

# Tsuru no Hi

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## Morning

Paris had endured a sleepless night beneath the shadow of an akumatized boy. Jules, just twelve years old, had swept from one soccer park to the next—starting with his own middle school. His powers left every field battered: goals bent, benches splintered, turf scarred by his furious passage. Ladybug and Cat Noir had chased him for hours, their exhaustion mounting with every missed opportunity. No matter what they tried, Jules, now the Dribbler, transformed and driven by the dark energy coursing through the corrupted soccer ball at his feet, always managed to evade them, pivoting on his strong side, circling away from every trap.

As dawn crept across Paris, the city grew anxious. News vans lined the streets, crowds gathered by damaged parks, and fear clung to every hopeful face. The heroes knew they were losing ground.

It was then, with the city fraying in the early light, Ladybug called for help. Kagami had spent the night ready, feeling a quiet hope she might be called to action. When summoned, she arrived as Ryuko, her presence injecting fresh resolve into the team. Watching Jules closely, Kagami's practiced eye soon picked out an oddity: in all his dazzling moves, he avoided putting weight on one foot, always arcing away in the same direction. His bulky, exaggerated soccer boots made the reason unclear, but the pattern was undeniable.

During a brief, harried regroup, Kagami shared her observation. Though neither Ladybug nor Cat Noir understood the hidden cause, her insight cracked the code of Jules's evasions. Together, they prepared to end the battle. As Jules gathered for one more rush across the battered turf, Ryuko intercepted him, blocking the route he always took. Ladybug's yo-yo snapped out, winding expertly around the corrupted soccer ball, just as Cat Noir charged in, unleashing his Cataclysm. The dark power shattered in his grasp, freeing the butterfly and breaking the spell.

When silence fell, reality returned with a heavy sigh. Jules—the costume and powers stripped away—collapsed onto the torn field, tears wracking his small frame. Only then, as Kagami knelt beside him, did she truly see: his right foot turned inward, unmistakably marked by the club foot that had shaped so much pain. Jules sobbed into his hands, shame bursting through exhaustion. "I just wanted to be picked by a team for the lunchtime game ONCE!" His voice cracked, the secret at last spoken.

Kagami's features softened. She rested in quiet empathy, then spoke, her words poised and honest: "I, too, was once akumatized. I understand how it feels. I know what it is to fall. But you are only defeated if you refuse to rise." She reached out both hands and, after a moment's hesitation, Jules gripped them. With careful strength, Kagami helped him rise from the ground, steadying him with respect rather than pity.

A few steps away, Ladybug tried to catch Kagami's words, moving closer. Cat Noir gently stopped her, laying a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "Cats have good hearing," he murmured. "But what she said was not for us. Just trust that she said the right thing."

Ladybug nodded and watched. Kagami stood beside Jules as the city's morning light grew stronger. For Paris, and for Jules, the healing had begun. Jules departed, shielded from prying eyes by Ryuko and the spectacle of the Miraculous Ladybug effect. Eventually, Ladybug and Cat Noir approached Ryuko, who was still and contemplative. Ladybug touched Kagami's shoulder as the gathering crowd cheered. "Couldn't have done it without you."

Cat grinned. "Sharp eyes, Ryuko. You saved our tails."

Kagami bowed her head slightly, but inside she felt something rarer than the satisfaction of duty well performed — a quiet, settled pride. Not a rival, not an accessory. *A comrade, a teacher, maybe a healer.*

## Afternoon

The salle brimmed with the chatter of students, blades clashing in rhythmic tempo. Adrien stood across the piste, sabre poised, but Kagami could see it instantly: he wasn't with the blade. His guard forced, grip strangling the hilt, thoughts miles away.

She knew why. The whole tangled web of Parisian romances was no secret: Marinette's flustered heart, Adrien's unspoken yearning, the world of gazes averted and hopes unspoken. Kagami had long accepted that Adrien's affections did not fall on her. And yet, seeing him falter stung in another way.

As they passed on the narrow platform, she rested her hand gently on his, a breach of her usual reserve. "You strangle the blade. Let it flow—water in your hand." Green eyes met brown, cloudy at first, then steady. He breathed, relaxed, and saluted.

The bout began anew. Adrien's cuts turned fluid, parries clean, his whole form transformed as if her words had unlocked something hidden. He won the match, but greater still, he smiled in the old way again — all radiance and warmth. He turned to her, flushed with gratitude. "You always know how to cut through the fog. Thank you, Kagami. I'm lucky to have a friend like you."

To conceal the flicker of vulnerability, she let a crisp, playful edge into her voice. "Let's see how you do in the finals—against me." The bout that followed was electric. Each touch, each counter, revealed the best of both fencers: poise, precision, and mutual respect. The score climbed point by point—14 to 14. The rapt onlookers cheered at the final touch; it had been a rare thing of beauty.

## Evening

Hours later, the house was suffused with stillness. Kagami sat poised over parchment, brush whispering ink into graceful arcs. Every line demanded patience, every breath discipline.

Her mother's presence hovered just beyond the shoji door, impatient to strike at imperfection like a hawk. Kagami braced herself — but another voice spoke first.

A visitor, the attaché from the Japanese embassy, paused on his way to a meeting with her mother. His gaze fixed on the brushstrokes. “Your hand carries assurance. Each line breathes restraint. Rarely is such discipline seen in the young. Sesshū would approve.”

Her mother's silence was forced, lips pressed tight by the weight of expertise she could not contradict. Kagami exhaled and laid her last stroke with serenity, the ink drying in quiet triumph.

## Night

On her futon, Kagami watched the day circle through her mind — donning the dragon's mantle and making the decisive call; steadying Adrien through his divided heart; silencing her mother with the weight of undeniable respect. She was satisfied, and . . . more? There was a feeling in her heart she could not put name to.

Eventually, her breathing eased into sleep. Longg came out and hovered above her shoulder, eyes soft with approval. “You faced today as only you can—with strength, with grace, and with rising spirit.” Longg paused momentarily. “No holder of a Miraculous has an easy path. Yours, though, is harder than most. That feeling you cannot name – it is happiness.” Longg gently kissed her brow. “I hope you can experience more often.”