb the stairs to the bedroom when Adrien took his chance and flung the garlic clove at her. It struck her backside and she whipped her head around, looking scandalised. Adrien just winked at her, smirking at his victory.

When she returned, he was half-expecting a reprisal, but there was none. She was now dressed in sports leggings and a long-sleeved t-shirt, carrying a pair of trainers in one hand. She kissed Louis on the top of his head.

"See you later, mon chatounet. Love you." She said.

She kissed her mother's cheek, "I'll be home by 8, maman."

"Bye, you, have fun." She kissed Adrien softly on the lips and his heart flipped when she whispered into his ear, "Love you, Chaton."

They worked together to mix together all their chopped ingredients to form the wonton filling. Sabine fried a little in a pan so they could all test the seasoning. Adrien thought it was perfect but Sabine decided to add a touch more soya sauce. On tasting the second version of the filling, he understood why. All the flavours were lifted by the added umami.

Louis and Adrien kneaded the wonton dough and Sabine added a few aromatics to a pan of chicken broth. They left the dough to rest a little longer when Tom came upstairs from closing up the bakery. He brought a few leftover pastries for them so Sabine made a pot of tea while Tom washed up, then the four of them sat down together. Louis told Adrien and his mamie and papy all about his day at school over tea (Louis had milk) and Madeleines. Adrien

felt completely at ease, even without Marinette's presence and he realised how hard it would be for her and Louis to leave this nurturing environment.

Marinette returned just before eight o'clock, glowing and happy and headed straight for the bathroom to shower. Louis explained that she went out with Alix to exercise a few times a week, but he didn't know exactly what they did.

"I think they do running." Louis mused.

»»★««

By the time Marinette was dressed in shorts, an off-the-shoulder sweatshirt and a pair of fluffy socks, hair still damp from the shower, she found Adrien and Louis carefully dropping wontons into boiling water as her mother scooped out the cooked ones as they floated to the surface. She smiled as she watched Adrien holding Louis back from the hot water, protecting him from burning himself on the steam or the saucepan.

Her father kissed the top of her head as she continued to watch the scene of domesticity in front of her.

"He's slotted right into the family," Tom said, just loud enough for her to hear.

She nodded. Adrien had always been welcomed into her family home, her parents seeing how starved of love he was at home. Now, though, it was different, Adrien might not have parents around, but his friends were his substitute family and these days he knew how much he was loved. It shone from every pore and he well and truly earned Alya's nickname for him. This was reflected in the way he behaved around her family. Instead of acting like he was undeserving of their affections, he basked in it and returned it with his own fondness towards them. He was a changed man.

The conversation was lively over dinner as Tom, Adrien and Louis debated which iteration of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles was the best. Tom was a proponent of the 1987 animated version, while Adrien insisted that the 2003 version was best. Louis believed that even the 2012 TV series was a historical relic and refused to accept any TMNT variant other than the 2014 movie. Marinette couldn't care less about the topic, but she was enjoying the spirited discussion. It was fun to watch the three males she loved the most share their enthusiasm like this.

Marinette smiled when she found a wonky wonton in her soup and asked Louis and Adrien which one of them made it. She laughed as each of them denied ownership and fished one of Sabine's perfect dumplings from the broth and insisted that it was their work. Her mother winked conspiratorially at her when the boys weren't looking.

She was sorry the evening had to end, but Louis was starting to nod off at the dinner table and Adrien was teaching an 8am tutorial in the morning. She walked down to the apartment door with Adrien, seeking privacy to say goodbye.

"Bye, Uncle Adrien!" Louis' voice followed them down the stairs.

“Bye, Louis!” Adrien called back.

“See you soon,” Louis replied.

“Yes, see you soon, Louis.” Adrien laughed.

“Thanks for coming to see us, Uncle Adrien,” Louis shouted.

“Go to bed, Louis! Stop stalling.” Marinette interrupted, laughing. Adrien laughed, too.

They waited in the hall for a minute, listening for further goodbyes from Louis. When none were forthcoming, Adrien wrapped his arms around her and held her close. She sighed and melted into his strong arms, closing her eyes and enjoying the warmth of his embrace.

“Mari, did I freak you out today?” He asked.

“A little bit.” She admitted, “But, I’m not saying no, just not yet. Is that okay?”

“That is definitely okay,” He pulled away from their hug and Marinette started to object.

Then, he kissed her.

When he pulled away, she pressed her forehead to his, noses almost touching. There was only one thing standing between her and Adrien. A secret she had to share.

“Adrien?” She said.

“Yes, Mari?” He replied.

“...” *Why was this so hard to say?* “Never mind.”

“Okay,” Adrien looked amused. “See you soon?”

She nodded.

“Love you, My Lady.”

“Love you, kitty,”

She closed the door as he walked around the corner and out of view.

*Damn. So close.*

## **J'ai des pouvoirs superpuissants**

Nobody should be awake at 7am, let alone in the park working out, Adrien decided. Even the sun wasn't up yet. At least Kim, Nino and Ivan were there for moral support.

It had been a mercifully dry week, which was unusual for October, so although the ground was damp from dew, it wasn't muddy. Autumn was in full force and the air was crisp and cool. The trees were almost bare, save for a few leaves steadfastly holding on to their branches. The sun was pushing its way up, casting a bluish, almost purple light across the horizon. It would have been beautiful if he'd been there for any other reason.

He used to think that Alix's competitiveness was merely a reaction to Kim's need to win everything, but he was wrong. She was clearly a sadist. Adrien wasn't as fit as he once was, but until this morning he considered himself to be fairly strong. Now, though, he felt like he had all the athleticism of a wet noodle.

Alix had set out a series of exercises for circuit training in Place Des Vosges that morning, although you'd be forgiven for thinking it was some complicated series of torture.

Kim was keeping up with the exercises out of sheer bloody-mindedness but his face betrayed the effort it was taking. Nino had completely given up and was jogging punishment laps around the park. Adrien and Ivan were determinedly pushing through the pain. Adrien was sure that Ivan was only persevering through fear of Alix; that was certainly Adrien's current motivation.

He was on the final set of the circuit, plank jacks, a hideous combination of jumping jacks and planking that made Adrien long for burpees again. Every muscle in his body hated him, they had been worked harder than he could remember. He'd be lucky if he could walk properly by this evening. He was ready to die, which was why he saw an angel.

Marinette approached the group carrying a cardboard tray of takeaway coffees. Next to her, Louis was holding a large box marked with the logo of the Tom & Sabine Boulangerie Patisserie. They settled on the bench nearest to the straining and panting men (Alix was disgustingly composed in spite of the exertion).

Nino abandoned his laps and settled on the bench next to Louis, who opened the box for him. Alix shouted at him to warm down, but Nino held his middle finger up at her, shielding Louis' eyes with his other hand. He selected a huge pain au chocolat from the box and stuffed it in his mouth. Marinette handed him a cardboard cup.

"If you weaklings want to join Nino, I need one minute of planks from you," Alix barked.

Marinette laughed and Ivan muttered something about a gender-war.

"Oh, you think a woman couldn't do what you're doing?!" Alix challenged him? "You forget, I am a woman."

“No, Alix, you’re a machine.” Adrien grimaced.

“Oh, a wise guy, huh? Is Marinette feminine enough for you?” She asked and Adrien was glad his face was already flushed from the exercise, otherwise his blush would have been obvious from the top of the Eiffel Tower.

Marinette sighed, placed the coffees on the bench and slipped out of her blazer before joining the boys and Alix on the grass.

“I’m not really dressed for this,” She complained.

Adrien watched her position her ballet pump-clad feet into position and plant her elbows and forearms on the ground. She was wearing black cigarette trousers with a white sleeveless blouse tucked into them. Her technique was perfect and he realised then that the boys had been lead into a trap.

“I want to see Russian Kettlebell Challenge planks all around. The last one to fall wins.” Alix announced. “Assume the position!”

They all put their ankles together and closed the gap between their arms. The narrow stance made balance difficult and Ivan was the first to tumble. Adrien’s core muscles screamed at him, but he was determined to hold on. Alix and Marinette showed no signs of strain. Kim fell next.

“Come on Adrien, this is for all of mankind!” Kim tried to encourage him.

“You can do it mama!” Louis cheered.

“Hey, kid, whose side are you on?!” Kim sounded outraged at the betrayal.

“The winning side, by the look of it.” Nino laughed.

“Louis, come and make this a challenge,” Marinette said.

Louis hopped off the bench and approached his mother. He took a couple of seconds to find his balance, then lay down, back-to-back with Marinette, his mother now taking his weight.

Another minute passed. Alix admitted defeat. It was Marinette vs Adrien and every muscle in his body was begging him to stop. He glanced at Marinette and she looked composed, in spite of the fact she and her son were now giggling at the situation. He reckoned she could stay that way all morning, and if he held out much longer he was likely to rupture something. He put his knees on the grass and raised himself to a kneeling position. Louis jumped off his mother and started jumping up and down, cheering for her.

“Yes! Victory for women!” Alix shouted.

“Ah! Mar comes first,” Ivan groaned.

Kim raised an eyebrow and looked between Adrien and Marinette. “Does she?”

“Dude! Innocent ears!” Adrien chided him.

“Yeah, bro. I don’t want to hear that.” Nino groaned from the bench.

Adrien held a hand out to Marinette and she took it. He wanted to pull her up, but she managed to stand without requiring his support. They stood holding hands for a few seconds before Nino held the box of pastries out to them.

“You know that Mari does yoga most days, and she and Alix do parkour three times a week?” Nino said. “The girls have hustled you.”

Ivan stared at Marinette in disbelief. “You do parkour?!”

“She’s a natural at it,” Alix said, “It’s like she’s been running over rooftops all her life.”

Adrien looked at Marinette who said nothing, she just winked conspiratorially at him. He choked on his drink.

“You might be okay at parkour, Adrien... I mean, you could *probably* keep up with me,” She said, wiggling her eyebrows at him.

Adrien wanted to retort, but he was still trying to get the coffee out his nose.

This morning’s training might have been hard work, but he was glad for his friends, even Alix. It was moments like this that told him he was right to move back to Paris. They continued to joke with each other, drinking coffee and eating pastries and reassuring Alix that, yes, they would make sure to drink plenty of water throughout the day.

At eight o’clock, Marinette got Louis ready to walk the short trip to school. Before she left, Adrien caught her attention.

“Oh, I’ve been meaning to ask. The university has an astronomy tower and I’m sure Louis would love it there. Is there an evening this week he’s free?”

“That sounds amazing, thank you, Adrien, he will love it.” She smiled and kissed him. “Urgh, sweaty!” She giggled and wiped her face where it had touched his. Marinette led Louis away with a wave to her friends, leaving Nino and Alix fighting over the last croissant.

Across the park, a tall man surveyed the scene unnoticed, piercing grey-blue eyes watching with interest as the group dispersed.

## Être héroïque en cas d'urgence

Marinette laid her yoga mat on the floor and adjusted her yoga pants. She had an evening to herself, no Louis and no parents, so she planned to relax and concentrate on herself. She was going to spend 45 minutes on uninterrupted yoga, followed by a long bubble bath with a book and a glass of wine. It was going to be an excellent night.

She grabbed her phone, intending to scroll through her Spotify library to find the ‘Chillax’ playlist that Nino made for her, but there were 20 missed calls from Kim, Alix and Alya.

Before she could call one of them back, someone started banging loudly on the apartment door. She ran downstairs, still clutching her phone, and peered through the spyhole. Kim looked red-faced as he continued to knock urgently. She pulled the door open.

“Mar! Have you seen the news?! Gabriel Agreste escaped the hospital on Tuesday, it’s just been announced. We need to find Adrien, but he’s not answering his phone. Where is he?” Kim breathed heavily. He must have run all the way here.

“He’s at the observatory tonight... With Louis.” Marinette’s eyes widened and her hands flew up to her face. “Oh my God, Kim. Adrien is with Louis. We have to find them.”

She grabbed the trainers that were still by the door from her parkour session with Alix earlier and pulled the door closed behind her.

The university was a fifteen minute walk from her place, but at the pace they ran, they made it in six. Marinette took the steps in front of Notre Dame in one bound, vaulting over the concrete benches and bollards surrounding the Cathedral concourse. Kim was on the phone, talking to someone for the first couple of minutes. As they crossed Petit Pont, they were joined by Nino and Alix.

“I’ve never wanted Tikki and Wayzz to be here more than now.” Nino puffed as they neared the astronomy tower.

“I know what you mean.” She agreed grimly. “But we’re on our own.”

The door was unlocked so the four friends ran up the stairs, Marinette took them two at a time. Kim’s legs were the longest so he was ahead of her and he reached the closed door at the top first.

He didn’t try the handle. Pressing his ear to the door, he put his finger to his lips, telling the rest to be quiet. Marinette reached the door next and put her ear to the door, facing Kim. She heard voices, one older, gruff, commanding, the other, Adrien, was calm but wary.

They had found Gabriel.

She strained, listening hard but she couldn’t hear Louis. Her heart was thumping like a bass drum in her chest and panic buzzed like a bluebottle in her head. She caught Kim’s eye and

mouthed, 'I have to get in there'.

"How long until the police get here?" Kim asked.

"At least five minutes," Nino winced, cradling his phone under his chin. "We need to get in there now."

Usually, Marinette would insist they wait for the authorities, but Louis was in there. Adrien was in there. She had to go to them. She gently tried the handle, not daring to believe it would be that easy.

It was locked.

Alix was prepared for this. Pulling a set of picks from her back pocket, she knelt by the lock and peered into it, concentrating. Once it seemed like she had formulated a plan, she selected her picks and started to work at the lock.

"I'll go in first, ok?" She whispered, barely daring to make any sound. "I'll get Gabriel away from them, you protect Louis."

Kim looked like he was going to object, but Nino nodded.

"Ready to follow your lead, LB." He said.

Kim's mouth opened in surprise for a moment and his eyes darted between the pair. They had faced down Hawk Moth before, but this time the stakes were higher. This time, she was fighting for her son.

With the faintest 'click,' the door was unlocked. Alix blew on her fingertips and grinned. She turned the handle delicately and pulled the door smoothly and slowly open, just enough for Marinette to slip inside. A tiny voice in the back of Marinette's head reminded her to ask Alix about the origins of her locksmithing skills at a better time.

»»★««

"And that, is Venus," Adrien said and Louis gasped in wonderment.

He had been pleasantly surprised when Marinette had agreed to Louis accompanying him to the observatory alone. She had been happy for him to spend the evening with Louis, and Adrien was touched by the display of trust. For his part, Louis was having the best time, listening intently to everything Adrien told him and was awestruck by the constellations and planets he could see through the telescope.

The door opened and Adrien turned in surprise. He wasn't expecting to have to share the astronomy tower.

He certainly wasn't expecting to see...

"Gabriel?!"



“Son.” The tall man said.

He was greyer and more gaunt than the last time Adrien saw him and it was jarring to see him in anything other than sharply tailored clothing. His eyes still burned like a cool flame, though, and his expression was still haughty. He closed the heavy wooden door behind him and locked it, taking the ancient key from the lock and slipping it in his breast pocket. There was no way out.

“What are you doing here?” Adrien asked, guiding Louis to shelter behind him, shielding him from his father’s view. “Why aren’t you in the hospital? Or prison?”

“You didn’t want to see me.” Gabriel hissed, ‘You tried to cut me out of your life.’”

“So you broke out of hospital? Are you even well enough to be out?” Adrien heard the fear in his own voice, tried his best to keep it level, not wanting to betray emotion. Gabriel was advancing and soon, he’d surely see Louis. Adrien needed to protect him, but how?

“I MADE YOU. And you wouldn’t even deign to visit me.” The man spat.

“No!” Adrien was resolved, almost calm now. “You broke me. I’ve spent the past seven years rebuilding myself.”

“Don’t kid yourself, you’re nothing without me, look at you. Pathetic.” Gabriel’s anger was barely simmering under the surface and Adrien knew it could burst out at any moment. “Everything I did was for you.”

“You never did anything for me, or mother, or anyone else. Everything you did was selfish and you need to realise that. Hell, you spent your free time terrorising the city and putting my life in danger on a regular basis for your own egomaniacal agenda. Go back to hospital, let them help you.” He wanted to shout, but somehow he managed to stay calm.

Adrien’s hearing was heightened by adrenaline so he heard the clicking of a door lock while Gabriel remained ignorant of it. The door opened almost imperceptibly, moving slowly and deliberately. Adrien felt his courage surge when he saw His Lady slip into the tower, unseen by Gabriel. She held her finger to her lips and he realised she was motioning to Louis, who was crouching behind the massive telescope. She pointed to the gap in the door and he saw Nino’s face, his expression steely.

“Hawk Moth.” Marinette spoke and Gabriel faltered.

“You!” His eyes narrowed and he took a step away from Adrien. “This doesn’t concern you, Ladybug.”

“It does now, Hawk Moth.’ Marinette circled Gabriel, “Chat Noir and I are a team. If you take him on, you take me on, too.”

She was moving Gabriel’s attention away from where Adrien and Louis were standing. In doing so, she was putting his father between her and the door, but Adrien knew that she was doing it to protect her son.

“I should have squashed you when I had the chance, bug,” Gabriel glowered, his back was now to the door.

“Don’t kid yourself, you never had that chance, butterfly, we were always at least one step ahead of you. Why should today be any different?” Marinette asked.

Her eyes flitted to one side, a wordless signal to Nino who entered the room and ran to Louis. He picked him up and ran back to the door. Adrien saw Marinette share a look with her son, determined, reassuring and loving all at once.

Gabriel watched as the boy was swept from the room, the boy he hadn’t noticed in his single-minded mission to target Adrien. He looked back at Marinette and Adrien, mouth agape.

“The bug and the cat had an offspring?” He asked, sneeringly, his eyes narrowed. “Of course, she was one of your simpering fangirls. Shame, I thought you’d have better taste.”

“No, he’s not...” Adrien started before realising that he owed this man nothing. “Stop it. You destroyed lives, you don’t get an opinion.”

“Oh, I intend to destroy one more.” Gabriel snarled and Adrien saw a glint of silver in his hand. “If you don’t want to be my son, so be it.”

He moved towards Adrien, scalpel held like a dagger. He was quicker than he looked and Adrien froze in fear.

Marinette acted.

As Gabriel advanced on his son, Marinette ran at Adrien, shouldering him out of the way. Adrien hit the floor, looking up to see his father’s eyes grow wide in horror. Marinette dropped her weight and held her leg out, tripping Gabriel up. The scalpel was still in his grip and he swiped wildly at Adrien. Before Adrien could react, Marinette was on top of Gabriel, pinning him to the ground. She seized his hand and beat it against the tiled floor until he relinquished the blade.

At this, Kim ran into the room and flipped Gabriel over into what looked considerably like a Three Quarter Nelson, holding him down. Although, Adrien’s wrestling knowledge came entirely from video games so he could be wrong. The blade was in front of him and Adrien kicked the scalpel towards the wall, away from his father’s reach.

“You’re not in your right mind, Gabriel, you need help,” Adrien said, breathing heavily.

“You foolish boy.” Gabriel’s voice was stifled by the wrestling hold Kim had him in, but he could still discern the bitterness and severity in his tone. “I’ve been lucid for years. I just play at confusion to avoid prison. We both know the minute I’m better, they’ll want to take me to trial.”

“You know you’ve just admitted that in front a room full of people?” Kim said.

“It’s your word against mine.” Gabriel spat. “I’ve been manipulating the doctors for years, I can do the same to the police.”

Before anyone could argue, the police arrived and Gabriel was escorted out. The officers asked the friends to stay until they could get witness statements from each of them. Not wanting to stay in the observatory, they waited on the stairway. Marinette was hugging a tearful Louis who clung to her like a baby monkey. Adrien had his arms around both of them, stroking Marinette's hair. Kim and Alix were sitting next to them, holding hands and talking in low voices.

"You ok, bro?" Nino sat next to Adrien.

"No." Adrien laughed bitterly. "My psychopath father tried to stab me because I cut him out my life and I put Louis and all of you in danger because of it."

"Hey, you didn't put anyone in danger, Gabriel did. I saw how you protected Louis. So did Mari." Nino glanced to where she was nodding in agreement.

"He... He threatened me. Tried to hurt me, all because I don't want his toxic influence in my life." Adrien said, "And he'll never face justice for this."

"Actually," Nino smiled and lifted his phone, "I think he will."

Nino pressed a triangle icon on the screen and Gabriel's voice echoed in the stairwell. *'You foolish boy. I've been lucid for years. I just play at confusion to avoid prison. We both know the minute I'm better, they'll want to take me to trial.'*

Adrien was speechless. Alix, Kim and Marinette were equally dumbfounded. All of them stared in amazement at their friend.

"What?" Nino asked, "You can't live with Alya for all these years and not pick up a trick or two."

# Up to the test when things go wrong

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

By the time each of them had given their statements to the police, it was past midnight. Word was already spreading about Gabriel's capture and reporters were starting to gather along the police line. One recognised Adrien and called out to him for a statement. Kim held a hand out to the group of journalists.

"No comment." He said.

Nino's phone had been taken away by a crime scene technician to process the recording and Marinette realised that she had dropped hers in her hallway when she grabbed her shoes. Kim and Adrien had theirs, but the batteries had run down so they decided to walk back and call their loved ones from Marinette's home.

The group trudged back, the journey taking them twice as long as it normally would due to their exhaustion. Nino carried Louis in a piggyback until he fell asleep, then Kim carried him the rest of the way in his arms.

They reached the bakery and when her parents heard her arrive, they insisted that everyone come inside. Tom and Sabine had come home to find Marinette gone and her phone on the stair, they called Alya, who filled them in on what she knew. After that, they hadn't gone to bed.

Strong sweet tea was dispensed and Sabine encouraged the friends to talk about the evening's events.

"It will help you process everything if you vocalise it." Mrs Cheng said, "We've had a little experience in this." She ruffled Marinette's hair.

The conversation began hesitantly until Alix mentioned the thing nobody else was saying.

"He called you Ladybug, Mari. Are you?"

"I was." Marinette nodded.

"Woah." Alix gasped. "That's awesome. My friend is a superhero."

"Was," Marinette repeated.

"At least that explains your Wonder Woman impression in the park this week." Kim huffed.

Marinette laughed. "I don't have superpowers anymore, Kim. That was..."

"Wait," Kim interrupted, "Nino called you Ladybug when we were outside the tower. How did he know?"

“Carapace.” Nino said and gave a little salute.

Kim and Alix’s jaws dropped.

“While we’re sharing…” Adrien decided to add. “Hi, Chat Noir.” He waved.

“But, guys,” Marinette took her chance to speak while Kim and Alix were still stunned into silence. “This needs to stay a secret, okay? We’d never have a normal life if the press ever got wind of who we used to be.”

“Of course,” Kim nodded.

“Your secrets are safe with us.” Alix agreed.

With the air cleared, the group talked into the morning, Louis alternating between sleeping on Marinette’s lap and joining in the discussion. Adrien felt cleansed by sharing the experience, but couldn’t shake the guilt that his friends and Louis were only in that position because of him. It was everything he left Paris to avoid.

He watched at Marinette as she stoically encouraged her friends to process the evening’s events, in the same way she’d helped Nino, Alya and Chloe deal with the aftermath of being teenage superheroes. When Louis was awake, she prompted him to talk about his feelings about the night. Adrien listened to Louis as he talked about his fear and confusion when Gabriel turned up.

“I knew that nothing bad was going to happen, though, because Uncle Adrien was there and he was looking after me,” Louis said. “I knew he’d keep me safe.”

»»»★«««

Alya picked Nino up from the Dupain-Cheng’s at 6am and she offered to drop Alix and Kim at their homes, too. Sabine and Tom were already in the bakery, preparing for the day ahead. Marinette called her Saturday girl and told her the boutique would be closed for the day she wasn’t quite ready to let Louis out of her sight. Adrien held Marinette and Louis, not wanting to leave them.

“I’m sorry.” He was repeating. “I’m sorry.”

“Adrien,” Marinette said firmly, “None of this is your fault. Gabriel is not your responsibility. Please understand that.”

“But, you could have been hurt.” He tried to argue, “You put yourself between me and a blade.”

“You’re hardly one to talk, Chaton. You took an arrow for me once, remember?” Marinette smiled. “You protect the ones you love, so do I.”

“Louis was caught up in it all. If anything happened to him, I’d never forgive myself.” Adrien said.

“Look at me,” She shifted to face Adrien, staring into his eyes, unblinking. “This. Is. Not. Your. Fault. You protected Louis, I saw that.”

Adrien looked to Marinette’s lap where Louis was dozing again. His face was peaceful as he slept. He gazed at the boy’s pink cheeks and mussed hair, watching as he breathed slowly. Adrien stroked Louis’s hair, moving it away from his face, aware that his own hair was falling into his eyes too.

“I love him, Mari.” He looked at her trying to convey his seriousness. “I can’t explain it, but he feels like the thing that’s been missing from my life.”

Marinette looked back at him, sadness shining in her eyes. She opened her mouth to say something, then stopped herself. Chewing her bottom lip, she steeled herself.

“Adrien, about what Ga...”

“Guys! You have to see this.” Alya burst through the apartment door, waving a newspaper.

Louis startled in his sleep but didn’t wake up. Alya had the grace to look a little guilty for her intrusion, but the fire in her eyes told them that she had something important to share. She placed the paper in front of Marinette and Adrien, standing back with arms crossed above her baby bump. They leaned over the newspaper and saw the article Alya wanted them to read.

## HAWK MOTH TO STAND TRIAL

After an unprecedented standoff in the Observatory of Sorbonne, Gabriel Agreste has been captured.

Agreste, the mastermind behind the terrorist known as Hawk Moth, escaped a secure mental health unit early this week, finally surfacing last night to threaten his son, Adrien, 25, at knifepoint. Agreste Jr. has recently returned to Paris, having been absent since Agreste Sr.’s first arrest.

Police sources commended the quick actions of an associate of young Agreste, whose bravery prevented the situation from escalating. During the altercation, Gabriel Agreste was heard admitting that he was pretending to have a mental condition in order to prevent trial. In a statement to the press this morning, Detective Inspector Patron of the Paris Gendarmerie has confirmed that the Ministère Public will be moving forward with prosecution.

Prof. Cerveau, Head of Paris SMHU, where Agreste was being treated for an acute Psychotic Break following his unmasking as Hawk Moth, released this statement. “We wish to assure the public that we have increased security at the facility and we have launched a full investigation into how M. Agreste was able escape and how his absence went undetected for so long. While it is no excuse, we wish to remind the public that the villain Hawk Moth was an empath and, although we don’t know for sure if Agreste has residual powers, we do believe that this has made for a singular situation.”

Prof. Cerveau refused to comment on the claims made by Agreste that he has been faking his mental state to avoid prosecution.

A spokesperson for Adrien Agreste declined to comment.

Adrien stared at the newspaper, tears prickling his eyes. He felt relief that Hawk Moth would finally stand trial and be forced to face up to everything he did, and trepidation that the court case would be an emotionally tortuous experience for all involved.

Would he be asked to testify? Would Ladybug and Chat Noir be compelled to give evidence? How would he and his friends deal with the press coverage during the whole process?

## Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for all your amazing comments so far! They make me a very happy bunny (🌸'∩`🌸)

## **‘Cause I have a secret**

*‘The bug and the cat had an offspring?’*

Marinette couldn’t sleep. Her brain wouldn’t shut down, Gabriel’s comment was running on a loop.

“Mama? Are you awake?” A voice cut through the darkness.

She hung her head over the edge of her loft bed and could make out the shape of Louis, sitting up in bed, eyes open. “Yes, chatounet, are you awake too?”

“I was thinking about stuff.” He said. “Can I come up to your bed?”

“Just this once,”

Marinette wasn’t fooling anyone, Louis ended up in her bed most weekend mornings. They would cuddle up and read a story together before breakfast. She cherished the time together, and after the past few days, she needed the comfort as much as he did.

Louis clicked the switch on his bedside lamp, flooding the room with light. He climbed the ladder and snuggled under the blankets next to her.

“So, kitten, what’s keeping you awake?” She asked her son.

“Well, I... If I tell you, will you promise not to get upset.” Worry tinged his request.

“I’ll do my very best.” She promised him.

“Ok. I was thinking about what the bad man said. And... I was wondering if Uncle Adrien might be my dad.”

“Where did that thought come from?” Marinette tried to keep her tone even.

“You told me that my papa had to go away before I was born and he didn’t know who I was. Adrien went away when I was still in your tummy and he didn’t know about me until he came home this summer.” Louis explained.

“This is all true...” She conceded.

“And, there’s something about him, mama. I feel like I’ve known him forever, even though he’s only been here a few months.” He put a hand on her cheek. “Does that make sense?”

She nodded. When she blinked, she dislodged a tear and it ran down her face.

“You’re wise beyond your years, you know that?”

“I don’t know what that means, mama.”



“It means... If I tell you something, will you promise not to get upset?” Marinette stroked Louis’ hair as he looked back at her with earnest green eyes.

“I’ll do my very best,” Louis smiled and in spite of herself, so did Marinette.

“Seven years ago, Adrien and I were very important to each other. But some very sad things happened to him and he decided it was best for him to leave Paris for a while. His mother disappeared when he was younger, then his father did something terrible and the police took him away.” She explained.

Louis’ brow furrowed, twin gullies forming above his nose. “That man in the tower was his father?”

“Yes. Adrien’s father was Hawk Moth. You remember him from your book, right?” Louis nodded. “Adrien left and went to England for university. It was too painful for him to stay here after everything his father did. While he was there, I found out I was pregnant with you. *I* chose not to tell him that you were his son, *I* decided for him that he wasn’t ready to be a father yet. I wanted him to be able to deal with all the sad things that happened to him before he met you. I thought he would come back after Cambridge, but he wasn’t ready so he went to Italy for a few more years. The longer he stayed away, the harder it was to tell you and him the truth. I’m sorry, Louis, I truly am.” Marinette let the tears flow now.

Louis wrapped his arms around her neck and squeezed her tight. She held him to her, preparing herself for his reaction.

“Mama?” He asked. “I think I understand.”

“Really? You’re not angry with me?” Marinette said.

“No. You said he wasn’t ready to be my dad then, and that he was sad. I’m glad I get to meet Adrien now, when he’s happy. Maybe that means he’d like to be my father now.” Louis’ hopeful tone made Marinette’s heart skip.

“He might be angry at me, Louis.” She pointed out, “He might blame me for missing out on meeting you until now.”

“I’ll still have you, though. And mamie and papy, and uncle Nino and Auntie Alya, Chloe and Mme. Coquet.” He listed them on his fingers before spreading his arms wide. “I’ll still have all these people in my family.”

“I don’t know what I did right to get a kid like you, chatounet.” Marinette kissed her son on the nose.

Marinette stroked Louis’ hair until he drifted off to sleep. She gazed at the peaceful face of her son and felt awe-struck by him. He was an extraordinary little man and she was proud of who he was becoming.

Louis was born with blue eyes and blonde hair, but over time his eyes became green and his hair darkened to brown, like his grand-pere. Louis resembled Tom in so many ways, aside

from the hair and eye colour, he had his grand-pere's caring, calm demeanour.

Look closer, however, and you'd see Adrien's smile. Not the model smile that most people knew, but his genuinely-happy-to-see-you smile that only his closest friend saw. Louis had his mother's nose and the shape of his eyes were like Marinette's too, but the shade of green exactly matched Adrien's. His hair was untamed, like Chat Noir's, and only Marinette knew that he also took that from his father.

She chose to protect Adrien from the truth six years ago but now..? He had dealt with his past in therapy, given himself time to grieve and was back, ready to put down roots. She couldn't justify keeping this from him anymore.

There was no reason not to tell him. Except fear. She was afraid he'd reject her and Louis. Scared he'd blame her for missing out on his son's early years. Terrified that she might lose him again.

She had been nervous about how Louis would take the news, too. He'd grown up knowing that his father had to go away before he was born, but never knowing who he was. And yet, his reaction to finding out that Uncle Adrien was really his father gave her hope.

Maybe telling Adrien wouldn't be so bad..?

## **There's something about me that no one knows yet**

Gabriel pled guilty. Adrien knew it wasn't due to any penitence on his father's part, rather, his lawyer had suggested that the plea would engender sympathy in the judge, resulting in a lighter sentence.

It didn't. The judge had a long memory, aided by hundreds of victim impact statements from akumatised individuals, including Adrien's own statement detailing his family life (or lack thereof) with his father. He was sentenced to life in La Santé Prison. Gabriel wasn't going anywhere and for the first time in years, Adrien felt complete freedom from his father's subjugation.

The lawyer for the prosecution admitted to Adrien that she was relieved. Her case was full of holes. The police never had the butterfly miraculous in evidence and the five witnesses to Hawk Moth's detransformation were superheroes who disappeared after that day. Adrien's evidence was circumstantial, (unless he admitted he was Chat Noir - something he and Marinette were willing to do to ensure Hawk Moth went to prison, but they were holding off until the last minute to do so) and the word of countless akuma victims were never eyewitnesses to Gabriel's machinations. As far as Gabriel and his defence knew, however, the case against him was watertight, which was why he opted for the guilty plea.

It should have been the end of it, but, as usual, Gabriel got the last word.

"This is a press statement on behalf of Gabriel Agreste," His lawyer addressed the assembled media. "M. Agreste apologises for the distress he caused the people of Paris during his time as Hawk Moth. For four years, he was under the control of powerful magic, still mourning the loss of his wife and struggling to bring up his son alone. The lure of the butterfly miraculous was too much for his fragile psyche. While he does not expect forgiveness, he wishes to convey his remorse in particular to his son, Adrien Agreste, who many will know as Chat Noir and his partner, Mademoiselle Marinette Dupain-Cheng, Ladybug. M. Agreste bids you no ill-will and wishes you the best in the future."

The bastard.

He knew he was setting a pack of wolves on them, did it on purpose. Gabriel couldn't get to them now, not from inside one of the most secure prisons in the world, so he turned the press on them.

They were hounded.

Reporters and photographers camped outside the Dupain-Cheng's bakery, Marinette's boutique and Adrien's work. Marinette and Louis were followed to school. Chloe found paparazzi hiding in the alleyway behind her hotel - Adrien's last known residence. The media were baying for Ladybug and Chat Noir to make a statement, for Adrien and Marinette to confirm Gabriel's claims. He felt persecuted.

Kim, Alix, Ivan and Nino insisted on escorting Marinette and Louis everywhere, Alix even employing some distraction techniques to lure the pack of reporters away from mother and child. Louis's school was as secure as any primary school these days, but the police offered additional patrols in the area to keep the children safe.

Adrien's lawyer suggested filing for a privacy injunction, but the process was lengthy and the damage was already done. He and Marinette encouraged their family and friends to maintain a cone of silence where the press were concerned, but he knew that someone would snap eventually.

None of them expected the call that came from Louis' school.

"Miss Dupain-Cheng? Je suis désolée, but we need you to come and collect Louis. There has been an incident."

Marinette called Adrien on her way to the school, frantic. She needed emotional support and he was touched that she thought to turn to him. He hailed a taxi and urged the driver to hurry.

He arrived as Marinette was carrying her son out through the school gates, fighting through the reporters that were clamouring around her. She shielded Louis' face from the cameras as she tried to bypass them. He could see the fear and hurt behind her steely expression.

"Hey! Move aside." He shouted, his annoyance at the press intrusion on their lives reaching the surface. "You should be ashamed of yourselves."

The suddenness of his statement caused the reporters to part, letting Marinette through. Adrien put his arm around her and Louis defensively. He helped them into the taxi, closing the door and moving around to the other side of the car. Before he got in, he looked at the crowd of journalists.

"Please, give us some privacy." Adrien steadied his voice with this request. "This has been a difficult time for us."

As he got into the car, he heard the questions come.

*"M. Agreste, are you and Mlle. Dupain-Cheng involved?"*

*"Is the boy your son, Adrien?"*

*"Ladybug! Do you want to make a statement?"*

*"Marinette, who is the child's father?"*

*"Mlle. Dupain-Cheng, are you romantically involved with M. Agreste?"*

*"Chat Noir, tell us your story and we'll leave you alone."*

In the safety of the taxi, Marinette filled Adrien in on the situation. During the interval, a photographer scaled the school fence and ran towards Louis, knocking him over in his haste to capture an image of the boy. Fortunately, a teacher tackled the paparazzo and the police

were called. Louis wasn't injured, but he and several other children who witnessed the incident were incredibly distressed.

The headteacher suggested that Marinette file for a restraining order against the photographer and said the school would be seeking legal action against the newspaper he worked for. In the meantime, they agreed that Louis should take some time off until the situation was resolved.

Marinette was fizzingly angry about the whole affair and Adrien wasn't much calmer. They had to find a solution. Soon.

»»★««

"There is one way to stop this," Alya said, absentmindedly rubbing her stomach.

"Why am I already afraid of what that is?" Marinette asked, looking up from her sewing machine.

Alya, Nino and Adrien were lending a hand in the closed boutique on Monday morning. Marinette was in a sewing frenzy and her friends were helping her to restock. The one positive result of all the press attention was that the Bugaboo Boutique, and clothes bearing Marinette's superhero designs in particular, were in demand. Every child in Paris seemed to be wearing a Ladybug or Chat Noir inspired pattern.

Louis, who hadn't returned to school yet, was sitting at Marinette's desk, reading. He was handling the whole situation with the same stoicism as his mother, but Adrien could see the strain he felt through his frequent yawning and the bags under his eyes.

"Pick a reporter and give them the exclusive," Alya suggested. "Control the story and send the message that you're not running any more."

"It's not the worst idea, actually." Adrien agreed. " *If* we choose someone we trust to handle it sensitively."

"Oh, wait." Alya noticed Adrien, Marinette and Nino all staring at her. "I didn't mean me. I'm freelance there's no guarantee I could sell the story."

"Come on Al, we all know that's rubbish, every newspaper in the country will be biting your hand off for this. And if there's anyone who understands how to approach it delicately, it's you, Rena." Nino assured her.

"I'm in." Adrien said, "If it's you writing the story."

"Same here," Marinette concurred.

Alya puffed out her cheeks and exhaled slowly. "What if I stuff it up?"

"You won't, you're the founder of the Ladyblog. As if anyone else could do a better job than you." Marinette said.

Alya took out her phone and opened the voice recorder app. She set it on the desk, looking to Marinette and Adrien. “No time like the present, eh?”

# C'est mon histoire

## Chapter Notes

I feel like y'all have waited long enough for this...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### LADYBUG AND CHAT NOIR SPEAK

Exclusive by Alya Césaire.

In the wake of Gabriel Agreste's prosecution for mass terrorism, two individuals, Adrien Agreste and Marinette Dupain-Cheng believed their decade-long ordeal was finally over. After valiantly fighting Hawk Moth as teenagers, protecting the citizens of Paris in between classes, fencing lessons and Le Baccalaureate, they have spent the interim years recovering physically and mentally.

Instead of enjoying a peaceful retirement, Agreste Jr and Dupain-Cheng, both now 25, have been subjected to a barrage of press harassment. In one unconscionable event, Mlle. Dupain-Cheng's six-year-old son was the victim of press intrusion in his own school. The perpetrator, Mal Affreux, 36, has been convicted of trespassing and harassment and the school is pressing charges against his employer, news blog, Paris Aujourd'hui.

Adrien and Marinette, known to most of Paris as Chat Noir and Ladybug, hoped that the press interest would blow over, but the invasion of privacy of son, Louis, has prompted them to speak to this reporter to tell their side of the story...

Her story was, as Nino predicted, snapped up by the biggest newspaper in France who paid her handsomely for it. Alya didn't like to boast (yeah, okay, she did) but she had to admit, she'd done an excellent job of the piece. She managed to berate the press for their encroachment on Marinette and Adrien's lives while taking the high road herself. Her interview questions were probing, but not pushy. The response was overwhelmingly positive

Before long, various news programmes and talk shows were calling her to speak as the expert on Ladybug and Chat Noir. Seven years after the Ladyblog closed its doors and six years after her book was published, Alya Césaire was still proving herself as the Ladybug expert.

There was just one little detail that, in hindsight, she might have changed. Her wording around the account of Louis' ordeal was vague and suggested that Louis was both Ladybug and Chat Noir's son. Which she was sure he was, but Marinette still hadn't told Adrien that detail yet.

Maybe this would prompt Marinette to come clean. Alya would be okay with that.

»»»★«««

It was the first morning in weeks he'd been able to walk into work without fighting his way through reporters outside the university. It was a relief, perhaps his life was returning to something close to normal.

Almost.

The last half of his lecture on quantum chromodynamics was derailed by a student who had read Alya's article and he spent the time responding to questions on Chat Noir. After that, he granted each class twenty minutes to get their questions out of their systems on the understanding that they wouldn't get another chance to ask them. Most wanted to know what it was like to transform, how cataclysm worked and what Ladybug was like up close.

During the last class of the day, one student raised a thornier issue.

"Dr Agreste? Did you know Ladybug had your baby? You were away from Paris when he was born, right?" The student asked.

"Where did that question come from?" Adrien replied.

"The article said you and Ladybug spoke out because your son was harassed, didn't it? Did I read that wrong?"

Another student pulled their copy of the newspaper from their bookbag and read aloud the section that caused the confusion, 'privacy of son, Louis, has prompted them to speak'. He admitted it was unclear, but with the benefit of context he knew the truth.

Or, did he?

Marinette had never expressly told Adrien he was not Louis' father and in hindsight, there had been plenty of opportunities for her to do so. In fact, she was incredibly evasive whenever the topic was raised. Come to think of it, he'd never outright asked her who the father was... Was she waiting for him to ask?

The class broke into a debate over the semantics of Alya's wording. Half agreed with the first student that the article clearly stated that Louis was both Marinette and Adrien's son, the other half believed that the phrasing was unclear. In the end, nobody expected him to actually confirm or deny the suggestion.

Adrien wanted answers, though.

»»»★«««

The bell jingled as the door to the boutique opened. Marinette looked up from her sketchbook and saw Adrien. He looked burdened, she wondered if the press were still pursuing him. Since informing the assembled crowd of paps that she had given her exclusive to another



journalist, they had dispersed from her home and boutique and she hadn't seen a single reporter all day. Perhaps his profile meant they would keep harassing him.

"You ok?" She asked. His brow crinkled.

"Yes... No... I don't know." He admitted. "Did you read Alya's piece?"

"Of course." She confirmed, "It thought it was good, didn't you?"

"It was great. It's just..." Adrien took a deep breath, gearing himself up to ask. "Is Louis my child?"

Walls closed in on Marinette and her blood ran cold. The thing she'd been avoiding for years had happened and she had nowhere to run. She kicked herself for not telling him sooner, hated that her fear had held her back for so long. She summoned up her courage, unsure of how he was going to react.

"Yes, Adrien." She said. "You are Louis' father."

She saw betrayal flash in his eyes before tears filled them.

"You... you should have told me." His voice cracked with barely controlled anger.

"I tried to tell you so many times," She insisted, "But I..."

"NO! You had every opportunity to tell me. You've had seven years to tell me." He shouted.

"I know," Marinette was sobbing, "I'm sorry."

"That's not enough. I... I can't even look at you right now." He turned on his heel and stormed out the boutique.

*Shit.*

"No, no, no, no, no, no." She muttered to herself. She couldn't leave, there was still two hours until closing time and she didn't have anyone to cover her. Besides, she was now the last person he wanted to speak to.

*Damn.*

She had so many opportunities to tell him, why didn't she? The entire city was lauding her as courageous, every customer today had shaken her hand and thanked her for her bravery as Ladybug, and yet, she was shitless. She'd been too afraid of losing everything. She was a coward.

She put her index and middle fingers to her temples, massaging the beginnings of a headache. She needed a clear head to think.

There was only one thing she could do. She reached for her phone.

***Chloe? It's time for emergency protocol: Catbug.***

## Chapter End Notes

BONUS:

Chloe? It's time for emergency protocol: Catbug.

Her phone rang almost as soon as the message was delivered.

"WTF, Marinette?" Chloe was confused, "What the crap is Catbug protocol?!"

"It's a thing where I tell you that you were right and I should listen to you more," Marinette said.

"I still don't know what you're talking about, but I already like where it's going... Continue," Chloe prompted.

"Adrien knows that he's Louis' father and he's furious. All because I'm a ridiculous, stupid, fat coward" She sobbed.

"Come on now, Marinette, you're not fat."

Marinette snorted. "Thanks, I feel much better now."

"It's what I'm here for." She could hear Chloe's smile in her voice. "So, what do you need me to do?"

## The power of love, always so strong

“Oh, Adrien, you beautiful tropical fish, whose child did you think he was?”

Adrien was strongly regretting his decision to answer the door to his oldest friend. He mistakenly thought she'd take his side in this, but instead, she found it all very amusing.

“Of *course* Louis is your kid, Adrikins! Was there ever any doubt?!” Chloe laughed.

“Are you kidding?” He objected, “I’ve been away for seven years, when exactly was I meant to figure it out?”

“Have you looked in a mirror lately? I know you’re not a model anymore, but you must check your reflection when you shave, at least?” Chloe said. “You have the same eyes and smile. When Louis is around, I get flashbacks to when we were kids. How could you not see it?”

“So, everyone knows but me?” He asked.

“No. Nobody *knows* . We just... strongly suspected.”

“Oh, great, so everyone I care about has been speculating on my possible paternity status in my absence. Nice.” Adrien huffed. He knew he was being obstinate but he felt he was entitled right now.

“Yeah... Except for Nino, he must have known all along because he registered the birth.” Chloe mused, “But we all know Marinette and she’s loved you since she met you. Who else would be the father of her child?”

“Why didn’t you say something to me?” He asked

Chloe was unabashed. “We were waiting for Marinette to tell you. Honestly, though, you don’t have to be Max to deduce that you’re clearly the daddy. She calls him ‘mon chatounet’ for crying out loud. He is obviously Chat Noir’s son, look at his hair. So, assuming the recent reports are correct and you weren’t just posing in a leather catsuit for fun all those years, it’s time to accept that you’re not as smart as you like to think, *doctor* .”

Adrien sat down heavily. He was an idiot.

“What do I do now, Chlo?” He looked at her helplessly, “How do I move past this? I’ve missed out on six years of my son’s life because of Marinette’s secrets. If I hadn’t asked her, who knows if she’d ever have told me the truth.”

“For what it’s worth, Marinette knew you’d call me so she gave me this.” Chloe handed him a memory stick. “You should take a look before you accuse her of robbing you of Louis’ early years.”

Adrien plugged the memory stick into his laptop and a folder opened automatically. It was mostly JPEGs and MP4s. There was one document and Adrien double clicked on it first.

*Dear Adrien,*

*One day, you will know the truth about your child and I hope that you will understand why I couldn't tell you before now that he existed.*

*I'm sorry. Every selfish part of me wants you to know. I wish you could come back to me, for us to be a family. I know, however, that to tell you would be to interrupt the new life you've started for yourself and to stop your healing in its tracks. I want you to come back to me as a new man, ready to be a father, not the broken boy who left us. If you never come back, well, I understand that too.*

*In lieu of this, I will keep every photograph, every memento, every video I have of Louis growing up so that when you are ready to be a part of it, you will know everything. It's all dated so you can start from the beginning. I've listed the dates here with a description so you know what you're looking at.*

*Love always,*

*Marinette.*

*P.S. Now that you know, I want nothing more than for you to be a part of Louis' life. For us to be a family. I won't pressure you, though. If you want us, we'll be here for you.*

The first image on the list read:

*Nov 13th, my first scan. I found out I was expecting the day before and they managed to squeeze an appointment in with the sonographer. I had no idea what to expect, but when I saw my baby for the first time, I fell in love.*

He clicked on the corresponding JPEG as saw the ultrasound image of his son at 12 weeks and he understood why Nino seemed so giddy the day Alya had her scan. Tears blurred his vision as he opened image after image and watched Marinette's belly swell in size as corresponding scan images showed his baby growing.

*7th January, My 21 week scan was today and our little boy is growing well. Yes... it's a boy! I am thinking about the name Louis or Hugo, I like both. Although, isn't Hugo your middle name? Do you like it too? This is harder than I thought. He's going to have this name for the rest of his life and I have to choose it alone. ...Sorry, hormones and overwhelm are strong today. Maybe I'll wait until I meet him, see which one he looks most like?*

The cursor paused over the video file titled, The Birth. He had read Marinette's notes on it and was wondering if he should watch.

*25th May, the delivery. I should add an advisory warning here. Alya shot the video and she has no shame. If you're squeamish, probably don't watch. I don't remember much about the birth, but I do recall the midwife shouting at her for getting in between her*

*and the baby at one point... I haven't watched because I really don't want to see myself from that angle! Anyway, enter at your own risk.*

While he didn't want to stumble on to something he would never unsee, he desperately wanted to watch. Promising himself he'd fast forward through anything too graphic, he hit the play icon.

*"Push! Come on! You can do this!"* Nino's voice sounded tinny through his laptop speakers.

Marinette had her teeth gritted, chin pushed towards her chest and her face scrunched up with effort. Sweat plastered her fringe to her face. She was beautiful.

*"Ok, breathe."* A stern voice, Adrien assumed it was midwife. *"You're doing well. Just one more big push and he'll be here..."*

*"...Push!"*

Marinette's face screwed up with determination again and the camera moved to show Nino, face grey with fear, clutching her hand.

*"Come on, Mari! You've got this! Push!"* He shouted.

Adrien's stomach lurched as the camera swooped and he was afforded a view of between Marinette's legs. He was about to fast forward when he heard the midwife again.

*"Mademoiselle, please. The baby is crowning, you have to move."*

Adrien chuckled at Alya's obstinance. Without the Ladyblog, she was clearly channelling her stubborn tenacity into this filming. As the video continued, he watched in amazement as a human head emerged from Marinette. Following more encouragement from Nino and the midwife, the body soon followed. Then, he heard it. Louis cried for the first time. A small, but strong mewl that was the most wonderful sound he'd ever heard. The midwife placed him on Marinette's chest, draped in a blanket and he saw that his son wasn't the only one crying. Tears trickled down Marinette's cheeks as she greeted her baby.

*"Hi Louis, I'm your mama. Thank you for coming out to meet me."* She whispered. It was too much for Adrien, he sobbed with emotion.

*"Can I?"* Nino held out his arms. Adrien saw his best friend's eyes were watery. Everyone was overcome with joy.

Adrien didn't pay attention to the rest of the video, he couldn't see or hear it through his own tears.

»»★««

It was 5am by the time Adrien reached the last item in the folder, Louis' birthday party, six months ago. He was surrounded by his friends, with Marinette, Chloe, Alya, Nino and his grandparents behind him. Ivan and Kim held him aloft to blow out the candles on his

enormous cake. Adrien could make out Alix and a heavily pregnant Mylene on the sidelines. Marinette's note said the photo was taken by Mme. Couquet.

Louis was loved. Marinette had made sure of that. He wasn't short of father figures, either. Tom, Nino, Ivan and Kim were regular presences in his life. She had documented every single part of his life, from first scans to his birth, first step and first word. Every birthday, every Christmas, every special day was photographed and Marinette wrote him a little note to describe why it was important to her.

She loved him and he had been on her mind in every significant moment of their son's life so far. She did want him to be part of Louis' life. He understood that she was in a difficult situation and he couldn't honestly say he knew a better way she could have dealt with it.

He loved her, thought about her every day he was away from her. He loved Louis, too. He was a great kid and Adrien wanted to get to know him better, to have the sort of father-son relationship he missed out on.

He wanted to be a dad to Louis.

He couldn't get past the feeling of betrayal, though. He'd been back in Paris for over three months now and Marinette still hadn't told him.

Didn't he deserve to feel hurt by that?

»»★««

"Dude! You never heard of condoms?!" Nino let himself into Adrien's flat with his spare key just after 7am.

"Really? You think Gabriel gave me 'The Talk' when I was growing up?! We're all lucky I didn't stick it in her ear the first time." Adrien laughed bitterly.

Nino put an archive box on Adrien's table and wandered into the kitchen to help himself to coffee.

"Make yourself at home, bro," Adrien said sarcastically.

"I will, thanks." Nino chuckled. "You want one?"

"Yeah, thanks." Adrien rubbed his face, he was exhausted but he knew he was too wired to sleep.

Nino tinkered in the kitchen for a few minutes before returning with two mugs of coffee and a plate of buttered toast. He placed it on the table next to the box he'd dumped earlier and sat down.

"If you're here to persuade me to talk to Marinette, you can save your breath. You're lucky I'm even talking to you, Judas." Adrien said.

“Charming.” Nino laughed. “You forget that Mari’s been my friend since école primaire, Adrien. I owed it to her to keep her secret.”

Adrien glared at him. He couldn’t fault that logic, but he wasn’t in a forgiving mood.

“Anyway,” Nino continued, “You know why we kept it from you, I’m not going to apologise for it.”

They ate toast and drank coffee in silence. Adrien was still processing everything, stubbornly refusing to look at Nino’s amused expression. Eventually, Nino put his mug on the table and reached for the box.

“When Chloe told me you were being obstinate, I thought she was exaggerating, but for once, she was being restrained. I figured you needed some help to see the big picture. And if it all goes wrong, at least I’ll have had some practice in dealing with tantrums before our baby comes along.” Nino grinned.

“It’s not funny, Nino. She kept my son from me. She was selfish.” He reasoned.

“Yeah, when I think of Marinette, that’s the first thing I think, too.” Nino rolled his eyes to convey the irony in his statement. “Dude. I mean this in the nicest way possible, but, get over yourself.”

Adrien felt his glower deepen. “You’re meant to be my friend, Nino.”

“I’m being your friend.” Nino’s tone sharpened. “Now, shut up and listen.”

He handed Adrien and glazed tile bearing a pale blue handprint and footprint. The prints were tiny. Adrien ran his finger across them and read the words, ‘Louis, one week old’.

“There’s six of those in here, one for every year of his life. Mari made them for you.” Nino’s voice was muffled by the box.

The next item he found was a small white blanket with hand painted detail on it. It looked like the prototype to Marinette’s Chat Noir pattern. Adrien looked to Nino for an explanation.

“Louis’ first blanket. We wrapped him in it when he was born, after they washed the goo off him. Marinette made it with fabric paints in the week before she gave birth.”

Nino slid the box toward Adrien, gesturing for him to look inside. The box was full of mementoes of Louis’s early years. An envelope with the words, “Louis’s first haircut” contained a lock of blonde hair and a photograph taken at the barber’s. A tissue-lined box revealed his first pair of shoes. Photographs of his first day at école maternelle, his first swimming lesson and his first loaf of bread were mixed in amongst artwork. A painting caught his eye, it was basic, but he could tell that the figures were meant to be Ladybug and Chat Noir. On the back, in Marinette’s handwriting, it said, ‘Louis’ mummy and daddy’.

He looked at Nino, speechless.

“She’s spent the last six years caring for us all, dude. She’s been a mother to Louis and a lifeline to Al, Chloe and me. We wouldn’t have made it without her. Call her what you like, you’re entitled to be angry, but never call her selfish.”

At that, Nino left the flat, leaving Adrien alone with his thoughts.

“Shit” Adrien needed to get outside and clear his head.

He reached for his phone, noticing that Marinette has sent him a text, ten minutes after he stormed out of her shop.

***You have every right to be angry. Call me if you want to. M x***

That was it. No begging, no missed calls, just one simple message. She was giving him space to process everything. ‘ *I won’t pressure you... If you want us, we’ll be here for you.* ’ She was keeping her word.

He scrolled through his contacts and found the name he was looking for. “Hey, I need to blow off some steam, are you free?”



# My love can only grow

## Chapter Notes

All hail @Freedom\_Shamrock for coining the name Captain Oblivious. It was too perfect, I had to use it!

Alya was leaning against the wall outside Adrien's apartment when he reached the street.

"You're not Kim," Adrien said.

He wanted to run, to burn off some energy and stop thinking about things for a while. He thought some exercise might blow some cobwebs away and help him think clearly. If nothing else, it would wear him out and let him get some sleep.

"And I thought you were Captain Oblivious." Alya laughed dryly. "He had something to do first so he sent me."

"Are you here to give me a dressing down too?"

He knew that nobody had actually criticised him, but they weren't letting him wallow in misery either. He wanted someone to tell him he was right and neither of his closest friends would.

"Look, between you, me and the pavement, I wouldn't have handled things the way Marinette did. I wanted her to tell you." Alya said. "Remember, though, that she was eighteen and scared, neither of which lead to good choices. She was traumatised by everything that happened with Hawk Moth and trying to keep it together for the sake of everyone else. She was worried about how you were doing in Cambridge, missing you like crazy and stressed about how a baby might affect you."

Adrien shrugged. Alya made some good points, but he still couldn't help feel resentful for being kept in the dark.

"I understood why you guys didn't tell me about Louis when I was just some guy, but as his father, it was unforgivable," Adrien argued, even though he knew Alya was in agreement.

"I know. Honestly, I thought you should have been told regardless." Alya admitted "But, now that I've been on the receiving end of pregnancy hormones, I've got to say, Marinette was not in her right mind. I'd hate to have to contend with these bad boys on top of PTSD and the panic that I might be ruining the life of my baby-daddy."

Adrien felt a pang of guilt. "I thought you were on my side?"

“I am. Nino and I have fallen out about this more than once over the past few years.” She confessed. “I’m just saying, Marinette has some mitigation for her crappy decisions.”

Adrien sat on the apartment steps and put his hand in his hands. It helped to know that someone else agreed with him. He should have been told about Louis. He also knew Alya was right, Marinette meant well even if he didn't like her decision. Nino, too, was spot on; Marinette was never selfish and must have agonised over the right thing to do. There was just one thing still nagging at him.

“I let him down, Al. I wasn’t there for him.”

“Really?” Alya’s eyebrow arched higher than ever before. “I hate to kick you while you’re down, but that’s not actually your call, is it?”

“What?”

“Only one person can say for sure if you let Louis down. Louis.” Alya nodded her head to the end of the road. Adrien turned and saw Kim walking toward them. Next to him, emphasising Kim’s stature in an almost comedic way was the small, wiry, wild-haired figure of Louis.

His son.

In all of his anger at Marinette and disappointment in himself, he’d managed to forget about that bright, funny little boy... his child. His stomach knotted and he scolded himself for the omission. If he wanted to be a father to Louis, he had to start thinking about people other than himself.

Kim and Louis disappeared into a cafe further up the street, waving to him and Alya before they did.

“That’s our cue, Sunshine.” Alya took his arm. “Let’s go meet your son.”

»»★««

When he sat at the little table, next to Louis, Adrien was nervous. It was crazy, he’d spent plenty of time with him before now, but knowing that this was his child in front of him..? He was suddenly anxious to impress him.

“I’m going to get some drinks, what do you want?” Alya pointed to both of them.

“Um...” Louis was reticent.

“Hot chocolate?” Alya asked. “Your mama’s not here and I won’t tell her if you don’t.”

Louis’ eyes twinkled with familiar mischief as he nodded and grinned at Alya. She winked back at him.

“Sunshine?” She looked at him.

“Espresso, please,” Adrien said.

“So four hot chocolates, coming up. Kim? Will you help me carry them?” Alya and Kim left Adrien and Louis alone.

Adrien racked his brain, desperately trying to think of something to say that didn’t sound forced and awkward. Why was this so difficult?

“How’s your mum?” Was the best he could come up with.

Louis smiled thinly, “She’s sad. And mad at herself. She’s getting on with things, though. She’s always had to.”

*Ouch.*

“I’m sorry. I know I’ve contributed to that.” Louis shrugged so Adrien continued. “So, how did you feel when she told you that I’m your father?”

“Oh, she didn’t tell me. I figured it out for myself.” Louis said, completely seriously.

If he wasn’t in a public place, Adrien would have banged his head repeatedly against the table in frustration. An image of Chloe rolling her eyes at him swam into his mind. Was he really so clueless that a six-year-old worked it out before he did?!

“When?!” He couldn’t help but sound incredulous.

“Well, after the stuff in the tower with Hawk Moth, I figured it out, but there were lots of clues.” Louis explained earnestly, “When you went away, it was eight months before I was born. Mummies are pregnant for nine months. And, mama calls me ‘chatounet’ so I always thought Chat Noir might be my papa. Plus, we have the same eyes.”

“Well. When you put it like that, I suppose it was obvious.” Adrien felt like an idiot.

He was glad when Alya and Kim returned with hot chocolates for everyone. Although it wasn’t his first choice, the warm, milky sweetness was exactly the comfort he needed right now. Chocolat chaud was the cure for a battered ego, it seemed.

Louis took a long drink of his, then wiped his hot chocolate moustache away with the back of his hand. Alya cleared her throat and handed him a napkin. He smiled sheepishly and cleaned his hands and mouth with it. Looking at Adrien, his expression grew solemn.

“So, now you know, how do feel about being my father?” He asked.

“Honestly, Louis, I’m terrified,” Adrien admitted. “My own father wasn’t exactly a dream parent and I’m worried I won’t be any good at this. I mean, I didn’t have the best role model.”

Kim leaned forward, “Adrien, that fact that you recognise that already makes you a million times the father that Gabriel was. My dad wasn’t around either. Although, he was actually distant, not just emotionally, and I think I’ve been a pretty good role model to young Louis.”

Louis nodded enthusiastically at Kim. He looked at Alya who grinned encouragingly back.

“Do you want to be my dad?” Louis asked.

“More than anything, Louis,” Adrien said.

“Then that’s all we need to get started... Papa.” Louis smiled shyly and Adrien felt his heart melt.

If he hadn’t already burned his bridges, he was ready to face Marinette and apologise for his anger. He wanted nothing more than to be a family with her and Louis. He was ready to be a papa to his amazing son.

## Toujours présent

Marinette closed the boutique at 7pm, as usual, but she didn't go home. Instead, she settled into the back office to work on some new designs. Alya had texted and said she'd take Louis home and get him dinner so she had time before she needed to leave. Nino had just bought the LEGO Ghostbusters Firehouse and she reckoned he'd need Louis' help to build it.

There was no school tomorrow so Louis could stay up late and if need be, Alya and Nino would be happy to have him overnight. She knew that throwing herself into work wasn't productive in the long-run, but she wasn't ready to face her emotions yet. In the short-term, she'd added three new designs to her line and had almost completed a new pattern to add to her superhero range.

Mme. Couquet called her and she spent at least thirty minutes discussing her plans to expand the boutique. Her mentor was convinced that Marinette could easily branch out and develop a chain of boutiques, but she wanted to ensure she could maintain her high standards of quality through each store. Now that Louis was at school and the media chaos around her secret identity had finally quietened down, though, Marinette was keen to push ahead. As her time would be spent designing and producing handmade pieces for the boutiques, she required Mme. Couquet's expertise in selecting managers for both her flagship boutique and the new one, once they had selected a location.

By nine o'clock, she was struggling to focus on her work through tired eyes so she admitted defeat and left the shop.

The rain was pouring down as she pulled the shutters down and wrapped her coat around her, lifting the collar up to stop the water from running down her neck. Stuffing her keys into her pocket, she prepared to run home. She turned and ran straight into a strong figure.

"Adrien?!" She gasped, winded by the impact.

He smiled uncertainly and held his umbrella out to her, sheltering her from the rain. She couldn't help but think of the first time he shared his umbrella, the moment she fell for him. She looked at him, not sure if he was there to make amends, or say goodbye. She had considered both eventualities and she was prepared to deal with the fallout if he wanted to end their relationship.

"We should talk," He said, "Have you eaten?"

She hadn't. In fact, now that she thought about it, she'd skipped lunch, too. Adrien offered to cook her something at his place and she was too hungry to refuse.

They walked down the street in silence. Marinette's mind was whirring at a hundred kilometres an hour and she was sure his was as well. She tried to think of a conversation starter, but everything seemed contrived. Before long, they reached Adrien's flat and he unlocked his door and let her inside. She was still wrestling with her ankle boots by the time he disappeared into the kitchen to find something for supper.

Her eyes fell on his dining table and the box Nino had collected from her that morning. She shook her head in amazement that less than 48 hours had passed since Adrien confronted her about his paternity of Louis and her world collapsed around her.

She ran her fingers over the tiny foot and handprints from Louis' first birthday, remembering how frazzled she had been, trying to organise a party for her family and friends on top of juggling her second-year exams, style dossier, personal and group presentations and an internship. The following year, Alya organised Louis' second birthday party as Marinette's final collection was stressing her out more than she expected. She was determined to prove to everyone that having a child wouldn't stop her from excelling in her chosen field that she nearly burnt out at the finish line.

She knew that without her friends to support her, she would have crumbled under the pressure before the end of her course.

"Mari?" Adrien's voice jolted out of her musing. "Is risotto okay with you?"

"Yes, thanks," She said.

He gestured towards the kitchen, "You might as well come in here, then. It's going to take a little while."

She followed him to the kitchen and watched as he expertly prepared his ingredients for their meal. He opened a bottle of white wine, poured two glasses and handed one to her. For the first time since he met her outside the boutique, he smiled. This time it was more sure, more genuine. His eyes shone with affection as he clinked his glass against hers.

"I'm sorry." They both spoke at once.

Adrien held up his hand, "I'm the one who's sorry, Princess. I was angry with myself, not you. I was scared about being a father, worried my absence from his early years might cause me to end up like Gabriel and embarrassed that I didn't figure it all out sooner. Apparently, it was so obvious that even a six-year-old worked it out..."

"To be fair, he's a very bright six-year-old," Marinette laughed. "He gets that from me."

She was delighted when he laughed, too. Suddenly, a weight lifted from her chest and she felt hope that they could work through this.

"I don't doubt that. You've given him so much." Adrien said.

He threw chopped shallots and garlic into a pan and sauteed them together. Marinette looked at him and noticed the concentration on his face. It was an expression she saw every day in her son. Their son. She felt emotion well up inside her.

"And, Adrien? You could never be anything like Gabriel. You have too much love to give to ever turn into him." She assured him.

"It's been a long road to get here. When we took the miraculous from Hawk Moth and... *he* ...appeared? It took years to get rid of that image. After life with Gabriel, I had to work hard

to realise that I am in control of my decisions, my future, my emotions. I think that's why I was so angry; you took that control from me and made a massive decision on my behalf. I felt like I was a teenager again." He focused on the pan in front of him, not looking at her, but she could see the tears in his eyes as he spoke.

"I'm so sorry, Adrien." She said. "I thought I was doing the right thing by not telling you, but I see now that it wasn't my decision to make. I just..."

"Feel the need to take the weight of everyone's troubles on your own shoulders?" Adrien suggested.

"Not what I was going to say, but, yeah," She admitted.

"That ends today, okay?" He was serious. "I've seen how you sacrificed everything for Louis, how you put all your strength into caring for the rest of the team after I went away instead of concentrating on your own recovery. You refused to tell me about my son because you didn't want to add to my burden, for crying out loud."

"I... I was scared, Adrien." Marinette knew tears were flowing down her cheeks, but she didn't try to wipe them away. "It's easier for me to push it all aside and focus on others, or my work. I don't know how to confront my demons."

He had added the risotto rice to the pan and was now stirring in ladlefuls of stock so he couldn't move away from the stove. He held his left arm out to her. She ducked under it and he pulled her towards him. She felt him kiss the top of her head and squeeze her tight.

"We'll do it together." He promised.

# Miraculous

## Chapter Summary

Hiya gang, I've been travelling for a few days, but I didn't want to leave this story without tying things up... Enjoy (✿'◡`✿)

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### **Three months later...**

Adrien was woken that Saturday night by someone banging on the apartment door. Insistent, loud knocking that was likely to wake the whole building if he didn't do something about it.

“Mama! Papa! There's someone at the door.” Louis called redundantly from his bedroom.

“Thanks, son, I'd never have guessed,” He muttered sleepily.

He looked at the clock in the bedroom, it was 4am. As he left his room to investigate, he picked up his phone and noticed dozens of missed calls from Nino and Kim. That woke him up. The last time his friends called him this incessantly was when Gabriel escaped from hospital.

That thought was at the top of his mind when he looked through the spyhole and couldn't see anyone.

“Dude! Open up! I can see your shadow under the door.” It was Alix.

He breathed a sigh of relief, unbolted the door and opened it.

Alix grinned and looked Adrien up and down, which was when he remembered that slept in pyjama bottoms and no top.

“Nice abs. I think I pulled the long straw here. Kim had to go wake up Chloe and there's no way she looks this good at four in the morning,” She leered, “The Chat Noir hair really sets off the effect, by the way.”

“Not that I don't love having you come to my house at WTF o'clock to ogle me, but are you here for a reason?” He asked grumpily.

“Oh, yeah. Alya's in labour.” Alix said, “And we need to get to the hospital.”

Adrien's brain immediately woke up at the news. “M'Lady! Louis!” He shouted.



“Yeah, yeah, we heard foghorn-Kubdel there,” Marinette grumbled, fully dressed and pulling a felt fedora over her bed hair.

Louis came bounding down the stairs behind her. He was a morning person, something he definitely got from Adrien. Marinette was currently swearing at her boots and trying to put them on the wrong feet.

“Kid, you need a sweater, it’s February.” Adrien sent his son back up the stairs. “And bring a book or something, there might be a long wait.”

He followed Louis upstairs to throw some jeans, a shirt and a sweater on himself. This was dizzyingly exciting, he couldn’t even begin to imagine how Nino must be feeling right now.

“Marinette..?” He found her in the kitchen, “Bugaboo, we can get food there. We have to go.”

Marinette looked defiantly at him and pushed a packet of potato chips into her bag. She grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl as she passed and he couldn’t help but laugh. Over the past few weeks, it had become more unusual to see her not eating. She claimed it was due to low blood sugar, all Adrien knew was that his food bill had quadrupled since she and Louis moved in.

Adrien eventually herded his family and Alix out the apartment and they reached the hospital in time to see a grinning Nino in surgical scrubs, emerging from a swing door.

“Miles Lahiffe-Césaire has arrived,” Nino beamed at them. “There were complications during labour so Al had to have a c-section. She’s okay, though, they have her in recovery. Miles is perfect, do you want to meet him?”

Everyone squealed in assent, but the desk clerk told them they would have to wait until Alya was back in the ward and even then, they could only go in two at a time with Nino. They didn’t mind waiting, especially when Marinette produced a picnic from her pockets.

Kim, Chloe, Alix, Louis, Marinette and Adrien ate their snacks, accompanied with excited chatter about the newest member of their extended family. Nino would occasionally pop out to give them a progress report on Alya and Miles.

Eventually, they were able to see baby Miles. Marinette and Louis went in first, then Adrien and Chloe.

“Can I hold him?” He asked.

“Of course you can, Uncle Adrien,” Alya smiled.

She looked exhausted, but her eyes were alert. Nino was the same. Adrien held out his arms and Alya placed Miles into them. He pulled him in close to his body and gazed at the tiny life in front of him. He was perfect. He had beautiful caramel skin and a smattering of black hair on his head. Little, chubby hands, bunched into fists were held up by his face. Adrien looked to Alya with tears shining in his eyes.

“You’re amazing, Al. You made him.” He said.

“Hey, I helped make him.” Nino objected.

“Yeah, but Alya grew him. That’s crazy.” Adrien explained. “He’s gorgeous and you made him.”

Chloe placed her hand on his shoulder. “I think someone is broody.”

Adrien looked at her and rolled his eyes. Then he thought, *maybe I am*. He’d followed Alya’s pregnancy with interest and was almost as excited as Nino about the prospect of another baby in the group. He assumed he was just happy for them, but now, with Miles in his arms, he knew wanted this for himself.

He was delighted to be a father to Louis and knew that if there were no other kids on his horizon, he would be fulfilled. Louis and he had grown close over the past few months, since it was confirmed that they were father and son. They were seeing a family counsellor (mostly Marinette and Adrien, but they also had sessions with Louis) and had worked out a lot of the issues that had almost driven them apart. As a family unit, they were strong.

Would it be so bad to add another member to the family?

Would Marinette even want another baby? It wasn’t something they had discussed yet.

After Chloe and Adrien left Alya, Nino and Miles’ room, it was Kim and Alix’s turn. The remaining four waited in silence. They were all deep in thought. Louis got his book out and started reading, his eyes looked heavy, it was now 9am and the early reveille was catching up with them all.

When Kim and Alix emerged, Nino came with them to say that he needed to go home and grab a few things for Alya. The group agreed to wait a while longer for him before returning to their own homes (and beds, Adrien was sure). Kim and Alix offered to get some coffees for everyone, otherwise they’d all be dozing off by the time Nino was ready to leave.

“Adrien? There’s a packet of palmiers in my bag, can you grab them?” Marinette asked when she saw them coming back, laden with cardboard cups.

He opened her cavernous tote and lifted the packet of biscuits out to pass to her, when he noticed something else.

“Is that... a pregnancy test, Mari?” He whispered to her, aware that their son and friends were in earshot.

She nodded solemnly. “I’m late. I thought I should take a test.”

“And?” He asked.

“I haven’t done it yet.” She said.

“Do it now! I need to know!” Adrien laughed, “Please?”

Marinette took her bag from him. She looked to where Louis was leaning against Chloe, reading Clément Aplat, oblivious to anything the adults were saying.

“Chloe, can you watch Louis, please?” Chloe nodded.

Marinette grabbed Adrien’s hand and dragged him towards the toilets.

“Wait here.” She told him and disappeared into the ladies room.

Adrien leaned against the wall, impatient for Marinette to emerge. His mind was racing. He was overwhelmingly delighted at the prospect of a baby, but wary of getting his hopes up until Marinette had taken the test. How long did these things take? He had just started pacing when she emerged clutching a white and blue plastic stick.

“I can’t look.” She thrust it into his hands. “One line or two?”

He turned it over, “Two. What does that mean?”

“It means,” She grinned, “That in roughly 35 weeks from now, you’re going to be a papa again.”

Adrien spun Marinette around in his excitement, his cheering attracting the attention of their friends. Chloe shushed them and he couldn’t stop a giggle from escaping his lips.

### **Another 15 weeks later...**

The past four months had been something of a blur.

After they broke the news to Louis that he was going to be a big brother, he immediately headed upstairs to pick out which toys he was going to let his little brother or sister play with. He appeared on the landing with an armful of jagged plastic and asked, “Do babies like dinosaurs?” He was excited at the prospect of a sibling.

Marinette went into overdrive to secure a new boutique manager and increased her Saturday girl’s contract to cover Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Mme. Couquet and Marinette scouted locations for a second boutique in every free moment. She was serious about expanding her business and the sudden timeline the new baby had given them was driving her forwards.

Adrien read every baby book Nino and Ivan had, plus four or five more he found in the library. He offered to change nappies, help with bottle feeds and bathe Miles whenever he could. He ensured he cooked meals that were high in all the nutrients Marinette needed for energy and to nourish the baby. Adrien and Louis painted the third bedroom in preparation for transforming it into a nursery.

Now, in the clinic, they were ready to find out if Louis was getting a brother or sister.

“You know, if we’re having a boy, we’ll have to explain to Louis that we can’t name it ‘Thor’?” Marinette said.

“I dunno, I like the name...” Adrien teased.

“Well, maman et pere, you don’t have to worry about that,” The sonographer smiled, “You are having a girl.”

Adrien's heart soared. A girl! Marinette squeezed his hand and he looked at his partner, grinning back at him, eyes twinkling with joy.

“Are you happy with a daughter?” She asked.

He nodded vehemently. *A daughter!*

“Marinette? I know you had your heart set on Emma for a girl,” he said, “but I wonder if you’d consider Emilie?”

"Emilie," Marinette repeated. “It’s beautiful.”

## Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Your support keeps me motivated. If you want to check out my other works on AO3, I'd be honoured. Or, come find me on Tumblr here - <https://hari-writes.tumblr.com/>

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!