

An American Bobtail In Paris

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/29917962) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/29917962>.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Fandom:	Miraculous Ladybug
Relationships:	Alya Césaire/Marinette Dupain-Cheng , Ladybug , Alya Césaire & Kagami Tsurugi , Master Fu/Marianne Lenoir , Other Relationship Tags to Be Added
Characters:	Alya Césaire , Marinette Dupain-Cheng , Ladybug , Kagami Tsurugi , Fei Wu (Miraculous Ladybug) , Aeon Hill Uncanny Valley , Max Kanté , Markov (Miraculous Ladybug) , Master Fu (Miraculous Ladybug) , Marianne Lenoir , Kwami(s) (Miraculous Ladybug) , Penny Rolling
Additional Tags:	Miraculous Side Effects , Kwami & Miraculous Lore , Alternate Universe - College/University , Hijinks & Shenanigans , Alya Césaire Appreciation , Aged-Up Character(s) , Morally Ambiguous Character , Multilingual Character , Alya Césaire Is The Best , Women Being Awesome , Vigilantism , LGBTQ Character of Color , LGBTQ Themes , Magical Artifacts , Akuma Possession Side Effects (Miraculous Ladybug) , Adrien Agreste & Félix are Twins , Alternate Universe - Project MC2 Fusion , NOV8 (Project MC2) , Alternate Universe - Totally Spies Fusion , Kagami Tsurugi Appreciation , Black hair care
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-03-08 Updated: 2023-07-12 Words: 24,045 Chapters: 3/?

An American Bobtail In Paris

by [justputsomeglitteronit](#)

Summary

Fù Wáng has searched the globe for the Miraculouses he lost and has come up empty. To ensure the world's delicate magical balance stays intact, Fù must do whatever he can to assure the lost Miraculouses are returned to him.

To assist with his task, he has activated the ladybug Miraculous. Should any of his lost Miraculouses be activated as well, Fù will be prepared. After all, the best way to combat the power of a Miraculous is with the power of a Miraculous.

Notes

I do not own Miraculous Ladybug, Totally Spies, or Project MC2; nor do I make money from writing fanfiction. To be clear, this is Miraculous Ladybug with elements from both Project MC2 and Totally Spies so none of the characters from any of those shows will be appearing.

A/N: No characters were whitewashed in creation of this fanfiction

-I hate the tiger's Miraculous so it's changed to something else; I am also changing the whatever Orikko's Miraculous is.

-François Düpont is a university; Marinette (and everyone else, I guess) attended a different collège and lycée.

-Once again, Sabine & Tom Boulangerie Pâtisserie exists in the 21st arrondissement of Paris. François Düpont is also there since it's the next block over from the boulangerie pâtisserie.

-Once again Nooroo is the kwami of emotion

let's get to work

Paris, France

Tuesday, December 29th, 2020

Audrey Bourgeois pulls open the double doors of the penthouse suite of her hotel, Le Grand Paris Château, then walks inside. Once she takes several steps inside, she checks the heels of her shoes. Hmm. No dirt. Good.

She didn't return home after fourteen months of her international fashion tour of the twelve fashion capitals of the world just to come home to a dirty carpeted floor.

"Mme. Audrey...?" The blonde looks over her shoulder at the bellhop, "where do you want your luggage?"

"The master bedroom, obviously. Of all the utterly ridiculous questions..." She huffs. "The ivory double doors with the mahogany knobs? You can't miss it." As Audrey looks around the suite, the bellhops bringing in her luggage on the luggage carriers. "Do be careful with those. They're worth more than your annual salary." Lifting her sunglasses from her eyes, Audrey takes her phone out of her purse. Thirteen missed calls from André. She rolls her eyes then puts her phone back in her purse. If he wanted to talk to her, he'd be here.

Hm. Speaking of *here*, Audrey walks down the suite to the last bedroom at the end of the suite. Her daughter, in her pyjamas, is dancing and singing along (slightly off-key) to some generic upbeat song. Great. That'll be an earworm for the foreseeable future.

Audrey knocks on the door and her daughter whirls around to face her. "Maman!" She screams then runs over to the radio and lowers the volume. "I—"

Audrey holds up a hand, "it's..." She glances at the time on the clock radio, "10:42am on a Tuesday. What *possible* reason do you have for wearing polkadotted pyjamas and looking so... *utterly unkempt*?"

"I just woke up."

"You—*That's hardly an excuse!* You never know who will just... *show up!* You are so very lucky that *I'm* the one who caught you looking like *this* and not the paparazzi. And what is with this wallpaper? Why is everything *polkadotted*?" Her daughter opens her mouth but

Audrey holds up a hand, “no. Don’t answer that now. Go make yourself presentable right this second!” Her daughter blinks at her and Audrey points toward the bathroom, “*now!*” The girl flinches then scurries to the bathroom. Audrey massages her temples. “I need a drink.”

As she goes to the bar to fix herself a drink, her phone starts to ring. Sighing, she takes it out of her purse. Her expression brightens when she sees the caller isn’t André. She accepts the video call and Émilie’s face pops up. “Hi! Listen, I know you’re probably super busy, but I need serious help picking out my New Year’s Eve dress.”

“I’m the furthest thing from busy Ém, I just caught my adult daughter prancing around in cartoony polkadotted pyjamas.”

“You...” Émilie furrows her eyebrows, “you’re back in Paris?!”

“Just arrived not even half an hour ago and I’m already reaching for the cognac. I swear I hate helicopters.”

“*I* have cognac! Come by the manor and help style me up, Style Queen. Bring Chloé too.”

“If I must.” Once her daughter is dressed to Audrey’s standard, they take the elevator. Exiting the elevator, Audrey sees her chef de cuisine walking toward the hotel’s exit. Just where in the hell is she going at this time of day? Normally, Audrey would never go out of her way to do anything, but once she both heard of Marlana Césaire and tasted her cooking, she personally sought the woman out and offered her the chef de cuisine position. In just three short months since her hiring, the hotel’s restaurant received its first Michelin Star.

Audrey wasn’t getting rid of her if she could help it. The woman was a keeper; it was no wonder why she was married for over thirty years.

The door-attendant greets them as he opens the door. Émilie sent them a car because of course she did. Out the corner of her eye, Audrey sees a very familiar motorcycle pull up to the curb. Marlana hugs the motorcyclist as she’s taking her helmet off.

Not only is Marlana’s name famous but her eldest daughter, Nora, is a professional kickboxer.

That is reason number two why Audrey would never fire Marlana Césaire.

Émilie's mute chauffeur nods his head in greeting as they get in the car. Audrey sees Nora hand Marlène the helmet as the town car drives off. As Audrey looks around, she sees *everything* is polkadotted. "Chloé." Her daughter gives a distracted hum in response. "Maybe I've... missed something being away. Do tell me what's with all the polkadots?"

"They're for Vermilion Bug. Today is six months exactly since she first appeared. Police haven't been too happy since she's basically doing their jobs, but nobody else has any complaints. She does everything from stop robbers to help old people across the street. She's positively, utterly incredible."

"Sounds like you developed one hell of a crush on this... Vermilion Bug."

"Who hasn't?" Chloé's shoes, dress, hair tie, sunglasses, nails, hell even her phone case are all polkadotted. That explains the polkadotted wallpaper all over her room and the pyjamas.

"Show me a picture." No surprise that Chloé's lock screen wallpaper is of this "Vermilion Bug." It's a girl wearing a polkadotted domino mask over the top half of her face. Her hair is black with red highlights styled in double buns, and her bangs are just above her closed eyes. The outfit is a ladybug-themed catsuit with all-black thigh-high boots. She has a yo-yo tied around her waist. Minimalistic but effective. Audrey can see the appeal.

When they arrive at the Graham de Vanily manor, the chauffeur opens the door. Standing in the doorway is Émilie Graham de Vanily with her arms opened wide. "Audrey! It's been far too long!"

Audrey fondly rolls her eyes as she walks into the embrace.

Stepping back, Audrey notices Émilie is wearing a polkadotted scarf around her neck. "You're into this... Vermilion Bug as well?"

"I have to be!" She begins as they enter the manor. "She saved my bank account. *And my son!* Would-be kidnappers hijacked the town car I sent for Adrien to attend one of his shoots and if it weren't for Vermilion Bug I'd no longer be the richest woman in Paris. Let's just leave it at that. Naturally ever since, Adrien has the cutest crush on the hero! He even begged me to enroll him in François Düpont University so he can 'engage' with other fans."

"Tante Émilie the only fans Adrikins will encounter at François Düpont are his own. They have a fanclub dedicated to him. The only fanclub bigger than his is the one they started up for Vermilion Bug."

“I say you allow him to enroll anyhow. You have to let the boys live their own lives, Émilie. You can’t keep them caged forever. Gabriel was the biggest recluse who ever lived and he still caught sick and died.”

“There is a bright side to letting Adrikins and Fé enroll at François Düpont. I’m there, so I can keep an eye on them.”

“Plus the headmaster is living rent-free in André’s back pocket.”

Émilie takes a deep breath, “alright. Tell me more about this school so I can prepare.”



“...I don’t get it, Nadja. *Everyone* is raving over Vermilion Bug – with good reason, don’t get me wrong, but why isn’t anyone talking about Húdié? And I hope to God I pronounced that right. I mean, the crime rate in the city has been at an all-time low thanks to their joint effort. Húdié powers up ordinary civilians and lets them be temporary superheroes for a bit. I mean, come on Paris! Give Húdié some love!”

“Do you think Húdié is responsible for Vermilion Bug, Alec?”

“That’s the thing. I don’t know! Her powers definitely don’t come from an akuma, as we know akuma powers are temporary. Plus, as we all know, Vermilion Bug showed up about a month after Húdié did.”

“Naturally, citizens were *terrified* when a ...swarm—”

“Kaleidoscope.”

“—*really?*” Alec nods, “wow. When a *kaleidoscope* of butterflies just appeared in the sky and Húdié proclaimed he came in peace and was looking for a magical artifact. It was surreal, let me tell you. My daughter Manon has not stopped talking about how she saw butterflies group together to form Húdié’s face.”

“As always with our Miraculous watch, we remind you: If you find the Miraculous of the cat, tiger, or rooster – you will be handsomely rewarded.” Alec pauses, “ever wonder why they say *handsomely* and not *beautifully*?”

“Well, I’m wondering that *now*.” Alec gives a shrug and smile as the burgundy-haired woman sighs. “Now our question of the day comes from self-proclaimed number one fan of Vermilion Bug, M. Adrien Graham de Vanily who was saved by our very own superhero two months ago.”

“It would not have made a good Halloween for the Graham de Vanily family, I can assure you.”

“For those of you who do not know, in the holiday festivities, M. Graham de Vanily’s towncar was hijacked by masked would-be kidnappers. Vermilion Bug must’ve seen something out of the ordinary and she pounced!”

“This a reminder that ladybugs *are* natural predators.”

Nadja nods along. “M. Graham de Vanily could be exaggerating as no one has gotten an interview from Vermilion Bug yet, but he stated – during *our* interview with him – that Vermilion Bug effortlessly took out six large men.”

“You’d call BS, right? But just two days ago, Mlle. Vermilion Bug took down four *armed* robbers. And I’m fairly certain one was part cyclops. Or a troll mayhaps? Look, the guy was *big*! Alright. And we all saw that *live*!”

“We got off topic. M. Graham de Vanily writes... ‘I know superhero secret identities are crucial and, well, secret, but do you ever wonder if you’ve met Vermilion Bug’s secret identity in person? Do you think you’d be able to spot Vermilion Bug in a crowd?’”

“I will start off by saying that is two questions, M. Graham de Vanily. Nevertheless, what do you think, Nadja?”

“I’m gonna say yes.”

Alec hums, “are you?”

Nadja nods, “obviously, you won’t *know* she’s Vermilion Bug, but I’m certain she has the type of personality that stands out.”

“Ah. I get ya. I’m gonna have to agree with you based on that. I think there’s no way you’d

know Vermilion Bug's secret identity just by looking at every young woman in Paris. But I think she'd be a subtle badass, you know? Someone who helps out all the time sort of secret like?" A bell chimes, "aww. I was getting into that question. Our time is up sadly."

"Join us tomorrow for testimonies from people Vermilion Bug has saved as we continue to celebrate our hero's six-month arrival in Paris all week. I'm Nadja Chamack."

"I'm Alec Cataldi."

"This has been Miraculous Watch." They say waving at the camera.



Inside Sabine & Tom Boulangerie Pâtisserie, Tom Dupain sighs in relief leaning against the counter, "I think we're good." He pants. The last customer exits the boulangerie pâtisserie happily holding onto their purchase. "I have never seen such a calm mob in my twenty-plus years in the food industry."

His wife Sabine nods in agreement wiping her hands with a rag. "It's the city's love for Vermilion Bug."

"To think, we have our own little guardian angel! Two, if you include Húdié." Tom nods to himself. "Do you think the Graham de Vany's went a bit... overboard with the croquembouche head of Vermilion Bug?"

"Overboard is an understatement, Tom." Sabine and Tom both eye the large box on the counter. It was an all-day project they managed to do while squeezing all the other celebratory items; all ladybug-themed.

The bell chimes and Adrien Graham de Vany excitedly walks in. "Afternoon M. Dupain, Mme. Cheng." He gasps then points at the box, "i-is that—?" The pâtisseries both nod. "I can't wait to see it! It's probably the next best thing to having Vermilion Bug in person."

"Then maybe you should've ordered—"

Sabine elbows her husband, "do you need help moving the box?"

“Oh! Yes, please.” Both Tom and Sabine help Adrien carry the box outside of the boulangerie pâtisserie and onto the passenger’s side seat of the blond’s red Bugatti. “Thank you so much. Mère, Félix, and I will be counting on your services again for New Year’s, if that’s alright?”

“It’s more than alright, provided it isn’t completely last minute.”

Wincing, Adrien rubs the back of his neck. “My brother and I were having difficulties agreeing on what we wanted. He wanted a whole sculpture of Vermilion Bug and I thought that might be a bit much so I just wanted a bust of her... but thought that might be a bit perverse?” He gives a helpless shrug. “Eventually, we just settled on the head. *Oh!* Right. Payment.” He digs into his pocket and pulls out a check, unfolding it before handing it to Tom. “This should cover it, right?”

“Sweet Chinese Dumplings!” Tom exclaims, “d-do you see this?” With her jaw dropped, Sabine nods slowly. “You... You put *too many zeroes on this!*”

Adrien leans forward and looks at the check, “no I didn’t. You said it was 50,000€, right?”

“Is that what you heard?!! I said *500€!* And even if we said *...that*, you paid 500,000€! What kind of custom order anything is that much money?!”

“Mère paid 600,000€ for a lifesize self-portrait.” He replies with a shrug.

Sabine elbows her husband, “rich people don’t know how to shop.” She whispers and Tom nods in agreement. “Look, as much as it physically pains me to say because this could just set our daughter up for life—” She shakes her head, “—that’s not important. What I’m trying to say is, we cannot accept this much money.”

“You... can’t? I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. I didn’t realize there was such a thing as *paying too much*. Let me fix it!” He takes his checkbook out of his pocket then hastily scrawls on it before tearing it out of the book and handing it to Tom. “Better?”

“Why—”

Sabine nudges him. “It’s fine. Thank you, M. Graham de Vasily.”

“Just Adrien is fine, and I should be thanking *you*. You’ve done so much in such a short

amount of time it's only fair I pay you guys double for the rush job. Oh! I should've added more for New Year's—"

"Your icing is gonna melt."

Adrien gasps, "oh my gosh! Thank you! Thank you!" He shakes both their hands. "Until next time." He takes the keys out of his pocket then gets in the driver's seat. He waves before driving off.

The blond sighs lovingly as he sees Vermilion Bug swing past.



Thanks to Marlana Césaire's phenomenal cooking, Le Grand Paris Château is *the* hotel to visit in Paris, France.

It beat the Hyatt Regency Paris Étoile for the first time since Le Grand Paris' opening forty years ago.

The fact that the hotel is owned by The International Queen of Fashion, Audrey Bourgeois, is a bonus to some. Tomoe Tsurugi cares nothing of fashion but she has followed Marlana Césaire's career and has always wanted to try her cooking. If she has to be in Paris, why not be where she can accomplish that goal?

Tomoe elegantly and effortlessly exits the cab, probing cane out in front of her giving her wide berth; Tomoe doesn't even hear her daughter, Kagami, take one step out of the cab before she hears her hisses in pain. Tomoe stills, eyebrows furrowing. "What happened?"

Kagami lifts her foot and looks at the gold and black striped looped pin stuck in the sole of her shoe. "I stepped on something."

"Bad omen," Tomoe mutters.

The second the tip of Kagami's finger touches the pin to remove it from her shoe, there's a bright purplish light that shoots out. Before her very eyes, the light takes shape. When the light dissipates, a small purplish tiger rises from the ground and floats up to Kagami's face staring her in the eye.

They blink at each other before Kagami, now holding onto the pin, puts her foot down then walks around the tiger and follows after her mother. “You know...” Because why wouldn’t it talk? ...or float?, “not the typical reaction I get.” Kagami looks over her shoulder seeing the cab driver rubbing at his eyes staring in her direction.

“What *are* you?” Kagami hisses. Her mother had already walked on ahead.

“I’m a kwami,” It pauses, “*your* kwami. Name’s Roaar. I have the power of camouflage.” Kagami squints at Roaar, “I’m magic.” Kagami makes a disbelieving face, “don’t believe me? Put the earring on and say *Roaar, let’s hunt*.” The “earring” almost looks like an arm. Kagami puts the earring in her ear but it doesn’t feel right. “It’s a cartilage earring. You have to put it on the top of your ear.”

“Of course I do.” Fortunately, the earring has a clamp so Kagami just attaches that to her ear for the time being.

Kagami attaches the earring to her left ear, then puts her hair over her ear and walks into the hotel. Roaar flies into her jacket. The receptionist is a sweaty, balding, middle-aged white man who is blotting his red face with a thick cloth. “—I am terribly sorry for the inconvenience, Mme. Tsurugi. We will get to the bottom of this mix up.”

“It’s the least you can do.” Tomoe hisses and the man flinches.

“P-Please enjoy your stay.”

Tomoe harrumphs then a bellhop walks beside the woman. Kagami dutifully follows behind her mother watching the older gentleman almost desperately punch codes into whatever is in front of him. “Your services are no longer needed,” Tomoe says once the bellhop opens their hotel room. “Kagami, get the key. And if any of my luggage is missing, I will sue your boss.”

“O-Of course, Mademoiselle.”

“Thank you.” Kagami inclines her head as the bellhop drops the keycard in her hands.

“What terrible ‘accommodations’ are we in for?”

Kagami looks around the hotel suite with Roaar just relaxing on her shoulder, swapping

shoulders whenever she moves in her mother's direction, "a full kitchenette, two beds, a jacuzzi in the bathtub, a desk, a walk-in closet, and a loveseat."

Tomoe scoffs, "pitiful. They call this one of their best rooms? There better be a damn good reason why I flew all the way over here."

"Okaasan, I will be in the restroom should you need me."

Tomoe waves her away. Kagami inclines her head before walking to the bathroom. Closing the door, Kagami leans her head against the door. "Roar, let's hunt." She whispers. She *feels* the kwami fly into the earring; almost like it flew into her. Before her eyes, her body begins to glow a soft maroonish color then a catsuit forms over her body.

There are purple stripes all throughout her outfit. The bottom of her boots look like little paws.

Her eyes are now yellow and her pupils are slit. Her obviously magically enhanced hair is spiked up in a ponytail look like a tiger's paw; it's also been colored a dark purple. She looks at her reflection in the mirror. There's a crossbow and quiver attached to her back. The domino mask is covering her ears yet the earring is visible, above the domino mask. And with her hairstyle, it's practically in plain sight.

Not that she was expecting this, but she should have let Roar explain how to... undo this. If Roar is in the earring, it stands to reason without wearing the earring the transformation will break.

Kagami decides to test that theory, only the earring – which she realized is now a full-blown tiger hanging on where her ear would be – is more difficult to come off than you'd think.

This is far from the type of magic she's used to.

Before she can try and think of a way out of this Roar shoots out of the blinking earring ricocheting to the wall and Kagami catches the kwami before they can crash into anything else. "What happened?"

Roar groans, "went too long without eating. I don't know how long I was just... there before you found me."

“You *eat*?” Roaar nods, “*what* do you eat?”

“Whatever. I’m partial to fish but that’s never something any of my partners are able to carry around with them.”

“Carry around...?”

“We’re partners now. You’re gonna need me around so you can transform.”

“And you’ll just hide in my clothing?”

“Clothing. Backpack. Wherever. Haven’t you ever wanted to have superpowers?”

“Not particularly.” Kagami grimaces, “I already, unfortunately, have the ability to attract magic.” She sighs.

“That’s a super rare back in the olden days ability! It’s been a while since I had a partner who could do that. So with me, you’ll get a series of additional superpowers!” Kagami narrows her eyes at Roaar. “You’ll... also develop tiger-like tendencies, no cause for alarm.”

“No cause for—” Kagami takes a deep breath. If she takes too long in the restroom her mother might knock on the door. And sure enough, Kagami jumps when there’s a knock on the door.

She quickly washes her face and hands. She flinches when she looks in the mirror and sees her right eye is... *orange*. “Roaar?”

The kwami whistles. “T-That’s a new one.”

Kagami wordlessly opens the door and realizes the knocking is coming from the hotel’s front door. “Kagami, see who is at the door.”

“Yes, Okaasan.”

“She’s bossy, isn’t she?” Roaar whispers. The kwami hides in her jacket as Kagami opens the

door. Kagami raises an eyebrow at the same man she saw downstairs earlier.

“H-Hello, I’m André Bourgeois.” He begins in English. “I own this hotel, and I am also the mayor of the city.”

“Is there something you needed...?” Kagami replies in English.

The smile slips off the man’s face then he clears his throat, “I cannot find any records of any conversation with Mme. Tsurugi.”

“You *what*? Are you calling me a liar?”

“No! Of course not!”

“He’s lying.” Roaar whispers.

Kagami’s eyes narrow as the man rattles off pitiful excuse after pitiful excuse. “Enough!” Tomoe stands. “If you don’t have relevant news *leave!*” The man flees without making a sound and Kagami closes the door.

Tomoe sits back down and takes her sunglasses off. “Something feels... off.” She lifts her head and Roaar ducks their head back in Kagami’s jacket. “I’m going to take a nap. Feel free to order whatever. The mayor is paying for it.”

“Are you comfortable there, Okaasan?”

“Surprisingly yes.”

“I will explore this hotel. I have my cellphone in case you require something.”

“Yes, yes.” Tomoe yawns. “Be careful. I don’t trust that mayor, and I do not trust this city. Even the *air* feels foul.”

“I will be careful, Okaasan.” Kagami inclines her head then puts the keycard in her pocket.

Roaar rubs their paws together, “let’s get some grub.”

Kagami closes the door behind her then looks around, “why is my eye ...*orange*?” She hisses sagging against the door, “*orange* is not a natural eye color.”

“I-I don’t know! Do you have any ...eye conditions or anything?”

Kagami’s eyes widen, “shit. Eye issues are... hereditary in my family.” She pushes herself off the door then starts walking toward the stairway. Roaar, on her left shoulder, yawns.

“You know you’re gonna need the correct piercing right? To make sure the earring doesn’t fall off.”

Kagami sighs, “then I suppose that’s our first stop.”

“N-No, wait. We can get food first, right?”



André Bourgeois takes a deep breath watching the butterfly fly out of his tie then fly off. The purple ooze dissipates from his body returning him to normal. He flexes his right fist. So *that’s* what Húdié’s power feels like? Surely the man is insane to think anyone would willingly part with this type of power just for some uncertain, undisclosed “handsome” reward?

What were those Miraculouses he was looking for again?

Ever since the divorce, he’s been staying at one of the luxury suites at Le Grand Paris. Not even in the penthouse suite of his own damn hotel because of Audrey.

André found himself enveloped in power after getting stuck in the elevator with a pregnant woman whose water broke right as the elevator broke down. And this was not even five minutes after getting yelled at by *The* Tomoe Tsurugi. Wanting no part of what was about to unfold, Húdié got himself involved and changed André’s mind. With Húdié’s power, he was able to help safely deliver the baby and get them out of the elevator.

Being the mayor had its perks. *Everyone* wanted to interview Húdié’s latest civilian superhero.

That power, though? Maybe not that *particular* power. But the feeling overall? It was addicting. Felt even more powerful than being mayor!

When André returns to his suite he opens his laptop and looks up books on magic.

Perhaps he can stage a robbery so he can get a taste of that power again?



“Félix, are you ready?” Adrien bursts in the bedroom without waiting for a reply. His twin is laying on the bed, reading glasses on, writing on a notebook. “Félix!” Félix looks up from his book, “you aren’t ready!? The Louvre is supposed to be unveiling the sculpture dedicated to Vermilion Bug!”

“I *am* ready.” Félix has a ladybug hair clip in his hair over his right ear. He puts a ladybug bookmark in his book then gets up from the bed. His jacket’s inner lining is polkadotted.

“W-W-Wh-Wha—?”

Félix chuckles, “a custom order.”

Adrien’s eyes widen, “*it’s beautiful.*” He whispers.

“Yours is in the closet.”

Adrien runs over to Félix and hugs him briefly before routing through the closet and taking out the jacket similar to Félix’s; the only difference is Félix’s jacket is black and Adrien’s is red. “Do you think Vermilion Bug will show up?” Adrien asks shrugging the jacket on. It has a ladybug on the end of its zipper. “I mean, the whole city dedicated the day to her.”

“I’m fairly certain she has more important matters to attend to in both her civilian life and masked hero one.”

“More important than her own day of celebration? It’s like missing your birthday party!”

“I doubt crime will take the time off to accommodate her.”

Adrien sighs heavily, “yeah, you’re probably right.” He sighs again, “I really hope she shows up. Oh! I saw her swing past as I was leaving Sabine & Tom Boulangerie Pâtisserie to pick up the croquembouche tower! Would it be called a tower—”

“I understand the hero worship, Adrien, but nothing could ever come of a relationship between a superhero and civilian.”

“I know!” Adrien sighs, hanging his head. Gasping, he snaps his head up. “I could just become a superhero!”

“And how on earth will you do *that*?”

“Húdié is always looking for civilians to help! If I become a superhero, even temporarily I can... I don’t know just be on a more leveled playing field with her.”

Félix affectionately ruffles Adrien’s hair, “you’re delusion is showing. Let’s head to the Louvre.”

Le Gorille drops the six of them off at The Louvre. Adrien didn’t even know Chloé and her mother were visiting, and as always their mother’s personal assistant, Nathalie, was in attendance. The museum’s newest lead curator, Zebediah Kubdel, is standing behind a podium in front of the building. “Today we are honoring our hero that needs no introduction. Vermilion Bug has changed all of our lives for the better whether we realized it or not.” Police Chief Raincomprix, standing beside the curator, folds his arms over his chest with a huff. “Amateur sculptor Théo Barbeau was generous enough to create this sculpture in Vermilion Bug’s likeness! And to donate it to us.”

Some of the other curators pull the large sheet down revealing a lifesize bronze sculpture of Vermilion Bug swinging her yo-yo overhead.

The crowd breaks out into raucous applause.

“M. Barbeau, how long did it take you to complete this sculpture?” The lead curator asks.

“Four months.” The crowd cheers. “And I’d dedicate another four months just to make sure I

do our hero justice.”

Félix elbows Adrien with a grin, “sounds like you have some competition.”

“Any *real* superfan of Vermilion Bug wouldn’t forget her antennas,” Adrien mutters.

Félix blinks then squints up at the sculpture. Huh. Vermilion Bug *does* have antennas poking out of her head, doesn’t she? “Maybe they broke off during transport?” Adrien scoffs folding his arms over his chest.

“Any questions?” The sculptor asks.

When Adrien raises his hand Félix moves to stop him but the sculptor already points at him and acknowledges him. “You forgot Vermilion Bug’s antennas.”

The crowd stares at the blond before turning back to the sculpture and its sculptor. Félix facepalms as the sculptor’s cheeks begin to redden. “H-How could I have forgotten...!?” He puts his hands on his head, “I’m... I’m so *ashamed*! I call myself a fan and I forget something as significant as her antennas!?”

“There’s no harm done.”

“*No harm done!*?” He cuts the curator off. “*No harm done!*?” He repeats. “What if Vermilion Bug *saw* this!? I-I can’t have something *imperfect* connected to her. I-I need to melt it down and start over!”

“Why can’t you just *add* the antennas?” Someone in the crowd asks.

An akuma flies into the sculptor’s sculpting tool. It wouldn’t be the first time Húdié sent an akuma to help calm a civilian down. Théo is just standing there with the purple butterfly mask outline over his face, then the mask’s outline turns black and the purplish-black ooze overtakes his body. As the ooze dissipates, Théo Barbeau is now bronze.

The crowd gasps.

“*You think yourself a better fan than me, Adrien Graham de Vasily? Why don’t we find out*

just how much better you are!?” He dashes toward Adrien and Félix steps in front of his brother. The crowd begins screaming when Félix gets turned into a bronze sculpture.

The screaming crowd begins running away. The black mask outline appears over his face, “**no!** You’re not taking this power from me! Not yet!” Black translucent wings grow from his back. “Not until he pays!”



Húdié wipes the blood he coughed out with the back of his gloved hand. A corrupted akuma. The sculptor’s anger is too powerful to try and console. He can’t take the akuma out manually. Húdié closes his eyes. He has other akumas scouting around the city. But can’t risk another individual getting swept into the sculptor’s anger. No, he’s gonna need to unveil another Miraculous.

Question is, what would be the best to fight against the power of emotion? And *who?*



“All done. How do you like it?”

Rose Lavillant’s eyes widen as she looks at her reflection in the mirror. Her plain boring blonde hair is now decorated with pink, blue, purple, black, green, orange, red, and silver highlights. She squeals in delight. “*I love it!*”

“Glad to hear it. You know, we get requests all the time for people wanting to go blonde. Don’t really get any natural blondes wanting to go any other route.”

The hairstylist moves the cape from around the blonde’s neck. “First time I dyed my hair myself my mamans fainted!”

Her hairstylist chuckles, “first time I dyed my hair? My maman asked why did I only do the tips?”

As Rose examines her reflection, running a hand through her hair, there’s a brilliant blue flash outside the shop. A few of the stylists all crowd the window and front door trying to see what became of the blue flash.

“Thank you so much M—I mean Luka.”

“Anytime. Hairstyling is just one of my artistic vices.”

Rose pays the woman at the front counter for her hair. Eventually, the other stylist lose interest when they don't see anything of significance outside the shop windows, and return to their stations.

“Maybe it was a firework? I mean, people are probably setting them off early for New Years’.”

“Or Húdié sent out another akuma? I hear some dude went berserk at the Vermilion Bug sculpture unveiling.”

“Yeah, I heard that too. At the Louvre, right?”

“Lu, Jules is coming.”

“Oh yeah? Thanks” A tall purple-haired woman walks into the shop and stops dead in her tracks when she sees a blonde have a very well-timed hairflip showing off her multicolored hair. “Jules!” Luka runs over to the purple-haired woman embracing her. “How'd it go?”

The purple-haired woman sighs heavily, “every time the photographer tried getting a picture of me something would interrupt it.”

“He should change his advertising if he couldn't take a decent picture of you.” Luka pats his baby sister on the shoulder, “I'm sorry, Jules.”

“Don't be. You can't take a decent picture either.”

“Yeah, well—Take care!” Luka says to the rainbow-haired woman who smiles brightly and utters a melodious “you too” before exiting the shop.

The purple-haired woman grabs her brother by the collar, “*who? Was? That!?*” She hisses. Luka laughs.

Rose takes a picture of her hair to show her mamans and before she makes it to the stoplight she gets a video call. *"It looks like a unicorn exploded on your head!"* Both Jordan and Syd squeeze into the camera as the former yells.

"That's what I was going for!" Rose chirps.

"Rosie, if you love it. I love it. You look like a lit-up disco ball." Jordan hands off the phone before walking out of the frame. *"Don't forget the groceries, My Little Floral Angel."*

"I won't. Just have to stop by the tattoo parlor—"

"What!?" Jordan yells, out of the camera's sight.

"I'm not getting a tattoo, maman! I'm just gonna see about the piercing. I'll be home in a little bit."

"Love you."

"Love you too." As soon as Rose hangs up she bumps into an old woman. "I'm so sorry!"

"Oh no, Dear, it was all my fault. I should be watching where I'm going."

Rose helps the woman situate herself. Did the light change? Where did this woman come from? "Do you need help?"

"That would be just wonderful. Thank you." The woman holds onto Rose's elbow, and unbeknownst to the blonde slips a small box into her jacket pocket. "Everybody is just so busy with themselves nowadays." She pats Rose's hand. "Thank you for being so kind. Giving a bit of your time for an old woman like me."

"No problem."

"I love your hair. It's so sparkly."

"Thank you!"

After the blonde helps her reach her destination, the old woman puts the key in the apartment building front door opening it. “It’s much harder to do these tests of character nowadays Fù, I sure hope you selected a worthy candidate in that young woman.”

Meanwhile, Rose makes it to the tattoo parlor to talk about getting a tongue ring. When she reaches in her pocket to grab her phone to show a picture of what she had in mind, she feels something triangular in her pocket. Furrowing her eyebrows, she ignores it for now and retrieves her phone showing the picture of the piercing.

“Yeah. We can do that here. I *love* your hair! It’s like a unicorn spat you out!”

“Thanks!”

“I can give you a unicorn bauble but it’s probably best to do it when the swelling goes down. Did you want to make an appointment for the piercing?”

“Oh. Yes please.”

“We’re opened on New Year’s if you wanna start the new year off right.”

“That sounds like a great idea.”

After confirming the appointment, Rose takes the triangular object out of her pocket. “What’s this thing?” When she opens the triangular box there’s a bright light that coming from inside it. She quickly shuts the box before anyone can see and be blinded as well. Once her vision isn’t clouded with black dots, she starts walking. Wasn’t this... the light she saw at the shop earlier?

Rose all but runs to the restroom in the grocery store and opens the box. “You can open your eyes.” Blue eyes snap open and Rose stares in awe at a floating blue ...thingy smiling at her. “Greetings! I am Duusu, kwami of animation.”

“Huh?”

Duusu flies over to the door and locks it then flies back over to Rose. “I am a kwami. I am magic. I have been gifted to you.”

“Huh?”

“Perhaps your hair dye has sunk into your brain.” Duusu floats closer to Rose. “I am a kwami gifted to you. I will bestow you with great magical powers.”

“W-Why!?”

“‘W-Why?’ What a question! The Guardian has selected you!” Rose’s eyes widen, “you can be a hero. Just like Vermilion Bug.”

“S-So Vermilion Bug has one of you q-tip plushy things? Just, I’m guessing, a ladybug?”

“I am not a ‘q-tip plushy’ thing. I am the god of animation!” Duusu’s voice booms.

“You’re a plushy!” Rose squeals grabbing Duusu by the head and petting them.

“I-I—*Stop this at once!* I have powers beyond your mortal comprehension—*oh*. C-Can you itch that spot again?” Rose complies. “Ah yes, that feels marvelous.” Duusu wriggles from Rose’s grasp then clears their throat. “W-Where was I? Ah yes. The Guardian of the Chinese Miracle Box has selected you...”

“Rose.”

“...Rose, for my power. You seem to be quite an animated person meaning we should mesh well. To transform into a peafowl-themed superhero, simply say *Duusu, spread your feathers* then to break transformation, simply say *Duusu, feathers lock*.”

“Why not just... ‘close your feathers?’”

“Blame the sages. In the olden times, all we had to say was *please transform me* but then Miraculouses kept getting used for evil and we had to find a better way to stop that.”

Rose nods slowly, “now uh, who am I to... disagree with whoever but I don’t want to be a superhero! I don’t even wanna go back to university next week!” Duusu headbutts Rose.

“Okay, okay!” She rubs her forehead, “but I can’t just transform in a grocery store restroom.”



Adrien's running for his life from a statue person akuma who turned all his family and friends into statues. Even some of his fans valiantly albeit unnecessarily threw themselves in front of him.

He darts around the corner and hides behind a staircase. "Adrien! You have nowhere to run! You—*Hey, what the—!*?"

Adrien looks up from his hiding spot to see something blue kick the statue akuma sending him flying.

"Oh no! I'm so sorry!" Adrien blinks. It's a... It's a *peacock*. Everything is bright sparkly blue. From the catsuit with the peacock feather pattern, and also *actual* peacock feathers? He can't see their head from his angle so he tries to inch closer to get a look without giving his position away.

Adrien gets up then runs after the peacock as they run forward. Théo is unconscious on the floor. The peacock gasps, putting gloved hands to their... blue face. Adrien watches the akuma fly out of Théo's body and he's instantly covered in the purplish ooze and once it leaves his body he's returned to normal.

Akumas can be bad...? *Great.*

The peacock turns around and jumps in surprise. "You scared me!"

"W-Wait a minute. Who are you?"

"I—Didn't think of a name yet." The peacock waves him off with the fan in their hands. "Anyway, I have to go. *Bye!*" Then they run off.

Adrien stares at the retreating form. "Wow. Another superhero."

Meet Vermilion Bug

Chapter Notes

A/N: I was going to give Alya shoulder-length hair but then I saw the movie picture and am glad I decided against it

Paris, France

Tuesday, December 29th, 2020

“*Who is this peafowl? Another superhero? An akuma?*” Rose runs both hands down her face as she sees the news. She was transformed for, what, two seconds?, kicked an angry akuma in the face, and suddenly she’s the only thing on the news?

Worst of all...! She can’t even remember if things were like this the first time Vermilion Bug showed up! Or Húdié!

Come to think of it...? Who even—? The blonde groans. It was *that guy* who stared at her with his mouth hanging open. “Duusu?” The kwami pauses in fluffing up her hair, “who gave you to me again?”

“The Guardian of the miraculouses of the Chinese miracle box.”

Rose nods slowly then pauses abruptly, “...wait a minute! There’s no *peacock* in the Chinese zodiac!”

If Duusu had eyebrows, Rose figured one would be raised questioningly. “Do you know that for a fact or are you simply guessing?”

“Fact. An ex-girlfriend of mine celebrated Chinese—*Lunar* New Year and told me all about the twelve animals. I know there was a bird, but don’t remember which bird. *However*, I do know that the bird was not a peacock.”

“*Peafowl* is the correct term, by the by, and you are correct. Kudos to you for having a bit of knowledge on the subject. Perhaps you aren’t *truly* hopeless as you appear?” The blonde

blows out a breath, “but before you get a swelled head I will tell you kwamis precede Lunar New Year and all forms of... everything. Our likenesses have been used for millennia. It doesn’t matter to us. We had these corporeal forms made to make us easy to maneuver ourselves and guide our charges.” Rose nods slowly and Duusu continues to stare at her, “...you don’t understand.”

“No.”

“I must give you points for honesty.” Duusu sighs, “that’s okay, I will teach you all you need to know.”

“Speaking of *know*...? Since you *made* me transform, the least you could do is introduce me to Vermilion Bug.”

“I cannot. I do not know her identity.” Rose groans, “however, I am certain you two will fight together. You were activated because evil has surfaced. Even Vermilion Bug cannot handle on her own. The Guardian will activate one more individual to round out your team. And *no*, I do not know their identity either.”

“Kinda figured that.” Rose takes the television off, “what am I supposed to *do*, exactly?”

“Defending the planet from... things.”

“Right. That explains it.”

“It would be best if you were told by the Guardian. It would be a good idea to practice using your new abilities. You can summon amoks from the feathers on your fan. You have as many amoks as you have feathers. Also, there is more to this gig than working with Vermilion Bug.”

“Seeing as how you didn’t give me a choice, I’m allowed to gush about Vermilion Bug.”

“I just don’t want you to develop hero worship or any unrealistic expectations. She will be your teammate, not your commander.”

“Fine, fine! I get it. I can’t believe I’m a superhero!” She gasps, “like Majestia! Ooh, do you know Majestia?” Duusu sighs heavily.



International Waters

Wednesday, December 30th, 2020

This has officially been the weirdest day of Alya Césaire's life. The flight she was on was full so they offered her a first-class seat.

The lady in the seat across from hers mistakenly ordered a meal she was allergic to, so she offered it to Alya free of charge.

When Alya inadvertently bumped into a guy, not only did his luggage fall on him but several other overhead carriers opened and luggage started falling on people.

The guy walking behind her to get on the plane got his luggage stuck between the plane and the connecting walkway.

One of the flight attendants that was about to charge Alya for her meal promptly began choking and when another flight attendant performed the heimlich, they accidentally hit the undo button causing Alya's bill to disappear and she ended up getting her food for free.

Something seriously strange was going on.

Like she's wrapped up in a vortex of weirdness affecting everyone around her.

She drew the curtain around her and reclines her seat. It'll be a while before she lands. Yawning, Alya runs a hand through her hair and stills. What the...?

Alya moves some of her hair in front of her shoulder. There's a gold ring with silver jagged lines across it *in her hair*. How long has that been in there?

It takes a bit of an effort to untangle the ring from her hair.

Alya examines the ring. Looks real enough. With a shrug, shoves the ring in her left pants pocket. Maybe this because of the weirdness? Or maybe it's the cause of the weirdness? She's an avid comic reader, she's used to weird shit. Not *this level* of weird, but weird nonetheless.

“Mademoiselle?” Alya draws the curtain back and sees a flight attendant holding a frosted bottle in their gloved hands, “courtesy of our French connoisseurs, we have a glass of pinot noir for you to sample.” The flight attendant produces an ice cold champagne flute from behind their back, then pours the drink into the champagne flute and hands it to her.

“Um, thank you?” Alya takes a sip of the drink then almost immediately spits it out onto her garbage bag attached to the edge of her chair. “What the fuck was that?”

“It’s Domaine de la Romanee-Conti, it’s the most expensive wine in the world! One bottle alone costs 57,000 American dollars! One glass alone—!”

“Thank you for the ...history lesson, and free disgusting booze.” The flight attendant shrieks in dismay when Alya dumps the drink into the garbage. They sway on their feet for a bit before fainting. Another flight attendant trips over the unconscious one and a parfait lands in Alya’s hands.

“Oh! I’m so sorry.” The flight attendant picks up their colleague, “I...” They blink as the tray carrying the parfait lands in the trash bag and the parfait is neatly in Alya’s hands with the spoon sticking out. “...Huh. Odd. I suppose you might as well keep that, for the scare.” They drag their co-worker down the aisle.

Alya examines the parfait in her hands. Cherries, apples, some kind of spongecake, whipped cream. She drags her spoon through the whole thing to get a bite of everything at once.



This has got to be the weirdest day of Lila Rossi’s twenty years of existence on this earth. Weird shit was happening on the flight she was on. A chain reaction had luggage was falling on most of the passengers. Lila had the good sense to *duck* before a large duffel bag fell on her head. The guy beside her wasn’t so fortunate though. From her seat, **in coach** (her mother couldn’t even afford to give her a first-class seat and she’s the one that wanted Lila to come to France for some God-forsaken reason?!), Lila had a perfect view of first-class and that’s where most of the weirdness was manifesting.

But from her seat, **in coach**, she couldn’t see much. Just people falling and whatever or whoever was seated to the left was generating some serious (enviable) chaos.

A flight attendant drags a co-worker to the little flight attendant nook.

Lila leans to the left and tries to look through to first-class, then she has to move when someone runs down the aisle with a hand covering their mouth. Lila looks back at the person then back to first-class trying to see what's happening.



“How odd...” Jess Keynes doesn’t bother looking up from her book as her mother, Barbara, speaks.

“What’s ‘odd,’ mother?”

“That girl. Strange occurrences are happening and she is the epicenter.”

“Is that not why we are going to Paris? To ‘investigate’ strange occurrences?”

“You are displeased.”

Jess shuts the book then looks up at her mother, “yes, mother, I am ‘displeased.’ You pulled me out of a prestigious university I have been eyeing since I was *twelve* to play the Scooby-Doo to your mystery quest!”

“Jessica, don’t be absurd. You could get into any prestigious university—”

“By my own merits or simply because you can make a phone call?”

Barbara’s eyes narrow. “Don’t take that tone with me, Young Lady.” Jess reopens her book, “and you should be *thanking me*. You are far too brash to stay in New York alone.”

“Yes, mother, you must keep an eye on me at all times. After all, how else will you micromanage my life?”

Jess gasps as Barbara takes the book from her grasp, “you wish to act like a brat? You will be treated as such. You won’t be getting your book back until we land.”

The brunette gets up from her seat and walks toward the bathroom.



“Marinette? Marinette!” Sabine checks her watch as she stands at the edge of the staircase, “what time is it? Marinette, time to get up!”

“Sabine?” The black-haired woman pauses mid-step then looks back at Tom. “Maybe let her sleep a bit? We’re gonna be swamped later with all the New Year’s orders, plus making ourselves some New Year’s sweets. We’ll need our nocturnal daughter at her most energetic.”

Sabine sighs looking up the staircase, “I worry about that girl sometimes, Tom.”

“What?” Tom walks up a couple of steps and wraps his arms around Sabine’s waist, “oh come now, Sabine! What’s there to worry about?”

“Marinette never *goes* anywhere, Tom! She’s always upstairs designing or down here helping us with the shop.”

“She’s driven.”

“She’s *obsessed!*” Sabine corrects.

“Sabine, having a twenty-year-old daughter who knows what she wants to do with her life is far from the worst thing in life.”

“That’s just it!” Sabine wriggles from her husband’s grasp and turns to him, “*Marinette has no life!* She has no friends! She’s always just... *designing!* Designing, designing, designing, designing! It’s... unnatural! She’s been on this designer kick since she was *seven!* And honestly, Tom, what do we even *know* about our daughter besides that? I... I feel like I’m failing her.”

“What? Don’t be silly, Honeybun. You’re not failing her. Marinette is a good egg. My parents knew *nothing* about my hobbies when I was twenty. My papa still doesn’t know about a few now! Everyone is entitled to their secrets, Sabine.”

Sabine frowns, “I’m waking her up.” Tom sighs as she walks up the staircase. Shaking his head, he walks back down the stairs to the shop.

Sabine ascends the staircase until she reaches the attic. The black-haired woman pulls down the staircase to the attic then climbs up it and pops open the trap door and enters the room. As she suspected, Marinette’s latest design projects are hanging from her mannequins. Five of Marinette’s six multicolored mannequins are standing upright, the last is on the floor split vertically in half on the floor. Sabine *knows* her daughter is regarded as... *clumsy* and accident prone, but just how did that mannequin get damaged in such a peculiar manner?

Sabine looks around the room. When was the last time she really took a look around? Marinette’s walls are vertically striped pink and grey but other than that the walls are bare.

Sabine sees a note pinned on the corkboard with *her* handwriting saying *Graham de Vasily Annual New Year’s Dinner: Their Usual Pâtisserie Order; Dec 31 – Thurs? Fri?*

Marinette’s desk has her PC monitor on one side and her sewing machine on the other. The pink and white sewing machine staring back at Sabine, mocking her.

Marinette’s television is off on the TV stand under the skylight windows of her room, gaming consoles and games neatly stacked on the TV stand shelves.

All of Marinette’s fabrics are neatly rolled into a wooden basket but there’s a particular roll she’s unfamiliar with.

Her bed is propped in the corner under the lights as well. Her closet is closed and there’s a trail of clothing leading to the trap door that leads to her newly installed bathroom. Well not *newly* but new enough.

Marinette loved it. The only problem was, Sabine almost never saw her daughter unless she was coming downstairs to eat and even that was sparse. If Marinette had a minifridge, she’d never leave the room! What was she failing at as a mother? Her mother is her best friend. How could she not be the same with her daughter?

Sabine cautiously approaches the bed where Marinette is nestled in her multiple sheets and there is the strangest polkadotted eyemask over Marinette’s face.

Before Sabine can hold a hand out to reach for the eyemask, Marinette’s phone starts blaring

a generic preinstalled on her phone alarm. Sabine sighs heavily.

One of Marinette's hands shoots out from the blanket to reach the phone, once she shuts the alarm off her hand stills and Marinette sits up with the eyemask still on her face. "Māmā?"

"I thought I'd wake you up." Marinette gently takes the eyemask off her eyes then looks up at her mother. Sabine notes her daughter's eyes look a little puffy, whether it's from just waking up or something else she doesn't know, "when's the last time the two of us went out shopping together? We need a few extra ingredients for tomorrow's New Year's Eve dinner. Interested in going with me?"

"Sure, māmā." Sabine smiles then nods. "Let me hop in the shower real quick and I'll join you downstairs?"

"Yes. Of course." Keeping the smile on her face, Sabine makes her way down the stairs and closes the trap door.

Marinette waits until she hears footsteps before she gets up from her bed. "That was close..." The ladybug kwami, Tikki, floats up from Marinette's hands to her shoulder, "I felt her hand hovering over me. I had to fake your alarm." Sighing, the kwami pokes her partner in the neck, "if you went to bed at a decent time, you wouldn't be straining your eyes and I wouldn't've needed to lay on them to heal them."

"Sorry." Marinette sighs then yawns, "I had to finish. My parents' wedding anniversary is New Year's Eve." Twenty-fifth wedding anniversary – they never had the big, fancy wedding; instead choosing to get married without all the fanfare to save the money for their upcoming brick and mortar boulangerie pâtisserie. Marinette gets up from bed and walks over to her fabric basket, she unrolls the embroidered photo she made of her parents together.

It took Marinette four months to finish this gift, but it was worth it. Their wedding anniversary and the anniversary of the boulangerie pâtisserie first opening its doors was the same day. Both on New Year's Eve.

"Marinette, I noticed your mother lately seems particularly stressed when she looks at you. Shall I try to heal her?"

"You can try but it won't do much good." Marinette rerolls the photo then puts it back with her fabric, "this isn't something the miraculous ladybugs can help with. Māmā is disappointed I'm a wallflower." Marinette says with a one-shoulder shrug. "Sabine Cheng was the most popular girl in collège, lycée, and university growing up! Whether she was in

Shanghai or Paris *everyone* loved her! It's only biologically fitting that her daughter be the same, right? Instead, what Sabine got was a daughter that merely *looked* like her but turned out like Tom Dupain. Awkward. Uncoordinated." Marinette opens the trap door that leads to her bathroom then begins walking. "Māmā doesn't understand I find people to be a hindrance."

"You know Marinette, when you talk like that it's easy to see where she comes from. Not all humans function solitary, like you. Some actually *like* being around others."

"Tikki, the very first thing you told me when we met was that no one could know my identity. I told you that wouldn't be a problem since no one knows who I am as a civilian."

Tikki sighs heavily, "a ladybug cannot form a colony on her own."

"Then it's a good thing I'm not here to form a colony." Tikki frowns, "nonno used to tell me stories all the time about how people only bothered remembering papà existed because he was the kid with the pâtisserie parent. The one everyone always wanted to 'talk to' during holidays or events that required baking. Nonno told me these stories to prepare me. So that I don't have to worry about the same thing happening to me."

Tikki flies in front of Marinette's face stopping her from walking, "uh... quick question? Your... grandpa, just how long have you spent with him?"

"When the boulangerie pâtisserie first opened up, nonno lived here and looked after me. He stayed until I was six. Then after he went back to Italy, I visited him every summer."

"*That* explains so much..." Tikki mutters. She had the unfortunate displeasure of unofficially meeting Rolland Dupain when he came to visit over the summer. Shortly after Tikki was given to Marinette. Her parents were so cheerful, Marinette had to get her... less than cheerful nature from an outside-ish source. The man was as surly as the definition, "look Marinette. Humans are all about give and take."

"Too bad that's never taught in equal measure, hm?" Tikki blinks at her. "Why are you on this 'togetherness' kick all of a sudden anyhow?"

"You remind me of the kwami of destruction, Plagg. He was all about the lone gunslinger act too. 'Can't depend on people as far as you can magically haul them,' he'd say. I bet he'd just thrilled not to be on..." Opaque pink bubbles float out of Tikki's frowning mouth, "...leash' anymore. Probably got separated on purpose." Plagg must be looking for his perfect chaotic

match. Too bad Tikki was already gifted to her. With any luck, Plagg will find someone who reminds him of Tikki so he doesn't cause the destruction of another planet.

“And that was one of the lost miraculouses, Húdié is searching for?” Tikki nods.

“There's more...”

“There always is.”

“Master, I mean Húdié, believes it might be for the best for you to have a team.”

Marinette laughs humorlessly, “after six months of saying ‘it could only be me?,’ it suddenly isn't only me anymore? Yeah. No. Not happening. *He* needs *me*. I don't need *him*. And I don't need a *team*. And please feel free to tell him that.”



Alya is one of the first to exit the airplane and enter the airport. Like the tourist she not-so-secretly is, Alya takes pictures of everything. Alya hasn't spoken a word in French since her family left Martinique over fifteen years ago.

A woman walks past Alya then trips over her wheeled luggage. Then someone trips over the woman setting off a chain reaction.

Alya quietly picks up her pace and heads to a bathroom inside the terminal. When she enters the bathroom the lights shut off. Someone screams. A light turns back on and sparks start flying from it. Alya hears a toilet flush then a woman runs out of the bathroom holding up her pants with her hands. Lastly, the door closes then locks.

Ominous laughter echoes through the bathroom walls as the lights shut off again. “Weary traveler who has found the ring of Plagg. I grant you the power of devastation! Which you have spread nicely—”

“Nah bruh, you're about to grant the powers of turning the lights back on. I'm tired and not about to pee in the dark in an unfamiliar bathroom.” Alya sees a pair of white fangs in the mirror's reflection before the lights blink back on. Alya walks into one of the stalls then locks it.

“It’s just the two of us in here, and I’ve heard plenty of humans urinating before.”

“Heads up.” Plagg catches the ring his new wielder tosses out of the stall.

Plagg’s grin widens. “By the way? Having to hide in your luggage for all those hours? Not fun. Clothes smelled nice though.” The toilet flushes, Plagg floats over to one of the sinks and turns the water on. The stall opens and Plagg sees his wielder for the first time. She has gorgeous wavy orangish-red hair flowing past her shoulders. The type of hair Plagg would *love* to nestle in. Her brown eyes are behind a pair of black and grey framed lenses. “Does my wielder have a name?”

“Alya.” Plagg moves to the side so Alya can wash her hands, “what *are* you?”

“I’m a kwami. The literal translation is old god. Plagg means erasure in the old language, don’t know how it turned into ‘devastation’ over the years, but I’m not complaining.” Plagg sniffs Alya, “the plane made you smell like stale bread and entitlement.”

“Yeah, I feel it.” Alya dries her hands, “I need a shower, bad.” She eyes Plagg. “So what did I do to deserve the powers of ‘erasure?’”

“For you? It was as easy as ducking under a tree.” Plagg takes a bow, “and I thank you for that. You see the Guardian’s getting a little careless with age. He was on his way to see his lady carrying the miracle box and he dropped all the miraculouses inside. He gathered up as many as he could but I was one of the more fortunate ones who wasn’t found.” The kwami grins, “unfortunately, miraculouses can only be activated by humanoids. I truly don’t know how long I was just stuck in that tree until this gorgeous, gorgeous hair freed me from my prison. I have no intention of being sealed back in the ring, just so you know.”

Alya hums, “alright then, what’s in it for me? If I keep you active?”

Plagg beams, “ooh, I like you. Why *would* you do this for free? Great question. Hmmm. Let’s see. I can have you harness the power of erasure and destruction. Everything that happened around you on the plane? Imagine having *control* over that. *You* get to decide what bad things happen to who, when, and just how much.” Alya stares at her reflection in the mirror, thinking. “You just have to keep the miraculous on you *at all times*. Doesn’t have to always be on your finger. You can put it on a necklace. You can wear it as a toe ring. I can change its form so it functions as any other type of jewelry. So long as it’s making contact with your body, it’s active.” Plagg slips the ring on Alya’s left middle finger. “So... do we have a deal, Alya?”

Alya examines the ring on her finger, “yeah. I’ve always wanted superpowers. Let’s do it.” Plagg nuzzles Alya’s face and purrs.

“One more thing. You can’t tell anyone about me.”

“Am I gonna lose my powers if I do?”

“Uh... no? I mean, I don’t think so? Huh. No one’s ever *asked* what happens if you do tell someone.” Plagg beams, “got someone you want to tell?”

“My big sister Nora. Probably. She’s a professional kickboxer and the reason I’m even standing here talking to you. I had to transfer universities and everything. We’re gonna be living together. I just don’t want you to have to hide all the time while we’re harnessing powers and whatnot.”

“You know what? Let’s see what happens!”



It *has* been a while since Marinette just spent some time with her mother. Or either of her parents, really. Marinette tied her hair in a bun so Tikki could relax in there and communicate with her easier. According to Tikki, her mother kept sending her nervous and worried glances every few minutes during their walk to the market.

Sabine picks up a box of cookies and sighs heavily. This brand is Marinette’s favorite. Was? “Ooh!” Sabine snaps out of her thoughts when Marinette leans toward her, putting one hand on the box. “I haven’t had these in so long.”

“You know... we could actually make these cookies.”

Marinette’s eyes light up, “really?” She gasps excitedly, “we should make some for new year’s.” Sabine nods with a smile, “in fact, we should make all different kinds of cookies.” Marinette puts both hands on her cheeks, “I can’t wait to have mooncakes.”

Sabine and Marinette turn to each other, “we need noodles!” They walk to the baking aisle of the market and grab pre-made noodles and various assortments of flour. The international cuisine aisle has more things they grab to make for new year’s.

“I almost forgot! The Graham de Vasily family asked for a ‘surprise’ in addition to their usual order.”

Marinette raises an eyebrow, “a surprise?”

Sabine nods, “I could tell Mme. Graham de Vasily was trying her hardest not to ask for ‘exotic’ ingredients when she said we could throw in some of our ‘eclectic’ specials.”
Marinette shakes her head.

“Why do we do business with them?”

“The family totals a third of our business.” Marinette lets out an impressed hum, “plus, they namedrop the boulangerie pâtisserie to all their rich associates. Which brings in more business. Not to mention they overpay and are happy to do so.”

“Doesn’t mean we have to be subjected to their casual thoughtlessness.” Marinette frowns, “they probably think they’re doing us a favor and checking a few of their boxes helping out the Chinese influenced boulangerie pâtisserie.”

“I doubt they’re that thoughtful. Still, we’re getting paid. What should we make?”

“What about some egg tarts? Think that’ll be ‘eclectic’ enough for them?”

“We’ll see.”



“This is a beautiful earring.” Kagami tenderly moves some of her hair away from her ear.
“Cartilage piercings take a bit longer than lobe piercings to heal I’ll give you a care guide on what to do with your piercing.”

“Thank you for this.”

“It’s literally my job.”

With Kagami's hair only been shoulder-length, Roaar has taken to hiding inside her jacket. The jacket she is currently loosely holding in her hands. The ear piercer person said she might be more "comfortable" with the jacket off. The bluegreen-haired guy has been flirting with Roaar's poor oblivious kit ever since she walked into the shop. When Kagami carefully shrugs her jacket on, she pays for her new piercing at the front counter then leaves the shop. Roaar climbs up to the collar of her jacket.

Tomoe was in the lobby complaining about her meager accommodations and why the hell all her information wasn't sent to the correct hotel.

As the kwami of stealth, Roaar did a little digging into the Le Grand Paris computer system and found Mme. Tsurugi's information then forwarded it to the boss himself. They put her information in one of André Bourgeois' lesser-known hotels in the city. The Bourgeois' owned property all over Paris. It's how André made all his money enough to buy himself the office to become mayor.

There was *a lot* Roaar dug up on a man she's never heard of until yesterday.

Kagami was going to pierce her ear yesterday but there was an alert for all civilians to remain indoors after something called an akuma was running rampant. Roaar said "akumas" are what the butterfly miraculous wielder uses to temporarily grant superpowers to others. The only way one would run "rampant" was if it was corrupted. And for an akuma to become corrupted, their emotions and reasoning for the transformation would need to be shifted to ...less than pure motives, during said transformation.

Before returning to the hotel, Kagami stops by a clothing store. There is a large display in the shop's window for winter clothing "approved" by Audrey Bourgeois. Bourgeois. The same surname as the hotel owner. Kagami hesitantly enters the store. The place looks a bit too posh for her. Tomoe instilled a minimalistic style onto her.

"Greetings!" Kagami turns to the tall, beautiful, brown-skinned woman with her hair in light brown braids tied up in a ponytail. "I'm Charmayne. Welcome to Foreground! What can I help you find?"

"I am just... looking."

Charmayne nods, "I gotcha. If you need anything just give a holler." With a smile, she walks off to another customer.

The black-haired woman blinks at the display in the corner. ““Be like Vermilion Bug?”” She reads at the display that seems out of place in such a store. Everything in this display is polkadotted, and red and black. Kagami picks up a red and black boot in disdain. Shuddering, she puts it down. The backpack on the wall has a cartoonish drawing of a woman with her dark hair that has red streaks in a pair of high twintails swinging a yo-yo in her hands. *Vermilion Bug* is written beside her.

Kagami leaves the shop without buying anything and walks into another clothing store. This one more... modern. But this store also has a display dedicated to Vermilion Bug. There are socks, plushie toys, and berets.

Leaving the second store, she nearly bumps into a pale blond white man about to enter. “I-I’m sorry.” He stutters staring wide-eyed at her.

“It’s fine.” As he continues to stare, Kagami walks around him and leaves the store.

“*Wait!*” He runs out of the store and catches up to Kagami, “you walk fast.”

“I do so particularly when I do not wish to be bothered.”

“I can respect that.” The blond says panting, “I’m Adrien.”

“Uh-huh.”

“T-This *usually* is the part where you give me your name?”

“And why would I do that? You did not ask for my name. You demanded it, and I don’t give into demands.”

Adrien shudders, “w-wow. I-I’m sorry. Can I start again?” Kagami stops walking and regards the blond. “Hello Mademoiselle.” He bows, “my name is Adrien Graham de Vanyly. Would you do me the honor of telling me your name?”

“I won’t, M. Graham de Vanyly.”

The blond licks his lips, “p-perhaps another time then? Should we meet again? I-If I haven’t

offended or upset you again?”

“Perhaps.”

Adrien watches her walk away. Wow. Beautiful women usually just throw themselves at him. A few men too. This... This is new. And strangely welcomed. It's humbling. Adrien Graham de Vanily voted 2020's most desired eligible bachelor of Paris overlooked by a beautiful woman? Is this what regular people go through? He can't wait to attend university!



Chloé is doing her nails when Adrien returns to the hotel. “I just saw the most beautiful not masked woman in the world!”

“That's sweet of you, Adrikins. But you see me all the time.”

“I don't mean *you*.” The blonde sticks her tongue out at him. “I mean...” He pauses, “well I didn't get her name... but she was beautiful! I even told her my name and there was no reaction! Do you have any idea how that must've felt?”

“Terrible?”

“*Uplifting*! It felt like I didn't have a care in the world! I felt like a regular man should feel.”

“Adrikins, that's gross.” The blond frowns. “Classes start again on the fourth. Hope you're ready for hell. I went to collège and lycée with *the* most obnoxious girl you'd ever meet and she ended up attending the same university as me too! I swear it's just been *years and years* of bad luck piled on top of bad luck.” Chloé sighs, “I mean I get why my parents wanted to send me to public schooling. To give me a sense of what commoners go through and all that jazz. Mostly papa's idea, but that girl?” Chloé takes a deep breath, “I'd ball up my fists but I'm doing my nails polkadotted red and black for Vermilion Bug.”

“Didn't you just do your nails two days ago?”

“I got a smudge on my pinkie finger so I decided to do them all over again. By the way, what are you gonna study in university?” Adrien blinks at her, “Adrikins? Hun? You're going to school to *learn*, remember? Not just gush about Vermilion Bug.”

“W-What are you studying?”

“Business. I need to run this hotel better than papa” Chloé checks her nails, “then I have to be able to handle maman’s business as well. I’m hoping to get a degree in fashion as well. Might have to go to a different university for that though.”

Adrien frowns. “What are my options?”

“You can check all the courses on the school’s website.” Adrien takes out his phone and goes on the website. François Düpont was named after Íñigo Düpont and François Jordan, there are even statues of them. There are quite a few programs to choose from. Adrien frowns as he goes through the list. None of these sound particularly interesting to him. Huh. He can’t believe he didn’t think of thinking. Though to be honest, he never thought he’d get to this point. He was hardly expecting his mother to agree to send him to public schooling, least of all *now*. Wait... is university even public?

Oh man. He has *a lot* to learn. Maybe his brother is more knowledgeable on the subject?

Adrien sends a quick text to his brother.



“Alya!” Nora hugs her oldest younger sister tight as she exits the airport. “Damn, feels like forever since I last saw you!”

“We had a video call just yesterday.”

“Didn’t capture how big you got!” Nora puts Alya down, “I mean *damn*. Did I say damn? Because... damn! Gonna have to start carrying a bat around to chase suitors away. My legs are insured and I don’t wanna muck ‘em up on the rabble.”

“‘Rabble?’ You’ve been hanging around too many white people.” Nora busts out laughing.

“I’ve fucking missed you!” She squeezes Alya’s shoulder. “We can stay up late working on my kickboxing form and talking about girls while eating popcorn. It’ll be great! My dreads need to get done so I was hoping you could lend me a hand?”

“So I’m here as your personal trainer and hairstylist?”

“I’ve been *suffering* for three years without you! Do you have any idea how fucking hard it is to find a black hairstylist in this city? I’ll tell you. It’s pretty fucking ridiculously hard! And when I found one that motherfucker cost a fortune, and before I could get to him the shop closed down! Last time I got my hair done had to be like a year ago and Ella tried her best but...” Nora trails off with a shrug, “oh I’ll also need you to be an occasional apartment sitter.” Alya folds her arms over her chest. “Wanna hear your alternative? Ma, Pop, and the twins live at Le Grand Paris hotel where Ma works. Second nicest suite after the owners in the penthouse. You could always live there? I’m sure it’s got tons of space.”

“Fuck that. I’ve read articles. Ma is the only good thing that hotel has going for it. And I’m not about to get her ass fired because some snooty racist doorman tests my patience.”

“Did I mention how much I fucking missed you? My apartment is great. Okay, not great... but good. There’s like a park or something nearby and the school you’re transferring to is just across the park.” Alya yawns with a nod, “hop on. Let’s get you to your new home. I’ll order a pizza or something when we get there. You know everyone’s gonna wanna see you, right?”

“They can see me on New Year’s. I plan on sleeping until I wake up with an uncomfortable crick in my neck.”



“Welcome to Paris, Mme. Keynes.” Jessica pretends to be preoccupied by her phone as the two women exchange the cheek kiss greeting. Out the corner of her eye, the brunette watches the luggage trolleys being pushed toward the limousine’s trunk. The two women are chatting to each other in English.

Jessica’s eyebrows furrow as she looks at the image flashing across her phone of a young woman in a polkadotted suit swinging through the air on a string.

“Jessica, we’re going.” She follows her mother and the other woman inside the limousine. “By the way, this is Mme. Rolling.” The pink-haired woman smiles with a wave.

“It’s an honor to finally meet you.”

Jessica raises an eyebrow, “really? With all due respect, Mme. Rolling, I have never heard of

you so please forgive my skepticism.”

“Skepticism is good.” The woman replies. “That’ll keep you alive. My name is Penny Rolling and I am the lead agent of the organization NOV8. We are a team of all-female spies who investigate unnatural occurrences in the world.” Penny holds out a black card with the brown infinite symbol toward the brunette, “Jessica Keynes, we want you in NOV8.”

“What?” Jessica looks over at her mother who nods.

“I’ve come to Paris to recruit several agents, and investigate the phenomenon going on involving Húdié and Vermilion Bug. Your mother is one of our finest agents.”

“For the sake of conversation, let’s say I agree to this? What will I be doing?”

“You will be trying to recruit Vermilion Bug to NOV8. In six months there has never been an interview of the hero. She simply shows up when there is danger, deals with said danger, then disappears.”

“I know nothing about this ‘Vermilion Bug’ and I have no interest in playing spy in order to find out. I am simply in Paris to attend François Düpont University.”

Barbara frowns at her daughter. “I’m sorry to hear you aren’t interested,” Penny begins, “but it is what it is.”

The ride is filled with awkward silence in which Barbara spends a pretty good deal making disappointed faces at her daughter who uses her phone as a distraction.

They pull up at Le Grand Paris. Barbara and Penny exit the limo first followed by Jessica who looks around. “Welcome to Le Grand Paris!” A sweaty middle-aged balding white man greets with his arms spread out wide. “We’ve been expecting you, Mme. Keynes! Please, come in! Come in!” The man does a double-take at Penny. “O-Oh! Mme. Rolling. I-I had no idea you’d be here. Shall we prepare a room for Jagged Stone?”

“Oh no. No, no.” The pink-haired woman shakes her head. “I’m here on my own. Jagged is still in Britain visiting family before he goes back on tour.”

“In that case, shall we prepare one of our finest rooms for you?”

“No thank you, I’m not staying. But I appreciate the offer.”

“Of course, of course!” The man hastily snaps his fingers and all the bellhops grab luggage trolleys and roll them out the lobby. The Keynes family are so high profile it’s no wonder the man is pulling out all the stops for them.

Jessica rolls her eyes. Next thing she knows, the owner’s child is gonna appear in their hotel room and offer a flimsy veil of friendship. Hopefully, this extended stay hotel is better than the last few they were in.

When the elevator arrives, Jess is the last to enter inside and she can barely fit with her mother, and all the bellhops and their trolleys inside. She manages to squeeze out and gasp for air. “I’ll take the next one.” Her mother gives her a disapproving stare but the elevator door shuts before she can say anything. Jessica sighs in relief then frowns realizing she doesn’t know what room she’s staying in. The brunette takes a step back and sees the elevator going all the way up to the – damn – to the top floor. So much for taking the stairs.

While Jessica waits for the elevator, any elevator, she’s joined by a short black-haired woman and a blonde, both arriving separately yet at the same time. The blonde is angrily texting on her phone and making annoyed noises every few seconds while the black-haired woman is completely still. The middle elevator opens and the three of them enter.

“Ah! How lucky am I to be greeted by such beauty!” The elevator guy says. He flinches when the black-haired woman eyes at him with a blank stare. “W-Which floor?” He asks meekly.

“Seventh.” Is what the black-haired woman says at the same time the blonde and Jessica say “penthouse.”

The blonde lowers her phone, “you’re going to the penthouse?” Jessica nods, “have we met? I don’t think we’ve met. I would’ve remembered seeing someone as pretty as you. Are you staying in the other penthouse suite?”

“This hotel has *two* penthouse suites?”

“Yeah, well. My papa owns it and my maman and I live in there. But he made an additional penthouse suite – that’s next door but not connected – for other high-profile guests. Then on the floor below we have other luxury suites. I’m Chloé.”

“Jessica.”

The elevator reaches the seventh floor and the black-haired woman exits. When the doors close behind her, the elevator guy sighs in relief. “There was something terrifying about her.”

“Why? Because she wasn’t here for your sexist bullshit?” The blonde asks with an eyebrow raised. “Are you even certified? Because your comment teeters on sexual harassment.”

“Calling beautiful women beautiful is sexual harassment?! M-Mlle. Bourgeois, I don’t—”

“Save it. You’re at work, aren’t you? Be a little more professional. When I’m running the shots at this hotel, if you pull shit like that again you will be fired. Just a heads up.” Jessica lets out an impressed hum. The man stiffens for the remainder of the ride. Then timidly bows his head as they exit the elevator. “I swear the scum papa has hired...” The blonde shakes her head, “we should have breakfast tomorrow?”

“Sounds good.” Chloé nods, “this is your suite.” The blonde opens the door and Jessica gasps. This... This is as big as their two-bedroom apartment! “I’ll be there.” Jessica turns around and sees the long hallway and Chloé is pointing to the only other door beside the elevator door. Only two of the three elevators go all the way up to the penthouse suite(s).



Tomoe decided to take a virtual tour of the city while simultaneously trying to find a way to leave the city. She should’ve guessed the “opportunity” she got an e-mail about was bullshit. Or spam. To be able to introduce her family’s A.I.s and automated assistants worldwide was too good to be true. French was not one of the languages Tomoe was taught as a child but she – if nothing else – is a quick study. Since the plane ride, Tomoe has been listening to French language learning audiobooks. She had Kagami do the same but even with the headphones on, Tomoe heard her daughter snoring.

Hmmm. Speaking of her daughter, Kagami has been behaving rather strangely as of late. Must be whatever is going on with this city.

It felt like there was some kind of soul living in the city itself. Tomoe needs to get the hell out of here.

Tomoe hears the door open and recognizes Kagami’s footsteps, “how was your shopping

trip?”

“Odd. The city appears to be obsessed with a ladybug cosplayer.”

Tomoe hums, “so I’ve heard. They call her Vermilion Bug. Evidently, she’s the city’s ‘home-grown’ superhero. It’s been six months since her arrival and the city seems to be celebrating it even though they know next to nothing about her and only see her when there is danger.”

“Ah. I should check the news.”

“What did you purchase?” Kagami pauses which makes Tomoe curious.

“Earrings.”

“Earrings?” Tomoe repeats.

“It was as if they spoke to me. I also got my ears pierced so that I may wear the earrings.”

Tomoe hums, “you were gone for hours and all you purchased was earrings?”

“There wasn’t anything of interest beside the earrings.” Unconvinced, Tomoe simply hums.

let your true self shine

Paris, France

Thursday, December 31st, 2020

Alya slowly opens her brown eyes then immediately shuts them when she yawns. Still laying in the bed, she blindly feels around for her phone then squeezes something squishy. “Hey! Get a kwami some cheese first!”

“Sorry, Plagg.” Alya rolls over then grabs her glasses and phone from the nighttable. Nora had her apartment set up in a way that Alya just *knew* it was their mother who did the decorating.

Evidently..., yesterday wasn’t just a bizarre dream. She truly *did* obtain a supernatural creature partner that comes with a magical ring. Shouldn’t she be freaking out about this? ...Or reacting at all? Meh. Probably still suffering from jetlag. It may have been first-class but airplane seats are airplane seats. They could be heated, plush, and equip with built-in massagers and still be uncomfortable as hell.

Twenty-three missed calls; nineteen from her mother and the rest were from some of her friends who dropped her off at the airport. With another yawn, Alya puts her phone back down. Plagg yawns then floats off of the nighttable over to Alya’s lap. “What’s on the agenda for today? Gonna transform? Show you what you’re working with?”

“Yeah, sure. But first I’ll have to see my ma and the rest of the fam. No getting out of that.” Alya yawns again, “then after that, I’ll have the day free to explore the city.”

“It’s New Year’s Eve.”

“Right.” Alya slowly sits up then stretches. “I think exploring the city transformed might be a good way to see everything in a short amount of time.”

“Did I mention I like the way you think? Once you have the ring on, you say ‘Plagg, claws out’ to transform then ‘claws in’ to return to normal.”

Alya toys with the ring on her middle left finger, “then what?”

“Then... the rest is up to you.” Plagg beams.

Alya gets up from bed, “I imagine a magical ring will be waterproof. I can shower and wash my hands and wash dishes and stuff with it?” Plagg nods. “Let me take a shower.”

After Alya’s finished showering and getting ready, Plagg blow dries her hair. Alya had to admit it was easier with, uh, some extra appendages... paws, nubs, flippers, flaps; whatever the fuck Plagg had. However, it took the kwami four times to be able to hold the comb without fingers to grip the handle. “I don’t understand why you’re bunching up all this beautiful hair! It needs to be free!”

“Is there something you’re not telling me? Are you only sticking around with me because of my hair?”

Plagg flies into Alya’s ponytail nuzzling her hair, “I like *you*, Kit. The hair is a glorious, glorious bonus.” Alya shakes her head fondly.

As Alya’s putting in her earrings, the door opens. “Alya!” As Alya turns around, her mother embraces her. “I’m so glad to see you!”

“Ma! *Air!*”

“Whoops!” Laughing, Marlana releases her daughter. “Sorry.” She loosens her hold and Alya takes a deep breath, “I know you were too tired to function yesterday, being on such a long flight. Did you sleep well?” Alya nods, “that’s good. I’m so glad to see you.”

“You already said that, ma.”

“Have you been practicing your French?”

“Yes, ma. Not fluent in it. I mean, I kinda can’t be since the past week where you asked me the same question.”

“I know. I *know*! I worry. I’m sorry.” Marlana squeezes Alya one more time before letting go. “Maybe we should try speaking French now? Help you practice?”

“I’m good. Let’s just stick to English for now? I’m practicing.”

“Okay. Know I just worry about you. I don’t want you to get lost or led astray because you’re not fluent in the language.” Marlena clears her throat. “So, I had the day off of work and I just had to see you!”

“The hotel let their ‘chef de cuisine’ have the busiest night of the year off?”

“Apparently, you *can’t* work every major holiday.” Marlena shrugs, “who knew? I’m just glad the whole family will be together to ring in the new year. Right...!” Marlena puts the key in her hands in Alya’s. “Your house— *apartment* key. Don’t worry about how I’m getting in, I made a spare.”

“Figured that.”

“You’re growing up so fast! Imagine, you’re going to be twenty in just a few hours. My New Year’s baby.” Marlena kisses Alya on the forehead, “*ooh*. Your hair smells so nice! I *knew* you’d like the shampoos I bought. I still know my daughter. But honey, shouldn’t you wear your hair out? Wearing it in a ponytail every day causes breakage. I only have to wear my hair in a ponytail or bun because of service-related regulations.”

“I figured on the busiest night of the year, having my hair out is just asking for trouble.”

“...You plan on going out?”

“Well, like... after having dinner with you guys. Or before. Whichever.” Marlena’s face falls, “*Ma!*”

“What? What? I just thought you’d spend the whole day – the day before your birthday – with your family.”

“Ma, you said it yourself, I’m gonna be twenty.” Marlena frowns, “I’m gonna spend some time with you all. I also gotta see what the city has to offer. Find the school. Order some hair stuff because Nora says there isn’t a hairstylist in the city that can help.”

Marlena’s frown deepens, “and what about tomorrow? Do you at least plan on spending *part* of your birthday with us? I’m not working tomorrow either.”

“Yeah, I... just don’t know how much yet.”

Marlena sighs, “better than nothing. By the way, I hear Mayor Bourgeois is ‘looking into’ the lack of ‘ethnic haircare options.’”

“I sincerely hope he didn’t use the word *ethnic*.” Marlena makes a face, “and that’s the clown you work for?” Clicking her tongue, Marlena nods. “So you don’t just wear your hair in a ponytail because you can’t style it?”

“I can style it. I stopped perming my hair. Kept falling out. I still use the straightening iron but I’m getting serious breakage putting it in a damn ponytail almost daily. I think I’m just gonna cut it short and grow it out all over again.”

“I’m already signed up to be Nora’s personal hairstylist. Just tell me when and I’ll do your hair too.”

“I don’t expect you to squeeze me into your busy schedule to do my hair.”

“If it’s like a biweekly thing I can do it. You’d rather a stranger putting their hands in your hair?”

Marlena sighs, “you have a point. I’ll pay you... about half I’d pay a stylist since you’re my daughter.” Alya laughs. “If you’re looking for places to look around at, you can come with me back to the hotel. Just for a bit!” Marlena holds up her hands defensively, “to see the taxpayers money at large.”

“I wanna see it for the first time when I see you guys later. Be in awe and all that.”

“Fine, fine.” Marlena kisses Alya on the forehead, “I had errands to run and I was hoping to catch you here before you left... you know, without a key?”

“I didn’t wanna say anything but Nora beat you to the punch.”

Marlena gasps, “she didn’t!”

“She did. I have a spare key.” Alya takes the necklace from behind her shirt collar and shows

Marlena. “But I can always use a spare spare.”

Marlena closes her hands over Alya’s. “See you later tonight. What time will you be over?”

“Ma, don’t you even think about cooking. We’ll order something.”

Marlena huffs a laugh, “on the busiest night of year? You need reservations to order anything during the last week of the year. Fortunately, your father already handled the food situation. All I have to do is turn the oven on. Assuming he’ll even let me do *that*.”

“Do you want me to watch the whatever drop with you guys or just dine and dash?”

“I’d much rather watch the year end then the next begin with you.”

“Then I—*Nora and I* will be over like ten? Is that cool?”

“What the hell are you going to—” Marlena stops herself then takes a deep breath, “—that is acceptable.”



It was the worst idea in the world to brave the streets of an unfamiliar city on an international holiday, *but* Tomoe Tsurugi is very superstitious. They had to celebrate the upcoming year just right or they’d be cursed. Or something to that effect.

Kagami squints at the sign with a sigh. After Tomoe got them banned from three different stores, she decided to head back to the hotel and delegate all the shopping to Kagami. “Cheer up, Kit,” Roaar says, “if we transform, you might be able to cover more ground.”

“I doubt I could enter an establishment dressed as a tiger, Roaar.”

“This ‘Vermilion Bug’ does.” Roaar gestures to a smoothie shop that has Vermilion Bug drinking a cup of iced tea. Kagami hums then shakes her head.

“Come on.” Roaar shrugs nestling themselves in Kagami’s hood as she takes pictures of the directory sign on her phone. Roaar’s ears twitch and they pop their head up and look around

with narrowed eyes.

“Help!” Someone shouts, “that man just stole my purse!” The people in the area begin murmuring.

Kagami turns around just as someone runs past her and she grabs them by the collar yanking them back. The previously frantic yelling woman pauses mid-step staring wide-eyed at Kagami. As their head got yanked back, it reveals a head of hot pink hair. A bespectacled guy glares up at Kagami. Kagami takes the purse then hands it to the woman before releasing the would-be purse snatcher before they put their hood back on then run off.

“Thank you, but you just let him go. Why didn’t you turn him over to the police?”

“There was no crime to report.”

“He stole my purse! What if he goes after someone else?”

“That isn’t my problem. Excuse me, I need to be going.” The woman gasps as Kagami walks away. She turns to glare at Kagami, and Roaar pokes their head out of the hood and sticks their tongue out. The woman does a double take but the streets are clearing out.

“You know, it’s nice when you get a kit that doesn’t need basic hand-to-hand combat or defensive skills. It’s honestly a first for me.” Kagami hums. “I didn’t see any Japanese anything in the directory and we can’t order anything online and expect it to arrive before the year ends.”

Kagami stops walking and clinches her fists at her side. “She is just so... short-sighted sometimes.” Roaar pats her shoulder, “thank you. And I apologize.”

“Don’t. I’m your partner. I wanna learn as much as I can about you.”

Kagami smiles. “Alright then, I wish to learn more about you as well.” Roaar beams then Kagami starts walking again. “We’ll have to find appropriate substitutes for everything on this list. I saw a Chinese-influenced boulangerie pâtisserie on the directory. Let’s hope they do custom orders.”



Alya looks up from her phone at the cozy-looking ice cream parlor across the street then does a double-take at her phone frowning. “The hell? This isn’t a coffee shop.” She squints at the phone then looks up at the building again. “This map-app needs an upgrade.” She grumbles. Oh well, she’s already here. Maybe they have coffee-flavored ice cream? As she’s crossing the street, she sees a blonde open the door – backing facing Alya – and another girl – with black hair from what Alya can see – walking out of the shop. The blonde sticks her foot out tripping the black-haired girl who has a large drink in her hands. While Alya isn’t fast enough to save the drink, she catches the girl before she faceplants onto the sidewalk.

“Why don’t you watch where you’re going, Dupain-Cheng?” The blonde says haughtily. Before she can walk into the shop, Alya grabs her by her ponytail.

“Not so fast, Blondie!”

“*My hair!*” The girl cries then slips sending her backwards onto the concrete beside them. She screams in frustration and Alya only lets go of her hair in surprise. With a wince, the girl gingerly sits up and rubs her back. Then she feels up as much of her ponytail as she can while glaring at Alya, “I don’t know who you are, but you just made a fatal mistake laying a finger on me!” Alya flicks the girl on the nose. She grabs at her nose in surprise before springing to her feet and walking into the closed shop door. Grumbling under her breath, she opens the door then stomps inside the shop.

“W-Wow.” Alya belated released the girl she caught made no move to ...well she made no move, to move, at all. They both try getting up at the same time which only leads to the girl almost falling backward if Alya didn’t grab her by the jacket. “T-Thanks.”

“Let’s try and move separately?”

Nodding, the girl slowly gets to her feet – somehow – then offers a hand to Alya who grabs it and gets pulled up. “Thanks. I actually have to thank you twice. That was amazing. *You* were amazing. No one would *ever* think to do that to Chloé Bourgeois.”

“Should I know that name?”

The girl gasps, “y-you don’t know? T-Then that’s probably why. She’s the mayor’s daughter and I’m fairly certain the mara as well. But worse than that, her maman is *The* Queen of Fashion! She runs Fashion Empire magazine! She’s just as bad as her daughter, maybe even

worse! They say anyone who crosses her spends an undetermined amount of time rethinking all their life decisions that lead to the thought of getting on her bad side!”

“That’s a bit much, isn’t it?”

“She leads the underworld and endorses Vasily®!”

“Didn’t the creator die from being overworked?”

“That was the official story.” The girl sighs, “but it could’ve been one of those his wife murdered him and we all know it but have no proof stories.” She sighs again. “Gabriel Agreste was an inspiration. Made me want to get into fashion designing.”

“You design?” The girl blushes then nods, “awesome! I—” Alya’s phone pings loudly with a notification. She pauses then looks for her phone that she spots on the floor that’s near the shop door. However, before she can reach the door the girl from earlier comes out and steps on Alya’s phone.

“*Oops.*” To add insult to injury, she pours her piping hot coffee onto Alya’s phone. “I was gonna throw this at *you*, but this is just as good.” She pours the entire, extra large drink onto Alya’s phone then drops the cup on it and walks off whistling. She smartly walks away in the opposite direction. The black-haired girl held onto Alya’s arm before she could lunge.

“See? Messing with the Bourgeois’ just means you’ll get messed with back, tenfold.” Alya picks up her wet, sparking, partially melted phone. (Damn, how hot was that coffee? Petty Blondie must’ve ordered it extra hot.) How did Alya’s phone even... ah! She must’ve tossed it aside to grab the black-haired girl. “I’m sorry about your phone.”

“I’m not. I was due for an upgrade.”

The girl chuckles, “you’re an optimist. That’s... refreshing. My name’s Marinette. Marinette Dupain-Cheng. What about you?”

“Alya. Alya Césaire.” They shake hands then greet with a cheek kiss.

“Come on, Alya. I owe you a coffee.” Slightly taller, Marinette puts an arm around Alya’s shoulder and they walk into the shop. “I’m just about due for a phone upgrade too.”

“Does that girl always mess with you?”

“Yeah. I made the unfortunate mistake of mouthing off to her when we first met and she hasn’t let me forget it.”

“I gotta ask: how long ago did you meet?”

“Nine. Years.” Alya whistles. “Yeah, I know. I’m a masochist.”

“I was gonna say you’re incredible. I mean, dealing with that shit just once made me wanna punch her lights out. To deal with nine years of *that*? You must be remarkably strong-willed.”

“N-No, just really stubborn.”

“Same thing.”

“Such a joy to see you return! I heard about the issue and express my concern.” Alya blinks at the smiling man behind the counter, “have a coffee on the house. For free! It’s the least I could do for what you’ve done for me!”

“Thanks, André. I’ll have the drink I just had and didn’t get to taste... and I’ll pay for whatever Alya wants.”

The man tsks, “I said for free. That goes as well for your buddy.”

Alya massages her temples. Rhyming. It’s her third-grade english teacher all over again. And she failed that class. (The only class she’s ever failed, though she managed to move up to the next grade anyhow.) Deciding not to comment on the rhyming, lest she start up *more* rhyming, Alya simply looks up at the menu. An ice cream parlor and coffee shop? Interesting. But maybe they should put a coffee shop on the sign outside not to deter folks. “Uh... what is the ‘vermilion?’ It doesn’t say what’s in it.”

“Ah yes. The vermilion. It’s quite a test. It’s the official drink endorsed by simply the best! Our city’s hero Vermilion Bug needs a constant caffeine boost saving us continuously. And she does so miraculously.”

““Vermilion Bug?””

The man points at the sign with a person dressed as a giant ladybug hanging upside down from a yo-yo string. “Two days ago was six months exact since we’ve first been blessed to have the hero come and clean up the mayor’s mess.”

Marinette briefly glances at Alya as a haunted look crosses her face briefly before she covers it up with a forced grin. “A superhero? Interesting. I... I guess I’ll try. Unless there are nuts in there? I have an allergy to peanuts and tree nuts.”

“Fear not! The vermilion drink... well I will keep it a secret. I won’t spoil the fun. To see what you think! But rest assured, there is nothing that will hurt. Of this I am sure.”

“I have a spare epi-pen, just in case.” Marinette whispers with a smile.

“Alright, one vermilion please.” The man nods then gets to fixing the drinks. “Are you doing anything, Marinette? I could use a tour guide around the city, if you aren’t too busy?”

Marinette smiles brightly. “I’d love to give you a tour of the city. How long have you been here?”

“Just arrived yesterday.”

“And you headed right for the coffee shop? A woman after my own heart.” Marinette giggles cutely, “also, your French is amazing.”

Alya smiles, “thanks. Still learning but I have a great tutor.” With Plagg in her ponytail, he’s been translating everything to Alya and providing her with the translation of her replies. Alya’s pauses in speech are normal for one who isn’t fluent in a language; she needs to make sure she’s translating everything correctly. And Marinette doesn’t seem to mind.

“With the added caffeine boost, we should be able to handle the influx of last-minute New Years’ partygoers.”

Alya checks the time on the clock on the countertop. “It’s only 3pm.”

“That’s when the partygoers surface. Everyone gets this idea that if they arrive early they’ll get their pick of the parking spot and all the hors d’oeuvres but with everyone thinking the same pandemonium sets in as soon as the party kicks off.”

Alya whistles, “that’s wild.” After getting their drinks and thanking the owner, Alya offers Marinette her elbow and the black-haired girl takes it.

“Do you have any family in the city? Can’t imagine you arriving on New Year’s Eve’s... Eve without coming to see family? B-But I don’t want to presume anything!”

“No, no, you’re right. I’m here for my family. My parents barely let me finish my first semester of university before making me come down here.”

“I don’t mean to pry but where were you? I mean, who were you staying with if your parents are here?”

“Aunts and cousins and junk. Couple of friends. I’d couch hop. Wasn’t the greatest few months sleep wise but I had a shower and roof over my head.”

“Are you always so optimistic?”

“I don’t think so?” Plagg chuckles in her ear. “Maybe you’re just pessimistic?”

“Maybe... but can you blame me?”

Alya hums then she stops walking prompting Marinette to do the same, “you know what you need? A confidence boost! You can’t let people like that ruin your life. That’s letting them win. Miserable people want everyone else to feel as miserable as them! Then once they’ve succeeded, they don’t think about you anymore. Unless it’s to make you *more* miserable! You need to stop thinking about her. Who cares that she’s this or that? You mouthed off to Blondie before. You can do it again.”

“It’s not that simple.”

“It is.” Alya unloops her arm from Marinette’s to put both hands on the girl’s shoulders, “confidence is more powerful than you think. Don’t worry about what you can’t, focus on what you can.” Marinette stares at her in awe. “I know it isn’t easy to just change your way of

thinking with a snap of your fingers, so don't force it. Just let it flow naturally. One day you *will* be able to tell off Horrible Highlights again, and when you do you won't be alone because I'll be in your corner."

Marinette blinks at her, "Alya..."

"You're my friend now, Marinette, and I always look out for my friends."

Marinette blushes slightly as she stares at Alya in awe again, "y-you're amazing. So confident." Alya chuckles moving her hands to rub the back of her neck. "How do you...? We need to exchange contact..." Marinette's mood instantly deflates, "right, your phone got scorched."

"*But...*" Alya takes out a notepad from her fannypack around her waist, and shakes it with a smile. Marinette giggles.



When Marinette returns to the boulangerie pâtisserie, there is a beautiful black-haired woman walking toward her. Marinette moves aside and the woman nods her head in thanks as she leaves with a large paper bag with the shop's logo on it. Marinette blushes then takes off her outside shoes and puts on her slippers as she heads up the stairs.

Up in her room, Marinette gracelessly flops on her bed then screams into her pillow. Tikki flies out of her purse hovering over Marinette in concern. "Why are you screaming? What happened?"

Whatever Marinette just said was muffled into her pillow. Realizing this, she lifts her head. "Nothing, nothing. *Except I was body-snatched by some stranger!* What even the hell happened to me!? T-That wasn't *me* out there. I...I *giggled*, Tikki. I. Do. Not. **Giggle**. And I have never, in twenty years, **ever** been so composed around such a beautiful woman! And Alya is *easily* the most beautiful woman I've ever laid eyes upon! I-I feel so unworthy to look upon such beauty. A-And she called me her friend. Friend! We barely spent five hours touring the city. Friendships don't form that quickly! Friendship..." She plonks her head back down on the pillow with a groan.

"You know..." Marinette slowly lifts her head again, "I'd hate to tell you this, Marinette, but you wouldn't be behaving like this if you had a friend before." Marinette frowns at Tikki. "So

much for a loner ladybug, huh?”

“You said there were side effects to the miraculous—”

“Oh no.” Tikki shakes her head, “don’t go blaming this on the miraculous. It nor I have the power to change your personality. You know what I think? I think the you that you didn’t recognize is a glimpse of the true you, Marinette, not the poisonous bitter old man influencing you through his hatred since birth.” Marinette opens her mouth but Tikki flies over then puts a paw on it. “Did you feel, tell me honestly, did you feel that Alya was out to get something out of you when she spoke about being your friend?” Marinette’s eyebrows furrow. “She doesn’t know who your parents are, nor did she ask for a single thing from you. Hell, she didn’t even ask you to consider her your friend. Alya selflessly stuck her neck out for you before you were introduced. I have a good feeling about her.” Tikki moves her paw. “Alya could help your true self shine. She might even help you make more friends. Furthermore, I approve of her as your mate.”

Eyes widening, Marinette *meeps* then puts her head back down on the pillow.

“Marinette?” Gasping, Tikki floats over to Marinette’s left near her body but away from the purse that’s on her right side. Tom knocks on the trap door before opening it and looking around panting, “damn these four flights...!” He takes a deep breath. “Heard you screaming all the way from downstairs.” He blinks seeing Marinette laying face down on the bed. With a frown, he fully enters the room then walks over to his daughter. Tikki moves further down the bed with every step Tom takes toward the bed. He pats Marinette’s head, “are you alright? You know you can tell me and Sabine anything, right?”

Marinette lifts her head, “I’m gay.”

Tom stares at her then Marinette plops her head back down. “*O-Oh.*” He clears his throat. “I—hmm. Honey, that’s not something to be ashamed or unhappy about. And it absolutely isn’t something you should feel like you need to hide, not from us. Never from us. I-Is this why you’ve been so distant lately?”

Marinette slowly lifts her head with a heavy sigh. “No. I hadn’t realized I was being distant. I’m sorry for worrying you. I’ve been working on a project, and I guess I got so consumed with perfecting every detail. It’s finished now, so ...you no longer have to worry.”

Tom chuckles lightly, “we’re always gonna worry, Kiddo. No helping that. This project must be important to you, huh?” Marinette nods. “I get why you wouldn’t wanna stop when you’re in the zone, but make sure to take care of yourself too. Alright?” Marinette smiles softly

before moving to put her head back down, “wait, wait! Don’t duck back into your nook. That explains before. What’s bothering you now?”

Marinette lifts her head again, “I just developed an instant crush on the very first friend I made, today!” Then she puts her head back down.

“Are you thinking ‘romantic feelings ruin friendships?’ Is that what’s troubling you? That’s just bullshit, Honey. I speak from experience. Romance didn’t ruin my friendship with Sabine. In fact, it strengthened it. It allowed us to date, have you, then eventually get married and open a boulangerie pâtisserie. Now, I know your relationship won’t be nearly as good as mine but I say it’s worth taking a shot.”

Marinette lifts her head again then sighs heavily, “yeah, okay. I’d take whatever relationship I can get with her. She smells like morning dewdrops and—” Marinette lowers her head again.

“And you just met her *today*, huh? She must’ve had quite an impact on you.” Marinette lifts her head again and this time, she’s beaming. Tom smiles, “tell me all about it then.”



Alya loosens her hair from its ponytail and shakes her hands through her loose hair, fluffing it up and out. “I approve of Freckles. She’d make an excellent mate. I can just imagine the miniature kits. And she smells like fresh bread.” Plagg moans. “That’s one of my top five non-cheese smells. When are you seeing her again?”

Alya begins changing her clothing. “When I get a new phone?”

Plagg hums, “makes sense. And she’s probably with her and our soon-to-be family tonight.” Alya chuckles. “That blonde, however,” He scowls, “she made my whiskers twitch. And I can’t stop smelling the burnt, decaying scent of overpriced perfume. She needs to be destroyed if you want Freckles to have any chance of happiness.”

“I can’t just kill her... can I?”

“What?! Why did you immediately go to killing?!”

“Because it sounded like you wanted a permanent solution!”

“I *do*, but we gotta exhaust all our options first! Besides, you never throw away scraps. She might have her uses.”

“She *might* and she might not.”

“Well, let’s not jump directly into murder, okay?”

“Did I hear the word murder? You just got here! Who are you planning on murdering?” Nora walks into the bedroom then pauses at the sight of the floating ...thing next to her sister, “and what the fuck is that?”

Plagg floats over to her and Nora furrows her eyebrows, “nice ta meet ya, name’s Plagg. My kit here and I are partners, since she found my miraculous.” Alya lifts her left hand and wiggles her fingers; Nora stares at the gold and silver ring on her middle finger as she takes off her earrings and bangles from her wrist.

“Uh-huh. And what does that mean?”

Alya turns around, “I haven’t decided yet. For now, I’m just gonna use the miraculous to look around the city.”

Nora raises an eyebrow, “you sure that’s a good idea? It’s New Years’ Eve, and I already got a call from ma telling me to make sure we’re over there by ten.”

“Relax. Superpowers.” Alya says with a grin.

“Nah-uh.” Nora walks off, “wait right there!” She yells from another room. Plagg glances at Alya who shrugs in reply. Nora returns with a box in her hands, “better late than never.” Alya opens the box, “a communication set.”

Plagg stares at the contents of the box then up at Nora. “Are you a seer?”

“What?”

“Can you see into the future?”

“No.” She and Alya stare at each other briefly and the latter shrugs. “When we were younger, we used to have walkie-talkies. Used them all the time, even if we were in the same room. Gave them to the twins and they still use them. I didn’t think we could walk around with colorful walkie-talkies and I didn’t see any solid color ones, so I found a more discreet way of keeping in contact. Especially now that she’s gonna prowls around the city like Catwoman.”

“I *could* see myself stealing jewelry and other finery. A literal cat burglar. Robin Hood with claws.” She pauses then looks at Plagg, “I’m gonna get claws, right?” Plagg nods. “The next Arsène Lupin.” Alya rubs her hands together beaming, “steal from the rich and, after I’ve taken a small percentage, distribute the wealth around!”

“There’s one problem with this admittedly ambitious idea of yours, Little Sis. Vermilion Bug doesn’t take kindly to thievery.”

“Then I’ll just have to not get caught.”

“Isn’t she the greatest?” Plagg beams floating back over to Alya and nuzzling their faces together, “the greatest mind I’ve ever partnered with.”

“That statement does not bode well for my mental health right now.” Nora pinches the bridge of her nose then sighs, “I thought you’d wanna, you know, be a hero with superpowers?”

Alya scoffs, “that harbor’s been destroyed and its ashes lit on fire. I got a personal lesson on how ‘superheroes’ aren’t out to save anyone without money. They cater to the rich. Then again, a lot of superheroes are just bored rich people. They’re another whistle for the police to blow, but with superpowers. Rich people embezzle from their employees and no one bats an eye. Regular people steal much-needed baby formula and they’re in jail for life. Everyone says ‘they were in the wrong.’ No one thinks baby formula is stupid expensive when it shouldn’t have to be! I can help. Or, I can try to help. If I can steal some money or some baby formula and distribute it to those in need, I could do what superheroes are *supposed* to do. Of course, that’ll just brand me a ‘villain’ or ‘vigilante’ because I’m only taking money from the rich. Vermilion Bug wants to stop me? She’s welcome to try.”

“I hear you, and threat aside, I’m with you. But for what it’s worth? I think you’d be a damn good hero.” Alya smiles lightly, “now, as far as work goes, I don’t think Vermilion Bug should be your target. And I’m not just saying that because she has a great ass. She usually

shows up after the cops fail and I know sometimes they fail deliberately to get the time off. You should focus on taking down the ‘civil servants’ of the city. Húdié sends out akumas to ‘help with emotional turmoil.’ He’s hit ‘victims’ by powering them up and have them taking on robbers or whatever else. I’ve seen cops abuse that akuma power.”

“Akumas can get corrupted if the mindset behind the one afflicted shifts negatively.” Alya and Nora stare at each other then both grin. “Ooh. You were right about her needing to know about this. What are you two planning?”

“First order of business is: get better, more secure communication equipment. And weapons, gadgets, things to protect ourselves.”

“Uh, you don’t have to worry about Alya, Big Sis. I’m giving her superpowers, including the ability to destroy objects with a single touch. Plus, I am also giving her the ability to redistribute bad luck around.”

Nora looks at the kwami unimpressed. “Is she bulletproof?”

Plagg’s ears droop, “no?”

“Superspeed?” Plagg’s ears droop even lower. “I’m not doubting your power but you gotta understand where I’m coming from. This is my oldest little sister. My partner in crime. The only person I literally cannot remember living without. I’d die for her and I’d certainly kill for her. Once the cops see her skin color, they won’t hesitate to use deadly force. Prompting me to use deadly force in retaliation. Ma struggled *a lot* when it was just me and Alya, before she got her ‘big break?’ And even now, the most famous chef in the world? She’s still not considered ‘elite’ or any other special chef title aside from ‘celebrity chef.’ They say she’s so ‘humble’ because she’s not the stereotypical angry slash loud black woman. If they knew the accolades they dismiss because of her skin color...” Nora shakes her head, “we don’t get a do-over, Cat-Thing. Not with this. If we make a mistake and Alya gets hurt or worse by trigger-happy racist assholes, I am gonna end up going in the electric chair for murdering an entire police precinct for killing my little sister.” Plagg and Alya both whistle. “We’re doing this smart. No mistakes. No ways to track us.” Alya and Plagg both nod, “good. And you might as well let me know what else there is to know.”

“Good thinking. You’ll need to know how to transform, in case Alya is unable to.”

“Uh... I am not agreeing to that until I know what I’m working with. I have a strict no-latex clothing policy. That shit chafes.”

“No leather, no latex. You select on what you wanna wear, but if you end up overthinking it you’ll just get a plain outfit.”

Alya puts one of the communication devices in her ear and hands Nora back the box with her glasses on it. “Time for a test run. Plagg, claws out!”

Nora’s eyes widen as Plagg flies into Alya’s ring and it pulses. “Holy fuck!”



An akuma flies into Marinette’s bedroom through the skylight window as she is searching through her closet. “Marinette.” She jumps then turns around wide-eyed. When she spots the akuma, she frowns then goes back to looking in her closet. “Marinette, focus. I felt the cat miraculous activate.”

“If you can do that, surely you can locate it.”

“No, I cannot.” Marinette rolls her eyes when she turns back to the akuma, “I saw that.”

“Of course you did. Apparently, you can only see what’s in front of you. You’ll excuse me if I don’t give a shit. I’m looking for my New Year’s outfit. Whatever additional task you have for me to complete is going to have to wait. I’m through putting your bullshit before my family.”

“Marinette, I know these seems unfair—” Marinette scoffs, “but, as I’ve told you, *you* are the one who resonates with the ladybug miraculous. Now that I have selected you, I cannot select another.”

“Yeah, yeah. And I can’t renounce the power either. I’ve heard the speech. Oh? And by the way, now that I have you? Listen to me very carefully. I do not want a team. I do not *need* a team.”

“Don’t be foolish, Marinette.”

“I’m sorry but which of us wasn’t given a choice in this matter? ‘It befalls upon the ladybug

—”

“Yes, I-I am aware of the words I spoke. The ladybug miraculous is needed. *You* are needed. I...I apologize. I should not have let you do this alone for as long as you have. I should’ve looked for other wielders from the beginning.”

“Obviously. I don’t forgive you, but what’s done is done. Get your little team together and have *them* look for your cat miraculous. I’m not going on a wild goose chase tonight. I am going to ring in the new year with my parents.”

“Marinette—”

“No! You listen to *me*, Húdié! You told me this last minute so I’ll get to it as soon as I’ve available! Did you think I’d just jump up and go searching for you immediately?” Shaking her head, Marinette pulls out an all-black romper from her closet then hangs it on the closet door. “Am I just your miraculous catcher? No. Don’t answer that. Shoo, akuma, before I summon the miraculous ladybugs.” The akuma flutters away and Marinette thumps her head against the closet door, “fucking hell...” She grumbles.

Tikki flies over to Marinette, “master seems really worried.”

Marinette slowly turns her head in Tikki’s direction, “how’d he lose the miraculouses anyway?”

“I can’t tell you. And I’m not saying that to be difficult, I mean I literally have no idea. None of us were active except for Kaalki. One minute we were being polished, the next master is telling us a few miraculouses were gone. The... time in-between those two actions is iffy. Time passes differently inside the box. Judging by the vagueness, I can only assume he made a terrible mistake.”

“People make terrible mistakes all the time, Tikki. Mine was helping an old man cross the street.” She stands up straight. “Not looking for the cat, but I will do my usual patrol. Let’s go Tikki. Spots on.”

“Wait!” Before Tikki flies into the earring, she pulls it off Marinette’s ear.

“I had no idea you could do that.”

“Neither did I. You should come up with an excuse for your parents.”

“I don’t need an excuse. I already have a valid reason.” Marinette picks up a box from beside her bed then places it on the computer desk. Tikki hovers over and sees the box.

“What is this?”

“Chinese plums.” Tikki stares at Marinette, “it’s New Year’s Eve. We have to clean our insides and our outside as well as we clean the house. It’s tradition. And I already ate some, so we’re making this a quick patrol.” Tikki nods then puts the earring back in Marinette’s ear. “Spots on, Tikki.”



Audrey stomps her foot angrily, standing in front of the butler. “What do you mean Vermilion Bug **denied** the invitation to bring in the new year here?! How ridiculous! Utterly ridiculous! Are you sure this is a superhero? **No one** refuses an invitation from Audrey Bourgeois! What could *possibly* be more important than meeting me!?”

“She—”

Audrey holds up a hand, “I don’t want to hear it! She didn’t reject me. **I** rejected her! From now on, she’s irrelevant. Utterly irrelevant! Bring me the next famous hero and invite them here.”

“Vermilion Bug is the city’s only hero, Mme. Bourgeois.”

“Then go find another one!” She massages her forehead, “must I always be surrounded by incompetence?” She shoos the butler away. He bows his head then walks off, past Chloé approaching.

“Maman? Which dress is better for honoring Vermilion Bug?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Audrey replies not bothering to turn around, “she isn’t coming.” Chloé’s face falls, “and *she* no longer matters. Don’t mention that name in my presence again. We’ll

get a much more receptive guest for our event.” She turns around and walks past Chloé without looking at her outfit. Chloé sighs then grabs up her loose hair and ties it in a ponytail with the red and black polkadotted scrunchie on her left wrist. Chloé walks back into her room and puts both of her red party dresses back into her closet then closes the closet door with a sigh.

Chloé sees the shadow of something through the mirror’s reflection. She turns around with a scowl then looks around. Scowling deeper, she stomps over to the balcony then opens both the doors. “I’m not in the mood!” Her eyes widen when she sees a shadowy figure stand up fully on her balcony.

Screaming, Chloé shuts the doors and an arrow whizzes past her face shattering the glass beside her. With a startled cry, the blonde falls to her knees. Narrowly missing falling into the pool of shattered glass.

“Oh, wow. That was not my intention.” Luckily, no glass managed to get on her face. And Chloé hears footsteps approach before she looks up and sees a purple cat standing over her with a bow in their left hand. “Sorry.” They extend their right hand and Chloé takes it then gets to her feet, trying to avoid stepping barefoot on glass. “You startled me and I fired.”

For some inexplicable reason, Chloé finds herself blushing. It could be the fact – mask and all – that this is an attractive furry with a velvety, hypnotic voice she’s certain will reoccur in her wet dreams from now on. “Y-You’re going to have to pay for this.”

“I don’t exactly have pockets.”

“Shit!” They both turn to the balcony where a gloved hand is trying to grip the railing. Then another hand grabs the railing pulling a black cat up. “Whew. I nearly.... *oh*. Aww, no fair! I didn’t know I had to call dibs.”

The purple cat, much to Chloé’s dismay, walks over to the balcony and helps the black cat up and onto the balcony. “What are you talking about?”

“You’re not casing the place?”

“Who would be so stupid to try and steal from me!? I’m Chloé Bourgeois! Besides, my papa is the mayor!”

“Which means he’ll definitely be willing to pay a ransom fee~” Chloé screams.

“To be perfectly honest, I don’t think he will.” The purple cat argues.

“Oh? How do you figure?”

“André Bourgeois has proven to be nothing more than a gutless sack of slime who’d no doubt shamelessly sell his own child to protect his worthless ass.”

Chloé frowns, “...that *is* something worth finding out.” Both cats turn to her, surprised.

“What? I’m curious. I won’t even bother testing a theory like this on maman, but papa? I can’t help being curious. He often claims he’d move Heaven and Earth for me. Let’s see if those are just empty words. How about this? Since you came to steal anyway, I’ll save you the trouble and pay you both to test this theory. You may have *one* thing from this suite as payment.”

“Works for me.” The black cat gleefully brings her gloved hands together, “do you have black diamonds?”

The blonde scoffs. “Of course, I do.” Chloé beckons them both and they follow her to the armoire that she opens.

The black cat’s eyes sparkle, “shiny.” Chloé picks up a black diamond necklace from the hook it was hanging on and clasps it around the black cat’s neck. She squeals then caresses the necklace murmuring softly to it. Chloé shakes her head, fondly, then picks up an identical black diamond necklace then puts it around the purple cat’s neck.

The purple cat examines the necklace, “why do you have two of the same necklace?”

Chloé sighs, “papa has been buying me the same necklace every year for my birthday for the past four years. He may not have his personal shoppers pay attention to his purchases, but I pay attention. Especially when it comes to jewelry.”

“Maybe it’s not the same personal shopper?”

“Perhaps. I mean, I wouldn’t know. Not like papa gives me the present personally. It’s always a plain black box on my nighttable saying ‘Happy Birthday.’ Not even a personalized

message.”

The black cat whistles, “he’s definitely the worst.”

“Let’s just get this over with. I don’t blame Vermilion Bug for not wanting to ring in the new year here.” She sighs then walks over to her bed then dramatically flops back on it. “Papa? Hi! Busy?” Chloé rolls her eyes, “uh-huh. You should come see my Vermilion Bug dress! Yeah, okay. See you.” She hangs up then tosses the phone on her bed. Both cats hover over her curiously. She raises an eyebrow at them, “what?”

“I’m just an observer,” The purple cat begins, “but if your parents truly are assholes you don’t have to continue that trend.”

Chloé snorts, “then how else will I get noticed? Am I supposed to fade into obscurity like a commoner? My maman taught me one thing and that is to always be the center of attention, no matter how you do it.”

The black cat shakes her head. “Girl, it sounds like you need family therapy.”

“I have a therapist, thank you very much. And she says we’re making progress. But you’d never get either of my parents into a doctor’s office willingly.” She rolls on her stomach with a smile, “I bet you’re both pretty hot when you aren’t furries.”

“Too bad you’ll never find out.” Chloé huffs then rolls back on her back.

The purple cat taps the black cat on the shoulder, “you are aware that the guardian is searching for our miraculouses, yes? Probably too late to be thinking about it *now*, but should we cause a scene?”

“We absolutely should. I also think we should work together. Be our own badass cat duo—”

“I’m a tiger.”

“Which is just a big cat. I was going to be like a vigilante for the people. Steal from big corporations and billionaires to distribute that money to those who need it.”

“Ooh. I like that. My family is mistaken for wealthy all the time when we’re just average. It’s really the money my maman got with that lawsuit that made us get noticed.” The purple cat extends her hand, “I was thinking of basing my name off my power and go with something simple that did not obviously be a horrible feline pun.” The black cat nods in understanding as she shakes the offered hand, “how do you think Fade works? For someone with the power of intangibility and stealth?”

“I like. I wanted like an Egyptian or Caribbean theme to go with my name. Like CaribbiCat.” Fade shakes her head, “ouch. Hmm... Nergal?” Fade makes a seesawing motion with her right hand. “Whiskers Into The Void! No, no. Too long. Ooh! I got it! Bla—”

André bursts into the suite panting, “Hon—” He screams when he sees the two miraculous wielders, “akumas!” Fade unclips the crossbow from behind her back and aims it at André. “Wait! Y-You don’t want to hurt me! I-I’m the mayor! I-I have money! I know people! I can get you whatever you want!” Fade slowly moves her crossbow in Chloé’s direction, aiming at the blonde. André briefly glances at Chloé before staring back at Fade.

“What if I want her?”

“Y-You want my daughter? That’s... an odd request—”

Chloé sits up, “are you fucking serious!? You’d consider whoring me out to save your ass!?”

“W-What!? Of course not!”

“That’s what it sounds like!” Chloé gets up from the bed then stomps over to her father, “you! Are! The! Worst!” She pushes him and he falls on his back then Chloé stomps past him and leaves her room.

“Chloé, wait!” He glares up at the duo. “W-What did you do to my daughter!?”

“Opened her eyes.” André screams when Fade sails an arrow past his face, “as I will open yours. André Bourgeois, you are guilty of manipulating hotel reservation websites so that your hotel will be the only hotel anyone books.” Fade knocks another arrow on her crossbow, “you play the part of the oblivious fool well, but I will personally see to your act’s curtain call. You *will* right this wrong tonight or I fire an arrow in a painful place on your worthless body that unfortunately will not kill you, but it will make you wish you were dead.”

“Ooh. I just got shivers.” Fade smirks temporarily before her eyes harden. “Hey, I’d take the opportunity. Because me?” She unclips her baton and taps it against her gloved hand, “all I have is this blunt instrument,” Her pupils slit, “and a low tolerance for human garbage like yourself.” She taps her baton against her hands in a slow, deliberate manner repeatedly, “I’d get going if I were you. You don’t have long until midnight.”

Andre scrambles to his feet then runs out of Chloé’s room. “So, you said you had a name?”

“More like an idea for a name. Check it out. We wanna be scary while paying homage to our cultures. Therefore, I’m going with Black Sekhmet. Unless I can find a more befitting Afro-Caribbean deity name.”

“The only one I can think of off the top of my head is Anansi, and we at least want to be in the same animal family. I still don’t want to use a cat term, so I’ll just use Yūrei which is ghost in Japanese.”

“Japanese, huh? Nice.” They high-five, “what do you say we *really* ruin the mayor’s night?”

“Further? What did you have in mind?”



“You’re saying you were robbed... by two giant cats?” André sobs in his empty bedroom. Chloé is leaning against the doorframe with a smirk on her face and a cat-shaped sticky note in her hand. Raincomprix takes his cap off to scratch his head, “what about you, Mlle. Bourgeois, what did you see?”

“See? I didn’t see anything.”

André does a double-take then looks at his daughter wide-eyed, “y-you were there! You saw them!”

“Saw who, papa?” His eyes widen and he frowns looking at the floor. “I didn’t see anything. It’s New Year’s Eve, right? Who knows how many people are in costume.”

“R-Right, right.” Raincomprix puts his cap back on. “I will tell my team to... be on the search

of anyone dressed like cats who were near the area.” Then he leaves the room.

“Chloé, Princess, I know you’re angry—”

“Angry? Oh no. I’m furious! Or I *was*. Now? Now I feel vindicated.” She walks over to him then flicks the note on the floor next to him. He stares at the winking faced cat grinning at him; mocking him. In Chloé’s own handwriting. “You were always talking about ‘downsizing.’ Happy New Year’s Eve, André.” She laughs walking out of the room.

André balls up the piece of paper in his fists then gets to his feet. He still has a party to get to. He will sort out this... mess while getting donations downstairs.



“Spots off, Tikki.” Marinette slips into her window then shakes herself off, “and not a moment too soon.” She holds her gurgling stomach then runs to the bathroom.

Tikki remains in the bedroom and looks out the window. She squints seeing two blurs zip past... was that an armoire? She shakes her head. She’s probably just hungry. Marinette *did* say she could try one of the plums. And kwamis don’t, uh, cleanse the way humans do. They expel their excess... energy in other ways.

Tikki pops a plum into her mouth and moans appreciatively. She’s happily munching on the plums when Marinette comes out of the bathroom with a towel draped over her shoulders. “Sorry I took so long. I felt I needed a shower after I cleaned the bathroom. Particularly the toilet, but delving into that is gonna upset my unsettled stomach further.”

“Do you have more plums?”

Marinette walks over to the box and whistles, “that was the whole year’s supply.” Tikki frowns, “can probably get some after New Year’s. Come on, let’s grab some cookies.” Tikki perks up then flies over to Marinette, trailing after her.

As they head down the stairs, they hear voices. *Loud* voices. Tom and Sabine are at regular volume, but not these other voices. Marinette and Tikki nod to each other. Tikki flies into Marinette’s towel on her shoulders then Marinette comes down the staircase. “Evening—” She rolls her eyes when she sees the police chief and his annoying daughter standing in the

shop. “What’s going on? I thought the shop was closed?”

Sabrina narrows her eyes at Marinette who rolls her eyes in response. The bespectacled orange-haired girl bristles. “It is.” Tom replies, “as we were telling the police chief.”

“I figured, as I’m here picking up my order, that I’d ask some questions.” He hands the bag over to his daughter.

“Questions about what?” Tom asks.

“Less than an hour ago, the mayor was robbed.” Sabine gasps putting her hands over her mouth while Tom’s eyes bulge out. Marinette merely raises an eyebrow. “A pair of brazen individuals, dressed like cats... according to the mayor, wiped his bedroom clean.”

“Wait. They only stole from the mayor’s bedroom?” Everyone turns to Marinette curiously, “I-I mean, if you are going to steal from the mayor’s suite... you should steal from the entire penthouse.” She shrugs trailing off.

“That’s... an odd thing to note, Mlle. Dupain-Cheng.”

“No, it isn’t.” Sabine counters with a frown, “it’s common sense. It’s obvious whoever did this was only targeting the mayor. Instead of harassing us, why don’t you go talk to one of the mayor’s many enemies with flight capabilities because I’m certain the three of us cannot fly therefore cannot get into the mayor’s penthouse suite!”

“N-Now hold on, Mme. Cheng, I’m not accusing any of you—”

“And you’re no longer questioning us either. Leave.” He stiffens then hastily pushes Sabrina out of the shop. Sabine closes then locks the door behind him. “Honestly.” Tom soothingly pats her on the shoulders. “Dry your hair before you get a cold to ring in the new year.”

Marinette nods then walks back up the stairs.

“Psst.” Marinette pauses mid-step to see her father by the staircase, “you should talk to Sabine about... our conversation.” Marinette hesitates until Tikki pokes her then she nods and walks up the stairs all the way to her room.

“Someone robbed the mayor when I was patrolling? That’s gutsy.”

“It must be the cat miraculous wielder!” Marinette taps her chin in thought. “Master told us the miraculous activated, then next thing we know they become a literal cat burglar. That is just like Plagg.” Tikki grumbles.

“Hold on a second, Tikki. If kwamis can’t influence behavior, you can’t blame Plagg fully for this.”

Tikki pouts, “you’re right. He must’ve found someone with the same chaotic outlook as him!” Tikki shudders, “oh no! This is terrible! We need to stop them!”

“Is it that bad?”

“Have you heard of Planet Tauron?”

“No?”

“Exactly! Plagg had a chaotic match wielder and they destroyed the planet! I kinda thought that *you* were a chaotic match for Plagg, but he found someone more fitting.”

“Is it the clumsiness? Is that why?”

“No. It’s your orneriness but you can’t be fully faulted for that. However, I will place full blame on your parents for allowing someone who clearly should not be involved in childcare to assist in raising you.”

“My nonna’s less qualified. She’s in a biker gang. Only see her during the Tour de France Femmes and the annual Parisian Biker Bash. Taught me how to ride a motorcycle.”

“They’re *still* splitting up competitors by ‘gender?’ Sometimes I think this planet has regressed in thinking. All of this ‘gender separation sports’ nonsense is a recent thing.”

“Yes, Tikki, for a creature old enough to float around with dinosaurs.”

“No. For humans too. It was only in the 1950s that this started to occur.”

“Really? I *could* ask nonna.”

Tikki eyes Marinette carefully, “you don’t talk much about your nonna. Did your grandparents raise your papa?”

“Not together. They got divorced when my papa was still in primary school. They got joint custody; moved the kids – papa and his three older brothers – from house to house every two weeks. And as for not talking about nonna...? I talk to her weekly. I guess the subject of her never came up.”

“How about you tell me about your nonna and any other relatives you have that aren’t like your nonno?”

Marinette chuckles, “okay, deal. And in exchange, you can tell me about the other kwamis in the crate.”

Tikki nods. “Sounds good. Now, I was promised cookies.” Tikki flies into Marinette’s shirt collar. Marinette returns downstairs and goes in the kitchen, seeing her parents in the living area watching television.

“—ve with Police Chief Roger Raincomprix—”

The oven dings. Marinette opens a box of cookies in the cabinet as Tom enters the kitchen, “hey, you. Snacking a little early, aren’t you?”

Tikki swallows the entire cookie in her mouth without biting then hides back in Marinette’s shirt collar, then Marinette turns around grinning awkwardly, “plums, you know.”

Tom winces patting his stomach, “I ate mine earlier.”

Sabine enters the kitchen, “I hope you aren’t eating the offerings? You didn’t even eat dinner.”

“I ate my plums so I was looking for something to settle my stomach.”

Sabine sighs, “Tom made dinner, single-handedly. We aren’t letting it go to waste.”

“Of course, mā mā.” Marinette grabs two cookies then closes the box and puts it back in the cabinet. “Let me go wash my face.” She walks past her parents to the downstairs bathroom. “Hurry, Tikki.” She whispers.

Tikki flies out of the shirt then eagerly gobbles up both cookies. “So good.” Together, she and Marinette wipe off the crumbs from each other then wash their hands and faces. “What’s wrong?”

Marinette gives Tikki a small smile as she dries her hands, “nothing. Which is weird.”

Tikki grins, “ah. You’re thinking about Alya, aren’t you?”

“N-No!” Marinette stops then scowls, “well, *now* I am!”

“Deep breaths, Marinette.” Tikki flies in front of her face. “I need us to make a promise to each other. No matter what happens, I want you to do whatever feels the most right in your heart. Don’t listen to that pessimistic voice I’m certain sounds like your nonno.” Tikki puts a hand on Marinette’s chest, “*you* are my wielder, my partner, and my friend. I want *you* to be your best and truest self for this upcoming year. Wipe the slate clean, think of what *you* want not what you think someone else may want for you. I’m not one for making resolutions but I want us – together – to be the best selves we can be.”

“You aren’t being the best self you could be?”

Tikki shakes her head sadly, “I’m not being the best partner I could be. I’m not providing you with any support, I don’t back you up when Master orders you around. I’m sorry. It’s been so long that I’ve been with a partner that I forget how a partnership works. Give and take in equal measures, right?” Smiling, Marinette nods. “I vow to support you, not matter the decision, so long as you are being true to yourself.”

“Seems fair.” They gently bump their heads together, “as for me, I vow to... be me. The true me.” Taking a deep breath, Marinette looks at her reflection, “I just hope I like the true me.”

“You will. And I will too. I mean, I like you now.” Marinette pets Tikki’s head, “but look into the mirror.” Marinette obliges then gasps at her blurred, shadowy reflection. “See that tiny glowing dot, above your heart?” Marinette squints then sees a small pink dot. “Your true self is pulsing, waiting to be let out.”

“I’ve never noticed that before.” Marinette *has* noticed her reflection has always been... what’s an appropriate word? Murky? She blamed it on bad lighting and awful angles not her negative outlook. Perhaps that’s the reason her mother looks at her the way she does. Marinette gasps as the glowing dot increases in size slightly. In fact, her heart actually feels *lighter*. She takes a deep breath then steels herself. “Alright true self, you wanna shine. Let’s shine.” Alya did say confidence is more powerful than it appears. “Confidence.” Marinette says to herself. Nodding, she exits the bathroom and Tikki flies into her pants pocket.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!