<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Graphic Depictions Of Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/F, F/M, Multi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Miraculous Ladybug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Adrien Agreste, Marinette Dupain-Cheng, Chat Noir, Ladybug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Alternate Universe - No Miraculous, Alternate Universe - No Powers, Criminal AU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Steal My Heart and I'll Shoot Yours

by Bratist

Summary

Marinette Dupain-Cheng has it all. She has money, a company, a mansion. Everything except for her other half. She was different from a young age, she knew this. She paid the price in blood for being different. She didn't have a lot growing up, but she had *her* until that *her* was taken away. Now Marinette is left with nothing except for her possessions. Now he wants to take them away. And isn't it convenient that she gets a contract to end his life? Might as well get paid if she's going to kill him anyways.

Adrien Agreste has nothing. His father is dying. He lost all his money paying for treatments. Everything he held dear is slowly slipping through his fingers. And the target of his blame is Marinette Dupain-Cheng. A bad business deal left him with less money than he needed to save his father. He wants revenge. Wasn't he so lucky when Marinette decided she wanted the washed-up model to model for her new clothing line? He has direct access to her most valued possessions. He's going to rob her blind.

Ladybug is an assassin. Chat Noir is a thief. They're both gunning for the other. How exactly did they manage to screw up enough to fall in love?
Notes

This is a work in progress and I'm not sure how long I'm going to continue writing this one. I have a definitive ending in mind, but I'm definitely willing to extend it into a Part Two and continue the story if people ask for it. This has been an AU idea bumping around in my head for the past couple weeks and I was sad to find no one else had done anything like it! I hope you enjoy what you read! **Mature Content Warning** There is one chapter in which things become a bit explicit; that chapter has a warning listed. Keep that in mind while you read.

See the end of the work for more notes
“Target acquired. Descend from the roof in exactly ten seconds,” Nino said softly into Chat’s earpiece. The scroll on display at the museum hung proudly, even in the dark halls. Chat Noir gave a grin and, at the go-ahead, began to descend just as the cameras conveniently turned away from the piece he was about to steal.

“Okay security surrounding it is down, you have twenty seconds.” Not wasting any time, Chat lifted the glass case and carefully took the fragile scroll in hand. Juggling the scroll and the case, he swiftly pocketed the scroll before placing his calling card in its place, setting the case back down.

Chat heard steps from the night guard and swiftly climbed up to the ceiling rafters, sticking to the shadows. He made his way back to the ventilation shaft that’d been his entry point and slid through, taking care to move quickly yet quietly. Once outside the building, he took a calming breath and launched himself through the open air, tucking into a roll as he hit the ground. The alarms from the museum went off, but Chat was safely a street away, climbing into Plagg’s black van where he and Nino awaited Chat’s return.

The group shared high fives, grins all around. This was a big score. They weren’t sure that they would be able to pull it off, but they did. As Plagg drove off, Nino slid over to sit beside Chat. He rubbed his hands together in excitement.

“Well? Let’s see it man!” he exclaimed. Chat nodded and carefully pulled the priceless scroll from his pouch, unraveling it slowly. It was glorious.

~ ~ ~

“Target acquired,” Tikki said softly into Ladybug’s earpiece. “Take the shot and let’s get paid.” Ladybug took a deep breath and steadied her aim, peering down the scope at her target. Her haunting calling card had already been sent to the man scheduled to die. He looked paranoid. He should be. Her finger squeezed the trigger and her shoulder absorbed the force from the kickback. Through her scope, she watched his head explode as her shot found its mark. 300 yards and right between the eyes. That was one lucky shot.

Ladybug didn’t waste any time. She swiftly began to break down her sniper rifle and stowed it away in the black bag. She slid the strap over her shoulder and began a swift descent down the building’s fire escape. Tikki waited impatiently at the bottom in her black Mustang. When Ladybug slid into the passenger seat, Tikki turned off the tablet in her lap and slid it safely into the glove compartment while they waited.

One minute. Two minutes… Five minutes… At exactly the ten minute mark, Tikki turned on the car and casually drove away while Ladybug began to remove her suit. Tip, latex was a pain in the ass to remove while sitting in the passenger seat of a car. Thankfully, she’d had plenty of practice and was in civilian clothes well before the drop-off location. Reaching into the backseat, Ladybug grabbed the coils of fabric and ribbons sitting back there and shoved them into the duffel bag, wrapping the fabric thickly around each piece. She then placed the coils of ribbons on the top, giving off the illusion that it was an innocent bag belonging to a fashion designer.

“Alright, I’ll contact you once the payment’s been made and will direct your share into your off-shore bank account,” Tikki said once they reached the drop-off location. “I’ll let you know once we have a new target. Don’t spend your money all in one place.” Ladybug gave her a smirk and nodded, taking the black disposable phone Tikki handed her and placing it in the bag’s side pocket.
“Same for you girl. See you later,” Ladybug replied, slipping out of the car. She hoisted her bag over her shoulder and, after a small wave, began to descend into the subway system to make the long trek back to her home.

~ ~ ~

“Hey Dad,” Adrien Agreste said softly, stepping into the hospital room. Gabriel Agreste didn’t respond, just stared blankly at the wall. That was usual though. A nurse had left the TV on and the news played softly through the room as background noise. Adrien took a couple minutes to fuss with Gabriel’s sheets and pillows, trying to make the dying man more comfortable. Not that he’d notice.

“Paris last night was shaken as the two infamous criminals struck at the same time. Ladybug, the infamous assassin, took out yet another victim not five minutes after Chat Noir, well-known thief, stole a priceless scroll from the Louvre. Some are speculating that while unlikely, it’s possible the two worked together in order to divert police attention.”

Adrien rolled his eyes at the anchor. Chat Noir working with a cold-blooded murderer? Definitely not. Chat may have been a thief, but he didn’t kill. That was a line he’d never cross.

“The article Chat Noir stole last night was an ancient scroll depicting the mythos of the Egyptian Cat Goddess Bast. It was one of the oldest scrolls depicting the mythos known to man and only recently came into the hands of the Louvre museum. This has been Chat Noir’s most successful heist to date as the scroll is easily worth over fifteen million euro. As for Ladybug’s target…”

Adrien stopped listening, but gave his father a small smile. The man’s eyes had focused on the TV while the anchor was talking about Chat Noir and a whisper of a laugh, that could’ve been just a sigh, passed through the old man’s lips.

“Best help money can buy Dad. Just like I promised,” Adrien whispered, pressing his lips against his father’s temple. His phone buzzed with a text from his agent, but was promptly ignored. He could look at it later. He may have been a model, but since his dad was hospitalized he’d been falling behind on his shoots. All his money went to support his father. Growing up rich suddenly meant nothing with how fast the money dried up. Gabriel’s multi-million dollar company was bought out for way less than it was worth, the mansion Adrien had grown up in was sold, staff let go. The hospital wanted to transfer Gabriel to an old person’s home, but Adrien refused. He knew his father wouldn’t want that. But the price of keeping Gabriel here was so much.

It was Nino who came up with the idea of stealing in order to make money quickly. Nino, who knew more about computers could easily shut down the security of most systems. Plagg, their best friend, quickly hopped aboard. His knowledge about cars and racing made him the perfect get-away driver. And Adrien, with all his intense lessons growing up, made the perfect thief.

After hitting a couple of small places, getting a feel for the game, the trio slowly became more and bolder. They made a name for themselves. They left calling cards. They switched from stealing anything to keeping it contained at cat related pieces. A couple weeks ago, they’d broken into the Bourgeois mansion and had swiped a pretty cat-themed necklace that Mayor Bourgeois bought for his step-daughter. That necklace alone was two million euro.

While Adrien wasn’t as crazy about cat things as he liked the media to think, it made a great cover with Chat Noir. It helped establish the name for himself. And as much as Adrien would constantly deny it, he loved the feeling of stealing. There was this adrenaline that overtook him when he stole an object, knowing he was going to get away with it. His life had been about rules and regulations for longer than he could remember. It was nice to be able to just be free. Be himself. The bigger the score, the better the high.
After spending another hour with his father, Adrien finally made his way out. He checked the message on his phone and stumbled to a stop in front of the nurses' station.

“Adrien, are you okay?” one of the nurses asked kindly, giving him a concerned once over. Adrien managed to nod and forced himself to keep moving, staring at the words on the screen. The woman who had managed to buy out his father’s fashion company wanted to star Adrien Agreste in her newest fashion line. She wanted a meeting with Adrien at her home to discuss terms of agreement.

He’d heard of her. She was active in the community. She donated to charities on a regular basis, and could even be spotted working soup kitchens from time to time. People praised her as being an angel. Kind, compassionate, beautiful. But to Adrien, she was just the woman who haggled down the price of the company from a dying old man.

So, of course, Adrien agreed to meet with her. Because while in his eyes she was the cruel femme fatale that had robbed Gabriel of his company, she was rich. Very rich. Adrien didn’t even care if she had nothing cat-related to steal. He was going to rob her blind for what she did to his father. Marinette Dupain-Cheng… Chat Noir was going to come knocking.

Marinette Dupain-Cheng smiled softly at the blonde model and shook his hand. He was a gorgeous man with nicely tanned skin, a lean body, sparkling emerald eyes, and stylishly messy blonde hair. Just the sight of him made her heart stutter in her chest. A feeling that reminded her of her high school years when she pined over his picture in various magazines.

“Thank you for meeting me Mr. Agreste,” she began formally, taking a seat in her lounge chair and gesturing for him to do the same. He did, but didn’t speak. Instead, his eyes hardened slightly with suspicion as he waited for her to explain herself. It made her a tad bit uncomfortable. “First off, I want to express my sympathies for your father. I idolized the man growing up and this news hurts more than you can imagine.”

“So what was your intention?” He seemed to be almost growling with his anger. Anger towards her. She wished she could explain that it was something she was pressured into by Tikki, who convinced her that owning the company gave her a legal leg to stand on, should her other occupation draw unwelcoming eyes too close to home. A front to explain away the ridiculous amounts of money she made by ending lives. But she couldn’t. So instead, she launched into her usual lie.

“I want you to model my new line of men’s clothing.” Unable to hold his gaze, she glanced away to look around her lavish sitting room. Everything was top of the line and expensive. All of it beautiful. All of it bought with blood money. Including the company she owned. “I understand that you must think poorly of me for buying out your father’s company after his illness became public. That was not my intention.”

“So what was your intention?” He seemed to be almost growling with his anger. Anger towards her. She wished she could explain that it was something she was pressured into by Tikki, who convinced her that owning the company gave her a legal leg to stand on, should her other occupation draw unwelcoming eyes too close to home. A front to explain away the ridiculous amounts of money she made by ending lives. But she couldn’t. So instead, she launched into her usual lie.

“As I said, I idolized your father for quite some time. He was what sparked my interest in becoming a designer. Originally, I simply just wanted to work for him once I had my degree. Unfortunately, his health declined and that was no longer an option. When his company announced they were selling, I felt I had to jump on the chance. If I couldn’t work for him, perhaps I could keep the company from going under. Keep the Gabriel name alive and well.” Adrien winced at her poor choice of wording and Marinette mentally chastised herself. She cleared her throat and swiftly spoke on after her
“My parents fronted me the money.” *Lie. You used blood money.* “It wasn’t nearly as much as the company was worth, but it was all they could spare. I honestly didn’t think I’d get the company. I was quite shocked when the competition dropped out.” *You threatened them into dropping out.* “I still feel awful though, knowing that it didn’t sell for nearly enough. That being said, I’m trying my best to make up for that. Which is where you come in.”

“How does hiring me as a model help make up for basically robbing my dying father blind?” His voice was sharp and cold. This certainly wasn’t what she expected. Anger? Yes. But this coldness?

“Because I follow your work, Adrien. I know you haven’t been getting as many gigs since his diagnosis. I want to help you, and I will pay you quite well. The line that I’m releasing is a special line dedicated to the Agreste name. All proceeds from sales will go partly towards your father’s health and partly to charities supporting the cure for Alzheimer’s and cancer.” Her bright blue eyes turned back towards Adrien and she gave him a determined stare, daring him to back down.

She could see the change in him as his anger turned to shock and disbelief. It wasn’t every day when someone handed the answer to your prayers on a silver platter. Of course, she knew he was desperate for money. Keeping his father in the hospital must’ve cost him a fortune. Not even counting the treatments Gabriel Agreste would be undergoing.

Her voice softened with her next words, “Adrien, I’d like to work closely with you on this. I know I can’t just throw money at the problem and make it go away, but I still would like to help as much as possible. Please say yes.”

Adrien let out a long sigh, tension leaving his body. He closed his eyes and Marinette took in just how exhausted he looked. Bags under his eyes, skin paler than usual. He wasn’t holding himself as highly as he usually did. Perhaps this would be enough to mend the damage.

“Alright, I’ll work with you.”

~ ~ ~
Don't Steal My Pride

Chapter Summary

He wants to take her pride. She wasn't going to take the job. Now everything's changed.
Stupid Chaton.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Adrien frowned as Marinette led him to the front door. He wanted to hate her so much, but he found
he just couldn’t. Every time her delicate fingers moved to brush her thick black hair behind her ear,
he found himself wanting to run his own fingers through her hair.

_I suppose it has been a while since I’ve had sex_, he thought to himself as Marinette closed the door
behind him. But no, he couldn’t let that line of thinking change his mind. In the hour he’d been
inside the mansion she owned, and the four rooms he’d seen, he saw the countless number of pieces
he could steal. The woman decorated like she was out to impress someone.

The paintings she had covering her walls would go for a lot. So would the decorative vase in the
entryway. She even had a suit of armor nested at the base of the grand staircase, but he didn’t want
to even entertain the idea of attempting to move that much metal silently.

For a woman people praised as being down to earth, she sure liked shiny things. _Much like a cat
actually_, he thought with a chuckle. The place was beautiful, but it lacked substance. It felt more fake
and plastic than his own childhood home felt. At least he could reasonably call his old mansion a
home. This place felt more like a museum.

As the day darkened to night, Adrien hurried home to his sparse apartment and pulled his Chat Noir
outfit out from the secret false floor in his closet. The leather catsuit was black and covered his entire
body. Despite being skintight, it was lightweight and flexible, allowing him to move freely in it. He
adorned the outfit with a long belt, designed to appear to be a cat tail, a single gold bell at the top of
the suit that served as the zipper catch, and cat ears that he fit securely in his hair. Black combat boots
covered his feet, assisting him with the grip needed when climbing various objects. His gloves were
plain enough, except for the claws extending from the tips. The claws were securely sewn into the
thick fabric and had saved him from numerous falls more times than he could count. Fit over his right
ring finger was his signature ring. It was pure black with emeralds forming a cat’s paw protected by
thick plastic. When the suit was designed for him, the designer had tossed in the ring as a way to
inspire his signature for his calling cards.

He fit in his contacts and blinked through the slight blurring they had on his eyes. The contacts made
his sclera green and gave his pupils the slit one would find in a cat’s eye. Everything about his
costume was fulfilling to his cat persona.

Using black makeup, Adrien covered around his eyes so there would be no skin showing against the
dge of the mask. That step done, he took out his mask. He applied adhesive to the back of it and fit
it against his face, mentally shedding Adrien Agreste. Adrien followed the rules. Adrien was a tame
house cat who’d been broken in. Chat Noir, on the other hand, did not follow the rules. Chat Noir
was an alley cat who did what he liked, damn the consequences.
Chat gave his reflection a Cheshire Cat worthy grin before sliding out his window and making his way up to the rooftop.

He thought about contacting Plagg and Nino, but decided against it. They’d try to talk him out of it. They wouldn’t understand his need to steal from her. Not that he was stealing tonight, that’d be foolish. First, he needed to case the place.

With that settled, Chat grabbed his utility belt and baton from their hidden location on the roof and began to make his way towards the Dupain-Cheng mansion, using rooftops and parkour to his advantage. It wasn’t that far away, so with the added time saver of not needing to navigate the streets, Chat made it there in less than ten minutes, and he was barely even winded.

Once he got there, he pulled his small binoculars from one of the many pockets on his belt and peered at the house. Marinette had foolishly left her curtains open and he even spied a couple windows open as well. She must’ve been planning on enjoying the warm summer breeze.

And there she was, leaning against one of the open windows and staring out into the dark. She was on the phone with someone, but with the light at her back Chat couldn’t make out her appearance. Well that just wouldn’t do.

Silent as a cat stalking a mouse, Chat slipped down from the rooftop and made his way across the street. He made sure to stick to the shadows and kept his eye on her at all times. Once he’d reached her fence, he pocketed the binoculars and rubbed his hands together.

Time to enter enemy territory.

He took a running start and swiftly scaled the wrought-iron fence, letting himself drop from the top. He bent his knees and absorbed the shock of the fall before freezing. Chat listened closely, making sure nothing had stirred in his arrival, before finally straightening and making his way over to the far wall nearest to Marinette.

She was still on the phone and was talking about some job she didn’t think would be remotely possible. Odd for a fashion designer not to step up to the challenge of a difficult design. Then again, Chat didn’t think he could design a scarf, much less anything that would cause Marinette to balk.

Ignoring her conversation, Chat moved to the back of the house, keeping an eye out for any security measures. Thus far, there’d been nothing save the fence. It was odd. She had so many expensive items in her house, yet she didn’t worry about them being stolen. There had to be an invisible trip somewhere.

At the back, Chat noticed all the windows were closed with the curtains drawn. A complete contrast to the front where everything looked open and inviting. Was this a reflection of Marinette herself? One side that she showed the world, the other she hid from everyone? *I need to stop reading so much Shakespeare*, he mentally scoffed before spying a lone balcony where the door was slightly ajar.

Before thinking it through, Chat found himself climbing up the side of her house and pulling himself up and onto the balcony. He peeked inside. The room was pitch black with little to no light seeping in. He pulled his baton out from its hold on his thigh and carefully stepped into the room.

His eyes widened once they adjusted to the darkness. Jackpot.

The room was clearly meant to be a workroom with tons of mannequins scattered about in various poses. Male and female figures alike, adults and children. Some were bare, others had full outfits on,
a few had in-progress designs on. But past all them, nestled in the back of the room, was a
mannequin standing inside a glass case. It had on a regal attire, like a European queen, and was
striking a royal pose. What excited Chat so much wasn’t the clothing, but the jewels.

The mannequin had on emerald green jewels that he could’ve sworn resembled a cat’s paw, much
like his ring. Everything from the necklace, to earrings, to crown, to rings followed this theme. He
had to have it. He had to have it all. His mouth watered at the thought of making off with those
jewels. But it was clearly protected and protected securely at that.

He couldn’t make out all of the security measures, but there were black wires leading out of the back
of the case, hinting at something the naked eye couldn’t perceive. He didn’t want to even touch the
glass without knowing what measures she had up, but the risky part of him wanted her to know he
was coming. It was that risky part of him that pulled the black sharpie out of his belt.

Marinette jumped as the alarms went off through the house. Someone was inside… Not only that,
but someone was messing with her great-grandmother’s jewels.

“Tikki, I’ll call you back,” she said swiftly into the phone before hanging up. She ran to the back of
the house and placed her hand on the door to her workroom, hesitating. Something didn’t feel right.
She reached around and pulled her favorite handgun out of the back of her pants, flicking the safety
off. With a deep breath, she burst into the room, gun extended. It was empty.

Marinette’s eyes drifted over to the mannequin displaying the jewels, the one thing she prized among
anything else, and her jaw dropped. Scribbled over the front of the glass case in black sharpie read:
“Meow-velous ;)” A cat’s paw was scribbled underneath that in place of a signature.

Without studying the vandalism further, Marinette burst out through the wide open balcony door,
spotting that damned thief easily climbing over her fence like it was nothing. Her teeth clenched, she
sent him her best scowl even knowing he would never be able to see it. He did see her though. He
gave a mocking deep bow from the other side of the fence, then a two-fingered salute, before turning
and bolting into the shadows.

Game on Chaton.

Marinette called Tikki back, still staring at the shadows Chat Noir vanished into.

“A stroke of good luck has hit,” she said without explanation. Tikki wouldn’t need explanations. She
knew first hand the level of bullshit Marinette’s luck could bring. “Tell the client that I’ll be able to
take out Chat Noir after all.”

“But you sure you want to take this one Lady?” Tikki asked calmly. “I can almost taste a set-up.
Maybe we should let this one pass us by, let someone else pick up the contract. Added onto that,
your particular feelings regarding this client isn’t exactly hidden. Are you doing this for the right
reasons?”

“Fucker is targeting my great-grandma’s jewels. Yeah. I’m sure.”

By the time Adrien was supposed to arrive for their first official day working together, Marinette still
hadn’t been able to scrub the fucking words off the glass case. Damned prick of a cat. Did he not
realize how much these jewels meant to her? How had he learned she had anything like this
anyway? If he wanted to steal something, he could steal literally anything else from this damned
place. She didn’t care. Not these though, not her pride.

Her great-grandmother had made these jewels back when she was a teenager, had carefully fit every
gem together to form the beauty. It was a commission for some spoiled rich girl who ended up hating
it and demanding a total refund. Her great-grandmother ended up keeping the jewels as a reminder
that she couldn’t please everyone. And that sometimes, you were better off not pleasing everyone.
Sometimes you got something gorgeous in return.

And Chat Noir wanted to take this from her. The one thing in this house she was proud of. The one
thing not bought with blood money. Frustration lined her very soul as she thought of the added
measures she was going to have to take in order to keep the jewels protected. Last night, Tikki had
suggested using them as bait to lure him in, but Marinette firmly opposed the idea. No, she’d wait
until he came back to check the security, then follow him home as Ladybug. When he wasn’t paying
attention, she’d put a bullet between his eyes.

“Hey, your butler or whoever told me to come in here?” Adrien’s voice snapped her from her
murderous plans and she dropped the brush back into the bucket of soapy water. She stood and
grabbed a hand towel, drying her hands, before turning to shake his.

“Sorry, mind the mess. I had an unexpected visitor last night,” Marinette apologized with a grimace,
gesturing to the case. Adrien’s eyes widened slightly.

“Chat Noir is targeting you?” he asked, walking up to the case. He brushed his fingers down the
glass, making Marinette sigh in relief that she’d turned off the security sensors to scrub at the
mocking words. She didn’t think her head could handle anymore piercing alarms.

“Seems like it.” She moved to stand next to Adrien, eyes softening as she looked at her pride. She
designed the outfit around those jewels.

“No offense, but I can see why. These are right up his alley. Expensive, green, and cat-related.
Checks all the boxes,” Adrien commented, stepping back from the case. Marinette scowled in return.

“He just stole some priceless scroll. He doesn’t need my jewels. Maybe I should buy up a bunch of
cat-themed art pieces and place them in front as decoy. Get him to forget about the jewels.” Adrien
laughed at her comment, shaking his head.

“I’ve never heard of Chat Noir giving up on a prize. At least not when he’s taken the time to let the
person know he’s coming. You’ll just have to make sure they’re insured.”

“Ha. Ha. So funny. Enough about the jewels. I need your measurements.” Marinette pulled Adrien
away from the case and stood him in the center of the room, feeling a bit flustered as she measured
his body. Insanely out of character for her. She didn’t do flustered. She was supposed to be the cold
and calculating assassin.

But Adrien Agreste. He was something else. A man seemingly created by gods. When she was a
teenager, she mooned over his pictures and advertisements. When she was in college, she swooned
when she first saw him walk down a catwalk. Now in her late twenties, she had an excuse to move
her hands over his body. It was enough to heat her face. Maybe after all this, she could find the
words to ask him out. Assuming he didn’t still hate her after all.

The entire time she was measuring him, he kept stiffening up. Clearly, there was still some things he
hadn’t forgiven her for. He may have agreed to work with her, but that didn’t wipe their slate clean.
It may never be fully clean. And wasn’t that a damned shame?
An hour before sunset, Marinette finally let Adrien leave. She’d kept him for longer than she meant to, but she wanted to get the design for the outfit he’d show off perfect. And who better to ask about an Agreste inspired piece than an Agreste? She let her assistant go home not long after and then switched into assassin mode.

Marinette locked her guilt away into a chest deep within her heart and pulled her black duffel bag out from under her bed. The only thing left in it was a key. She took the key and made her way to her office, moving the floor-to-ceiling painting from the wall. Behind it sat a door perfectly flush against the wall. The only thing that gave away its existence was the small keyhole.

She inserted the key and pushed the door open, stepping into her lair, as a certain someone coined it. Numerous weapons lined the walls, poisons sat in a secure cabinet off to the side. And in the back, her Ladybug outfit stood waiting on display.

It was a single piece of latex, dyed bright red with black circles here and there. It covered her from the top of her neck down to her toes, no shoes required. She’d designed it that way on purpose. Less to mess with if she needed it off swiftly. The only piece of the outfit that required extra effort was her red mask that also sported black spots.

Marinette had spent a good month perfecting her outfit and she was damned proud of it. When Tikki asked her why she chose a ladybug, Marinette had given a smirk. Because ladybugs are lucky, like me. And their blood is toxic, like mine. Just because they look shiny and pretty, doesn’t mean they aren’t deadly. It was meant to be, a match made in assassin heaven.

Ignoring her outfit, however, Marinette opened one of the various drawers and pulled out her ladybug tracker. Something Tikki designed for her. It was a tracking beacon that could stick to any surface and was small enough to be ignored. The best part was it was designed to look like a ladybug, so the subject would originally believe it was just a bug when they eventually noticed it.

It was the perfect device to use in order to track Chat Noir back to whatever hole he crawled out of. If he came back tonight.

Tracker and pocket knife in hand, Marinette left the room, locking it behind her. She returned the key to the bag and slid it back under her bed. Then she made her way to her workroom and sat in wait.

It didn’t take as long as she expected. Marinette had been planning on waiting up until dawn if need be, but she didn’t have to wait anywhere near that amount of time. By midnight, Chat Noir slipped into the room and stalked towards the case.

Marinette stood silently and moved over to the balcony door, shutting it firmly. Chat spun around to stare at her as she flicked the lights on, giving him the scowl he didn’t have a chance to see the previous night.

“Ah, so you caught me Princess,” Chat said dramatically, seemingly not concerned. He gave a deep bow and straightened, wearing a shit-eating grin.

“Princess?” Marinette questioned, crossing her arms. The tracker was firmly between her fingers. Now she just needed to get close.

“A commoner wouldn’t have such lavish jewels of course,” he replied, adding a seductive roll to his voice. Marinette snorted. “Something funny? Purrincess?” Holy shit the cat puns. First meow-velous and now purrincess?

“Cat puns? Really?” She rolled her eyes. “Why are you trying to steal from me? What did I ever do
“Nothing personally, but I do like pretty things. I might be willing to make a trade for the jewels, if you could offer something else just as pretty in place of course.” Was the thief really flirting with her?

~ ~ ~

Was he really flirting with her? Sure, Chat was in a sticky situation at the moment, but there was more than one exit and this was a big place. He didn’t need to flirt his way out. But… His eyes trailed up and down Marinette’s body. He found he wanted to flirt with her. When she was getting his measurements earlier that day, the feeling of her hands drifting over his body had turned him on. Even worse when he had noticed the faint blush staining her cheeks. He wanted to see that blush now.

“You're ridiculous,” Marinette growled, tossing her hands in the air. “Buy a damned cat if you really need to. Leave my jewels alone.”

Chat stepped towards her, giving a smirk as he invaded her personal space. He crowded her against the door and bent down. Man, she was short, yet perfectly sized in his eyes. If only they’d met under different circumstances. But alas, they hadn’t. Instead, she’d screwed over his father and only recently decided to make amends. Too little too late.

“Tell you what Purrincess. You give me a kiss and I’ll give you enough time to say your sweet goodbyes to the jewels,” he said lowly. She swallowed, her hands automatically reaching up to press against his shoulders. To push him away more than likely, but she didn’t push. The blush he’d been craving stained her cheeks and she diverted her eyes.

“You're ridiculous,” she muttered.

“Actually, I’m feline pretty generous to be making such an offer. Time’s ticking. One kiss equals one night.” He knew she’d never go for it, but it was worth it to see her getting flustered.

Which is why it shocked him so much when she so delicately pressed her lips against his. Her hands slid around to his back, pulling him close for a minute. He savored what she offered, lips parting teasingly. Then she shoved him away, looking sour.

“Just know that I’m only going to use this time to make sure you can’t steal them,” she fired at him. He grinned, the challenge exciting him more than it should’ve.

“We shall see who is successful in the end then Princess. Until we meet again.” He gave her another bow and she moved away from the door, letting him slip out into the night.

Halfway back to his apartment, Chat took a break from parkour and sat there grinning. She’d actually kissed him. Why? Did it matter? When she did, it felt… Right. It felt good. He wanted to do it again. Hell, he was acting like a horny teen and he didn’t care at the moment. She was a mystery he needed to solve. He wanted to find out what made her tick. Who was Marinette Dupain-Cheng?

Chat pulled his earpiece from his belt and fit it in his ear, hitting the button to buzz for Nino. It took a couple minutes, but Nino finally answered.

“What the hell are you doing as Chat Noir right now?” Nino demanded through the earpiece. Chat winced, realizing he probably should’ve come clean to his friends before randomly calling like this.

“Long story. Listen, I need you to dig up all the information you can find on Marinette Dupain-
Cheng. I got our next prize,” Chat said, lips still tingling from her kiss. Nino gave a long and dramatic sigh, which made Chat chuckle softly.

“Hold on, there’s something weird flashing on your suit.” Chat frowned. “Dude! There’s a fucking tracker on your goddamn suit! On your left arm!” Chat straightened and twisted his arm to look. A ladybug was attached to his outer bicep. He snatched it off, blood running cold.

“Issue man…” Chat dropped the tracker and stomped on it before turning around, eyes open.

“What? What was that? Chat talk to me!”

“It was a fucking ladybug.” Were his eyes playing tricks on him or was that a flash of red a few buildings over?

“It can’t be. Who the hell have you pissed off enough to get a professional assassin after you?!” Chat moved just out of pure paranoia, and the wall he’d been leaning against exploded as the bullet hit it. Better the fucking wall than his face. Thinking fast, Chat snagged the broken tracker and bolted, staying low.

“It definitely is and I have no idea. I almost just lost my face. Fuck, I don’t know where to go.” Chat took a daring leap of faith and launched himself between two buildings. He slammed into the ledge and held on, clambering up swiftly as another shot came. Again, it would’ve hit his head had he not moved fast enough.

“Hold on, I put out an emergency to Plagg. He’s going to come get you,” Nino said, shutting down emotion and going into, what he liked to call, Oracle-Mode.

“I can’t exactly just wait around, she’s taking potshots at my skull,” Chat snapped. Nino ignored him. Chat took a risk to glance behind him, spying a flash of red as the assassin easily followed, silent as the night. Guess she knew parkour as well.

“Get off the rooftops, head towards the nearest subway, Plagg is on his way,” Nino instructed. Chat jumped down a fire escape, taking another risk and skipping the last level. He rolled with his landing as Ladybug took another shot from above where he would’ve been on the fire escape. How the hell had she gotten there so fast?

“Left or right Nino?” Chat demanded as he sprinted out of the alley.

“Left.” Chat turned left and the corner of the building took a bullet. “Plagg is straight ahead, make a run for it.” Chat growled and poured everything into his legs as he sprinted towards the subway. Above him, he knew Ladybug was scrambling for a better shooting position. That was her usual M.O. Let the victim know she was coming, then snipe them while they were panicking.

Ahead, Chat saw headlights as a car screeched around the corner. It swung to a stop on the side of the road, and Plagg pushed the door open for Chat. Chat leaped into the car and slammed the door shut as Plagg stepped on the gas. The back window shattered from another bullet.

“We need to work on your people skills!” Plagg complained, spinning the car around a corner.

“Is now really the time?” Chat demanded. The back passenger window shattered as well just as Plagg took another corner.

“Of course it’s the time. I’ll never get another opportunity to make jokes like this again!”
So in case you haven't noticed, this AU isn't the usual Marichat Criminal AU. In this one, Ladybug is a bad guy and selectively worse than Chat Noir! I wanted to play around with the idea of "What If." Specifically for here, what if Marinette's parents weren't the amazing snowflakes like they are in the show? What if Adrien had a half-way relationship with his dad? As we go further into the chapters, I'll explain some more things that have changed and what differs this from everything else. If something is confusing, let me know and I'll either adjust some things so it makes sense in future chapters, or I'll promise you that it's already being explained in future chapters. If you're still lost, let me know. Everything makes sense in my head the way I have it worked, but I know just because I understand it, doesn't mean you guys will.
**Chapter Summary**

She. Missed. How? How did she possibly? What happened to black cats being lucky?!
Did he STEAL her luck? Surely it had nothing to do with his flirting. Or that kiss.
Definitely not the kiss.

**Chapter Notes**

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ladybug scowled as the car took another corner and sped out of range. Stupid cat. It took her long enough to psyche herself up to pull the trigger. Then when she finally got the nerve, he moved. Black cats were supposed to be unlucky. Ladybugs were supposed to be lucky. But tonight, everything seemed reversed. She kept missing by that much. And he found her tracker before getting home. When he stopped for longer than two minutes, she wrongly assumed he was home and went for it.

“So you didn’t get him?” Tikki asked from her earpiece. She sighed and shouldered her gun, turning to make the long trek back to her abandoned bag. Maybe she should’ve gotten up close and personal.

“No. I didn’t. He had help I wasn’t aware of. I incorrectly assumed he worked alone. I won’t make the same mistake twice.”

“Does he still have the ladybug?”

“Yeah, but he smashed it. The one who tipped him off to it is probably going to dissect it, not that they’ll find anything. But still aggravating. That was nice tech.” Ladybug sighed as she finally reached her original rooftop, collapsing her gun and stowing it.

“I can still track it, but it may take some time. I’ll let you know when I have the coordinates.” With that, Tikki disconnected. Ladybug frowned and hefted her bag up. Her fingers unwillingly reached up to brush against her lips.

Why did she kiss him? Sure at the time it seemed the easiest way to distract him long enough to get the tracker on him. But it was stupid. She shouldn’t have done it. Now every time she thought about seeing that stupid black cat again, her heart fluttered and her face heated.

*The jokes were lame!* Ladybug scolded herself. Herself didn’t listen. There was something about that cat that made her want to know more. She wanted to pick him apart, piece by piece. Before the kiss, she was looking forward to ending him for even thinking about touching her pride. After the kiss? She was looking forward to this interesting game of dynamics. She may even be sad when she had to finally pull the trigger. It was an odd thought. Sad.

For so long, she hadn’t thought it’d be possible to feel something as mundane as sadness over a person’s death. People die all the time. It was just the natural order of things. She supposed she may feel something if Alya or Tikki died, but they could barely count each other as friends. Would she be sad if her parents died? “Make the right choices Marinette. Take the good deal or get the fuck out,” her father shouted at her. She’d been six at the time. A frown stretched across her face. No, she
wouldn’t be sad if her parents died. They cared more about spreading their business across the nation than they did their own daughter. Their only child. But sure, making it rich was more important.

Chloe…

She’d be sad if Chloe died. She didn’t have a lot growing up; she had even less after being shipped away to the private boarding school. But she had Chloe.

Thinking of Chloe, she pulled her cell out of her bag and dialed the other woman, feeling a shiver of anticipation.

“I was just thinking about you Dupain-Cheng.” Chloe answered teasingly. And everything was brighter.

“Oh yeah? What were you thinking about?” Ladybug replied lightly, slipping across the street to one of her many safe houses to get changed.

“Nothing much. Just the night before I left. When you snuck into my room in that latex suit like a villain.” Chloe’s voice dropped an octave, tone taking on an air of flirt. Ladybug smirked and pried her mask from her face, setting it aside. She put the phone on speaker and set it down beside her mask.

“I am a villain Mademoiselle.” She reached behind her to grasp the hidden zipper on the outfit, pulling it down slow enough for there to be an audible sound. Chloe groaned loudly.

“Marinette you’re killing me. You’re totally changing out of the outfit aren’t you?” Marinette leaned in close to the phone, letting out a throaty chuckle.

“Yep.” She popped the ‘p’ and slipped her arms from the suit.

“I want to come back home.” Chloe’s voice lost the flirty air as she spoke softly. “I miss you.” Marinette’s heart clenched painfully in her chest and she sighed, quickly stripping out of the rest of the suit and stowing it in her bag.

“I know ma abeille. I miss you too, but you know it’s not up to me otherwise you’d be back here before you could blink.”

“It’s stupid! Paris is supposed to be the city of love! France has been proactive way longer than all the other countries! So why am I not allowed to fall in love with you?” Marinette’s heart tightened as Chloe flung out her feelings like that. Something Marinette was never able to do. She’d wanted to say it for a while. She knew how she felt about Chloe, but she could never quite say it.

“Well you did announce our relationship out of the blue and told your father that we were also polyamorous,” Marinette pointed out as she got dressed. Chloe huffed.

“That was supposed to make him feel better. Like ‘Don’t worry, there’s still some straight sex happening, just between the lesbian sex.’” Marinette laughed at that, rubbing her chest.

“Good thing I’m Ladybug ma abeille because he was begging people to target me after that. Something about tainting his daughter.” Chloe was silent for a few moments.

“Maybe I should’ve let you take him out. The world would be better off.” Marinette sighed and took the phone off speaker, placing it back up against her ear as she collected her things.

“I told you before and I’ll tell you again, it’s not happening. When I made that offer, I was emotional.
You were right to refuse me. I won’t take any contracts from you for a reason Chloe. I don’t want you mixed up in this life.” Marinette slipped out of the safe house and slowly made her way back to her house, fingers rubbing over the honey bee charm on her phone for luck.

“But you’re mixed up in it Marinette. Ugh, let’s drop that. Why were you suited up tonight?” Chloe asked, causing Marinette to wince.

“I was failing to fulfill a contract.” Chloe burst out laughing, inciting a pout that she couldn’t see from Marinette. “Stop laughing, it’s not funny.”

“Oh shit, you were serious? I thought you were joking. How could you possibly fail a contract? You’re the best there is.” Marinette slipped inside her home and made her way to her lair; Chloe had been the one to dub it so. The phone went back on speaker as she began putting the suit away.

“This target is a pain in the ass. Have you heard of Chat Noir?”

Chloe gave a hum as she thought the name over. “I think I’ve heard a little. I haven’t been paying much attention to Paris news all the way in America. I usually just do daily searches for ‘Ladybug’ to make sure you’re not dead or in prison.”

“He’s some hotshot thief that’s been all the rage the past year or so. Dresses up as a black cat, steals anything hinting at being cat related, likes green. Apparently, he stole some fancy necklace your dad bought your step-sister a couple weeks ago and they want revenge.”

“And you took the contract?! From them?” Marinette winced.

“I wasn’t going to originally. But the fucker decided to target me and my great-grandma’s jewels. Left a big message on the case that implied it was going to be his.”

“And you figured if you were going to kill him, might as well get paid for it.” Chloe’s voice was flat. “Ma cheri, you know if he did steal it I’d just buy it back for you. Maman has ties in the black market. I’d just ask her to keep an eye out for it and the second it popped up, I’d make sure it was yours again. Don’t kill for something so petty ma cheri. And never kill for them.”

“If I don’t, they’ll just find someone else…” Marinette whispered, pulling the pieces of her rifle out of her bag. She began to methodically clean each piece, letting a calm wash over her as she did.

“So let them. You owe this cat nothing… But you’re not telling me everything. Open communication, we promised that.”

Marinette took a swift breath. “I planned a trap for him tonight. When he showed up he was flirty, teasing. Said he’d give me a night to say goodbye to the jewels if I gave him a kiss. I needed an excuse to get my tracker on him so I gave him the kiss. Then later when I went to take the shot, I hesitated.”

“Sounds like someone needs some Chloe advice. I know you’ve had your heart set on Adrien Agreste as a potential, but maybe we should consider this Chat guy. I mean a black cat to your ladybug. Bad luck to your good. Yin to your yang. Oh, this is getting too romantic and adorable for me!” Marinette managed a laugh and rolled her eyes, putting away the pieces of her rifle.

“You’re ridiculous ma abeille.”

“Hey, doesn’t matter as much to me. So long as he doesn’t take all your attention from me and understands that only you’re allowed to touch me romantically. I only swing your way ma cheri.”
“Enough about my mistakes and mishaps. Tell me how America is treating you. Is it as beautiful there as everyone says it is?”

“It’s pretty enough, but it’s no Paris. And there’s no Marinette here so already Paris is ten times better.”

Nino squinted at the small device, trying to pry it apart. Plagg was asking around to find out if anyone had heard about the hit on Chat. The man of the hour was slowly recovering from the experience of being shot at and almost dying multiple times at the ripe age of twenty-nine.

“Okay, I think I figured something out,” Plagg announced. Nino ignored him while Chat sat up swiftly and gave Plagg his full attention. “It’s nothing concrete, but the mayor has apparently not been happy since Chat swiped that necklace. He’s paying Ladybug the big bucks to take him out.”

“Return the necklace,” Nino stated as if it should be obvious.

“Already sold it,” Chat reminded him.

“Get it back.”

“Already spent the money.”

“For fuck’s sake. This is why we can’t have nice things.”

“Look!” Plagg interrupted. “We know Ladybug is stalking Chat. Simple solution. Stop being Chat for a while. That scroll has us set for at least six months. More if we don’t spend the money on anything stupid. She hit Chat with the tracker to find out where he lived, or at least to find out where he dressed up as Chat. He didn’t get that far so the obvious solution is to just be Adrien Agreste until this simmers down.”

Good plan. But the thought of not being able to put on the mask made Chat feel like he was suffocating. Added onto the fact that meant giving up on those beautiful jewels at Marinette’s place. Giving up on Marinette period.


“So you’re fine playing dodge the bullet every night? Because I’m not.”

“It’s not like she’s hard to miss! I fucked up tonight because I wasn’t prepared. If I knew I was supposed to be watching out for a bright red suit, things would’ve been different,” he argued.

“Adrien! She’s a fucking assassin. She’s good at what she does. Her last victim? Shot him in between the eyes from 300 yards away. It’s an impossible shot, yet she did it easy. The one before that? 100 yards through both eyes before he hit the ground, during a storm even. She’s not called the best for nothing. The woman is insane with a weapon. All weapons. And despite that bright red suit, she’s almost never seen.”

“If she’s so great, how come she missed a shit ton tonight?”

“You got lucky. That’s all it was. Luck. That or she was toying with you. The woman managed to hit you with one of her trackers when you weren’t looking then started shooting. For all we know, she’s messing around until she can find out your identity. Be a lot easier for her to take out Adrien Agreste than Chat Noir.”
“I can’t give up on this score Plagg. You don’t understand.”

“You’re right! I don’t! I don’t see how this fucking job is worth more than your life!”

“Guys I think I have something,” Nino cut in. Both heads swiveled towards the dark-skinned man. He adjusted his glasses and held up a small chip. It was cracked, but Nino seemed confident.

“What is it?” Plagg asked, voice softening.

“So on the back of this chip is a name. I don’t know if it means anything particularly useful because of the connotations of the name, but it's better than nothing.”

“What’s the name? Don’t leave us in suspense,” Chat begged, leaning closer.

“Tikki.” Nino and Chat both turned to look at Plagg, who turned bright red. The man shook his head so fiercely that his shaggy black hair didn’t know which way to move. His pale skin looked odd with the bright red overlay.

“Well Plagg does know Tikki,” Chat mused innocently.

“No. Fuck you both. No,” Plagg pleaded.

“They do have a history,” Nino agreed.

“Guys please, the woman is scary.”

“And it could be very useful information that could save all our lives.” Nino nodded in agreement with Chat’s statement.

“You’re both fucking dicks, you know that right?” They shrugged. Plagg sighed and rubbed his face. “Alright, fine. I’ll do it. But you both owe me some camembert after this!”

“Deal.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So you may have noticed that Chloe isn't a raging psychopath like most fanfics write her as. She's an easy antagonist, so naturally, I wanted her to be a protagonist. Originally, she was just going to be Marinette's best friend, but I needed a reason for her to be out of Paris and in America (This comes into play muuuuuuch later). As I was brainstorming, I realized the answer. Chloe and Marinette are lovers. In this AU, Adrien didn't grow up with Chloe, and so, therefore, Chloe never got super attached to Adrien. Instead, she mostly grew up with Marinette. This turned her usual attention from Adrien to the attention-starved Marinette. Because of Marinette's parents, Marinette didn't get a chance to grow up with all her friends. All she had was Chloe. Another change is the divorce between Chloe's parents. Chloe's mom lives in New York and her father is still the mayor of Paris. He remarried and instead of showering Chloe with all the attention in the world (Making her pretty spoiled like in the show) he showered the attention on his step-daughter. Chloe is going to cameo here and there as "words of wisdom" character until her arc
finally occurs. I hope you guys like the "What If" I played with concerning her character. I tried to keep her base personality the same with only minor changes from her differing circumstances.
Chapter Summary

Race away from the cops? Easy. Take on an extremely skilled assassin aiming for your skull? Simple. Facing down your scary (And super smart) ex-girlfriend you may or may not still have the hots for and may not be completely totally over? Can we see a movie instead?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You’re doing fine Plagg,” Adrien promised his best friend through the earpiece he and Nino made Plagg wear.

“Fuck you both for this,” Plagg hissed in response. He took a steadying breath before entering the building of Tikki Enterprise. The receptionist glanced up at him with a polite smile.

“How may I help you sir?” she asked, raising a brow at his attire.

“I need to speak to Tikki Coccinelle,” Plagg replied. So what if he came dressed in a black t-shirt and jeans? He wasn’t dressing up for the woman. That would only serve to make her more suspicious than she would already be. Maybe he should’ve combed his hair though…

“Do you have an appointment?”

“Uh no. Just tell her it’s Plagg Mittelman. She’ll want to speak to me.” *If only to yell and demand to know why I dare show my face that is,* Plagg thought to himself.

“I’m sorry, that won’t be possible. No appointment, no Miss Coccinelle,” the receptionist stated firmly.

“Plagg, you need to get up there,” Adrien hissed in his ear. *No shit!*

“Listen, Tikki and I go way back. At least just ring her? Tell her I’m here?” Plagg asked sweetly, giving the lady a toothy smile. The receptionist sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose.

“Fine, fine. Go take a seat. I’ll let you know what she says.”

“Thank you!” Plagg swiftly moved over to the seats and grabbed a magazine about cars to look over while he waited.

“We should’ve set up a camera for this one Adrien,” he heard Nino whisper.

“I know right? Hell, we should’ve thought of that!” Adrien whispered back with a snicker.

“Fuck you both to hell,” Plagg muttered under his breath. Five minutes later, he hated them both that much more.

“Plagg Mittelman!” Tikki snapped. Plagg’s head jerked up from the magazine and, as always, she
took his breath away. Her unruly fiery red hair was yanked back into a puffy ponytail and she was wearing a smart business attire, pencil skirt and all. Her pale skin was spotted with freckles and her dark hazel eyes spat fire as she stomped over to him. She was all of five foot even and still scared him. And made him want her that much more.

“Tikki, you look… Amazing,” Plagg said breathlessly, his pale green eyes widening. She scowled and stood before him, crossing her arms.

“Why are you here? What could you possibly want from me?” She was so pissed, it made Plagg feel like he was on cloud nine. If she was pissed, then she still cared. Despite everything, he wanted her to still care.

“Can we talk somewhere private?” Plagg asked kindly. Tikki rolled her jaw and nodded firmly, turning on her heel to stomp off towards the elevators. He hurried to follow, not missing the look of sympathy the receptionist shot him.

“Does she look good?” Nino asked.

“Of course she does,” Plagg mumbled before stepping onto the elevator with her.

“Open and honest communication, it’s how Alya and I have survived this long.”

“Wait, you tell Alya you assist Chat Noir in stealing things?!” Adrien jokingly demanded. “Ow!” Plagg struggled to keep a straight face as he pictured exactly how hard Nino had hit the model.

Tikki led Plagg into her office, shutting the door behind them. She sat behind her desk and folded her hands in front of her, giving him a cold look.

“I’m not telling you anything about the tracking device,” she said simply. Plagg blinked in shock.

“Wait, did she just…” Adrien breathed out.

“Do you take me for a fool Plagg? You suddenly stop contacting me right around the time that Chat Noir shows up. All it took was a little hacking to know exactly what you’ve been up to.”

“I mean, a get-away driver was needed. I’m one of the best in the city. And I was broke as shit. Can you blame me?” Plagg blurted out.

“So you are actually working for Chat Noir then.”

“Why didn’t you deny it?!” Nino hissed. “Even I could tell that was a bluff!”

“Tikki, I know what I did was wrong, but the woman you’re providing tech to is going after my boss. Someone I’ve worked closely with for the past year and a half. I daresay even call him a friend now. And she’s trying to murder him over a stupid necklace.” Tikki sighed and rubbed her temples.

“I tried to talk her out of it. Maybe I shouldn’t have mentioned the hit in the first place. But then your friend had to fuck up everything by targeting Marinette Dupain-Cheng as his next score.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Adrien demanded. Plagg repeated the question. Tikki sighed.

“Listen, Marinette is a good friend of mine. Those jewels mean a lot to her. When she found out Chat Noir was targeting her jewels, she told me about it. I mentioned it as a gripe to Ladybug. Ladybug decided to help Marinette out and figured she might as well get paid while doing so.”
“What if Chat gave up on the jewels?” Plagg demanded. Adrien hissed something very ungentlemanly in his ear.

“That might change things. If Chat Noir agrees to drop the case of the jewels, I’ll speak to Ladybug about dropping the contract.” Plagg nodded.

“He’ll drop it.”

“Don’t speak for me, Mittelman!” Adrien snarled. Tikki nodded, satisfied. Then her expression changed to sadness.

“Plagg, how’d you get mixed up in this? With him?” she asked softly. It was like a knife to the gut. He held her gaze.

“How did you? Chat Noir may be a thief, but at least he’s not a killer.” Tikki winced.

“I’ve known Ladybug for a while. She needs this.”

“So does Chat.” Tikki stood and walked around her desk, perching herself in Plagg’s lap. He gulped in shock. Her hands slid up his chest as she kissed his jaw, lips hovering by his ear.

“Excuse Plagg for the moment boys,” she whispered, then proceeded to pluck the earpiece out of Plagg’s ear. He stared at her. “Did you think I wouldn’t notice an earpiece? Shoddily made one at that. I could make you one better.” Then she kissed him. "This is what I need now Plagg..."

~ ~ ~

Tikki gave Plagg a small wave from the reception desk as he walked out of the building in a daze. The “receptionist” rose a dark brow at the redhead.

“I’m assuming everything went according to plan then?” she asked.

“Of course it did Marinette. Plagg will convince Chat Noir to lay off your jewels. You tell the mayor the job’s impossible because no one knows who Chat is under the mask. You tell your honey bee that you canceled the job. Everything is right in the world once more.”

“Good. How’d you know by the way? That Plagg was working with Chat?” Marinette asked curiously. Tikki let out a sigh.

“I wasn’t certain, but when I back-traced the chip, the coordinates showed it in Plagg’s apartment complex. Doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that he’s the most likely culprit, considering his history with illegal street racing. If Chat Noir was working with a team, it’d make sense that he’d hire on Plagg to be behind the wheel.”

“I’m surprised you were able to back-trace it so quickly. You made it sound like it would take a couple days last night.”

“It would’ve, but I already had Plagg’s information keyed as priority. I like to know what he’s getting himself into. He doesn’t always look before he leaps.”

“Did you get any other info?”

“Nope. It was squeaky clean. Whoever is working as their hacker may be shit at designing electronics, but they’ve got some serious skill keeping unwanted people out of their business. Plagg’s server was impossible to hack from a distance. I’d have to actually be there in order to break in.”
“Interesting. Don’t bother, unless Chat fails to uphold his end of the bargain.”

“Naturally. Have a nice day Marinette.” With that, Tikki turned on her heel and walked back to the elevators. Marinette gave a soft laugh at the abrupt dismissal and stood from behind the counter, gesturing for the actual receptionist as she made her way out of the office building and into the beautiful Parisian streets.

She wondered if Chat would show up tonight. Or if he’d show up at all. Odds were pointing towards not showing up, but she’d sit and wait anyway. Just in case he did. And of course, she’d have to keep an eye out for him as Ladybug—Marinette put an instant stop to that train of thought. She did not and would not watch out for him as Ladybug. If some other assassin showed up and took him out it was not her concern. She was washing her hands clean of this situation. Besides, I need to focus on my new clothing line. It’s not going to design itself.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

This was a shorter chapter, but I wanted the focus to be on Tikki and Plagg's relationship. More specifically, the dynamic between them. There's a common fan theory floating about that Tikki and Plagg are in a relationship and I thought it'd be fun to bring to life. Only this isn't the Tikki that we all know and love. She's calculating and she puts her job first. In this instance, she's putting her job with Ladybug over her feelings towards Plagg. I want that to be clear because I know someone is going to mistake Tikki as being heartless and using Plagg. She does still care about him dearly, but like Plagg she's loyal. Extremely loyal. And in her analytical mind, she has no reason to be more loyal to Plagg over Ladybug. Plagg betrayed her when he ended their relationship without a word or explanation. Ladybug has never betrayed her.
Chat called himself an idiot once again and scaled the wall, pulling himself up onto the balcony. Plagg and Nino both threatened to quit if he didn’t let go of the jewels. He couldn’t be Chat Noir without their help. He could dress up all he liked, but nothing was getting stolen without Plagg’s driving skills and Nino’s hacking. But he still couldn’t stay away.

He slipped into the room and smirked at the sight of Marinette bent over a sewing machine, frowning at whatever she was doing. She was utterly concentrated on the piece and didn’t notice him enter.

“Why hello Purrincess,” he greeted dramatically. She jumped with a squeak and turned a glare at him. She was holding pins in her mouth, which only made the glare that much more adorable. “I must say, that was well played on your part. Convincing the assassin Ladybug to take me out. I’m a touch hurt though that you’re able to brush my death off so easily.”

As expected, Marinette turned bright red. She shut off the machine and carefully took the pins from her mouth before shaking her head.

“I did nothing of the sort. I griped to a friend that Chat Noir was targeting my possessions. I had no idea that my friend knew anything about Ladybug, let alone knew her personally. Why are you even here? Tikki told me that a deal had been struck and you wouldn’t be going after the jewels anymore,” she shot out.

“I came to say goodbye of course.” His gaze drifted over to the glass case. She’d managed to scrub off the majority of his message, but not all of it. The jewels still beckoned to him. They seemed to be screaming, “Steal me! Steal me!” But he ignored it.

“You’re saying goodbye to… Objects.” Her voice was flat. His gaze drifted back to her.

“Not only the objects Princess.” Her breath caught in her throat and she swallowed. His eyes swept over the curve of her neck. “You know I would’ve stopped for something just as pretty. I told you so myself.”

“I don’t have anything just as pretty Chat Noir. At least not to your standards,” she argued softly. He knelt in front of her and rose a brow.

“Don’t you?” She licked her lips.

Fucking hell he wanted her. He wanted her like a man dying of thirst wanted water. Part of him still hated her for what she did, but the rest of him didn’t care. Just one night to get her out of his system. He didn’t care if he had to get that as Chat Noir or Adrien, but he rationally knew it had to be Chat Noir. She was working with Adrien Agreste. Sex would massively complicate the working relationship.
“Are you saying that I’m just as pretty as my priceless jewels Chaton?” she asked lowly. *Chaton*. The endearment pleased him more than it should’ve. *So I’m your kitten now, am I Princess?*

“Perhaps even prettier,” he promised lowly. She lowered her head to his when she caught sight of something behind him.

A lot happened in the next second. Her eyes widened, her body barreled into his, and pain exploded in his side. The pain was unbelievably intense. Had he been shot? He’d been shot hadn’t he? Why was he shot? Did Ladybug go back on the deal? Did she think he was going back on the deal? But if it was Ladybug, why was he still alive? He couldn’t be dead, if he was dead it wouldn’t hurt this much.

He heard a gun go off twice and tried to shake the pain from his head. *I’ve broken numerous ribs, many bones, had countless concussions. I’ve been tased, had pepper spray shot into my eyes, even been stabbed. Why does this gunshot hurt so much more than all of that combined? Get it together Agreste. Marinette needs you functional.*

Chat struggled to sit up, his hand pressing firmly against his side. He was shot from the back, why was blood coming out the front? He gripped the edge of the desk and forced himself to stand, turning to look at the scene behind him. Marinette was on the phone, talking softly, and held a handgun. A man Chat didn’t recognize lay dead on the floor, two gunshot wounds in his chest.

Marinette glanced over at Chat and swiftly hung up the phone, stowing her gun behind her back in her waistband. Anger seemed to flicker in her eyes as she gently moved his hand away from the wound to inspect it before replacing his hand.

“I need to get this cleaned up. I called Tikki and told her what happened. She should be here soon to… Take care of this,” Marinette explained gently.

“You shot him. You have a gun. A gun you know how to use?” he questioned through the pain. She slung his arm over her shoulder and began to carefully guide him from the room.

“A girl can’t be too careful living on her own in the city. I jumped through all the necessary hoops, and legally I have it for sports. As for knowing how to use it, I learned a few years back. Felt I needed to know how to shoot a gun if I was going to own one. Otherwise, it’s rather pointless.”

“You killed a man. How are you not freaking out?” Marinette was silent for a moment.

“He was going to kill you. Then me. Granted I’m probably in shock at the moment. That was the first time I’ve ever had to shoot someone coming after me. I’m working off objectives right now. Objective one was to call Tikki for help. Objective two is to get you fixed up. Objective three is to take a shower and have a nice, long break down session.” Chat stumbled on the carpet in the hall, wincing in pain.

“Fucking hell I didn’t know being shot hurt so much,” he groaned, pressing his hand harder against the wound.

“I’m assuming hospitals are out of the question.”

“What gave it away? The mask?” Marinette gave a choked laugh.

“You are bitchy when you’re hurting and not in shock. Don’t worry, I’ll get you patched up.” They finally made it to their destination, a bathroom.

Marinette carefully sat Chat down on the tiled floor and unzipped his catsuit down to his waist. He
gave her a pain-filled grin.

“Eager to undress me Princess?” he teased through clenched teeth. She rolled her eyes and ignored him, instead focusing her attention on carefully pulling his arms out of the suit and folding it down enough to expose the wound. Chat continued to wince in pain, but endured it.

He was doing pretty good too until the wound was exposed and he glanced down at it. He swore and stared straight upwards.

“I expected a hole that was bleeding, like in the movies. Not this disaster.” His flesh looked as though it was pulling away from his body. It was an ugly disaster and he didn’t even want to think of the bullshit explanation he’d have to give his agent regarding this new scar.

“This is the exit wound. The entry wound is going to look a lot different and not as horrific. You’re lucky though. At least the bullet went clean through. I won’t have to dig it out.” She stood and pulled a medical kit from the bathroom cabinet, opening it up to pull out the needed equipment.

“How do you know this stuff Princess?” She sounded so certain in her answers like this was something she dealt with on a daily basis. Marinette paused in her movements for a second before continuing.

“Google.” *Bullshit.* She was way more certain in her words and actions than anyone who’d just googled what to do.

“You’re lying.” She gave him a hard stare, then proceeded to dump hydrogen peroxide directly onto the wound, which caused Chat to scream like a little bitch.

“Are you allergic to iodine?” He shook his head, teeth grit tightly. She nodded and applied the equally burning solution to the wound.

“There’s… No way… Google taught you… This…” Chat gasped out through the pain. She pulled a suture kit from the box and threaded the stitches through the needle.

“I could say I learned it in basic first aid,” she countered, confidently moving to make the first suture. The needle passing through his skin was hell and Chat swore he passed out for a moment because one second the needle was going in, he blinked, and then she was cutting the thread and preparing for the second stitch.

“First aid doesn’t teach you this,” he muttered, black spots passing over his vision.

“I’m a seamstress.” Second suture. He blinked and she was placing the needle down, dabbing more iodine onto the wound. Three sutures. When had she done the third?

“Sewing clothes and stitching up a human body are two completely different things.” She sighed and placed a thick piece of gauze over the wound, using medical tape to keep it pressed firmly against his skin.

“I need to turn you over and deal with the other side Chaton.” Her voice was soft, gentle. He clumsily attempted to help turn his own body over, every movement feeling like his skin was pulling apart. “I lied earlier… When I said I didn’t know Ladybug…”

“Well, technically you said you didn’t know Tikki knew Ladybug, not that you yourself didn’t know her. Though that was the general assumption you allowed me to make. So lying by omission we’ll say.” *Why are you defending her? Oh right, she’s saving your life and identity all in one.*
I know Ladybug. I don’t know if you’d call us friends exactly, but she’s come to me with wounds on multiple occasions. She couldn’t do it all herself, so she showed me how to stitch her up. I kind of ended up becoming a private doctor for her, at least wound-wise.” More hydrogen peroxide. More pain. More iodine. Moment of relief as she threaded the needle.

“Would it be crazy to assume that she gave you the gun and taught you to shoot?”

“It wouldn’t be crazy to assume that, no.” This time the needle didn’t hurt as bad. Wait, when did she finish? Marinette pressed the last bit of medical tape over the gauze and turned Chat back around. “Still with me Chaton?” Chat managed a nod. Marinette moved to wash her hands before filling a cup with water and grabbing a couple pills of ibuprofen. She assisted Chat in taking the pills, before wetting a washcloth. He struggled to force the black spots from his vision, not wanting to pass out once again.

“So you have the gun and know how to shoot because you’re Ladybug’s personal trauma surgeon.” Marinette snorted at that as she gently cleaned the blood from around Chat’s skin.

“Surgeon is going way too far. All I do is stitched her up, slap some bandages on her, and kick her out. She figured I’d be targeted if people knew I did that for her, so the gun became a requirement. As well as knowing how and where to shoot. I wasn’t lying when I said that’s the first time I’ve had to shoot someone to defend myself though. That one was completely honest.” Marinette was silent for a moment. “I didn’t think I would actually have to use that aspect of her teachings.”

“Marinette!” a woman suddenly called. The two looked up to the doorway to see a short woman with blazing red hair standing there, looking concerned. Tikki, that was Tikki. Chat had seen pictures.

“I’m fine Tikki. I need help getting Chat Noir to one of the guest bedrooms,” Marinette replied. “Is Ladybug here too?” An expression Chat couldn’t place passed over Tikki’s face before she ultimately nodded.

“I can just call Plagg to pick him up Marinette. He doesn’t need to stay here.” Well didn’t he feel welcome. Marinette scowled at that.

“He’s staying, at least until I’m sure he isn’t going to be stupid and pop the stitches. Now help me. Have Ladybug find us once she’s finished… With the body.”

“A vote of confidence would be nice,” Chat attempted, wincing as Tikki and Marinette pulled him up. Tikki took a moment to text someone before nodding to Marinette.

The three made slow progress through the monster of a house before finally making it to one of the guest bedrooms. It was large, lavish, and very plain. The color scheme was beige, white, and more beige. It definitely screamed guest bedroom. Made Chat wonder what Marinette’s room looked like.

Once Chat was securely in bed, Tikki vanished to go help Ladybug. The one person Chat was not looking forward to seeing, considering she had just been trying to kill him the previous night. Marinette didn’t speak as they waited, just twiddled her thumbs nervously. Chat didn’t speak either, just attempted to breathe without pain. Finally, Tikki reappeared with Ladybug, the two stepping heavily into the room.

Ladybug was not what Chat was expecting. Granted he didn’t get a good look at her when he was running for his life, but something felt off about her. He couldn’t place it though. Marinette watched his expression with wary eyes.
“So you tried to kill me last night,” he managed to say cheerily. Ladybug shrugged, seeming a bit uncertain.

“Bloody business,” was her curt reply. He glanced back at Marinette. She seemed tense. Of course, he’d just caught her in multiple lies and she had just saved someone one of her friends tried to kill, so it was probably an awkward situation all around.

“Glad you missed,” he said smoothly, testing the waters. Marinette stiffened and Ladybug shifted uncomfortably. Tikki snorted and cut in before Ladybug could speak.

“Missed my ass. You got lucky. I was watching the entire chase through the street cameras. You just managed to duck in the nick of time every time she fired. For a black cat who’s supposed to be unlucky, you seem to have the luck of ladybugs about you.” Ladybug nodded in agreement, eyes flickering over to Marinette, who’d relaxed a bit. Something was definitely off about the situation, but Chat was too tired and in too much pain to figure it out. He would eventually though. Once he’d gotten enough sleep.

“Get some sleep Chaton,” Marinette said softly, kissing his cheek. “If you need help, just call.” Chat nodded and closed his eyes, letting oblivion sweep him away.

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Chapter End Notes

And so it begins...
Alya yanked the mask off with relief once they were safely away from Chat Noir’s room. She made a face as she handed it to Marinette.

“Ugh, don’t ask me to play Ladybug out of the blue like that again. I didn’t know what to say! All I could do was stand there awkwardly.” Without a care in the world, Alya began to strip out of the latex suit, leaving Tikki to go fetch her clothes.

“He knew something was suspicious about the situation,” Marinette mused. “He tested you, wanted reassurance that you were the real Ladybug. Hopefully, he forgets about his suspicions when he wakes up.”

“Well usually when we do this scam, I have more time to prepare girl,” Alya pointed out. Marinette nodded and winced.

“Sorry, this was… Not something I expected. As Ladybug, I’ve made it clear to the majority of assassins that this place and all occupants were off limits. Wasn’t expecting someone to be stupid enough to break that rule. I just needed him to see me in the same room with Ladybug. He was asking too many questions while I was patching him up and I got nervous. I probably should’ve planned it better.”

“You think?” Tikki demanded as she came back with Alya’s clothes. The woman dressed gratefully before snapping her fingers.

“Don’t worry about the body though, Tikki and I got that cleaned up while you were patching him up. I was cleaning up the blood when Tikki texted me, then had to make a mad dash to your room to get the key, then made a mad dash to your lair. Tikki found me struggling to fit into the damned suit.”

“We had to shove everything down flat,” Tikki commented blankly.

“Yeah. Damned good thing you made the suit so stretchy. Otherwise, my ass and bust would’ve ripped something.”

“Sorry, sorry. I appreciate the help though,” Marinette said, rubbing the back of her neck.

“Chaton?” Tikki questioned. “Don’t tell me you’re keeping strays now Marinette.”

“It’s more like fostering the stray. I’m keeping no one.”

“Be careful. You don’t know how feral that one is,” Alya commented.
“Your concerns are appreciated, but unneeded. I’m twenty-eight years old. I think I know all about trying to keep the lost looking kittens. You guys should head home, I’m going to finish cleaning up and head to bed.”

“Actually, I have a better idea,” Tikki said suddenly.

“I’m not sorry for shooting at you. But I am sorry you got shot by someone else,” Ladybug said softly. Chat groggily turned his head towards Ladybug, who was standing beside the door in the darkness of the room. She was leaning against the wall, studying him. She seemed so much more relaxed now than she did… However long ago.

“Where’s Marinette?” Chat mumbled, glancing around the room.

“Shock finally wore off. She’s currently in tears clinging to Tikki in the other room. I think Tikki is making her shower before sending her off to bed.” Ladybug was alone with him. He could test her without interference. So long as his exhausted brain could keep up with the conversation.

“You could’ve shot me before I saw you,” he pointed out. Ladybug took a deep breath.

“I hesitated. Something I’m not proud to admit. It’s no secret that I don’t especially like the mayor. The only reason I accepted the job was because I figured if I was going to kill you, I might as well get paid while doing it. No way Marinette was going to pay me for protecting her things. I regret accepting the job. I see now that a simple threat probably would’ve sufficed.” Ouch, and there went his ego, being chopped down a notch.

“So why hesitate at all if you fully planned on killing me?”

“It didn’t feel right. Don’t misunderstand kitty, I was going to shoot you. You would’ve been dead had you not have moved when you did. But I did hesitate and that’s why you’re alive to be in pain today.”

“How did you keep missing?”

“I didn’t keep missing.” She practically spat out the words as if they were an insult. “My shots were true every time. You, however, somehow managed to elude me every time. I would’ve had you on the fire escape, had you not switched up how you were descending at the last minute. I calculated it to the last step, and then you just leaped over the edge without a care in the world. Once you were on the ground and running full out, the odds were all against me. Triple that once you got in the car. I didn’t expect you to have help.”

“A… Friend of mine figured you were just toying with me.”

“What would be the point in that? The contract wanted you dead. No special addendum added. Why would I waste time toying with you when I could be getting another contract?”

“Fair enough.” Suspicions put to rest, Chat relaxed back against the pillows.

“Keep in mind I’ll be watching the place for the next month or so while things simmer down. You likely won’t see me, but I’ll be around. Keep that in mind should you be feeling sticky-fingered around Marinette’s things.” The threat was clear. Try to steal while here, get a bullet through the skull. He had a feeling she wouldn’t hesitate next time.

“You aren’t going to hunt down all the people involved with Marinette’s break down?”
“That’s not your concern. Heal up fast kitty. The longer you’re here, the higher the risk of repeat assassination attempts.” Having the final word, Ladybug slipped silently from the room. That’s when it hit Chat. What bothered him so much about her first visit. She didn’t step silently then.

He scratched his head in confusion about that, but ultimately placed it aside as ‘She isn’t supposed to be talking to me right now and doesn’t want to get caught by Marinette.’ That made the most sense. She called him kitty though. He gave a soft chuckle and closed his eyes. She must be warming up to him. Then immediately reopened them, stiffening. _That wasn’t the same voice as earlier._

~ ~ ~

Marinette gave Alya and Tikki a nod goodbye before listening to the silent household. Her suit was safely back in her lair, all the evidence had been cleaned up, including the bathroom. All that was left before bed was to threaten the community of assassins residing in or near the Paris area.

She walked into her office and booted up her computer, pulling up the dark web page specifically for the assassin community. She wasn’t worried about her IP being tracked, Tikki made sure it would bounce around constantly, at random, making it impossible for someone to track her. And Tikki also guaranteed she’d be impossible to be hacked.

The message was simple but direct. “I learned tonight that some ballsy assassin has decided to break the single rule I placed over everyone. I don’t ask for much, but this I demanded. The household of Marinette Dupain-Cheng was to be left untouched. It is considered a safe haven for all who enter it. The house itself was designed to be a safe haven for all who need the help. Marinette has helped many of us when we were bleeding to death on her floor. The fact that someone has broken her trust and my rule will not be accepted. That someone is dead now. Marinette and his target still live. I don’t care what Bourgeois promises or how much he’s willing to throw to you. Ask yourself this: ‘What do I want more? His money? Or my life?’ If anyone has any further complaint regarding this rule, please feel free to take it up with me. Just make sure your affairs are in order first. ~Ladybug.”

Within seconds after posting the message, people were responding, calling the dead assassin a coward and a fool. Post after post came of people promising they would never even think about betraying the safe haven as such. Satisfied that at least those in the surrounding area wouldn’t be foolish enough to openly break the rule, Marinette closed the program and shut off the computer. Step one completed.

Her shower was long, and she ended up sitting on the floor of the shower with the hot water beating down over her. She’d pulled herself up into a ball and took a steadying breath. Her eyes shut as she pictured the moment again.

_I lowered my head to press my lips against Chat’s. Just like I did last night. Only this time, I wanted more. It’d been too long since I’d had sex and I’d made the decision to use him as he undoubtedly planned on using me. Only I heard the creak of the balcony door, which had been shut. My eyes flashed upwards to see the assassin raise the gun towards Chat. My eyes widened as I tackled Chat to the floor as the gun went off, muffled by the silencer. Chat’s eyes widened in pain as he was shot in the side. The assassin missed his target, which had been Chat’s heart. My hand swiftly pulled the gun from its place flesh against my back and I raised it without mercy. The assassin’s eyes widened with panic at the cold look on my face. He moved to adjust his aim, but he knew it was too late. He made the connection too late. I fired twice, once in each lung and he went down. Chat was swimming in an out of consciousness, so I moved off him to call Tikki. The assassin continued to choke on his own blood._

“I’m... Sorry...” he choked out. “I didn’t... Know...” I curled my lip in disgust.
“You broke my only rule. Suffer until death.” Tikki answered the phone and I softly conveyed the situation. She promised to arrive as soon as possible with Alya to get the mess cleaned up while I patched up Chat. Before I hung up, Tikki reminded me that I needed to be the vulnerable Marinette and not the cold-blooded killer Ladybug. That comment was enough to shake me from my revenge long enough to notice Chat struggling to stand. I hung up, trying to let go of my anger. Trying to put emotion back in my voice. Trying to make some expression. It was hard though. I’d made a kill. Ladybug needed to be in control after a kill. It’s how I made sure to remain alive, out of prison, unrevealed, and most importantly feared.

Marinette was so lost in the memory, she didn’t even hear the bathroom door open. The water had long since gone cold and she was shivering under the spray. Chat turned off the water and managed to pull out a large towel, wrapping it around her body.

“You should be asleep,” she said softly, taking care not to cling to him and further injure him.

“So should you,” he countered. "Instead, you’re sitting in a freezing cold shower curled up into a ball. I don’t sleep well in big empty houses, lay down with me.” He rubbed her arms slowly, bringing heat back to them. She barely managed a nod and allowed him to lead her back to his room. She didn’t bother with clothes, just kept the towel wrapped tightly around her body. She climbed under the warm covers and didn’t fight when Chat pulled her close against him.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered.

“You don’t need to apologize. You killed someone tonight. That’s enough to make anyone freak out.” I killed him protecting you! That’s why I’m sorry! I’m sorry you, for even a moment, saw the darkest parts of me I struggle to hide when I’m not wearing the mask. But she didn’t say any of that. Instead, she nodded and shut her eyes, letting Chat’s warmth guide her to sleep.

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Chapter End Notes

So here I wanted to give you guys a look at what happened from Marinette's eyes without restating what we've already seen. I've had a couple people thankful that Chat isn't stupid and realizes that something isn't right concerning the "Ladybug" he met. Because there's no magic involved, and Chat is a grown ass man, I think he should be smart enough to figure out some clues. He's smart enough to rob places after all!
Chat squinted his eyes open in the daylight hours, pain stabbing through his side. The pain was so bad, it was making him sick to his stomach. He couldn’t even convince himself to sit up. His face felt gross and oily from wearing the thick black makeup and mask for so long, though he did count his lucky stars that his mask managed to stay on while he slept.

He remembered waking up at one point to hear the shower running not far off. He had assumed it was Marinette and ignored it, but it kept going and going. Finally, he’d managed to get up and made his way over to the sound to find her curled up in a ball while freezing water poured over her. And he didn’t understand. He still didn’t understand. Were all of his suspicions completely off base?

“Chaton, you’re awake! How’re you feeling?” Marinette asked gently, making her way over to his side. She walks without a sound too. Probably does it unintentionally.

“It hurts,” he admitted. “I feel sick.” No point in lying about it to seem macho. The woman had watched him pass out numerous times and heard him scream in pain. Plus she may or may not have hunted him across rooftops taking shots at his skull in an attempt to murder him. But the court was still out on that last one.

“Oh ma Chaton, let me check the bandages, make sure you’re still in one piece,” Marinette said softly, peeling the blanket down. It was then he noticed that someone had taken off his belt, boots, gloves, and cat ears. When had that happened?

The wounds were fine, so Marinette helped him sit up and propped him against a couple pillows. Then she made him sip some water before giving him some ibuprofen for the pain and inflammation.

“You’re on bed rest for at least two more days while this heals. No walking around without assistance, nothing. If you’re thirsty, call me. If you’re hungry, call me. If you’re in pain, call me. If you need to take a piss, call me. Clear?” Chat nodded before giving a cheeky grin.

“If I’m a good patient, does that mean I’ll be rewarded? Because I can think of a mew things my nurse can reward me with.” She rolled her eyes at the pun.

“Chat, if I tried to ride you now, I’d break you. Sorry kitty.” She gave him a pat on the cheek before turning to leave the room. “I have some work I need to get done and some calls to make, I’ll be back in about an hour to make sure you’re still doing okay. If the nausea is gone by then, I’ll make you something to eat.” She started to walk out of the room, then paused and glanced back in. “Oh and I’ll bring some clothes for you too, so you can at least bathe.” Then she was gone. Chat frowned. Kitty? That’s what Ladybug called him.

Suddenly the blood drained from his face. Work. Calls. Adrien! His phone was at home and it’d be
kind of suspicious if Adrien Agreste stopped answering his calls while Chat Noir was injured.

With willpower he didn’t realize he had, Chat slid from the bed, spying his belt on the dresser. The blood drained from his face as pain shot through him, but he slowly made his way over to the belt, using the wall to hold him up. He grabbed his earpiece from the belt and shoved it in his ear, beeping for Nino. Then he began the painful journey back to the bed.

“Chat?! Where the hell are you? What happened?” Nino demanded, answering almost immediately.

“It’s a… Long ass story man. Listen, I don’t have much time. Can you patch all calls for my personal cell over to my earpiece?” Chat slid back into the bed, wincing as he moved. He felt a stitch pop on his side and glanced down. Blood was beginning to soak through the bandages.

“Yeah, yeah sure, but it’s going to take about an hour. Can you hold out ‘till then?” An hour?! That was when Marinette was coming back, which means her calls would be done before then!

“I need it a lot sooner than that man. Kind of in a sticky situation. Like, my identity is in danger situation. I need those calls forwarded.”

“Fucking hell, alright I can do it faster, but I’d need your cell. Where is it?”

“Never.”

Nino hung up the call and Chat slipped his earpiece into the pillowcase figuring this was a good enough reason to shout for help anyways. Bonus if it delayed her for a while.

“Marinette!” he yelled. He listened closely and heard nothing. “Marinette!” Suddenly the door burst open and Marinette rushed through. She… Ran across the fucking house without making a goddamn sound. How the hell?

“Oh what the hell did you do Chat?” she groaned, spying his bleeding bandages. Chat gave a sheepish expression.

“I was just trying to get more comfortable when I felt something pop. I looked down and there’s blood,” he lied easily. She sighed and nodded.

“Alright, give me a minute to patch you up. But if you pop them again, I’m pouring more hydrogen peroxide on it.” He raised his hands in surrender.

She vanished into the en suite bathroom and came out with a medical kit and towels. After laying down the towels, she opened the kit and put on some gloves before carefully peeling the bandage up.

“Looks like it’s only one of them. You got lucky. I’d be pissed if I had to re-do all of them.” Chat didn’t reply, just stared upwards as she removed the old suture from his wound. She threaded a new needle and swiftly got to work on patching him up. This time, he didn’t pass out. Almost wish he did though. It hurt, a lot.

Once Marinette was done, she cleaned the area of blood and dabbed on some more iodine before placing on a new bandage, pressing down firmly. Then she checked Chat’s back to make sure he hadn’t popped any of the stitching there. Thankfully, he hadn’t.
“And we’re all done. Please be more careful Chaton. I do need to get some work done. I know bed rest sucks, but if you’re willing to wait, I can bring you in a TV or something to pass the time later. Sound good?”

“That sounds purrfect Princess,” he replied with a wink. She rolled her eyes again, but he caught the small smile.

“Good, but you only get it if you don’t pop anymore of my stitching. Anything else before I get back to work?” Chat gave her a pitiful look.

“Kiss it and make it better?” She snorted, but bent her head and brushed her lips over the bandage slowly, her beautiful bluebell eyes watching his as she moved. Heat rushed through him straight to his smaller head and he gave a strained laugh. “Keep teasing Princess and I’ll pop more than a few stitches.” Her eyes sparkled at the threat and she danced back, silently again, wiggling her fingers at him.

“Be a good Chaton and get some rest.” Then she was gone.

Chat swiftly grabbed his earpiece out of the pillowcase and fit it back in his ear. He dialed for Nino again and waited impatiently for his buddy to pick up.

“Great timing, I just finished rerouting your calls. Remember, if the earpiece starts buzzing, that means someone is trying to call you. Just press the Nino button and it’ll answer. It’ll also connect me through so I can record and monitor the calls. So no phone sex. Also, you can’t dial, only answer,” Nino spewed out in a rush upon answering.

“Perfect. You’re the man Nino.”

“I know, I know. Bow before my glory. So what the hell happened to you man? Plagg and I have been freaking out trying to get a hold of you.” Chat winced.

“Not to steal anything. I was going to… I don’t know say goodbye I guess.”

“To… Jewels…” There was a long sigh.

“Listen, you want to know or not?” Nino stopped talking. “So while I was there, an assassin came in, not Ladybug, and shot me. Marinette tackled me and I was only hit in the side. But I have six stitches in my body and can barely move without popping them. So I’m stuck here until I recover some.”

“What happened to the assassin? How’d you get patched up?” Chat opened his mouth to reply when his earpiece began buzzing in his ear.

“Hold that thought, getting a call.” He cleared his throat and took a breath, trying to envision the calmer and softer voice he used as Adrien Agreste. Chat Noir and Adrien blended so much, half the time he forgot which was his original voice. He pushed the button to answer. “Hello?”

“Hey Adrien, it’s Marinette. Listen I know we had a couple of appointments scheduled for the week, but I’ve had an unexpected visitor staying with me for a few weeks so I’m going to have to cancel.
I’m so sorry,” Marinette said. *Nino, you’re so getting a fucking raise. Or you would if we didn’t already split the profits evenly.*

“All right then, everything okay?”

“Yeah, yeah. Just my cousin. He’s really picky about strangers, so when he does randomly decide to pop in for a visit, I have to clear my entire schedule. It sucks, but what can you do?”

“All right. Just call me when you’re free and we can work around that.”

“Thanks, and sorry again. Bye!” She hung up and Chat released a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding.

“You’re the cousin, aren’t you?” Nino asked. Chat grimaced at the thought.

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“I’m telling Plagg.” He then proceeded to shout ‘Chat is a cousin fucker now’ across the room, causing Plagg to begin laughing hysterically.

“I fucking hate you both. I’m on my goddamn deathbed and you shits are mocking me.” Nino burst out laughing.

“Deathbed my ass. You probably got Marinette playing naughty nurse for you already. Don’t you pry enough ladies off your arms as is?” Chat rolled his eyes. “If I had half of your level of suave, it wouldn’t have taken me so long to get with Alya.”

“Listen dammit. Did you run the information on Marinette that I asked for?”

“Yeah, but what do you need that for now?”

“Just… Trust me on this. I have a hunch and I hope I’m wrong, but I’m afraid I might be right. So I need that shit forwarded to my PDA as soon as possible. Password protected. Unhackable.”

“Consider it done.”

“Oh, and I spoke to Ladybug last night after getting shot. Talk to you later guys!” Chat smirked and hung up on Nino and Plagg’s protests. They could just call him back, but they knew better. If he was on bed rest in Marinette’s house, he couldn’t be found chatting it up with his buddies. Rule of thumb, don’t let anyone other than Nino or Chat touch Chat’s earpiece. The last thing he needed was Marinette to catch him with it and take it away. Paranoid? Maybe. Smart? Definitely.

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Chapter End Notes

This chapter and the next are going to be on the shorter side. Chapter 9 is going to be decently long, so I wanted to break things up to flow a little better! Hope you guys like some more Chat, Nino, and Plagg dynamic!
Chapter Summary

Do cats and snakes get along? Do bugs and snakes get along? Why is there even a snake?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marinette raised her head from the sewing machine and glanced at the time. It was almost time to check up on Chat. She’d gone in there a few times throughout the day, and each time he seemed to get more and more of his flirt back. The last time she’d gone in, he asked for a sponge bath. Which would be whatever, if not for the suggestive wink.

Any other man and she’d have shoved her fingers deep into his bullet wound until he understood proper patient behaviors. But with Chat, she found she didn’t mind his flirting. It didn’t feel like he honestly thought something would happen if he asked for a hand job mid-sponge bath if he asked enough times, but more like he flirted because it was fun. It was refreshing. And enticing.

When she’d called Chloe earlier to give her an update, she was informed to get him healed and then immediately enjoy some sexual release. “But only if you think about me while doing so. Otherwise, I might get jealous,” Chloe teased. Hell, Marinette loved that woman. She was perfect.

Just one more year. One more year and Chloe would come home. And once she came back home, she was moving in with Marinette and wasn’t leaving like this again. The separation was killing Marinette. It was killing both of them.

At the buzzing of her disposable phone, Marinette glanced down to see a text from Tikki. “No good. As I mentioned, the tech might be shit, but the security is ridiculous. Can’t hack into their channel with Plagg’s device. I would need access to their main computer in order to bug Chat’s device.”

Marinette responded swiftly, sighing to herself. “Don’t worry about it for the moment. I think we’re in the clear as is. I’ll just keep a closer eye on him the next few days.”

“Well, you may want to take a rain check on babysitting him tomorrow night. We’ve got a new contract. Simple stuff. Some government official who managed to talk his way out of a jail sentence after assaulting a young girl, using slander to his advantage. Figured it was right up your alley. Money isn’t the best, but it’s all the girl can afford.” That was something that was right up her alley. Marinette tapped her phone against her chin, thinking it over. When she first started doing this, she had the naive idea of only taking cases like this. Where she was taking out “the bad guy” and helping “the good guy.” Naturally, as she grew up she learned there was no such thing as a bad guy and good guy. Everyone was layered in shades of good and bad.

“I’ll do it. Have her set up an IOU account. She can slowly make payments every month until she reaches my usual fare. If that’s not alright with her, she can find a new assassin.”

“You got it, boss.” She’d have to be careful coming and going with Chat in the house, but she could make it work. With his injury, he wasn’t going much further than the bathroom. Maybe she should
just toss in a sleeping pill to make sure he was out cold while she was gone.

Marinette slipped the disposable phone into the locked cabinet at her work desk and began to head towards Chat’s room. All was silent, save the TV she’d hooked up for him. She peeked her head into the room and saw him sleeping, hand resting on his stomach. His hair was getting oily and skin was dirty as hell. Plus wearing the catsuit like he was had to be bothering him. Not to mention having that mask on 24/7.

She stepped back and made her way to Luka’s bedroom, pulling out a pair of his sleeping pants as well as a pair of boxers. At the very least, she could allow Chat to get cleaned up. At the door, she hesitated. *I could use the help.*... Then she called Luka.

“Last time you called me out of the blue like this I played ‘My Heart Beats For You,’” Luka answered in a laid back voice. “Something tells me you’re not calling for a bit of sexual release this time though. How may I serve my lady?”

“Need some help from Viperion darling, think you can get me in contact?” Marinette asked, face heating at his casual reference to their on-again, off-again sex life.

“I suppose that could be arranged. Only if we get to go ice skating again. I haven’t had that much fun in years.” If possible, Marinette’s face turned a brighter shade of red.

“I’ll think about it. Tell the viper to bring his contact solution. And one of those cloth masks.”

“As my lady commands.” She hung up and shook her head at the phone. Luka… He would be so perfect. If it wasn’t for the fact that he and Chloe hated each other. Chloe felt he was *too* laid-back for a serious relationship and Luka felt Chloe couldn’t truly understand his and Marinette’s way of life.

Marinette walked back to Chat’s room and set the clothes on the chair beside the bed. She wouldn’t wake him up yet, she’d wait for Viperion to arrive. She wondered how Chat would react to being watched over by an assassin. Not that he wasn’t currently being watched over by an assassin, he just didn’t know it.

Viperion was… An interesting assassin. He honestly had no real need for his suit, considering how he killed, but he liked to make a statement. The only pictures the media had gotten of Viperion were flashes of a tall man dressed in black and teal. Viperion killed exclusively with deadly poisons. Unlike how Ladybug could switch it up depending on what her client demanded of her, Viperion straight up refused to use anything except poison. The man was also insane enough to slowly build up his tolerance for most poisons and venom. He could probably walk through a field of venomous snakes and be totally fine if a little sore from all the bites.

He did all that while managing his busy civilian life. Luka was an indie-musician, wasn’t signed on with any label, but still made a killing from his music. His songs were what swayed Marinette’s heart after all. If she closed her eyes, she could vividly picture the day they met.

“Don’t come back until you’ve learned your lesson!” Tom shouted, shoving me from the house and into the street. It was pouring rain and I was not wearing the proper clothes. I was quickly soaked, but I had to finish my punishment if I ever wanted to be allowed back in the house. I slowly picked myself up off the ground and wrapped my arms around myself, making my way to the bridge where I’d dropped the delivery of cupcakes I was supposed to make. I was instructed by my father to pick up every single crumb and bring it back to him. Time was money, and my blunder caused my parents to lose money. A fair punishment? Or a twisted form of abuse?
Upon approaching the bridge, my heart stopped as I saw birds had braved the rain to gobble up the destroyed cupcakes. There was nothing left to pick up! The larger pieces were eaten by the birds and the smaller pieces were washed away by the rain. Hot tears fell down my cheeks as I sat down, wrapping my arms around my knees. I would never be allowed back inside now.

“Your heart sounds like this,” a voice came from behind me. My head jerked up and I glanced back to see a young man sitting under an umbrella beside the railing of the bridge. He was holding a guitar and began to strum slowly, playing a heartbreaking tune. “It should sound like this.” He changed rhythm so fast, playing a light and happy song that made me crack the smallest of smiles.

“Thank you, but I don’t think my heart will be singing praises anytime soon,” I replied, wiping tears and raindrops from my eyes. He put his guitar in its case and stood slowly with the umbrella.

“That’s a shame. You’re much too beautiful to be crying in the rain. Come on, let’s get you somewhere warm.” I knew I shouldn’t. I knew I should just go back to the house and admit my failings to my father. Take the beatings and move on with my day. But it was so cold and he treated me so normal. The only other person in my life to treat me so normally was Chloe. “I’ll even buy you a hot chocolate.” With a small nod, I crowded under the man’s umbrella and let him lead me off the bridge and into a new life. “My name’s Luka. What’s yours?”

Marinette smiled at the memory while checking Chat’s wounds. Ah, Luka. He taught her how to shoot. He taught her parkour. He taught her everything. In return, she made him his Viperion suit. And he got her in contact with Tikki and Alya. She blinked as the question from a couple nights ago came back to her. Luka. She would be sad if Luka died too. She didn’t just have Chloe. She had Luka too. Maybe she wasn’t the cold ice queen she thought she was. Maybe she did still have the ability to care about others.

Her phone buzzed with a text from Luka. The message consisted of the snake emoji, nothing else. With a small smile, she left Chat’s side to head to her workroom, embracing Viperion in a hug once she walked in.

“I saw your message on the dark web last night. What was that all about?” he asked, glancing down at her with concern. Marinette took a breath and quickly explained what happened, giving him a condensed version of the events that transpired.

“So now I have a dirty cat sleeping in my guest bedroom with a nasty gunshot wound and I have a contract to complete for tomorrow night and I really need some help here,” she finished, rubbing her hands together.

“Alright, I’m assuming my first task is to bathe the cat?” Viperion’s eyes twinkled with mischief. She narrowed her own eyes suspiciously.

“Yes… What are you thinking you little snake?” she questioned.

“Nothing, nothing. Just wondering how hard it's going to be. Cats don’t particularly like water after all. He may try to claw his way out.”

“I hate everything.”

“Oh Mari, come on. I know you fang my puns.” She gave him a blank look.

“Was that supposed to be ‘hate my puns’ because if so, you’re slacking.” He grinned and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

“I’ll sssssssee what I can do about the cat. Introduce me.”
With a heavy sigh and a roll of the eyes, Marinette led Viperion to Chat’s bedroom. *When did I start thinking of the bedroom as Chat’s?* Shaking off the thought, Marinette opened the door and gently nudged on Chat’s shoulder.

“Chaton, wake up. I have someone I want you to meet.”

Chat woke up quickly and tried to sit up, only to wince and swear. Marinette scowled at him and shoved him back down against the pillows.

“Hey kitty-kitty,” Viperion said with a grin, leaning back against the wall.

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Chapter End Notes

Luuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu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Checks and Balances

Chapter Summary

This is the start of something beautiful.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chat Noir stared at the man standing against the wall. The man was tall, maybe even taller than Chat, and had shaggy dark hair. The top half of his hair was black, but the bottom half was dyed teal. The suit he was wearing was just as skillfully crafted as Ladybug’s, designed to fit his body perfectly. It was mostly teal, with accents of a black-ish blue down his sides. His gloves and boots were teal, as well as his mask, and everything had a scale-like texture to it. A teal whip hung coiled on his hip. The thing that shocked Chat the most, out of everything, were his eyes. Obvious contacts, but still unnerving. His sclera were teal and overtook his irises, leaving the vertical slit of his pupils the only thing not teal and textured like a snake.

Viperion. This guy could only be Viperion. He was the second best assassin in France. Used to be the best, until Ladybug came along. The news reported that he killed only with lethal poisons and his victims suffered quite a lot before finally dying. The fact that Marinette was bringing in a very skillful assassin while Chat still apparently had a bounty on his head did not make him feel great.

“Ha! Don’t look sssso freaked out kitty-cat,” Viperion said with a wink and a laugh. “Marinette asked me for a favor, and I owe her several. She did patch me up the multiple times I got shot, stabbed, or otherwise mortally injured. Not here to kill you, promise!”

“You need a bath,” Marinette said firmly. “And I have work to be done. I also have to leave tomorrow for a business dinner that I can’t miss. I was going to ask Ladybug to watch you, but she apparently had a bounty on his head did not make him feel great.

“Princess, I’m hurt. You know I would never refuse you bathing me,” Chat said, giving her an innocent blink. She snorted and shook her head.

“Sorry Chaton, you’ll have to settle for the snake.”

“I promise I won’t bite,” Viperion supplied with a wink. Chat had the odd urge to hiss at him. He refrained and instead nodded to Marinette. Why did she hang out with so many assassins if she wasn’t Ladybug? Furthermore, why were there so many damn assassins in Paris?!

“I put some spare clothes there,” Marinette said, pointing to a chair off to the side. “I figured Luka wouldn’t mind if Chat borrowed them for now. Considering he’s out of the country and all.” She was staring at Viperion as she said it and he held her gaze with a smirk.

“Don’t worry, I won’t say a thing to Luka. He’ll never know his clothes kept a stray cat warm,” Viperion commented. Who the hell is Luka?!

“Alright, I’m getting back to work.” Marinette pressed a kiss to Chat’s temple. “Be good Chaton and get clean.” Then she left the room as silently as she always did.
“Alright, let’s get you to the bathroom kitty-cat,” Viperion said, silently stepping up to the bed and carefully tossing Chat’s arm around his shoulders.

“My name is definitely not kitty-cat,” Chat hissed out through the pain as Viperion helped him stand, his hand covering the bandage on his front.

“It could be though. It should be though. With that outfit, Chat Noir is way too on the nose. You gotta have a little fun with your code name.” The two slowly shuffled around the bed towards the en suite.

“Kitty-cat does not have the same air of defiance,” Chat pointed out. “Besides, I’m not the only person with a fancy not-on-the-nose nickname. Ladybug is pretty on the nose.”

“Fair. But she’s too serious to have a fun nickname. You, on the other hand, seem a lot more laid-back than she is.” Viperion set Chat down on the edge of the tub, then vanished back into the room to grab the chair, pulling it into the bathroom so Chat could lean back against something.

“You’re oddly laid-back too, for an assassin,” Chat pointed out once he was seated in the chair. Viperion shrugged and began to help Chat pry the rest of his suit off. The relief was instantaneous. The leather was so tight and constrictive after wearing it for so long, it felt nice to get it off. He didn’t even care that he was stripped down to his boxers in front of someone he didn’t know.

Viperion started the water, and Chat put his feet in the tub. He felt an odd connection with the snake-themed assassin, like the kindling of a potentially great friendship. Which was odd, considering he never thought he could be friends with someone who made a living by killing people. Then again, he never thought he could ever feel anything other than hate for Marinette, so surprises all around.

“That high you feel when you steal something,” Viperion said suddenly. “That sense of freedom. When you put on the mask and you shed the expectations people have for you in life and you can just be you. The better you. That’s what being Viperion does for me. I was angry at the world for a long time. The world took my sister, who was my best friend. Being Viperion gave me the freedom to enact the justice she deserved. Not just that, there’s this freedom that comes with it. Sure, I kill people and get money out of it. But I balance it back out with what I do in my civilian life. What I take, I give back. Life is all about checks and balances, you know?” Chat thought that over as Viperion began to wash his arms.

“But you kill innocent people. I don’t understand that,” he finally admitted. Viperion gave a laugh.

“No one is ever truly innocent Chat Noir. When a person reaches a certain age, they give up any sense of ‘innocence.’ I kill with reason. I kill with purpose.”

“By using deadly poisons that make their final moments agonizingly painful?”

“The poisons I normally use have a stimulant that blocks the pain receptors. Think of it like overdosing on morphine. Yes, it looks like they’re in agonizing pain, but they aren’t. Their bodies move like that as a reaction to ‘fix’ what is wrong with their body. Like when someone is choking, their hands automatically fly to their throat. It doesn’t stop them from choking, but it’s the body’s natural movements in such a situation.”

“How do you know? They die afterwards.”

“I perfected the poison-mix on myself first of course.” Chat stared at him with wide eyes. Viperion shrugged. “Everything I use on my victims has been used on myself first. Like I said, checks and balances. First I was doing it to gain a tolerance to the different poisons and toxins. Then I wanted to
know if it was possible to have someone die a peaceful death, but look painful as hell. So I started experimenting.”

“How are you still alive then?!” Viperion thought that over for a second, then began counting everything off on his fingers.

“Tolerance, chemistry, antidotes, and the luck of the gods.” Chat let out a laugh, shaking his head. Viperion gave a grin. “I know. I’m insane. Marinette told me so when she found out. You know my last victim? He was my client for the assassination.”

“He paid you to kill him?”

“Yeah. He was a washed out politician with really good political views, but no one would listen to him. He was dying already, so he asked me to make him a martyr. Even paid me triple to do it in the daylight during one of his speeches.” Chat thought back and remembered that news report. It was about a month ago. The press was shocked that Viperion went after such a minor figure in the political world and everyone assumed someone higher up was trying to shut the man up. Thinking back on it, about a week after the man’s death, Paris did change a few of their political policies for the better.

“How’d you meet Marinette?”

“Ah, Marinette. Was wondering when you’d ask that.” He gave a grin. “Officially I met her through Ladybug.”

“And unofficially?”

“Unofficially, I’ve known Marinette for years. Not personally, but close enough. She’s good friends with my buddy Luka.” There was that name again. Luka.

“And Luka is?”

“My buddy. And a good friend of Marinette. He’s an indie-musician and travels a lot. So much, that he usually lives in hotels. Whenever he’s in Paris, he stays here. He hates his parents and obviously, he can’t be shacking up with an assassin when he’s in town. So Marinette lets him crash here. She said it’d be sad if he didn’t have an actual home to stay in when he’s in his hometown.”

“Am I allowed to ask about Ladybug?”

“You can ask, but I can’t tell you much. Woman came out of nowhere one day and swiped my top spot. I’ve run into her on a couple occasions and she once found me after I’d been shot by the police after fleeing from a crime scene. Ladybug helped me get here so Marinette could patch me up and vanished after she helped Marinette. She’s my rival, in a sense, but there’s no bad blood.” Chat gave a small chuckle.

“Reminds me of Rena Rouge,” Chat commented.

“The fox girl?″

“Yeah. She and I have run into each other during heists. But while we’re considered rivals, there isn’t much bad blood. Considering she likes anything shiny while I like cat things. She prefers to steal jewels and gems whereas I’ll take a scroll if it’s expensive and features a cat. When we do run into each other, it’s kind of awkward. Mostly because it’s something our personal heists don’t plan on and everything has to change on the spot. Once we got into a whispered argument on which one of us was stealing from a particular museum first and which one had to wait a week for the heat to
die down.” Chat grinned at the memory.

“Who won the argument?” Viperion asked with a smirk.

“She did. A man knows when to tuck tail and run.” The two masked men laughed at that.

As Viperion finished helping Chat bathe and get dressed in the comfortable clothes, they chatted more, getting to know each other as much as they could considering the masks. Viperion told Chat that his friends should take on code names as well, keep their lines as clear of personal information as possible, even if it was amazingly encrypted. Chat agreed and promised he would bring it up to them.

Finally, the time came when Chat needed to wash his face. Viperion moved Chat’s chair over to sit in front of the sink so he could see his own face.

“I’ll step outside,” Viperion said. “Just call me back in when you’re done.”

“Thanks man.” The two fist-bumped and Viperion stepped out of the room. The thief removed his mask and stared into the mirror. Viperion had left him with contact solution, so he could take out his contacts for a bit, and a cloth mask that wouldn’t hug his face as much, allowing his skin to breathe while keeping his identity under wraps.

Adrien stared in the mirror and gave a small sigh. He rubbed his fingers over the mask.

“Who are you?” he asked his reflection in a whisper. “Are you Adrien Agreste or Chat Noir? Which one is the real you?” The thief or the model? One would think that after twenty-nine years, he’d know the answer by now, but he didn’t. He wished he did. It would make life so much easier.

Adrien washed his face, scrubbing hard to get all the makeup off and adhesive off. Once his face felt fresh enough to stop, he cleaned off his mask. Then he took out his contacts, blinking with relief, and carefully placed them in the contacts case Viperion had provided. After squeezing contact solution into each side, he put on the cloth mask. When he went to bed, he’d have to put his other mask back on to make sure it didn’t fall off while he slept, but for now, this was good.

“I’m ready,” he called out. Viperion stepped back into the room and blinked.

“Whoa, your eyes are actually green? And here I thought the green was just to be cheeky,” he commented. Adrien rolled his eyes.

“Are your eyes actually a creepy teal?” he countered. Viperion smirked.

“And wouldn’t you like to know?” Adrien snickered and let Viperion help him out of the bathroom and back into bed. The snake then got Adrien’s mask and the contact case and put them both on the bedside table, along with a bottle of mask adhesive.

“I’ve gotta slither away now, but I’ll see you tomorrow man,” Viperion said, giving Adrien one last fist-bump. Adrien smirked at the pun.

“Don’t get into any catastrophic accidents on your way home.” The two shared a laugh and Viperion left. Adrien noted that just like Marinette and Ladybug, he didn’t make a sound when he moved. The information was useless at the moment, but he felt like it was an important piece of the puzzle that he was slowly fitting together in his head. He just needed a few more details that he couldn’t quite figure out.

~ ~ ~
Viperion slipped into his apartment and stretched, whistling softly to himself. Maybe it was time for Luka to come home from “vacation.” He removed his mask and took out his contacts, blinking at the sudden change. Luka texted Marinette to let her know Viperion made it back in one piece. She always worried.

As Luka stripped out of his outfit, he smirked at Marinette’s response. “I would be a bit concerned if you actually managed to get into trouble on your way back. See you tomorrow snake boy.” He shook his head at her text, a grin stretching across his face. Then he went to the bathroom to wash out the spray-in dye from his hair. It took a couple good rinses, but soon his hair was back to its usual light blue dye against natural black hair. As the teal-tinted water swirled down the drain, he grabbed a towel and began to rub his hair dry. An alert popped up on his phone.

“OMG I think I saw Luka Couffaine at a resort in Hawaii! Think that’s where he’s been hiding out???” The post on his social media said. Soon his social media was filled with theories on why he was in Hawaii. Let them think what they want, he thought with a chuckle. It’s just easier to distance Viperion from Luka if they’re not in the same country.

He sprawled out on his couch and pulled out his guitar, playing a couple chords. He did miss being home. It was slightly hard to go out as Luka Couffaine if Luka was supposed to be on the opposite end of the earth. And it would be nice to spend some time with Marinette. They could go to the park together. Maybe once Chat Noir was healed up enough to not need a babysitter, they could.

Luka’s disposable phone rang. His brow furrowed.

“Hello?” he answered.

“Viperion, we got a new contract. You’re never going to believe this one,” Rose replied, sounding irritated.

“Who’s it for?” he asked, his hackles rising. Rose didn’t usually make comments like that when reporting new contracts. She usually just laid it all out once he answered.

“Three targets. Chat Noir. Marinette Dupain-Cheng. And Ladybug. Ten million euro. The contract is from Mayor Bourgeois and his brat of a step-daughter.” Rose spat out the words with a venom Luka didn’t have in his arsenal. He hissed under his breath, sounding very much like the snake he pretended to be.

“Is the man stupid? He’s asking me to go after Ladybug.”

“Not that I want to defend his intelligence, but hardly anyone knows the two of you are friends. Most people assume you hate each other because of the rival status the news placed upon your relationship. He probably assumed you’d jump at the chance to take your number one spot back.”

“Obviously I’m not taking the contract.”

“Clearly, but here’s where things get complicated. He keeps jacking up the price. Every time an assassin turns down the hit, he raises it by another five million euro. It’s only a matter of time before someone gets greedy and stupid enough to take it.” Luka sighed and rubbed his face.

“This is bad.” Rose was silent for a few moments.

“Viperion… I know you assassins have your code and everything to ensure total chaos doesn’t reign across Europe. But maybe you should take him out.”

“I can’t Rose and you know I can’t. The code is there for a reason and with my higher level in the
Assassins Organization, it would be hell if I broke it. Everyone lower would figure it was their chance to get their own revenge on people who’ve wronged them.” This was a cluster fuck. “But what I can do is call an emergency meeting in the organization…”

“The last time a bunch of assassins were in the same room together, things did not go well,” Rose pointed out. Five years back. Someone took a deal with the police and led them straight to the meeting. People were arrested. People were shot. People were killed. It was a disaster and those remaining agreed not to meet up like that again unless it was an absolute emergency.

“I don’t think we have a choice now. Bourgeois added Marinette and Ladybug to the list of hits. I’m assuming Ladybug because she canceled the contract and Marinette because she’s helping Chat. Who’s to say he won’t add Viperion next? Or Hawk Moth? Or Rena Rouge? Or Tikki or you? He’s gone too far this time. Call for the meeting.”

“When? Your last message said Viperion was helping to cover for Ladybug while she took out a target tomorrow.”

“This takes priority. Have it set for tomorrow night. She can stop in once she finishes her job. Chat Noir will just have to settle for being surrounded by assassins all night long.”

“Alright… And L—Viperion?”

“Yeah?”

“Stay safe… She’d never forgive me if I let anything happen to you…” His hand gripped the phone tightly. Tears blurred his vision. Juleka… Why'd you leave us?

“I promise.”

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Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys like the dynamic I played with surrounding Luka as Viperion. Personally, I feel Luka is too laid-back to honestly sign on with a music label, which is why I have him as an indie musician. Originally, I was going to make him and Chat rivals, but then I remembered the episode "Frozer" and realized that Luka just wants Marinette to be happy. He doesn’t need to be the one to make her happy. But he will always be there for her when she needs him. So instead of rivals, Luka and Chat are friends. I loved writing it, so I'm crossing my fingers and hoping you guys love reading it!
Who Are You Marinette Dupain-Cheng?

Chapter Summary

Exposition in-coming! Take cover!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Adrien frowned at his PDA, scrolling through all the information Nino had sent over. It was late at night, or early in the morning depending on how one looked at it. 3 am. Marinette was asleep and Adrien should’ve been asleep, but he wasn’t sure if he was going to get a better chance than now to look over the information.

“Marinette Dupain-Cheng, age twenty-eight, but only a handful of months away from her birthday. Born to Tom Dupain and Sabine Cheng. She attended a public school up until grade five when her parents’ bakery chain took off and they came into a lot of money. They transferred her over to an all-girls private school where she attended until graduation. After graduating, she spent four years at a local college getting her degree in fashion design. At the age of twenty-six, she bought out the company Gabriel, previously owned by Gabriel Agreste, when the company started going under. Unlike the previous CEO who preferred his privacy, Marinette can often be found working closely with her employees and the public with each new clothing line she creates.

“That being said, not much is known about the personal life of Marinette Dupain-Cheng. She’s been seen in public with the famous Luka Couffaine numerous times, but both have denied any romantic affiliation with the other. Despite claiming to be an open-book, Marinette is quite secretive about her life. She’s known to volunteer and donates to various charities, but rarely mentions what goes on in her downtime. When asked by a reporter about her relationship with her parents, she gave a very generic response before changing the subject. Many speculate that they don’t have the best relationship.

“Oddly enough, for someone who isn’t vain and acts quite down-to-earth, Marinette’s home is a large mansion filled with expensive items. When asked by interviewers what the point of all that is, considering she claims to not care about material objects, she simply stated that while she liked the look of the pretty things, she honestly did not care for them. She claimed the things she held dearest to her heart were things she knew were made with love and care. She doesn’t have any butlers or maids hired on, does most of the cleaning herself. She has an assistant hired, but unlike Nathalie Sancoeur who was hired on as Gabriel Agreste’s personal assistant, Alix Kubdel does not live with her.”

Adrien rubbed his face. This information was close to useless, but there were some good points in it that he needed to take note of. Most specifically, Alix Kubdel. That had to have been the shorter lady who’d seen him into the house when Marinette took his measurements. She may know something, but it wasn’t certain.

Odd that the information made no mention of Tikki. In fact, the one common theme here was that Marinette led a very lonely life. But that couldn’t be right. From what he’d seen, Marinette was surrounded by people almost every day. One call and Tikki came over to help her, along with Ladybug. Another and Viperion showed up. Granted, Adrien doubted it’d be public knowledge that
Marinette associated herself with assassins on the daily, but… Something didn’t feel right. It felt like there was a lot in the public information missing.

Adrien took a breath and keyed in the password for the added information Nino dug up. The stuff that wasn’t public information. *What are you hiding Marinette?*

A lot.

“At the age of ten, Marinette Dupain-Cheng was taken to the hospital after showing up to school with bruises covering her body and a severe case of hypothermia. The police suspected child abuse, but Marinette refused to speak up. Child Protective Services looked deeper into the case but could find nothing amiss in Marinette’s home life. At fifteen, she was jumped by a group of girls at her school for being in a secret relationship with Chloe Bourgeois. She spent three nights in the hospital after the beating she took. Chloe had to be pried from her side while she was in the hospital. At seventeen, a couple girls tried to attack her again, but she easily defended herself, showing that she had gotten some serious self-defense training. This was not long after she was seen hanging out with Luka Couffaine. She cut all ties with her parents when she moved out at eighteen, instead choosing to rent an apartment with Chloe until Chloe’s father forbade her from ever seeing Marinette again. It’s suspected that they either came out to him or he found out about their relationship. Not long after this, Ladybug first appeared in Paris.

“A month after Chloe was banned from seeing Marinette, she snuck out late at night to see Marinette and the two went on a romantic date, where a local witness watched Chloe propose to Marinette. Marinette accepted the proposal. The information made its way back to the mayor, who shipped Chloe off to his ex-wife living in New York. It’s unknown whether Chloe will ever return. All public records of the two’s relationship were hidden under the mayor’s demand. Following this, Marinette became extremely closed-off.

“When Marinette was twenty-three, she visited her parents one last time. It’s speculated that she went to attempt to repair their relationship. Security footage shows Tom Dupain throwing her out of the house, yelling for her to never return until she’d become successful enough. Following this, Marinette started coming into a lot of money. No one knows where this money came from, but it’s suspected that Chloe was the one sending the money. She eventually made enough to comfortably support herself, but the money kept rolling in until she eventually bought out the fashion company. Not long after doing that, her monetary value shot through the roof and she became one of the youngest millionaires in Paris to date. She still has not returned to see her parents.”

“What did they do to you bugaboo?” Adrien asked under his breath. Hell, he thought his life was rough after his mother passed. His life was wonderful compared to hers. Sure, his father worked a lot, but at least Gabriel made time for Adrien. Plus, Adrien had Nino and Plagg. He was never truly alone. From this, it seemed like most anyone Marinette got close to was soon taken away from her. And his father would never dream of beating him.

He scowled and made a mental note of her parent’s address. The second he could, he would take from them what they clearly valued most in the world. Things. People like that didn’t deserve to have as much as they did.

Adrien stuffed his PDA under the mattress and sighed, laying back against the pillows. He put in his earpiece and called Nino, who he knew would still be up until dawn trying to find someone who could watch over Adrien without asking questions when he was free to leave Marinette’s house.

“Did you finish going over the information?” Nino asked upon answering.

“Yeah. That was not an easy read. I had no idea she went through that kind of shit growing up. How
is she not simmering with rage from all of what people have put her through?”

“Not a clue. Why’d you want all that anyway? I know before it was because you needed background information for when you robbed her, but you aren’t doing that now. So what gives?” Adrien sighed and rubbed his face. *Should I tell him? Yeah, I need to.*

“Because I think Marinette is Ladybug.”

“And we are instantly dropping this conversation until you are back here!” Nino hissed. “Listen, I know you. Don’t do anything stupid for fuck’s sake. This is shit that people get killed over. It doesn’t matter, it’s not our fucking business. We don’t get mixed up with that side of the criminal underground Chat. You’re going to focus on healing and then you’re going to get out of there and never look back. Am I clear? No snooping, even if you think it’s safe.”

“Crystal. Not like I can exactly do much snooping if I can’t move without help.”

“I’m serious Chat.”

“So am I. On my honor as a cat, I will not be snooping around this house while I am injured and cannot make a quick getaway.”

“Good. Now get the hell to sleep. Fucking hell man, way to make me ten times more paranoid about you being in that house than I already am. I’m going to dive into the deep web, see what I can dig up. If I need to barter for your skin, I better have something good to trade…” With that, Nino hung up the call. Adrien gave a small chuckle and hid the earpiece again.

He took off the cloth mask and picked up his leather one, applying some adhesive. Sticking it on his face, he gave a small sigh. Already he felt more like Chat Noir, it was a comforting feeling. As if putting on the mask meant he didn’t have to worry about rules and regulations the way Adrien did. He could be free.

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Chapter End Notes

This was a lot of plot, backstory, and *EXPOSITION*. But I hope it gives you guys some insight into why Marinette is the way she is. Hopefully, it makes her more sympathetic as a character. Let me know!
Chapter Summary

The top seven assassins of Europe and a cat in a single room together. What could possibly go wrong?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ladybug took a slow breath and waited for the politician to notice the ladybug card. The words had been written carefully. “In the eyes of the law, you’re innocent. I have judged you as guilty.” She wanted him to know why he was dying. She watched him through her scope as he froze, finally noticing the card. His hands shook as he lifted it from the ground and opened it up. Suddenly he dropped it and pulled his phone out of his pocket. Likely to call for help. Too late.

His head exploded as the bullet tore through it. He went down hard, his employees screaming around him. Ladybug swiftly collapsed her rifle and stuffed it in the bag, heading down the fire escape to where Tikki sat waiting for her.

After she slipped into the car, Tikki held out a hand to stop her from her usual task of getting changed. Ladybug frowned in confusion.

“There’s been an emergency meeting called by the Assassins Organization. Meeting ground is your place,” Tikki informed her. Ladybug jerked in surprise.

“What? Who called this?” she demanded.

“Viperion.” Ladybug ground her teeth together. She knew Viperion would have a good reason for risking her identity like this, but it still didn’t make her feel any better about not being informed. Looked like Marinette’s business dinner was going to be running on for longer than expected. She couldn’t risk changing at home.

“Are you going to it?” she asked her partner.

“I have to. The meeting called for every high ranker in the organization. That includes all us tech-geeks who only forward you guys the contracts.” Ladybug nodded and handed Tikki a spare mask.

“Not that it’s going to help with your hair.” Tikki shrugged at that.

“Better than nothing.” She added adhesive to the mask and fit it on her face, putting the car in drive and leaving the alley. The mask was similar to Ladybug’s, with the color scheme swapped. Instead of a red mask with black spots, her mask was black with red spots. Ladybug had constantly begged to be allowed to make Tikki her own outfit for occasions like this, but Tikki always refused. She claimed it wasn’t worth the time or money to make her an outfit when she would rarely ever have a need for it. Ladybug knew she had a point, but still. It made her twitchy to know that someone could pick out Tikki in a crowd based off her hair alone.

The two made it to the private parking three blocks away from Ladybug’s home and got out of the car. Ladybug took a moment to gear up, handing Tikki a knife and handgun, and adding her own
smaller weapons to her person. Safety first. One could never tell how a meeting with the Assassins Organization would go.

Once suited up, Ladybug blew her rifle a kiss goodbye and the two walked up to the entrance of the tunnels. An abandoned underground system that ran throughout Paris. Ladybug’s home was skillfully placed over one of the tunnels and she spent a lot of money making sure her house was connected. It was useful for entering her home without prying eyes. It also made it useful for those in need of Marinette’s help who couldn’t just sneak in through the revolving balcony door.

Tikki entered the code and the door swung open without a sound. The two plunged into the darkness, the door closing behind them. They walked silently and with purpose, knowing they were going to be a little late. Finally, after five minutes of darkness lit only by glowing red spots on the ground, the two made it to the right door.

Ladybug put in the code and the ceiling opened up, a ladder coming down. She thought the door was clever. It wasn’t a real door and it was pretty secure. Anyone who didn’t know the code wouldn’t be able to hack the system and no one could break in this way without her knowing about it. The two climbed up into Ladybug’s home.

They came out in one of the many closets on the first floor, and Ladybug made certain the trapdoor was shut and ladder raised before she opened the closet door and walked out into the living room. She was greeted with quite the sight.

Rena Rouge was awkwardly sitting next to the fireplace, her orange eyes constantly darting over to where an injured Chat Noir stared at her. Seemed the two knew each other. Viperion was talking to Rose, who was wearing a mouse mask. Always odd to see the viper casually talk to a mouse. Hawk Moth was talking to Peacock, trying and failing to flirt with her. Nothing unusual there. Queen Bee was relaxing on Ladybug’s chaise, looking over what Ladybug assumed to be a new contract. Illustrator and Ivan were playing cards on the floor, Ivan’s golem mask covered his entire face.

“Finally,” Viperion announced upon seeing Tikki and Ladybug. “Now we can begin.”

“It looks like we’re missing some people,” Ladybug pointed out. Hawk Moth shrugged.

“Max is getting a drink of water from the kitchen, Sabrina is in the bathroom, and Gorilla is securing the perimeter,” Hawk Moth explained.

“And Rena’s assistant?” Ladybug inquired.

“Sick with the flu,” Rena said. “I told her to stay home.” Ladybug nodded and took a seat on the couch with Tikki. She propped her feet up on the footrest and glanced around.


“Business dinner. Asked me to watch over her kitty while she was busy. Figured it was a good time to call this meeting. No need for civilians to put up with criminals any more than needed,” he replied.

“Why is this meeting called? We agreed not to do this unless it was an emergency.”

“You’re right Viperion,” Queen Bee suddenly cut in. Heads swiveled towards her. “Your name got added to the list and now it’s up to fifteen million.”

“I suppose this is an emergency then,” Illustrator commented. Ladybug frowned.

“Mayor Bourgeois sent a contract to Viperion late last night,” Rose explained softly. “He offered ten
million euro for the deaths of Chat Noir, Marinette, and Ladybug. This meeting was called to discuss the assassin code.”

“Even if all of us refused the contract, our names would just get added to the list of people he wants dead,” Peacock surmised. “Eventually he’ll run out of decent assassins.”

“Only for a lower-ranking one to get greedy and see it as a way to take out the competition and get rich while doing so,” Sabrina pointed out, hurrying over to her place beside Queen Bee. Her yellow mask didn’t work well with the rest of her outfit, but Ladybug could tell she didn’t care too much about fashion choices.

“No one in Europe would be that stupid,” Hawk Moth disagreed.

“He could out-source,” Max pointed out as he wandered into the room with a glass of water. He sat comfortably on the floor at Peacock’s feet. Ladybug hid a smile as Peacock reached down and began to stroke her fingers through his springy black hair. He adjusted his metallic-looking mask and glanced down at his tablet. “If he called in an assassin from another country, who’s to say they won’t take it? And succeed? You guys would have no idea who to watch out for. You’d essentially be stuck in limbo, unable to do any jobs until the contract ended. Even then you’re not safe if whoever it is finds out your identities.”

Everyone was quiet at that. They sat thinking this complication over.

“It seems the only thing to do is to take out the mayor,” Peacock stated firmly.

“We should test Viperion’s theory a bit more beforehand,” Hawk Moth argued. “The last thing we need to do is break the code without being certain. He may give up.”

“I’ll send in your refusal of the contract,” Sabrina said to Queen Bee quickly, pulling out her disposable phone and keying in the message. While she did that, Ladybug’s eyes were drawn over to Chat Noir. He was clearly uncomfortable, sitting off in the corner watching them all. Viperion had made him get dressed in his catsuit, likely for safety’s sake. Not that any of the people in the room would dare harm him in the safe haven that was her mansion, but it likely made the cat feel better to have some layer of protection.

“He looks a lot better than he did a few nights ago,” Tikki whispered in Ladybug’s ear. Ladybug felt herself flush slightly and tore her gaze away from Chat. She gave a small nod and instead looked to Peacock.

“When’s the wedding?” she asked casually. Max began to blush fiercely, his dark brown skin taking on a hint of red. Peacock gave a laugh.

“We haven’t settled on a date yet,” she said, smiling down at Max. “But we’re thinking of having two weddings. One public wedding for our civilian lives and a private wedding for this one.” Ladybug nodded and smiled.

“I’ll be looking forward to it.”

“I think I’ll ask Marinette to design the dress for the private wedding. She does such amazing work.” Peacock’s eyes glimmered with amusement. Ladybug chuckled at the compliment.

“When’s your wedding?” Illustrator asked Ladybug. She shot him a thousand-watt glare, taking brief enjoyment from the way he withered.

“Ladybug still hasn’t accepted my proposal,” Viperion commented dramatically, which was unlike
him. But she knew why he was doing it. “No worries guys, I’ll break her down eventually. My lady can’t refuse me forever.” Viperion’s fingers twitched in Chat’s direction and Illustrator got the hint. He gave a laugh.

“Everyone knows Ladybug is a lone wolf,” Queen Bee said, waving her hand through the air. “I’m more interested in Rena’s boy.” Rena scowled as the attention shifted from Ladybug to Rena Rouge.

“He’s a civilian and knows nothing of this life,” she stated firmly.

“Perhaps you should bring him by. He may enjoy our company,” Peacock said, running her fingers through Max’s hair once more. “Worked for me.”

“I doubt he’d be okay with this.” She gave a slight sigh, her eyes going dreamy. “He’s got a strong moral compass. Wouldn’t be okay with the criminal life.” Likely that was what drew Rena to her man in the first place.

“What’s his name anyway?” Hawk Moth asked. “We should probably know, just in case one of us gets a contract for him. Would be a bit awkward if we accidentally killed him because we didn’t know he was off-limits.”

Rena opened her mouth to reply when Ivan suddenly jerked up and raised his hand. “Illustrator just got a new contract. Twenty million euro. Chat Noir, Marinette, Ladybug, Viperion, and Queen Bee. I think Viperion’s theory is confirmed now.”

“Well shit,” Tikki said, leaning forward. Suddenly everyone started talking at once, arguing over whether or not they should break the code to handle this issue. Hawk Moth, Ladybug, and Illustrator were firmly on the do not break the code end of the argument. Rena, Viperion, Queen Bee, and Peacock all agreed that these were extenuating circumstances.

“What is this code you guys keep arguing about?” Chat Noir suddenly asked, shutting everyone up. All eyes fell on him and he shifted slightly.

“The Assassin Code is something we came up with here in Europe,” Queen Bee explained. “It’s to keep anarchy from raging. With so many assassins in a collective place, it became clear that we needed to have some form of rules to keep us sane. Part of the code is not to turn on your contractor. This means if someone has sent out a contract, they gain immunity. We can’t just kill them because we don’t like the hit they put out. It would give greedy people too much power. Take the money from a hit, then kill the contractor for more money.”

“We also can’t take a hit we previously turned down. Our decision is final in that regard. But we can cancel a hit we originally accepted. No one can force us to kill, but we can’t take a potential hit away from another assassin because we’re feeling wishy-washy,” Peacock added.

“Plus, we have to make everyone aware of high target hits,” Illustrator said. “For example, if there was a hit out on the Prime Minister sent through a contract to me, I would have to make everyone else in the organization aware of the hit before accepting or refusing the hit. This way if multiple contractors want the same person dead, we have a head’s up.”

“Any neutral ground or safe haven is a no-kill zone,” Rena piped up. “Such as this place. Marinette has done a lot to help us, keep us alive, patch us up when we needed it. She basically gets auto-immunity and anyone who is currently inside her home gain the same immunity during the duration of their stay.”

“Which is why I was pissed when that fucking idiot attacked you and her here,” Ladybug grumbled,
crossing her arms. “Shame she killed him before I could get my hands on him.”

“Furthermore, Ladybug is allowed to add and delete people from the immunity list at will, assuming it doesn’t clash with the previous codes. She’s top dog,” Hawk Moth stated.

“Finally, we don’t kill unless we have a contract stating to kill. We’re not murders in the correct sense. We’re assassins. If we’re killing, we’re getting paid. Tacked onto that, we’re not allowed to put out our own contracts. This keeps people from finding a loophole in the ‘no killing without a contract’ portion of the code.” He gave Ladybug a hard stare. She wrinkled her nose. *That’s why I took the contract in the first place. So I could kill Chat.* “The only thing that allows us to kill without a contract is in self-defense, if someone breaks the code, or if it’s to protect our identities.”

“We sidekicks are usually always in the deep web, keeping an eye out for any code-breakers,” Rose stated. “Nothing happens there without our knowledge. And if there’s a new assassin in the game, we find out. We inform our assassin, and they handle the introductions. Usually, it’s the second-ranking assassin who handles newbies. We don’t want to risk our unofficial leader, so the second-ranker is essentially bait to make sure the new player will play by the rules.”

“I had to introduce Ladybug to the rules,” Hawk Moth complained. “I thought she was going to break my arms when I told her about the rules here in Europe.”

“And now I’m the bait,” Viperion said happily. Chat frowned slightly and rubbed the back of his neck.

“What if you get a contract to kill a contractor? Isn’t that a loophole in your code?” he asked. Everyone went silent.

“But we can’t put out contracts. Weren’t you listening?” Queen Bee said suddenly, sighing.

“I know someone who can,” Tikki mused, resting her chin in her hands. Her eyes were staring at Chat. He blinked.

“Um, I don’t think I’m exactly comfortable doing that,” he said quickly, waving his hands away.


“You’re talking about Plagg?” she asked her partner. Tikki nodded.

“Plagg is loyal. And Plagg is one of those people willing to do whatever it takes to keep those he cares about safe. It’s why he cut all communication with me when he became involved in Chat’s heists. To keep me from getting involved in the criminal world. Granted, he wasn’t aware that I was already involved, but no matter. If I told Plagg that this was the only way to ensure Chat’s safety, he’d do it.”

“So who’d he send the contract to?” Ivan asked.

“I can’t do it,” Ladybug announced regretfully. “I made a promise to someone that I don’t intend on breaking.”

“I don’t think it should be anyone on the list,” Max said. “He’d be expecting that. Currently, he seems to be jumping down the line of top assassins. The current ranking for the top dogs goes Ladybug, Viperion, Queen Bee, Illustrator, Hawk Moth, Peacock, Rena Rouge.”

“But he hired a low-ranker to attack Chat after I canceled the contract,” Ladybug pointed out.
“And he clearly realized his mistake in doing so,” Max argued. “No one lower than us has received another contract from him. That might change if everyone in this room refuses.”

“So Hawk Moth, Peacock, or Rena?” Sabrina questioned.

“I’ll do it,” Peacock said. “Illustrator, delay the refusal for twenty-four hours to give Plagg enough time to send me a contract for the mayor’s death. This way when I receive the contract, Hawk Moth gets one from him. Then Hawk Moth can accept the contract while I take him out.”

“This is a high profile target, you’re going to need help,” Rena argued. “No offense, but you’re not like Ladybug who can take him out from an insane distance. Or like Viperion who can poison him with no one the wiser. I vote for a group effort.”

“Group effort?” Viperion asked, seemingly interested in the prospect. Rena nodded firmly. “If we plan this, and plan it well, we can all have a hand in his demise. And it increases our chances of success ten-fold. If one person fails, another can take the chance. It also helps make sure we all stay safe out of jail. Can’t catch seven assassins if you’re only chasing after one,” she explained. It was a good plan, but…

“I still can’t do anything,” Ladybug said, frustration radiating from her. “I want to help, but what can I do?”

“Lend us your luck,” Hawk Moth said softly, gripping her shoulder reassuringly. She felt a fatherly kindness radiating from him and sighed, giving him a nod. “You may not be able to directly help little bug, but your luck is legendary. I have faith that just being there will give us enough luck needed to pull this off.”

“We keep this hidden from the dark web,” Illustrator stated firmly. “Last thing we need is for the low-rank guys to get greedy and sell the information to him.”

“Max and I can make up some new phones for everyone,” Tikki said. Max nodded in agreement.

“I’ll keep an eye on the dark web to ensure no one knows a thing,” Rose stated.

“I can coordinate everyone’s schedule with their criminal life and civilian life,” Sabrina jumped in.

“I’ll ask my partner to watch the civilian news. That’s something she can do while sick,” Rena commented.

“I can work with Gorilla on security,” Ivan cut in. “He and I can make sure anyone who starts acting fishy don’t act fishy anymore.” He cracked his knuckles for effect.

“You know, I’m starting to regret swiping that necklace,” Chat muttered.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

I’m going to go ahead and clear up some misunderstandings that I know people will have concerning this chapter.
Hawk Moth is *not* Gabriel Agreste in this universe. Peacock is *not* Emilie Agreste nor is she Nathalie. Finally, Queen Bee is *not* Chloe. I wanted to have these characters in a sense appear, but I wanted to be able to have a bit more liberty with said characters.

And yes, the top seven assassins who control the Assassin Organization know each other's identities. The purpose of the masks their assistants/side-kicks/tech geeks wear is to protect their identities when coming and going from the meeting location, as well as protect their identities from anyone not in the know who may be attending the meeting. This is why Ladybug knows everyone by name, and why the Illustrator makes a reference to her engagement with Chloe.

If you have any other questions concerning this chapter, just ask in the comments below and I'll explain things best I can!
Chat sucked in air through his clenched teeth as Viperion and Ladybug helped him back up to the guest bedroom. He still didn’t know how he felt about Rena Rouge being an assassin. In the year and a half that he’d known her, she’d always been just a thief to him. He couldn’t imagine her being any different. From her hurried explanation, she told him that while she was an assassin, she preferred being in the business of stealing and that was why she ranked the lowest on the totem pole. He didn’t bother to mention that she ranked the lowest of the top seven assassins in all of Europe. That seemed rather obvious.

“Why’d you bring him downstairs?” Ladybug demanded of Viperion. “This just makes more work for everyone in the long run and risks his stitches.”

“Because if he needed something, it was easier to handle when he was right there. Besides, cats are naturally curious animals,” Viperion replied.

“I’m. Right. Here,” Chat hissed. They finally made it to the bedroom and he was dumped unceremoniously onto the bed. He shot Viperion a glare, who chuckled and helped him get into a more comfortable position.

“I’m gonna go get a coffee, be right back,” he said suddenly, silently leaving the room. Leaving Chat and Ladybug alone together. Well, this is awkward.

The two were silent for a couple minutes. In the better lighting, Chat made more connections between her and Marinette. The black hair, blue eyes. Granted, it was all circumstantial and nothing said quite clearly that she and Marinette were one and the same. But he felt he was getting closer.

“People keep assuming that I took the contract because I planned on killing you for targeting Marinette and figured I’d might as well get paid for doing so,” Ladybug said suddenly. To be fair, you also stated as much when you threatened me the other night. “That’s not the case. I took the contract so I could kill you without breaking the code.” Chat rose a brow at her.

“Taking that code into consideration, I don’t exactly have to be worried about you now do I? You canceled the contract you took against me and now you can’t re-accept it. Nor can you just kill me for shits and giggles. I could steal everything in this house and you couldn’t do shit about it,” he commented. Not that he had any plan to do so, but he wanted to know her response to that. She stiffened and stared down at him.

“Kitty, you’re adorable if you think I don’t know my way around the code. I could always just have Marinette put in a contract against you.” Chat gave her a wide grin.

“No, she can’t.”
“And why can’t she?” Because I’m 85% certain that she’s you, so that would go against your code.

“Well, I suppose physically she can, but this is Marinette we’re talking about. I don’t think she’d be able to handle asking you to kill someone. It’d go against her nature.” Ladybug pressed her lips together and considered him.

“You’re smarter than you look kitty.”

“Nice back-handed compliment. You saying I look dumb?” She shrugged and tossed him a smirk.

“Maybe. You know, even if I can’t kill you in accordance with the code, there’s a lot more I can do. Things that would be worse than just putting a bullet between your eyes.” She flicked his forehead and tossed her hair back. “So don’t even joke about stealing anything. Because there are some fates worse than death.”

And as per usual, after having the last words, she slipped from the room and left Chat feeling a chill in the air. It was when she acted like that, like the queen of cold with zero emotions, that he struggled to believe she could be Marinette. Marinette who acted so warm and friendly. He thought back to Marinette’s hidden story and shook his head. That would explain the emotionless Ladybug, but how can someone hide that much pain in their everyday life? He didn’t understand.

Viperion slipped back into the room a couple minutes later and sat in the chair beside Chat’s bed. He propped his feet up on the bed and gave Chat a once over.

“Ladybug, she’s cold. She’s got this harsh exterior that’s nearly impossible to break through,” he stated, making it sound like it was an off-hand comment.

“If she truly wanted to kill you, then you’d be dead. I don’t know what you did to her but whatever it was affected her enough that it changed her mind.”

“I find that hard to believe. How could anything that I’ve done change her mind about something she was so certain about?” Viperion shrugged in response.

“Word of advice though? Don’t let her get to you. She acts all cold, but sometimes it’s like she’s the only person in the room that feels a damn thing. She’s had a tough life and you just need to be patient with her.”

“Probably be best if I don’t run into her again after I finish healing,” Chat pointed out. Viperion laughed and nodded.

“Yeah. Unless you’re interested in becoming an assassin? We could always use one more.” Chat rolled his eyes at that.

“No thanks, I’ll stick to my bloodless thieving thank you very much.” Viperion lightly punched Chat on the shoulder.

“Worth a shot. Marinette texted by the way. She said she’d be back soon. Twenty minutes tops. She wanted to know if you busted any more stitches in your side.” Chat shook his head. “I’ll let her know. Try to get some sleep. May not seem like it, but remaining still is one of the best ways to heal from a gunshot wound. Your body needs time to stitch itself together.”

“I figure it’ll be another couple days before Marinette deems me healed enough to get out. Less if my partners can find us a decent doc who won’t talk.”
“Well, in case I don’t see you again after you leave, it was a pleasure cat sitting you.” Viperion stuck out his fist. Chat gave a laugh and tapped his fist against Viperion’s.

“Oddly enough, it was a pleasure being cat sat by you. I’m going to get some sleep so slither your way out.” Viperion tossed his head back and gave a full laugh, grinning wickedly.

“Enjoy your cat nap.” Chat smirked.

“Work on your puns man. Because I’m not feline it.”

“Will do. Catch you on the flip-side.”

As Chat was busy laughing, Viperion slipped from the room. He was going to miss that damn snake. Odd as it was, the two became close extremely fast in the two days they interacted. It helped that Viperion didn’t act any different from a normal person. Unlike Ladybug, he wasn’t trying to be scary all the time. He just… Rolled with life. Didn’t seem to have a care in the world. He was probably one of the most laid-back people Chat had ever met. Which seemed out of place considering the brief backstory Viperion gave him the previous day. What exactly turned Viperion towards his life? What led him down that path? Chat had a feeling that whatever it was, it was a lot more severe than he was willing to know.

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Chapter End Notes

So this one is a bit on the shorter side than I like. The reason behind it is that the next chapter is split up between Chat’s eyes and Marinette’s eyes and I felt it needed its own chapter to hold the weight I wanted it to. The last chapter was a bit too long to have this part tacked on, so I was stuck with this important bit of character development floating around in space with nowhere to add it in. I *could’ve* bulked it up some more, but I felt that would make it too wordy and take away from the emotional impact concerning the scene.

On the bright side, since I promised 5 chapters per day while I get you guys caught up to my brain, you only have to wait the 10 minutes it’ll take to get the next chapter up!
Goodbye

Chapter Summary

Chat is healed up enough to finally leave the Dupain-Cheng mansion. It's time to say goodbye.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Chaton,” a soft voice drifted to his ears. Chat turned his head to the side and gave Marinette an easy smile. It’d been three days since he witnessed the oddest business meeting in his life. Three days with nothing happening. Marinette watched over him, changed his dressing, checked on his healing. He relaxed, didn’t snoop, and rested as much as possible.

“Is it time?” he asked her. She nodded. Nino had finally found a decent doctor, so Plagg would be picking him up tonight. It was an odd thing, making sure he could slip from the house unnoticed by going through the front door.

“He’s pulling up now,” Marinette explained, running her fingers down his arm. “Before you go, I just wanted to say goodbye.” She brushed her fingers through his hair and Chat’s breath caught in his throat. “Last time I tried, you were shot.”

“Worth it,” Chat replied. Marinette’s lips quirked and she lowered her head, pressing her lips to his. Chat’s hand snaked around the back of her neck and he pulled her closer, humming as her lips parted against his.

In no real rush, he slowly kissed her, tongue moving out to tangle with hers. Her hands slid down to press against his chest as if to keep her from laying against him. He wanted her to. He wanted her sprawled out over him. His free hand came up to cup her cheek while his other hand slid down from her neck. He pocketed the necklace he pilfered, the note already prepped and waiting for her to find.

Plagg cleared his throat from the door and the two slowly parted. Chat gave her a slow grin.

“Definitely worth getting shot over,” he told her softly. Her already flushed face burned brighter as she moved away, clasping her hands together in front of her.


“Same to you.” Plagg collected all of Chat’s things before helping his friend up. The two made it out of the house and into Plagg’s car with zero issues. Chat waited without breathing, waiting for all hell to break loose, but they made it past the gate safely. And then they were on their way home. Chat fit his earpiece in.

“Your suit is secure, as is the car. No trackers anywhere,” Nino reported.

“Did you get it?” Plagg asked Chat, who nodded. He lifted the necklace from his pocket.

“Yeah, I got it.” He rubbed his fingers over the small charm and turned to stare out the window, lost in thought. “Did you leave it on the note?”
“Yep. Don’t worry man, she’ll find it. Right now, we need to focus on getting you better as quickly as possible. Adrien Agreste has been out of the spotlight for far too long. The hospital called, worried about you.”

“What’d you guys tell them?”

“That you were out of town for the moment and would be back soon.” Plagg snuck a glance at Chat. “Your dad’s doing better by the way. The treatments are going well at least.” Chat nodded and leaned against the cool window, shutting his eyes and letting the motion of the car rock him to sleep.

Marinette watched the rear lights of the car disappear into the night and sighed, reaching up to her neck to rub her charm. Her heart stopped when she didn’t feel her charm. That son of a bitch! Anger flew through her as she stormed back into his room, hoping and praying that she just dropped it and he didn’t take advantage of their kiss to steal from her. Was he just using her? Just wanted a chance to rub it in her face that Ladybug couldn’t stop him?

Her eyes fell on something shiny on the dresser. She frowned and lifted it up. A necklace with a small black cat charm. There was a note underneath it. She lifted the note and read it swiftly, tears stinging her eyes. Stupid Chaton… What if I hadn’t found it?

“I hope you don’t mind Princess, but I took a souvenir to remember our time together. A beautiful good luck charm for this lucky cat, no? Despite the circumstances, I found I enjoyed my stay at Marinette’s hospital. 10/10 service. But because as a thief, I understand that it isn’t stealing if I give something of equal value in return. So I propose a trade. Souvenir for souvenir. You can remember me while I remember you. Take care of yourself Princess, and stay out of trouble. And don’t worry, I’ll see you soon… You just won’t see me.” It was signed with his usual black paw print.

Marinette gripped the necklace tightly and sucked in a shaky breath, rubbing at her chest. She knew he would be leaving. She thought she’d prepared herself for when he did. So why did it hurt so fucking much now that he was gone? Why’d he have to leave such a heart-breaking note? And he could follow her silently without her knowing. He knew Marinette. But she didn’t know him. She couldn’t follow him as Ladybug.

Suddenly gripped with the burning desire to know who he was, she texted Tikki to tell her to find out Chat’s identity. She had to know. If for nothing else… But to return the favor.

“He got to you, didn’t he?” Tikki replied. Marinette didn’t affirm that, only repeated her command until Tikki agreed. Then she curled up in Chat’s bed, surrounding herself in his scent. She wasn’t sure what was going on with her, she was better at controlling her emotions. Stupid Chaton, she thought. Why’d you weasel your way inside?

Chapter End Notes

This one is super short. But it has to be and it’s supposed to be. When writing, I feel the best goodbyes characters have between each other are short and sweet. Something gut-punching that makes the reader go "NO TURN AROUND GO BACK YOU FOOL!" If the chapter drags on and on, this takes away from that emotional attachment.
Don't worry though. This isn't a final goodbye.
Who is Ladybug?

Chapter Summary

Chaton, you discovered the one thing you never should've discovered...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Adrien stared at the mask sitting in front of him. Three months. For three months, he’d been unable to become Chat Noir. It took three months for his side to finish healing. He was ready to stretch his legs.

“What’s the plan Adrien?” Nino asked, fingers tapping on his keyboard. Adrien rubbed the back of his neck.

“I need to know Nino. There’s something in me that’s burning with the desire to unravel this mystery surrounding her. Maybe it’s dumb. And no I have no idea what I’d do with the information. But I still want to know for certain,” he explained. Nino nodded and spun around in his chair.

“Well lucky for you, I have access to all of the security cameras in her mansion. Hacked into them while you were stuck there in case you needed to get out quick.” Adrien perked up.

“What’d you see?” Could he have witnessed Marinette change into Ladybug?

“Nothing out of the ordinary. None of the bedrooms have cameras and the few cameras that are placed around are placed weird. The only one in a definitive location is in her office, but even that one has a weird placement. And it would constantly shut off,” Nino reported. Adrien frowned.

“So there’s something in her office?”

“That’s not all. One of the cameras focuses down a hall, but its angled towards a bedroom door. As if she wants to know who exits and enters that room. I’d put money on it being her bedroom.”

“My money is on something being hidden in her bedroom,” Plagg supplied from the couch, pausing his racing game to glance back at the other two. “If you go in, definitely search her bedroom top to bottom. Maybe that’s where she keeps her suit... If you’re right.”

“How’s your assassination contract going?” Adrien shot out at him. Plagg scowled and turned back around.

“The last update I got said it would be completed tomorrow night. If you decide to go in, do it then. The place should be empty then.” Adrien shook his head.

“No. I’ll do it tonight.” Nino and Plagg stared at him like he was stupid. Adrien quickly raised his hands in defense and explained himself. “Listen if I get caught, Plagg’s in danger because she knows he’s associated with me. But they can’t do anything about Plagg currently in accordance with their code because he’s currently supplying them with a contract. Logic dictates that I go in and found out the life-ending information before his immunity is up.”
“I hate to say this, but that makes sense,” Nino admitted. Plagg scowled.

“Do not get yourself killed Adrien. Or I’ll never forgive you,” he growled.

“Just be ready and waiting in the car in case I need a quick pick up,” Adrien said, giving a shrug. Plagg turned back to his game with a huff while Adrien began to suit up. Nino turned back to his computer.

“I’ll be on the comms watching out for you man. Stay safe and don’t be stupid.” Adrien fit on his mask and Chat Noir gave Nino a nod. He stretched, his side tightening slightly. Hopefully, it wouldn’t slow him down. With everything set and ready to go, he slipped up to the roof and began to run.

It was freeing, being able to run and jump like this. He missed it more than he was comfortable admitting. Every so often, his side would tighten and he’d nearly miss a jump, but he always recovered in time. It was his first time out since the injury. I should’ve done more to make sure the muscles relaxed, he admonished himself. Finally, the mansion was in view.

“Alright, she’s currently in her office on her computer, so I recommend taking this chance to get into her bedroom,” Nino reported. “Looping the cameras in the halls now.”

Chat scaled the wall and snuck in through the balcony door, which was unlocked and slightly open, as usual. He stepped lightly and with purpose as he walked through the dimmed halls.

“Second door on your right.” Chat slowly opened the door and peeked into the dark room. He knew it’d be empty, but he still felt the need to check. Once inside, he closed the door behind him and set to work.

He opened drawers, cabinets, dressers, closets. He searched for hidden panels and walls but found nothing. It was starting to frustrate him. Was he wrong? There’s still the office to search through, he reminded himself. As a last ditch effort, he peeked under the bed. And frowned.

There was a black duffel bag laying under the bed. He slid it toward him and his frown deepened. It appeared to be empty, but why was it under the bed? He was searching through all the pockets, feeling around, when his fingers touched something cold and metallic. He pulled out a random key. Now, why was this hidden here?

“Chat hide, she’s on her way towards you!” Chat pocketed the key and slid the bag back under the bed. After a quick glance around, he took a chance and jumped on top of her wardrobe, pressing himself flush against the wall, hidden partially behind the top décor on the wardrobe.

Marinette walked into the room and flicked a switch, the bedside lamps turning on. Chat held his breath. She was humming something he couldn’t quite make out. His heart pounded in his chest and his mouth went dry as she stripped out of her clothes, tossing them in a hamper. Hell, she was gorgeous. It took everything within him to remain hidden when she turned towards him and he caught sight of her beautiful full breasts and the cat necklace he’d left behind for her. She kept it. He wasn’t sure she would, but she did.

Marinette gave a yawn and pulled a nightgown from her dresser, slipping it on. Then she climbed into bed and clicked the lights off. Chat remained frozen for a solid fifteen minutes while her breathing slowly evened out and she fell asleep. Wish I could fall asleep that fast.

With the coast clear, Chat slowly lowered himself to the floor and eased his way across the room. She didn’t stir. He slipped out, barely opening the door enough to fit through and released a breath
once he was on the other side. The dim lighting from before was gone and the place was cast in darkness. Better for Chat. Nino directed him towards the office and set that camera on a loop as well, watching him through the live feed as he searched the place.

There was nothing. Absolutely nothing. The key didn’t work on anything either and he checked, twice. With a growl of frustration, he kicked the desk.

“Chat relax. Clearly, we’re missing something,” Nino said, trying to calm him down. Plagg’s voice crackled to life from his end.

“In the movies, things are hidden behind paintings. Maybe check to see if she has a secret safe or something,” he offered. Discouraged, Chat began glancing behind the paintings on the wall, still finding nothing. Then he reached the large floor-to-ceiling painting behind her desk. It swung open to reveal a wall.

“Great, so there’s nothing here,” Chat muttered, leaning back against the desk. Nino sighed in his earpiece.

“I’m sorry Chat. I know you wanted to be right, but maybe it was just a coincidence. This is good though, right? It means she didn’t try to kill you.”

Chat sighed and stepped towards the wall, intent on pushing the painting back into place when his eyes caught sight of something odd. He frowned and leaned closer. It was a keyhole, barely noticeable against the wall. His heart pounded as he drew the key once more and fit it into the lock. He held his breath and turned the key. The wall silently swung open. Lights came on inside the hidden room. His mouth fell open.

Guns lined the walls. A cabinet filled with he only could assume were poison sat nestled in the back. There were sliding drawers stationed under the wall of guns. He slid one open to see various different types of blades. From throwing knives to combat knives to a fucking katana. But the most damning piece of evidence sat in the back of the room, fully on display. The Ladybug suit, sitting on a mannequin, waiting to be worn. The way she had it set up reminded Chat of the old superhero cartoons where the hero set their suit up on display.

“Guys,” Chat breathed slowly. His skin felt itchy like he needed to start running. “Marinette is Ladybug.”

And that’s when everything went wrong.

“Chat run!” Nino shouted as an alarm started going off. It sounded like it was coming from everywhere. Chat winced, but followed the orders, bolting from the room. As he raced through the dark house, he caught sight of Marinette bursting from her bedroom. Their eyes met for a brief second before Chat crashed through a window.

He shook the shards of glass off him and continued running, leaping over the fence. He didn’t spare a glance behind him. Everything felt off and wrong like he needed to keep running and not stop.

“I’m on my way Chat!” Plagg assured him. Chat knew Plagg was reliable. But he had a sickening feeling that his best friend wasn’t going to make it in time.

~ ~ ~

Marinette turned off the alarm and quickly typed up an emergency notification to the other six members of the organization. She felt sick doing it. Then she ran into her wide open lair and began suiting up, stuffing her earpiece in quickly.
“Tikki, talk to me,” she demanded as she grabbed a few light weapons.

“I had the bug keep track of certain keywords. If any of them said anything relating to you being Ladybug, alarms would sound. I did it as a precaution! I didn’t know they’d actually figure anything out!” Tikki said quickly.

“I’m running after him now, I need help! Get the others on his partners, we need to contain this! If my identity gets out…”

“Doing it, doing it! Hurry!”

Ladybug raced out of the room and took off running, following behind the cat. She wasn’t sure which way he went, so she glanced over the rooftops with her binoculars.

“I need eyes Tikki.”

“Hold on I’m looking… There! Southwest, two miles away. He’s hauling ass, you need to hurry. Everyone else has been notified and they are on their way to contain the situation.” Tikki sounded grim.

“Plagg has immunity for now,” Ladybug promised. Tikki didn’t reply. Ladybug sighed and raced after Chat. Once she was close enough, she threw her baton towards his leg. She hit her target and he went down hard.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

Welp, this went south fast.
Chapter Summary

It happens and it happens fast. They really didn't have a chance to prepare against this type of attack.

Chapter Notes

For the best emotional impact, I highly recommend listening to "Greensleeves" played on the flute while reading this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chat swore as pain raced through his body. Seemed Ladybug had somehow managed to catch up to him. He rose his own baton just in time for her to swing a staff down on his head.

“Why didn’t you just leave well enough alone?” she demanded, twisting to try and get a hit in on his side. He rolled and bounced up, deflecting the blow.

“Cats are curious creatures!”

“You’re not a fucking cat!” She swung again at his head, forcing him to step back and actually fight. She swung, he parried and managed a hit against her knuckles. One-handed, she swung the staff wide.

“I had to know for certain! You think I wanted to be right?” She shook out her hand and grasped the staff again, using it as a pole to vault at him, leg extended in a kick. He slid back and smacked her foot away.

“You don’t understand you fucking moron! I have to kill you now. I have to keep my identity secret!” He ducked her next swing and tripped her with his baton, quickly stepping on her pole and pressing the end of his baton against her neck.

“No, you don’t. Do you think I’d just tell the world? Why would I ruin you like that Princess?”

~ ~ ~

Nino’s fingers flew across the keyboard as he attempted to find the bug in their system. The second Chat said Marinette is Ladybug, an alert went off. It was a good bug, but he could kill it if he could find it. He’d turned off the comms until then. They were all flying blind. Finally, he found it.

He made quick work of killing the bug and keyed everyone back in when a random pop-up showed up on his screen. His eyes widened.

“Uh oh. How unfortunate!” a cute little pink figure with black spots was saying in a sweet child-like
voice. “Uh oh! How unfortunate! I’m gonna do a sneaky thing, and throw a new contender in the ring!” The figure disappeared and the words ‘A New Challenger Has Appeared!’ flashed on the screen. Just as Nino heard the door break down.

He scrambled away from the laptop, quickly crawling towards the open vent that he always promised Chat he’d never have to use. It was for a quick getaway. This was his first time actually using it.

“The fox is on the prowl!” he heard Rena Rouge call. “Come out and play little hacker boy!” He glanced back to see the woman stalking through the apartment. When she didn’t find him, she gave a shrug and sat cross-legged in his desk chair, pulling out a flute. She began to play an odd song that he was sure would give him nightmares.

“Plagg, I need an evac,” he whispered as he turned away from Rena and crawled through the vent. The vent led to the garage. He could make it.

“That’s going to be a problem…” Plagg replied slowly.

~ ~ ~

Plagg stared at the Illustrator, who stood in the middle of the road, directly in front of his idling car. You have immunity, you have immunity, he reminded himself. The Illustrator raised a hand and waved. Plagg spun the car around swiftly, gunning it in the opposite direction, only to screech to a halt when Hawk Moth stepped out into the road. He was trapped.

On the right was a long building with no way through. No alleys to duck into. On his left was a river. Hawk Moth in front, Illustrator behind him. His only chance was the river.

He bailed out of the car and raced towards the railing, launching himself off without a second thought. Just when he tasted freedom, it was yanked away. A chord-like thing wrapped around his neck, stopping him. Air was cut off. He dangled from over the railing. Black spots danced in his vision as he tried and failed to pry the chord away.

Just as he was about to lose consciousness, someone grabbed his arm and yanked him upwards. Air filled his lungs and he coughed. Peacock stared down at him with a smirk.

“You can’t die driver. Not yet anyway. But soon.” Then she injected him with something and it all went black.

~ ~ ~

Nino swore as Plagg’s line went dead. He scrambled out of the vent and raced towards his car. His keys were already in hand. The sound of buzzing filled his ears.

“Not so fast turtle boy!” a woman called out. He felt a sting on his leg and fell, turning back to see Queen Bee standing there with a smile. “Oh, you’re cute. And here I was expecting someone a little on the heavier, non-hygienic, side of things. Guess I was wrong! What’s your name turtle boy?” He swallowed his fear away, leg throbbing.

“Carapace,” he blurted out. He’d been thinking on code names ever since Chat recommended it. He would not have chosen that, but with her mentioning turtles, it made him think of shells and… Kind of just slipped out.

“Cute. Let’s go see Rena!” Queen Bee grabbed his arm and jerked him upright. “Don’t worry, we won’t kill you yet. We want to get all you naughty little boys in one place first.”
Chat winced as Nino’s line went dead a minute after Plagg’s. He and Ladybug were at an impasse. He couldn’t move without her attacking him again, but she knew he wasn’t going to truly hurt her. So the two were stuck in as they were. All he could do was hopefully convince her that he meant no harm.

“Uh oh! How unfortunate!” a sweet child-like voice suddenly came through his earpiece. “Uh oh! How unfortunate! I know how much you like to fight, so I’ll add a new problem to your night!” He yanked his earpiece out, stomach sinking at Ladybug’s smirk.

“What was that?” he demanded. She shrugged.

“Your three-second warning.” Something wrapped around Chat’s arm and yanked him away from Ladybug. He stumbled and followed the whip with his eyes, which was what wrapped around his arm, to the source. Viperion. The snake shrugged.

“Nothing personal man, sorry. But I’ve gotta protect my lady,” he called out. Ladybug stood slowly and dusted herself off.

“This will go so much more smoothly if you give up kitty,” she warned. Chat growled and yanked on his arm, pulling the whip out of Viperion’s hands. The two attacked at once.

Chat felt he put up a good fight. He’d dueled against two opponents before during martial arts practice. But those opponents weren’t hell-bent on killing him. And he didn’t feel bad hurting them. And they never fought nearly as well together as Ladybug and Viperion did.

Every time Chat dodged one of Ladybug’s strikes, he dodged into a hit from Viperion. Whenever he landed a hit on Viperion, Ladybug followed it with a strike on him. But he was holding his own. Up until his side tightened in refusal and he went down.

“You alright my lady?” Viperion asked Ladybug. She nodded before gesturing to Chat.

“Drug him. He’ll probably be wanting to see his friends.” Viperion gave a nod. Then he turned to Chat and shrugged.

“Like I said before, it’s nothing personal.” He injected Chat with something and nothing mattered anymore.

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Queen Bee jerked Nino back into the apartment, where Rena Rouge was still playing her flute. He scanned the area, looking for any possible way out, but knew he wouldn’t get far. His leg was throbbing like crazy, and when he looked down at it he saw a bright red bump from where he was hit. He wasn’t sure what Queen Bee injected him with, but he wasn’t going to be running on that leg any time soon.

Rena finally stopped playing the flute and turned towards the pair with a smirk. Her eyes landed on Nino. Her smirk dropped into an open-mouthed look of pure shock. Her flute slipped from her fingers and fell to the floor. He blinked.

“You’re their hacker?” she asked softly.

“He said his name is Carapace,” Queen Bee reported. “Who is he really?” Those eyes…
“His name is Nino Lahiffe,” Rena said slowly. That hair… It was different, but the same. It couldn’t be. It had to be someone else. There was no possible way it could be her.

“Alya?” he whispered in disbelief. Rena took off her mask and flicked her hair back. His girlfriend Alya stared back at him. His heart broke.

“Drug him and take him,” she said, picking up her flute and turning away. “We can discuss it… Later.” Something was injected in his neck and he willfully fell into the darkness. Anything to take away the image of his beautiful Alya as a murderer.

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Chapter End Notes

Brownie points to whoever can correctly guess the references in this chapter! I make a reference to the show and a reference to... Something else.

So the song Rena Rouge played is "Greensleeves." I listened to that while writing these scenes. It’s a slow and slightly sad song in the right context. The way I pictured it in my head was the three scenes happening at once: Chat fighting on the rooftop against Viperion and Ladybug, Nino struggling to escape through the vents, Plagg strangling as Peacock held him over the river. Taking out all dialogue and "background" noise and just imagining those scenes with just the song playing was pretty intense for me and I want you guys to feel the same. It holds this air of hopelessness perfect for the emotions our heroes are struggling with as they fight for their lives.
Kidnapped

Chapter Summary

It's okay guys! Plagg has a plan!

Chapter Notes

I'm gifting you guys with a chapter early because you're all awesome <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Her dark hair slid like silk through Chat’s fingers. Her beautiful blue eyes gleamed playfully. Their bodies twisted together in the passion of the moment and Chat brought his lips against hers once more. His heart pounded with excitement in his chest. Marinette... Her name left his lips like a whisper. Then she pulled her head back and the amusement was gone from her eyes. Her face held no emotion as she stared at him coldly. A red and black spotted mask covered her eyes. The loving embrace turned into a death struggle as she jabbed a knife into his side. Pain raced through him as Chat stared at her in disbelief.

"I told you kitty," she said coldly. "There are worse things than death." She twisted the knife, bleeding him dry.

“Chat wake up.” Adrien shook his head, trying to clear it. “Chat, come on man get the fuck up.” He swallowed a couple times, mouth dry. Eyes squinting, he peered through his lashes to see Nino seated across from him, bound to a chair. Adrien tried to get off the chair he was in, but something kept him still. He glanced down in confusion to find ropes holding him steady.

“Nino? What’s going on?” he asked carefully, words feeling odd in his mouth. Nino looked panicked.

“Chat listen to me. I need you to keep your head down, okay? I think Hawk Moth is the only one who actually looked at your face, but couldn’t recognize you thanks to the black makeup. So keep your fucking head down, just in case," Nino ordered. His mask... Where was his mask? Adrien jerked at the ropes holding him to the chair, only proceeding to rub his wrists raw.

“Fucking hell, where are we?” Adrien demanded, looking around for anything he could use.

“I don’t know. Plagg is still out. I got nabbed by Queen Bee and... R-Rena Rouge.” Adrien frowned at the way Nino stumbled over the fox’s name. Nino shook his head. “Look, there’s a screwdriver to your left. I can’t exactly do anything from over here. It’s worth a shot, am I right?” Adrien nodded and took a breath, his side shouting at him. He jerked upwards and pushed himself towards the left, the chair slowly moving. At the last bit, Nino informed him someone was coming. So he jerked himself sideways, tipping the chair over and slamming into the table. Pain ricocheted through his shoulder, but he got his hand on the screwdriver and slipped it up his sleeve.

Illustrator walked in and sighed. He didn’t say a word, just forced Adrien back up and slid his chair
back into place. Then he grabbed Adrien’s chin and lifted his head, frowning at his face.

“Dammit we need better lighting in here and to get that shit off your face,” Illustrator complained, dropping Adrien’s chin. “Maybe Ladybug will be able to place you.” He continued to grumble as he left the room, shutting the door behind him.

“Please tell me that wasn’t in vain,” Nino whispered. Adrien gave him a nod and slipped the screwdriver down his sleeve, getting to work on the rope.

“Camembert,” Plagg groaned, waking up. “I was being choked by camembert.”

“Plagg, you’re good. You’re not being choked. Are you okay?” Nino intervened. Plagg’s head swiveled around in a panic.

“Where are we?! One minute I’m in my car about to go get Chat, then Nino calls for help, then Illustrator pops up in front of me and… Hawk Moth cut me off when I tried to leave, then when I ran Peacock grabbed me. What the fuck happened?” Plagg spoke in a rush, panic radiating off him in waves.

“Plagg! Plagg calm down. We’re fine, for now. We just kicked a hornet’s nest apparently.” They were not fine. This was not what Adrien would call fine. But he wouldn’t disagree with Nino. It wouldn’t help to have Plagg panicking. The room they were in reminded Adrien of a warehouse with cement floors, ow, and walls. It was dark, with only a single light above them all. There were two doors leading out.

“I guess it’s safe to assume we fucked up somewhere along the way,” Plagg groaned. “But how? We were so careful!” Nino sighed.

“There was a bug on our comms. When Chat said ‘Marinette is Ladybug’ it triggered some intense set-up. And no, I have no idea how the bug was planted. It should be impossible to even touch our system without access to everyone’s comms and my computer.” Nino seemed frustrated, but Adrien couldn’t pay too much attention to him now that he’d almost got his hand free. Just a little more…

“That… Might be my fault…” Plagg admitted sheepishly. Adrien paused to stare at him. He was quick to explain. “Okay, it was while Chat was healing. Tikki came by with wine and ended up spending the night. Nino was out with his girlfriend.” Nino definitely winced there. “And so I figured what the hell. I didn’t think she’d bug us!”

“What’s done is done,” Adrien cut in before Nino could explode. Letting anyone Nino didn’t know near his stuff was taboo and Plagg knew it. “Let’s focus on how we’re going to get out of this with our skin intact.” There, free. He sliced through the ropes holding his other hand, then untied his legs. He almost stumbled over to where his mask sat tauntingly. But he had no adhesive to put it on. With a sigh, he pocketed it.

“Chat, I have a plan.” Adrien did not like that tone of voice Nino used. He stared at his teammate and one of his best friends. “But you gotta leave me.”

“The fuck I do, come on.” Adrien walked over to Nino and began to untie him. Nino jerked away.

“Listen man. I can’t run. Queen Bee stuck something in my leg and now it’s swollen to shit. Your best chance is to take Plagg and get the hell out.”

“I’m not leaving you!” he hissed in response.

“Guys hold up,” Plagg interrupted. The other two looked over at him. He gave a cheeky grin. “I
know you guys are better at plans than me, but I got a good one. One that if we can pull off, means we all get out. Listen up…”

~ ~ ~

Ladybug took a breath, pacing back and forth. She hit redial on her phone. “Hey, this is Chloe, leave a message!” Beep. She hung up again and chucked the phone across the room.

“Still no answer?” Viperion asked. Ladybug shook her head, paranoia weighing her down. “Maybe she’s in bed.” Ladybug gave a bitter laugh.

“It’s only nine at night over there. You and I both know that Chloe isn’t in bed at nine.” Viperion let out a sigh and wrapped his arms around Ladybug, holding her tight.

“It’s going to turn out alright Ladybug. It always does.” She sank into Viperion’s hold and released a slow breath, her nerves slowly settling. “For the time being though, you’ve been avoiding three people we currently have locked up in the warehouse. We should probably go deal with them.” She stepped back and nodded, grim acceptance showing on her face to hide the pain in her chest.

She had been avoiding them. For one, she didn’t want to look upon Chat’s face. His real face. She wanted to know who he was, but not like this. Not because she tied him up and ripped away his mask. And then the matter of actually killing him. It was her identity, so it was her job to kill him. But she didn’t want to. She didn’t want to kill Chat Noir, the stupid Chaton who’d nestled into her heart. The foolish kitty who’d stolen her necklace while they kissed goodbye, only to leave her a reminder of him in its place. She didn’t want to kill the man who made stupid jokes while she patched him up. Who teased her while she changed his bandages. That man with the most beautiful green eyes she’d ever seen. No, she didn’t want to kill him.

But she had to. It was a fact she couldn’t avoid any longer.

She walked into the warehouse, fully prepared to end his life as swiftly and painlessly as possible. She was met with a shock when she walked in, however. Because he wasn’t there.

His partners were there, tied up just as she left them. But Chat was nowhere to be found.

“Where the fuck did he go?!” she shouted, anger mixed with relief coursing through her so quickly that she nearly stumbled. The youngest one, Plagg, use his name coward, squinted at her before smirking.

“Well it took a while, but we finally convinced him to leave us. I mean, it’s him you want right? He’s the one that actually saw the evidence. We just listened,” he mocked. Ladybug swore and turned around, heading back towards the exit. She felt the oddest need well up inside her chest. The need to break down and start sobbing. She stuffed that need away, trying to clear her mind enough to give orders.

“Chat Noir got out. Find him! And bring him back to me alive or so help me we will be down a fucking assassin!” Everyone began to scramble, not wanting to deal with Ladybug’s wrath. The wrath she put on display for everyone to see. She couldn’t afford to let them see anything else.

“Where will you be?” Viperion asked, grabbing her arm. She jerked away, not wanting his touch. He knew her too well. If he looked in her eyes now, he’d see her indecision. He’d question her, make her think about what she needed to do. He’d waver her resolve like he always did.

“I’m going to check my mansion. Just in case. I also want to load up with my rifle.” She paused. “I won’t hesitate again.” He took a step back, looking a bit sad.
“I’ll stay and keep watch over the other two. In case he doubles back.” She nodded and turned away, racing for her car. Tears formed in her eyes as she ran and for the first time in so long, she hated the mask that she wore on her face. Ladybug felt more like a prison than the freedom it had portrayed.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So I saw a couple of people who felt the easy way the assassins got our boys was a little *too* easy. So I wanted to clear some things up for you guys!

They knew where everyone was because Tikki had their system bugged. Since they were all wearing their earpieces, all she had to do was track them, like what Nino does when he’s directing Chat during a heist. She simply told the different assassins where each person was and let them take it from there.

Adrien/Chat is actually more skilled at fighting than Ladybug and Viperion. If you notice, he took down Ladybug quickly before Viperion showed up. After Viperion showed up, he was only getting beat up a bit because he was holding back. Despite everything, Chat didn't want to hurt them. And even with getting beat up a bit, he was holding his own. He only lost because his side failed him. Remember, that side was just finished healing and he hadn't done any work with it since it finished healing.

As for how the assassins were all collectively free... Two reasons. 1. As I mentioned in response to comments, Marinette's luck is suuuuuuper important in this fic. Because I'm not using magic or miraculous, the way I'm writing her luck falls under the type of luck Nagito from Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair has. Like a ridiculous chain of events that make things go his way, even if it doesn't seem like it's going his way at the time. 2. Keep in mind that the assassins *would* be free. It's late at night for them and they don't have any out-standing contracts save for the hit against the mayor.

I hope that clears thing up a bit! I'll be trolling the comments for any other questions that come up I can explain without spoiling future chapters! I'm so, so happy you guys are liking this!
Plagg's Plan

Chapter Summary

Plagg, the man who broke the second Tikki questioned him about Chat. The man who let her in, giving her the ability to bug their system knowing she worked with Ladybug and knowing she was a hacker AND KNOWING it was taboo. He had a good plan.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Adrien waited until everything quieted down, staring down at Viperion from his perch in the rafters. As Plagg predicted, Ladybug sent out everyone searching for him in her anger. All but one. Of course, it had to be Viperion, the one assassin he actually liked and didn’t want to beat unconscious. Not like he had a choice in the matter here though. Between Viperion and his friends, he’d choose his friends every time.

Adrien slipped down to the floor and pulled out the pipe he’d taken in place of his baton. He approached Viperion’s back silently, making sure not to make a sound. Nino and Plagg concentrated on glaring at the door, making sure their eyes didn’t drift around the room and accidentally give Adrien away by lingering in his location for too long.

“If you hit me with that damned pipe, I’m not helping you Adrien Agreste,” Viperion stated calmly. Adrien froze, mouth falling open. *How could he possibly know I’m here? How does he know me?* Viperion turned around and gave a lazy smile. “I was the one who brought you in. I was the first to look upon your face unmasked. Don’t worry, I told everyone I couldn’t recognize you with all the makeup. You would’ve been in deep shit if Rena, Ladybug, or Queen Bee looked at you though. Even Peacock might’ve been able to place you.”

“Don’t trust him Chat,” Nino said quickly. Viperion scowled and slipped something from his pocket, spinning it around in his fingers.

“I’m your only chance of making it out of this alive and masked. So accept my help and drop the pipe or attack me and see how far that gets you.” Adrien took a breath and looked the situation over. Viperion was standing beside Plagg, and there was that something in his hand. Adrien was still five steps away. Wouldn’t take long to cross that distance, and he could probably take Viperion in a one-on-one fight. But he had a feeling the snake wouldn’t strike at him, but instead at Plagg. And that was a risk he wasn’t willing to take.

“Why are you willing to help us?” Adrien demanded, tossing the pipe down. Nino groaned in annoyance at Adrien’s move but didn’t comment further. Plagg, who was turned away from the action, whispered for Nino to tell him what was going on. Nino ignored him and glared at Viperion’s back instead. Viperion shrugged and pocketed the knife he’d been holding.

“Because you change her for the better. Because you did nothing wrong. Because I trust you. But beyond all that, mainly because I like you,” Viperion replied simply.

“Assuring.” Adrien’s voice was flat. His only hope was helping him because they had a couple conversations that went well. Fan-fucking-tastic.
Viperion smirked and removed his mask, tossing his hair back. Adrien blinked a couple times before letting out a sharp laugh, shaking his head. Of course, it’s you.

“As a gesture of good faith,” Luka Couffaine stated.

“I should’ve known. It all pointed towards you, down to the fucking hair. But everyone said Luka Couffaine had been spotted in Hawaii when I knew Viperion was in Paris.” Luka shrugged.

“Fans, they see what they want to see all the time. Now shall we depart?” Adrien nodded and the two quickly untied the others. Luka tossed Nino’s arm over his shoulder, supporting the shorter man, and led the group towards the back of the warehouse.

“Door’s in the other direction man,” Plagg pointed out. Luka kicked the wall and a secret passage opened up.

“You’re dealing with a lot of bored millionaires. We like secret passages.” He flashed a grin and moved into the darkness. Adrien shrugged to Plagg, who shook his head in disbelief, and the two followed. The door swung shut behind them.

Luka led them forward for about five minutes before pausing at a T-section in the tunnel. He nodded to the right, then transferred Nino over to Adrien.

“Alright, hang a right here and keep walking for about… Ten minutes. You should meet up with Rose. She’s with me. She’ll take you guys to a safe place. I’ll meet up with you later,” Luka said, gesturing once more in the direction he wanted them to go. Adrien frowned.

“What are you going to do?” he asked, suddenly worried for his newfound friend. Luka grinned.

“What I do best. Lie to the people I care about.” With that, the assassin began to jog back the way they came. There were certain connotations that came with his statement. Connotations that made Adrien’s heart ache for the other man. Despite all that, the trio began making their way in the correct direction, shuffling forward as fast as they dared in the darkened tunnels.

They were silent for the first couple minutes before Adrien couldn’t keep silent any longer. “Nino, what the fuck is going on with you and Rena Rouge? Every time her name comes up, you act weird.”

“Oh good, I’m not going crazy,” Plagg sighed in relief. “You noticed it too.” Nino let out a groan.

“I don’t want to talk about it right now. Don’t make me talk about it while we’re running for our lives.” Well, now you have to.

“Talk about it.”

“She’s Alya. There, are you happy?” Adrien froze. Plagg froze. Nino stared hard at the ground. “I found out when she and Queen Bee took me. My girlfriend is a cold-blooded killer who is totally okay with just handing her boyfriend off to be killed.”

“Maybe there’s more to this story,” Adrien attempted. Plagg gripped his shoulder and shook his head. Right. Now was not the time for a pep talk. They continued on.

“You know I bought a ring for her last week? I was planning on proposing this weekend,” Nino griped. “I feel like such a fucking idiot. Three years. I spend three years with the woman and didn’t notice anything was amiss.”
“My ex slept with me in order to gain access to our system,” Plagg supplied helpfully.

“The chick I’m hardcore crushing on has tried to kill me multiple times now, despite saving my life once,” Adrien added with cheer. Nino gave a pitiful laugh.

“We’re just a bunch of fucking morons when it comes to women. Aren’t we?” he asked.

“Hey, we’re bad luck brothers. I wear the shirt with pride!” Plagg protested, causing the group to laugh. They lapsed into silence again. This time Plagg spoke up. “We’re making it out of this alive, right?” Nino shot him a hard look.

“I did not get stung by Queen Bee and hobble my ass through miles of underground secret tunnels to die at the end Plagg. We’re going to survive it. Worst case in my book? Australia is nice this time of year.”

“I bet Australia has nice places to rob,” Adrien said wistfully.

“Giant ass spiders too,” Plagg pointed out. They all waited a bated breath.

“But no assassins!” they said in unison, causing them to laugh again. Yeah, they’d make it out okay.

You aren’t touching my brothers, Princess. You can have me, but you can’t have them.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

Plagg had a good plan. And you all thought Adrien actually left his buddies ;3

I had fun writing the end of this with the guys' back and forth. Some nice bro-bonding!
Chapter Summary

Why hello there. What are you doing here?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marinette curled up on the floor, her mask chucked across the room. She was currently in the process of bawling her eyes out. Something she never thought she’d do again. She never realized she still had tears left to shed. Chloe was missing. She was expected to kill Chat. Luka was looking at her like she was a stranger. Everything was falling apart. Lucky? She was cursed.

“Oh for fuck’s sake,” Tikki hissed, stepping into her lair. Warm arms went around Marinette. “Why didn’t you call me if you felt like this? We’re a team Mari, we help each other always.” Marinette glanced up in confusion, trying to stem her tears.

“I… I don’t understand…” she mumbled. Alya sighed from the doorway. When did Alya get there? Why were they there? They were supposed to be finding Chat.

“As I said, she’s probably crying her eyes out. Girl, what are you doing to yourself?” Alya asked, joining in on the group hug. What was this warmth spreading in Marinette’s chest?

“You don’t have to kill him if you don’t want to,” Tikki admonished her, leaning back to rub her tears away from her cheeks.

“But I have to.”

“You’re the unofficial leader of the Assassin Organization here in Europe girl,” Alya snorted. “You don’t have to do shit. Just add him to the immunity list, then sit down and have a talk with him. Like the one I’m going to have to have with Nino.” Alya’s face turned grim. “This wasn’t how I wanted him to find out.”

“You didn’t want him to find out,” Tikki pointed out. “And that’s why it went to shit.”

“Like you’re one to talk!”

“With age comes wisdom. I learned from my mistakes with Plagg.”

“Woman, you are a year older than me. Shut the hell up.” The two fell into giggles and Marinette stared at them in wonder. That’s what friendship looks like Marinette.

“Why are you guys here for me like this?” she asked softly. Tikki and Alya shared a look.

“Because we’re your friends dumbass,” Alya stated in her crude fashion. “We’d be shit friends if we didn’t leap to your rescue.” Friends?

“Come now Alya. The woman can barely cope with the knowledge of being attracted to the cat. Let’s not overload her brain with the realization that we’re her friends,” Tikki lectured, her hands
rubbing warmth into Marinette’s arms. *They are my friends. They do care… I didn’t realize. Two more people I can add to my list. I’d be sad if they died. I truly would.*

“That’s not the only reason we’re here though,” Alya said, shooting Marinette a grin. Marinette frowned, her suspicions rising. There was this twinkle in Alya’s eyes that put her on edge. They were hiding something.

“So why?”

“We brought you a gift. It was supposed to be a surprise… So surprise!” Alya moved out of the way and gestured to the door. Marinette’s heart failed to work for a minute.

There she stood in all her beauty. Standing tall with a slim figure, yet pronounced curves. Flowing blonde hair with natural highlights. Beautiful baby blue eyes that lit up the world. Lightly tanned skin that looked a little paler than it had been since Marinette had last seen it. She was dressed in a yellow blouse and white pants. Last month’s fashion. Not the norm for her. Marinette didn’t care.

“Ma chéri, you look a disaster,” Chloe said with a frown, gliding over to her. Chloe tsked at the state Marinette was in and pulled the woman from Tikki’s arms. She kissed away what was left of Marinette’s tears, her fingers smoothing back the woman’s hair.

“What are you doing here?” Marinette asked softly, blinking multiple times. Chloe gave a smirk.

“Maman helped me out. She, Tikki, Alya, and I have been working on getting me back sooner than later. My probation isn’t up in Paris yet, so I have to stay indoors, but it’s worth it to see your face.”

“Uh, Luka helped too,” Alya pointed out. Chloe scowled.

“The hippie barely had to lift a finger.”

“He supplied the majority of the money,” Tikki mumbled.

“And how’d he get that money? Poison. Pah, no skill involved. Ma chéri is much better.” Marinette couldn’t wait a second longer. She pressed her lips to Chloe’s and kissed the woman with everything she’d been holding back in the time they’d spent apart. Chloe giggled softly against Marinette’s lips and returned the kiss with gusto, sighing happily. For just then, in that moment, everything was right in the world. Nothing else mattered. There was no cat on the loose with Marinette’s identity in his grasp. There was only Chloe.

“You’re here,” Marinette mumbled.

“Every second was worth it to see you now. Your skin feels much better than a picture on my phone.” Chloe kissed Marinette’s eyelids, just like she used to, then straightened. “Now come ma chéri. We must go fix the issue with your chat. There’s no mess that cannot be cleaned up. No mistake that cannot be undone.” Marinette took her hand and squeezed it gratefully. She could already feel Chloe’s strength pulling her out of the dark hole she’d found herself in.

Before they left though… She looked to Tikki and Alya.

“Thank you. I can’t thank you enough.”

“Thank us by not killing our men,” Alya supplied cheerfully. Marinette laughed. *Laughed.* Tikki held up a finger and grabbed the mask, handing it to Marinette.

“Protection first.” Chloe plucked the mask from Marinette’s fingers and fit it back over the woman’s
face. She gave a slow grin.

“Perfect. My lady luck is back.” Ladybug gave a slow grin and allowed Chloe to pull her from the room, feeling as though maybe her luck didn’t fail her after all.

~ ~ ~

“You lost them?!” Ladybug shouted, feeling herself caught in anger once more. This night was turning out to be a roller coaster of emotions. Chloe snickered somewhere behind her. Luka gave a dramatic eye roll.

“I assumed if he came back he’d come back through a door. Didn’t figure that he was hiding on the ceiling waiting for everyone to clear out before bashing me over the head with a pipe!” he exclaimed, rubbing the back of his head. Her heart squeezed painfully at the thought of Luka getting hurt. He wasn’t wearing his mask, apparently one of the three took it from Luka’s face after they were free. His identity was just as compromised as Ladybug’s.

“Hippie, you need a new career,” Chloe supplied. Luka rolled his jaw in annoyance.

“You need a new life,” he shot back. Ladybug rubbed her temples. She was starting to find it hard to believe that he’d actually had a hand in bringing Chat Noir back to Paris.

“I do not have time for your bickering. We not only managed to lose Chat Noir but also our leverage for getting him back. Just… Perfect.” She could feel a headache coming on. “By this point, he’s already shed Chat Noir and is in civilian form. How the hell are we supposed to find him now?”

“You know his accomplices,” Chloe pointed out. “If you find them, you find him.”

“They’re probably hidden in the deepest hole Chloe.”

“We’re running out of time anyways,” Queen Bee cut in, clearly tired of watching from the sidelines. “No offense Chloe, but your dad needs to die. He’s become too big of a risk.” Chloe sobered and gave a sad nod.

“I know. And I understand.” Her eyes turned to Ladybug. “I release you of your promise ma cheri.” Ladybug’s eyes widened.

“You can’t do that. It’s okay Chloe. I can sit this one out!” Chloe’s eyes hardened and she crossed her arms.

“He got me banned from Paris. I was shipped to New York like a damned package he couldn’t be bothered with. If it’s a choice between you or him, I choose you every time.”

“Where the hell has Ladybug been hiding her all this time?” Hawk Moth muttered.

“I heard the legends. But I didn’t believe them to be true,” Illustrator said dramatically.

“A person who has even the lucky Ladybug on a leash,” Peacock commented while nodding sagely. Luka was falling over himself laughing while Ladybug shrank under Chloe’s glare.

“And meet the new Queen Bee,” Queen Bee mumbled, hiding a smirk. “Guess the viper’s gotta start answering to her now.” That shut Luka up.

“We’re fucked,” Rena said with a laugh.

“I cannot believe three of you looked upon the chat’s face and yet cannot place the man in a crowd,”
Chloe snapped, turning her temper on the three men in the room.

“‘It was dark and he had makeup on! We were told not to fuck with it until Ladybug talked to him!’” Hawk Moth argued in their defense. That brought the glare back to Ladybug.

“What’s done is done,” Luka said in his usual nature. “We can’t look backward, only go forwards. Let’s just focus on finding the two we can pick out in a crowd and go from there.”

“You know we’re in trouble when only the hippie is the only one making sense,” Chloe muttered, rubbing her forehead dramatically.

“I’m literally the opposite of a damned hippie!” he snapped back, glancing around the room. “Does anyone have a temp-mask I can borrow? Didn’t exactly bring a change of clothes with me.” Hawk Moth passed him a black cloth mask, which Luka quickly tied over his face.

“Let’s break for now and head home. We’ve got…” Ladybug glanced at the time. “Seven hours before we need to prepare for the hit. We need to be rested and refreshed in time for that. We’ll focus on this, then worry about smoking the three of them out. Rena.” The fox glanced up at her name. “Have Trixx keep an eye out for anything relating to my identity or Viperion’s. We need to have a head’s up if things go south fast.” Rena nodded.

“Consider it done.” Ladybug nodded back and glanced at everyone else.

“What are you all waiting around for? Go home!” They left.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

Chloe!!!!!!

You guys received the bro-bonding last chapter. So I wanted to balance it out and give some girl bonding. It flows a bit different because *Marinette* but it's still bonding!
Luka entered the apartment, greeted with four weary faces. Adrien sighed in relief when they registered that he was alone.

“I was worried,” Rose said quickly, wringing her hands together. “This is a dangerous game you’re playing Luka.” He gave her an easy smile.

“Ah, don’t be worried. Lying to people I care about is what I do best. I did it to you for years, did I not?” She scowled. Adrien had learned a lot about Rose in the three hours they’d been acquainted. First and foremost, despite her small stature, she was vicious when she needed to be.

Luka ruffled her short blonde hair, causing her to narrow her ice blue eyes at him.

“I’m not a doll Luka,” she complained, pulling away to pat her hair down. He shrugged and fell backward on his couch, letting out a comfortable sigh. Nino and Plagg frowned at him.

“Aren’t you going to change?” Plagg asked. Adrien had. The second they got here, Rose shoved him in the bathroom with a change of clothes and demanded that he remove his Chat outfit and scrub his face clean.

“What’s the point? I gotta be Viperion again in seven hours,” Luka mumbled, closing his eyes and releasing a yawn. “Might as well sleep in costume.”

“You little…” Rose grumbled under her breath and stomped over to him, patting him down. He ignored her as she pulled out a knife, three vials, and a syringe from his pockets. She muttered something about stupid men stabbing themselves in their sleep and went to put all the things away.

“You guys can crash in the bedroom,” Luka mumbled. “I’m gonna pass out right…”

They waited.

“Did he just fall asleep mid-sentence?” Nino whispered in confusion. Rose sighed and rolled her eyes, giving them a nod.

“He does that a lot. It’s annoying as hell. Ignore him, let’s get you guys situated in a room.” The trio followed the small woman to the bedroom where she began to pull pillows and blankets from a side closet. “You’ll have to figure out sleeping arrangements on your own. Sorry, the place isn’t huge. He likes to keep himself as hidden as possible.”

“Who’s the girl?” Adrien asked, lifting a picture of a pretty girl who looked to be in her late teens, early twenties. In the picture she was posed between Rose and Luka, grinning up a storm. Her hair was long, the same black as Luka’s, and her bangs were dyed purple. Her bangs covered her left...
eye, but her right eye sparkled happily, the color of a honey-based ale.

Rose looked over at the picture and a look of deep sorrow passed over her face. She dropped her arm-load onto the bed and stepped over to Adrien, taking the picture from him. Her eyes welled up with tears and she sniffed.

"Juleka. Luka’s sister. She died. It was my fault,” she said in a whisper. The three stared at her in shock. “It was late and I was staying the night. I got the grand idea of sneaking out and going on a date. You know, to visit the Pont des Arts, watch the Seine river flow beneath us. It was supposed to be a romantic night out for us.” Adrien sat down on the bed and pulled Rose to sit next to him. This was something she’d been keeping in for a while. He knew from his own personal experience trying to face his mother’s death that holding it in was the worst thing possible, worse than blaming yourself.

“Did you make it there?” he asked softly. She needed to get it out. Why didn’t she talk to Luka about it? The two were clearly close. Rose nodded.

“Yeah, and it was so beautiful. The moon was full and the sky was clear. No one around. It was like we were the only people in the world. But on the way back, we started joking around and goofing off. I suggested racing home. She was faster than me, of course. Her legs longer. She was maybe ten feet in front of me when she turned a corner and left my line of sight.” Her hands closed into fists and she stared down at them. “You know the Rat Pack?”

Plagg, Nino, and Adrien collectively sucked in a breath. That was a name that hadn’t been whispered in years. Not since they were in high school. It was this gang that made a lot of money kidnapping young girls and selling them off into the sex trade. Their operations had been shut down for years though. No one knew why they suddenly vanished, but Adrien started to understand what Luka meant by ‘enact the justice she deserved.’

“I don’t remember much more about that night. They got me too. When I woke up, it was cold and wet and I hurt all over. I kept crying for help, begging for Juleka. I was so weak.” She spat the words out as if they were a personal insult. “They laughed at me, called me a little mouse. They said my friend at least had some bite to her.”

“How long were you there?” Nino asked gently, squatting down in front of her. He placed his hand on her knee, offering some support. Adrien’s eyes flicked to Plagg, who was glaring at the wall, his figure frigid. This was probably just as hard for Plagg to hear as it was for Rose to speak about.

“I don’t remember. I’m told three months. I was beaten, abused, starved, humiliated. I never saw Juleka, as much as I begged. They used her against me.”

“How’d you get out?” Plagg asked, rage simmering in his voice. *Keep it together man,* Adrien thought, split between comforting Rose and wanting to comfort Plagg.

“One night, someone broke in. There were screams, shouts, yelling. Gunfire. It went on for a while. Then the container I was stored in was opened and he was standing there.” Rose’s eyes softened as she looked down at the picture. *Luka.* “He was dressed in dark clothes and wore a crappy black mask on his face. He didn’t say anything, just unlocked the chain on my ankle and lifted me into his arms. I kept asking for Juleka, telling him to take me to her. He never said a word, just carried me out. There were bodies everywhere. I still couldn’t tell you how he managed to take them all out by himself.

“He placed me outside and handed me a phone, then finally told me to call the cops. I did what he said, but then he left. So I ran back inside, searching for Juleka. I couldn’t find her.”
“If she fought against them, they would’ve killed her and dumped the body,” Plagg stated with certainty. “You survived because you didn’t fight.” Rose nodded.

“I found out later. While I’d been in there, begging for her… They told me every day that if I listened, they’d let me see her eventually… She’d already been dead. The police found her body in the fucking Seine. The very river we visited that night. I got the woman I loved killed!”

“No, you didn’t.” Her gaze snapped up to Plagg. “If they took you both, then they had their eyes on you for months. They probably planned on waiting for you both to fall asleep before taking you, but because you left the house they changed their plans. They were nothing if not organized.”

“How do you know?” she demanded. Plagg lifted up his shirt, showing off the rat tattoo on his hip.

“Because I was one of their victims.” Adrien and Nino looked away. “I didn’t have anything to do with that. But I raced for them. Illegal street racing. I was good and the money was great. Then they tried to get me involved in the sex trade and I said no, then decided I wanted out. They beat me unconscious and strapped me down. I woke up to them tattooing this shit on my hip. They told me I was one of them and could never escape them.”

Rose stood from the bed slowly, pulling away from Adrien and Nino. Nino reached out to stop her, but Adrien held her back. Plagg looked prepared. She stopped in front of him and took in a breath. He didn’t look at her.

She hugged him tightly, shocking the hell out of Plagg and Nino. Adrien released Nino.

“They’re dead. They’re all dead and they’re never going to touch us again,” she whispered softly. Plagg blinked before slowly returning the hug, shutting his eyes. Adrien’s own eyes stung with tears. “He killed them all.”

“Remind me to thank him for that,” Plagg choked out, a couple of tears slipping down his cheeks. She stepped back and looked the three of them over.

“You think they’re monsters. Murderers. They’re not.” With that, she left.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So I’ve made hints to Plagg’s criminal background with the illegal street racing comments. Here we get to find out a little more concerning that as well as the big reveal on what exactly happened to Juleka. Honestly, I didn't want to kill her. I had plans on having her be Peacock, but when I introduced Luka/Viperion into the story, I realized I needed him to have a good reason behind doing what he does. After brainstorming for a bit, it hit me that, unfortunately, Juleka couldn't live through this one :(
The wheels in Adrien’s head are turning and turning.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Adrien pushed the button on the coffee maker later that day, feeling like he’d slept on concrete. He, Nino, and Plagg had played cards to figure out who’d get the bed after Rose had left. Nino, that little shit, won.

“Pour me a cup.” Luka mumbled from the couch, slowly sitting up. His hair was a disaster. Most of the temporary teal dye rubbed off while he slept, leaving a teal stain on the arm of the couch. Adrien stared at him, then pulled a cup down from the cabinets, it’d only taken him five minutes to hunt them down, and poured himself a cup of coffee. He took a minute to stare Luka in the eyes and noisily sip the hot liquid.

“I’m not your butler. Get it yourself,” he replied. Luka flipped him off, then stood, stretching.

“I save your ass and this is the thanks I get,” he bitched over a yawn, walking into the kitchen to grab a mug. He poured himself a cup of coffee and checked the time. “Fucking hell why am I awake?”

“Because I loudly opened and closed cabinet doors trying to find your coffee and coffee mugs for about five minutes?”

“That would do it. Asshole.”

“Careful there Couffaine, you’re shedding your disguise.” Luka gave a smirk at Adrien’s pun and gulped down the coffee.

“I need a fucking shower. Then I need to sleep for three more years. Where’s the other two?”

“Still sleeping.” Adrien fell silent, then leaned back against the counter. Now or never. “Rose told me about Juleka.” Luka froze, then turned away. He opened the fridge and started rifling around through it. “That’s what you meant by getting justice for her. Being Viperion allowed you to kill those who killed her.” Luka slammed the fridge shut.

“Don’t start this man, you’re not going to like where you end up.” His voice was dripping with the threat, but Adrien wasn’t concerned. Common defense mechanism.

“My mom died when I was twelve. I had a hard time adjusting to—”

“Do not even think about comparing our situations!” Luka shouted, cutting off Adrien’s words. “They found her fucking body in the Seine! She was beaten to death! And you know who had to identify her body?! Not my piece of shit parents who didn’t give a shit! Me! Me! The dumbass who was supposed to keep her safe…”

“It’s not your fault,” Adrien said firmly. Luka gave a bitter laugh.
“Like hell it isn’t. I was supposed to keep her safe. I was supposed to be watching her. While our dead-beats were off doing who the fuck knows what, I was supposed to make sure she stayed safely home. Instead, I passed out on the couch and she snuck out.”

“You didn’t know they were targeting her.”

“I should have! I should have known! She complained that she felt like someone was following her on her way home from school, but I didn’t listen. I thought she was being ridiculous. Rose certainly didn’t mention anything. I failed her.”

“No, you didn’t. Fucking hell, don’t you assassins see a goddamn therapist?”

“The only therapy I needed was justice for her.” Adrien stared at him in disbelief.

“As your friend, I’m going to tell you that’s not good enough. You need to see someone about this. You need to talk to someone about this. You can’t keep blaming yourself after all these years. Did you know Rose blames herself too?” Luka’s head jerked up and he stared at Adrien in confusion.

“Why would Rose blame herself? It wasn’t her fault. She’s just as much a victim.” Adrien placed his coffee mug down just so he could throw up hands up dramatically.

“Dude, trust me on this, it’s not going to get better by keeping it in. Think of it like a gunshot wound. You didn’t treat it, just covered it up and pretended it didn’t exist. What happens when you don’t properly treat a wound?” Luka was silent for a few moments, thinking over the analogy.

“It becomes infected.”

“Exactly. This is a wound same as any other. You just can’t see it. It’s become infected and it’s festering. The only thing you can do now to fully heal is to clear out the infection. And yeah, it’s going to hurt like a bitch. It’s going to take a while to heal completely. But it needs to be done.”

“You sound like a shrink Agreste.” Luka rubbed his face and poured himself another cup of coffee. Adrien snorted.

“I have a Bachelor’s in Psychology. Thought about being a psychologist for a while, but then my dad got sick while I was working on my Master’s. I dropped out so I could take care of him.” Adrien shrugged. Part of him regretted not being able to finish his degree, but he didn’t regret dropping everything to take care of his father. He knew his dad would do the same for him in a heartbeat.

“Maybe you should be the organization’s personal shrink,” Luka snorted out. Adrien chuckled at that and shook his head. A joke, they both knew it, but it got the wheels in Adrien’s head churning. He knew he needed to barter for his life in some way. He planned on giving himself up to save Nino and Plagg, but if he could offer up something of equal value… And surely assassins needed some form of therapy. They have to face the reality of killing people all the time. That couldn’t be easy to deal with.

He saw it himself the night he was shot. The heartless Ladybug, sitting curled up under the freezing cold spray of the shower. Maybe he was over-generalizing the situation. Maybe only Ladybug had an issue distancing herself from her victims. Hell, the others could enjoy it. But then, even if they did enjoy killing, that’s something to get therapy for. Hawk Moth was getting up in the years, he could tell. He had to be pushing forty. Wouldn’t the man like to retire at some point? He would need someone he could talk to about it after he turned in the mask.

But then he’d have to get Ladybug to listen to him. She couldn’t just shoot first and ask questions later, he needed her to ask questions first, then shoot if she didn’t like the answers. It would mean he
had to reveal his identity to her though… And that was a huge risk.

“So what’s your plan tonight for taking out Bourgeois?” he asked Luka casually, taking a swallow of his now-cool coffee.

“There’s a benefit tonight that the mayor’s hosting. Since Illustrator took his contract to keep him from getting suspicious and can’t make the kill, Illustrator is going in as a civilian. Same with Ladybug, Hawk Moth, and Peacock. Queen Bee, myself, and Rena will be high above in the shadows waiting for a chance. First one who gets a chance to take the shot takes it. We played around with the idea of drawing him outside so Ladybug could get a shot off on him, but figured we’d be better off with a little more finesse, plus Marinette has to make an appearance at the benefit,” Luka explained.

“A benefit, huh?”

“No.”

“No?”

“No, you can’t come. This benefit is to reveal Marinette’s latest fashion line and to commemorate her for all that she’s done for the community. Mayor’s giving her an award and everything. Once he’s dead and panic ensues, everyone in civilian form is supposed to change into their suit and make a show of being there so the cops won’t be able to figure out exactly which one of us did it. So no, you can’t come.” Adrien sighed and nodded.

“On my honor as a cat, Chat Noir will not be making an appearance,” he promised. Luka nodded firmly then made a face.

“I’m going to shower and get ready to leave. Be a good kitty and don’t scratch up my furniture while you’re here.” As Luka walked off, Adrien thanked whatever deity there was that the snake was too tired to notice the wonderful loophole he’d left himself. An alert Luka would’ve noticed it right away. He promised Chat Noir wouldn’t show up. He made such no promises concerning Adrien Agreste.

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Chapter End Notes

First and foremost, I want to thank BFG for making the suggestion that Adrien wonders if there’s a therapist for assassins! It was a great idea and I hope you like how I weaved it together! I’ve seen a few fanfics that have Adrien follow different paths rather than just modeling after high school and I figured psychology would be a good pick for him. Obviously, he’s not currently a psychologist, but he has most of the pre-requisites. Hell, in my state you can be a criminal psychologist with just a Bachelor’s, so it works out perfectly.
Chloe kissed Marinette firmly as they stood at the door. Marinette giggled against her lips as the lovers clung together. Finally, Chloe pulled away with a satisfied hum.

“I'll never get tired of kissing you,” she promised. “Come back safe.”

“I always do ma abeille,” Marinette said, giving Chloe one last peck on the lips. Chloe trailed her hand down Marinette’s arm.

“Oh, I was looking up Chat Noir while you were sleeping. He’s cute. Consider me in the Marichat fandom.” She waggled her eyebrows. Marinette laughed, shaking her head at Chloe.

“Why are you perfect?” she asked teasingly. Chloe tapped her chin as if thinking it over.

“Curse of the gods I’m afraid. Now go, before you’re late and he has another reason to want you dead ma cheri.” Chloe pushed Marinette out the front door and blew her a kiss before closing it behind her. Marinette gave the door a wry smile, then slipped into her car.

This was it. He was going to die tonight. And it might be her who killed him. She took a steadying breath as she drove. In her purse was the poison she’d use if she had an opening. It was disguised as a bottle of perfume, could even be worn as such. The poison wouldn’t take effect unless ingested. She took another breath as the Ladybug side of her wanted to take control. *No, I need to be Marinette tonight.* But she didn’t kill people as Marinette. That was Ladybug’s job.

*You killed the assassin as Marinette,* the annoyingly logical part of her brain reminded her. *But not really, because you fell into your Ladybug side when you saw him,* the rational part stated. She kept the two sides of her life separate for a reason. She needed the coldness of Ladybug to properly file away her emotions of a kill. She wasn’t sure how to do it if she was playing vulnerable Marinette.

Too late to back out now. She pulled up to the hotel and slipped out of the car, handing her keys to the valet. Cameras began to flash at her and she smiled brilliantly, giving waves. As she walked across the carpet towards the door, she paused every so often to talk to reporters and sign autographs. Then a reporter asked a question that almost made her break her composure.

“Marinette! How do you feel about your parents being present tonight?” a reporter asked, shoving a microphone at her. Her smile wavered, but she forced it to remain.

“It will be a happy surprise,” she told the reporter.

“It’s been five years since you’ve last spoken to them, has it not?” he asked. She forced a laugh.

“Well, we all lead very busy lives after all. I’m the owner of a fashion company while they’re owners
of a famous bakery chain. If you don’t mind, I need to head inside.”

“One last question,” he pleaded. She waved for him to continue. “It’s rumored that you’ve been working with Adrien Agreste on this new clothing line. Is his presence tonight a confirmation of that?”

“Now that would be telling,” she teased, heart pounding in her chest. “No spoilers I’m afraid. Enjoy your night.” She made her escape and slipped inside. Why didn’t Adrien notify me that he’d be coming? It was… Annoying. They were supposed to be working together on this. She thought they’d been working together well over the past two months. She’d hoped he’d been getting over his feelings towards her. Was this his way of telling her that she wasn’t forgiven? Or was he just trying to surprise her? She didn’t like surprises. Chloe. Okay, she liked some surprises.

Marinette waited while security patted her down and checked her purse. They ignored the perfume bottle containing the poison and handed her the purse back.

“Have a wonderful evening mademoiselle,” the man said. She gave him a brilliant smile and thanked him, then walked into the lavish ballroom. Time to rub elbows with the upper class.

“I have to say, that dress looks amazing on you,” a low voice said in her ear. She smirked to herself, tapping the button on her bracelet to turn on her comm. Her eyes found the speaker across the room, standing next to the bar.

“You clean up nice yourself Nathaniel,” she replied softly.

“I think he would,” Viperion cut in with a grumble. “In fact, I think I should’ve gone in civilian instead of Nooroo.”

“You’re just jealous,” the older man in question said, appearing beside Marinette. His gray eyes peered down at Marinette and he gave her a grin. “You look gorgeous Marinette. I’m excited to see your new line.” He lifted her hand and pressed a kiss to her knuckles. She laughed and took in his attire.

Always odd to see him not dressed as Hawk Moth. He wore a white suit and gold-rimmed glasses, his salt and pepper hair slicked back. A purple necktie fit beautifully with the ensemble, as well as giving a wink towards his other life.

“You look quite dashing yourself Nooroo.” She kissed him on either cheek and smiled. “I’m afraid I cannot chat long. I have so many people I’m certain are waiting to ask me about my new line.” He nodded to her before lowering his voice.

“Your parents are near the front talking to Adrien Agreste. If you want to avoid them, I can keep an eye out for you.” Her smile tightened.

“Thank you,” she breathed back. Why were her parents talking to Adrien? What could they possibly be talking about? A knot settled in her stomach as she walked away from Nooroo, catching Duusu’s eye from where she swayed on the dance floor in Max’s arms. Duusu gave Marinette an encouraging nod before turning her attention back to her fiance. The knot slowly unraveled. It didn’t matter why her parents were talking to Adrien. She had all the support she needed, both inside and out.

Marinette stood off to the side and had to smile at Duusu’s dress. It was a dark purple with etchings of peacock feathers stitched into the skirt of the dress. Duusu didn’t do subtle, she did in your face so much you automatically look the other way because who would be this obvious?
And Marinette adored her for it.

“I wish I could dance,” Queen Bee stated grumpily over their comms.

“But don’t you wanna sting the mayor?” Rena teased in response.

“I can multi-task.”

“May I have this dance?” Marinette turned to see none other than Adrien Agreste standing there with a sweet smile, holding his hand out to her. Her heart skittered. She gave him a slow nod and slipped her hand into his, allowing him to pull her onto the dance floor.

“Careful Marinette, the snake looks like he’s going to poison your dance partner,” Queen Bee said with a laugh.

“I might,” Viperion hissed.

“I didn’t know you would be coming tonight,” Marinette said simply as Adrien swung her into a dance. He gave a soft chuckle.

“I was forbidden from coming actually. Something about having work that needs to be done. So naturally, I had to come,” he replied in her ear. The hand on her waist pulled her closer. Ah, his agent. She’d met his agent. Didn’t like him. Would’ve disobeyed too.

“I’m going to shoot him,” Viperion growled.

“Possessive much?” Duusu asked. “You have to get along with Chloe before you’re allowed to claim Marinette you know.”

“By the way, your dress makes you look like a princess,” Adrien whispered. A shiver raced down her spine. The dress was one she made herself. It was a mermaid style strapless dress with a form-fitting corset and a loose skirt. The under fabric was a dark red with black sheer fabric over top. The corset and skirt were separated by small roses she’d stitched into the dress. The corset had small shimmers lined down her stomach and side that had taken ages to finish. She was wearing a black sheer shawl over her shoulders to add to the effect of the dress.

“Thank you, I made it myself,” she replied breathlessly.

“I changed my mind, you can shoot him,” Duusu commented. “That was so painfully cliché.” Marinette would’ve told them that no, Viperion could not shoot Adrien, but unfortunately, she couldn’t exactly say as much with Adrien right there.

“A friend of mine saw you talking to my parents,” she commented casually, trying to gain a hold of her libido. She had no idea why he was flirting with her. He hadn’t the entire time they’d worked together. In fact, he had been nothing but the face of professionalism any time they met up.

“I figured I’d introduce myself. No offense, but they’re fucking awful.” She choked back a laugh, turning her head to see his green eyes sparkle with mischief. Those eyes… Reminded her of Chat’s eyes. She’d only seen Chat’s eyes without the contacts once, and that was after Viperion had helped Chat get cleaned up. She remembered thinking they were the most beautiful green eyes she’d ever seen and had wanted to design a dress after those eyes.

Her heart squeezed painfully and her smile fell. Adrien frowned and opened his mouth to say something when the song ended. She took the excuse to step away.
“Thank you for the dance Adrien,” she said formally. He seemed confused.

“Did I do something wrong Marinette?” he asked softly, following her off the dance floor. Fucking hell she was going to start crying and then she was going to ruin her makeup. Then Chloe was going to beat her for ruining her makeup. Her hand reached up to rub against the cat charm hanging from her necklace. *When did I fall in love with Chat Noir?*

“No, you’re fine. You’re eyes just… They remind me of something sad,” she admitted. She casually shut off her comm, not wanting the others to hear what she was about to say. “A little bit ago, I found an injured cat on my doorstep. He had the most beautiful green eyes.” Adrien cocked his head to the side, listening intently. “I patched him up, but then he ran away. I didn’t realize I’d completely fallen for the damned thing.”

“Maybe he’ll come back,” Adrien said softly, tucking her hair behind her ear. “Cats can be a bit free-spirited, especially if they’re strays. Sometimes they get scared of being indoors, like they’re being held against their will, so they run. But sometimes if the person left a good enough impression upon them, they’ll come back.”

“Thanks, but I don’t think this one will be coming back anytime soon…” If only Chat had just been a normal cat. Then she wouldn’t be in this situation. She looked back to Adrien and willed her heart to love him instead. It would be so much easier to fall in love with Adrien Agreste. She knew he was a good person, he was extremely attractive, and best of all he knew nothing about her Ladybug side. She wouldn’t feel conflicted with him, torn between her duty to the organization and her heart.

But her heart didn’t listen.

“Have a nice night Marinette,” he said finally. “I only came to rebel against the one who forbade me to come, so I’d best head home before he kills me.” She gave him a nod and kissed his cheek.

“I’ll see you next week when we do the fashion show.” He nodded and gave her a smile before vanishing into the crowd. She sighed and turned back towards the people, hitting the button on her bracelet to turn her comms back on.

She began to walk towards the bar, needing a drink, and spoke lowly into her comm. “You guys have been quiet, what’s the situation?”

“Oh nothing, we noticed you’d turned off your comm and didn’t want to interrupt,” Queen Bee said. “Please tell me you got that hottie’s number.” Marinette smirked.

“Already have it.”

“Guys I’ve got an opening,” Viperion said slowly. Someone in a black mask bumped into Marinette and she scowled at the man’s figure. What a di—Wait. Black mask? *Chat?* Her pulse spiked. “Taking the shot.” She turned and pushed through the crowd, trying to catch sight of the man who’d bumped into her. “Hit, guys time to move!” He was gone.

Marinette forced her feet to head to the bathroom as the mayor collapsed. Duusu, who was near him at the time, let out an award-winning scream that set the crowd into a panic. People started shoving Marinette out of their way as they ran towards the exit while the mayor convulsed on the ground.

Once in the bathroom, Rena slipped in through the vent and handed her the Ladybug outfit. Duusu slipped in moments later and was given her Peacock suit. The two swiftly changed and Rena scrambled back into the vent with their civilian clothes.

Ladybug gave Peacock a nod and the two ran out of the bathroom, splitting off in different
directions. People screamed when they saw Ladybug and Peacock.

More screams came when Viperion and Queen Bee locked the main exits.

And even more came when the remainder of the crowd tried to get out through the back doors, only to find Hawk Moth and Illustrator blocking those off too.

The screams got a little annoying when Rena Rouge dropped down from the ceiling with a grin.

“Alright, everyone quiet down!” Ladybug shouted. They actually listened. Shocking. A few whimpers here and there, but not that big a deal.

“We’re not here to kill you all,” Rena promised, placing her hands on her hips.

“We’re just making a simple statement,” Queen Bee swore, twirling her stinger.

“The mayor was asking us to kill each other you see,” Peacock explained, tossing back her feathers dramatically.

“All because of a little necklace he happened to misplace,” Viperion chuckled. He tossed it to Hawk Moth. Chloe found it on the black market and bought it back for them after she heard about the contracts going around. Sneaky bee.

“That’s just not okay in our books,” Illustrator sighed, leaning against a pillar. Security pounded on the front doors, trying to get them open.

“So just for the rest of you rich people can understand, allow our leader to say a few words,” Hawk Moth said, gesturing towards Ladybug. She took the necklace from him and spotted the Bourgeois brat. She tossed the necklace to the young woman, who fumbled and dropped it.

“The contract you and your step-daddy put out is done. We got a contract of our own. You’re lucky it was only for his life. It all falls on you now,” she said threateningly. “Make the right decisions. And we won’t have to make anymore… Statements.” The girl nodded swiftly, tears staining her cheeks.

Satisfied, Ladybug nodded to Illustrator. He tossed out a couple smoke grenades and the assassins melted away into the shadows.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

This was a long one. And got pretty intense towards the end. I thought about having it all go wrong for the assassins, but that wouldn't be fair to them. They're pretty well organized and it'd be a bit cheap to make them screw up. Then I thought about Marinette being the one to kill the mayor, but I liked the idea of her forgetting her mission because kitty.

Also, that moment when you realize Viperion doesn't want to shoot Adrien because he's dancing with Marinette, but because he specifically told Adrien not to come and Adrien came anyway.
Need some feedback!

Okay, so I'm at the part in the fic where Chat and Marinette finally sleep together. I stated at the beginning of this fic that the sex scenes would likely be explicit. But now I'm unsure if I want to do so as I don't want to draw away from the story going on. Because I can't decide, I'll let you guys vote on it.

**The votes are in and the majority decision is to have explicit sex scenes! Thank you for everyone who voted, gave feedback, and some suggestions! Sorry to those of you who would've preferred not to have the explicit scenes. I'll be sure to leave a warning at the beginning of each chapter where those scenes take place.
Marinette coughed as she stumbled out of the hotel into police arms, pointing inside the hotel.

“They were in there officers!” she said quickly, trying to breathe. The officers ran past her while one stayed with her to take her statement. She cried and rocked, putting on the best show she possibly could. Out of the corner of her eye, she spied Nathaniel, Duusu, Max, and Nooroo doing the same. Viperion, Queen Bee, and Rena were already in the wind.

Cause of death? Poison injected via dart to his neck. The dart came through the window from the rooftop. No one could figure out exactly which assassin did it, however. After an hour or so, the police didn’t have much choice except to allow everyone to go home. Bit hard keeping a bunch of rich people in a place they didn’t want to be.

As Marinette walked to her car, pulling her shawl around her tightly, she heard someone call her name. She froze and shut her eyes before turning stiffly to the two people she hoped she’d go all night without seeing.

Her father’s cold eyes stared down at her while her mother clung to his arm like a burr.

“Why have you not come to see us?” he demanded. She took a steadying breath, reaching down to turn off her comms. She didn’t want the others to hear this. Her fingers touched skin.

Her eyes flickered down to see her bracelet missing. She forgot to breathe. Chaton… You little shit… She wasn’t sure whether to laugh at his ballsy maneuver or cry because now the others would have to hear this.

“Father…” she said slowly. “I didn’t believe I was welcome.”

“You dare look him in the eye as such?” her mother hissed. She automatically dropped her eyes in shame. “It’s because you’re hanging around that boy. Luka Couffaine. He doesn’t even have a real job Marinette. Is this what you’ve come to? Whoring your body out to any woman or man who’ll give you money?” Marinette stiffened and swallowed past the lump in her throat. They’d never accept her. She didn’t know why she thought they would.

“Mother, I don’t accept money from Luka. I make my own money now,” she said carefully. Her face stung with the slap she received from Sabine.

“Don’t talk back to me!” Marinette bowed her head.

“Forgive me…”
“There’s no forgiving you,” Tom stated with a scowl. “You stoop low enough to associate yourself with that washed-up model Agreste. He may have been a good match when he was successful, but he’s let it all go to waste. Your mother and I will be choosing a suitable partner for you. It’s clear you cannot be trusted to do so yourself.” There it went. Her freedom. She’d hoped if she avoided them, she would be able to live her own life. But here they were, taking it away from her. Tears welled up in her eyes and she blinked them away.

“We will not have you marrying under your class like that tramp Duusu,” Sabine added. “That woman. Flaunting her body for money… Marrying under her. It’s disgusting.”

“She’s not a tramp,” Marinette said softly.

“What was that?” Sabine demanded. Oh, how Marinette wanted to speak up against her mother. It would be almost poetic. Unable to defend herself, but able to defend someone she cared about. But when she met her mother’s eyes, she withered.

“Nothing Mother…” In self-defense, she locked up her emotions in a chest and shoved it away. It was the only way she’d survive them. If she allowed herself to feel, she’d shatter. She froze herself over like the ice queen everyone claimed she was. Emotion left her face.

Maybe she was lucky and the others didn’t hear this. Chat did steal the device controlling her comms. Maybe it shortened out after a certain distance. Maybe she truly was… Lucky…

“Is there a problem here?” Nooroo asked coldly, approaching the three. He placed himself beside Marinette and stared her parents down without flinching. Tom’s eyes narrowed.

“I believe it does. You seem to be harassing my client,” Nooroo replied. “My firm represents Madame Dupain-Cheng and her company. Therefore her business is my business.” Nooroo no… Just leave. “Furthermore, I believe I heard you call my employee Mr. Kanté as… Not of the same class while I was walking to my car. As I’m his employer, that also makes this my business. Triple that if you take into consideration that I also represent the model Duusu Paon and I believed you called her a tramp, which I can take as slander as that would fall under the category of making false and damaging statements about someone.” Nooroo cocked his head to the side and placed his hand on Marinette’s shoulder.

“How dare you?” Sabine gasped, outrage showing on her face. “That is our daughter!”

“Who is a legal adult and, thankfully, no longer in your care. Now before I advise Madame Dupain-Cheng to pursue legal action against the both of you, I would recommend you both leave immediately.” Tom let out a mocking laugh.

“She would never sue us,” he boasted. They’re right… They’ve already broken me.

“Perhaps then I’ll just have to place my own contract forth to handle the situation.” Nooroo’s eyes flashed dangerously. “I hear there are seven assassins without a contract.” Marinette jerked her head to look at Nooroo. He couldn’t, that’d go against the code.

Tom and Sabine both paled and took a couple steps back. But they don’t know about the code. Nor do they know he’s Hawk Moth.

“Leave.” They stumbled away, casting glares over their shoulders.

“This isn’t over!” Tom threatened, shooting Marinette a glare as if this was her fault. And it was her
fault. If she hadn’t let Chat steal her bracelet, she could’ve turned off her comms, then Nooroo wouldn’t have heard, and he wouldn’t have come over. *I’m not lucky, I’m cursed.*

“Marinette, get in your car and go home,” Nooroo said stiffly.

“Nooroo…”

“Now,” he snapped. “I’m very angry at the moment and I’m barely keeping my composure. Get in your car. And go home.” She nodded dejectedly and unlocked her car, sliding into the driver’s seat. Right before she shut her door she heard him mutter, “I would break the code to slaughter them.”

The scary part was when she heard everyone else give their agreement over the comms.

~ ~ ~

Marinette stumbled into the dark mansion, feeling empty inside. On the way home, she’d asked Tikki if there were any new contracts. There weren’t. When Tikki had asked what happened, Marinette hung up on her.

She glanced up the stairs. Chloe would be asleep in bed, waiting for Marinette to wake her up with a kiss as promised. But she couldn’t. Not like this. She stumbled through the parlor and bumped into the table holding the decorative vase Chloe had mentioned she liked one day when Marinette was trying to figure out how to furnish a mansion. The vase tipped over and she grabbed it quickly. She frowned at it.

This wasn’t her vase… This vase was the same size and shape, but instead of the beige color and soft flowers the other had, this one was white with small cat heads spattered about on it. Her eyes widened and she flicked on the lights. Her eyes fell on her paintings.

All of them switched out. The mountain painting? It was now a painting of a cat version of the Mona Lisa. Her butterfly painting? That now showed a picture of a kitten playing with a ball of yarn. Even the fucking one cat painting she had that she had just bought, which depicted Bast, had been switched out for an image of a pissed off looking white cat.

Anything of any value she owned art-wise had been swapped with something depicting a cat.

How in the ever-living hell did he manage to pull this off?

She raced up to her workroom, throwing the door open and staring in the back. Her jewels were still there. She sighed in relief and stumbled over to them. There was a note hanging off the case. She plucked it off with shaking fingers and opened it up, reading the words.

“As much as I covet these purrecious jewels, I did make a deal to not steal them. And I don’t have anything of equal value to put in their place :(. So instead I decided to switch out everything else! I think the place is much more cat-friendly now Purrincess, don’t you agree? :) I’d like to bargain with you, but I need you to promise not to shoot first. I would prefur to keep my bullet wounds to a minimum you see. Let’s meet on that one rooftop, you remember the one. Should still have the bullet in the wall. Tomorrow night at midnight. You need your beauty sleep after all. No weapons, that’d be cheating. See you then.”

Signed with a black paw print.

~ ~ ~
Chapter End Notes

And you guys thought you weren't ever going to see Marinette interact with her parents. No faith I swear. So here, I wanted to really nail home the exact reason why Marinette avoids them. It's not because she doesn't want to fight with them in public, but rather because she doesn't know how to fight them period. I want to pull attention towards her bracelet as well. Throughout this chapter, Marinette is convinced that she must not be lucky after all because Chat was able to steal her bracelet, which in turn left her teammates able to hear everything that was said between her and her parents. I'll let you guys make your own decision on whether she was lucky here or unlucky. I'm interested to see your take on it.

**Special thanks to BFG in the comments who gave me the idea of having Chat swap out Marinette's stuff for cat-related pieces. It was a great idea and I loved playing with it to give a more upbeat contrast to the depressing scene prior!**
Ladybug landed on the rooftop and looked around, seeing no one. She hadn’t told anyone about this meeting, not even Chloe. It felt too… Personal. Like too much of who she was remained on the line. If this went south, she needed to make sure everyone else was safe.

It still baffled her how her list kept growing. Only a handful of months ago, Chloe was the only person on her list of ‘People who would make me sad if they died.’ Then she realized she had to add Luka to the list. Chat got added without her consent. Then Tikki and Alya. After last night, she realized she had to add Nooroo, Duusu, Nathaniel, and Polly. What was happening to her?

Her eyes landed on a small earpiece sitting next to the wall. Its design reminded her of Chat’s earpiece. She frowned and lifted it, fitting it into her ear. How did this one turn on? Her fingers hit a button on the side.

“Hello there Ladybug,” an unfamiliar voice echoed in her ear. She jumped slightly, then admonished herself for doing so. “We haven’t met. I’m Carapace.”

“You mean Nino,” she said flatly, hackles rising. Where was Chat?

“I figured a skilled assassin would know better than to use real names over a comm system.” She scowled at that. “So here’s the thing. We want to trust that you didn’t bring weapons, just like how we want to trust that you didn’t bring anyone else. But we really don’t. So Chat will not be meeting you here.” Well, she sure as shit wasn’t calling him Carapace. What was it Queen Bee called him?

Right.

“Then why the hell did I come here turtle?” she snapped in response, turning. Was this a set-up? Did Chat betray her? He said he wouldn’t, but that was before she kidnapped him and his friends. He might’ve changed his mind. She wouldn’t blame him for it.

“Face ninety degrees to your left and make your way across seven rooftops. I’ll give you more instructions once you’ve completed this step.” The comm shut off.

This is ridiculous. But Ladybug turned to her left and began to run, sliding under billboards, leaping over exposed air vents, launching herself from building to building. She counted down in her head every time her feet landed on a new roof. Finally, her feet hit the final roof and the comm crackled back to life.

“Nice. You’re faster than Chat and you’re a bit better than he is at this leaping across the roof thing. Then again you have more experience with it. Explains how you’re able to catch up to him so quickly time and time again.” This was a test to figure out how I was so fast?!

“I did what you told me turtle. Now where’s Chat?” she demanded.
“Not so fast. There’s a door to your right that leads into a stairwell. Inside the stairwell is a bag with a change of clothes for you. Change, then step back out onto the roof.” The comm shut off again. Her heart stopped and she hesitated. They wanted her to stop being Ladybug. They wanted her to be Marinette. She didn’t know if she had the strength to face anyone as Marinette after what happened last night. “Remember me while I remember you.” Her fingers reached up to rub the charm, hidden under her outfit. And she forced her feet to move.

Marinette finished changing, shaking her head at her own clothes. He was either really brave or really stupid. What if Chloe had spied him while he stole these? Then again, she slept through his exchange of her art, so Chloe was probably sleeping like the dead as her body struggled to adjust to the new time zone.

She stuffed her Ladybug outfit into the bag and stepped back out onto the roof, feeling oddly exposed. The comm turned on once more.

“Good job. Now we’re going to wait for a couple moments while my associate goes and secures the bag. Don’t worry you’ll get it back afterward. Don’t want anyone stumbling across the Ladybug outfit, right?” Marinette’s eyes pierced the door. If she moved now, she could get leverage back. It was probably Plagg. She could easily take him. Then all she would have to do is demand Chat meet with her on her terms.

She didn’t move. Just stared at the door. She was split between her duty and her heart. Always split. The kitty had nestled inside her and refused to leave. She’d already damaged what little trust they had between them, even if he started it. Did she really want to ensure he’d never trust her again?

“That must’ve been hard for you,” Nino said softly. “We appreciate you placing your trust in us. That will go a long way. It would’ve been so easy for you to betray us once again.”

“You betrayed me first,” she commented, wrapping her arms around herself.

“No, we did what we do best. We stole. The only difference was that we stole information over items this time. Chat didn’t want to be right, you know. He doubted himself for so long. Eventually, we all agreed that in order for him to stop pacing a hole in the floor, he had to know for certain. We didn’t expect to find anything substantial. It broke his heart knowing that you had been the person who tried to kill him.”

“That was before…” she choked out, tears welling in her eyes. She shook with shame. What if she had killed him that night? She would’ve robbed the world and herself of something beautiful, someone beautiful.

“Maybe your luck held out after all,” Nino commented gently. “Maybe your luck guided you to get to know him.” She jerked in surprise. “Your luck is legendary after all.” She had never thought of it that way.

“What do I do now Carapace?” The comms were silent for a moment, then a deliciously familiar voice echoed through her ear.

“Now, Princess, you go back into the stairwell and walk down to the third floor. 3A. Knock on the door. When the owner answers, get inside by any means necessary. Then you’re going to steal something of value from the resident. When you’re done, return to the rooftop and place the item you stole down. I’ll see you soon,” Chat whispered in her ear.

“What do you have against the resident?” she asked. Not because she cared, but because she wanted to hear his voice again.
“Guess you’ll have to steal something to find that out.” The comm went dead. She took in a breath and walked inside.

Sure enough, the bag was gone. She ignored that and made her way to apartment 3A. She stood in front of the door and pressed the buzzer. Someone shuffled around inside and the door opened to reveal…

“What are you doing here at this hour Marinette?” Adrien asked, frowning in confusion. Why does Chat want me to steal from Adrien Agreste? She couldn’t speak, just stared. He waited for an explanation. She fumbled for one, completely off-guard.

“Sorry, I know it’s late, but I needed to check a couple color palates against your skin tone before I forgot. Finishing touches for your outfit.” She spoke in a rush, clinging for any reason that would make sense.

“You didn’t call first?” He still seemed baffled. She felt her face burning with embarrassment.

“I suppose I should have. I can come back in the morning?” He let out a sigh and stepped back, allowing her entry.

“Might as well come in now. No point in going all the way home just to drive back tomorrow.” She stepped into the apartment and blinked. It was… Small. Smaller than Luka’s apartment. It was also sparse, with seemingly nothing of value. Second-hand couch. Crappy television. She counted at least two light bulbs that were burned out.

“It’s not your mansion, that’s for sure,” Adrien admitted sheepishly, rubbing the back of his neck. Marinette forced a smile. Was that his bed off to the side? He didn’t have a bedroom?

“It’s cozy,” she attempted. He shrugged. He sends all his money for his father to get help. Maybe he needs some help too. She mentally filed that information away. Within the next couple weeks, Adrien Agreste was going to come into money. She’d make sure of it.

“Do you want something to drink?” he asked, turning away from her to head to the kitchen. This was her chance. But it made her sick to think of stealing from someone who had so little. Chat needs this and I need him to trust me again.

“Sure, some tea if you have it,” she called to him, casually walking around the living space. There. A watch on the coffee table. Her eyes bounced over to Adrien. His back was turned. She lifted the watch and slipped it in her pocket, heart pounding. She was so not a thief. How did Chat do this so easily? Was this what he wanted her to experience?

Marinette sat down on the couch and stared at the TV, frowning at the news report. Adrien came back and handed her a warm mug of tea, following her gaze.

“Crazy shit right?” he commented, sitting beside her. “Chat Noir’s out of commission for three months and then he comes back in full force. Hey, at least he didn’t steal your stuff.” She didn’t reply.

“Chat Noir is at it again after his three months hiatus. The victims were Tom Dupain and Sabine Cheng, owners of Dupain Eats, a popular bakery chain. Chat Noir stole everything of value in their home last night, leaving graffiti of his signature paw print on every wall. The residents claim they found a note left by the thief stating that they got what they deserved. This seems to have been the cause of a personal vendetta against the couple, but no one knows why.”

Her heart swelled in her chest. Did you do that for me Chaton? How was it possible to fall in love
with him even more? She didn’t even know who he was under the mask. She wasn’t sure she wanted to know anymore.

“Should we get started?” Adrien asked, leaning towards her. All she wanted to do was see her Chaton. She made a show of patting her pockets before wincing. She had naturally picked the worst possible excuse to use on the fly. She was so, so not a thief.

“I… Forgot my phone. Sorry, I was kind of in designer mode.” Adrien cocked his head to the side and frowned.

“Well, you can use mine. Just google the right color palate.” He handed her his smartphone. *But I just want to leave now!* She bit back an annoyed sigh and googled a random color palate. Then she held the phone up to his skin, pretending to think it over.

“Perfect. Thanks a bunch Adrien!” She almost raced to the door.

“Leaving so soon?” he questioned, following her. “You can stay a bit longer if you want.” She swallowed as he crowded her against the door.

“I wouldn’t w-want to impose,” she stammered, trying to find an out. How did Chat keep his cool when *she* had him cornered. She supposed she could flirt with Adrien a bit as Chat did to her, but the thought made her feel dirty.

“You wouldn’t be imposing.” he breathed out, leaning down and lightly brushing his lips over hers. Her heart lurched into her throat and she shoved him away, eyes wide. He stumbled back and quickly raised his hands. “I’m sorry Marinette! I thought… Well shit, I clearly misread the signals. Let’s just… Pretend this didn’t happen?” She wanted to be mad at him, but he looked so ashamed, she couldn’t find the heart.

Instead, she gave him a stiff nod and a shaky smile.

“Have a nice night Adrien,” she said, slipping from the apartment. Then she about ran up to the roof. Her kitty was waiting.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So Marinette steals from Adrien. But why Adrien? Why make her steal at all? I'm curious to see your theories for this ;3

I will give a hint though. The majority of this scene is a test for Marinette. The guys are testing her to see what exactly she'll do when placed in such dire situations. She doesn't know Adrien is Chat, and she's not a thief, so she can be easily caught here. This chapter's theme is all about trust and the blind trust that sometimes needs to be placed in others. Consider this as Marinette's one last chance to redeem herself in Chat's eyes.
Chapter Summary

**Warning: Explicit scenes of sexual nature lay ahead. If that's something you're not okay with, I recommend skipping this chapter with the adverse side-effect of missing out on character development. Read at your own risk**

What is the choice that is eventually made?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Marinette found the rooftop empty, she nearly screamed in frustration. How many hoops did she have to jump through?! Taking a deep breath, she took the watch out of her pocket and placed it down, taking a step back and waiting. And waiting. And waiting…

“Purrincess, you did well,” his purr came, sending shivers down her spine. She turned and there he was, leaning against the door. He casually walked over and scooped up the watch, turning it over in his hands.

“Why Adrien Agreste?” she asked, resisting the urge to fall into his arms, burst into tears, and beg for his forgiveness. Chat glanced at her and gave her a wicked grin.

“Because he danced with you last night. That’s what I wanted to do.” She choked back a laugh. Of course. “Cats are quite territorial.”

“You stole my bracelet.” Anything to keep the conversation light. She didn’t want things to get serious. Not yet. He smirked and took a step towards her, running his fingers down her arm.

“I did. I may have been eavesdropping while you and the model guy were talking too.” His smirk grew. “Have you fallen for me bugaboo?” Her eyes widened.

“I…” He hushed her.

“You can’t say it can you? That’s okay. I understand. I know what those assholes did to you.” His eyes hardened. “They’re going to have their hands full fixing up their place and replacing all their stuff.”

“How did you do that?” she asked softly, reaching up to brush her fingers against his jaw. “You stole from them and replaced all my artwork in such little time. You only had three hours, max.”

“I can’t reveal all my secrets Purrincess. Where would be the fun in that?” Her heart fluttered.

“But you know all my secrets, I feel you have an unfair advantage over me,” she whispered. His smirk returned and he leaned down close.

“All your secrets? I’m certain I’m missing one or two.” His lips met hers and she kissed him eagerly. All rational thought fled her mind as he controlled the kiss with ease. No, she could never kill her Chaton. Code be damned, she just couldn’t. It would be like killing Chloe.
“Put in it your pants Chat; we did call her here for a reason,” Nino’s voice came over the comm system. He sounded bored. Marinette’s face flushed as she remembers they technically had an audience. Chat groaned and pressed his forehead to her’s, breathing heavily. She stared into his eyes, wanting to memorize every detail, when he pulled away. Her arms ached with the emptiness.

“Right. I’d like to barter for my life, and the lives of my friends,” Chat stated. He opened his mouth and began to launch into his sales pitch. “See I realize we did a bad thing now, which was bad on us, but we did not realize the implications of snooping….”

“You’re free,” she said firmly.

“Such mishaps are easy to make. Obviously, your identity is safe with us and.” He stopped talking and stared at her. “Wait, no. I’m supposed to finish my speech and give you information of equal value.”

“I’m not going to kill you Chaton. And I won’t have them killed either. Tikki and Rena may have words with me if I did have them killed. I don’t need your information of equal value.” This felt weird. Placing her trust in someone that wasn’t involved in her life in some way. But she had to do it.

“But I was going to offer to become your assassin therapist.” She gave him a baffled look.

“Therapist? We don’t need that kitty.” Automatic response to such a silly suggestion.

“Actually, I disagree. Hawk Moth is getting up in the years, how is he supposed to handle normal society when he retires?” She blinked. That was something she’d never thought about. Nooroo retiring. Leaving the organization. It was unthinkable. “And you. You need therapy for all the shit that you’ve gone through. But you need someone who you don’t have to guard your words around.”

“I don’t need therapy. Everyone has some shit happen in one way or another,” she snapped.

“Marinette… They abused you all your life.” Why was he looking at her like that? With pity?

“They didn’t abuse me! It was just discipline for when I made mistakes! So I didn’t repeat the mistakes!” She wasn’t abused. She wasn’t damaged. She wasn’t. She wasn’t.

“Beating a six year old black and blue then leaving her outside for so long that she catches hypothermia is discipline?” He shook his head. “Bugaboo, what did they do to you?”

“Nothing I didn’t deserve!”

“No one deserves that.”

“I did!” She was shaking. Everything felt cold. She needed her mask. She needed to become Ladybug. Ladybug wasn’t contained like this. Ladybug didn’t have to feel like this. His arms suddenly came around her and she clung to him, tears breaking free. She smacked his chest. She screamed at him to let her go. She sobbed into him. He just held her close.

“No one deserves to be treated that way bugaboo. Especially not you,” he whispered. “Does the mask give you freedom?” She managed a nod. “And I took that away when I discovered who was under the mask. I made you feel trapped and contained. I took your freedom and instead made it a prison. I’m sorry.” She released a watery laugh.

“I’m the one who kept trying to kill you and you’re apologizing to me?” she asked sadly.

“I get that freedom when I wear the mask too. Civilian me has so many responsibilities. Being Chat
lets me give up those responsibilities. Chat allows me to forget everything that’s on the line. I can let go, pretend my life isn’t falling apart around me. I can be me. I don’t have to watch my words. I can just act like I want to. So yes, I’m sorry I took away your freedom.”

“Silly kitty,” she whispered, turning her face up towards his. “I made it my own prison when I decided I needed to kill you.”

This time when their lips met, it wasn’t slow and measured. It was fast and desperate. They let their emotions flow freely between each other, electricity crackling between them. Everything else in the world stopped seeming to matter. It was just him and her.

Chat lifted her easily and pressed her back against the door to the stairwell, the claws on his gloves digging painfully into her thighs. The pain only served to increase her need for him. She squeezed her legs around him and grabbed onto his bell, tugging it downwards. His lips made a hot trail down her jaw and to her neck. He released her thighs and reached between them, releasing the latch his belt and letting it drop without a care in the world. She finished unzipping his suit.

Her hands reached up to shove the black leather away from his skin, wanting it off, wanting to feel his skin pressed against hers. He growled low in his throat, nipping at her neck. A gasp escaped her. He allowed her to push his suit away from his shoulders, but that was as far as he let her go. He grabbed her shirt at the bottom and moved back just enough to tug it over her head, pressing his bare chest against hers. It felt electric, amazing, perfect. His skin, despite being marred with various scars, was soft instead of leathery. Everything and more.

“I regret to inform you Princess, but we happen to lack a soft surface,” he rumbled in her ear, voice thick with need. She gave him a snort.

“Chaton if you think this isn’t the first time I’ve had sex on a roof, you’re more naive than you let on,” she shot back, trailing her nails down his bare chest. He gave a low chuckle and let her drop down, gesturing grandly to her. His eyes danced with a mixture of amusement and lust as they raked over her body.

“Then please, Princess, show me how a professional does it.” She took off her shoes and wiggled out of her pants and scooped up her shirt, balling up the fabric. Then she made a show of laying down for him, placing the balled-up shirt under her head. His eyebrows quirked. “Handy.”

He kicked off his boots and removed his gloves before taking the catsuit the rest of the way off. Her eyes gazed over him hungrily. He truly was a gorgeous man. He was toned from the exercise he partook in as Chat Noir and his skin had just enough of a tan to make her designer mind start dancing. He’d be the perfect model if it wasn’t for the scars that puckered against his skin. Not that the scars detracted from his beauty, on the contrary, she felt the scars enhanced his beauty and gave him more depth, but she knew that in the fashion industry anything that would take the eyes away from the clothes was a no go. It was a shame really, she’d love to dress him up and watch him strut down the catwalk. It was a catwalk after all.

*Did I really just pun?*

“You seem to be thinking hard about something,” Chat teased, stretching his body over her. He pressed his lips against her collarbone and she gasped, sliding her hands up to race across his back.

“Hm, just lost in your beauty Chaton. If it wasn’t for your scars, you’d be the perfect model.” He let out a low chuckle at that and lifted his head to gaze down at her, eyes sparkling with amusement once more.
“Would I? Maybe I’m a model already under the mask.” She rolled her eyes at his teasing and wrapped her legs around his waist.

“Chaton I work in the fashion industry. Those scars would get you kicked out faster than you can blink.” He snickered and ran his fingers down her sternum, lighting her nerves on fire. And as before, everything else ceased to matter. The world narrowed down to only include him and her.

He moved her legs away from his waist and slipped off her panties, watching her face carefully for any sign that she didn’t want this. She stared back at him, looking for any sign that he didn’t want this. Neither found anything.

He removed his boxers and stretched out over her, his lips finding hers once more. She raked her nails down his back and returned her legs to their previous position of being wrapped around his waist. He reached between them and his fingers found her clit, causing her to gasp into his mouth. He took advantage of that and slipped his tongue in, rubbing his tongue against hers. She rocked her hips against him, feeling herself begin to climb upwards. His fingers entered her slit and curled upwards, seeking her g-spot. Once found, he immediately set to work, seeming determined to have her over the edge in record time. His thumb pressed down against her clit while he devoured her mouth. She gasped and panted, lost in the differing sensations.

“Chat!” she cried out against his lips as she finally hit the precipice and came around his fingers. He lifted his head and gave her a wicked grin. His hair hung down around his face, mask perfectly fit in place.

“Now that was a nice steal,” he commented. She thumped her head back against her shirt and struggled to find the best words. How did he do that? Always knew what to say and when to say it? Giving up on wordplay, she simply stated, “Hurry up and fuck me already you pesky feline.” He laughed and nodded to her before holding up a finger. He reached over to grab his belt and pulled a fucking condom out of one of the various pouches lining the belt. She rose her brow at him, but he didn’t comment, just tore open the foil and rolled it on.

“I’m old enough to know better than to place myself in any situation in which I may need a condom and not have a condom,” he commented as he slowly guided his cock into her. There was something about his casual responsibility that lit her blood on fire. And finally, she watched his demeanor break as he groaned, dropping his head.

“You feel much too good for this to be healthy,” he muttered, pushing all the way in. She licked her lips and lifted herself up enough to press her lips against his jugular. She nipped slightly and felt his cock jerk inside her. He let out a hiss. “I’m not going to last long if you do that Princess. It’s been a while.”

Then he began to rock his hips, setting her on fire once more. Through the clouding of her mind, she noted how he angled himself so the head of his cock would rub firmly against her g-spot every time he surged in. Their lips found each other once more and they clung together.

Somehow, he was no longer fully on top of her and she was no longer laying fully under him. Instead, they managed an odd position in which they were sitting up, a tangle of limbs. Everything in Marinette tensed before exploding once again. She tossed her head back and cried out his name. Apparently, that was enough for him because he slammed home once more before freezing. He pressed his forehead against her shoulder and squeezed her hips tightly, gasping for breath.

They lay there for a while, just trying to catch their breath, lost in the throes of what just occurred. This is what would’ve happened three months ago if he hadn’t been shot, Marinette thought to
herself. *It was worth the wait.* If she’d slept with him back then, she likely would’ve just tossed him to the side afterward. Now it felt different, less like the casual sex she had with Luka and more like the passionate love-making she shared with Chloe.

“I want to stay like this forever Princess,” he mumbled in her ear. She knew that tone of voice.

“But…?” He let out a sigh and kissed her jaw.

“But I need to leave. I have somewhere I need to be in the morning.” She nodded and brushed her lips against his. “You’ll find your Ladybug costume in the stairwell.” Oh yeah, that was a thing that happened.

“Goodnight Chaton,” she whispered as they slowly released each other. She didn’t bother asking when she’d see him next. She knew that he’d find her. He always did.

They dressed slowly, constantly taking breaks from putting on clothes to kiss. Neither of them wanted to leave, and it was clear in their body language. But eventually, Chat was fully dressed and he had no further excuse. He gave her a two-fingered salute and that grin she loved so much before racing away.

She watched him jump for as long as she could, watching him leap across the rooftops of Paris. Nino had a point. He definitely was not up to her skill level. With a small smile to herself, she drifted back into the stairwell and picked up the bag waiting for her. She checked to make sure her suit was in there and walked down the stairs to the ground floor, deciding to walk home. Maybe she’d get lucky and catch a glimpse of Chat on her way home.

It was on her way home that she realized the sneaky kitty had managed to swipe the earpiece from her ear at some point.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

Please do not make the mistake that this means Chat just forgives Marinette for all she's done. He hasn't. This is them slowly starting to place more trust in each other. Marinette makes the decision here that she doesn't want to know who Chat is under the mask because she wants to prove to him that she can trust him with her most valued secret without having "something of equal value" in return. I know it wasn't clear, so I wanted to make sure to state it here to keep people from getting confused.

At the end of the chapter, Marinette reminds herself that Chat will find her because he always does. This is her way of acknowledging the fact that she can't always control the situation surrounding her, something I'll delve more deeply into in later chapters.
Father

Chapter Summary

There are two sides to every coin and fathers are no different.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Adrien sat next to his father and held the man’s hand. He convinced himself that the man was looking better, more healthy. He had to be.

“I met someone,” Adrien told his dad softly. There was no response as Gabriel Agreste stared blankly at the wall. “She’s… Well, she’s something else. She tried to kill me on multiple occasions, but she did save my life once or twice. So it kind of balances out. For the most part.” He took a deep breath. “She’s shattered inside, but she doesn’t think she needs to be saved. I don’t know what to do Dad. She only knows me as Chat Noir, but she doesn’t want me to remove my mask and show her Adrien Agreste. I’m stuck between a rock and a hard place here.”

Gabriel Agreste didn’t respond, and Adrien sighed, then smiled.

“You know, she almost reminds me of Mom when she’s not trying to kill me. Passionate and fierce. Remember when we went to that amusement park and the rides kept closing down every time we tried to ride them?” Adrien laughed at the memory. “Mom was so pissed. Kept demanding our money back. While she was shouting at the park manager, you and I snuck away to go eat ice cream. I can clearly picture the look on her face when she found us an hour later. She gave us this sour look, hands on her hips and eyes narrowed. Then you offered her an ice cream cone and she melted.” Adrien sniffed and rubbed away the wetness on his cheek.

“When did I start crying? “I need you to be better Dad… I can’t lose you too…” He pressed his head against his dad’s shoulder, taking with the effort to hold his tears in.

“I… Remember…” Gabriel hissed out. Adrien raised his head quickly. “Beautiful. You both…” The dying man slowly turned his head towards Adrien and reached over to pat his hand, giving a weak smile. “I love you… Always. You’re strong.”

“I love you too Dad. Please don’t leave me,” Adrien begged, squeezing his father’s hand.

“You need… To let me go. It’s okay.” Every word seemed to take so much effort for him. “We can watch you together…” Adrien shook his head, no longer trying to hold his tears back.

“I can’t. You’re all I have left Dad.” His father slowly shook his head.

“You have N… Nino. Plagg. This new w-woman. Nathalie. You don’t. Don’t need a dying man. I’m so. So proud.” His eyes began to lose their lucidity. “Proud of you…” Then Gabriel Agreste began to stare blankly at the wall once more.

Adrien dropped his head and sobbed, letting all of the pain out. Wasn’t going through this with his mother enough? He had to watch his father go through it as well. “Don’t leave me! Please! Daddy, please don’t go…”
A hand ran across his back and familiar arms wrapped around him. Adrien turned into Nathalie’s arms and began to sob against her chest. She hushed him and held him close, rubbing his back reassuringly.

“We’ll survive Adrien,” she promised him softly. “Somehow, we’ll survive. It’s what we do.”

Chloe sat on her bed, a glass of wine in hand. Marinette was at work. Chloe couldn’t leave. Her father’s funeral was in two days. But she couldn’t go. She wasn’t sure how she felt about it. She took a swallow of wine, letting it burn in her stomach.

“Daddy!” Chloe called happily, racing into her father’s arms. He laughed as she barreled into him, lifting her seven-year-old body easily. He hugged her tightly and spun her around.

“Hello, my darling girl. What did you do today?” he asked. In usual seven-year-old fashion, this got Chloe chatting excitedly all about her day, what she did in school, everything. And he listened intently, giving her his undivided attention, a small smile on his face.

Chloe took another swallow of wine, tears burning in her eyes.

“Dad, I don’t want to go to an all-girls school,” Chloe said softly. “Why can’t I stay at my school with all my friends?” He grunted in annoyance and waved a hand at her.

“Because I said so. Now go, you’re distracting me.”

“But Heather is allowed to go to a normal school. Why are you sending just me away?” Her stepsister was allowed a normal school, something the other girl rubbed in her face every chance she got.

“Because I said so! Now get out!”

She poured more wine into her cup, tears slipping down her cheeks. She was glad it wasn’t Marinette who took his life. But also dissatisfied that it wasn’t. Perhaps it would’ve been a form of karma. She couldn’t mourn his loss, not in the way most people could. She already mourned the loss of her father when he sent her away to America, getting her banned from her home of Paris.

Something broke in him when her mother left him. But something was already broken before then. That last year before their divorce was awful. He was focusing so much on politics and Audrey wanted him to focus on their family. They fought all the time. Finally, it was over. Audrey left, wanting to take Chloe, but lost the custody battle. Something shattered in him.

“Why’d you even fight for me if you were just going to send me away like an inconvenience you piece of shit?!” Chloe threw the wine glass at the wall, bursting into tears as it shattered. She fell into a ball on the floor and sobbed, mourning him once again. She mourned the loss of a parent. She mourned the loss of who he was. But mostly, she mourned the loss of never knowing if she could ever get her Papa back.

Chapter End Notes
This is a shorter chapter, but like I’ve said before: I want my super emotional scenes to be short. They need to punch straight to the point and can't be dragged on. I, personally, teared up a bit when writing the scene between Adrien and his father. So I'll count this as a success if I get you guys to do the same.

I connected these two scenes because they show essentially the same thing, but from two different angles. You have Adrien: a man who is losing his father currently, who doesn't want his father to give up. He wants his dad to keep fighting because he doesn't want to lose him. He fears being left alone. At the end of the scene, Nathalie shows up to comfort him, reminding him that they’re in it together. It shows that no matter how alone he feels, he isn't alone. He has his support.

Then you have Chloe: a woman who is torn between wanting to hate her father for what he's become, but sad because she lost the father she remembered fondly. She makes mention of not being able to mourn his death properly because she's already mourned him once before. Chloe is utterly alone in this scene because she's meant to contrast Adrien. While Adrien has his support system right there, Chloe's support system is divided. Now that doesn't mean people don't care as much for Chloe as they do for Adrien, but instead, it's meant to show that our most painful mourning is done when we're by ourselves and can truly let our emotions loose without fear of repercussions. Chloe hates her father but needs to mourn and grieve him while struggling with the guilt of needing to.
Aftermath

Chapter Summary

"For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." Newton's Third Law of Physics.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I’m sorry,” Alya whispered over the phone. “Please Nino, I’m so sorry. Just call me back. Please. I love you so much. I can’t lose you. I’ll explain everything, just call me back. Please.” She hung up the phone, shaking in her grief. She wished, more than anything in the world, that she’d told him. She knew she should’ve told him. She wanted to tell him, but she was so scared of losing him. But she lost him anyway.

~ ~ ~

Nino stared at his phone. It lit up with another voice mail. He deleted it without listening. Tipping the bottle back, he took a hard swallow of the beer, finishing the last of it. He raised his finger to the bartender for another bottle. He’d been here for a while. But he didn’t have anywhere else he could go at the moment.

Once Adrien made sure that they wouldn’t be hunted anymore, the guys left Luka’s place. Nino came here. He knew he should’ve gone home, but then Alya would be there and he didn’t want to see her. He glanced at his watch. She had work in an hour, she’d be gone then and their apartment would be empty. He could collect his things then.

He took a swallow of beer.

~ ~ ~

Plagg stared at Tikki, sitting across from him with her hands folded on the table. She watched him as he watched her. He waited for her to speak. She called him here, she could say whatever it was she needed to say.

“You were never in any danger,” she began. He rose a brow.

“Really? Because I dangled over the Seine with a cord wrapped around my neck. Seems pretty dangerous to me.” She winced.

“I’m sorry…”

“Why did you do it? Why did you use me like that?” She casually brushed her fingers under her eyes, trying to hide her tears in usual Tikki fashion. “And don’t lie to me.”

“Because I was trying to protect Marinette. I’ve been with her for years. The entire time I’ve been with her, she’s never betrayed me. You did. You left me without a word of explanation. It was Marinette who held me as I cried my eyes out when you left. It was Marinette who helped me get over you. I still watched you though, all the time.” She reached out to take his hands, but he slid
them off the table and leaned back. She hesitated. “I don’t think I ever truly got over you. It drove me
insane not knowing why you left. I tried so hard to figure it out, but never could. It wasn’t until the
tracker incident that I began to start putting together the pieces. And I was angry.”

“I was trying to protect you.”

“By breaking my heart?!” She didn’t bother to hide her tears anymore, just glared at him. “You left
me wondering what I did wrong! I couldn’t figure it out! Then you have the audacity to just waltz
back into my life without a care in the world! What I did was wrong, but you’re not innocent in this
matter Patrick so don’t you dare try to pin it all on me.”

Plagg let out a long breath and looked away, unable to hold her gaze. He hated it when she used his
real name like that. He hated his real name in general, but when she used it like that… It always hurt.

“I never would have placed you in danger like that Tikki.” She gave a hollow laugh.

“Really? If it was between me and him, you wouldn’t choose him? If Ladybug told you that Chat
could live, but I had to die you wouldn’t feed me to the wolves?”

“Don’t do that! That’s not fair!” She deflated.

“I know… I’m sorry.” She reached into her purse and pulled out a flash drive, placing it on the table
between them before standing slowly. He frowned in confusion.

“What’s this?”

“I know it will take a while to repair the damage done, but hopefully this is a step in the right
direction. Only I have seen what’s on that drive and no one else knows anything about it.”

“What’s on it?” She gave him a steady look.

“Proof that Adrien Agreste is Chat Noir.”

~ ~ ~

Alya walked back into their apartment, heart shattering at the emptiness. He still wasn’t home. She
dropped her keys in the bowl and dropped her purse on the floor, walking slowly into the bedroom.
She froze in the doorway.

Nino’s side of the closet was open and bare. His dresser drawers were also open and empty. All of
his special nick-knacks that’d been scattered about were gone as well. All of the pictures. His laptop
was gone. She stumbled into the bathroom and looked around before tearing through the rest of the
apartment, eyes blurring more and more with tears as she searched. All of his things were gone.

She collapsed in the kitchen and screamed in pain, clutching her heart. He left her. He left her. He
left her.

“Don’t go!” she begged to no one. “I love you! I’m sorry!” She pulled her phone out and dialed his
number, hands shaking. She got a generic message stating the caller couldn’t be reached. She blocked
her number. She curled up on the floor of the kitchen and just cried. She didn’t want to call Tikki.
Tikki was going through the same shit and didn’t need Alya’s shit piled on top. Marinette was…
Complicated. She didn’t think she could handle knowing Marinette got her guy despite her mistakes.
Trixx was still sick as hell.

So she called Polly.
“Hey Alya, what’s wrong?” Polly sounded concerned.

“He left me. He left. He didn’t even give me a chance to explain,” Alya sobbed. Polly swore softly.

“Alright, you’re at home right? Stay there. I’m on my way over. Do you want me to call Tikki or Marinette?”

“No!”

“Okay, okay. I’ll be there soon. Just hold on sweetie.”

Thirty minutes later, Polly picked the lock on the front door because Alya couldn’t find the will to get up off the floor and go open it for her. The woman rushed over to Alya and lifted her up, wrapping her in her arms. She rocked Alya back and forth, rubbing circles on her back.

“Why does it hurt so much?” Alya wailed. Polly winced slightly, then let out a small sigh.

“Because you love him. Because he’s everything to you. Because you don’t even get the chance to make it better. Because you know you screwed up. Because he’s your other half and he left. Left without a word.”

“It feels like someone cut out my heart and left me bleeding. I just want it to stop hurting!” Polly kissed the top of her head and nodded slowly.

“I know sweetie. I know. It’s going to be okay. I’m here, I’m here. I’m not going anywhere. I promise.”

“I want to talk to him. I want to explain. I want to fix things,” she sobbed. Polly hesitated then, with a deep breath, she ripped the bandage off.

“Alya… There’s some damage you just can’t fix.” The younger woman began to cry harder, inciting Polly to hold her tighter.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

Concerning Alya and Nino, there isn't much to say. It's pretty clear what's going down, so I'm not gonna bog down the emotion with explanations. If you have questions, leave 'em in the comments and I'll answer what I can.

Tikki and Plagg, however. Tikki drops quite the bombshell on Plagg. She hands him a flash drive and states that the information on it proves that Adrien Agreste is Chat Noir. I talked a lot about trust in Marinette's chapter, and here is Tikki struggling to gain back Plagg's trust in this one. They've both made mistakes, and she takes account that she's made a bit more mistakes than he has. But she does what she can to reestablish their trust in each other. Instead of doing what she would've done beforehand in giving Marinette the information that Adrien is Chat, she instead keeps it to herself and gives it over to Plagg. This becomes absolutely vital in the next arc of the fic, so always have that piece of information in the back of your head!

I wonder what exactly she has that proves it though...
The Assassin Code

Chapter Summary

Someone commented how they were a bit confused regarding the assassin code and asked if I could make a complete list, so here it is! Hopefully having it compiled like this makes it a bit easier for people to understand, vice having to read it through dialogue.

The Assassin Code

*Assassins cannot go after the person they have taken a contract from. That person gains a temporary immunity during the duration of the contract. (Loophole: Having someone else place a contract against the contractor. Ex. Plagg putting out a contract against the Mayor, thus rendering the temporary immunity null and void for the mayor.)
*Assassins can turn down or cancel a contract at any time.
*Assassins cannot retake a contract they previously canceled or turned down.
*Assassins must make each other aware of high profile hits. (Ex. Prime Minister)
*Any neutral ground or safe zone is strictly a "no-kill" zone.
*Any residents of a safe zone gain immunity.
*Anyone inside neutral ground or a safe zone gain temporary immunity while they are there.
*Top Assassin has power over the immunity list and can change it at will, so long as it does not conflict with the code.
*Assassins are not allowed to kill without a contract unless in three specific cases. (Listed at the end)
*Assassins and Assistants are not allowed to put out their own contract.
*Assistants are to immediately inform their Assassin if a new Assassin shows up.
*Protect your identities at all cost.
**Specific cases allowing Assassins to kill without a contract: Self-defense. If another Assassin breaks the code. To protect your identity.
It's time for Adrien Agreste to use that fancy degree for something other than picking up girls and getting in the minds of those he steals from.

“Is this really necessary?” Luka asked, squinting at Adrien.

“Yes, now talk. Tell me about Juleka. What was she like?” Adrien replied, sitting back against the armchair with a notepad in his lap and a pen in hand. Luka sighed dramatically and rubbed his face.

“She was amazing. She didn’t take shit and let her opinions be known. She loved music. She was my best friend. Our parents were what she liked to call ‘free-spirited’ which is just a fancy way of saying they weren’t around enough to care. I’m pretty sure Juleka and I were mistakes honestly.” Adrien nodded and noted something down on his notepad. “But while it bothered me, she just brushed it off. She didn’t care, said she had enough in me and Rose. She had this big heart that most people didn’t see. The kind of girl who held doors open for others, even if they were total dicks to her about it.” Luka gave a sad smile and rubbed his chest, not meeting Adrien’s eyes.

“Did people misjudge her based on her appearance?” Adrien asked calmly. Luka nodded.

“Yeah, all the time. But she dressed like that, not to make a statement, but to hide herself. She didn’t really like meeting new people. She was shy until she got to know someone.”

“What do you miss the most about her?” Luka dropped his head down and took a breath.

“Her voice. It haunts me all the time. She had this beautiful singing voice, but she never sang in front of other people. I used to sit beside her bedroom door and listen to her sing to herself because she was too embarrassed to sing in front of anyone. It was kind of funny. She thought she sounded awful, but she really didn’t.”

“Tell me about your parents. You mentioned before that they didn’t care?”

“I think they tried to care. They did the usual parental duties when Juleka and I were too young to care for ourselves. But they really didn’t know how to have kids. They had me young, really young. When I reached high school, they took that as cue to be able to do their own thing.”

“What was their own thing?”

“They liked adventure. They used to sail a lot.” Luka gave a short laugh. “I can remember when we were young, they took us on a sailing trip with them. They acted like pirates the entire time and got me and Juleka in on it. We played with toy swords, I can remember dueling with my dad as the ocean passed around us. At night, Mom would teach me how to play the guitar.”

“How old were you?”
“Seven. Juleka was five. Which was an issue for the schools when we got back.” Adrien raised a brow.

“They took you guys out of school to go sailing?” Luka nodded in confirmation.

“Yeah. When they got the need for adventure, they just had to go. So when they were told that they couldn’t pull us from school to do that, it frustrated them.”

“Why not home school you guys?”

“Because they didn’t know how. And I think they wanted us to be able to have friends. They wanted us to have stability but couldn’t stand being stagnant. So they chose to leave us at home a lot when they could so they could have their adventure.” Luka scowled. “They weren’t there when she was taken. I tried to get a hold of them. They never picked up.”

“How long have you been mad at them?” He fell silent. Then rubbed the back of his neck.

“Thirteen years.”

“And how long since you spoke to them last?”

“…Thirteen years. The last time I spoke to them was at the funeral. I never forgave them.” Adrien nodded and made a couple more notes, then leaned forward and caught Luka’s eye.

“This is what I’m going to recommend. You have a lot of anger bottled up and most of it is directed towards them. So I want you to write them a letter. You don’t have to send it, but I want you to write it. Pretend your speaking to them. Write out all of how you feel, why you’re mad, what you feel they did wrong, and what they should’ve done better. Next week when we meet again bring the letter.”

“Is that going to help?” Luka seemed skeptical. Adrien nodded and leaned forward, making sure to check his words carefully as to not confuse his friend.

“It won’t fix everything, but it’s a step in the right direction. It’ll help you come to terms with your own feelings. I also want you to write a letter to Juleka.”

“Why would I write a letter to Juleka?”

“Because I want you to tell her how you feel. Tell her everything you’ve kept bottled up. It will help you come to terms with your own emotions concerning her death.”

“I’m assuming I need to bring it next week.” Adrien nodded. “Figures. Will you make me read it to you?” Adrien gave a shrug.

“If you want to. That’s up to you. If you’re not comfortable doing so, you don’t have to.” Luka let out a sigh of relief and stood, making his way to the kitchen.

“Are you sure this talking shit is good? Because I feel raw.” Adrien stood and followed.

“You’re supposed to feel raw. We’re slowly digging out the infection, so the surrounding skin is going to be irritated. You’ve held in a lot of anger and guilt for thirteen years. It’s not going to vanish overnight.” Luka gave a nod and poured himself a glass of whiskey, tossing it back in a single gulp. He carefully placed the glass down, his hand shaking. The wound metaphors seemed to make sense to him, so Adrien made a point to use them as much as possible in order to help Luka understand the process.
“I think I’m mad at her too…” he whispered. Adrien didn’t speak but instead let Luka take it at his own pace. “I mean, she promised me she would never leave the house without letting me know. She also promised she wouldn’t leave me. She promised it would always be me and her against the world. But then I feel guilty for being mad because she’s dead. It’s not like she asked to die at sixteen and leave me all alone to face the world without her.”

“It’s okay to be mad at her Luka. I don’t know Juleka, but I don’t think she’d blame you for being mad at her. Sometimes you need to be mad. It’s part of the grieving process.”

“Grieving process?” Adrien frowned and tried to think of a good example to use.

“Like the healing process. It scabs over and when the scab starts to flake, it itches like mad. Instead of letting it flake over properly, you just kept picking at the wound, re-opening it.”

“Which leads to infection.” Luka nodded as if that made sense. “Thank you for this Adrien. You don’t have to do it.” Adrien smiled.

“You’re right, I don’t. But I want to. This is kind of what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.”

“You know this isn’t going to keep me from being Viperion, right?” Adrien held up his hands as if in surrender.

“Wouldn’t dream of it. But maybe it’ll keep you from testing random poison mixtures on yourself.” Luka let out a laugh and poured another glass of whiskey, tossing it back.

“That would make Rose feel better.”

“Alright, I’ve got to head out. Call me if you need me.” The two tapped fists.

“Going to visit your dad?” Adrien nodded.

“Yeah. The doctors said he’s stopped fighting, so it won’t be long. I want to spend as much time with him as I can.” Luka frowned, then pulled Adrien into a tight hug.

“You call me if you need me too. I’m here for you man.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So this is session one of Luka's therapy with Adrien. There will be a couple chapters like this one speckled about for the remainder of the fic. These chapters have multiple purposes. First and foremost, to give the reader a look inside the mind of Luka. Secondly, to give the reader a brief break from everything that's happening around them. And finally, to help develop the characters of Adrien and Luka in a way that feels more natural.

As someone who regularly visits a psychologist, deals with depression, and wants to get a Bachelor's in Psychology, I feel it's always best to bring light to that aspect in my writing. A lot of pop culture puts therapy in this negative light or therapy is shown to be something only weak and broken people go to and it's always irritated me. So I like to write it in a positive light. Hope you guys can appreciate and enjoy that!
Closure

Chapter Summary

Peek into the minds of Alya and Nino as they both deal with the decisions they've made.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nino sat in the hotel room and stared at the picture in his hand. *Rip it up. It doesn’t matter,* he told himself. But he couldn’t bring himself to do so. It was a reminder of happier times. Three years. They’d been together for three years. Rena Rouge had been active for seven. Their entire relationship was a lie. She lied to him the entire time.

He glanced over at the bed in the hotel. His brain reminded him of something he wanted to forget.

*Alya laid the orange, silk nightgown on the bed with a teasing smile on her face. I wrapped my arms around her waist and kissed her neck, breathing in the addicting scent of her perfume.*

*“Teasing me already?” I asked in her ear. She giggled and turned to peck her lips against mine.*

*“Maybe. But you’ll have to wait. I want to go sight-seeing first.” I grinned and nuzzled her neck, lips brushing over the tender part on her shoulder which caused her to let out a breathy moan.*

*“I think I can change your mind,” I murmured. She turned in my arms to face me and pressed her lips to mine, drawing me backward onto the bed.*

Rome. They went last year for their two year anniversary. His eyes drifted down to the picture again.

*I won’t miss her.*

*I stood outside the changing room, holding the pile of clothes Alya had already tried on. She was trying to find a new dress to wear to some fancy office party the next night she’d been invited to by a friend. Suddenly, her hand shot out from the curtain and wrapped around my arm, yanking me into the changing room. I tripped and stumbled, dropping the pile of clothes.*

*Her lips met mine as she pressed me against the mirror, causing me to laugh against her lips. She hushed me with a grin and kissed me again, sliding her hands up and down my chest.*

*“Fucking hell I love you woman,” I groaned. She pulled away from me and stared me in the eye, looking shocked as hell. I flushed. We hadn’t exchanged the ‘I love you’s yet. This probably wasn’t the best time.*

*Her hands cupped my face. Her voice was soft. “I love you too.”*

Six months into their relationship. He was head over heels in love with her. *I deserve better than her.* The picture mocked him.

*I laughed at some stupid pun Adrien made, shoving my best friend on his shoulder. Plagg came back from the bar and slammed down three beers.*
“Nino, best thing ever just happened,” he said with excitement. I glanced over to him and took a swallow of my beer.

“What’s this best thing ever? You get Tikki knocked up?” Plagg turned bright red.

“No! Ugh, look over at the bar. The chick with the orange hair and black glasses.” I glanced over and spotted the woman. She was gorgeous. “She asked me if you were single.” I choked on my beer.

“She was probably asking about Adrien,” I said swiftly. Adrien let out a laugh.

“No man, she said ‘Your friend with the glasses. The cute one.’”

“What are you waiting for Nino?” Adrien asked. “Go talk to her.” She glanced over and gave me a smile. I spun back around and took a desperate gulp of my beer.

“Dude, I don’t know how to talk to women! You know I don’t!” I whispered urgently. Adrien leaned forward.

“Start with your name. Then make a joke, not a sexual joke, but something to make her laugh.”

“Like what?!” Adrien sighed and Plagg jumped in.

“Tell her she looks hot.” There was a thump and Plagg winced, rubbing his shin where Adrien kicked him.

“Don’t do that. It’ll make her feel like an object for you to gawk at.” Plagg muttered something about stupid psychologists getting in people’s heads. “Ask her if she’s waiting on someone because a woman like her should never be sitting alone.”

“How will that make her laugh?” Adrien’s eyes sparkled.

“Trust me. Go!” I slowly stood and made my feet take me over to the bar where she was sitting. She turned to me with a smile and I was blown away by her gorgeous honey-colored eyes.

“Uh hi. I’m Nino,” I introduced, feeling awkward. I could feel my friends’ eyes on me.

“Alya.”

“Um, are you waiting for someone? A woman like you should never sit alone.” She laughed, her eyes sparkling. She leaned forward, resting her chin in her hand.

“A woman like me, huh?” I nodded and slid onto the bar stool next to her.

“You’re beautiful, it’s practically a crime.” Her eyes danced with pleasure at the compliment.

“Well, I think it’s a crime that a cutie like you is single. Why’s that handsome?” I flushed and rubbed the side of my neck, resisting the urge to make a tactical retreat. I wasn’t good at this kind of shit.

“I suck at talking to women,” I blurted out. Then turned beet red from mortification. Did I really just say that?! She reached out and brushed her fingers over my hand.

“Well, I think you’re doing great so far. So let’s get some practice in for you.”

The night they met. It was one of the best nights he could recall. She was patient with him and they talked for hours. He stumbled over his words at the beginning, but she didn’t seem to mind. By the
end of the night, he was having no issue speaking to her. She told him all about her job working as a freelance reporter and how she dreamed of getting her own investigation show one day. He told her about his own freelance work as an IT guy and even how he would DJ at a couple nightclubs on the weekends. That got them talking about music. Which led to animals somehow. Then she said she had to go, but gave him her number and a kiss on the cheek.

The hand holding the picture began to shake. *I’ll stop thinking about her. I’ll get over her. One day. Maybe. A couple tears dripped onto the picture.*

“Why? Was it all a lie?” he demanded of the picture. The stupid thing. When he was packing, he grabbed his old box of stuff from the closet. Just some old crap they didn’t have space for in their apartment. She’d been looking for this picture for a while now. Apparently, it had managed to make its way into his box.

He’d taken it a week into their relationship when they visited the Arc de Triomphe. It was a candid picture that captured her as she had just turned to face him. Her eyes were sparkling with joy and she wore a brilliant smile. It was his favorite picture of her and he was disappointed when it vanished. It’s why she was looking for it, so she could make a smaller copy of it for him to keep in his wallet. “So you never have to worry about losing it again.”

He laid back on the bed and placed the picture on the nightstand, propping it up against the lamp. He stared at it, everything in him aching. *Is this really the end?*

~ ~ ~

Rena Rouge sat on the rooftop, staring at the Arc de Triomphe. Her heart ached something fierce. She should’ve told him. But she didn’t want to risk losing him. She needed to talk to him, to explain. But he wouldn’t answer her. Polly offered to track him down for her, but she refused. That would probably just piss him off more. If she did this, she had to do it in a way he’d understand.

She glanced down at the crystal turtle she swiped from the museum earlier that night. He might not hear about that on the news, considering the news were only talking about the assassins showing up and killing the mayor. In order to break through that news barrier, she had to do something different. She glanced back up at the Arc de Triomphe. This would be different. Nora always told her that one should never do things half-assed. If you’re going to do something, make it count. She hoped this would count. It had to. She had no other ideas on how she was supposed to get his attention. This had to be the right move.

Rena took out a sharpie and drew black glasses on the turtle, completely destroying all value it held. She didn’t care; she wasn’t after the money. Once that was finished, she left the rooftop and made her way over to the monument. It took her a good hour, but finally, it was finished. Rena Rouge slipped off into the shadows, hoping this would count for something.

~ ~ ~

“Rena Rouge strikes in the oddest way possible! After stealing a crystal turtle worth over a million euro, she defamed the piece and put it on display underneath the Arc de Triomphe by hanging it from chords and leaving it swinging fifteen feet off the ground. This is completely out of character for the criminal and people are questioning why she chose to do this instead of selling the piece.”

~ ~ ~

“Talk to her,” Adrien commanded. Nino ignored him, staring out the window. “Dude, she drew fucking glasses on a super expensive turtle piece, completely negating any value it had. Then she put
"She was going to have me killed. She lied to me the entire time we were together," Nino snapped. "Everything was a lie!" Adrien grabbed his shoulders and forced Nino to look at him.

"You need closure, Nino. I’m not telling you to give her another chance. I’m telling you to talk to her. You need that closure or it’s going to keep eating you up inside.” Nino shoved him away.

"You’re supposed to be a thief, not a fucking shrink.” Adrien sighed and pointed to the television screen where the news was still speculating over the reason behind Rena’s odd actions.

“She did that to get your attention. That turtle is supposed to be you. If you don’t talk to her now, you might miss your chance. Don’t miss your chance Nino because you’ll regret it. You need the closure if you want any hope of moving on.” Nino didn’t respond. “Do you know why I was so desperate to find out if Marinette was Ladybug?”

“Because you’re too curious for your own good?” Adrien snorted.

“Close, but no. Because I needed closure. I was willing to wash my hands of Ladybug and Marinette Dupain-Cheng, but the question kept bugging me. I came to the realization that in order to properly move on with my life, I needed the closure that came with having that question answered. You have questions you need answers too, but you’ll never get them unless you talk to her and ask her. Otherwise, you’ll end up in limbo. Everything looks much worse in your head Nino, I promise you that.”

"Why wouldn’t she just tell me?” Nino demanded, glaring at Adrien. Adrien gave him a steady gaze, unflinching.

“Why didn’t you tell her you were working with Chat Noir?”

“Because I thought I would lose her if she knew what I was doing.” Adrien raised a brow.

“So why wouldn’t she tell you she was Rena Rouge?” Damned psychology majors. Getting into your head and making you think and rationalize things when you want to be irrational.

“I’ll think about it.” Knowing that was the best he was going to get, Adrien nodded and gave Nino a hug before leaving. Nino continued to stare out the window. The Arc de Triomphe mocked him. He should switch rooms.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So I wanted to give you guys a look into Alya and Nino’s relationship a bit before everything went to shit. Like how they met and some of the most pivotal moments in their relationship. Obviously, the best way to do so is to give it through flashback while Nino questions the entirety of the relationship.

Don’t misunderstand Adrien’s intentions either, he’s being completely honest to Nino about closure and how it’s something Nino needs if he wants any chance of moving on from Alya. And yeah, he kind of pulled a shrink move on Nino by making him think of the most logical reason why Alya wouldn’t have told him that she was Rena Rouge.
Psych majors man. Always getting in your head.
Tikki

Chapter Summary

Tikki gives some background to her involvement with the organization, as well as some background on the organization itself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“How did you get into this life?” Plagg asked of Tikki, taking a sip of water while she relaxed against his kitchen counter, a glass of white wine in hand. She pushed her fingers through her hair and gave a half-shrug.

“I’ve always been involved really. You may not remember, but there was this assassin years ago, Volpina.” Plagg jerked in surprise, then frowned.

“She was the assassin who started the masked assassin theme. Dressed up like a mythical fox who used different hallucinogenics to make her victims see whatever she wanted before eventually killing them. She vanished about twelve years ago after being active for twenty years.” Tikki nodded and gave a grim smile.

“She was my mother.” Plagg stared. Tikki took another sip of wine. “Her name was Lila and I remember her as being the most beautiful woman ever. I loved her so much and I admired her. I wanted to be just like her. Of course, as a child, I had no idea what she did for a living nor where all the money came from.”

“You never did talk about your family…” She drew in a breath and nodded.

“I never met my father. Maman always told me that it was a passionate love affair from when she visited China. She described the man as being more beautiful than she’d ever seen before and wise beyond his years. When I was a teen, she told me a bit more about him and the situation. She’d visited China to learn about the hallucinogenic drugs that she later used on her victims and he was her teacher. They were ten years apart in age and it was something that was a bit frowned upon, as she wasn’t Chinese. Their love burned fast and bright. She told me that he almost came back with her to Europe, but decided not to in the end because he couldn’t leave his home behind.”

“Why didn’t she stay?” Plagg watched her carefully, wanting to absorb all the information he possibly could. We’re making progress.

“Because it wasn’t her home. She didn’t realize she was pregnant with me until she returned to France.” Tikki gave a smile, looking down at her glass of wine. “You know it’s funny. The news painted Volpina as this psychotic killer, but all I can see is my beautiful mother, who always made sure to tuck me into bed at night and tell me a story. It was our tradition every night. No matter what contract she had waiting for her, no matter how old I got, she always made sure to kiss me goodnight and tell me a story.”

“Whatever happened to her?” Tikki drained her glass and set it aside, bracing herself against the counter and closing her eyes.
“She died. Eventually. She got sick, really sick, and slowly started to fade away. The private doctor believed it was a side effect of the hallucinogenics she surrounded herself with as an assassin. The drugs slowly started to kill her. The night she passed, she asked me to bring her the fox mask. When I did, she pressed it into my hands and made me promise to give it to someone who could carry on her legacy.”

“Not you?”

“No. Not me. I learned pretty quickly in high school that I was much more interested in the technological side of things rather than the physical side. I often dreamed of making cool gadgets for her to use on her contracts, being her sidekick.” She laughed. “Pipe dream, she was gone before I could make such progress.”

Plagg leaned back in his chair and considered Tikki. He cocked his head to the side and it hit him. “Alya. You gave the mask to Alya.” Tikki nodded. “Not Marinette?”

“No, not Marinette. I offered it to Marinette, but she said that she wanted to become her own being. She wanted to make a name for herself in her own way. We met in college you see, right before Ladybug. Alya we met not long after, but we kept Alya separate from our other life. But Alya reminded me so much of my mother, I often wondered if it was fate that drew us all together.”

“The news has never spoken of Rena Rouge as an assassin, not until the other night. She’s always just been labeled as a thief like Chat Noir,” Plagg pointed out. “And yet, she’s in the top seven.”

“It’s the hallucinogenics. Rena uses them, but in a different way than my mother did. Where my mother would drop what was essentially a smoke bomb, Rena shoots a dart into her victims. And she makes sure they’re always alone. She doesn’t take on many contracts, but she’s so skilled at it that it would be an insult not to count her into the top seven. She’s said she’s always preferred simply stealing as opposed to killing.”

“How did the organization form?” Tikki gave a smile.

“The same way the themed assassins came about. My mother.”

“Your mother started the organization?” All roads lead back to Volpina.

“Yep. She got this idea that the assassins of Europe should unite. She wanted some way to have everyone connected. Hawk Moth was one of the first people who joined her organization. She gifted him with his mask and taught him to be better. People resisted at first, they didn’t want structure, they wanted the freedom to do what they wanted.”

“What changed?”

“There was an incident where three different assassins got the same contract. They ended up fighting each other over the money instead of completing the contract. They killed each other. My mother used this as a way to show everyone else what happens without structure. People soon fell into place after that.” Plagg shook his head in amazement.

“She sounds like an amazing woman. Now I understand where you get it from.” Tikki shrugged and turned away slightly, reaching for the bottle of wine.

“She taught me well. ‘Remember your loyalties,’ she told me. ‘They’ll be what keeps you safe.’ I may have taken that a little too literally though.”

Plagg smirked. “You think? Just maybe?” She wrinkled her nose at him and tossed a sponge at him,
which he easily dodged, the two of them laughing.

“You know, I vet all of Ladybug’s contracts. We all do. It’s one of the closely guarded secrets we keep from the assassins.” Plagg frowned in confusion. She went into further detail. “Well, say there’s a contract from a rich abusive prick who wants his wife dead because she left him. We don’t even bother mentioning it to our partners. We just instantly reject the contract. Granted, I can’t speak for all assassins in Europe, but at least we close-knit ones in Paris do so.” She poured another glass of wine and sighed.

“You protect them…” She nodded.

“It’s our job. Even if the person we’re protecting them from is themselves. We know our partners better than we know ourselves. We know what they can handle and can’t handle, mentally. Moreover, we never allow themselves to take a contract they may not be able to handle. Like for Ladybug, I only tell her about contracts where the victim has done something damaging to another person. It’s a form of therapy for her. She’s taking revenge for someone who otherwise can’t do it themselves.”

“But you told her about Chat.”

“Chat is a criminal,” she pointed out. “And he’s technically caused damage to other people. How many millions have museums and people lost from what he’s stolen? How many museum curators have lost their jobs because they couldn’t properly protect what they had on display?” Plagg lapsed into silence, considering that. It was a valid point, something that he had never taken into consideration. And he doubted the others had taken it into consideration.

“We never thought of it like that.” Tikki nodded.

“Exactly. The only reason I didn’t want her to accept it was because of who the contract was from. To me, it felt like a trap, especially after Chat targeted Marinette. I was worried Bourgeois somehow found out Marinette was Ladybug and was after revenge.”

“Here’s something I can’t figure out. Everything just seemed too convenient. Chat targets Marinette because of what Marinette did to him and his dad. Then Ladybug targets Chat, but he manages to get away. We strike the deal, which was only possible because of our history together. Then the next assassin the mayor hires on just… Finds Chat like it’s nothing. He gets shot and Marinette is forced to save his life, which traps him in her mansion for days while he heals up enough to be moved. All of this stems from two facts. Chat stealing that stupid necklace months ago and Marinette hiring Adrien to model for her.” Tikki took a deep breath at Plagg’s words and walked over to him, sitting down beside him. She spun her finger around the rim of her wine glass as she considered her words.

“You know me Plagg. I’m not one for superstition. I like my world based around in facts and figures. Numbers. Logic I can figure out.” Plagg nodded. “Ever since meeting Marinette, that’s been hard for me. Even when things don’t go her way, they go her way. For example, this guy she met while in college. Real nice guy. Met him in some cafe. She considered sparking a relationship with him, but on their first date her car broke down and she couldn’t make it. She tried to call him to explain, but dropped her phone and broke it.”

“That doesn’t seem to be things going her way Tikki,” Plagg pointed out. She held up a finger.

“Turns out, that guy was a serial rapist and kidnapper. As in, he acted one way in public and preyed on young women, making them trust him, inviting them out, then drugging and kidnapping them. Her luck kept her alive that night.”
“Coincidence.”

“Right. Of course, there was also the time we were running late to class. Right before we reached the cross-walk in front of the campus, Marinette tripped and twisted her ankle. While I was helping her up, a car blew a red light. It would’ve hit us had Marinette not tripped because we would’ve been on the street.” Plagg frowned.

“Creepy coincidence…”

“And naturally how can one forget the night we went clubbing with Alya and Marinette had too much to drink. While she was vomiting and we were sitting with her in the bathroom, there was a power outage. A lot of drunk people packed in one place and the power goes out. There was a stampede as people panicked and raced for the exit. Fourteen people were injured while we were safely out of harm's way in the bathroom.” Plagg stared at her.

“Okay, that’s just plain creepy,” he admitted. “So your guess is that it’s Marinette’s luck that caused all of this to occur?” Tikki nodded.

“As I said, even if it doesn’t seem to be the best thing at the time it always works out for the best. At least where Marinette is concerned. Look at the facts. Despite everything, this turn of events has helped Adrien get over his hate of Marinette and it’s helped Marinette become more in touch with her own emotions. She’s able to come to terms with things she didn’t want to face previously. She’s letting people in.” Plagg sat back and released a breath, shaking his head.

“I guess we’ll have to wait and see how things turn out.” He suddenly frowned and Tikki leaned forward, placing her hand on his arm.

“Don’t make that face. I don’t like that face. I don’t trust that face.”

“I have a bad feeling that things are just going to get worse before they get better,” he admitted. Tikki swore softly and drained her glass of wine.

“I hate it when you get those feelings. Because you’re usually right.”

“Well, let’s pray I’m wrong.”

~ ~ ~

“Do you understand what your job is?” Tom Dupain demanded, crossing his arms. The person he’d hired nodded, leaning back.

“Secure the package. Don’t harm her. Bring her to the safe zone. Keep her secure until it’s time for the pick-up,” the man stated. “You sure you’re gonna be able to pay me Frenchie? Last I heard, you got robbed blind.” Tom scowled. Americans.

“You’ll get your payment. Half before the job and the rest once she is safely secured and unharmed.” The man shrugged and stood. Tom gritted his teeth at the impatient stance the man took.

“I’m waiting.” Tom tossed the man the envelope filled with money. The man opened it up and counted every bill before nodding, satisfied. “I’ll get your prize. Just so you know, the guy you’re dealing with? He likes them clean. Virgins. He’ll comp you if she isn’t one.” I am aware.

“Do your job.” The man shrugged and popped in a stick of gum, leaving Tom’s office with a whistle.
Before anyone jumps to the conclusion that Plagg just gives Tikki another chance after their last conversation, he's not. This is them talking to each other and slowly getting to know each other again. Bit by bit.

Plagg mentions how Tikki's never talked about her family before and we finally see why. I wanted to use Lila AKA Volpina in some way, but I didn't want to stick her in as a villain like so many other fics do. I want my fic to be different. So I wrote her in as a loving mother who always places the needs of her daughter first. This is shown by how Tikki remembers her mother always making the time to tuck her into bed at night and tell her a story, no matter what else was going on around them. I had a small image in my head when writing that where Volpina, all dressed up, tucks a little Tikki into bed and tells her a story about foxes.

Most importantly, this chapter officially ends the previous arc and starts the new one.
*Rubs hands together in excitement.* I hope you're all ready for this.
Nathalie smacked Adrien’s hand as he reached for a cookie. He gave her a wounded look. She rolled her eyes at him.

“You’re not slick Adrien. Now hold still while I cover this up,” she commanded, carefully sliding the makeup sponge across his side to cover up the scar from his bullet wound. “When are you going to stop getting filled with holes?”

“Probably when I stop stealing things,” he replied in a cheerful voice. He caught the look in her eye. The one that clearly said, “What reason will you have for stealing soon?” He had taken the time to consider that.

Once his father passed, his excuse for being a thief would vanish. He could go back to college, finish his Master’s. Maybe even get a PhD. He could focus on modeling again if he wanted to. But the thought of giving up on the freedom Chat Noir offered made him feel like the walls were closing in around him. Reasonably, he knew he was addicted to the high of being a thief. Addicted to the freedom Chat Noir gave him. Didn’t change his desires. He just hadn’t come to a definite decision. Plus, there was Marinette to think about.

“You know I’ll support you with whatever you decide Adrien,” Nathalie reassured him, pulling out a smaller brush to make the makeup look more natural. He nodded and gave her a smile.

“I know Nathalie. If only you were more helpful with the ways of the heart,” he quipped. She narrowed her eyes at him and stabbed his thigh with the handle of the brush, causing him to wince.

“I could be if you told me exactly what’s going on. For now, the only advice I can give is to have open and honest communication. And don’t be a prick to her. And no, you can’t have another cookie.” He pouted and eyed the cookies longingly.

“Just one?”

“Adrien Agreste, you are about to walk the catwalk for the first time in months. Do you honestly want to risk having cookie bits stuck in your teeth?”

“Stop making sense.”

“Stop putting me into positions where I need to.” She set down the small brush and patted setting powder over everything before standing up straight. “Done. You ever going to tell me how you got this one?” He gave her a grin.

“Nope. You’ll have to guess.” She rose a single brow and stared him down. He hated it when she gave him that look. As if she could read his mind and see everything that happened beneath the
surface.

“Assassins,” she said flatly. He squinted his eyes at her. Can you read my mind? She rolled her eyes for the seventh time since he arrived and tossed his shirt at him. “You’re going to be late. Get a move on Adrien.” He slipped on his shirt and gave her a two-fingered salute, which caused her to scowl. “Don’t give me that Chat crap. I expect a decent hug.” The corner of her lips quirked slightly and he laughed, hugging her tightly.

“Thanks for everything Nathalie. I mean it,” he said earnestly. She squeezed him back before stepping away, gesturing towards the door.

“I know, you’d be lost without me. You’re just like your father. Organized chaos.” He watched her eyes shine with tears and made a point to kiss her forehead.

“I’ll see you tomorrow morning. Bring coffee! And bagels! With lots of cream cheese!” He hurried to the door, ignoring her pointed laugh and comment about getting back into modeling only to chuck the diet out the window.

~ ~ ~

“Adrien!” Marinette called. Adrien changed course and rubbed his hands together, forcing himself not to immediately yank her into his arms and kiss her senseless like he wanted. Instead, he calmly walked over and gave her a slight smile.

“Marinette. I was just on my way to get changed,” he said in greeting.

“Just a minute, there’s someone I wanted you to meet.” She waved someone over and Adrien turned, forcing himself not to emote. “This is my best friend Luka Couffaine. Luka, this is Adrien Agreste, the main model of the night.”

Luka gave a grin, his eyes sparkling. He extended a hand to Adrien. “Wonderful to meet you, Mr. Agreste. I must say, I have heard so much about you. Marinette’s been obsessed with your work for years now.” Adrien took Luka’s hand and had to bite back a laugh at the flush on Marinette’s face.

“He means your father’s work.” Well wasn’t she quick to explain? Luka considered that.

“I mean sure. His father’s work. My mistake, I didn’t realize his father only used Adrien as a model. Surely that must explain the countless Adrien Agreste pictures you used to have plastered all over your room.” Luka, you’re my new best friend. Fuck those other two scrubs, you have the info.

“Adrien, don’t you have to get changed?” Her face was beet red and she was glaring daggers at Luka. Adrien snapped his fingers.

“I do. Say, Luka, why not tag along? I’d love to hear all about how much Marinette adores my father’s work.” Luka agreed and the two turned away to head to the back. Adrien snickered the second they were out of ear-shot.

“Agreste, her face. Like ‘what have I done?’” Luka chuckled out.

“Gave us an excuse to hang out without people questioning it. Did you write the letters?” Luka nodded and rubbed the back of his neck. “Did they help?” He nodded again.

“Say, what are you going to do about the scars?” he asked suddenly, lowering his voice. “You kind of have to take your shirt off in front of other people.” Adrien grinned.
“Don’t worry, I’ve got it covered. The person who helped me come into my suit covers them up for me.” They reached the back and Adrien was yanked aside by a designer, who commanded him to strip and get changed into the first outfit. He followed the command and pulled his shirt off first, mostly to settle Luka’s nerves concerning his scars. And Nathalie did her job well. Luka’s raised a brow and gave him a casual thumbs up. It was like they weren’t even there. Not an easy feat with raised flesh, but she pulled it off with ease.

“So Marinette has pictures of me plastered all over her room?” Adrien questioned Luka as he was getting changed, grinning. Luka laughed.

“She used to. I met her right before she graduated high school. Her room was covered in them, head to toe. Then her college dorm? Same thing. She has been in love with Adrien Agreste for quite some time. Until recently.” Adrien nodded, understanding. Until Chat Noir came into her life and stole her heart. Maybe there was some form of hope for her accepting him as Chat then. But how do I make her desire the information? She’d get annoyed if I just unmasked. I could damage what little bit of solid foundation we have between us by doing so.

“It’s a tricky situation,” he stated finally. Luka nodded, then rubbed the back of his neck.

“It’s going to go south one way or another. Pick the lesser of two evils.” Adrien nodded. He finished getting dressed and Luka had to go back out to the audience. It was time for the show to begin.

Adrien took a deep breath behind the curtain, running through all his knowledge concerning modeling. The outfit he wore fit him like a glove. A black suit with green undertones. They’d played with the idea of adding a hat into the outfit before ultimately deciding against it.

He shook himself loose and stepped out from behind the curtain, keeping his eyes straight, face expressionless. He walked forward across the stage, ignoring the flashing lights around him. He ignored the constant chatter of the audience. He ignored the eyes.

At the end of the stage, he held a simple pose for the cameras, hand on his hip. Show off the clothes. Wait three seconds. Turn to the left. Arm up. His side screamed in pain. Three seconds. Sweat speckled across his brow. Don’t show your pain. She’s watching. Then he released the pose and began walking back towards the curtain, another model passing beside him. Right before he disappeared behind the curtain, his side tightened and he stumbled slightly. For fuck’s sake.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

Hey, remember when Adrien got shot in the side? And it had an effect on how he fought? I do too. Good times, good times.
Marinette’s eyes widened as she watched Adrien stumble towards the end. There was something wrong. She glanced around, seeing Luka get a look of concern on his face. No one else seemed to notice it yet. She slipped out of her seat and made her way into the back, needing to check on her model. Luka followed closely behind her.

“Probably tripped or something. It’s been some time since he’s done this right?” Luka said, trying to reassure her. She ignored him and burst into the back where Adrien was sitting, face twisted in pain. She shoved aside the people in her way.

“What happened?” she demanded, staring down at him. He tried and failed, to wipe the pain from his face.

“Cramp, it’ll pass.” He caught Luka’s eye. Her eyes narrowed in suspicion. He was holding the side Chat was shot on. Chat had her steal from Adrien. Chat was at the event Adrien wasn’t supposed to be at. It felt like too many coincidences.

“Take your shirt off,” she commanded. He frowned at her.

“Is that really necessary?” he asked. “It’s just a cramp. I’ll be good in a minute or two. This is my first time walking the stage since my father’s diagnosis. I haven’t exactly been keeping up on my eating regimen.”

“Take your shirt off.” Her tone left no room for argument. Didn’t Chat tease her about potentially being a model under the mask? Don’t be Chat. Don’t be Chat. Tell me my Chaton didn’t betray me like this. Adrien sighed and stood carefully, stripping his jacket and shirt off. Her eyes raked over his body. Not a mark on him. She closed her eyes in relief, tension leaving her body.

“Are we done now?” he demanded, seeming annoyed. She nodded.

“Get changed. You present the next outfit in two minutes.” Then she turned on her heel and walked away. She slipped away from Luka and found a dark corner where she leaned against the wall, reaching up to rub her cat charm.

She’d been so worried for a minute. If Adrien was Chat… That would ruin everything. It would basically scream at her that he’d been playing her from the start. Adrien Agreste hated her. For good reason. She didn’t want to think about her Chaton toying with her heart as a way to get back at her for something she was struggling to make right.

“Ma’am, you okay?” an attendant asked her, walking over to her. She didn’t recognize him. He had an American accent. Odd, since she didn’t recall seeing any foreigners on the roster of approved workers.

“I’m fine,” she said stiffly, her hackles rising. Everything in her screamed for her to move, so she did. The needle he had hidden in his hand pierced the air. Her eyes widened and he hissed in annoyance.

“Hold still you little bitch,” he growled, lunging for her. She ducked around his attack and shoved the hand with the needle away from her. If he hit her with that, she was done. Why did she ditch Luka?! She slammed her foot into his ankle before turning and running. He grabbed her ankle,
causing her to fall. She opened her mouth to scream, but he was there, covering her mouth. At least he’d dropped the needle.

Her mind shuttered off into Ladybug mode and her face lost expression.

Her attacker barely had time to widen his eyes at her sudden change when she brought the heel of her hand up and slammed it against his jaw. He stumbled off her and she straightened, kicking her heels off and bouncing on the balls of her feet.

“Stay down,” she warned darkly. He didn’t listen, instead stumbled up and attacked her. She bounced to the side and delivered a sharp kick to his gut, then grabbed his arm and twisted him over her shoulder. She slammed him into the ground and pressed her knee to his chest. Then she felt a prick against her leg.

She swore as she watched him press down the plunger on the syringe, injecting her with whatever was inside the needle. Her vision began to blur. She stumbled off him and managed three steps before she fell.

“Fucking annoying bitch. Not so tough now, huh?” He stood and walked over to her, kicking her in the stomach. Her fingers curled over her stomach. He’d think it was because she was in pain. Well, she was, but she was also pressing the emergency button hidden on her new bracelet. Her vision began to fade. The last thing she remembered was her cellphone ringing as the man lifted her over his shoulder.

Luka searched around for Marinette, admonishing himself for losing sight of her for even a moment. He wasn’t sure exactly went through her head when she confronted Adrien, but it couldn’t have been anything good. He needed to do some damage control, make sure she was okay. Where did you go Marinette?

He heard ringing off in one of the closed off corridors and stepped in, spotting her phone on the floor. But no Marinette. He swiped her phone off the floor and answered Tikki’s call.

“Tikki?” he asked.

“Luka?! Where’s Marinette?!” she demanded, sounding panicked. “I’ve been calling nonstop for the past two minutes!”

“I don’t know. What’s going on?”

“I don’t know either! Two minutes ago, Marinette pushed her emergency button!” Luka straightened and narrowed his eyes at the only exit straight in front of him. He bolted for the door, slamming it open and racing through. A car sped off from the street. He ran after it, muscles burning, eyes memorizing every detail.

“BG 555 NA. Black sedan. Find it Tikki!” he snapped into the phone. Then he put an alert out to the dark web to keep an eye out for the vehicle, and to notify Viperion the second someone saw it. Luka raced to his car and fit his earpiece in, calling Rose.

“I just got the notification from the dark web,” she said upon answering. “What’s going on?”

“Patch Tikki through, I’m getting my suit. Find me that fucking vehicle!”

“Viperion! What is happening?!”
“Someone took Ladybug!” Tikki’s voice came through his earpiece.

“I’m searching for it now. Find her and bring her home or so help me I will kill you.” Her voice was dead serious. His hands clenched on the steering wheel.

“If I fail, I’ll welcome it.”

~ ~ ~

Adrien frowned, looking for Marinette and Luka at the after party. His brief stumble had been brushed aside and he didn’t screw up anymore. His side finally loosened up enough to pose without pain. But he couldn’t find the two people he wanted to see. He called Luka.

“Chat, this is Rose. I’m patching you through to Viperion now,” Rose answered. Adrien stiffened. Something was happening. He turned away from the party and slipped out the front, heading towards his car.

“Ladybug’s been taken, I’m tracking them now,” Viperion stated.

“I’m on my way,” Adrien promised him. Viperion gave a hollow laugh.

“No offense, but I don’t think this is your kind of job. You aren’t willing to do what needs to be done Chat. We are.”

“Let him help. At the very least, he can be a distraction,” Tikki’s voice cut in. Viperion didn’t respond and Adrien scowled, heart pounding in his chest. “We’re going to need a driver Chat. Someone who knows the streets like the back of his hand.” Plagg. “And get me your hacker friend. His skills can come in handy.” Nino.

“Consider it done.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

First off, Marinette isn't dumb. But she's clearly skilled at blinding herself when she doesn't want to see something. She also has the habit of assuming no one can truly change, which is why she gets so upset at the thought of Adrien being Chat. Because, as she thinks to herself, to her that would mean Chat's just playing with her heart and using her for revenge.

Second off, Luka is very clearly in love with this woman. He takes what he can get from her and understands that she and he will never be together the way he wants to be. He wants her to be happy, which is why he's okay with Chat/Adrien being with her. Despite that, or perhaps because of that, he would do absolutely anything for her. This is shown when he helps Chat escape and here when he tells Tikki that he’d welcome death if he failed to save her.
The Unexpected

Chapter Summary

Marinette awakens to find herself in a compromising situation. Alya and Nino sit through an uncomfortable silence until Nino can't take it anymore.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marinette kept her breathing even as she woke up. She left her head hanging down. Body slack. She could feel her hands bound with handcuffs. She was sitting on the floor, leaning against a thin pole. Her legs were free. Feet barefoot. Dumbass. One would think after the solid ass-kicking she supplied at the fashion show, he’d be smart enough to bind her feet. Failure on his part, good for her.

She remained quiet and listened carefully. Someone was shuffling near her. Did I hit the emergency button in time? It didn’t matter. She’d get out of this. She was Ladybug. She wasn’t some damsel in distress that needed saving. If she wasn’t currently dead, it meant she was wanted alive. For what, she didn’t know. She didn’t plan on sticking around long enough to find out.

She heard steps coming toward her and readied herself. The person leaned over her. She jerked her head up and caught someone’s chin, dazing herself and stunning him. Ignoring the pain, she kicked hard, aiming for his kneecap. Solid hit. She smirked in satisfaction as she heard the kneecap pop out of place, her captor screaming in pain and falling to the floor.

Not wasting another second, she slid up the pole she was tied to, pulling her hands with her. The guy was out of commission for the moment, but that wasn’t good enough for her. She slammed her foot down onto his neck, crushing his windpipe. Now he was out for longer.

She twisted painfully, pulling one of her earrings free. Then she twisted and pulled out the other one. Idiot didn’t see these were lock picks? He was dumber than he looked. It took her exactly thirty seconds to free herself.

The man suddenly started laughing as much as he could with a crushed windpipe. She ignored him and looked around, not understanding her surroundings. She was… In a metal box?

“You’ve got nowhere to go you stupid bitch,” he wheezed. Her eyes narrowed on him.

“Where am I?” she demanded, pressing one of the lock picks against his neck. He smirked.

“A fucking plane going to your new husband. There’s no escape. You’re trapped in here.” She cocked her head to the side and considered him.

“You don’t know me, do you?” He frowned.

“Why would I? You’re just some chick I was paid to pick up. Nothing special, even if you can pick a lock and defend yourself.”

“I’m Ladybug, you moron.” His eyes widened, fear finally showing through his facade. “And I don’t get trapped.” Done talking to the waste of space, she shoved the lock pick deep into his throat and
pulled it out just as quickly, letting him bleed out. Complication. If she was in a metal box on a plane, that meant she couldn’t get out from the inside. Which meant she couldn’t take out the pilot. Not that she could fly a plane, but she’d rather crash and burn.

She wasn’t sure if it’d work, but she detached the earpiece from her ring, fitting it in her ear. She hit the correct button on her bracelet and waited, praying. Only static echoed in her ear.

She was alone.

~ ~ ~

Illustrator raced down the runway, aiming at the same time. He took the shot just before the plane took off, his tracker thudding into its side. He finally stopped running and stood there, gasping for breath. They got lucky. He lived right next to the airport and was already changed when a message came in through the dark web stating someone spotted the vehicle here. The person remained on scene and directed Illustrator towards the correct plane when he arrived.

“I saw the woman they loaded up,” the hacker said, fidgeting slightly. “I won’t tell anyone.” Illustrator considered the kid. He was young, in his teens. Likely just got involved in the dark web because he thought it was cool. It would be more dangerous to leave this kid alive than it would be to leave an adult alive. Teens were fickle.

“I’m sure you won’t,” Illustrator assured him. His fist shot out and slammed into the kid’s jaw. He caught the kid before he hit the ground and pulled out the serum Viperion perfected two years ago. It was recent memory, it’d be wiped. Illustrator injected the kid before calling Ivan for clean-up. He slipped a couple thousand euro into the kid’s pocket as payment for assisting them.

“Tell me you’re tracking that plane,” Illustrator said into his comm.

“We got it,” Carapace replied stiffly. “I can get you guys in the air in under an hour, but that won’t do much until we know exactly where it’s headed. No offense, but you guys can’t board a plane mid-flight.”

“Then we trust that she stays safe and in one piece until she lands,” Hawk Moth stated reasonably.

“I hate this,” Viperion hissed. “I want to go now. Can’t we follow at a distance?”

“We don’t even know how much fuel you’d need. I hate it too, but for now we stand down,” Tikki said slowly. “I want to know who hired her to be kidnapped and why. Find me that information while we wait.”

“Gladly,” Illustrator hissed. These fucks targeted the wrong people. *Fuck the code.*

~ ~ ~

Nino bent over the computer, going over traffic cams. Tikki was behind him on her laptop scouring the dark web. He wasn’t sure how he felt working with the people who had been so gung ho about killing him a week ago, but Adrien asked for his help and he couldn’t say no. Plus, anything was better than moping around in a hotel room all day long.

“Tikki, I got the stuff you wanted,” Rena said, slipping into the room through the window. He could feel her eyes on him. He forced himself not to look. It wasn’t easy. He could feel her presence like they were connected by a string.

“Thanks.” Tikki let out a yawn. “I’m gonna make a coffee run, can you get everything set up for
“Sure,” Rena replied with a tight voice.

“You want anything, Nino?” Tikki asked as she grabbed her purse. He shook his head. She gave a nod and walked out the front door. Rena didn’t say anything, just set to work setting up the computer she’d lugged over from Tikki’s place. Nino did his best to ignore her, he really did. But the silence was killing him. He didn’t do uncomfortable silence.

“What was the deal with the turtle?” he asked, finally looking away from the screen. His eyes felt like he’d rubbed sand in them. Maybe he should’ve taken Tikki up on the offer of coffee. Rena straightened and took off her mask, setting it down on the desk.

“You blocked my number,” Alya said softly. “I didn’t know what else to do. I just want a chance to explain Nino, that’s it.” He took a breath. This is what he needed. Answers. Why did you do it? Was it all a lie? Was I just a fun game to you?

“So explain.” She bit her lip and sat down on the edge of the desk.

“I didn’t want to lose you. Hell Nino, the entire time we were together you always talked about right and wrong. You had this strong moral compass that drew me in from the start. I was scared that if I told you, I’d lose you forever. I never imagined I would be put in a situation like this… And I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” Shit, she was crying. He hated seeing her cry.

“You just handed me over to be killed.” It was something he couldn’t get over. Her head jerked up and her eyes widened.

“Is that what you think? No! No, I’d never do that to you, Nino, I love you! I took you in because I had to, but you were never going to be killed! I was going to explain the situation to Ladybug and ask that she add you to the immunity list. I’d never have let them kill you!” She seemed sincere. Or she’s a really good liar.

“And what would you have done if Ladybug said no?” He crossed his arms. She rolled her jaw and met his eyes.

“I would’ve broken the code and gotten you out of there.” Does that mean Luka broke the code when he helped us? “But it wasn’t going to come to that. Ladybug had already decided not to kill you guys when you made your grand escape.” He blinked.

“Wait, she wasn’t going to kill us? Then why was she hunting us like crazy?!”

“Because she still kind of needed to talk to you guys. You know her secret identity. She knew she couldn’t just say ‘Welp, never mind they’re free.’ But what she was going to do was talk to you guys about it. Work out a deal to keep you safe. It’s what she did with Chloe.”

“What does Chloe do for you guys?” This new information was making his head hurt. Luka didn’t even know this.

“Chloe monitors the dark web for anything of interest. Anything that is sold through the dark web that she feels could be helpful to us, she buys. It’s how we got the necklace back. After Peacock’s boyfriend found out about her, he became her assistant. Knowing someone’s identity isn’t an immediate death sentence. Well, originally it would’ve been in Ladybug’s case, but Chat did something. Got under her skin. Tikki and I found her sobbing in her room, conflicted over her duty to the code and her feelings for Chat. That’s something that has never happened before.”
“So you all know each other’s identities?”

“So you all know each other’s identities?”

“Naturally. How else would we be able to contact each other in case of an emergency?” He rubbed his jaw. Easy way to find out if she’s just bullshitting you.

“I’ll believe what you’ve said, but I want you to tell me who Viperion is.” Her eyes widened.

“Nino I can’t! That’s wrong on so many different levels!” He shrugged and turned back to his computer, hitting play on the traffic cam recording. “You’re asking me to betray one of my friends Nino. That’d be like asking you to betray Chat Noir.”

“It’s not like I can do anything with the information. I haven’t sold out you or Ladybug,” he snapped. “Tell me who he is and I’ll believe everything you’ve told me. I’ll let you explain in detail. If you can’t do that, then we have nothing more to talk about.”

Alya took a deep breath behind him. He could almost feel when she made up her mind. He closed his eyes. Moment of truth. “Luka Couffaine. Viperion is Luka Couffaine.”

The door to Plagg’s apartment swung open and Tikki walked back in, carrying a tray with coffee. It smelled delicious and Nino reminded himself that none of it was for him. He said he didn’t want coffee.

“I got you something anyway Nino; figured you could use some later if you didn’t want it now,” Tikki said, placing a cup in front of him. “Caramel cappuccino, right?” Nino blinked in shock and took the cup, taking a sip. His favorite type of coffee and something he didn’t get often.

“How’d you know?” Tikki handed Alya a cup and sat down in her desk chair, giving a shrug.

“I’m best friends with your ex.” Both Alya and Nino winced at that. “Now then, let’s get back to work.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So some shit happened here. There isn't much to say other than GODDAMN MARINETTE. You carry lock picks as earrings woman?! Holy shit! Originally I was going to have her just strangle the guy, but then I was like... You know... Lock picks can be used as a weapon if pressed firmly and swiftly in the correct location. Let's make Mari a little brutal.
Duusu walked through the dark hospital slowly, casting a smile to the night nurse. The nurse smiled in return before holding up her hand, showing Duusu that she had five minutes. Five minutes would be plenty of time.

“Hey Gabriel,” Duusu said softly, stepping into the room. She sat down beside the man and took his hand, running her fingers over his knuckles. “You look like shit.” She kissed the back of his hand. “If I showed up to a shoot looking like you do right now, you would’ve fired me on spot.” His eyes slowly turned towards her.

“Did you bring it?” he asked weakly. She nodded and pulled out the syringe from her purse. He gave a smile.

“Before I give it to you, are you certain? This… Decision is a little insane.” He managed to raise a single shoulder.

“I’m doing it for him. He’s never going to let me go. He needs to focus. Focus on living his life. I love him too much to allow him to ruin his life by keeping me here.” She blinked away the tears and squeezed his hand.

“And here I thought you were going to use that money to buy yourself some vacation home to die in,” she managed with a laugh, kissing his hand again. He reached up and brushed a stray tear from her cheek.

“I’d much rather use the money to have my Peacock show me Emilie one last time.” Duusu nodded and injected the poisoned hallucinogenic into his IV. She sat with him while his pupils dilated. “Emilie…” His hand reached out for someone who wasn’t there. Someone who’d been dead for years and years.

“Goodbye Gabriel,” Duusu said softly, standing and kissing his forehead. “I hope we meet in the next life old friend.” She released his hand and stepped from the room, giving a nod to Trixx, the night nurse. Trixx stood and made her way into the room to sit with Gabriel during his last moments while Duusu left the hospital, sorrow dragging her down.

She slipped into the car and buried her face in Max’s chest, crying. Crying for what she’d done, crying for what she’d been asked to do, crying for the loss of a friend, crying for the loss of a father figure. And Max held her close, reminding her that she made his painful end something happy and peaceful.

~ ~ ~

Marinette stood beside the door to the metal box and waited. The plane had landed ten minutes prior,
and she’d figured out that the door to the box opened inward. So she placed the dead body, which began to stink after a couple hours, in the corner and stood waiting. She kept her breathing even and she stood ready. Finally, the door unlocked and swung open.

When the gun appeared in her view, she moved swiftly. She grabbed the gun and pointed the barrel downwards, kicking the man in the ankle. His grip loosened and she twisted the gun away. Without mercy, she pointed it in the man’s direction and pulled the trigger, then ducked back behind cover as shots came at her. She thanked her lucky spots that both guns were silenced.

3, 2, 1. She spun back around and pointed the gun to the second shooter, her bullet hitting him through the eye. She had no idea where she was, but she wasn’t going down without a fight. She was Ladybug and she wasn’t a damsel in distress. She didn’t need to be saved.

Marinette scooped up the second gun and patted the men down for anything of use. She found keys, extra ammo, cigarettes, and a lighter. She grabbed a bag and stuffed everything inside, save a gun. Then she wished she had worn something other than a damn dress to the fashion show.

She peeked out of the plane’s windows and her eyes widened. It looked like she was in some sort of jungle. Definitely not in France anymore, though that much was painfully obvious by the long plane trip. There were armed men patrolling buildings. She squinted. The majority of them carried assault rifles, but she spied some snipers on the roofs. Target acquired.

Marinette stayed low, slipping out of the plane and ducking behind some crates. She was too far to hit the snipers with the handgun, but wasn’t it nice of that guard with an assault rifle to step away from the group in order to pee? She watched her footing and stepped up behind him. Then covered his mouth, kicked him in the back of the knee, and jerked his head sharply to the right. She softly laid the body down and scooped up his gun. After patting him down, she could’ve cried with happiness. He had a silencer. What a nice man!

She twisted the silencer on the gun and took aim at the sniper. Don’t hit him through the scope, as much as you want to, she ordered herself, checking her aim. Then she squeezed the trigger, her bullet tearing through the top of his head. The other snipers, realizing something was wrong with their buddy suddenly dying, began to turn to locate the shooter. Marinette twisted around from her spot, downing every single one.

That step finished, she stuffed the rifle into the bag and secured the bag around her shoulder. Then began to climb up to the roofs. She scooped up the first sniper rifle she came across and kissed the barrel. My precious. In a comfortable position, she knelt at the edge of the roof and looked through the scope. Heads came into view. She fired without mercy.

By the time anyone could figure out that they were being gunned down, it was too late. No alarms raised, everyone dead. She wasn’t the top assassin in Europe because she was pretty after all. Now to figure out where the fuck she was. And maybe find a change of clothes.

She found a cellphone on the third guy she searched, some crappy flip phone that wouldn’t tell her shit. But it had its use. She dialed her cellphone, the only number she remembered by heart. If her people were any good at their jobs, they’d have found her phone.

“Hello?” Luka’s voice answered, sounding brittle and angry. She smirked.

“Hey snake, seems I’m in a bit of a sticky situation,” she answered, hopping down from the roof to enter one of the many buildings. Oh dear, that man was alive and groaning on the floor. She pulled out the handgun and shot him.
“Marinette! Where are you? What happened?” Luka demanded. Marinette found a kitchen and almost groaned with relief. She was starving. She set the gun on the counter and began to make a sandwich.

“Funny, I have no idea where I am. Track this call. It’s some jungle. The guys I’ve been killing look Latino. I’m going to assume Cuba or Mexico. Potentially South America.” She bit into the sandwich and hopped up on the counter after grabbing a soda from the fridge. “As for what happened, some American guy jumped me at the fashion show. I would’ve been fine, but he cheated and brought drugs. Don’t feel too bad, but I already killed him hours ago. What have you guys figured out on your end?”

“No shit, Tikki is tracking you now. We got a tracker on the plane after you took off and it’s showing you in South America. We can get in the air in under an hour and get you.”

“Eh, don’t bother. I don’t plan on being stuck here long. I just need an exit strategy.” She gulped the soda and took another bite of the sandwich.

“Hate to break it to you my lady, but we can’t get you an exit strategy without having eyes on your location.” Why does he sound so worried? This is me we’re talking about.

“Right, but another plane coming in would draw too much attention. From what I can see, this is some fancy complex. I’m in what you’d call the ‘town’ portion. There’s a big shiny mansion not far up the road. I could clear it, but why risk it when I can essentially just walk out?”

“Maybe I want a shot at these fucks Mari,” he growled. She gave a small smile at that. Her bloodthirsty viper.

“We’re assassins, not a sub-military group. This is what I want you to do my darling viper. File a police report.”

“What?!”

“Marinette Dupain-Cheng is missing, having been kidnapped from her fashion show. This is big news. Also, if Tikki gets any contracts for Ladybug, I’m going to need someone to put on the Ladybug mask and do the contracts for me. No one can know that Ladybug is out of commission while Marinette is missing. Once Tikki gets a location for me, I’m going to need my exit. I’ll wait here until she calls back.” A radio crackled to life near her.

“Marinette, please… I can’t lose you.” She frowned at that.

“Yes, you can. Now, do as I’ve stated Viperion.” Then she hung up and lifted the radio, listening.

“Team B, come in. Do you have the hostage?” the speaker was asking. She brought the radio to her lips and hit the button.

“Yep, we’ve got the hostage,” she said brightly.

“Who is this?!?”

“Unfortunately, the hostage then killed everyone and is now enjoying quite the delicious sandwich. You guys suck at this hostage-taking shit.” The radio went dead and she set it down, taking another bite of the sandwich and sliding off the counter. Marinette hummed as she started lifting as much spare ammo as she could carry before grabbing a change of clothes and moving back up onto the roof.
She changed out of her dress and into cargo pants that barely fit her, she used a belt to keep them secure, and a tight t-shirt she’d found. Her feet were covered by combat boots she took from a corpse with small feet. They were a bit tight but better than being too big. She slid black sunglasses she’d found on her face and got down on her stomach.

The sniper was set up in front of her, the radio by her side, cellphone beside her hand. It was hot as shit, but she ignored that fact. She peered through the scope up the path that led to the mansion, watching men mobilize to her location. They were driving towards her in jeeps. Shame.

She squeezed the trigger and the lead driver jerked as her shot found it’s mark. The car spun out of control, crashing into a nearby building. She brought the radio back up to her lips.

“Whenever you guys feel like giving up, just let me know. I’ve got a lot of ammo and a lot of patience. Oh, and did I mention that I’m known for my lucky shots?”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

I can already sense the hate headed towards Duusu for her decision. 1. As of the time this fic is being written, physician-assisted suicide is illegal in France. 2. It was Gabriel's decision. 3. She's broken up about it. 4. I support the hell out of her decision to make her friend/father figure's passing something happy and peaceful for him rather than letting him suffer through moments of temporary lucidity before staring at a wall while his body is ravaged by an incurable disease.

Instead of focusing on Duusu, let's all take a minute to appreciate how badass Marinette is. Like, come on. She utterly destroys all who stand in her way, then makes a sandwich, while having the foresight to call her cellphone and order Luka to not only report Marinette missing, but also make sure Ladybug is still active. I wanted to be able to show *why* she's the best assassin in Europe. Everyone keeps saying she is, but we don't really get to see her skills in action. So here are her skills in action. Hope you enjoy!
The Past

Chapter Summary

Luka comes clean to Chat regarding his feelings and delves into his past with Marinette.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I got her location pinpointed exactly!” Tikki called. Nino glanced over at her screen before rolling his chair back to his own computer. Chat and Viperion stared at the two as they tapped away at their computers.

“Well?” Viperion asked impatiently. He was ignored. Chat shook his head at Viperion and leaned against a wall.

“Don’t bug them. They’re trying to hack into whatever security system they’ve found. We won’t get any information from them until they finish,” Chat said simply.

“I hate this waiting bullshit,” Viperion snarled, going back to pacing. Chat nodded in agreement. He hated that she was in another country, far from their reach. He wanted to be able to find her and take her home. Maybe he didn’t have it in him to kill people, but he could scout. He could sneak into any place. Unless it was outside of Paris.

“So if she hadn’t gotten free and called her phone?” Viperion’s fists clenched.

“So if she hadn’t gotten free and called her phone?” Viperion’s fists clenched.

“If she hadn’t, I’d be tearing through South America looking for her.” Chat lapsed into silence, considering his friend. Viperion was tense and shaking, unable to sit still.

“How long have you been in love with her?” Chat asked gently. Viperion jerked his head up to look at Chat in shock. He swallowed and glanced away, but at least he’d stopped pacing.

“How long have you been in love with her?” Chat asked gently. Viperion jerked his head up to look at Chat in shock. He swallowed and glanced away, but at least he’d stopped pacing.

“I’m not in love with her, don’t be ridiculous. We’re just good friends.” His eyes darted as he said that, arms crossing. His feet pointed away from Chat as if he wanted to physically leave the conversation. Everything about his body language screamed that he didn’t want to talk about it anymore.

“You don’t need to lie to me man. It’s not like I’m gonna get pissed or anything. Just talk to me. Tell me what’s up.” He lowered his voice. “I mean, I’m kind of your therapist and all.” Viperion sighed and jerked his head for Chat to follow. He led Chat outside to Plagg’s tiny balcony, closing the door
behind them so they could have at least a little bit of privacy.

“I met Marinette about eleven years ago. She was sitting in the rain with no coat, no umbrella, crying her eyes out while watching birds eat some bits of cupcakes. Even as torn up as she was, she was the most beautiful girl I’d ever laid eyes upon and I hated seeing her cry. I convinced her to come with me to a cafe, where she explained why she’d been crying.”

“Why was she crying?” Viperion’s fists clenched and he glared out at the Paris skyline.

“She dropped an order of cupcakes and her dick of a father demanded that she bring back every single crumb before she could come back inside. Because there was nothing left for her to pick up, she was afraid of either being locked out forever or being beaten. Some bullshit about time being money and that she lost them money.”

“What happened next?”

“I took her to another bakery and bought a thing of cupcakes from them. Then we chucked it out in the rain and I helped her pick up the crumbs so she’d have something to bring back to her father. Honestly, I wanted to take her away from them. I didn’t want her to go back to that toxic environment, but who was I? Just a stranger. We exchanged numbers and I made her promise to call me whenever she needed help.

“The next time we hung out, she told me about getting jumped two years prior because she was in love with another girl. I offered to teach her self-defense. She was such a fast learner, it didn’t take her long to put me on the ground.” He smiled fondly at the memory.

“This was after you were Viperion, wasn’t it?” He nodded.

“Yeah. She found out about it after getting jumped by some girls for the second time. She managed to defend herself and came over to my place to tell me all about it. She was so excited and proud of herself. Unfortunately for me, she came in just as I was. And I was in full Viperion mode. It wasn’t this suit, she made this suit for me. It was the old one.” Chat remembered the stories. Viperion’s old suit was completely black with a teal ‘V’ spray-painted on the center.

“That must have been a shock for her.” Chat could only imagine how Marinette reacted to seeing a known assassin waltzing into her friend’s apartment.

“That’s an understatement. She attacked me, screaming at me to tell her what I did to Luka. I realized my only way out of the situation was to come clean, so I took my mask off. She was so confused. I sat her down and explained everything the best I could. I explained how, why, and what I did. I explained the organization and the code. Then she shocked me by asking me to train her. I guess the thought of the freedom I got from being Viperion was too tempting for her. So I started training her.

“We quickly learned she had a thing for guns. She was an amazing shot. I taught her how to parkour like I do, how to use the rooftops of Paris to her advantage. It took her a bit to learn that because she was afraid of heights. She kept at it though. I think she wanted to prove to me that she could do it. That she had what it took.”

“For someone with her past, that would make sense. She was constantly put down by other people, most notably her parents. If you were instructing her, then she’d naturally want to make you proud. Show you that she could be useful to you if given the chance.” Viperion nodded in agreement.

“Yeah, I ended up figuring that much out. I tried to shower her with praise when she did good, and calmly correct her when she made a mistake. Her response was always the same, no matter what. ‘I
can do better.’ And she would do better. When she got to college, I introduced her to Tikki. I knew Tikki didn’t have a partner, and Marinette didn’t have an assistant. The two hit it off quickly and Tikki offered her the fox mask. She refused, saying that she wanted to make her own name. You know, she made her own suit. Then, in thanks for my teaching her, she made me this one.” Viperion shifted uncomfortably suddenly.


“When she gave me the suit, I kissed her for the first time. I don’t know what came over me, I knew she was in a relationship with the woman she lived with. But Marinette kissed me back and told me the best news I ever could have heard. That she and Chloe were polyamorous and were looking for a third in the relationship. I didn’t know Chloe, but I figured if Marinette liked her, she’d be okay.” He winced before making a face. “We didn’t get along from the first meeting. Chloe had this air of righteousness that I didn’t like. I felt she couldn’t handle the reality of the assassin world that Marinette had entered. Chloe kept telling me that I was too laid-back and clearly couldn’t handle a serious relationship. That I’d never be able to give all of me.” If she thought Viperion was too laid back, what the hell would she think of Chat?

“We’re two peas in a pod, he and I.

“From the information I’ve read over, Chloe was shipped away to America after her father discovered she and Marinette were sneaking out to see each other.”

“It broke Marinette’s heart. She’d been transferred to a college dorm after being banned from seeing Chloe because she couldn’t afford the apartment on her own. She didn’t leave the dorm for a week straight. That’s when I realized I had no chance with her. So I stopped trying. I just want her to be happy, you know? And maybe some part of me hopes that one day she’ll return my feelings.” He shook his head and gave Chat a broken smile. “I can see now how impossible that is. She doesn’t even see me. Not the way I want her to see me. While Chloe was gone, we had casual sex. I took that and I was happy because I got something. But in the past ten years, she’d become more and more closed off from her emotions. So I talked to Tikki and Alya and we worked together with Chloe and her mom to bring Chloe back to Paris.”

“Wait, if Chloe’s back… Where is she?” Chat frowned in confusion. Viperion let out a laugh.

“Oh that’s right, you wouldn’t have seen her yet. You made me deal with her when switching out all of Marinette’s stuff while you were off robbing her parents. She’s stuck in Marinette’s place. She can’t leave, because she’s still on ‘probation’ here in Paris. She isn’t supposed to be in the city. The ban never got lifted after the mayor’s death. She’ll have to send in an appeal to the new mayor whenever he or she gets elected. For now, she’s stuck pacing.”

The two fell silent, staring out over Paris. Chat gave a shake of his head, letting out a small sigh. Viperion glanced over at him in confusion. Chat gave him a wry smile.

“Well, it seems any hope of a future with Marinette relies on two things. One, her accepting me as Adrien. Two, Chloe accepting me period. Odds aren’t looking good on either one.”

“We’re fucked brother, that’s for damn sure. Both hopelessly in love with a woman who may never see us.” Chat nodded in agreement. “I can’t stand this waiting shit, let’s find out if Chloe can accept you as Chat first. If she can accept you as Chat, there’s no way she’d say no to Adrien Agreste. Adrien is like, your mature side.” Chat let out a laugh.

“What the fuck man? You saying Chat Noir isn’t mature?” Viperion smirked.

“Dude. You got me to steal Marinette’s expensive artwork and exchange it with a picture of an internet meme. Hell no, you are not mature.”
“That cuts deep man.” The two fell into laughter.

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Chapter End Notes

I recently attempted to read a fic involving Luka, Adrien, and Marinette. The fic claimed they were all supposed to be in their late twenties, but they acted like teenagers and I hated it. Please tell me I nailed the "adult" thing here. Like I'm 23, in college, and half the time I need an adult XD So hopefully, this worked out well.
Nice To Meet You Chloe

Chapter Summary

Chat and Chloe finally get their meeting. Introduced by Viperion. Well, I can't think of anything that could possibly go wrong here!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Hey Chloe,” Viperion called out. A blonde haired hurricane raced down the steps and fell into Viperion’s arms, sobbing loudly. He stumbled back in shock. “Um, Chloe? Did you get body-snatched or something?”

“Shut the fuck up you fucking hippie and hug me,” she sobbed. “Where’s Marinette? Did you find her? Is she okay?” Hippie? Chat stood awkwardly to the side. Viperion gave a sigh and hugged her close, walking her over to the sitting room to get her off her feet.

“We did find her, but she’s in South America. She called her phone from over there and basically banned us from going after her. Tikki put in a police report upon her request. She and Carapace are working on hacking into the security system of the complex she’s at in the hopes of getting her an exit. We don’t want her flying blind through the jungle. She promised us that she’s fine and she’s safe enough. From the way she spoke, I think she’s mentally shuttered herself off into Ladybug mode.” Chloe sniffed and raised her head, rubbing away her tears.

“Good. Ladybug will fuck them up; who is that?” She stared pointedly at Chat.

“Chat Noir,” he introduced blandly, uncertain on the best way to move forward. Usually, he’d add a bit more flair into his introduction, but this wasn’t the time. Maybe this wasn’t a good idea. Chloe stood and looked him over from head to toe, frowning slightly.

“You look… Familiar. It’s like I’ve seen your face a million times over, but not your face,” she said suspiciously. Chat looked to Viperion for help.

“How many blondes are in New York Chloe?” he asked casually. She threw her hands up with a groan.

“Way too fucking many. You’d think the blondes would stick to the beaches, but no! I swear every model Maman worked with was a fucking blonde. Most of them dyed their hair blonde! Like, what’s wrong with other hair colors?” Her eyes darted back to Chat. “Is that dyed?” He shook his head rapidly. “Good.”

“So I’m the one who’s been… Around Marinette,” he attempted casually. He had no idea how much Chloe knew and didn’t want to get Marinette into trouble. Chloe nodded.

“Yeah, you guys fucked on a roof. Old news. What are your intentions with ma cheri?”

“Well, I don’t intend to harm her. In fact, I think she has a better chance of breaking my heart than I do breaking her heart.”
“What do you do for a living.” Why am I being interrogated?

“I steal things.”

“Hm.” Chloe narrowed her eyes, staring Chat down. Then she shrugged and sprawled out on the chaise, fidgeting with a ladybug charm on her phone. “Good enough for now. I’ll have to see how you and Marinette interact with one another.”

“Well doesn’t that feel good,” Viperion muttered under his breath. Chat’s heart went out to the man. Chloe frowned at Viperion.

“You don’t even like me snake. Besides, like you could ever be serious enough for her.” Chat watched as Viperion’s hackles rose. This was a bad idea.

“You don’t even know me, Chloe. You took one look at me and the way I dress and instantly decided I couldn’t be good enough for her,” he snapped. This was a really bad idea.

“Serious enough for killing sure! But for a relationship? Don’t make me laugh. You instantly thought I couldn’t handle the assassin world. Well, I’m still fucking here, aren’t I? In fact, if memory serves, I’m the reason you guys have half the shit you do! Who buys Rena more hallucinogenics when she needs them? Who supplies you with half of your poisons? How about all the high-tech equipment Tikki and Max need to make all your fancy gadgets?”

The two continued to shout at each other, leaving Chat feeling awkward and unsure of how to proceed. His earpiece crackled to life and Nino’s voice came through on the other end. For a minute, Chat was relieved.

“Chat, um. I don’t know how to tell you this…” Chat froze at the tone. He forced himself not to think about why Nino would be talking like that.

“What’s happening Carapace?” he demanded, causing Viperion and Chloe to shut up and focus intently on what was happening. They both looked instantly concerned.

“You got a call from the hospital.” Chat’s heart stopped. Tears blurred his eyes. Don’t say it. Don’t you dare say it. “Your dad’s passed away… I’m so sorry.” The tears fell. This can’t be happening. No. I was supposed to see him in a few hours. Nathalie and I were going there and we were going to talk about the good times with coffee and bagels. He can’t be dead. Don’t tell me he’s dead. This can’t be happening.

“Chat?” Viperion asked slowly.

“I have to go,” he choked out. He barely managed to meet Viperion’s eyes. “It’s not Marinette. It’s… Someone else.” Viperion instantly understood and nodded.

“I’ll keep you updated. Go.” Chat nodded in thanks and raced out the door. Plagg was pulling up to the corner before Chat made it past the gate. Once inside the car, Chat yanked his mask off.

As Plagg drove to Adrien’s apartment so he could get changed, Adrien cried harder than he had in a long while. The last time he cried that hard, was when his father told him that his mother was gone.

~ ~ ~
Shorter chapter, again because emotions and feels and blah blah blah you guys have heard the rant a million times over. But the next chapter is nice and long to make up for it.
“You’ll run out of ammo eventually you fucking cunt,” the speaker on the radio hissed. Marinette laughed into it and took out another person trying to sneak up on her.

“Eventually, maybe. But I’ve got a lot still. And you keep sending in guys to give me more. So sweet of you,” she replied. Every time she felt she was getting low, she purposefully allowed someone to get close, taking out everyone behind the person. Then when they were close enough, she’d take them out with her handgun and hurry down to loot their body, keeping the others back with the automatic rifle. Then she’d retreat back up to her perch. None of her shots had missed. And they were all kill shots. “Maybe you’ll run out of people first.”

“Why all this trouble Marinette? We could do great things together.” She pulled a bag of chips out of the bag, after an hour on the roof she got hungry so she’d raided the kitchen again while the enemy was regrouping, and started to munch on them.

“See, I don’t exactly appreciate being taken against my will, attacked, kicked in the stomach, handcuffed to a pole, and being shot at. Oh, being drugged is also a no-no in my book.” She felt a tingling on the left side of her skull and turned the sniper in that direction, spying someone trying to sneak through the jungle and flank her. Well, that plan failed for him.

“You were not supposed to be harmed, my dear. My deepest apologies for that. But I’m certain the man did not last long.”

“I stabbed him with a lock pick. Let him bleed to death in that metal box.”

“How resourceful. I’m certain we can come to some form of agreement darling. Why not put the weapon down and come join me up here in the mansion? You must be awfully hot down there.” She was, but she’d been in worse situations.

“Why not you come down here instead? I’m certain then we can talk things out. You, me, and Lucy.” This prick had been trying to convince her to give up for the past hour since realizing he couldn’t get her while she had a weapon and ammo. He tried multiple different tactics to get her to lower her weapon. Didn’t seem to understand how stubborn she was.

“Lucy?” Marinette aimed up towards the mansion, spying a lone guard near a window. She guessed it at about 400 yards. It’d be a bitch of a shot. She steadied her breathing and accounted for the wind. A couple of clicks to adjust the rifle. *Boom.* Right through the temple.

“That’s Lucy.” The man snarled and started threatening her again. She rolled her eyes. “Get some new material, my man. You’re putting me to sleep over here.”

“You have to sleep eventually.”
“Slept enough on the plane. Thanks for asking though. Hey, wanna see a trick shot?” She aimed at a metal pole and squeezed the trigger. The bullet hit the pole at just the right angle, and the bullet ricocheted off the pole and into a man’s skull. “Ah, now that was one lucky shot. I think I’ll call it the lucky charm.” The cellphone finally began to ring. “Oops, I’ve gotta take that, lemme put you on hold, Pablo.” She silenced the radio and answered the phone.

“We’ve been working all night, but we’re finally in the system. Camera to your right, wave hello,” Tikki reported. Marinette wiggled her fingers to her right with a grin.

“Can you get me an exit? These guys are no fun. Zero sense of humor.” Tikki was silent for a moment.

“Wait. You’re… Joking around with them? Since when does the lucky Ladybug joke around?” Marinette made a face to the camera before taking a moment to shoot someone who came too close.

“After the first thirty minutes, it got boring being serious. I decided to try it the Chat and Viperion way. I now understand why they joke around as much as they do. This is fun. It’s getting whoever the fuck it is up there pissed off and it’s quite relaxing. Tell me you saw my trick shot by the way.” Tikki gave a sudden laugh.

“Yeah, we saw it. It looked badass. You ready to start making your way home?”

“Fuck yeah. Jungles are lame without Viperion around to almost get bit by rattlesnakes,” Marinette complained, referring to the time she and Viperion got a contract to hunt down a guy hiding out in the Amazon. First time she’d had to leave Paris. They’d had fun. Viperion had stumbled too close to a rattlesnake and it was thanks to Ladybug’s quick draw that he hadn’t been bit. Marinette had held it over Luka’s head for weeks afterward.

“Alright, so there’s a beige jeep behind you, near the plane. It’s the only one we can find with a GPS in it. You’re going to need to follow the runway down, heading south, for about a mile, then take a hidden dirt road off to the left. Carapace is hacked into the GPS, he’ll navigate you towards the nearest town.” Marinette nodded, then turned the radio back on.

“Sorry Picasso, but while it’s been super fun thinning your ranks, it’s time for me to head out.”

“You have nowhere to go.” Wasn’t he cute?

“That’s where you’re wrong. See, you, unfortunately, picked the wrong person to kidnap. Probably the worst person to kidnap. So while it’s been great, I’ll be leaving now. Au revoir.” She tossed the radio off the building, shooting it mid-air with the rifle. This brought a laugh from Tikki.

Marinette stood, lifting her bag with her, and took out the nearest guys, and blowing out the tires of the nearest vehicles, before turning and bolting to the jeep. She slid into the driver seat, turned on the speaker on the phone, and didn’t bother with keys, instead yanking the wires out from under the dash and set to work on hot-wiring the car.

“You’ve got thirty seconds before the guys get close enough to take potshots at you,” Tikki warned. Marinette twisted the correct wires together and the jeep rumbled to life. She put the thing in drive and tore down the runway.

“How do people drive like this?” she complained. Tikki laughed at her.

“I’m just glad I didn’t have to remind you to get in on the left side as opposed to the right. Turn’s coming up.” Marinette spotted it and made a sharp left, wincing at the crappy turn. She heard shots from behind her.
“Fucking hell, why couldn’t they have kidnapped Plagg along with me? I can barely drive myself to work.”

“I’m going to pretend you did not just say that. Okay, last I saw they were tearing after you in cars. You’re going to have company soon.” Marinette grabbed the assault rifle from the bag and considered the trees she passed by. Finally, she fired at one, passing under it just before it crashed across the path. “Did you just…”

“They’re going to have some issues keeping up. Hey, maybe I can start a forest fire! I have a lighter and cigarettes!”

“No! No fire! Jeez, I think I like all business Marinette better.” Marinette laughed and the GPS directed her towards a main road. She made sure to drive on the right side of the road, which was just plain wrong.

“So how am I supposed to get home with no money?” Marinette questioned.

“Okay, we’ve got that covered. One of our people is in South America on a job. She’s going to meet up with you in the town and get you to safety.”

“Who? Can she be trusted?”

“Well it’s Riposte, so yeah, I sure as shit hope so.” Marinette perked up.

“So this is where she’s been hiding! I can’t wait to see her again. What job is she doing?”

“Don’t know. Some long con thing that she hasn’t been able to finish after three goddamn years. Last I heard, it was something personal that had to do with her mom. Hell, I don’t know if we can even call her ‘one of us’ at this point. She doesn’t exactly conform to our rules and regulations. And we don’t even know what she’s been up to the past three years.”

“Tikki, I just failed to conform to our rules and regulations,” Marinette pointed out. “I mean, how many bodies were on the ground?”

“We can argue that as self-defense.”

“Not when I get the drop on them. Plus as the idiot in the mansion kept saying, they didn’t want to hurt me and wanted me alive. Technically, not self-defense. Self-preservation maybe, but not self-defense.”

“Speaking of the ‘idiot in the mansion,’ I know who he is. Some high profile crime boss by the name of Martin Anders. He has a habit of buying women, selling drugs, the works. He’s a pretty big deal in your area, so be careful.”

“If Riposte and I can’t handle what he throws at us, we deserve to be taken out.”

“Please don’t even joke like that…”

~ ~ ~

Martin Anders frowned out the window as his lieutenant explained how they’d lost her. She was good. Really good. And challenging. She was not what he’d paid for. He was promised a meek and submissive woman who’d cow under him. Not a daring woman with the wit of a viper, the reflexes of a cat, and the skills of a trained soldier. No, better than a trained soldier.
“Let her go, for now. Seems we’ll have to pick her up from Paris ourselves,” he stated, turning to where he had Sabine tied up. She winced as he reached out to remove her gag. He frowned. “That is not the woman I was promised, Ms. Cheng. What aren’t you telling me about your daughter?”

“I don’t know!” she promised quickly. “I swear I’ve never seen her act like that! It’s not the daughter I raised, that’s for certain!”

“You realize that if you want to go home and see your husband again, I need my payment fulfilled. The two of you have been behind on your payments. That’s just not acceptable. As I told your husband, I’m willing to forgive your outstanding debt, but I expected a bride in return. So where’s my fucking bride?”

“I swear! I had no idea she could do any of that!” He nodded and patted her cheek.

“I believe you. But I’m afraid I’m going to have to comp you for the inconvenience.” Her eyes widened with fear as he gestured for a knife. “Don’t worry, humans are durable. We can live without a couple fingers.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

If my summary and end note game seem off these past five chapters... It's because I'm tired. I'm trying, once again, to reset my sleep schedule and I haven't slept in like, 24 hours. I'd like to sleep now, but I'm waiting on food, so yeah. That's a thing.

I don't know what to say here other than... Well, I guess that explains why Tom was so quick to sell off his daughter. Jokes on him though, Marinette is not to be contained. This Martin guy must be pissed. So no one's confused, Martin Anders is a completely original character and I suck at names, which is why his is so generic. But names are hard :'( 
“Hey lucky lady,” Kagami said with a grin, stepping out of her car.

“Kagami! It’s been too long!” Marinette called with a smile, pushing off from the jeep to embrace her old friend. “What are you doing in Brazil?” Kagami tapped the edge of her nose and winked, hazel eyes sparkling.

“Later, let’s get you on the road to home first.” She patted her car. “Hop in.” Marinette hefted her black bag over her shoulder and slid into the passenger seat of the car, almost moaning in relief at the A/C. Kagami slid behind the wheel and pulled away from the jeep Marinette abandoned on the side of the road before reaching the town.

“So how are you getting me home? Teleporter?” Kagami laughed and glanced over at Marinette with a raised brow.

“Who are you and what have you done with Marinette? I’m liking the new attitude.” Marinette shrugged.

“I’m trying something new. So enjoy it while it lasts because I’m pretty sure it’s just a Brazil thing. You gonna answer my question or leave me in suspense?” Kagami tossed back her short black hair and shrugged.

“I’ve got a plane I can take you home in. It’ll take a few hours, but it’s better than trying to get you through airport security with no identification. What happened to you anyway? Tikki called and said you were trapped in the area and needed a way home. I offered to help get you out of whatever firefight you were in, but Tikki told me not to bother.” Marinette made a face.

“So I was at a fashion shoot and some moron attacked me. He brought drugs, totally gamed the system, and I woke up in a metal box on board a cargo plane heading here. I was handcuffed to a central pole and the guy was in the box with me. Idiot left my legs free and didn’t take my lock pick earrings. He died quickly. I can only assume he was supposed to keep me drugged while on the trip because I found more drugs in his pockets when I searched him.”

“That sounds horribly annoying.” Marinette nodded in sad agreement.

“It was. After landing, two guys with silenced handguns tried to come in to retrieve me. The first lost his gun and brain, the second lost his eye. Then I managed to gain an assault rifle and a silencer for it. Next, I took out snipers…”

“And then the idiots were pretty much fucked,” Kagami said with a laugh. Marinette grinned.

“Pretty much, yeah. What do you know about Martin Anders? That’s the fuck who had me
“Kidnapped.” Kagami’s face lost all trace of amusement and she set her jaw.

“Martin Anders is the fuck I’ve been trying to take down for the past three years. He’s the little shit who killed my mother.” Marinette blinked.

“Well, it sounds like things are going to get very interesting very soon.”

~ ~ ~

Queen Bee grumbled as she lined up the shot. How the hell does Ladybug do this on the daily? She couldn’t really appreciate the skills behind Ladybug’s aim until she was looking through the scope herself.

“You got this,” Sabrina said confidently through the earpiece. “You’re the best shot after Ladybug.” It’d be pretty fucking embarrassing if she missed too, considering that would ruin the entire plan Ladybug had set up.

Queen Bee let out a low breath as the woman targeted to die glanced around her in a panic. Queen Bee pulled the trigger. Thank fuck. The bullet tore through the side of the woman’s head. Everything else following was clock-work.

Queen Bee took the rifle apart and put it in the bag before descending the stairs and slipping into Sabrina’s car. She stripped out of the Ladybug costume, feeling like she couldn’t pull in a proper breath, and set to work on putting on civilian clothes.

“That was perfect,” Sabrina said proudly, giving her partner a smile. Polly made a face.

“I’m just glad that Ladybug doesn’t always go for the insane, show-off shots every time. That was only 150 yards. At least the next contract lined up is for knife action, so that is all Peacock. Let’s see her squeeze into this tight ass suit.” Sabrina laughed as they pulled away.

“I guess Ladybug is a bit on the slimmer side. But hey, if busty Alya can manage to wear the suit long enough to play ‘trick the civilian,’ then I’m certain tall and lanky Peacock can manage.” Polly tugged off the black wig and stuffed it away, letting her blonde hair down.

As Sabrina drove, Polly tugged on a strand of her black hair. Something she started doing in high school that made the idea of ‘Queen Bee’ come to life. The first time Sabrina saw the black streaks in her bright blonde hair, she said Polly looked like a queen bee.

“I’m just glad you managed to do it and you’re back safe and sound,” Sabrina stated firmly. “I don’t know what I’d do without my best friend.”

“Fall to pieces probably,” Polly commented, casting a fond smile towards Sabrina, who shrugged.

“I know you’re teasing me, but probably. Can you imagine the shit that would come about if you were caught by the police? My dad would kill me.” Polly took her best friend’s hand and squeezed it gently.

“If I were to ever be caught by the police, I’d make sure nothing pointed back to you. Speaking of, how’s the police doing searching for Marinette?” Sabrina sighed at the question.

“I know I feel this way because I have insider knowledge, but they’re being stupid.”

“In what way?”
“They’re looking in all the wrong places! Did you know they actually interrogated Adrien Agreste? Right after his father died no less! Like please, there’s no way that model could ever have kidnapped our Marinette. And then the interrogation Luka and Tikki went through, who are the two people who filed the police report in the first place! Then when asked why they waited so long, they’re response was completely legitimate, ‘We were under the impression that we had to wait a certain amount of time. We kept hoping that she’d turn up eventually.’” Sabrina fell silent for a moment. “My dad made Tikki cry.”

“I hate to play devil’s advocate here, but they’re just doing their job. They can only do so much with the information provided. At least the plan is working. Marinette is all the news are talking about. The public is in an uproar over the loss of Paris’ Angel,” Polly pointed out.

“I know. I’m still mad at him though. He didn’t need to make Tikki cry.” Polly gave her a grim smile.

“The police want Marinette back just as badly as the fashion industry does. She’s been their golden idol for how the ‘perfect Parisian’ should act. They’re going to be flipping up every rock and stone searching for her.”

“There’s something else I’m worried about.” Sabrina gave a frown. “What if this Martin asshole comes after Marinette again? What if he comes here?” Polly let out a sudden laugh, thinking of Viperion.

“Let him. He won’t know what hit him.”

Adrien sat numbly beside Nathalie as the arrangements for his father’s funeral were made. When asked if they wanted a priest, Nathalie had stiffened up and stiffly asked that it be nondenominational. Adrien agreed. He couldn’t imagine a god who would rob someone of both their parents way before their time. No god he’d believe in, that was for certain.

The only thing keeping him steady was Nathalie’s hand gripping his like a lifeline. Unfortunately, it was also the only thing that assured him this wasn’t some twisted nightmare he’d wake up from.

The only thing that made his day even remotely better was the knowledge that Marinette was on her way home. However, even that knowledge was spoiled by the fact that she didn’t know he was Chat, so he couldn’t act upon his feelings. He couldn’t rush to her side when she got home and kiss her hard. He couldn’t tell her how proud he was of her for being able to keep herself safe. He couldn’t laugh with her over how she sounded when she spoke to Tikki like she was high as a kite. If he wanted to do any of that, he’d have to be Chat. But then, as Chat, he couldn’t gain her support over the loss of his father. He couldn’t cry with her as he spoke about the good times. He couldn’t seek her support in his time of need.

Stuck between a rock and a hard place. “Open and honest communication.” That’s what Nathalie told him. But how could he have open and honest communication when she didn’t even want the honesty? He’d seen her face at the fashion show when she started to suspect. She looked angry and hurt. And it was his own fault. He’d basically announced to the world on Adrien Agreste’s feelings towards Marinette Dupain-Cheng. Was it even truly her fault? All the money he gave to his father, prolonging his life, only delayed the inevitable. And his father took the decision in his own hands.

Adrien did have to go over all his father’s financial records. He saw how much money his father had been hiding from him, and he saw it’d all left twenty-four hours before his father died. It didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out what his father had done. Oddly, he wasn’t mad at his father for the
decision, nor was he mad at whoever had taken up the contract. He knew his father had been in pain, and the kind night nurse who’d stayed with him in his last moments had assured Adrien that Gabriel passed peacefully without pain. She even said he was smiling at the end. It was pretty easy to narrow down who did it as well. The only assassin who wasn’t busy last night. Peacock.

He wanted to be mad at her. He wanted to hate her for robbing him of what little time he had left. But he couldn’t. He felt that would dishonor his father’s decision and his father’s memory. And didn’t Viperion say he once did something similar for a dying man?

He’d been smiling in his final moments. Not staring blankly at a wall. Not struggling through the pain. It’d been peaceful and happy enough to bring a smile to his face. He supposed he could thank Peacock for giving his father that much.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I *know* I said I’d start doing updates on Fridays from now on buuuuuuut. I’m selectively OCD. And it’s been bugging me that the chapters available aren’t divisible by 5 (Yes, I know I’m weird). I managed to write up enough before class to give you guys two chapters. I think. I haven’t checked the length of the other half I have typed up, so I may panic write for thirty minutes before getting that beautiful divisible by 5 chapter total :D
Marinette sprawled out in the co-pilot seat, watching as Kagami flipped switches and set a course for Paris. Kagami gave her an amused expression.

“You know, you should probably get some sleep. It’s going to be a long trip,” she commented. Marinette studied her.

“What happened to you Kagami?” she asked suddenly. “You were with us for a year, then threw out something about your mother and vanished.” Kagami let out a sigh and shrugged her shoulders.

“My mom went missing three years ago. I’ve been searching for her ever since.” Blunt as always. “All roads point towards Martin Anders. I was in Brazil trying to dig up information about him, but it’s been tricky. Either people are on his payroll or they’re too scared to talk about him. What information I have managed to dig up is that he’s cruel. He doesn’t like losing.”

“Something you have in common,” Marinette commented. Kagami snorted.

“At least I can accept defeat. I can accept when someone is better than me. This guy can’t.” She gave Marinette a steady look. “You’re going to be in danger Mari. He isn’t going to stop chasing after you.” Marinette tossed her hands in the air.

“I don’t even know what he wanted with me. Maybe he just wants me to make him a new suit.”

“One of the rumors I heard going around was that he’s becoming increasingly aware of his age.” The way she said that sent chills down Marinette’s spine.

“His age?”

“Yeah. He’s unmarried, has no children. Someone even whispered that they suspected he was looking for a bride. Granted, I’m probably far off the mark here, considering it isn’t a secret how he likes his women. Quiet and submissive. Women who won’t disobey him. That’s the complete opposite of you.” Marinette started to feel sick, a certain conversation coming back to the forefront of her mind. “Your mother and I will be choosing a suitable partner for you.”

“He would think I was quiet and submissive…” she mused softly to herself. But would they stoop so low as to… Sell their own daughter? “Well if he wants someone who will bend the knee to him, I think I just proved that I won’t. So I’m good.” Kagami gave a sharp laugh.

“Were you not listening? He doesn’t like to lose. You may have shown that you are anything but quiet and submissive, but you’ve only made yourself a challenge in his eyes. Another mountain to claim. He’s going to come at you with everything he’s got and he won’t stop until he has you. Then
when he has you, he’ll *force* you to be what he wants.” Marinette suddenly stood.

“You’re right, I should get some sleep. Wake me when we’re about to land.”

~ ~ ~

“Alright, the plan’s in motion. Marinette is back in Paris,” Tikki stated, letting out a sigh of relief. “Is the site ready yet?” Hawk Moth gave the affirmative over the comm system. Tikki nodded and cracked her knuckles. “Alright, let’s get Marinette bound up like a present. Rena, don’t forget to give her the drugs before you guys bail out of there. This needs to look as real as possible. The anonymous tip will be sent to the police in an hour, hurry it up guys.”

~ ~ ~

Martin considered the breaking news report overtaking the airwaves in Paris. He stretched out in the seat on his private jet, rubbing his jaw as he watched it play out on his phone for the third time.

“This just in, police have finally located Marinette Dupain-Cheng three days after her kidnapping. She was found drugged and tied to a chair in an abandoned warehouse but was otherwise unharmed. Police aren’t releasing any further information at this time, but we will keep you updated as the story progresses. The main question on everyone’s mind: Who could’ve done such a thing to Paris’ beloved angel?”

It cut to a scene of Marinette being escorted out of a warehouse by police, a blanket around her shoulders. She was dazed and stumbling, back in her dress. She looked nothing like the strong and confident woman who’d completely obliterated the majority of his men.

“Sir, our people did their best, but they weren’t able to figure out who hacked into our system,” his lieutenant reported.

“Disappointing. Kill them,” Martin ordered, his eyes not leaving the screen. *What are you hiding little mouse?*

“We did find something useful, however.” Martin’s eyes finally left the screen and he stared at the other man, waiting. “One of the people you had searching for information on Marinette found something interesting on the dark web. Specifically in the Paris locale. There’s this thing called the Assassins Organization in Europe headed by Europe’s top assassin Ladybug. She has Marinette on this thing called an immunity list. From what our guy found out, apparently, Marinette is some kind of private doctor for these people. They get injured and they go to her for help. Apparently, after she was taken, they were tearing through the streets of Paris searching for her.”

“Useful. Find me more. You’re dismissed.” The man nodded and headed towards the back of the plane. Martin rubbed his jaw. *Well, you certainly weren’t lying little mouse. You probably are the worst person I could’ve chosen… But the biggest challenge. Ladybug. Interesting. Seemed if he wanted his prize, he’d have to learn more about this organization of assassins.*

~ ~ ~

Chat slipped into the hospital room silently from the window, spying Marinette on the bed. She was frowning at her phone, clearly unsettled by something.

“I’m glad you’re safe Princess,” he said simply, causing her to jump. She gave him a smirk.

“Did you expect anything less Chaton? Everyone is smothering me.” She made a face. “It’s ridiculous. You guys need to have a little more faith in me.” He didn’t respond, just sat beside her and grasped her hand.
“I didn’t know you were gone until Viperion told me…” he said softly. Pain streaked across his chest. “I didn’t know how to help. I could’ve lost you.”

“Silly kitty, I’m okay. You’re acting… Off.” He ignored that. Of course, he was acting off, his father just died. She got taken by some psychotic crime boss and then his father died and she could have died. But she wouldn’t let him tell her anything about that because she didn’t want to know who he was under the mask.

“What were you looking at on your phone?” he asked instead, rubbing her knuckles.

“Oh.” Her eyes glanced down to the screen. “I just found out that Gabriel Agreste passed away while I was gone.” Pain stabbed in Chat’s chest. “His funeral is tomorrow morning.” Stab. “I hope I’m out of here in time to go. I really respected him.” Stab. “I wonder how Adrien’s holding up.” Stab. “Chaton?” Chat stood and turned away from Marinette, the pain causing his face to contort. Tears filled his eyes and he struggled to pull in a breath. “Chat are you okay?”

“No. I’m not,” he admitted. “Marinette, we need to talk. But it’s about something you don’t want to talk about.” He heard her sit up in the bed and turned back to see her watching him suspiciously.

“So talk.”

“I want you to know who I am. Under the mask.”

“No.”

“Why not?” It’s not like he hadn’t expected this, but it still cut deep. How could they have a real relationship if she didn’t want to know who he was?

“Because I don’t need to know and I don’t want to know. I fell in love with who you are now. Chat Noir.” She frowned. “If you remove the mask and show me your other half, then you’re adding in a new layer I can’t handle at the moment.”

“Marinette, you were just kidnapped! I didn’t know anything was amiss because you don’t know who I am!” It was an easy excuse to latch onto. Her eyes sparked with anger.

“That only proves my goddamn point Chat. I was kidnapped. Do you know how much danger you could be in if I know who you are under that mask? What if I’d been tortured and forced to reveal the identities of everyone in Paris who wears a mask? They would’ve come after you. At least this way, you’re safe.”

“I can protect myself. You don’t need to protect me.”

“That only proves my goddamn point Chat. I was kidnapped. Do you know how much danger you could be in if I know who you are under that mask? What if I’d been tortured and forced to reveal the identities of everyone in Paris who wears a mask? They would’ve come after you. At least this way, you’re safe.”

“I can protect myself. You don’t need to protect me.”

“Can you? Can you really Chat? I got out of there because I killed people. A lot of people. You have made it clear that that’s a line you are not willing to cross. I will not place you in a position where you have to cross that line.” Her eyes held his captive. “Maybe once this Martin Anders guy is dead, then we can discuss you potentially taking off that mask. But until then I don’t want to hear another word spoken about it, am I clear?” She wasn’t going to budge. His voice was cold.

“How are we supposed to move forward with whatever this is if you aren’t willing to accept all of me?” Her mouth set into a determined line.

“At this point in time, I don’t think what we have is the best idea. Like I said, around me, you’re in danger. Do I want to lose you Chat? No. No, I want you to crawl into this bed and hold me because for the first time in years I am terrified of someone. But I can’t lose you. I can’t lose you and I can’t lose Chloe. I sent her away Chat.” She blinked away tears and finally looked away. “I sent away the
woman I love because I don’t want to risk her getting hurt. I should send you away too. And Luka, and Tikki, and anyone else I don’t want getting caught in the cross-fire.”

Chat shook his head and made his way back over to her, crawling into the bed next to her. She jerked in shock. He pulled her close and wrapped his arms around her, the anger leaving him.

“You can try to send me away, but I won’t listen. I’ll keep the mask on for now, if only to make you feel better.”

“If things go south Chat… You stop being Chat Noir. Understand? You hide away in your civilian life and don’t look back. I can’t lose you. I can’t lose any of you.” He nodded.

“I understand.” He kissed the top of her head. “Now get some sleep, Princess. I just wish I could be here when you wake up.”

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Chapter End Notes

Okay, I love writing bad guys. There's something immensely satisfying about writing the person who is causing all the conflict and forcing the heroes to evolve and change. As an English Lit major, it's been beaten into my head that one must write the villains first before they can write a good hero. With something like this, where each arc has a new villain, that becomes a little complicated. This is why I spend time on my villains, establishing them and their motives.

That being said, I'm not going to try to make you guys sympathize with Martin Anders at all. Maybe a twinge of sympathy for Tom and Sabine, but only a twinge. Martin Anders isn't evil for the sake of being evil, don't get me wrong, but he has his reasons and motives. Why did he buy Marinette? Because he's getting up in the years and wants a successor. Why does he want a woman who won't fight back? Because he needs to always be the one in control. Why is he even a thing author and can he just spontaneously combust? Because we need a villain and no, he cannot.
Nice to Meet You, Get Out of My City

Chapter Summary

A funeral, a meeting, and poor decisions await.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“We’ll be landing in Paris in three hours,” Martin’s lieutenant informed him. He gave a distracted nod, still going over the information he’d been provided concerning Marinette. When he’d purchased her from Tom and Sabine, he hadn’t much cared about who she was or what she did. She was attractive and they promised she was docile, that’d been enough for him. Now, he was having to look into who she was.

She was the owner of a multi-million euro fashion company that she’d purchased at the young age of twenty-six. Quite ambitious of the woman. She ran the company with grace and helped bring it up from the ashes. Now, where did you get enough money to make such a purchase? Most people suspected her lesbian lover Chloe Bourgeois, but he doubted it. No, he was almost certain her friend Ladybug had something to do with it. Perhaps payment in return for patching her up. The competition for the company mysteriously dropped out as well. Ladybug likely scared them off so Marinette could have the company. His future bride had such powerful friends.

Her relationship with Luka Couffaine was interesting. To the public, they were nothing more than good friends. However, in private they were more. It was… Annoying that she wasn’t a virgin, but he had suspected as much from her demeanor at his complex. She didn’t seem the type to be pressured into waiting until marriage. Likely she embraced her sexuality. Something else he’d have to comp her parents for.

Not that there was anything wrong with not being a virgin, of course. It would simply mean that he hadn’t gotten there first. On the contrary, this news was good. This Luka would be the perfect person to use against Marinette. An indie-musician, likely thought more about his own appearances than he did his surroundings. He’d be an easy capture.

Next on his list was Alya Césaire. A freelance reporter. She covered anything and everything relating to the assassins; had been one of the first people to capture Ladybug’s picture. It was a blurry picture of the assassin jumping between rooftops, but it’d marked her down in history. She’d been friends with Marinette since college. She’d be a bit harder to grab. In his experience, reporters were a bit on the paranoid side. Always watching their backs. Once his people got the drop on her, however, she’d be done for.

The hard one, Tikki Coccinelle. Coccinelle wasn’t even her real last name if his information was correct. Her real last name was Rossi. That made Martin sit up a bit straighter in his seat. Rossi as in Lila Rossi, her mother. Well, it certainly explained how Ladybug got in contact with Marinette in the first place. And he had no doubt that this Tikki was just as immersed in the criminal underworld as her mother was. He had been twenty-seven when he’d heard the news of Lila’s death. It was a shame, he’d been trying to hunt down the annoying fox for years after she’d assassinated his brother.

Tikki would be a problem. A large problem. Not only was she definitely close with the other
assassins, but he could guarantee her mother taught her well. Added onto that complication, she was the owner of a massive technology company. There’d be eyes on her at all times, whether they be physical or digital. He’d put a pin in that one. Maybe once he’d broken Marinette in, he could use her to gain his revenge against the Rossi family.

Chloe Bourgeois was, unfortunately, out of the question. Not long after Marinette returned to Paris, she’d sent Chloe away. No one knew where exactly. Marinette likely suspected he’d try to use Chloe against her. Chloe would’ve made it easier, certainly, but there were others he could use.

Such as the last person that had been dug up. This one was a bit on the sketchy side. It was unknown exactly the extent of their relationship. Chat Noir. Not an assassin, but a thief. A rising star in the criminal world. This cat wouldn’t have made the list if not for the simple fact that he targeted Marinette as a person he was going to steal from, only to turn around and not steal from her. He sent her a message and everything but chose not to take whatever it was he’d been after. That was out of character for the thief, based on Martin’s research.

There was a contract that had gone around demanding the thief’s head. Ladybug had originally accepted the contract, only to cancel it a day or so later. From what his people had dug up from the dark web, another assassin attempted to kill him while he was in the home of Marinette and paid with his life. This sparked the rage of the top assassin, which eventually led to the untimely death of Paris’ mayor.

*Who are you Chat Noir? And what is your relationship with Marinette and Ladybug? Why did you not steal from Marinette? Why did Ladybug decide not to kill you? How can I best use you?*

Martin had a plan, of course. Once he landed in Paris, he’d request an audience with Ladybug as a courtesy. He’d explain the situation he was in, assure her that he meant no disrespect when he purchased Marinette and that he’d been unaware of the hierarchy of Paris. She was an assassin. She spoke money as he did. He was certain he’d be able to convince her to allow him to take what was rightfully his. It was just business after all. And while he was doing that, he’d have his people pick up Luka and Alya to make sure Marinette didn’t fight him when Ladybug ultimately handed her over.

~ ~ ~

Adrien stared at the mound of dirt that marked his father’s grave. Certainly, the gravestone would’ve given it away but it wasn’t as fresh as the dirt. He wasn’t sure why he was still standing here beside the grave. The only thing under the mound of dirt was a body in a casket.

“Adrien?” a soft voice asked behind him. “Is there anything I can do?” He shook his head. Marinette stepped up to stand beside him, sliding her fingers down his arm to take his hand. She carefully bent down and placed a red tulip on the grave, nestled among the red roses. It looked beautiful.

“Why a tulip?” he asked. Not because he cared, but because it was something to talk about.

“Red tulips mean undying love. I figured… I figured it’d be nice for him to know that despite his passing, his love lives on.” She seemed uncertain in her words like she didn’t want to offend him. Her words did the opposite of offending him, they made him fall deeper in love with her.

To her, Adrien Agreste was a man who hated her. He was attracted to her but hated her. And yet still she had the thought to bring a flower with meaning to his father’s grave. Still, she stood beside him and held his hand, lending him her strength.

“I don’t know what to do anymore,” he admitted softly. *Do I remain as Chat Noir or do I let it all*
Marinette misunderstood his words, as were his intention.

“If you don’t want to model anymore Adrien, you don’t have to,” she told him. “You can do whatever you want. Follow your own path. No one can decide for you, that’s something you have to figure out yourself.” She squeezed his hand. “But I have a feeling you’ll make the best possible decision for you.” His eyes left the flower and he looked to her face, seeing her watching him with the most gentle of smiles.

“Things were hard after Mom died. He became closed off. But despite all that, he still found the time to eat dinner with me every night. He found the time to go to all my competitions and watch me. I knew it must’ve hurt him. He always told me how much I looked like her. How much I reminded him of her. How much I reminded him of her, but he still managed to find it in him to give me his love and affection.”

“He was an amazing man,” Marinette agreed. Adrien nodded.

“He was. You know, he knew all about…” His voice trailed off.

“I can’t tell her about Plagg. She doesn’t know Plagg and Adrien are good friends.

“All about what?” He swallowed stiffly before giving a half-smile.

“All about my feelings towards modeling. He knew I didn’t like it. He knew I hated the diet and having to leave school for a shoot. I never understood why he made me keep doing it. He finally told me it was so he had an excuse to see me, even when he was working. Most parents don’t get to see their kids at work, but he got to.” I want to let you in so bad Marinette. I want to sit here with you and tell you all the stories, all the adventures, all the trouble. But you won’t let me. You won’t let me let you in and that’s a scary obstacle I don’t know how to overcome.

“What do you want to do Adrien?” she asked, turning her eyes away from his and looking back down towards the grave. I want to be with you.

“I don’t know. I think I’d like to be like Chat Noir, free. Able to carve my own path in the world. He gets the chance to do whatever he wants. He gets to be whoever he wants. He doesn’t have to worry about the rules and regulations of society. No one can tell him what to do or how he should act. It’s a freedom that I worry I’ll never be able to have as just Adrien Agreste.” There, he laid it all out. All his worries and fears about giving up the mask.

“You know, you have plenty that Chat doesn’t have,” Marinette commented wisely. “You can stand out here in the sun and not have to worry about the police chasing you down. You can go to a cafe and order a coffee with your friends and not have to worry about people wondering what you’re going to steal from them. You have a safety that Chat will never be able to experience because of who he associates with.” Her breath hitched. “I think, if I were Chat, I’d much rather be you.”

“You talk about him like you know him.” Marinette dropped Adrien’s hand and turned to walk away, glancing back once more to give him a soft smile.

“I think we all have a little bit of Chat Noir inside us. Someone who feels trapped and just wants to be free.” In usual Ladybug fashion, Marinette turned and began walking away, having had the last word.

Adrien waited until she was out of earshot, then said under his breath, “Some of us are a bit more Chat Noir than others Princess.” For not the first time, he wished he had the strength and courage to say that to her face.
“We should just kill him,” Tikki complained. Ladybug gave a slight smile from her position on the rooftop and shook her head, knowing Tikki would see her.

“You sound like Viperion.”

“Well, he’s right. This asshole kidnapped you. According to Riposte, he’s not going to stop coming after you no matter what you try.” It was a logical argument, but Ladybug wasn’t having any of it. Her mind drifted to Chat Noir and she tried to think what he would approve of. She wished she had the chance to talk to him after she’d gotten the message that Martin Anders wanted to meet with her. But she had no way to contact him. *I could go through Tikki to Plagg, but that would take too long.* So she was stuck guessing. That’s what led her to give Anders a chance to explain himself and a chance to make the right decision in leaving her city immediately and never returning.

“Not in Brazil anymore Tikki, I should really follow the code while in town.” Tikki muttered something that would make her mother proud while Ladybug scoped out the meeting point. Down on the docks, open area, only Anders standing there. She’d already checked all the surrounding buildings and found no one hiding. Seemed he truly did come alone. With that in mind, she made her way off the roof and slowly approached the man who had purchased her.

He appeared to be in his mid-forties with dark brown hair, gray streaks in his temples. His skin was leathery and tanned, giving him the appearance of someone who was outside a lot. Considering where he lived, that made sense. He was tall too, possibly six foot, and seemed to tower over Ladybug’s shorter stature. He was slim and worst of all… Attractive. Even down to his dark blue eyes that seemed to hold no window to his soul. *Or maybe he just lacks a soul.*

“I’m happy you decided to meet with me Ladybug,” he began, his accent thick. Ladybug leaned against a lamppost and remained silent, allowing him to take the lead on the conversation for the time being. “I’m afraid we’ve gotten off to the wrong foot. As you may have already figured out, I’m not from around here. I was unaware of the hierarchy that goes on in Paris. For that, you have my apologies.”

“Apology accepted. Are we done here?” Ladybug asked coldly, falling into her role with grace. He gave a smile.

“I see you live up to the name of ice queen. Unfortunately, I’m in a bit of a sticky situation. I paid good money for my bride. As I said, I was unaware of the hierarchy in Paris. Had I been aware, I would’ve made sure to gain your approval before making a purchase in your city.” He spread his hands. “You cannot expect me to leave without getting what I paid for.” Ladybug cocked her head to the side.

“As I’m certain you’ve learned by now, Marinette is somewhat of a private doctor for myself and the rest of my organization. In return for patching us up when we become injured, we provide protection for her. If she does not wish to be your bride, then she isn’t going to be your bride.”

“I paid good money Ladybug. I’m certain you can understand.” *He thinks that because I’m an assassin, I’ll understand how money drives a person.*

“Money I can easily reimburse. Marinette I cannot. I’m not going to be giving up someone who still holds use and value. I’m certain you can understand.” She tossed his words back at him with a blank expression, pushing herself off the lamppost. “Marinette is not for sale, nor will she be for sale anytime in the near future. When I no longer have any use of her, I’ll be sure to let you know.” He scowled.

“I thought we would understand each other Ladybug, but it seems I was mistaken. Allow me to warn...
you of the war you threaten to bring upon your city over a simple girl. I can bring your organization crashing down around you. Is one girl truly worth the trouble?” Ladybug took a step closer to him. He didn’t move.

“You think I’m scared, Anders? Yes, you have boys with guns. I have assassins at my beck and call. And not just the ones you hear about on the news. You think you’ll be having a war against Paris, but you’ll be having a war with Europe. Every assassin, hacker, thief, illegal street racers, and anyone else who frequents the dark web follow my command. All I’d have to do is snap and you’d be dead in a matter of minutes. The last person who threatened my organization is now six feet under. Do you think you can bring my organization crashing down? I can leave yours as nothing but ashes. Think on that the next time you make the decision to threaten me. If you’re smart, you’ll leave Paris and never return.” Having the last word, Ladybug turned and raced away, melting into the shadows and vanishing from his line of sight.

If she’d gone a bit slower, she would’ve heard his last words, “Then let the games begin.”

Luka walked home from the show with a frustrated air about him. He was impatiently waiting for Ladybug’s notification to let him know that she’d concluded the meeting with Martin Anders. He still felt like they should’ve taken the opportunity to just kill the bastard, but Ladybug was having none of it. While he was glad she was growing as a person, he was also annoyed that she was taking such unnecessary risks.

Someone scuffled behind him and he turned, seeing a man dressed in black barreling towards him. Luka side-stepped and brought his foot up with a snap, connecting with the man’s midsection. As he went down hard, Luka let out a cheery whistle and placed his guitar case on the ground, grabbing the guy around the chest. He dragged him into a side alley and tossed him up against the wall.

“You really aren’t the brightest person are you?” he asked casually, delivering a right hook to the man’s jaw. It felt good. The poor guy tried to fight back, but Luka easily moved around all of his attacks, easily countering each and every one. When the man was too dazed to fight back, Luka grabbed his guitar case and pulled a syringe from it, returning to the man. He cocked his head to the side and considered the guy.

“Y-you’re that snake assassin,” the guy gurgled out. Luka sighed and switched out the syringes.

“I wasn’t going to kill you. Just drug you and take you in so we could question you. But you had to go ahead and do that. Sorry my man, but I can’t allow you to live knowing that.” The man tried to fight for his life, but he was beaten too badly to do much. Luka pushed the needle into his neck and injected him with the poison. Once done, he lifted his guitar case and continued on his way home.

Alya rubbed her eyes under her glasses as she struggled to write the article. The words just wouldn’t come to her. Probably a side effect of her brief talk with Nino. He agreed to give her a chance to explain everything but hadn’t said when. The stress was eating at her. What if I can’t convince him that I’m telling the truth? What if it doesn’t matter in the end? What if he doesn’t give me another chance? The article wasn’t happening. She turned off the monitor just in time to catch the reflection of someone approaching her from behind. She smoothly turned her chair over, the man’s fist crashing through her monitor. She scowled.

“That was expensive asshole!” she snapped, kicking his ankle firmly. The crack of it breaking
satisfied her. As he tumbled to the ground, she slipped on top of him and delivered a series of punches directly to his face, cutting her knuckles on his teeth. Remembering herself, she took a calming breath and left him bleeding on the floor, walking over to her purse. She pulled out her dart gun from it’s hidden pouch and loaded in a hallucinogenic dart. Then she shot the guy in the thigh.

She called Trixx and pinched the bridge of her nose as she mourned the loss of her monitor. The blood she could clean out of the carpet, but the monitor was going to come out of her assassin funds.

“Clean up on aisle four,” she informed Trixx before hanging up. Code for: “I have someone in my apartment who needs to be taken in.” She tied the guy up and righted her chair, sitting next to him to watch him as the hallucination let him see whatever it was he desired most.

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Chapter End Notes

I give a long chapter to make up for you guys having to wait until Friday. I can't promise all of the Friday updates will be this long, but I have made the decision to write as much as I can, then just upload what I have on Friday. Hope that makes up for the lack of daily uploads!

Poor Adrien, he doesn't know what he wants to do. He doesn't know what he should do. And he can't openly talk to the one person he feels he needs to talk to about it. He finds a way around it, in a sense, and expresses his desires in a way that makes him seem envious of Chat Noir. Now that he reasonings for being the thief is gone, the only thing holding him back of Marinette. That, and the freedom he gets from being the cat.

Also, fuck Martin. I love writing him <3 He's so much fun. I can't wait for you guys to see what I have in store for you next concerning his character. --- For those of you who were concerned about Martin easily figuring out Marinette was Ladybug based off what she was saying while in Brazil, I want to express how different she acted. As shown here, Ladybug is usually all business, no expression, no emotion. Marinette in Brazil acted more like Viperion/Luka and Chat Noir/Adrien. Even if she made comments to her luck, the personalities are so vastly different it'd be hard for a person to connect them in their minds.
Open and Honest Communication

Chapter Summary

Marinette is forced to face some things she has struggled not to see.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Are you okay? What happened?” Marinette demanded of Luka, taking his face between her hands and looking him over. He had no noticeable injuries, but his knuckles were split and bleeding. He gave a shrug and sat down, glancing at his knuckles.

“Some asshole attacked me while I was on my way home from a show.” He gave her a steady look. “I’m not a betting man, but I’d put money on him being sent by Anders.” Marinette bit her lip and glanced downwards.

“Hold on, let me grab the medical kit.” She almost bolted from the room.

“You don’t need to do that Mari, I’ll be fine,” he called after her. She ignored that and returned with the kit, kneeling in front of him and opening it up. For fuck’s sake Mari, he thought as he turned his gaze away from the image of her on her knees in front of him like that. He was too tired to control his own imagination.

She grasped his hand gently and carefully began to pat the splits in his knuckles with a cotton ball soaked in hydrogen peroxide. It stung, but Luka didn’t even flinch. He just examined her face curiously. She’d never taken such care when tending to his wounds before. He desperately wanted to believe it was because she had miraculously started to see him as he wanted her to, but had a feeling that wasn’t the case. It was Chat Noir’s doing.

“I put out an alert on the dark web to keep an eye out for this asshole,” she told him as she cleaned his knuckles. The cuts were apparently deeper than she liked because she pulled out a strip of gauze and the suture kit. As she threaded the needle, Luka glanced upwards, trying to push the images out of his head.


“I wanted to give him a chance to tuck tail and run,” Marinette admitted, pushing the needle through his skin. He glanced down at her and gave a slight smirk.

“I’m going to assume that it didn’t go well my lady.” She made a face and cut the thread.

“Of course it didn’t. The rat bastard.” She carefully began to wrap his hand and his eyes fell away from her face again. Rubbing alcohol. Isopropyl alcohol. (CH3)2CHOH. Gypsum. Calcium sulfate dihydrate. CaSO4.2 H2O. Laughing gas. “What are you thinking so hard about viper?” His eyes found hers once again and she was giving him that teasing smile that always made his heart thump twice as hard in his chest. Covering that up, he granted her his own teasing grin.
“Just going through the chemical compounds and formulas of basic things. Baking soda, bleach, rubbing alcohol. Fun stuff like that,” he replied. She laughed and moved onto his other hand, shaking her head at him.

“You should’ve become a chemist with that brain of yours Luka.” He chuckled lightly at the thought of him joining a career as serious as that and shook his head. No, he enjoyed being a musician too much to give it up.

“You know, you never did say why you came over here Mari. Usually, you just call to give me updates.” She didn’t answer as she worked on finishing up his other hand, instead choosing to carefully think over her words. It was something she did often that he loved. She never answered irrationally, except perhaps when she was oddly emotional, she made sure to think things through and consider the consequences of her words. He loved it, but also loathed it. She gave herself a chance to censor herself, so he could never figure out if what she was saying was something she truly felt.

“I had an interesting conversation with Adrien Agreste today,” she said finally, placing his newly bandaged hand down. That could be potentially bad if he slipped up. She remained in her position, making it hard for him to concentrate on her words. “He was questioning what he wanted to do with his life and mentioned wanting to be like Chat. Free. It stuck with me all night long, making me think more on what you did for me.”

“What I did for you?”

“Yeah. You gave me the tools to become free and I feel like I never properly thanked you enough for that gift you gave me.” Luka waved a hand at her.

“You made me my suit as thanks Mari. I think we’re good.” She frowned at him.

“But you did so much more for me. It wasn’t just teaching me to be an assassin, but also helping me when I needed someone that day in the rain. You didn’t have to do that, but you did. You became my rock for so long, and you still are. And yet, when I look at how I’ve treated you for the past five years, I’m ashamed.” Okay, now I’m confused.

“How you treated me? What are you talking about?”

“Using you for sex. Knowing you wanted more, but never giving you enough of myself to let you have more. Then I have the nerve to go and fall in love with some random thief who stumbles into my life… I’m ashamed.” Luka blinked a couple times and, before he realized he was doing it, he reached out to brush his fingers across her face in order to bring her eyes back to his.

“You didn’t make me do anything I didn’t want to do my lady. I was happy to take what you were giving. I’ve come to terms with what we are to each other long ago. Don’t feel ashamed because you did nothing to warrant that feeling. I have and will always be your loyal and faithful knight, protecting you always.”

“Even if it’s from myself?” Those eyes, she knew something. He held her gaze.

“Especially if it’s from yourself.” She gave a nod and finally stood, giving him just enough time to breathe out in relief, before sliding into his lap and wrapping her arms around his neck. His pulse jumped as he stared at her. “What are you doing?” Think of Chat, think of Chat, think of Chat, think of Chat, think of Chat, think of Chat.

“Viper, I know you helped Chat Noir and his friends escape when we had them captive,” she said
silkily in his ear, sending goosebumps across his arms. “I also know that this likely means you know the identity of Chat Noir and that he definitely knows yours.”

“I should question where you’re getting such information,” he forced out, trying to ignore the feeling of her pressed against his body. She gave a throaty laugh.

“I was too caught up in my own emotion to see it then, but I had plenty of time to think on that plane. It’s truly the only logical conclusion to come to, considering you have shown zero signs of head trauma since the incident. Sure, there was blood at the scene... But that almost-healed cut on your palm lets me know exactly how the blood got there. Sneaky snake.”

“Maybe I’m just a fast healer. Maybe he didn’t hit me hard enough to cause lasting damage.” She snorted at that.

“If he hit you hard enough to cause you to black out in any way, there’d be lasting damage. Just promise me that you won’t reveal who he is, especially not to me.” Her blue eyes held his captive. “I can only have so many people in danger around me. I already have to deal with knowing you won’t let me ship you off to some deserted island.”

“Assuming I do know the identity of Chat Noir, it would be poor form of me to reveal something entrusted to me. I may be a snake, but I’m an honorable one.” He thought of their current positioning. “Honorable enough. His secrets are his to tell.” She smiled softly.

“Thank you for saving me from making a horrible decision I would highly regret. You truly are my knight in shining armor.” He chuckled, but it sounded strangled even to his own ears.

“Any time my lady. Now if you don’t mind, I would appreciate you removing your body from mine. Please. It’s hard enough to think when I’m exhausted and you’re not helping matters.” She laughed and pressed her lips against his jaw before getting off his lap, giving him a wink.

“Nice to know I still have such an effect on you viper. I’ll have to keep it in mind for future interrogations.” He let out a groan.

“Fucking hell Marinette, you will always have that kind of effect on me.” Her gaze softened and she leaned over him, her fingers brushing down the side of his face.

“I wish it had worked out with you and Chloe,” she admitted. “It would’ve been so much easier to fall in love with you. It should have been you.” Her lips brushed over his lightly and it took all of his self-control not to immediately pull her to him and deepen the kiss. A month ago, he would have. Despite having talked to Chat, he would have ignored the cat and pulled Mari to him now. But that was before he really got to know Chat Noir; before he got to know Adrien Agreste. He couldn’t do that to his friend. With that in mind, Luka regretfully pulled away from her lips.

“I can’t do that to him Marinette,” he admitted. “We’ve become good friends and despite how I feel about you, I can’t betray him like that in this way. I know how he feels about you, I know his frustrations concerning you, I know his fears with you. I can’t do this to him.”

“If a heart is big enough to love two people, can’t it be big enough to love three?” she asked softly, pressing her forehead against his. Don’t do this, my lady. Don’t break my heart like this. “I had hours to think on that plane, Luka. I’m done running away from my emotions out of fear. So don’t run from me out of fear.” He grasped her wrists in his hands and shook his head.

“It’s not fear that’s holding me back. I told you that I’d always protect you. Now, I’m protecting you from making a mistake. Don’t go down this road without cluing him in on the details because that’s
not fair to him. He understands he has to share you with Chloe.” *I can’t believe I’m about to say this.* “He shouldn’t have to share you with me as well.”

“And if I told you that he already knows?” Luka jerked his head back.

“Wait, what?”

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**Two Hours Prior**

“Everything go okay Princess?” Chat asked with a purr in his voice, perched on the balcony railing, looking very much like a cat. Marinette gave him an amused look.

“If you fall, I’m laughing,” she warned. He gave her a smirk and straightened, hopping down from the railing to trace his claws across her jaw.

“You liar. You’d be annoyed that it wasn’t you who took meow-t.” She rolled her eyes at the pun but pulled him close to kiss him hungrily. He gave a low purr from the base of his throat before pulling away and watching her with amused eyes. “You’re avoiding the topic at hand Purrincess.” She huffed and gave him a scowl.

“It sucked. He threatened me. I threatened him better. But I didn’t harm him or kill him without giving him a chance to run for the hills.” She wrinkled her nose. “I should’ve just taken him out while he wasn’t expecting it.” Chat considered this.

“You know, Nino made a good point earlier. He pointed out that it might not have been Martin Anders you met up with. It could’ve been one of his lackeys with a script. So even if you had just killed the guy you met up with, you may have been killing the wrong person.” Marinette blinked.

“I… Didn’t even consider that fact. Riposte did say he was cunning, it may have been a set-up to see if I would just attack before talking.” She thought it through in her head. “I could’ve royally fucked myself over by shooting first and asking questions later.”

“Did you manage to get any information on who exactly he purchased you from?” Chat asked, leaning against the balcony, spinning his tail casually. Marinette shook her head.

“No, but I have a pretty good idea on who it was. I just need to get the proof first.” She swallowed stiffly. “But I don’t think I have the strength to face them alone.” *Her parents.*

“Take Luka.” She jerked in shock. “I would go, but I can’t. Wouldn’t be healthy if people spotted Chat Noir casually walking down the street with Marinette Dupain-Cheng. Chloe would be the next choice, but who knows where you stashed her away. So take Luka. This way you have emotional support and physical support.” *And because of how he feels about you, he’d never let anything bad happen to you while he was there.*

“Chat… I don’t know if that’s such a good idea,” she said carefully, taking the time to pick and choose her words. “The thing about me and Luka is that… Well for the past five years, we’ve been lovers. Not in the emotional sense, but in the physical one. And I know he’s always wanted more from me emotionally.”

“I know.”

“Wait, you do?!’” Chat gave a shrug.
“While you were gone, he and I talked. It wasn’t hard to figure out how he feels about you, considering his words and actions. His overall demeanor pretty much shouted it from the rooftops.”

“You’re… You’re not upset?” He laughed.

“Why would I be upset? Turns out that I actually enjoy his presence. We got close. We bonded. Despite the way Bourgeois felt about relationships… Darling, this is France. Casual sex between two consenting adults isn’t something that is usually frowned upon in our society. Beyond that, I’ve had time to do thinking on my own.”

“But… You were upset because Adrien Agreste danced with me at the fashion event,” she pointed out. **Oh yeah, I did use that as an excuse.** He gave her a cheeky grin.

“That was jealousy. Because I wanted to be the one to sweep you off your feet that night, not Adrien Agreste. Our… Thing was so new and fresh, and you were kind of gunning for me still. I felt a bit bitter that Adrien was the one who could get close enough to you that night.” **Because it felt like despite everything, you could never truly be able to accept both sides of who I am. I still worry about that. I still worry that you’ll be able to accept only Adrien or only Chat Noir, but never both at once.**

“So you’re not as possessive as you let on Chaton?”

“Can’t be. I’m willing to accept your heart split between me and Chloe. How could I call myself your kitty if I couldn’t accept your heart also including someone I highly respect?” Her eyes searched his as if looking for confirmation. Then she grasped his face and pressed her lips firmly against his.

The two stumbled inside her home, and Chat lifted her easily. He carried her to her bedroom and laid her down on her bed with such care, as if worried she would shatter. Her fingers unbuckled his utility belt and she tossed it aside without a care in the world before grabbing his bell and pulling the zipper down. He helped her by pulling his arms out of the sleeves of his suit, shivering at the feel of her running her fingers over his torso. **Making sure they’re all still there Princess?**

Her fingers were moving over each and every single one of his scars, especially the one on his side. It was clear she hadn’t forgotten the fashion show incident, but he couldn’t call attention to her actions without making it clear that he knew what had occurred at the fashion show. And Chat Noir should have no idea about that.

They were at this odd impasse. Chat knew this even as he pulled her clothes away from her body. Even as he allowed her to move him onto his back and roll a condom over him. Marinette couldn’t tell him about her confrontation with Adrien Agreste because she couldn’t risk Chat not feeling like she trusted him. And he couldn’t assure her that she didn’t have to worry about that because she forbade him from revealing his identity until this current threat was dealt with. Even as Marinette rode him and he lost himself in her, that knowledge was still sitting in the back of his mind. Mocking him. Reminding him that until she knew the truth, they had no future.

“I think I may be in love with Luka too,” Marinette admitted softly as they lay curled up next to each other afterward. Chat tipped her face up towards his and kissed her gently.

“That’s okay,” he promised her. “I’m okay with that. I trust the both of you enough to be okay with that. I know neither of you would run off together and leave me high and dry.”

“But how do you know that Chat?” She seemed so confused. It would be too much information, but he couldn’t lie about this. Maybe stretch the truth just a little bit. He pushed her hair away from her face and gave her a grin.
“Because I’m a psychologist Marinette. Granted, that doesn’t make me a mind-reader, but I can pick up on the hidden details most people don’t realize they’re showing. It comes in handy more often then you’d think when being a thief. I did offer to become your assassin therapist. I may have already started working with Luka. I pride myself on being able to figure out how people work, what makes them tick. Why they do the things they do.” She gave him a smirk and cupped his face in her hands.

“I knew you were bullshitting me when you said you may be a model under the mask.” Why do you act so relieved?! Would it really be so bad for me to be Adrien?! “I never imagined you were a psychologist though.” He forced himself to laugh.

“I think if I were a model, I’d hate every second of it.” She laughed and nodded. Pick up on the hints already! Stop blinding yourself to what I’m trying to show you!

“I could see that. It explains how you’re able to so easily talk yourself out of so many issues.” She suddenly made a face. “I want to stay longer and talk to you more, but I know if I do I’ll just end up putting all the pieces together and we can’t have that.” Clearly, you can’t put all the pieces together, even if I did all of the puzzle and left the last piece for you to place in! “I should go ask Luka to accompany me... To confront them tomorrow morning.” Chat nodded in agreement, even as he wanted to shake her in frustration. How many different ways did he have to hint at who he was without outright giving it away? Comparing himself to Chat Noir as Adrien, admitting he and Luka were fast friends as Chat, telling her that he and Luka were already working together as psychologist-patient, telling her that if he were a model he’d hate it. What next? Remove his contacts while she was looking at a picture of Adrien Agreste so she could do a side-by-side? It was infuriating.

“I’ll see you tomorrow Princess,” he said, giving her one last kiss before she slipped from the bed. He watched her get dressed and treated himself to one last kiss before she left. Once the front door shut, he let out a groan and rubbed his face. “This woman is going to give me gray hairs, assuming she doesn’t kill me first.”

~ ~ ~

Marinette stood in front of her parent’s front door, feeling panic settling in on her shoulders. She never imagined a situation in which she’d ever willingly come back, and yet here she was. It felt like she couldn’t get enough air into her lungs, like there was a weight pressing down on her chest. Only Luka’s strong presence kept her from turning and running as fast as possible.

“We can get the answers another way,” Luka reminded her gently, running his fingers down her arm. She shook her head, firming her shoulders.

“This is the quickest and most simple way to gain the information we need. They can’t hurt me, not while you’re here. It would tarnish their public face,” she replied stiffly, earning herself a bark of cruel laughter from Luka.

“Their public face is pretty shit as is. You’re the public’s angel and people have noticed how you avoid them. Don’t you read up on the news where they speculate about why that is and what these people could’ve done to make you avoid them so much?”

“No, I avoid all conversations relating to me on the news as much as possible. I don’t have time to be sitting around watching TV all day.” She forced herself to hit the buzzer.

Unlike Luka in his usual jeans, striped t-shirt, and denim jacket, Marinette had made the decision to dress up some. She was wearing tan slacks, a black blouse, and black ballet flats. She’d taken the time to style her hair just so and had even gone the extra mile to put on makeup she usually didn’t
touch except for in formal situations. She’d even broken out her designer handbag that lived in her closet. The only jewelry she wore was her cat necklace, which she rubbed like a nervous habit, and her bracelet, which was for emergencies. With her parents, it was always dress to impress. They would accept nothing less. She probably wasn’t even dressed up enough for them as is.

A butler opened the door and blinked at her in surprise before hurrying her and Luka in. The older man seemed sad and gave her a brief hug before leading the two to the sitting room located a room off the parlor. As they walked, Marinette struggled to hide her smile at the state of the home.

It was bare, devoid of all decoration. The walls were in the process of being repainted. On some of the walls that she could see, there was still a very clear outline of a black cat paw showing through. *Oh, kitty. You have such a mean streak.*

“Remind me not to get on the cat’s bad side,” Luka muttered in her ear as they sat down. Marinette choked back her laughter as they waited.

“Tea?” the butler asked, returning with a tray. Marinette thought about what Chat said the night before, how he was able to pick up on things people didn’t realize they showed. She took in his appearance. He seemed nervous, his hands were shaking. If she listened closely, she could swear that she heard the teacups rattling on the tray. She knew she was probably missing out on a bunch more tells that Chat would be able to pick up, but what she could see told her that something wasn’t right. The butler was scared. *But why?*

In an attempt to help him relax some, Marinette reached for a teacup. She’d just gotten it off the tray when she heard her father’s voice echoing through the house. Without meaning to, she dropped the teacup, spilling all of its contents onto the floor.

“Shit, I’m sorry,” she apologized, a numb beginning to work its way through her body. Luka waved the butler away and turned to her in concern, squeezing her knee.

“You’re okay Marinette. I’m here,” he whispered. “They can’t hurt you.” She nodded gratefully and closed her eyes, taking a steadying breath. Tom finally walked into the sitting room, gaze narrowing in on the spilled tea the butler was trying to clean. Anger passed over his face.

“Did you learn nothing growing up you stupid girl?” he demanded. She ducked her head, shame racing through her. Knowing better than to speak up, she kept quiet. “What is he doing here? What are you doing here?”

“He would prefer you to watch your tone,” Luka said flippantly, crossing his ankle over his knee and leaning back against the couch. He seemed completely at ease, polar opposite of Marinette, who was wishing the floor would open and swallow her whole.

“Don’t speak to your betters that way boy,” Tom snapped. Luka yawned.

“Sorry, but I fail to see how you’re my better at anything. Last I checked, your business was going under, you’d just been robbed, your home vandalized, your daughter hates you, and no one in Paris wants to associate with you in fear of catching your bad luck. I, on the other hand, am extremely successful, have millions of adoring fans, a good support system, and fantastic taste in music.”

“My daughter does not hate me. Watch yourself before I kick you out.” Marinette somehow found her voice.

“If you kick him out, I go with him,” she said numbly, still staring at the floor. Tom scowled.

“It’s bad influences like these in your life that have changed you Marinette. I will not have you
associating yourself with the likes of him anymore.” She closed her eyes, feeling the warmth from Luka beside her.

“How am I even supposed to talk to them if I freeze up the second they enter the room?” I asked Luka softly as we rode in the back of the cab. Luka took my hand and gave me a lop-sided grin.

“Just imagine you’re speaking to me and say what’s on your mind. Picture the words in your mind, imagine it as a song. Let your heart do your speaking and not your head. They can’t hurt you around me. I won’t allow it,” he coached, bringing a smile to my face. It reminded me of when he mentored me years ago.

That comforting feeling brought some strength into Marinette. Just enough. **Speak with your heart and not your head.** “I’m a grown adult Father. You cannot decide who I am or am not allowed to associate myself with.” She opened her eyes and finally glanced up. Tom looked shocked, Luka looked proud. She chose to focus on the pride on Luka’s face, letting that fill her with courage. Tom’s eyes darted to Luka’s face.

“You ruined her!” he accused, shaking a finger at Luka.

“No, you ruined me!” Marinette shouted, standing swiftly. “You beat me down for every little mistake I made. You criticized everything good I did. Why do you think I avoid you and Mother? Because I hate you both! You both tried to mold me into your perfect daughter, your perfect servant. And when you saw that was impossible, you kicked me out of your life. You didn’t visit me in the hospital when I was fifteen and beaten within an inch of my life. You didn’t visit me in the hospital when I was finally found after being kidnapped. What kind of parents don’t care that their own daughter was kidnapped?!” She shook with anger, wanting to take it out on Tom. He may have been a hulking beast of a man, but she knew she could take him in a fight. She knew she could easily put him on the ground. It was Luka’s hand finding hers that kept her from doing just that.

“You lying little bitch!” Tom seethed, glaring at her. “You act like such an angel to the public, but you’re nothing but scum. Associating yourself with the criminal underworld, dealing with assassins and thieves. I don’t know how you set up your little rescue attempt with the police, but how do you think the public would feel knowing about your lies?” **Someone has no practice playing word-filter.**

“So you are the one who sold me to that man? You’re the reason I was kidnapped?” she demanded. “My own father, the amazing Tom Dupain, had his daughter sold to a crime lord?”

“You’re my goddamn property! I can sell you if I want to!” **It’s over. That was it.** She felt… Oddly disappointed by how easily they got the information. Luka pulled his phone out of his pocket and stopped the voice recording.

“Well, now that we have that nice tidbit for the police, I believe we’ll be on our way,” he said casually. He stood and took Marinette’s arm, leading her past the shaking Tom. He seemed honestly shocked that he’d been outplayed the way he was. It was a plan Marinette and Luka had gone over the night before. All of it hinged on Marinette being able to find her voice and unleash her anger towards her parents. Interestingly enough, Luka said the plan was Chat’s idea. She had no idea how Chat knew anything about her parents’ personalities considering he’d never spoken to them, but he was right. Tom exploded like a firework.

They were at the door when Marinette tripped on the rug and fell into Luka, causing the both of them to stumble to the floor. Which was pretty fucking lucky considering that was when the gun went off and a bullet hole appeared in the door. It would’ve hit Luka.

Tom stood there shaking, but his hands were empty. The butler was cowering in the corner. At the
top of the stairs… Martin Anders frowned in annoyance and readjusted his aim.

“Interesting how some theories pay off in the most amusing sort of ways,” he said lightly, descending down from the stairs. “Some of the things you said in Brazil stuck with me you know. Your jokes and jabs about luck.” Luka’s hand closed around her wrist as if he was going to try to make a run for it, his thumb pressing down hard on the emergency button on Marinette’s bracelet.

“So you shot at us to test a running theory?” Marinette shot back at him. He ignored her and trained the gun on Luka. She’d mentally shuttered away into Ladybug, feeling untouchable once again.

“Remove your hand from her wrist boy. I’m quite interested to know how a musician was able to beat my hired gun into a bloody pulp. And don’t bother trying to deny it.” Luka scowled. “Teeth. They cut like knives don’t they?” Luka took his hand away from Marinette’s wrist, raising both hands in the air. Martin gestured to them with the gun. “Tom, tie them up. And make sure to take any jewelry they have on them. Wouldn’t want either to be hiding some lock picks to stab into my neck later.”

“Oh, you remembered? I’m so flattered,” Marinette mocked, standing slowly. Martin raised a brow at her movement and focused the gun on Luka.

“You move, I shoot him.” Marinette snorted and side-stepped into the gun’s line of sight. Luka cursed under his breath.

“You want me alive. You’ll have to shoot me to shoot him. Be smart Petro, you know I can take anything you throw at me. Let’s make this simple and have that conversation between just you, me, and Lucy. Remember Lucy?”

“You have to know my name by this point Marinette. Why do you continue to call me things like that?” Anders demanded. Tom stood idly by, seemingly unsure what he was supposed to do. He seemed shocked by the change in Marinette. He should be. Marinette gave a smirk.

“Because it pisses you off and makes me happy. I thought that would be rather obvious.” She knew she didn’t have a chance in this situation. The only weapon she had was in her purse, which was at her feet. He was too far away for her to get his gun. He wouldn’t hesitate to shoot Luka. She needed to stall for as long as possible until help arrived. Her phone began to buzz in her purse.

“My dear, like I told you in Brazil. We could do great things together. You needn’t fight me so.” His voice was silky smooth, as if he honestly thought it’d work the second time he tried it.

“It’s not going to work Marvin, no matter how many times you try it. Get some new material, this shit is boring me.” That’s right, keep your eyes on me. She crossed her arms over her chest.

“I wouldn’t be throwing insults if I were you Marinette,” Anders threatened darkly. “You’re in a rather compromising position. I may not be able to shoot that particular lover of yours at the moment, but who’s to say I can’t shoot your other lover?” Marinette snorted.

“Chloe isn’t even in Paris dip shit.” Anders smirked.

“I wasn’t referring to Chloe Bourgeois. I was talking about the thief.” Marinette’s blood ran cold. How does he know anything about Chat? “You know, the outside really isn’t the place for romantic rendezvous. Do your lovers know about each other? Or did I just let out a secret?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she attempted. Anders laughed and nodded to Tom, who pulled a thick envelope out of his back pocket and tossed it to Marinette. She caught it and quickly opened it, pulling out pictures of her and Chat last night.
The pictures were taken with a long-range camera. They showed her talking to Chat. Chat touching her face. The two of them kissing. Chat giving her his Cheshire grin. Then the two of them kissing again and stumbling inside. Her hands were shaking as she flipped through the pictures, panic flooding her veins.

“If you don’t want the cat hurt, I’d recommend making your way over here and giving up without a fight. Just ask Tom how I comp people who give me trouble.” Tom uncurled his right fist, showing Marinette the stub where his ring finger used to be. *Chaton, tell me you didn’t go down like a bitch after Viperion and I had to rely on your side giving out in order to take you in.*

“You’re bluffing! There’s no way you caught Chat!” she argued, throwing the pictures down. The memory of her fighting with Chat Noir on the rooftop oddly calmed her. She remembered the fight well. She remembered wondering why he was clearly holding back against her and Viperion. She remembered the relief she felt when his side finally gave out, allowing them to catch him.


A canister came crashing through the window, smoke immediately spouting from it. Anders jerked in shock and covered his mouth, turning to point his gun towards the new intruder. Marinette quickly grabbed her purse and Luka’s hand, coughing as the smoke filled the room, blinding everyone. Eyes burning, Marinette felt for the door handle, grasping it and yanking the door open. She fell into the arms of Riposte, who looked angry.

“Get to the car, we’ll be back for the bastard later,” Riposte stated calmly, shoving Luka and Marinette from the house. The two stumbled down the pathway towards the black car waiting, both hacking and wheezing. Gunshots fired from behind them, all of them hitting Riposte’s riot shield.

Plagg tapped the wheel impatiently as Marinette and Luka scrambled into the car. He glanced back at the two of them and gave a small wave before whistling sharply. Riposte lifted her shield and began to walk backward towards the car, tossing out another smoke grenade before climbing into the passenger seat.

“Drive,” she commanded. Plagg put the car in gear and stepped on it, flying through traffic. A siren sounded behind them. “Lose them.” Plagg sniffed in annoyance and shifted gears, swinging around a corner with ease.

“I definitely needed you in Brazil, Plagg,” Marinette coughed out, accepting the bottle of water Riposte handed her. She drank about half before handing the rest to Luka.

“If you wreck us, I’m never forgiving you,” Luka muttered.

“If I wreck us, please immediately put one in my brain because clearly I’m tragically ill and won’t make it,” Plagg commented, shifting the car again and racing into a tunnel. “These streets are my bitch. I work with Chat for a reason.” *Chat!*

“Call Chat!” Marinette demanded. “Someone call Chat! I need to make sure he’s okay!” They entered a tunnel, three cop cars struggling to keep up.

“Marinette, he was bluffing. You know as well as I know that Chat isn’t going to be taken down easily. Right now we need to focus on getting out of our current situation,” Luka told her quickly. “He wants you to panic. He’s trying to push you into making a mistake. Neither of us should call Chat. We don’t know what kind of tech he’s working with at the moment. I’m not going to risk Chat’s identity by panic calling him the second we’re free.”
“Who the fuck is Chat?” Riposte demanded. Plagg down-shifted and jerked the wheel to the right, smoothly drifting in a 180 turn into the opposite lane. He shifted again and slammed on the gas, dodging around cars to take the first available exit, not giving the police a chance to recover.

“Chat Noir is a thief who is off-limits and a man I will slowly and painfully kill Anders over,” Marinette stated firmly.

“Draw a fucking number,” Luka complained. “That bastard pointed a gun at me. And at you.”

“That man killed my mother. I’ve been chasing him for three years. I think I get the first shot,” Riposte stated darkly, leaning back against the seat. “Fucking hell I forgot how heavy this shit was.”

“You left before I could give you the new suit,” Marinette pointed out. Riposte shrugged.

“I needed to leave.” Riposte’s suit was completely black and was essentially the uniform the BRI unit used. She was wearing thickly padded armor and a bullet-proof vest with equally thick black gloves. A black mask raised up to cover the bottom half of her face and she wore a thick helmet that covered her hair and the majority of what was exposed on her face, leaving only her eyes to be seen. She carried around a riot shield and a handgun, as well as her foil. She also had a loaded arsenal of smoke grenades, flashbangs, and other such things that go boom. As a former member of the BRI division, Riposte had a lot of experience using her suit to its fullest potential.

Originally, she hadn’t wanted Marinette to make her a new suit because she didn’t want to give up the protection her current suit gave her. This left Marinette with a fun puzzle that she was determined to solve. Something lightweight that would offer the same protection, with more mobility. She’d finished the first prototype of a new suit when Riposte announced to the organization that she had to leave and then left. Never got a chance to determine if it would be up to Riposte’s standards. The plan was to perfect Riposte’s suit, then work on updating everyone else’s suits to offer the same amount of protection. It would mean less mobility than what everyone was used to, but also a less chance of taking a bullet wound or knife wound. It was a project that still lay unfinished in her workroom.

“Thank you for taking the Plagg express, please exit on the left and do try not to get into any police chases in the near future. Thank you, and have a wonderful day,” Plagg said, pulling up to the abandoned warehouse. The trio got out of the car and Plagg was off once more, barely bothering to wait until they’d shut the doors. Marinette squinted at the fading car.

“He is a really good driver. I know Tikki said something about his history with illegal street racing, but he is scary good,” she commented.

“He drove for the Rat Pack,” Luka commented in such an off-hand manner, Marinette was certain she’d misheard him at first.

“Wait. He drove. For the Rat Pack. And you haven’t killed him three times over without my knowledge?” Luka wiped out the Rat Pack years ago. He made it a hobby of his to hunt down the remaining members that escaped his grasp over the years. It was the only time the organization agreed to allow him to break the code and kill without a contract, provided he didn’t kill like Viperion and didn’t wear his suit when doing so. Luka sniffed.

“Plagg’s cool. He’s as much a victim. So he gets a pass.”

“Is he single?” Riposte questioned, the three of them making their way to the warehouse. Luka and Marinette exchanged a glance.
“Technically, yes. But he and Tikki have… A history. I wouldn’t go after him unless you want to deal with her,” Marinette said carefully. She wasn’t exactly certain on the status of Plagg and Tikki’s relationship and didn’t want to misspeak. Riposte gave a one-armed shrug.

“Shame. Alright, let’s get inside so I can tear this shit off. Also, that’s two you owe me Marinette.” Marinette gave a grin and nodded.

“That would be two. I missed you girl.” She couldn’t tell, but she was pretty sure Riposte grinned under that black mask.

“I missed you too. It’s nice to be home, despite the shootouts and heavy armor.”

~ ~ ~

You know, I’m starting to think I’m bad luck, Adrien thought to himself bitterly. His face hurt, his knuckles hurt, his side hurt, his leg hurt… Everything hurt. He was cold, dripping wet, and all of his shit had been taken from him. He was also suffering from deja vu, considering the fact that he was bound tightly to a chair in an empty warehouse with a single light beating down above him. He’d lost feeling in his fingers about five minutes ago.

Last night when he left Marinette’s house, he’d felt like he was being followed. Because of this, he made the decision not to return home. Instead, he headed towards the abandoned warehouse. The warehouse, despite the shit memory of being held hostage there, was neutral ground and owned by the organization. That meant it would be a safe place to hide out and get assistance from the others. Marinette told him on multiple occasions to go there if he ever felt like he was in danger and might need help. He never made it.

Five blocks away, he’d been jumped by four guys wearing black masks. He’d held his own, not bothering to hold back. He knew in the back of his mind that this had to be connected to Marinette’s kidnapping, though he had no idea why he was being targeted. There should’ve been zero connection listed between himself and Marinette, save for the jewels he ended up not stealing. Everything was going fine until a fifth guy jumped in out of nowhere and stabbed Chat in the leg. They took off his mask after they tied him up and returned only once to dump ice cold water on him.

“Hey cat,” the guard said gruffly, approaching him.

“Only my friends call me cat. You can call me Chat,” Adrien countered. The guard frowned. “Doesn’t it mean the same thing?” he asked, scratching his head. Adrien sighed. “Whatever, your phone’s ringing. I’m going to answer and put it on speaker. Act like everything’s okay, boss’ orders. If you don’t, I’ll break your fingers.”

“Well if I don’t have a choice…” The guard squinted at Adrien, trying to figure out the sarcasm, before giving up and holding Adrien’s phone up. He swiped to answer and put it on speaker phone. Nino.

“Dude, where are you?” Nino asked, seeming frustrated.

“Carapace, you know me… Always running late,” Adrien said happily. “I actually had something come up, so I won’t be able to make it.” Nino caught on fast.

“That sucks man. Julia said she couldn’t wait to meet the mysterious Samuel.” I love code. ‘Julia’ was their way of asking if everything was alright in a way that didn’t seem suspicious. Samuel was Adrien’s fake name. Something bland and uninspired used to protect his identity.
“Tell Julia that I’ll meet her soon enough.” *I need to keep him on the phone long enough to track my location.* If Adrien had said ‘I’d honestly rather not meet Julia,’ that would’ve let Nino know that everything was fine. But because Adrien said he’d meet her soon enough, that let Nino know that he was not okay and everything had gone to shit. Likely Nino was already working on getting his location, but it was best to delay as long as possible. “Sorry again man, you know how work gets. Someone calls off and I have to go in.”

“Dude, you need to quit that job. I don’t get how you can work at the same gas station for two years and not want to leap off a building.” *He needs a bit more time.*

“Hey, it pays decent enough. Was there anything else you need?” Nino was silent for a few moments and Adrien held the guard’s gaze, daring the guy to hang up the phone on that note. If they wanted everything to seem like normal, they would be forced to play by Adrien’s rules.

“Nope, just calling to check up on you. Call me after you’re done with work. We might still be partying.”

“Will do man. Catch you later.” The guard hung up and walked away, leaving Adrien to shiver in the chair. “Can I get a blanket or something? I’m gonna catch hypothermia over here.”

“Hypothermia is the least of your concerns,” a new voice said. Adrien followed the voice to the source. A middle-aged man with soulless dark blue eyes. Logic dictated that this was Martin Anders.

“Well it’s gonna be hard for you to get information out of me and use me to lure in Marinette if I’m dying from hypothermia,” Adrien commented with cheer. Anders let out a sigh. “I see what Dupain was talking about when he said Marinette is surrounded by bad influences. You seemed to rub off on her Chat Noir.” *He doesn’t know my identity. Good.*

Despite having the mask removed, unless Anders lived in Paris he wouldn’t be able to place Adrien as anyone other than just a random person on the street. There were no more billboards showing off his face on every street corner. He didn’t make the front page of magazines anymore. He hadn’t even been photographed since his father’s diagnosis, with the exception of the fashion show. Even with the fashion show hanging over his head threateningly, the picture the magazines used to promote ‘The Return of Adrien Agreste’ was of him walking away from the camera. Something about teasing readers with wondering how his face had aged in the past year and a half. When he’d been told about that, he hadn’t cared. Now he was glad.

“Me? Rub off on Marinette? I think not. She doesn’t have my charming purrsnonality.” Anders raised a brow before delivering a punch to Adrien’s jaw. Pain shot through him, his head spinning on the impact. He shook his head to remove the daze and spat out a wad of blood.

“You’re going to star in a little video for me Chat Noir. You’re not going to make any stupid puns. You’re going to say exactly what I tell you to say, or I’m going to shatter your kneecaps. Am I understood?” Adrien rolled his jaw to ensure it wasn’t too badly hurt before squinting at Anders.

“According to your own threats, I’m dead no matter what. Why should I listen to you and lead Marinette to her doom? That seems counter-productive for me. I have a much better chance of getting out of this alive if she stays away long enough for her assassin friends to find me.” Anders gave Adrien a cruel smile.

“Do what you wish thief. But I wonder how much pain you can take before you eventually break. I’m very skilled at breaking people, so if I were you, I’d think carefully on that.”

“I’d act like I’m scared, but I’m kind of a shit actor.” Anders delivered a punch to Adrien’s stomach,
knocking the wind out of the younger man.

“The more beat up you look in the video, the less it’ll matter what you say to her.” There’s some truth to that.

“I have a confession to make.” Anders cocked his head to the side, listening. “You’re going to get a bullet between the eyes if Ladybug catches you first. If it’s Viperion, you’re going to slowly die of poison, choking on your own blood. Peacock will strangle you with ease. Hawk Moth will put an arrow in your neck. Illustrator will torture you for at least an hour before snapping your neck. Queen Bee will fill you with holes, after chasing you down and stinging you with her darts. Rena will be the most merciful, but only because she’ll make you see the one thing you want the most as she slits your throat.” Adrien gave a bloody grin. “No matter which way you swing it, you’re fucked. The funniest part is that your entire plan hinges on Marinette wanting to save me, but the second she sees my real face in the video, she’s going to be so pissed off that she’ll tell you to keep me because like a true criminal, I’ve been lying to her about my identity from day one.” Anders set his jaw.

“Are you done?” he asked stiffly. Adrien had struck a nerve. Good.

“One last thing. Go fuck yourself.” He spat at Anders, a bloody glob of spit landing on the man’s cheek. Anders calmly took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the spit away. Adrien didn’t even see the next punch coming.

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Chapter End Notes

Already breaking my own schedule. Shame on me. So, I was taking a break from writing my essay for College Comp II and was struck with inspiration. Started writing a bunch and just now stopped. Out of pure curiosity, I decided to check how much I had written between tonight and yesterday and my geez this was long. So I figured I’d might as well go ahead and give you guys the chapter.

Usually, I’d start picking apart what I wrote here, but there’s just so much and words are swimming off my laptop screen. With that in mind, I’ll let you guys decipher this however you want while I troll the comments waiting to see your thoughts, theories, and predictions for what comes next. With luck, this will tide you guys over! Enjoy!

*BRI is Paris’ version of S.W.A.T. for all us Americans according to Google.*
See You Soon Chaton

Chapter Summary

When you're supposed to be taking notes in Effective Speaking, but instead you decide to work on your fanfic.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“We can’t tell Marinette,” Riposte said softly after removing her helmet. She held her helmet under her arm and stared Nino down firmly, her mask still firmly in place. Rose had brought Luka his suit and he was listening to the conversation with half an ear while he suited up.

“Ladybug is his best chance of getting out safely,” Nino hissed in return. He seemed agitated and pissed off, which made sense considering his best friend was being held captive by some crime lord that had just attacked Luka and Marinette, forcing them to get a rescue by Riposte.

“Actually, she’s his worst chance. The second he has her in his grasp, your friend is dead. I know how Martin Anders works and he’s done shit like this before. Your friend will be used as bait and once he gets what he wants, he disposes of the baggage,” Riposte stated coldly. “I’m sorry, but that’s the truth of the situation. If you want to save your friend, we need to go in quietly and quickly.”

“In broad daylight?” Luka asked, grabbing his mask. “I know it’s been a few years Riposte, but we’re wanted criminals here. The second we get spotted, we’re going to have the police all over us. Wouldn’t it be best to wait until night?”

“He’ll be expecting a rescue attack at night. And the longer this Chat Noir guy is there, the more beat up he’s going to get. Trust me on this one, it’s best to move now during the day while we have the upper hand.”

“How are we supposed to keep Marinette from figuring this out? I think she’d notice Riposte and Viperion just walking out in full gear in broad daylight while Carapace works tirelessly over his computer,” Luka pointed out. Riposte gave a chuckle.

“That’s what we have the tunnels for.” Luka suppressed a groan.

“The second she finds us missing, she’s going to be pissed.”

“I’ll keep her preoccupied,” Alya stated, walking into the room. She and Nino made it a point to not look at each other. Made Luka want to bash their heads together and yell at them to just sit down and talk already. “She won’t even know you’re gone.” Luka shrugged and put on his mask.

“What are we waiting for then? Let’s get the kitty back,” Viperion said.

~ ~ ~

Adrien spat out onto the floor, his stomach churning from the pain. Nausea threatened to overtake him and he was constantly swallowing back warm saliva. *This will be a bit harder to hide.*
“Why are you even working for Anders?” he asked his guard, who was standing there silently. Martin Anders had beaten the absolute shit out of Adrien, then made the video while the younger man was half-out of it from the pain. Adrien couldn’t see out of his left eye from how swollen it was and there was a cut above his right eye that kept bleeding down. The only saving grace was that because they threw water on him at the start, his black makeup had streaked down his face, effectively hiding his identity just as well. But the contacts felt like daggers in his eyes.

“Shut up,” the guard said gruffly. Adrien spat again and wiggled his fingers, trying to get feeling to return to them. When he came to, he’d lost feeling in both his hands. That was a bit worrying.

“You can talk to me, it’s alright. Not like I’m gonna take Anders out for a beer later and tell him all about what you said.” Adrien gave a hollow laugh, wincing at the pain of that action. He was pretty sure that his ribs were bruised at the least, broken at the most. The guard remained silent, but he shifted slightly. “Man, he must have some serious dirt on you. I can’t imagine any other reason why you’d be working for him. You don’t seem like the type of guy to do it all for money and I highly doubt he inspires loyalty.”

“He kidnapped my sister,” the guard blurted out. “If I want to see her alive again, I have to pay off her debts to him. So I work them off.” Adrien gave him a look of sympathy, or as best he could manage with a busted to shit face.

“I’m sorry. I can’t even begin to imagine how difficult that must be. What’s your sister like?” The guard sighed and rubbed his head.

“She’s a bitch. But she’s still my sister, you know? She wanted to rebel against our parents, started doing drugs, hanging out with the wrong crowd. Eventually, she was addicted to cocaine. I tried to help her get clean, but it was like she didn’t want to. She ended up working with her boyfriend to steal a bunch of cocaine from Mr. Anders and got caught. Her boyfriend ended up dead and she begged for forgiveness. He told her if she could pay it back, he’d let her live.” The guard scowled, dark eyes flashing. “She told him that I would be able to pay it off for her. Ignoring the fact that I have my own family to feed. But I couldn’t just let her die.”

“What does he make you do?” The guard gestured around.

“Just this. Guard work. Usually, all I do is guard his workers at his packaging plant, but after that Marinette girl blasted through his people, he was short-staffed. So I was made to come with him. I just hope my family’s okay.” The wheels began to turn in Adrien’s head, as painful as thinking was.

“I’m sorry, I never asked your name.” The guard gave a slight smile.

“It’s Jim.”

“Hey Jim, I’m Samuel. But you can call me Sam. Tell me about your family.” Jim grinned.

“My wife is amazing. I met her when she brought her car into my garage three years ago. She wasn’t used to driving on our dirt roads and managed to royally mess up her car. She’s strong, independent, and everything I could ever want from a woman. We married after six months and last year she gave birth to our daughter, who is my pride and joy.”

“Does your wife know about… All this?” Jim nodded.

“We tell each other everything. She allowed me to do this on the condition that I stay safe and come home every night.” Jim suddenly frowned. “I feel like shit for breaking that promise, but I didn’t have a choice in coming here. I’m just glad she’s... on vacation with a friend of hers at the moment,
“so she doesn’t know enough to worry.” Open and honest communication. But odd hesitation.

“If she’s on vacation, where’s your daughter?”

“With my parents. They promised to look after her if anything happened to… To me.” There was something about the way Jim said that, the way he hesitated, that made Adrien consider his words. He wanted to push, but he knew better than to. He needed to remain on Jim’s good side and that wouldn’t happen if he was constantly pushing for more information. Jim would clamp down and Adrien’s chances would go down the drain.

“Sorry for mocking you earlier Jim. Sarcasm and humor is my defense in stressful situations,” Adrien apologized, opening and closing his hands. Jim let out a chuckle.

“I understand. I’m sorry I can’t do anything to help you, but…”

“I get it, no worries. Could you at least loosen the ropes around my wrists? I’ve lost feeling in my hands and in the rare case that I get out of this alive, I’d like to be able to use them in the future.” Jim nodded and walked over to Adrien. In a movie, this would be where Adrien attacked and managed to break free. But this wasn’t a movie. Instead, he just sighed in relief as the ropes loosened and blood rushed to his fingertips. It hurt at first, but then it was just relief. Jim returned to his spot off to the side.

“So tell me about your daughter Jim…”

~ ~ ~

Marinette’s phone buzzed with an email from an unknown address as she and Alya were doing some target practice. Marinette frowned at the flashing screen and stepped out of the room, pulling up the email. It was blank with only a video attachment. She played the video.

“Hello, my dear. Sorry to do things this way, but I wasn’t quite satisfied with our last conversation. I’m really going to need you to come to me on my terms so we can discuss your moving to Brazil with me,” Martin Anders said into the camera. “And to sweeten my deal, I caught this annoying creature.” The camera panned over to show Chat Noir tied to a chair, mask off. Marinette let out an involuntary scream and covered her mouth.

Chat was beaten badly, one of his eyes swollen. The other had blood dripping into it. His lip was split and he looked dazed. Bloody saliva dripped from the corner of his mouth. He couldn’t keep his eyes open. His face was a disaster of blood and black makeup streaked down from around his eyes. His leg was bleeding too and the way he was hunched over suggested he’d taken a few body shots. The camera panned back to Martin, who was cleaning bloody knuckles.

“It’s sad business, really. He wasn’t supposed to be this hurt during the video. In fact, he was supposed to do the talking. But he just would not shut up and kept refusing to do the video, no matter how many times I hit him. A shame, but things happen. If you want to see the thief alive again, then you’ll come to the coordinates I send. Alone. Unarmed. With no jewelry. If I find that you’ve broken any of these conditions, I’ll have him killed on camera. I hope we understand each other.” The video cut off.

Marinette mentally shuttered into Ladybug and emotion left her face. She straightened and headed directly for the weapon’s stash. You threaten what is mine. I’ll take everything that is yours. Alya was still in the gun range. She likely hadn’t noticed Marinette even left the room. Good. Her phone buzzed again from the same email, sending her coordinates. She sniffed and grabbed the gadget Tikki had been trying to work on for the past year, but hadn’t been able to figure out the exact
Tikki had been inspired by a popular video game series relating to assassins and decided to try her hand at making the glove. Unfortunately, she struggled to get it as thin as she wanted it to be. The device was meant to look like a normal glove with a hidden blade inside. Tikki wanted some of the lower ranked assassins in the organization a chance to flex their skills and work with blending in. At least, that’s what she claimed. Marinette figured it was just because Tikki completely geeked out over the franchise and had to make it.

Currently, the glove was having some issues extending easily with how slim Tikki managed to get it. And it still wasn’t slim enough. It was too bulky and easily seen unless worn under something like a coat or a jacket. Because of its size, the blade rested way too close to the skin and fingers. This ran the risk of losing a finger when attempting to activate the spring lock. An easy solution would be to elevate the blade away from the wrist, but then it wouldn’t fulfill Tikki’s requirement of being slim enough. Marinette couldn’t even swap the positioning of the blade to sit on top of her wrist vice under it because of how the spring lock worked.

In order to make it work without injury, the user needed luck and a shit load of courage. Marinette had the luck, she had the courage, and she was pissed off. She pulled the glove onto her hand and took a deep breath. She pulled her wrist back slowly and the blade sprung out.

Adrien’s head jerked up as a window broke. Jim jerked and moved closer to Adrien, drawing his gun. A grenade was tossed into the room, but it didn’t look right. Instead of being round, it was more of a cylinder shape. Adrien had maybe half a second to stare at it in confusion before it burst in a flash of bright light, blinding him. There was a ringing in his ear and he felt dizzy. The world seemed to slow down around him.

“Don’t kill him!” Adrien attempted to shout. He couldn’t hear his own voice. That was odd. “Don’t kill him!” Hands gripped Adrien’s wrists and he was free. The hands began working on his ankles. “Don’t kill him.” His vision cleared, but the ringing remained and he shook his head, trying to clear it. Viperion got his legs free and helped him out of the chair. He was yelling at someone else, but Adrien couldn’t make out what he was saying. Viperion began carrying Adrien out of the warehouse and into the blinding light of the sun, heading towards a familiar black car.

Viperion carefully placed Adrien in the car, laying down in the back seat, and moved to head back into the warehouse. Adrien grabbed his wrist, pulling the assassin’s attention back towards him. He swallowed and shook his head. The ringing was finally starting to lessen.

“Don’t kill him, and get my mask,” he pleaded. Viperion gave a scowl to let Adrien know exactly how he felt about that but nodded in the end. Adrien let him go. Plagg was tapping his thumbs on the wheel nervously. Not that Adrien could hear it, but because he knew that’s what Plagg did. He didn’t like waiting. He liked moving.

Finally, Viperion and someone in full riot gear got in the car and Plagg put it in drive. Viperion started to feel around Adrien’s torso for injuries, causing the thief to wince and curse at his friend. Viperion shook his head.

“I hate to say this… But you need a doctor. A real doctor. We have no idea of the extent of your injuries and no way to treat anything internal,” Viperion said carefully. Plagg suddenly changed course on a dime, causing Adrien’s stomach to rebel.

“We know someone,” Plagg stated simply. The woman was silent, just glancing back at Adrien with
a curious expression, then turning her attention back to Plagg, then back to Adrien. There was something about her eyes that were hauntingly familiar to Adrien, yet not. He couldn’t see her face, but the way she looked at him made him uncomfortable. As if she’d just figured out his identity despite the disaster that was his face. Plagg’s words suddenly registered to Adrien.

“We cannot take them there Plagg!” he shouted. Plagg ignored him and shifted gears.

“If we don’t get you there as soon as possible, she will stab me in the throat and you know it,” Plagg countered. “You weren’t there for the lecture she gave me when you were shot.” Adrien winced.

“If this is about your identity, don’t worry,” the woman said suddenly. There was something about her voice that just… Felt familiar. Not her voice itself, but the way she spoke and the mannerism she used. But Adrien couldn’t remember where he’d heard it.

“And I already know your identity,” Viperion pitched in. That wasn’t what Adrien was worried about. He was worried about her reaction towards the assassins. Nathalie knew he’d been hiding something, but he highly doubted she knew he’d been hiding this. She made her straight-faced jokes but if she knew he was in any way involved with the assassins of Europe, she’d have locked him in a room and thrown away the key.

Plagg screeched through the streets of Paris while the woman continued to study Adrien as if he were a science experiment.

“You lost the battle because you hesitated,” she said suddenly. Plagg jerked the wheel out of shock and Adrien jerked, trying to sit up. His body rebelled, causing him to wince in pain and lay his happy ass right back down. She nodded and turned back around. “Thought so.”

“Okay, what the hell did I just miss?” Viperion asked, frowning. Adrien stared at the back of her head in shock.

“An old lesson,” he finally said, blinking his one good eye. “How did you figure it out? How did you become… This?” She took off her helmet and shook out her short black hair, leaving her mask up.

“We knew each other in high school, Adrien. How many blonde friends can Plagg truly have that put up with his… Everything?” she asked, the corner of her eyes crinkling in such a way to reveal she was grinning. He remembered that grin. The way it made his heart pound in his chest in high school.

“I have lots of blonde friends thank you very much!” Plagg complained. She cast him a sidelong look.

“Name two.”

“Adrien and…”

“Rose,” Viperion supplied helpfully.

“Rose! Adrien and Rose.” She shook her head and laughed lightly. It was a common thing they did back in the day, teasing each other. Talk about a blast from the past.

“So, I’m going to assume that you guys know each other,” Viperion said carefully. Adrien nodded, still staring at her in amazement. She always did joke that one day she’d have to save his life.

“We went to high school together,” she said. “We were fencing partners. Which makes the fact that
you were kidnapped that much worse. Did you learn nothing from Sensei?"

“Not my fault. A guy jumped in mid-fight and stabbed my leg. Didn’t realize he was there.”

“And when you were kidnapped by Viperion and Ladybug?”

“He was actually holding back during that fight,” Viperion cut in. “Ladybug and I could both tell. Plus, his side gave out. If he didn’t hold back, we’d’ve been fucked. Which would’ve been embarrassing for two highly trained assassins to get the shit beat out of us by a kitten.” Adrien flipped him off.

“So how are you this now?” Adrien asked softly. “Last I heard, you joined BRI. What happened?”

She gave a shake of her head and tapped the side of her nose, passing a wink back towards him.

“Later, we’re here. But call me Riposte for now.” Sure enough, Plagg pulled the car into the garage and let out a shaky breath as the garage door shut behind the car.

“She’s going to kill me, I just know it. Somehow, she is pinning all of this on me,” he said with certainty. Adrien gave a pained grin as Viperion helped him up and out of the car.

“Let’s be real Plagg, she’s going to kill me. Then maybe kill you. Nino’s the only one who’s safe.” Viperion gave a laugh.

“I think I’m going to like this woman. Also, Nino’s already on his way. I forgot you couldn’t hear him over the comm system without a comm.” Adrien would have flipped him off again, but he was too busy struggling to get from the car to the side door where Plagg and Riposte were waiting. Plagg knocked on the door and they waited. After a couple seconds, Nathalie opened the door and stared at the four of them with a stern expression.

Her lips tightened slightly as her eyes took in Riposte, Viperion, and Adrien’s appearance. She sucked in a breath through her nose and Adrien could feel the disappointment coming off her in waves. She shook her head and stepped aside, holding the door open for them. Plagg hurried in, ducking his head low. Riposte gave Nathalie a nod and followed after Plagg. Viperion cast Nathalie a grin while Adrien gave her what he hoped was a reassuring smile. She shut the door behind them and locked it.

“Plagg, get me my cellphone from my office. Woman, grab some towels from under the sink in the kitchen. Man, place the idiot on the kitchen table. Gently,” Nathalie commanded. Ouch, idiot? Viperion choked back a laugh and helped Adrien up onto the table, laying him down as gently as able.

“I’m Riposte,” Riposte attempted. She was ignored too. Nathalie walked over to the table with the bowl and set it beside Adrien’s head, accepting the towels and phone that were brought to her. She sent a quick text to someone and dunked the towels in the water, wringing them out before carefully starting to clean up Adrien’s face. He winced with each pass of the towel.

“I’m okay,” he promised gently. “It looks worse than it is.” Nathalie blinked past the shine in her eyes and gave him a hard stare.

“You’re not allowed to talk right now, am I understood? First, your father dies, then you stumble to my doorstep looking like this. Need I remind you that you were shot three months ago? And this is why. You promised me that you would only be stealing things! Instead, you’re running around with
assassins!” she shouted. Riposte and Viperion shifted uncomfortably. Plagg stood off to the side and spoke to someone on his phone softly, yet urgently.

“This isn’t their fault. Not really. I made some stupid mistakes, it’s all on me,” Adrien told her, reaching up to grasp her wrist in his hand. He frowned. “I’m not… I’m not involved in their organization. I just happened to get mixed up in it three months ago. A series of events made it impossible to avoid, which stemmed from a misstep I made. If I hadn’t gotten mixed up with them, I’d be dead now. So please, don’t blame them. They’ve saved my life… Three times and counting.” He didn’t feel the need to mention the second time was Viperion saving him from the organization. Or that it was Ladybug trying to kill him in the first place.

Nathalie sighed and shook her head at him, dipping the towel back into the water and going back to cleaning Adrien’s face. “Trix will be here soon mon fils. Hold still while I clean you up.” There wasn’t a more effective way for Nathalie to slam the door on a conversation than that. Though Adrien didn’t miss the way Viperion and Riposte exchanged a glance.

“Um, guys?” Plagg said softly. “We kind of have a situation back at the warehouse.” Four sets of eyes landed on Plagg. He swallowed stiffly. “Al—err, Rena just called. Ladybug is missing.”

~ ~ ~

Marinette pulled the jacket tighter around her as the boat cut through the water. She ignored Martin Anders’ eyes on her. Her fingers reached up to rub her cat charm before remembering that she’d taken it off and left it behind at the warehouse. She just needed a chance. A single chance. This was hard to come by with Anders watching her every move and his guards standing suffocatingly close.


“As I’m certain you drugged it, no.” He shrugged and poured himself a glass. “Where’s Chat?”

“Around. Don’t worry, he’s being properly taken care of.” There was something about the way he said those words that made Marinette feel the need to hurry this along. The sooner she killed him, the safer everyone would be. Time to hurry this up.

“Why are you even doing this?” she demanded. “Why me? Why not someone who actually wants to be here? You’re a rich guy, I’m certain you could attract someone dumb enough to fall for your bullshit.” Anders scowled and Marinette smirked. It felt good knowing she could still push his buttons, even trapped as she was.

“Because you were promised to me. I paid for you. Now I’m collecting on my payment.” He smoothed his face over with some effort and took a sip of wine. “I’m not this monster you seem to think I am, Marinette. I’m simply a man doing his best to live up to his older brother’s legacy.” She rolled her eyes.

“Oh great. Instead of mommy or daddy issues, you have big brother issues.” He slammed his fist down on the table. She didn’t jump.

“My brother was a great man you little bitch,” he snarled. “Watch how you speak of him or I’ll remove your tongue myself.” She gave him a dispassionate blink.

“I’m so scared. Do you think you’re the first person who’s threatened to cut out my tongue? You’re not. And you won’t be the last.”

“Your attitude is starting to get on my last nerve girl.” Then come over here and make me shut up you fucking psycho prick.
“If you don’t like my attitude, then why even bother chasing me to Paris? Seems you’re spending more time and money than I’m worth. Bit of a waste just for someone to warm your sheets at night. You know hookers exist, yeah? They’re much cheaper.” Anders gave her a steady look, staring into her eyes without so much as a blink.

“But then I’d lose. I’d much rather have the satisfaction of breaking you to my will. What’s the point in all my money if I can’t spend it? And on the off-chance that I can’t break you to my will, then I’ll at least have the pleasure in watching the life fade from your eyes.” For once, Marinette didn’t have a witty response. There was something about the way he said it that made Marinette… Scared. Scared for her own life. *I should have shot first and asked questions later as Ladybug,* she realized. As she came to that realization, something else hit her.

“Let Chat go now. You have me. You don’t need him.” Anders gave her a cruel smile and gestured with his glass of wine, glancing pointedly at his watch.

“At this point, he’s already free… In a sense. You do make a valid point, I have no use for hostages now that I have you in my grasp. He outlived his usefulness. It turns out that cats really don’t like water after all. Who knew?”

Marinette’s world stopped turning at that revelation. Her lips parted in shock. Blood roared in her ears. The entirety of her attention was focused on a single fact. *Chaton is… Dead?* She felt brittle, weak, empty. Like the wind could blow her over and she’d shatter. She dragged him into this life. She brought that beautiful soul into this life. And now he was *dead.* It was her fault. All her fault. She might as well have been the one to pull the trigger herself. *I should have let him go. I should have just let Martin have me in Brazil. I should have never allowed Chaton to stay. I should have… I should have… I should have killed Martin when I had the chance.*

Even if she fought now and got free again, who would be the next to suffer? Would he kill Luka, her darling snake? Perhaps Chloe, her precious bee? Alya and Tikki, her best friends? Nooroo, the best surrogate father she could ask for? Who would be the next to suffer and die because of her actions? *Do I fight or do I die Chaton? I can’t put anyone else at risk, but at least if I fight… I can take him with me.* A fitting end for a heartless murderer. Killed as she took revenge on the man who made the world a darker place. Her decision filled her with peace. *I’ll see you soon Chaton.*

~ ~ ~

**Chapter End Notes**

I look forward to the shouts of outrage in the comments. They're my lifeblood. Don't let me down guys.
Chapter Summary

Some insight into the relationship between Nathalie and Adrien

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“No internal bleeding. The ribs are just bruised, should heal fully in a couple of days. I’m a bit concerned by how hard you were hit down here.” Fingers prodded a sore spot on Adrien’s lower back and he hissed in pain. “But it seems fine for the most part. Do try not to sustain further injuries. The hospital is going to start wondering where all their medical supplies are going eventually.” Trixx stepped back and pulled her gloves off, tossing them in the trash. Nathalie handed Trixx a roll of cash.

“Thank you Trixx. We appreciate this, as well as your silence,” Nathalie said with a certain air of professionalism that Adrien could never hope to mimic. Trixx smiled and nodded.

“Of course. What are old friends for?” Nathalie led Trixx to the door while Viperion stared after the two with a furrowed brow. Plagg was taking Riposte over to Marinette’s place to meet up with Alya, certain that Marinette had realized the two assassins were missing and deciding to change into Ladybug to find them and chew them the fuck out. Riposte promised to keep Adrien’s injuries on the down-low until he could be moved out of Nathalie’s house and to Plagg’s apartment, where Marinette could find him with his mask and chew him out. It was odd, looking forward to a lecture from Marinette. Of course, just an hour ago I was certain I was never seeing her again. Nino had turned around and was headed back to the warehouse so he could try hacking Marinette’s phone to get her location, considering Tikki was at work.

“So what’s the story there Agreste? Isn’t Nathalie your dad’s old assistant?” Viperion asked. Adrien gave a pained laugh, hand moving to his ribs.

“Yeah. His old assistant and an almost mother figure to me. She’s always been there for us, even before Mom died. After Mom died, Nathalie took up the mantle of keeping us in one piece. When my dad tried to keep me from going to high school, Nathalie reigned him in. When I would have nightmares about Mom, Nathalie was there to hug me and sing me to sleep. Even after Dad’s diagnosis, when we couldn’t pay her anymore, she still stuck around. She’s loyal as hell and would do anything for us.” Adrien swallowed stiffly and corrected himself. “I guess just for me now.” When will it stop hurting so much?

“But she knows all about your Chat Noir life?” Viperion seemed interested.

“Yeah. She’s the one who found the designer to make my Chat Noir suit. I promised her I’d only be stealing things and wouldn’t be in any danger.” He winced. “She said she would allow me to do it only because she could see it in my eyes, could see that I had to. Whenever I got banged up from a job, I’d come here. Depending on the nature of the injury, she’d either tend to it herself or call in Trixx. When I started getting scarred up, back when I still had jobs as a model, she’d cover my scars with makeup. She’s the one who did it for the fashion show.”
“What does she do for a living? Also, if she’s who you go to when you get banged up, why’d you have to search for a private doctor when you were shot?” So many questions...

“For starters, I didn’t want her to know I’d been shot in the first place. I was worried she’d pull the plug on everything. She terrifies Plagg and Nino. I think they view her as a form of Momma Bear. They avoided asking her for help until the last minute, where she proceeded to chew them out for not immediately calling her from what I hear. As for her job, she is currently a manager of a bank, but she flips around constantly like nothing seems to really fit right anymore. Once I pull off another job, I’ll probably send her enough money to retire.”

“And she knows Trixx…” That wasn’t a question. What am I missing here? Adrien looked over Viperion’s demeanor, the interested look in his eyes, the way he was sitting, the direction of his feet, how his hands were positioned, where he was looking, the tone of voice he used when talking. Viperion was deep in thought, but Adrien wasn’t sure what exactly those thoughts pertained to. Perhaps he, as an assassin who holds his identity as sacred as the holy grail, finds it odd that I started Chat Noir with five people who knew my identity.

“Hey, you know the second I get healed up we’re having our next session, right?” Adrien asked with amusement. “Just because we had to push it back some with everything that’s happened, don’t think I forgot.” Viperion glanced over at Adrien with a smirk.

“I’d be disappointed if you did forget.” Viperion fell silent, then glanced back in the direction Nathalie and Trixx went. “She calls you mon fils? My son?” Adrien flinched slightly. He took a deep breath, trying to formulate his thoughts into words without being misunderstood.

“Nathalie’s always been there for me like I said. So I’ve always been there for her. Like the day when she was informed that she couldn’t have children.” The painful memory smacked into Adrien and he glanced away from Viperion, shutting his good eye. “And when she got into a bad car accident.” Another painful memory he forced himself to shake off. “And when her parents passed away.” So many bad memories that just seemed to keep piling up. “When I was in high school, my dad had papers drawn up to make Nathalie my legal guardian and officially my adoptive mother. He said he didn’t want us to be alone in the event anything were to happen to him.” Viperion stepped closer and gently squeezed Adrien’s shoulder. “She only calls me mon fils when she’s really worked up. After my dad died, she constantly called me that. When I was shot, she called me that. When I decided to become Chat Noir, she called me that. And when dad got his diagnosis, she called me that. It’s our special thing.” He gave a brief smile. “She also calls me that when she’s disappointed in me. I can usually tell based on the tone of her voice.”

“You guys have an amazing relationship together,” Viperion said gently. “I didn’t… Such a close bond with someone who you’re not related to by blood and aren’t involved with romantically… I didn’t think such a thing was possible.” Adrien gave him a weird look.

“But don’t you have that with Rose?” Viperion jerked and thought it over, a slow smile spreading across his face.

“Yeah, I guess I do. She’s slipped up when I stumble home bleeding and injured, yelling that she can’t lose her frère. I guess it just… Went right over my head on how close she and I are.”

Their conversation was cut short when Nathalie walked back into the dining room. The woman’s eyes passed over the two of them and something softened in her. She walked over to Adrien and bent over, kissing his forehead before pressing the back of her hand over his forehead to check his temperature.

“You don’t have a fever. Viperion, help me get him to the bedroom. I’m certain he’d rather be laying
on a bed over a table,” she commanded gently. Viperion nodded and the two worked together to carefully lift Adrien from the table. Adrien only winced a couple times as they made their way through the house to Adrien’s room. They helped him onto the bed and he sighed in ecstasy at the soft mattress.

“I’ll grab an ice pack for your eye,” Viperion offered, stepping out and leaving Adrien alone with Nathalie. Nathalie brushed Adrien’s hair out of his face, sitting beside him on the bed.

“Have you made your decision yet mon fils?” she asked softly. Adrien nodded.

“I have, but I don’t think you’re going to approve of it,” he admitted. She laughed softly.

“I told you before. I will support your decision, whatever it may be. You don’t need my approval for this, it’s your life.”

“I may not need it, but I’d like it.” Nathalie grasped his hand tightly and gave him a smile.

“No matter what you choose, I will not love you any less. And if you’re making the best decision for you, then who am I to deny you approval? I’ll always be here for you, I will always support you. So don’t you ever think otherwise.” Adrien nodded and released a breath.

“I’m not going to stop. There’s something about being Chat Noir that feels so free. It’s like another side of me comes out. Someone I can’t hope to be as Adrien. When I put on the mask, it’s like another side of me comes out and is set free, someone who’s usually contained.” He smiled. “And something Viperion told me before just stuck with me. Life is all about checks and balances. Because of what he does as Viperion, he balances it out by doing as much good in his civilian life. I want to do something similar. Chat Noir has never stolen for himself before, so why should he start now? Hell, the one time I do try to steal for myself, everything goes to shit.”

Nathalie considered him, considered his words. She rubbed her thumb across his knuckles and gave him a smile, nodding with tears in her eyes. “I’m so proud of you mon fils.” Then she gave a watery laugh and pretended to glare at him. “But stop coming to me with all these injuries. My skills with a makeup brush only go so far.” Adrien laughed with her and accepted her careful hug, a feeling of warmth spreading through his chest.

Viperion came back with an ice pack and handed it to Adrien, who placed it over his swollen eye. The assassin was grinning. “Nino managed to hack into Ladybug’s phone. He said he was going over her files as we spoke. Never thought I’d be so happy that you have a better hacker than we do.” Adrien gave a laugh, relief flooding through him. Marinette would be pissed, but she’d be found soon.

“Did Plagg, Rena, and Riposte find anything at her place?” Viperion shook his head.

“No, her suit’s still there. But that doesn’t mean anything. It is still daylight outside. She’s probably just searching around in civilian form.” Nathalie gazed at Adrien’s face with a knowing look and raised a single brow.

“So is Ladybug this mystery woman you’ve been having difficulties with Adrien?” she asked. “The one that you said you couldn’t tell me anything about? Who didn’t want you to remove the mask and show her behind the Chat Noir persona?” Adrien turned bright red.

“Um. Maybe?” Viperion started laughing his ass off, clutching his side and doubling over. At Adrien’s glare, he straightened and pretended to wipe away a tear.

“The suave ladies man talking about difficulties with a woman? Oh, this is much too good. Nathalie,
darling, please tell me more,” he begged. She smirked evilly. Adrien gave her a pleading look, which she promptly ignored.

“Where. To. Start?” she said dramatically, placing an emphasis on each word. Adrien groaned and covered his eyes. Why are you giving the snake ammo to use against me?

~ ~ ~

Marinette brushed her fingers over her bare neck and stared at the wall. But I had so much to tell you Chaton. Instead, I let you walk away. She brushed away a couple tears. What could we have been? Would we have been like a wildfire? Burning fast, leaving destruction in our path before sputtering out? Or maybe like a fireplace, warming each other from inside. Keeping the other from freezing to death? That was the worst part, she felt. Never knowing what could have happened in the future. Never knowing who he was. He’s a psychologist. Her breath hitched and she mentally corrected herself. No, he was a psychologist.

“I can’t reveal all my secrets Purrincess. Where would be the fun in that?” My heart fluttered.

“But you know all my secrets, I feel you have an unfair advantage over me,” I whispered. His smirk returned and he leaned down close.

“All your secrets? I’m certain I’m missing one or two.” His lips met mine and I kissed him eagerly. All rational thought fled my mind as he controlled the kiss with ease. No, I could never kill my Chaton. Code be damned, I just couldn’t. It would be like killing Chloe.

And then not long after.

“I’m the one who kept trying to kill you and you’re apologizing to me?” I asked sadly.

“I get that freedom when I wear the mask too. Civilian me has so many responsibilities. Being Chat lets me give up those responsibilities. Chat allows me to forget everything that’s on the line. I can let go, pretend my life isn’t falling apart around me. I can be me. I don’t have to watch my words. I can just act like I want to. So yes. I’m sorry I took away your freedom.”

“Silly kitty,” I whispered, turning my face up towards his. “I made it my own prison when I decided I needed to kill you.”

This time when our lips met, it wasn’t slow and measured. It was fast and desperate. We let our emotions flow freely between one other, electricity crackling between us. Everything else in the world stopped seeming to matter. It was just me and him. Us together.

Their first meeting.

“Tell you what Purrincess. You give me a kiss and I’ll give you enough time to say your sweet goodbyes to the jewels,” he said lowly. My heart beat hard against my chest and I could feel my cheeks starting to heat under his intense gaze. He looked at me like I was the only woman in the world. It took everything in me to turn my hands in order to carefully place the tracker against his outer bicep. I could’ve pushed him away then, but I didn’t want to. I wanted to kiss him. I wanted to know what his lips would feel like pressed against mine. I wanted him.

Later that night.

I watched Chat spin around in a circle, talking to someone who wasn’t there. He has friends, I thought to myself. I aimed up the shot... And hesitated. My finger moved off the trigger for a second as my lips burned with the feeling of his kiss. I shook my head and cleared my throat, aiming the
shot again. Without giving myself a chance to think, I pulled the trigger just as he moved out of the way. I swore and tossed the strap of my rifle over my shoulder, leaping across to the building he’d been residing on. I watched him leap between two buildings, barely holding onto the ledge, and swiftly pulled my rifle up. I fired just as he managed to find purchase and drag himself to safety.

The damned cat is going to make me work for it, I thought, making the same leap after him. I cleared it easily and watched him start down a fire escape. I hurried over to the edge of the building and aimed downwards, firing where he was going to be. But the damned kitty jumped over the edge of the fire escape. I swore softly and quickly readjusted my aim, firing towards him as he turned the corner. The bullet hit the corner of the building and then all the odds were against me. I managed to fire twice at the car before giving up. I could only scowl as the car sped out of range.

Marinette pressed her hand over her heart and shoved away a few more tears, her eyes falling to the glove covering her right hand. She just needed one chance. One shot. She pulled her wrist back in one sharp movement. The blade sprung out, narrowly missing her fingers.

~ ~ ~

Adrien, Nathalie, and Viperion were laughing over some stupid story Nathalie told about one of Adrien’s first photo shoots when Nino rushed into the room with his laptop. Rena Rouge, Riposte, and Plagg were trailing behind them. Adrien quickly sat up at the sight of Rena, eye widening. She stumbled backward in shock at seeing Adrien, her lips parting with surprise. Riposte scowled and snapped her fingers in Rena’s face.

“Now is not the time,” she snapped, gesturing to Nino. Something’s not right. Nino and Plagg would never just reveal Adrien’s identity like this unless it was an emergency. Nino spun his laptop around to show the three a paused video. He hit play.

Adrien's stomach churned at the sight of his own freshly beaten face. In the video, he was clearly out of it. Martin Anders was saying something, but Adrien wasn’t paying attention. That's how I looked? I looked half-dead… His head jerked up to stare at Nino.

“Where did you find this video?” he demanded. Nino glanced away and paused the video, closing his laptop.

“I found it in the files on Ladybug’s phone. She received this video five minutes before Riposte and Viperion got you out of the warehouse from an unknown email address. A few seconds later, a set of coordinates came in from the same email address. I tracked the coordinates to some pier. Security feed shows her getting on a boat and the boat pulling away from the pier.” Adrien was stunned.

“She gave herself over to him?!” Viperion shouted, standing suddenly. Everyone started talking over each other, but Adrien wasn’t paying attention. His hand reached out and he grabbed his Chat mask, forcing himself to sit up. He swung his legs over the side of the bed, ignoring everything going on around him. Someone tried to grab his arm, but he shook them off. Hand braced against the wall, he forced himself to stand. He pushed past everyone as he moved forward, walking out of the room.

In the bathroom, he grabbed his mask adhesive, black makeup, and the oxycodone Trixx had brought him from when he’d been shot. He took one of the small white pills and began spreading the black makeup over his eyes, ignoring the pain. Once his eyes were sufficiently covered, he applied the adhesive to the back of his mask and took a deep breath, steeling himself. Then he firmly pressed the mask over his face, gritting his teeth as his fingers pressed against his swollen eye.

“Adrien, what are you doing?” Viperion demanded, grabbing his arm. Chat jerked away and turned a glare onto his friend.
“You didn’t tell her. Because you didn’t fucking tell her, she thinks he has me still! Who knows what the fuck he’s told her now?!” he shouted. “So while you guys argue back and forth, I’m going to go get her back.”

“We don’t even know where she is,” Viperion snapped. “So sit the fuck down and let us handle this.” Chat shook his head.

“You didn’t talk to that fucking asshole. You don’t understand what he’s capable of, what he’s most likely doing to her right now. What do you think she’d do if he told her that he killed me? Or that he was torturing me?” Chat countered. Viperion fell silent for a moment.

“… She’d try to kill him.” Chat nodded firmly.

“Exactly. And then he’d kill her. So if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go save the woman I love. You can either join me or get the fuck out of my way.” He shoved past Viperion and walked out of the bathroom, coming face to face with Riposte. “Move.”

“I know how to find her,” she said simply. Chat narrowed his eyes.

“How?”

“Same way I knew that there would only be one guard on you. Same way I knew where to go to save Viperion and Ladybug beforehand. Same way I knew Ladybug needed help in Brazil. I have a man on the inside.”

~ ~ ~

“You need to eat,” the guard said gently. Marinette gave him a blank stare. He sighed and winced slightly, fingers lightly prodding at his broken nose. He gave Marinette a poor attempt at a grin. “This is a gift from your friend. The one dressed like a snake. He gave it to me when he sprung the cat guy out of the warehouse.” Marinette scowled and stood, giving the man her coldest look. He blinked and took a step back as she approached. She wanted to stab her blade into his neck, but she only had one shot and she needed to make sure it would be against Martin. Everything would fall apart if she struck too soon. But she’d remember this man. He was most likely the one who killed her Chaton.

“Don’t patronize me,” she snarled. “Take your drugged meal and get the hell out.” She lifted the tray of food and flung it at his face. He brought his hands up in defense and the tray hit his forearms. She turned and sat back down on the bed, staring at the floor. “Tell your boss that I’d rather starve than eat this shit.” The guard sighed and nodded, moving to leave the room. He hesitated at the door and gave her a tentative smile.

“If you change your mind, just call me. The name’s Jim by the way.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So I'm posting this one early because the next chapter ties into this one. Not that you guys will complain much about that lol.

So here I wanted to break things up in a particular way. First, I wanted everything to be relaxed. Everything feels fine. Adrien gives Viperion some background into what
Nathalie means to him and why she's doing this for him. But beyond the relaxed nature, there's still this air of "something is wrong." For all you loyal readers, you'll probably notice a familiar name I mentioned before. Trixx. Now, where did that name come up before? I mean, it was only like once, maybe twice, before. I'll forgive you for not remembering. ;3

Next, we have Marinette thinking back on her different interactions with Chat. I wrote it in an odd way on purpose because I wanted it to call attention to those periods in time. Those were huge moments for Marinette as a character. The beginning of her arc, and the end of her arc. Start and finish. Her remembering hammers home her grief over the thought of Chat being dead. (It also gives me an excuse to write that scene from the second chapter from Marinette's POV).

Then we have Adrien's reaction to hearing Marinette gave herself up to Martin Anders because of the video. He's angry. He's angry at himself for being caught, at Viperion for not telling Marinette the plan, at Alya for letting Marinette leave, he's just angry. Despite his injuries, he refuses to sit on the sidelines again. He needs to do something, even if he has nothing to go on. Which brings us to the twist at the end I may or may not have hinted at. ;3 Hope you enjoyed~
Three Years Ago

Kagami sighed as she drove the car into the small garage, wincing at the unhappy sound the engine was making. She’d taken a corner too fast and ended up in a ditch, unused to the dirt roads. And, of course, she still hadn’t found where the mansion was. The information her mother left her was sketchy at best, incomplete at worst. No one in this town seemed to want to help her either.

“That looks like it hurt,” the mechanic commented as she stepped out of the vehicle. She glanced up and watched the young man step out of an office, wiping oil off his hands with a rag. She gave a shrug and laughed lightly.

“I’m not used to your dirt roads here,” she explained briefly, glad her mother had pounded her with English lessons growing up. He rose a brow at her accent.

“You’re from France? What are you doing here in Brazil?” he inquired, leaning a hip against her car and tossing the rag over his shoulder. She took a moment to glance him over.

He was young, maybe twenty-four or twenty-five, with curly dark brown hair. He had dark brown eyes that seemed to dance with amusement over her predicament. His skin was dark as well, showing his clear Brazilian roots, and there was a nice bit of scruff on his jaw. He had about a foot on her 5’4” and that caused her to glance upwards at him. An odd change of pace, she usually looked down when men were standing before her. Of course, that would be after Riposte flashed them and shot out their knees.

“I’m here for work,” she replied, extending her hand towards him. “Kagami Tsurugi.” He grinned and took her hand, shaking it. His hand was rough and callused from physical labor, much like her own. Though likely from vastly different types of physical labor.

“Jeovanni Santos. But I go by Jim.” She nodded and gave him a smile. Her eyes flickered over to her car expectantly and he flushed slightly, dropping her hand and turning towards the sad looking vehicle. He cleared his throat. “Right, I’m assuming you want this guy fixed up.”

“You would be correct. About how long would it take for it to be done?” He gave her an odd look.

“Don’t you want an estimate first?” She laughed and shook her head.

“Money is of no concern. I heard you’re the best in the area and I just really need it fixed up fast. Work and all.” I need to find that son of a bitch and kill him. The sooner the better. Jim shrugged and popped the hood, glancing around at her engine. Her eyes swept over his form as he looked around. He was attractive, especially when he was bending over her car like that. It made her want to—Stop
“Well, you really did a number on your engine. This is going to take me a bit. I’m going to have to replace the majority of the engine and I don’t have the parts needed here, so I’ll have to order some in. I guess about a week, maybe more,” Jim finally reported, straightening from her car. Kagami bit back a groan of disappointment.

“No way to speed things up?” she inquired. He shook his head.

“Nope. If you need a car fast, you can probably trade this into Luiz down the street. He might cut you a good deal for it.” And abandon my baby? I’d rather die. Kagami huffed out a breath and shook her head.

“It’s fine, I’ll wait the week. Might as well enjoy what your country has to offer while I wait.” Jim rubbed his hands on his pants and tossed her a flirty smile.

“Well, if you’re free in an hour when I close up shop I wouldn’t mind taking you out to the local watering hole. Maria serves the best drinks around here, hands down.” Say no. This isn’t what you’re here for.

“Sure, that sounds nice.” What is wrong with you?

~ ~ ~

Five Months After

“Are you having any luck with your job?” Jim asked Kagami, wrapping his arms around her body. She curled up closer to him, feeling a pang of guilt. I’m not really lying to him, this is my job. Kind of. I’m just not telling him the whole truth of it.

“Not really. Things are at a stand-still at the moment.” He glanced down at her and cocked his head to the side.

“You know, in the five months you’ve been here, you’ve never told me what it is you actually do. I want to know everything about you Kagami.” To delay, she pulled his face down and kissed him firmly. She’d been struggling with the decision of whether or not to tell him for the past month. She was in love with this man, despite everything, and she wanted him to know her. All of her. If I lose him, then it’s something to learn for the future, she rationalized, pulling away from his lips and looking into his eyes.

“I’m a professional assassin,” she told him honestly. He immediately started laughing, shaking his head at her.

“Good one babe,” he chuckled out. She stood slowly and walked over to her closet where she ripped up the fake flooring she had installed when she arrived. His laughter faded. She pulled out one of her handguns and walked back over to the bed, swiftly taking it apart and laying all the pieces out onto the bed.

“I’m not joking…” She easily put everything back together and returned the gun to her bag before pulling out her helmet, hesitating for only a second before turning back around and showing it. “This is who I am, Jim. In Paris, I was known as Riposte.”

“How…?” He moved closer to her, hand outstretched. The three seconds he hesitated were the worst three seconds of her life. But then he brushed his fingers over her helmet and met her gaze. She could’ve sobbed in relief. His gaze had nothing but love and the want to understand.
“Family business. My grandfather was Riposte. Then my mother was Riposte when he retired. After she retired, I took up the mantle. My child will likely take up the name too. The Tsurugi family has a long history with it. We have strict outlines regarding what we do, but it doesn’t change what it is. We kill for honor, safety, and justice. What separates us from the average vigilante is that we get paid for our services. Each Riposte looks different, but we keep some aspects of our family name.”

“What aspects do you keep?”

“My foil. My family is filled with proud fencers. I have been fencing since I was five. Every Riposte carries a foil with them. It’s what we kill our targets with. My personal method is to blind the target, shoot out their legs, then finish them off with my foil.” Jim took her hand and brought it up to his lips, kissing the calluses on her fingers.

“I thought you were amazing before. Now I know you’re amazing,” he stated. “I was going to ask you to marry me tonight anyway, but I wanted to know if you’d trust me enough with your job before I asked. Why are you so perfect?” Kagami jerked her head back in shock.

“I’m not perfect. I kill people for a living.” He gave her a grin.

“You kill bad people and get paid. But you’re right, you’re not perfect. I mention wanting to marry you and you ignore that to discuss my question on your perfection.” She gave a laugh and moved her helmet aside so she could climb back onto the bed, sitting up on her knees and cupping his face in her hands. She kissed him long and slow, everything in her feeling light and airy. She loved this man so much it almost hurt. Everything made sense when he was around.

Finally, she pulled away from him and stared him in the eyes. “Of course I’ll marry you.”

~ ~ ~

About a Year Later, Give or Take

“Jim!” Kagami shouted from the bathroom, staring at the white stick in her hand. “Jim I swear to fuck if you don’t get in here I’m shooting you!” She heard him race through their small home, knocking over things on the way. He burst in through the door and stared at her in a panic, eyes falling to the white stick in her hand.

“I’m too scared to look at the result,” he admitted, turning around. “Just tell me.” Kagami grinned broadly and put the pregnancy test down, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing his jaw.

“Baby, I’m pregnant,” she told him, feeling so happy her heart was ready to burst. Jim whipped around and let out a happy laugh, lifting her in the air and spinning her around.

“Yes! I’m going to be a father!” he cheered. She laughed with him and the two shared a kiss that Jim abruptly jerked away from. “I’m going to be a father! I don’t know how to be a father!” Kagami giggled at his slight panic and held him close.

“Don’t worry lover. I have no idea how to be a mother either, but we’ll figure it out along the way. And I’m certain your parents are going to be here with us every step of the way,” she assured him.

He got down onto his knees and brushed his fingers over her flat stomach, making her smile. She brushed her fingers through his thick hair as he pressed his lips against her stomach. She pictured a beautiful baby boy with Jim’s curly brown hair and her honey-colored eyes. Or maybe a girl with her straight black hair and Jim’s gorgeous dark eyes. Would the baby have her nose or his? Her serious lips or his constant smirk? I wish you were here for this Mom.
Let’s Say… Eight Months Later

Someone knocked on the door and Kagami frowned. Jim was at work. His parents were busy. No one should be coming around at this hour. The knocking came again. Feeling a bit on edge, Kagami slowly stood, wrapping her hand protectively over her swollen stomach. She pulled a gun from the coffee table and slowly waddled over to the front door, bracing the hand holding the gun on the wall and opening the door slowly with her other hand.

“Is your husband home?” a man asked. She didn’t know this man and she knew everyone in town. She cocked her head to the side and considered him, her eyes passing over his figure. There. He was carrying a sidearm, hiding it with his shirt.

“Who’s asking?” she demanded. The man gave her a smirk.

“Martin Anders. Your husband has some debts he needs to pay.” Kagami narrowed her eyes. She knew for a fact that Jim had nothing to do with Martin Anders, despite having to take a leave of absence from her investigation due to her pregnancy.

“My husband owes Anders nothing. I think you need to leave,” she said sharply. Her hand tightened on the gun. Behind the man, her neighbor poked his head out of his door, eyes wide. He made a gesture to her that he was calling for help and she gave a slight shake of her head. The man in front of her pulled his gun out and pointed it at her.

“You know, I don’t really want to shoot a pregnant woman, but if you don’t step aside I will,” he threatened. Kagami gave a sniff of indifference and adjusted her aim against the wall, mentally mapping out where the bullet would hit.

“You know something? My neighbors adore me,” she commented. The man frowned in confusion. “So not only are they going to help me get rid of your body, but they’ll also cover for me.”

“Wha—” She pulled the trigger. The bullet blasted through her wall and made its way into the man’s skull, embedding itself deep within his brain. The sound was loud and deafening, and Kagami rubbed her hand over her stomach protectively. Her neighbor hurried outside, whistling sharply.

“Don’t worry sweetie, we’ll get this covered up,” he promised her. She gave him a grateful smile.

“Thank you, Victor. Lifting dead weight is such a pain while pregnant,” she complained. Maria, owner of the local bar and Kagami’s midwife, hurried over from next door. She tsked at the action and hurried Kagami back over to her couch.

“I told you to stay off your feet darling. I don’t know how Jim puts up with you not listening,” she scolded, taking the gun from Kagami, flipping the safety back on, and placing it back in the coffee table. Kagami laughed and sat with a sigh of relief, her ankles and feet throbbing.

“I don’t know how he puts up with it either. He’s a crazy man, that’s for certain.” Maria laughed and got Kagami a glass of water while the other neighbors got to work hiding the evidence of the shooting.

“Well, I’m glad he’s found someone who is willing to do whatever it takes to protect him and the little one.” Maria gave Kagami a loving smile. “I worried about you at first. I thought you would be one of those ditzy French girls who cared more about looks. I’m glad I was mistaken.”

“Oh Maria, you don’t even know the half of it.”
Sometime Later

“Push!” Maria commanded. Kagami screamed and pushed, squeezing Jim’s hand.

“You’re doing great baby!” Jim said in the most unhelpful way. Kagami glared daggers at him.

“Shut the fuck up Jim! Ah!” She screamed as another contraction hit, her hand crushing Jim’s. He did his best to cover up his winces of pain. Not well enough. “Wince in pain again and I’ll give you something to fucking wince about!” Another contraction, more pushing. “If you come near me with that dick again, I’m cutting it off!”

“That’s just cruel,” he muttered, leaning forward to kiss her temple while his mother wiped the sweat from her brow. More pushing, and then…

The baby’s wail came and it was over. Kagami slumped back against the bed. Her heart was pounding and she felt like she’d just went through a hundred fencing matches without pausing. Even still, she looked up towards Maria, who was grinning proudly.

“It’s a girl,” she informed them. Kagami let out a breathless laugh and looked to Jim, who was staring at their child in awe. “What are you going to name her?”

“Kaida,” Kagami said. “My little dragon.”

“Kaida Tsurugi,” Jim clarified. Kagami blinked at him in shock. He gave her a loving smile and kissed his wife. “So the Tsurugi family name lives on.” Maria gave them a smile and gently laid the crying baby in Kagami’s arms. She showed Kagami how to get the baby to latch on properly. Kagami listened with half an ear, staring in amazement at her beautiful baby girl with straight brown hair and soft brown eyes. She was perfect. My little dragon.

One Year Later. Ish.

“The place is getting shot to shit,” Jim said softly over the phone. “French woman with wicked aim. She’s completely plowing through all of his men.” Kagami cocked her head to the side and frowned, bouncing Kaida on her knee to make the girl laugh.

“Do you know this woman’s name?” she asked. Jim let out a breath and lowered his voice more.

“Yeah, Marinette.” Kagami stiffened, causing Kaida to gurgle unhappily. She forced herself to keep bouncing the toddler.

“Marinette… I know her. Fucking hell, I need to help Jim.” He swore softly and she heard him moving around.

“Alright, here’s the plan. Take Kaida to my parents, then do what you need to do. You know they’ll watch after her in case… Something were to happen.” Kagami winced at the thought of leaving her daughter without a mother. But she couldn’t abandon Marinette. Especially not to Martin Anders. “Baby… I love you.” Her heart broke a little.

“I love you too. Stay inside and stay away from the windows. Don’t let her even think about getting a clear shot on you. She won’t know… She won’t know that you’re not someone she needs to target. Promise me. Because she never misses.”
“I promise. Now go.” They hung up and Kagami forced a smile on her face, lifting her daughter up and grabbing the diaper bag.

“Who wants to go see Grandma and Grandpa?” she cooed to the girl, tickling Kaida’s stomach. Kaida giggled. “That’s right. Time to go my little dragon.”

Kagami left the house quickly and strapped her daughter into her car seat, placing the diaper bag on the side. Before jumping in the car, she let her location be shown through the dark web for the first time in three years. Then she grabbed her bag from the house. It held her suit, her foil, multiple different types of grenades, and a few different types of handguns. She loaded that into the trunk and started the car, driving carefully over to her in-law’s. They were waiting for her outside.

“Jim called us,” Jose explained, looking worried. Adriana got the diaper bag out of the car while Kagami unstrapped Kaida and Jose took out the car seat.

“I don’t know how long I’ll be gone,” Kagami admitted. “Please keep her safe.” She could feel herself getting choked up as she handed her daughter over to Adriana. Jose hugged Kagami tightly.

“We’ll protect her. You keep yourself safe my dear. Come back in one piece.” She nodded against his chest and gave Adriana a one-armed hug. Then she kissed Kaida’s forehead and shoved back her tears.

“Maman’s got to go help a friend now sweetie,” Kagami said softly. “I’ll be back sooner than you know. Be good for Grandma and Grandpa.” With a heavy heart, Kagami forced herself to walk away from her family and get back in the car, heading out towards the mansion. On the way there, she got the call she was waiting for from Tikki.

“Riposte, you’re in Brazil?” Tikki questioned.

“I sure am, what do you need?” Kagami replied casually, as if she didn’t just walk away from everything she loved more in the world.

“Marinette needs help. She needs a way out of Brazil and back to Paris.” Tikki gave a brief explanation and Kagami agreed to help, telling Tikki where Marinette was to meet her. With the spare time, Kagami doubled back to her home and loaded up her car with as many weapons as she could fit. Once satisfied, she headed towards the meeting spot, parking a couple buildings away so she could scope out the location when Marinette showed up.

~ ~ ~

I don’t know maybe two weeks later?

“Don’t kill him!” Chat was shouting. Riposte resisted the urge to roll her eyes. Of course, I won’t kill him, he’s my husband. But she had a part to play. Viperion helped Chat out of the building while Riposte pointed her gun at her husband. He gave her a wink, causing her heart to flutter.

“My most kinky fantasies come to life,” he mouthed to her. She grinned behind her mask and rolled her eyes at him, tugging her mask down enough for him to see her lips.

“I love you,” she mouthed. He nodded. Viperion burst back into the warehouse and Riposte quickly raised her mask again. The assassin looked pissed and annoyed as he collected Chat’s things. He started back outside but narrowed his eyes at Jim. Riposte stiffened, worried that she’d have to reveal who Jim was to keep Viperion from killing him. But the viper only slammed his heel down onto her husband’s nose, breaking it. Then he headed back outside.
Riposte hesitated, wanting to go to her husband and make sure he was alright, but he shook his head at her and gestured for her to leave. As she walked backward with her shield raised, Jim held his nose and gave her a loving look, mouthing to her, “I love you too.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

Betchya didn't see that one coming. Or maybe you did. I mean, I did hint at it, but it was subtle. I worry it was too obvious. Was it too obvious? DID I SPOIL MY OWN TWIST?! Let me know what you guys think. :3 Should I have hinted at it at all or should I have just randomly had a Jim appear here? Personally, I hate reading suspense when I can't guess at what twists are coming. To me, they're as bad as mystery novels where the secret bad guy is a character that isn't ever introduced until they're caught and everyone you're supposed to suspect is just a red herring. That's aggravating to me, which is why I wrote this the way I did. But I want your opinions on it. Do you guys want to be completely side-blinded or do you want a chance to figure things out before it happens?
And so we begin to wrap up the second arc.

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Wait, you’re married?” Chat demanded.

“You have a kid?” Plagg asked.

“If you’re in a relationship, why did you ask if Plagg was single?” Viperion questioned. Plagg jerked his head towards Viperion, a look of pure confusion on his face.

“Well, considering that I know Plagg from high school, I was confused as to why he was working for assassins. I mean, he has his colorful history with the Rat Pack. Working with murderers is something he swore to never do again. I was trying to figure out his relationship with you guys; if maybe he was dating someone from the organization. You and Marinette are the ones who assumed it was because I was interested in him, so I played it off that way. My marriage to Jim is supposed to be a secret. No one can know about my family, they’d be in too much risk,” she explained briefly.

“Wait, you know Plagg from high school?” Rena asked in confusion. Nino sighed.

“Jim tried to subtly tell Marinette that Chat was alive,” Riposte reported. “Anders told her that he had Chat drowned not long after he had her in his grasp. She didn’t believe him and threw a metal tray at him.”

“Jim tried to subtly tell Marinette that Chat was alive,” Riposte reported. “Anders told her that he had Chat drowned not long after he had her in his grasp. She didn’t believe him and threw a metal tray at him. I am a Psychology major. Do you think I wouldn’t use what I’ve learned?” Rena let out a long sigh.

“So, tell me this,” she began, leaning forward and staring at Chat. “How is it that Adrien Agreste, the model, happens to be Chat Noir? I can’t seem to wrap my head around it.”
Dad was dying. Needed money fast. Had a bunch of lessons growing up that gave me all the skills required,” Chat said simply. He gestured to Nino and Plagg. “Two best friends, one is a stupidly skilled hacker and the other is an amazing driver. I’m honestly surprised I’ve been a big secret for as long as I have. Not even Tikki figured it out.” Plagg coughed.

“About that…” Five sets of eyes zeroed in on the driver. “Um, Tikki knows. She figured it all out about a month ago. She came to me after everything went down with Bourgeois. She had a flash drive that held all the proof needed to show how Adrien Agreste is Chat Noir. She said instead of giving it to Ladybug, she was giving it to me. No one else had seen what was on the drive and no one else knew about it.”

“So Tikki is the only one capable of using basic logic,” Nino surmised. That earned him three different glares.

“Not fair,” Chat pointed out. “A lot of people judge things based on personality, which my personality as Chat and Adrien differ massively. If I acted more like Chat as Adrien or more like Adrien as Chat, people would be able to figure it out without problem. Because the two personalities are so different, many choose to see what they want to see. The differences. I put on a different voice as Chat. Chat has many scars Adrien doesn’t appear to have. There’s no conceivable way for Adrien Agreste, a model, to pull off the heists we have pulled off. And if someone doesn’t want to see the truth, they blind themselves to the facts subconsciously.”

“Hate to cut this heart-to-heart short,” Riposte interrupted. “But we’re here.” Nino grabbed his laptop and opened it up; he tossed Chat, Rena, Viperion, and Riposte a small sticky bug. Plagg parked by the side of the waterway and put in his comm. The others followed in suit.

“Remember,” Nino said. “I just need one of those stuck to any security camera. I don’t care how you do it, but I can’t hack into the system without it.” Viperion gave him a look of disbelief. “Okay, I can, but it would take too long. We want to be in and out. Once I have access to their security system, I’ll be able to guide you guys through the boat in the safest manner possible.” His eyes met Chat’s. “Think of this as a heist dude. Get into that mindset.” Chat nodded and took a breath, pushing the pain away. I can do this. This is just another heist. I’m only stealing a person instead of an object this time. Remember the plan. Remember the plan. He opened his good eye and nodded firmly. “Go.” They went.

~ ~ ~

Marinette opened her eyes to see Martin Anders standing over her with a syringe in his hand. Panic shot through her and she jerked her wrist back, aiming for his neck. He caught her wrist and pushed it aside, giving her an amused look. The stupid blade failed to spring out.

“Now, now my dear. This is just going to help make you a little more willing to listen,” he promised her. She screamed and fought against him, but more hands came down against her. Despite how much she fought, he still got the needle in her neck and injected her with the drugs. Her world seemed to slow down. Colors became brighter and more vibrant. Her head felt like it was stuffed with cotton. “Now isn’t that much better?” His voice sounded wavy and distorted like she was listening to him underwater.

She felt hands running down her sides, but they didn’t feel like hands really. Someone was talking, but she was too busy floating in her sea of colors to notice. Chaton, she called out mentally. If this is like Rena’s hallucinogenic, then I want to see my kitty. I want to see my Chaton one more time. A face wavered in front of her eyes. She couldn’t make out the details, but it had to be her Chaton. Just a hallucination, but that was okay. The face kissed her and she kissed back eagerly.
Rena slipped across the darkening deck of the boat, Nino’s sticky bug already on a security camera. She gazed down at the guards patrolling. There, at the front of the boat, she noted. He was alone and he wasn’t Jim. She pulled out her darts and loaded one into her flute, taking careful aim. Then she blew out harshly, sending the dart straight into the man’s neck. He slapped the side of his neck in confusion and turned around, eyes landing on Rena.

His eyes widened as she straightened and walked towards him slowly. He reached out for her eagerly. One gloved hand came up and she traced a finger along his jaw, walking around behind him. Her knife was slipped out and she brought it around to press against his neck. In one smooth pull, she slit his throat, cutting through the jugular, and he collapsed. She began to hum her favorite haunting tune as she sat down, running her fingers through his hair as he bled out his lifeblood. She sat with him, humming softly as he died. He didn’t seem to notice that he was split open from ear to ear. Just how she liked it. The light finally faded from his eyes and he stopped jerking. She wiped her knife on his clothes and stood, feeling the security camera staring at her.

“Did you have to kill him?” Nino asked, seemingly annoyed. Rena set her jaw and rose her chin a notch. Riposte’s story came back to her, how Jim accepted Kagami despite everything she’d done and everything she was. Her knowledge of Tikki and Plagg echoed in her ear, how Plagg was able to at least give Tikki a chance to explain and could take responsibility for his side of the lies. Her understanding of Chat and Ladybug haunted her, how Chat found it in himself to forgive Ladybug. How he was now risking his life to save her, despite all the harm she’d done to him and those he cared for. Duusu’s words whispered in her ears. “Never be ashamed of who you are and what you do.”

“Yes, I did. Don’t question it again Carapace,” she replied. She slipped up onto the railing at the front of the boat and sat cross-legged, pulling her flute up. She hit the switch to open the holes and shut her eyes, bringing the flute to her lips. And she began to play what she had been humming, letting the song echo hauntingly across the ship. Nino turned on the microphone attached to her suit and flipped on the speakers on the boat, letting the song be heard clearly from everywhere. Remember the plan.

Martin jerked his head up from Marinette’s willing body, frowning at the song playing over the speakers. Everyone started looking around in confusion.

“What the hell is this? I never authorized this,” he snapped, turning a glare towards the guards. They all shrugged, but stood there like morons. “Go find out what’s going on!” They quickly filed out of the room and he growled in frustration, moving away from his bride, who was still lost in the throes of the drugs he’d pumped into her system.

The guard with the broken nose entered the room and cleared his throat, standing at attention. Martin turned a glare on him.

“What?” he snapped. The guard glanced at Marinette before turning his gaze back to Martin. This was the guard who allowed the thief to escape. I’ll have to remember to comp him for that failure later.

“Sir, we have a situation above deck that needs your immediate attention,” the guard reported. “We caught someone sneaking around. They’re being held in the bridge.” Martin swore at the interruption and gestured to Marinette.
“Guard her, there might be more. Don’t fail me again.” The guard nodded and moved aside so Martin could pass.

~ ~ ~

Chat ground his teeth together, fighting the pain as he clung to the ceiling, waiting for Martin to pass by underneath him. Everything hurt. But he thought of Marinette and forced himself to keep hanging on. Finally, Nino gave him the all-clear, and he managed to silently slip onto the floor. He tapped on the door and Jim let him in.

“Do you have the counter-drug?” Jim asked softly. Marinette was clearly drugged out on the bed, but she looked no worse for wear. He hadn’t hurt her physically at least. Chat nodded, handed Jim a comm, and moved over to his Princess’ side, sliding up her sleeve and gently pushing the needle into her skin. He injected the counter-drug Rena and Viperion swore would work to purge her system. She moved her fingers over his face and gave a smile.

“Chaton, you’re dead. I’m going to kill them for you,” she promised. Chat swallowed past a lump in his throat and kissed her nose.

“Now, now **Purrincess.** You know I’d never just go off and die on you,” he whispered. She giggled.

“I’m going to be so sad when these drugs wear off and you’re dead again.” His heart broke. He nuzzled her neck and slipped her necklace back on her. This was where it belonged. There was one new addition to the necklace. His ring.

“Time to go,” Jim said, lifting Marinette for Chat. The two headed out of the room, listening to Nino’s strict directions.

~ ~ ~

“I must admit, I was expecting Ladybug,” Martin stated as he walked onto the bridge. “I’m a bit disappointed.” The woman in the riot suit gave him a shrug. It bothered him that he couldn’t see her face under her mask. Why haven’t my people unmasked her yet?

“Ladybug wanted to wait to talk to you on her own terms,” the woman stated. “I’m here to bring you to her.” Martin gave a bark of laughter.

“You seem to have failed, considering how you’re now my captive.” He stroked his jaw. “I think you’ll fetch a fine price.” He frowned at her own laughter. “Something funny?”

“Chat was right. You’re so full of yourself that you don’t realize when you’ve been played,” she said, standing smoothly. Why isn’t she tied up?! She gave a wink and rolled something onto the floor, turning her head away and quickly covering her ears. **What?** The flashbang exploded.

~ ~ ~

Viperion slipped around the ship, using his darts to inject anyone heading for Rena. She’d officially gotten the attention of all the guards. The perfect distraction. By the time they realized that’s all she was, it was much too late. Viperion slipped down from his perch and grabbed one of the final guards from around the neck, jerking his head sharply to the right. The bones broke with little effort. A gun went off, hitting Viperion in the shoulder. He snarled and looked back towards the final guard. **Should have been paying more attention.** He pulled out his own gun and shot the guard in return.

“We got both packages, time to fall back,” Nino commanded. Rena pulled the flute away from her lips and slipped it onto her back. She nodded to Viperion and made her escape with ease. The song
still continued to play in Viperion’s head as he met up with Riposte, who was dragging an unconscious Martin Anders. Viperion injected him with a sleeping drug and the two lifted him, making their way towards the van.

Chat had Marinette laying across the bench with her head in his lap. She was sleeping as he stroked her hair. Chat gave Viperion a nod, letting him know that she was alright. Viperion nodded back and dumped Anders on the floor of the van unceremoniously. He and Riposte took their seats as Plagg drove away. Riposte took out the detonation device and flipped the switch. No one flinched as the boat exploded behind them.

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I’ve been moved, Marinette noted as she opened her eyes. Her head was pounding, her mouth felt like she’d been sucking on cotton balls, and she felt sick. The bastard drugged her. She wasn’t certain of her location now, only that she was in a small room. Relief coursed through her as she felt the glove blade pressed against her wrist still. At least he didn’t find that. She sat up slowly and took in her surroundings.

She was in a small bedroom she didn’t recognize. It was dark, still night outside. So she hadn’t been out for that long. Unless I’ve been out for longer than a day. There weren’t any guards in the room with her, but the room itself was bare. It reminded her of a guest bedroom. She stood and walked over to the door, noting that her feet were bare. She listened carefully and frowned. Clearly, this was a place where Martin didn’t believe he’d have to worry about her escaping from as there didn’t seem to be any guards on the other side of the door. That was a mistake on his part. I’m not looking for escape. I’m looking for revenge.

Marinette slipped out of the room and glanced to her left and right. There were sounds coming from her right, but an open door with light streaming from it on her left. A guard perhaps. She extended her blade carefully, wincing at the sharp sound it made and headed for the door. She could threaten the guard to take her to Martin or to bring Martin to her so she could kill him. Sure, she’d die in the process, but he’d be dead. You’re leaving Chloe alone, her brain reminded her. She deserves much better than me, her heart snapped. And Luka? That made her hesitate, but she pushed on. Luka will move on eventually.

She stood at the side of the door and centered herself, bringing the blade up. She’d jump whoever was inside, not give them a chance to fight back, and cover their mouth quickly so they couldn’t call for help. For luck, she reached up and rubbed her cat char—How am I wearing this? She’d left this at the warehouse. And on it was… Her heart shattered and she braced herself against the wall, tears blurring her vision. Chat’s ring. That bastard must’ve attacked the warehouse while I was out and put this on me to mock me. Anger mixed with her grief and she knuckled away her tears, forgetting about the blade. She winced as the sharp edge sliced against her cheek and bit her tongue to keep herself from making a sound. Though she must’ve made some form of sound, as the person in the room suddenly stopped moving. She stopped overthinking it and moved in, slamming her fist against the person’s jaw. The man cried out and fell to the floor, allowing her to leap on him and cover his mouth. The tip of her blade rested against his throat.

“Adrien Agreste is working for Martin Anders?” she asked in confusion. It made… A twisted form of sense. Adrien hated her. But the betrayal still cut deep. He looked like hell, probably got the shit kicked out of him by his employer for one reason or another. Maybe he crossed paths with Luka and barely managed to get away. I thought we were finally working past our differences. He held his hands up, eyes sad. Her eyes were hard. “You’re going to call your boss and bring him to me. You’re not going to call for help. If you do, I’ll kill you. Understand?” He nodded as much as he could with her blade at his throat.
As she relaxed to move her hand away, his shot out and knocked the blade away from his throat. She gasped in surprise while he swiftly rolled them over, pinning her wrists down above her and holding her still with his weight, despite her struggles. *How can a model fight?*

“Princess, stop struggling,” he said gently. He *dared* to call her that?!

“Get off of me! You piece of shit, you don’t deserve to call me that!” she hissed softly, trying not to draw attention to them. He hadn’t called out for help, so she definitely didn’t want to draw anyone else to their location by shouting, though every piece of her wanted to.

“Marinette, look at me.” Her eyes swept over his form quickly and her anger boiled up. He was wearing Chat’s outfit!

“How are you wearing that?!” she demanded. “Did you take it off his dead body?! You son of a bitch, you’re worse than your boss!” She jerked her knee up and he winced just enough for her to pull her wrist free, slicing at him wildly. He blocked it with his arm and sighed, grabbing her forearm and twisting it around. He moved off her enough to flip her onto her stomach, pressing the wrist with the blade firmly against her lower back. Using his knee to keep it still, he pressed her other wrist down and covered her eyes with his free hand. “Get off of me!”

“Princess, just listen,” he murmured in her ear. “Just listen to my voice.” Tears filled her eyes and she shook. *Why do you sound like my Chaton?* “I’m here. You know I’m too *clawsome* to die.” *Oh god. Chaton. It’s my Chaton.*

“Chaton…?” she whispered hoarsely. “It can’t be… You’re dead.” There was a low chuckle and she felt lips brush against the back of her neck, right where she loved it. A shiver raced through her body.

“Don’t be silly bugaboo. You know I’d never let anyone kill me. That’s a right only reserved for you and you alone.” Different emotions flooded her as her breath hitched. She felt his grip loosen and she turned quickly, pressing her face into his chest as she sobbed. His arms came around her and he hushed her, rubbing circles on her back.

“He told me you were dead,” she cried. “He said he drowned you.” Chat scoffed, a sound that rumbled through his chest, warming Marinette down to her toes.

“Oh *Purr*incess, don’t be silly. Cats hate water, he’d never be able to get me in a bath long enough to drown me.” She shut her eyes and turned her face up, pulling his head down and pressing their lips together. She curled her fingers down without thinking about it and sliced her middle finger down the edge of the blade, causing her to jerk back in pain. She swore softly and held her wrist back from the blade, pressing down against the open wound.

“Shit,” she hissed. Chat’s hands covered hers to help apply pressure and she turned her face up to give him a grateful look. Adrien’s green eyes glanced down at her in concern. It was like a bucket of ice water was thrown over her. “You’re Adrien Agreste… Chat Noir is Adrien Agreste…” He winced slightly.

“I wanted to tell you. I wanted to talk it over together, but you didn’t want to hear it,” he said quickly. A feeling of numb spread over her as the earlier betrayal she felt returned. Not as prominent, but still there. He’d been toying with her. He’d been playing her.

“Get away from me,” she whispered.

“Marinette—” he attempted.
“Get away from me!” she screamed, shoving at him with her shoulder. He backed off with his hands raised as multiple footsteps ran towards them. Viperion entered the bathroom and looked over the two of them, eyes wide. She turned her anger on him. “You knew! You fucking knew!”

“Marinette, calm down,” Viperion demanded. “We need to look at your finger and face.” He sounded so reasonable. I don’t want reasonable!

“You knew he was Adrien this entire time! Get out! Get out all of you!” Rena was by her side in an instant, hugging her from behind. Some gesture was made and everyone else left. Adrien hesitated by the door, looking back at Marinette with an expression that was filled with what Marinette could only describe as regret.

“I’m sorry,” he said simply. Then he left too.

Rena helped Marinette pull the glove off carefully, neither could get the stupid blade to retract properly, and began to bandage her up while Marinette sat in silence. It wasn’t until Rena was wiping the blood off of Marinette’s face that she finally spoke up.

“Did you know too?” she asked her friend. Rena considered the question.

“Yes, but not before you gave yourself over to Anders. I found out right before we staged our rescue after he was saved. I walked in while he was unmasked after being treated for his wounds. He kind of got the shit beat out of him and wasn’t wearing his mask, thanks to the black eye.” Marinette gave a nod.

“And Riposte?” Rena hesitated, then placed a couple butterfly bandages on Marinette’s cheek.

“I don’t know the logistics of that exactly. From what I understand, they were friends in high school. I’m not sure if that means she knew he was Chat from the start or not, but Mari…” Rena caught her friend’s eyes. “She had no way of knowing prior to any of this that you and Chat had anything going on. Don’t hold this against her.”

“Why didn’t you guys tell me you were staging a rescue for Chat?”

“At the time, it seemed best to keep you in the dark. We all know how you get when someone you love is in danger. Clearly, we made the wrong decision.”

“Clearly.” Marinette’s voice was flat. “What happened to Martin Anders?”

“We have him at the warehouse. We were waiting on Ladybug to be ready to… Handle the situation.” That’s the best news I’ve heard all night.

“I gave you a chance and this is how you repay my generosity,” Ladybug said coldly, standing in front of the man who’d haunted her nightmares. Martin Anders gave a simple shrug.

“I told you. Marinette is my property. I paid good money for her,” he replied. “You think you’ve won, but I guarantee that my people are searching for me as we speak. When they find me, you’re going to regret not just handing the girl over.” Ladybug gave a smile.

“You sound so certain. It’s quite amusing. You see after we blew your ship sky high, my people got in contact with your second-in-command. We explained to him the situation and offered to allow him to leave in peace. He agreed. He and the rest of your men are currently on their way back to Brazil.” Martin’s lips parted in shock. “They abandoned you happily. You don’t inspire much loyalty among
“Your followers.” She had to give him credit. He recovered quickly.

“Why am I still alive then?” Ladybug cocked her head to the side and finally sat in the empty chair sitting in front of him. She crossed her legs and leaned backward, getting comfortable.

“Because I want to know why you’re so obsessed with Marinette. Why do you want her so bad? More specifically, why did you kill Sabine Cheng?” When Ladybug had heard the news from the second-in-command that Sabine was dead, she struggled to feel something. Anything. Normal people should feel sad when their parents die. It’s something that should affect them in some way, no matter what past is shared. But all Ladybug felt… Was nothing.

“It was meant to be a gift to my bride once we’d returned to Brazil.” Ladybug rolled her eyes.

“You think Marinette would be okay with you showing off her mother’s corpse?” Martin gave a sly smirk and rolled his shoulders back.

“I frankly don’t care either way if she would be okay with it. She’s my property, I bought her. Besides, Tom and Sabine failed to pay back the debts they owed me. I warned them that if they didn’t, they would pay. That’s all there is to it.”

“And Marinette?”

“Because giving her up would mean losing. Now I will admit, I would’ve been more inclined to give her up if not for a few key facts.”

“And what facts would that be?”

“For starters, she was nothing like I’d been expecting. I expected a meek and submissive girl cowering in the corner. Instead, I got a strong-willed fighter who obliterated the majority of my men in a single afternoon. That intrigued me. She shows such a different face to the rest of the world, I found that I wanted to learn more. Then there was the fact that she is friends with Tikki Rossi.” Ladybug stiffened. “Yes, yes. I know all about Miss Rossi. Her mother killed my brother in cold blood years ago. I’ve wanted revenge for some time, but Lila Rossi, unfortunately, died before I could take my revenge. Tikki would’ve made a nice substitute in place, but I’m not foolish enough to just go after Volpina’s daughter. That’s where Marinette would’ve come in handy.”

“Is that all?”

“There was also you, of course.”

“Me?” Martin stared pointedly at the cut on Ladybug’s face. Why does this matter?

“At first, I thought nothing of it. Nothing of the coincidences. Until Ladybug failed to come after the one thing she claimed she’d go to war over. I’ve been sitting here for quite some time waiting for you. I started connecting little dots. Ladybug is known for her accuracy and skills with a sniper rifle. Marinette couldn’t be touched while she had ammo and that sniper. Even managed to pull off some impossible shots. Marinette also made several references to being lucky, which is something I witnessed myself when she had the meeting with her father in his residence. Ladybugs are usually known for bringing good luck. Marinette’s connections to you assassins seemed off as well. Why would a seamstress be the one to patch you guys up? Certainly, you’d be able to find a doctor. It might make sense in the movies, but you and I both know that sewing clothes and sewing bodies are two vastly different skills.”

“Is there a point to this?” Martin leaned forward and gave her a grin.
“If I controlled Ladybug, I controlled her organization. Think of it Marinette. Our two criminal undergrounds would be unstoppable.” Ladybug stood up and walked over to the man, shaking her head at him.

“I may have been tempted, but you went about it the wrong way. You’ve instead just pissed me off.” She stabbed the syringe into his thigh and pushed down the plunger, watching him with a blank expression. “This poison will kill you, slowly. Your body will feel like it’s melting, your organs like they’re burning, your skin like it’s crawling. Every second up until your death will be filled with agony. That is my retribution.”

“Y-your code!” he argued in panic, pain already beginning to contort his face. She turned and shook her head, walking away.

“We’ve decided to say ‘fuck the code’ when it comes to you Martin.” As she left the room, his screams chased her.

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Chapter End Notes

So this is a lot of information in a short amount of time. I'd apologize for breaking my schedule again... But you guys would probably be more shocked if I kept to the damned thing. I will be posting a shorter chapter tomorrow, so I'm only partially breaking my schedule! :D I would tack on the extra chapter here, but I want that one to be a stand-alone chapter. You'll understand when it comes out, promise.

So how'd I do with Martin's end? Satisfying enough? There really isn't much of his backstory given, and I know a lot of people were looking forward to that, but I couldn’t find a way to properly integrate his backstory fluidly. Everything I tried just seemed out of place. What I think I may do once the main story is over and completed is go back through and give characters who don't get much of a backstory (Like the mayor, Martin, Tom & Sabine, Juleka, etc) one-shot chapters dedicated solely to telling their backstory.
“Did you bring the letters?” Adrien asked gently. Luka gave a nod and pulled two unsealed envelopes from his back pocket. “Did they help?” He’d already asked before, but he wanted it on record now.

“Yeah, they did. If you want me to read them… I think I can.” Adrien nodded and gestured for Luka to begin. He took a breath and pulled a letter from one of the envelopes, opening it up and clearing his throat.

“Mom and Dad, we haven’t spoken for thirteen years. Not since we buried Juleka. It’s because I’m mad at you both. I’m so angry at you guys. You left me alone to deal with her death. I tried calling you when she went missing, but you never answered. I tried calling you when she was found, but you never answered. You failed in your duties as our parents. You forced me to become an adult when I still should’ve been a child. You wanted us to have stability, but failed in doing that because you weren’t there. You weren’t ever there. If you wanted adventure, then you should’ve taken us with you. You should’ve homeschooled us. If you didn’t want to do that to us, then you should’ve stayed. You should’ve waited for your adventure. The sea isn’t going anywhere, but Juleka did. She went somewhere and now we’ll never be able to get her back. I often wonder if things would’ve been different if you were home that night. If you were home period. Maybe they wouldn’t have targeted her if they knew you were home. The only thing I’m grateful for is the lessons. You guys didn’t have to save up in order for me to get those private lessons, but you did. And that saved my life. It also saved Rose’s life. I couldn’t save Juleka, but I got revenge for her. I don’t know if I can ever forgive you guys for not being here, but I think I’m tired of being mad.”

Luka raised his head and wiped his fingers under his eyes, trying to hide the tears there. Adrien gave him a minute to compose himself, then leaned forward to catch his eyes.

“It’s okay to let go of the anger and it’s okay to not forgive them,” Adrien said softly. Luka nodded and glanced upwards, blinking.

“It feels like almost a betrayal to Juleka to stop being mad at them. Like somehow I’m betraying her memory by letting go of the anger,” Luka admitted. Adrien shook his head.

“It’s not. You’ve been mad for thirteen years. I think it’s time to finally let go and move on with your life. Picture the roles were reversed. Would you want Juleka mad at them for so long?” Luka shook his head. “So why do you think she’d want you mad at them still?”

“I don’t know.”

“Think on the answer. It’ll surprise you, I’m sure. Do you still want to read the other letter? You don’t have to.” Luka shook his head. “We can talk about something else then. Why are you still
“Hunting down the Rat Pack?”

“Because they killed my sister.” Luka said it as if it should be obvious. Adrien rose a brow and noted something down on his notepad.

“Plagg was a member of the Rat Pack.”

“Well, he wasn’t involved with her death.”

“Don’t you think that perhaps not every single member you’ve been targeting may not have been involved with her death? Is there a chance you’ve been killing people who have had nothing to do with it?”

“No. I investigate every single person before I go after them. If they had any links with the human trafficking section, they die. If they didn’t, they don’t.”

“When was the last time you hunted someone down?” Luka thought this over, appearing to mentally count the time in his head.

“It’s been a while. Maybe a year? I haven’t been able to track down anyone else.”

“Perhaps you’ve gotten them all.”

“It would make sense.”

“And how does that make you feel? Happy? Relieved?” Luka paused for a moment and made a face.

“You’re going to call me crazy, but I feel… Weird. Like I’m failing to complete a mission. I thought that once I’d finished killing them all, I’d be able to finally move on. That it’d feel good. But instead, I feel hollow. Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad they’re dead. But I feel like there should be more.”

“Maybe there is and you just haven’t been able to find it yet. When was the last time you visited Juleka’s grave?”

“…Thirteen years. I told her I wouldn’t go back until they were all dead.” Adrien nodded.

“Take a day out of your schedule in the coming week. Go to her grave and let her know that as far as you’re aware, they’re all gone. Spend the day grieving properly. Take Rose with you and grieve together. Remember the good times and bad times together. Most importantly, mentally let go of the thought that it’s unfinished. Do your best to start planning for the future rather than focusing on the past. I want you to make visiting her grave a regular thing for the next couple of months. Once every week, just visit her. It doesn’t have to be for that long, but long enough for you to truly finish grieving her properly. You’re stuck in an endless loop of mourning and that’s what is causing the infection.”

“I’ll talk to Rose about it and see what we can work out together,” Luka agreed, rubbing his face. The two stood and Adrien shook Luka’s hand.

“I won’t lie, it’s going to get worse before it gets better. But you will heal in the end, I promise you that.” Luka nodded and grabbed his jacket, heading for the door.

“By the way, I know you told me not to pay you, but I feel like I should. So I looked up how much therapists usually make and left you a check on the counter.” Adrien opened his mouth to argue, but Luka cut him off with a look. “Dude, no offense, but if we’re going to continue this shit I need to
make sure you can afford an office. It’s a bit odd to be meeting up in apartments to talk about my feelings.” Adrien gave him a grin.

“I could always just steal something. Haven’t done a heist in a while.” Luka narrowed his eyes.

“You aren’t putting that mask on until you’re healed. I don’t even want to know what kind of damage you could’ve done to yourself on the boat. Gain the ability to open up your left eye, then we’ll talk.” Adrien laughed and Luka swung open the door, coming face to face with Alya. She blinked in shock and lowered her hand, which had been raised to knock, taking a step back. “Um, hi Alya. I’ll see you later, Adrien.” Luka made his escape.

“I don’t mean to drop by like this,” Alya began carefully. “But Luka told me... Well, he said that you were doing therapy sessions with him. I was curious to know if you’d be willing to do the same for me.” Adrien gestured for Alya to come inside, shutting the door behind her.

“Of course I’m willing, but what exactly does this pertain to?” he questioned gently, not wanting her to get upset. She made a face.

“Well, I haven’t been doing well the past month or so. I’m certain you can guess why. To be honest, you wouldn’t be my first choice when it came to a therapist, but my options are limited. Not many people know I’m Rena Rouge and it’s not like I can just talk to any random psychologist about the issues I’ve been having.” She rubbed her fingers together. She’s nervous and unsure.

“I don’t know if it’s even therapy that I need, but just talking to my friends doesn’t seem to be working. Maybe because I know their opinion is massively biased. Not that I can trust your opinion to be unbiased, but you’re all I’ve got.” Adrien gestured for her to sit on the couch and sat in his chair, giving her a steady look.

“I’m assuming you’re referring mostly to the issues you’ve been having with Nino.” She nodded. “You’re right. I can’t be unbiased. That being said, I’m not going to judge you for anything you have done in the past or will do in the future. Keep in mind that while I would not technically your therapist and you would not technically be my patient, I hold doctor-patient confidentiality strictly. None of our conversations will be recorded by any means and I ask that all electronic devices be turned off while we talk. I’ll be taking notes during conversations, but that’s mostly so I can give myself a starting point when making suggestions to help you. Suggestions. You are under no obligation to do anything I tell you to do. As I told Luka as well, I’m not looking for any form of payment either. I don’t need your money. This is entirely your decision and you’re free to stop showing up whenever you’d like.”

“What do you mean by suggestions?”

“For example, if I felt you had some emotions bottled up that I felt you were having issues getting out in a healthy way, I would suggest you do something to assist in that. Write a letter, take up kickboxing, practice painting. Things like that. I would never suggest for you to do something that wouldn’t help you.” She nodded and let out a breath.

“That makes me feel better. But why do it for free?”

“Think of it like… My own personal checks and balances.”

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??? Ago

“Are you certain?” Polly asked the woman gently. Chloe gave a firm nod, a look of frustration on
“When I met Chat, I realized how insignificant I am,” she admitted begrudgingly. “Look at the people Mari has fallen in love with the past ten years. You’ve got Luka, a laid-back musician during the day and a hardcore assassin with a crazy mind for chemistry he might as well be a mad scientist at night. You’ve got Chat Noir, an apparent psychologist during the day according to the rumors I’ve heard and a smart-mouthed thief at night. Then me. A rich girl with no particular skills, no particular talents. I don’t work for a living because I don’t have to. I’m just her childhood sweetheart.” She finally forced herself to meet Polly’s gaze and confessed to her deepest fears. “What if that’s all I truly am? What if she realizes that and decides to move on?”

“Chloe… Even a blind man could see how deeply in love with you Marinette is,” Polly remarked gently. “You don’t need to be a kick-ass, hardened criminal to gain her love.”

“But is it me she’s in love with? Or is it what we used to be?” Chloe forced back tears. “You know when I got back… I imagined our meeting in my head. After ten years apart… I pictured our first night together.” Chloe blushed lightly and glanced away from those soft blue eyes that seemed to know all her secrets. “But nothing happened.”

“To be fair, things were a bit intense when you came back into Paris,” Polly pointed out.

“We haven’t slept together since I came back!” Chloe shoved her fingers through her hair in aggravation. “The most she’s done is kiss me, but when I try to push for something more, she makes up some excuse. Not just sex sleeping together either, but actually sleeping together in the same bed. After ten years one would think she’d be happy to cuddle up to me at night, but I’ve gotten none of that. I’m losing her, I can feel it.”

“I know you’re a bit bitter at being sent away, Chloe, but she did this to protect you.”

“She wouldn’t need to protect me if I could defend myself!” Polly sighed and glanced skyward.

“Alright. Alright fine. I will begin training you. But this stays under the radar, clear? I don’t know how long it’s going to be until we get the all-clear, but when we do you tell no one else. If Marinette finds out that we’re doing this, it’s our heads on the chopping block. Not yours.”

“Deal.” Polly nodded and rubbed the side of her face again.
“I’ll talk to Nooroo and Nathaniel when they get back from the store. We’ll see about teaching you the basics. Wish Duusu could be here too, her fighting style would probably be better suited for your figure.” Polly began to stroke her jaw, glancing Chloe up and down. “Actually, yes. I’m going to eventually need Duusu’s help here. Based on your figure and height, you’d probably benefit greatly from learning to use a whip of sorts. But we’ll see if you have any luck with my stingers. Perhaps a mixture of the two?” Polly continued to mutter to herself as she walked around Chloe, the air crackling with anticipation.

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Chapter End Notes

I think I've been teasing the Chloe arc for long enough now. It's time for it to come to life.
“Stop trying to block his attacks!” Nooroo snapped from the sidelines. Chloe sucked in a breath and shook the pain from her arms. Nathaniel took a step forward, a punch aimed for her head. She ducked and weaved, like in the movies.

“You’re working harder than you need to,” Polly stated. A surprise fist slammed into Chloe’s side, knocking the air out of her. Nathaniel took advantage of that and dropped down, tripping her. She hit the floor hard and blinked at the sudden change. “And that’s why we work smarter.”

“I’m not supposed to block his attacks, I’m not supposed to dodge his attacks,” Chloe wheezed out. “What exactly am I supposed to do then?” Nathaniel gave her a hand up and laughed.

“You’re supposed to dodge, but you’re over complicating it. This isn’t like the movies where everything needs to be big and flashy, that just drains you of precious energy you need in the fight in order to gain the upper hand,” he explained. “You only need to move my fists just far enough away so I don’t make contact. Watch Polly and Nooroo.” Chloe turned her attention to the two older assassins as they squared up.

It was clear they were way more skilled than she was, and that Nathaniel had been holding back. Nooroo delivered two quick strikes against Polly’s face, but she nudged his fists out of the way just enough so his fists could only graze her. He struck out against her core, but Polly simply turned her body away and delivered a sharp counter against his face. This dazed Nooroo, giving Polly a clear advantage over him. They stopped and turned back to Chloe.

“You need to think fast and use small motions,” Nooroo explained, walking over to Chloe. He stood behind her and grasped her wrists. Nathaniel made a slow punch towards her face. Nooroo guided her hand up to push his arm just enough so it simply brushed past her face. “Only do as much as you need to do. Now go again.”

Chloe took a breath and rolled her shoulders forward, moving her hands up where Nooroo had placed them. Polly reminded her to watch Nathaniel’s eyes, not his fists. Nathaniel came at her slow at first, giving her a chance to get comfortable with having his fists so close to her face. Any time she pushed his arm too far away, he’d punish her with a jab in the side to prove a point.

“How much as you need to,” Nooroo reminded her. “You’re going to be covered in bruises by the time we’re done, so get used to the pain. Use the anger to fuel your motions, but don’t let it control you and make you sloppy. Learn to take the punch.” His voice dropped as he muttered to Polly, “I feel like an abusive father talking to his kid….”

“You sound like it,” Polly assured him with a laugh. Chloe bit her lip to keep herself from giggling before realizing Nathaniel’s fist was flying towards her face. Unable to get her arms up in time, she
jerked sideways rapidly in a panic and fell off-balance. He immediately took advantage and clocked her on the jaw before ramming her with his shoulder, sending her down hard.

“Distractions happen in a fight,” Nathaniel lectured. “Learn to ignore them.” Chloe let out a sigh and rubbed her jaw, sending him a scowl.

“Did you have to hit me so hard?” she complained, accepting his hand to help her upright once more. He sent her a bemused look.

“That was me holding back.”

“Of course it was…”

“Again,” Polly cut in. Chloe got in position again, pain throbbing throughout her entire body. Everything hurt, but she knew it was going to be ten times worse in the morning after a decent night’s sleep. She wanted to get this move down before calling it quits. She knew she could do it, but it seemed so impossible against someone as experienced as Nathaniel. It should be simple. Defend the punch, deliver a counter. But every single time his fists came so close to her face, she lost her cool.

Every.

Single.

Time.

Chloe hit the floor again with a groan and rubbed her chest where Nathaniel shoved her. He offered her his hand and she hesitated. Do I really want to keep doing this to myself? What if I don’t have what it takes after all? She thought of Marinette’s soft blue eyes growing colder and colder as time went on. Steeling her nerves, she grabbed Nathaniel’s hand and stood, giving him a firm nod. She’d do it for Marinette.

This time when Nathaniel came at her, Chloe held Marinette’s face in her mind. She let her body do the movements without thinking too much on it. The edge of her hand knocked his fist to the side just enough to barely miss her face. While he was slightly off-balance, she delivered a sharp punch to his throat, blinking in shock as he went down with his hands at his throat, hacking up a lung.

“I did it!” she cheered, throwing her fists in the air. “Holy shit, I did it!” She grinned at Nooroo and Polly, only to be tackled to the floor by Nathaniel. She yelped in pain as her head smacked against the floor, seeing two Nathaniels for a moment.

“Just because he’s down does not mean he’s out,” Polly coached from the sidelines. Chloe groaned, rubbing the back of her head. “Now that you likely have a concussion, I think it’s time to call it for tonight. Tomorrow we’ll work on endurance.” Nathaniel helped Chloe up and rubbed his throat, giving her a thumb’s up before grabbing a bottle of water.

“You’re all just sadists in disguise,” Chloe grumbled, grabbing her own bottle of water. She spared a grin as Nathaniel choked on a mouthful of water. Maybe… Just maybe there is something to this humor aspect Luka is always playing at.

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Chloe stood in front of the full-length mirror and considered her body. She ignored the dark bruises formed on her ribs, thighs, and sides. She ignored the yellowing bruise on her jaw. She even ignored the split on her bottom lip. Instead, she focused on her physique. A healthy diet and regular runs kept
her in pretty decent shape, but looking at herself now she could see the change.

In the past week, Polly had been alternating her training daily. Every other day they dedicated to endurance build-up. Which was a fancy way of saying Polly forced Chloe to run until she couldn’t feel her feet, gave her an hour break, then forced her to run some more. On the off-days, she was learning how to fight with Nathaniel as a sparring partner while Nooroo and Polly coached from the sidelines. Yesterday had been the first day of her parkour training, which she currently sucked at. But improvements had been made.

Her abs were beginning to become more defined. Muscles were becoming more prominent. Her calves looked more thick and rounded. Her ass and bust she swore were raised higher. Even her posture had somehow improved from all the working out. She no longer felt much softness around her thighs and hips, mostly just muscle. Her hands, which used to be soft and delicate, were now rough and callused. Her knuckles were becoming bruised, despite the thin bandages Polly had her wear. She was beginning to resemble the female assassins more and more.

“If you’re feeling self-conscious about rough skin, I’ve got a great lotion you can borrow,” a soft voice intoned from her right. Chloe glanced over and smiled at Duusu.

“Hey, I thought you’d be going straight back to Paris once your shoot in Milan ended,” Chloe greeted, walking over to her bed to get dressed. Duusu shook her head.

“I figure they have everything handled there. Besides, Polly asked me to come help out. Super secret training is so my thing.” Chloe laughed and threw her hair up into a messy ponytail, earning a raised brow from Duusu. “Since when does the infamous Chloe Bourgeois not take extra special care when styling her blonde locks?” Chloe made a face.

“Since she learned that it was just going to get screwed up within five minutes of training anyway. Why put forth the effort when it’s just going to be ruined in the end? Not like I’m out to impress anyone.” Duusu nodded and Chloe took a moment to take in the woman’s outfit.

Like Chloe, Duusu was dressed in tight-fitting workout pants and a comfortable t-shirt. She wore basic sneakers and had her light brown hair pulled back in a braid. With her height and looks, she could’ve been ready to walk onto a model shoot advertising workout clothing.

“So Polly thinks you’d benefit from learning to use something like my whip chord,” Duusu commented, walking over to sit beside Chloe on the bed. Chloe nodded but made a face.

“If we ever even get to the weapon’s training portion.”

“Until you stop getting these,” Duusu poked at one of the bruises, “from Nathaniel, I wouldn’t even entertain the idea of letting you anywhere near my whip. The thing is balanced very particularly that in order to learn to use it properly, you need to use it. Not something you can have a stand-in for. Because of that, you’re liable to slice yourself up. It’s important to learn everything else first.”

“I get that, but I feel like I’m making no progress. Yeah, sometimes I can knock Nathaniel down, but forget taking him out. Most of the time it’s him knocking me down.”

“For one, it’s only been a week. We’ve had years of training. For two, you’re actually learning really fast from what Polly’s been telling me. You’re a natural at this when you stop over-thinking it. Finally, and don’t tell him I said this or his ego would explode, Nathaniel is an extremely experienced fighter. Even if you had as much experience as us, he’d probably still be able to take you down in a heartbeat. He has an eye for the small details.”
“Then why am I sparring with him if he’s so impossible to beat?” Duusu smirked.

“Because he’s the most patient. Also because that gives him the best angle to see where you’re screwing up the most in order to help teach you.” Duusu was quiet for a moment. “You know, I’d love to see Nathaniel and Chat Noir duke it out. That’d be one hell of a fight.”

“I get the feeling that there’s more to that than just wanting to watch Nathaniel wipe the floor with a thief.” Duusu smirked and nodded, giving Chloe a wink. “Well? Are you going to tell me or leave me in suspense?”

“Okay, so back when we were rounding up those pesky thieves after they discovered Ladybug equals Marinette, Viperion and Ladybug were fighting Chat Noir.” Chloe nodded. “Well, I watched the footage Tikki had on that fight and it was amazing. Viperion and Ladybug have always been this unstoppable duo. They fight together in a way that makes someone think they’re reading the other’s mind. Chat Noir, in this two v one scenario, was holding his own. And he was holding back. The only reason they won was because his side gave out.” Chloe blinked.

“Wait. He was holding his own against them both?” Duusu nodded.

“Yep. When it was just him and Ladybug, he took her down in seconds. If he tried against Viperion and Ladybug, I can almost guarantee he would’ve had them beat easily. The only two people I’ve ever seen able to stand up against Marinette and Luka combined is Kagami and Nathaniel. So yeah, I’d kill to see Chat Noir and Nathaniel spar at some point. I wonder who would win.”

“I’m putting money on Nathaniel,” Chloe voted. Amusement flickered in Duusu’s bright hazel eyes. She shrugged.

“Perhaps. Perhaps not. Doubtful we’ll ever truly know.”

~ ~ ~

“Don’t forget to use your hands,” Polly coached. Chloe heaved a breath and forced herself to stand back up again. Her shoulder was aching from messing up the roll, but she shook it off. She released a slow breath and took a couple steps back before jogging forward. She bounced after a couple steps, pressing her hands against the floor and angling her shoulder down. She rolled with ease this time and bounced up, giving a grin of pride.

“Excellently done!” Duusu cheered from the sides. “You’ll be a free runner in no time!” Even Polly’s eyes flickered with pride.

“Let’s run it again.” Chloe nodded firmly and moved back to the starting point, closing her eyes and shaking off her weariness. They’d been training for two hours already, but this was nothing compared to the running Polly was having her do before. Or the fighting training she was doing with Nathaniel.

Chloe took off at a jog again, jumped, and smoothly transitioned through the roll. Polly gave another nod of approval and had her run it five more times before deciding that it was time for the next step of the training.

“While I get it set up, go take a break.” Chloe gave a thumb’s up and made her way to the small kitchen, grabbing a bottle of water out of the fridge. Nathaniel was sketching at the dining table while Nooroo was on the phone with someone.

“What are you drawing?” Chloe asked, sliding into a seat across from Nathaniel.
“The trees,” Nathaniel explained, not bothering to lift his eyes from the paper. “I don’t usually get a chance to see the forest like this while in the city, so when I do come out to the countryside, I like to draw them.” He fell into silence and Chloe got the impression that he wasn’t going to be saying much more. Her eyes traveled over to Nooroo.

“Alright, I’ll let everyone know.” His voice was stiff. Something was up. Chloe frowned slightly. “Yep. Thanks, Luka.” He hung up.

“Is everything okay?” Chloe asked, unsure if she should even be speaking. Nooroo wiped a hand over his face, giving a sharp nod.

“Relatively speaking? Yes. Martin Anders has been dealt with and will no longer be an issue. We are technically free to return to Paris. However, something unfortunate happened.”

“What happened?” Her hackles rose at the tone of voice Nooroo used, and even Nathaniel put his pencil down to frown at Nooroo.

“Marinette discovered the identity of Chat Noir apparently. And from what Luka explained… It’s not a good thing. He didn’t tell me Chat’s identity, so don’t bother asking, but right now Marinette has locked herself away, likely in her mansion, and is refusing to speak to Chat, Luka, Kagami, and Tikki. Alya is the only one allowed to see her at the moment.”

“She’s refusing to speak to Luka? And Tikki?” Chloe demanded, shocked. That didn’t make sense in her mind. Despite how much she argued with Luka, she always figured he and Marinette had become a sort of package deal. Especially when she considered how Luka had been there for Marinette the past ten years while Chloe was stuck in America. Same with Tikki. Those two were Marinette’s closest and oldest friends, so it didn’t make sense for Chat’s identity to be a reason behind refusing to see them.

“From what Luka briefly explained, anyone who knew the identity of Chat Noir prior to Marinette discovering it is now on her shit list.” Chloe let that sink in. The only explanation for that is if Chat ended up being someone Mari hated.

“Well, we should start heading back to Paris then. Right?” Nathaniel pointed out. Nooroo sighed and gave a shrug.

“I honestly have no idea. Luka gave the all clear, but Marinette won’t answer my texts. I tried calling her before talking to Luka, but she just keeps ignoring my calls.” He cast Chloe an apologetic look. “I’m not sure if she wants us back in Paris at the moment.”

It was all of Chloe’s fears come to life in that very moment. She doesn’t want me around right now. The young woman gave a small nod and stood. She ignored the two men’s attempts at reassuring her and left the room. She doesn’t need me. She walked into her room and locked the door, not wanting to be disturbed at that moment. Falling backward on the bed, she stared at the ceiling with a blank face. Am I enough for you Mari? Or are you already searching for someone better?

~ ~ ~

“Just breathe Mari,” Alya encouraged, squeezing her friend’s hand. Marinette nodded and squeezed Alya’s hand in return. She gave her right leg her most devastating glare, hating everything in that moment. The doctor returned to the room, a grim expression on his face. Marinette didn’t need to hear the results, she could see it in his face. She doesn’t need me. She walked into her room and locked the door, not wanting to be disturbed at that moment. Falling backward on the bed, she stared at the ceiling with a blank face. Am I enough for you Mari? Or are you already searching for someone better?

~ ~ ~

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only nod.

“There are a few options we have moving forward,” the doctor was saying. “But the next few months are going to be the hardest.” He paused for a moment. “I recommend keeping your friends and family close during this time.” And let them see me like... Like that? Never. “I would also recommend you begin to see a psychologist.” Her mind immediately went to Chat, but she mentally shoved that thought away.

As she and Alya left the doctor’s office thirty minutes later, Alya pulled Marinette in for a tight hug. That alone was almost enough to break Marinette’s composure, but she managed to keep it together.

“Are you going to be calling Chloe back to Paris?” Alya asked after taking a step back. Marinette couldn’t meet her friend’s eyes.

“No.”

“No?!”

“No. I can’t… I can’t let her see me like this. It’s bad enough that you have to see me like this. Having my bee… See me broken… I couldn’t take it. Promise me you won’t tell her, Alya. Promise me you won’t tell anyone.”

“Marinette… This isn’t a battle you can face alone.” Marinette shook her head and let out a slow breath, ignoring the look of disapproval on Alya’s face.

“It’s a battle I have to overcome on my own. What're a few months when we faced ten years?” Alya didn’t look convinced. Marinette wasn’t even sure that she convinced herself.

~ ~ ~

“She’s not answering my calls,” Luka muttered dejectedly. Adrien sat in silence beside him, unsure of what to say to make it better. She wasn’t answering Adrien’s calls either. He’d even tried to just show up to her place, but no one answered the door when he knocked and the place was empty when he broke in. It seemed like she hadn’t returned home.

“I don’t understand why she’s so mad,” Adrien admitted, staring at the shot of whiskey in front of him. “Is it really such a bad thing that I’m Chat Noir?” Luka’s gaze softened.

“It’s not that. I promise.” He paused for a moment, considering his words. “Marinette has a very… Logical mind. That much is obvious. But she doesn’t really understand emotion change. She’s been getting better at it the past few months since you stumbled into her life and made her question her morals, but she’s not completely there yet.” The answer slapped Adrien across the face.

“She thinks I still hate her.” Luka nodded. “But if I still hated her, why on earth would I get involved with her like that?! That makes no sense!”

“It would make sense… If you were doing that as your own form of revenge against her. You couldn’t steal her jewels, so instead you toy with her heart. It’s her biggest fear and why she struggles to make personal connections to people. She’s always afraid of the person betraying her.”

“I want to kill her parents.” Luka gave a bitter laugh at that, tossing back his own drink.

“Her mother is already dead, but killing her father won’t just undo the damage they did to her. You, of all people, should know that. All we can do is wait for her to come to us. She will eventually.” Adrien slumped down over the table, burying his face in his arms.
Eventually.

~ ~ ~

“So how did you become Rena Rouge?” Nino asked cautiously, watching Alya from across the table in the hotel room. His ex heaved out a breath and pushed her glasses up her face.

“I met Marinette and Tikki in college. We were fast friends. See, I come from an athletic family. My older sister Nora is a kickboxer. My mother used to do a lot of rock climbing. My father was a soccer player. My younger sisters are gymnasts. Athleticism is just something that runs in the family. When I was in high school, I hung around the wrong crowd. Was taught many different skills, hardly any of them legal. So when I got to college and started having issues paying for tuition, I started stealing things. I used my skills from growing up in my family and the skills I was taught in high school to my advantage.” Alya spoke with her hands, but paused here, as if unsure she should continue.


“One night, I got ballsy and went to steal from some high-class guy. The guy happened to be a Ladybug target, specifically a poison target. She caught me breaking in and we were both almost caught. I thought I was dead for sure, but I guess I must’ve impressed her with my skills. Or maybe it was Tikki I impressed. Either way, the two brought me to the warehouse and offered to take me under their wing. Originally, they were just going to help me become a better thief. I was ecstatic. I felt it was something more that connected us as friends. Ladybug even let me photograph her leaping between buildings after she finished a hit. It was the first time anyone had ever gotten a picture of Ladybug before and it solidified my career as a journalist. But I wanted to do more. It was like there were these scales that were unequal. They did so much for me, but I didn’t feel I did enough for them. When I expressed that to them, Tikki offered me the freedom of the fox mask on one condition.”

“That you train to become an assassin.” Alya nodded.

“Correct. I agreed. We worked out the semantics of it pretty quickly. My main focus was and would always be stealing. But… I’d always been in love with Volpina. Yeah, I was raised to view her as a villain, but she was amazing. One of the first extremely successful female assassins. Never caught. I idolized her growing up, and Tikki offered me a chance to continue with her legacy. How could I refuse? I don’t take on many contracts though, but the ones I do take on… Well, I follow in Volpina’s footsteps. I use hallucinogenics and allow the person to see what they desire most before slitting their throat. My assistant and I worked out a way to choose contracts that work for both of us. Rena Rouge isn’t a known assassin, which is why I’m even in the top seven. Because I’m not known. People think I’m a thief and nothing more.”

“Why didn’t you just tell me?” Nino leaned back in his seat, trying to process the information he’d been given. Alya crossed her arms and shot him a glare.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were working with Chat Noir?”

“Because I wanted to protect you and I was scared I would lose you if I did tell you.” She raised a brow. “…Right.”

“Nino, this is my life. This is what I excel at. This is my freedom. When I become Rena Rouge, I’m able to let go of all the stress in my everyday life. I can just be free. I love you so much it hurts.”

“So where does that leave us?” It was like his heart was being broken all over again.
“That’s purely up to you.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So I just woke up and I keep yawning. I'd break down what happens in this chapter...
But I'm tired. I hope you guys enjoyed <3
Three Months Later

Chapter Summary

Three months and no word. Marinette sure is stubborn amirite?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Three Months Later

“Alright, security is down,” Nino said softly in Chat’s earpiece. Chat slipped in through the window and approached the painting with caution. “Careful, another guard is scheduled to walk by in exactly forty-three seconds. Grab the piece and let’s go.” Not wasting any more time, Chat took out his knife and carefully cut around the edges of the painting, pulling it from the frame it was threaded into. He swiftly rolled it up and placed his calling card in its place before making his way out of the building, heading to Plagg’s van.

As he was climbing in the back, he could’ve sworn he saw movement on the nearby rooftops.

“Chat! Let’s go!” Plagg interrupted his thoughts and Chat shook off the sense of longing.

“She’s not there.”

The alarms were raised in the museum and Chat shut the doors behind him, slumping down on the bench in the back. His fingers traced the spot where she sat so long ago after they saved her from Anders. If he closed his eyes, he could still feel her head pressed against his thighs.

“Maybe this is for the best Chat,” Nino offered gently, closing his laptop. “I mean, we’re thieves. We don’t belong in the assassin world.”

“So you’re just going to let Alya go because, on occasion, she happens to break the law for money?” Chat snapped. Nino jerked his head back in shock and Chat immediately felt like the biggest dick.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. That wasn’t okay.”

“Alya’s been lying to me this entire time,” Nino bit out, glaring at his hands. “If it was just that she was Rena Rouge, I could get over it. But it’s not just that. She kills people for money. I don’t understand how you’re okay with that. How either of you are okay with that.” Plagg cleared his throat from the driver’s seat.

“Hey, leave me out of this one,” he said. “Tikki doesn’t kill people for money, she just directs Marinette. Not that she’s been doing much of that the past three months anyway.”

“Still.” I shouldn’t get involved, the rational part of Chat’s mind pointed out. I shouldn’t get involved. I should just drop it and forget it ever happened.

“Nino, soldiers kill for money. The police on occasion end up killing for money. The difference between what they do and what assassins do is that assassins pick their targets. They have the option of saying no. And their employers are usually civilians with money to burn. And the whole legality of it.” Plagg shrugged his shoulders. “The way I see it, if we’re being honest, so long as they’re not killing people for petty reasons then I don’t care.” Chat and Nino stared at Plagg in shock.

“That was… A rational explanation,” Chat commented in wonder.
“What? I make good points sometimes!” For what felt like the first time in three months, Chat cracked a grin. Nino sighed and shook his head.

“I haven’t… Made a definitive decision yet. It just feels so wrong to just be okay with it. Part of me wants to start over with her, take a chance. And part of me balks at the idea of giving her another chance,” Nino said softly. Chat reached over and squeezed his friend’s shoulder.

“Don’t take forever man. Because the longer you take, the greater the chance of someone else coming in and taking her away from you forever. My advice is to take the chance, otherwise, you’ll be stuck wondering ‘what if.’ You don’t want to go through life with too many of those; it’s unhealthy.” Nino nodded, then chuckled.

“Is that your professional advice?” he teased. Chat smirked.

“How’re the classes going?”

“Good. They’re going good. It’s nice, being able to finish things up. I’d like to officially open my own office eventually. The office I have now is kind of… Under the radar. I’d be fined if it got out that I was an active therapist.”

“You’d probably have to deal with more than just being fined,” Plagg added. “Last I checked, it’s illegal to practice psychology without a license. At least, if you’re getting paid for it.” And Luka was still insistent on paying him. Even Alya had started leaving him checks after their sessions.

“Once I finish up this portion, I can apply for a license. Until then, it’s still hush-hush.” The three fell into a comfortable silence. Plagg focused on the road while Nino listed the painting for sale and Chat leaned back against the van’s side, closing his eyes. For that time, he was able to fall comfortably back into the familiarity of his group. Like they were before. Before all the assassins, before the women, before the hard life decisions. And yet despite all the hardships, Chat couldn’t imagine his life continuing on without those people with him.

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“Alright, you can do it!” Alya encouraged, standing close by in case Marinette fell. Marinette grit her teeth and forced herself into a standing position, gripping the handrails tightly. “You did three steps yesterday, so I’m expecting four tonight!” Pain shot up through Marinette’s leg as she took the first step, sweat already beginning to form on her brow. She forced it away and made her leg take her weight as she shuffled her other leg forward. “Just one more!”

“Two steps. That’s two.” She slid her hands forward and moved her leg an inch. It threatened to crumble under her and she understood, not for the first time, that her arms were holding her up more than her legs were. “One more! I can do this. I’m Ladybug, if I can leap across rooftops then I can take four steps.” She shuffled her other leg forward before the pain became too much and she stumbled forward.

“Shit!” she gasped out as Alya caught her and helped her back to the wheelchair. Once seated, she couldn’t stop the stupid tears that had become more and more prevalent over the past three months. “I hate this! Why me? Haven’t I suffered enough?!” She buried her face in her hands as shame raced through her.

“You’ll get through this Mari…” Alya promised gently, rubbing Marinette’s back. “Remember, the doctor said everything looked real promising on the last test.” Marinette sniffed and pulled her hands away from her face, looking at Alya.
“I’m dying. You know it. I know it. The doctor knows it. Why bother keeping up with this stupid charade like I’m going to magically get better?”

“Don’t speak like that!” Alya snapped. “You will get better!” Marinette shook her head and turned away, fumbling with the wheelchair wheels to bring her over to the nearest window so she could look over her city.

“I have to want to get better first,” Marinette muttered under her breath. “I’m sorry to inform you, but even if everything goes accordingly... You may never be able to walk without assistance ever again, Marinette.” The doctor’s words came back to her unwillingly. Alya refused to believe that as a possibility. Marinette wished she could share in that faith. If I can never walk on my own again, then I can never be Ladybug again. I’ll be half-dead at that point already. What kind of existence is that? Being half-dead, half-alive?

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“Press forward!” Chloe stepped into Nathaniel’s guard and slammed the heel of her hand upwards into his chin. He stumbled back, dazed, and Chloe followed it up by delivering a swift kick to his abdomen. She was perched behind him with her training knife pressed against his throat before his knees hit the mat. Duusu clapped and grinned brightly, bringing Chloe out of the battle haze.

“Nicely done,” Polly praised, giving a nod. “You’ve been progressing quite nicely.” Chloe managed a smile and moved away from Nathaniel, offering him a hand to help him up. He flashed her a grin.

“Keep it up and I may have to stop holding back,” he teased, rubbing his jawline. Chloe scoffed and shook her head.

“Hell no, you’d wipe the floor with me. I’ve heard the legends and I’m not foolish enough to sign my own death warrant.” The two shared a laugh and the four began to make their way outside for weapon’s training when Nooroo walked in, face grim. He was finally off the phone with Tikki then.

“We need to return to Paris,” he said simply. His eyes fell on Chloe and he hesitated, before rephrasing. “Nathaniel, Duusu, and I need to return to Paris.”

“What has happened?” Polly demanded, crossing her arms. Nooroo seemed hesitant to answer in front of Chloe, but she crossed her own arms and glared at him as if daring him to tell her she couldn’t hear.

“Tikki has confirmed that someone has been following her around. From what she’s said, she’d assume it was nothing, however, Luka and Alya both agree that they’ve been followed as well. For Luka, that would be nothing new. He is a celebrity. But Alya?”


“What about Marinette?” Chloe asked, fear for the love of her life striking her. Nooroo winced and spread his hands in apology.

“Still no word and Alya is sworn to secrecy. But Alya has reported that she doesn’t believe Marinette is being followed. She’s taken measures to ensure no one can follow Marinette.”

“Measures? What’s that supposed to mean?” Duusu demanded. “Why would she have to take any measures? It’s not like anyone could follow Marinette if Marinette didn’t want them to. The woman knows the streets of Paris better than she knows her own home.”

“I don’t know. I can only relay the information I was told. Even Tikki was confused by the wording.
The good bit of news is that Kagami and Jim have reported no one following them around Brazil. So whoever it is, is localized to Paris. Likely isn’t someone like Martin Anders.”

“This is odd, but are we sure we’re not just jumping the gun a bit here?” Polly asked. “Is it even the same person? Could everyone just be overreacting? Just a bit?” That caused everyone to fall silent, dwelling on Polly’s wise words. It was Chloe who finally broke the silence.

“Even if it is an overreaction,” she began. “We should still assume it isn’t. Because if it’s not and we ignore it, things could go very wrong very quickly. And we would be in no position to help.”

“We?” Nathaniel asked, cocking his head to the side. Chloe nodded firmly.

“We. I’m not passing up this chance to go home. And if you try and stop me, I’ll just sneak back on my own. Then I’d be without protection and you’d all be in trouble. It’s in everyone’s best interest not to argue with me on this.”

“We’ve created a monster,” Duusu said with a chuckle. Polly smiled and shook her head.

“No, she’s always been this stubborn. This is just the first time she’s been brave enough and comfortable enough to show it.”

~ ~ ~

“And in the world of fashion, the famous designer Marinette Dupain-Cheng still continues to be a recluse after three months. Even after all this time, she still has not left her home. Many speculate she’s still grieving over the loss of her mother, but some wonder if something more is going on. Sadly, she seems to be following in the footsteps of her predecessor Gabriel Agreste, who also became recluse following the death of his wife. Will Marinette come back to the world of the public? Or is she fated to follow the same path that Gabriel took many years ago? More on the story as it progresses.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

I wish I had written more than I did, but this past week has been insane. I almost wasn’t able to get this chapter out today. Last night, I checked back on how much I had written and realized I was only half-way done with the first scene. So I panic wrote for about an hour before my wrists hurt too much to write anymore. So if this chapter doesn’t feel up to my usual standard, that’s why :(
And now the arc can truly begin now that set-up is out of the way.

“Have you finally made up your mind?” Alya asked cautiously, wrapping her hands around the warm mug of coffee. Once again, she and Nino were meeting in the neutral location of a small cafe. They were sitting in a secluded corner in the back where there was no one around to overhear their words.

“I... Have. But I’m not sure if it’s the right decision,” Nino admitted, unable to meet her gaze.

“Well?” She had prepared herself for the worst. If he wants to give us another chance, it will be a happy surprise. If he doesn’t, then it won’t hurt as much as it would have, she mentally rationalized. Either way, she wasn’t going to let her happiness be determined by him. She’d dedicated enough of her life to this man. If he wasn’t willing to accept her as she was, then she’d simply have to find someone who would. She was done waiting.

“I don’t want any what ifs,” he blurted out, tightening his grip on his own mug. Alya blinked, a bit confused. In all the responses she had expected him to say, this was not one of them.

“What on earth are you talking about?” she asked. He huffed out a breath and finally looked up at her face, seeming to find himself on more stable ground now that he was explaining something. Classic Nino.

“If I don’t take a chance and find out if we could work, then I’ll always be stuck wondering if we would have. And honestly, I want what we had. The closeness, the trust...” He gave a tiny smile, his eyes going distant as he recalled a memory. “I want that day in the dressing room.” Her face softened as she remembered that day. It had been a spontaneous decision that she didn’t regret. When he told her that he loved her, she could still remember the feeling of her heart swelling with so much love and emotion. But it’d been hard as well, knowing who she was and understanding who he was. She felt trapped but was determined to make it work.

“No more lies between us,” Alya said softly, her hand wrapping around his. He nodded and intertwined their fingers, his thumb rubbing against the outside of her hand.

“No more lies,” he agreed. A thought suddenly came to Alya and she winced. Nino being Nino noticed her reaction instantly. “You’re hiding something.” He pulled his hand away. She shook her head and swiftly grabbed his hand once more.

“It’s not that I’m hiding something exactly, but there’s something I’m not allowed to say. It has nothing to do with me, but it involves...”

“Marinette,” he guessed, giving her an uncertain look. She nodded.

“Please don’t ask me about it because she made me swear not to tell anyone. And with everything
that happened three years ago, her ability to trust people is pretty shaken right now. She’s not even
talking to Tikki or Luka. I don’t want to damage her trust in people even more, especially since I’m
the only person she’s been talking to.”

“Should I tell Adrien?” Alya shook her head.

“No, he already knows.” Nino blinked and cocked his head to the side slightly.

“Why does Adrien already know? Did Luka tell him?” No lies. Oh, but it was hard to admit this. To
admit she needed this kind of help most normal people didn’t need. “Don’t think of people as normal
and don’t think of yourself as abnormal,” Adrien said, giving her a stern look. “There’s no such
thing as normal. Everyone needs some kind of help at some point in their life. What matters is if they
can understand and accept that fact.”

“No, I did.” Alya took in a breath and closed her eyes. “He’s been seeing me as a psychologist for
the past three months. It’s helped a lot with things.” Nino gave a half-smile and shook his head in
amusement.

“So that explains how he got the money to open up that office, and has enough money to keep it
open. And here I thought he was cheating on me with another hacker.” Alya laughed and shook her
head, relief flooding her. She squeezed his hand.

“Nothing like that, I promise.” Her phone went off and she dug it from her bag, eyes widening at the
screen. Marinette knew Alya was meeting with Nino right now, she wouldn’t call unless it was an
emergency.

Holding up a finger to Nino, she got up and walked a couple of paces away, answering the phone.
“What’s wrong?”

“I can’t get out of bed,” Marinette sobbed out, frustration thick in her voice. “I had to go to the
bathroom, but when I moved to get into the wheelchair, I slipped and accidentally unlocked the
wheel and it spun around just far enough out of my reach and I can’t get it. And now I’m sitting up
on the edge of my bed staring at the floor and wondering if I should even try to use these useless
things without you here.” Panic struck Alya at the thought of Marinette trying to walk and falling.

“No, no! I’m on my way back now. Just wait for me.” That seemed to only make Marinette cry
harder.

“I’m so sorry for cutting into your time.”

“It’s okay! It’s okay Mari. I’m coming back now. Give me about fifteen minutes.” She hung up and
hurried back over to Nino, giving him an apologetic smile. “I’m sorry, I have to leave right now.
Mari…” “Promise me you won’t tell anyone.” “Mari needs my help with the thing I can’t tell
anyone about.” Nino nodded and stood, kissing her cheek.

“I’ll talk to you later then.”

~ ~ ~

Luka paced the length of the room, hands behind his back. Cameras watched his every move. The
window was covered with steel bars and all of the furniture appeared to all be made in one piece
from solid wood. There was nothing he could break and use. Even if he could somehow break a
weapon out of the chair by the window, the door was steel and controlled by a keypad he’d need the
combination for. Even if he managed to get past that, there was a second door he’d only managed to
catch sight of every once in a while when food was brought to him. The bathroom was of no help.
The shower had no curtain and the mirror was a reflective metal piece that was bolted to the wall. And if he created too much of a fuss for whoever was watching, gas was pumped in through the vents, knocking him out for at least an hour at a time.

He’d discovered all of this yesterday within an hour after waking up here. No doubt Rose was already panicking. But he wasn’t sure how she’d find him. He wasn’t sure how anyone could find him. He knew someone had been following him. He deliberately had turned to walk through the empty subway terminal so he could confront the person. He didn’t think they’d shoot a tranquilizer into his shoulder the second he was alone. The only thing he knew was that it wasn’t just a crazed fan. This was much too sophisticated to be just some crazy fangirl.

“Luka Couffaine, tell us the identities of Ladybug, Peacock, Hawk Moth, Queen Bee, and Illustrator,” a voice came through over the speakers. Male? Female? He had no clue, the person used a voice scrambler. Another hint that this wasn’t a fan of his. The person had been doing this every so often, demanding the names of the other members of the organization. And just like every other time he was asked, Luka put on a confused face and spread his hands.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he called out. “But can I go now? I’m certain the police will cut you a deal if you let me go right now.”

“Tell us their names if you ever want to leave Luka Couffaine.”

“I don’t know who you think I am, but you’ve got the wrong guy!” The vents activated and Luka held his breath.

30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37...

He gasped in a breath and continued to count as the gas began to make him dizzy.

54, 55, 56, 57... 57 seconds. He blacked out.

~ ~ ~

Chloe unlocked the door to the mansion and walked in, looking around. The house was quiet. There was a line of dust on the furniture. Marinette hadn’t been here in a while, but why? Where are you hiding Mari? After locking the door behind her, Chloe made her way to the lair. Once inside, she was even more confused. All of her Ladybug stuff was there, untouched. But it’d certainly been used, the news had still made consistent reports on Ladybug’s hits. Chloe pulled her phone out of her purse and called Polly.

“She’s not here,” she reported, frowning. Polly huffed on the other end.

“She’s not at her usual safe house either. Where the hell could she be?”

~ ~ ~

Rose chewed on her lip and sat in front of her laptop, staring at the email with pain in her heart. We have Luka. If you notify the organization about his disappearance, we will kill him. If you notify the police about his disappearance, we will kill him. Do as we say and he will be returned mostly unharmed. She didn’t know what to do. She was conflicted. Her gut reaction was to contact Tikki and Marinette, tell them what was happening and get Luka back. But the email specifically said not to tell anyone in the organization. If she did, it would be his life on the line.

Tears filled her eyes and spilled over onto her cheeks. The air felt thin like perhaps she couldn’t get enough air in. She gasped for breath and clutched at her chest, trying to push the panic attack away. It felt like hands were grabbing all over her body. She hadn’t felt this way in years. She was helpless once again. She hadn’t been helpless, not like this, for a while. There was always something for her to do, some way she could be useful. She curled up on the floor and squeezed her eyes shut, clutching her hands on her head.
For a set amount of time after, she wasn’t sure exactly how long, she felt real and physical hands grasping her shoulders. She let out a shout and shoved away from the person, her heart pounding in her chest. *They’re back. They’ve come to take me back,* she thought in her panic.

“Rose, Rose look at me,” Adrien’s voice gently broke through. She glanced up to see his blurry face through her tears. He looked grim. “That’s it, I want you to breathe with me now. Deep breaths, just like me.” He pulled in a slow breath and she forced herself to mimic him. It didn’t feel like it was enough, but with his soothing voice and assurances, she slowly felt herself begin to calm down.

“W-what are you doing here? How did you get in?” she asked breathlessly, a chill settling onto her. She shivered and wrapped her arms around herself, only for Adrien to help her to the couch and drape a blanket over her shoulders. She gratefully pulled it around her body.

“Luka missed his appointment today and didn’t answer his phone when I called,” Adrien explained. “I stopped by his apartment, but it was empty. So I called you, but you didn’t answer either. I got worried and came over here. I knocked, but no one answered. However, I heard gasping and crying from inside, so I picked the lock. I thought I’d find someone attacking you, to be honest. This isn’t what I thought I’d find.” He looked pointedly at the open laptop. “How long as he been gone?”

“Almost two days now,” Rose said softly, rubbing her hands together. “I don’t know what to do. I want him back, but they said they’ll kill him if I told anyone. He’s all I have Adrien, I can’t lose him.”

“You’re not going to lose him, Rose. We’re going to get him back, I promise.” He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her in close. “Don’t worry, this cat’s on the case. I don’t want to lose him either. He’s become a very close friend of mine. I’ll get the info ball rolling. You haven’t told a soul, understand me?” She nodded firmly. “I found out on my own through means you couldn’t have avoided. Next time they email you, text me saying ‘Julia is looking forward to meeting you.’ Then I’ll come running.”

“Julia is looking forward to meeting you?” A small laugh left her lips. It seemed so ridiculous, considering the circumstances. The corners of Adrien’s eyes crinkled with his grin as he nodded.

“Yeah, code phrase. Nino and I use them in case of emergency so we can get information passed between each other with no one as the wiser.”

“I’m honestly surprised thieves are so organized.” His grin widened.

“Well, we are wanted by the police after all. Organization is required if we want to stay out of police custody.” Rose’s hands suddenly gripped the front of Adrien’s shirt, fear striking her without warning.

“I don’t want to be alone,” she admitted softly, pressing her forehead against his shoulder. He jerked in surprise, but slowly nodded and leaned back against the couch. He tucked her head under his chin and tightened his arms around her, holding her close. She shut her eyes and swallowed stiffly, listening to his gentle heartbeat. An emotion she hadn’t felt in a while clenched in her stomach and she gulped. *How can Marinette pass up a man as kind and gentle as this?* She blinked rapidly at that thought. *No! Bad Rose! He’s Marinette’s!* Adrien began to hum softly, adjusting the blanket over her shoulders and shifting to make sure she was comfortable. *But she hasn’t even talked to him in three months. She’s made it clear she doesn’t want him. Is it so bad of me to pursue what she tossed away?* Rose mentally shook her head and took a deep breath, trying to keep her mind in the here and now. *This isn’t the time. Luka is in danger and he’s more important than some fantasies about Adrien Agreste.*
“Trust me, Rose, I’ve got a plan,” Adrien said softly, oblivious to her inner turmoil. “But once we get Luka back, maybe you should schedule your own appointment with Shrink Agreste. That panic attack I walked in on concerned me. I don’t want to see you in pain like that again.” Rose glanced up at him in shock.

“But I’m not an assassin or anything,” she protested. He smirked.

“You know I’m always here for you, assassin or otherwise. Nothing will change that.” What is it about Marinette that makes men pant after her like dogs? What would you do Juleka? Luka first.

“Who was on the phone?” Marinette asked as Alya walked back into the room. Alya chewed on her lip, rubbing her fingers together. Concern was written in every aspect of her. Something’s happened. That much was obvious.

“Nino. Luka’s been taken by someone extremely well organized.” Marinette’s eyes widened. “I’m going to go over there now, see if I can’t help out in any way. Is there anything you need before I leave?” My suit! My viper is gone, I need to be there for him! Marinette forced herself to shake her head, her hands gripping the armrests of her wheelchair. She ached to get suited up and leap across the rooftops. She wanted to find him now. She wanted to see him so bad. She wasn’t even mad at her Chaton anymore, she just wanted him here.

But they fell in love with Ladybug. It was Ladybug that drew them in. Her strength. Her power. Not… Marinette. Not a broken woman who couldn’t even get out of bed. Not a damaged being who had to call upon Alya for help at every turn. And her assassins? How could she be their leader when she couldn’t even lead?

So stand up.

She locked her wheelchair in place and glared at the floor. I can do this. It’s just standing, something I’ve taken for granted for my entire life. That’s all it is. Toddlers can stand. If they can do it, I can do it. She slipped one foot off the footrest and placed it firmly on the floor. Then the other. She pushed off against the chair and forced her weight onto her legs, gasping in pain. She crumbled like a bug swatted out of the air, falling forward. She landed hard on her hip, the flash of pain there taking her attention away from the pain in her legs.

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“What loyalty do you owe to them?” the disembodied voice asked over the intercom. Luka ignored the voice and remained cross-legged on the bed with his eyes shut, trying to focus on the formula. He wished he could get a sample of the gas they used, of course in order to make something to guard against it, he’d also need access to his lab. He couldn’t get access to his lap, but perhaps he could get a sample of the gas. 
He noticed the voice wasn’t asking for Rena’s identity nor Riposte’s identity. So either this person already knew their identities, or they just weren’t involved in this scheme. He rationalized it in a way that this wasn’t something personal, but then that didn’t make too much sense. If it wasn’t personal, why demand everyone else’s identities. If it was personal, why not ask for their identities? Riposte, he could understand. Riposte went back to Brazil after Anders was handled. If it wasn’t related to Martin Anders, then it couldn’t involve her. Which begged the question, what was it?

“Why continue to torture yourself this way? Just give us their names and we’ll let you free.” So what travesties has the group committed recently to piss someone off to this extent? Way too much. They were assassins after all. It was their job to kill people, which left behind unhappy relatives. But who could be this organized in an attack against them? “Perhaps you need some incentive… Tell us their names or we’ll kill Rose Lavillant.” Luka’s eyes shot open. “Ah, that got your attention. She’s a pretty girl. That short, boyish blonde hair. Pretty blue eyes. Such a little mouse to be scuttling around with a snake.”

“They called me a little mouse,” Rose said, her voice so broken and eyes pained. She met my gaze with a burning passion, anger rippling across her face. “I want to take that back! I can be the mouse to your viper! Please, Luka!” My lips parted and I struggled to figure out an answer. “I need this.” I found myself nodding, agreeing to let Rose into a world I felt she wasn’t strong enough for.

“The Rat Pack isn’t dead?” Luka guessed. The voice snorted and laughed.

“Hardly. You made quite the dent and we may not have recovered if not for the help from quite the distraught young lady. Apparently, your group killed her father. We personally don’t care about your friends, but she does. And once she has them, we get you. So the real question is how much pain are you willing to inflict upon little Rose?”

“We’ve killed many fathers. You’ll have to be more specific.” Buy time. Always buy time. Adrien, you better notice I’m missing and you better be protecting Rose. Marinette, you’d better be putting your anger aside to keep Rose safe.

“It doesn’t matter. The names, if you’d please.” Luka frowned and stared at the floor.

“I… I don’t remember them. There’s something in the gas, it’s messing with my memories. Scrambling up names. There was a… Nathan? No, Natalie. Wait, that doesn’t sound right.” Gas began to flood the room again.

“Let us know when your memory clears enough to give us a full name,” the voice grunted. Dumbass. Luka forced himself not to smirk as darkness took him away.

~ ~ ~

“Where’s Ladybug?” Hawk Moth demanded of Rena once the fox had shown up, his arms crossing. Rena winced and glanced away.

“She can’t make it,” Rena explained without explaining. Naturally, everyone jumped to the worst case scenario.

“Is she honestly letting her feelings about what happened get in the way?” Peacock demanded, tossing her hands in the air. “Honestly! Viperion’s life is on the line here! I never thought she’d be so petty about this!”

“It’s not that!” Rena promised, looking stricken. “She honestly cannot make it. She made me promise to bring him back and show them no mercy. I want to explain, I do, but I can’t.” Chat frowned at
her, worry seeping into his bones. Something wasn’t right. Even if Marinette was still pissed, she
wouldn’t allow her feelings to get in the way of helping him. She wasn’t wired that way. The only
reason she wouldn’t come was if she physically couldn’t. By glancing over at Chloe’s face, Chat
could tell she was thinking the same.

“To be honest, there isn’t much you guys can do right now,” Nino reported, rubbing the back of his
neck. “So it’s a moot point.” Tikki gave him an odd look, but nodded nonetheless.

“Until we identify who took him, we can’t send you guys out to beat information out of people. At
this point, you’d just be distractions. Right now we should focus on protecting Rose. It’s clear they
know who she is and likely the connection she has to Luka. So… Shoo. Go make sure she’s safe.”
Dismissed, the other assassins grumbled and began grouping up to discuss how best to protect Rose
without tipping the captors off. Plagg stayed by Tikki’s side, rubbing her shoulders as she turned
back to her laptop. Rena gave Nino a small smile and he nodded to her before turning back to his
computer. Chat narrowed his eyes at Rena.

This is going to get me shot, Chat acknowledged to himself as he slipped out the window and waited
on the roof. After about a minute, Rena slipped out and began to make her way across the city. Odd
that she didn’t feel the need to get a car. Just before Chat began to follow her, he noticed someone
else sneak out of the window and clumsily begin to follow Rena. He frowned.

Why is Chloe following Rena Rouge?

He followed at a distance, thanking the fact that Rena wore orange and white while he wore black.
Even Chloe stood out in the night wearing a yellow shirt, even if she was wearing black sweats.
Speaking of Chloe… The girl obviously had some form of training in parkour, but not nearly as
much as anyone else who regularly jumped around on rooftops at night. Curious, but ultimately, she
was spoiling the chase for them both. She kept stumbling and tripping and swearing softly under her
breath.

When Rena jumped a large gap that even Chat would’ve slightly balked at attempting, Chloe didn’t
hesitate. From the moment she started the running jump, Chat knew she wasn’t going to make it. Her
form was all off for a long jump. He growled under his breath and raced over to her, grabbing her
just before she made the jump, covering her mouth with his hand.

“Are you dumb?” he hissed. “There’s no way you can make that jump!” Chloe glared at him and
shoved his hand away.

“She knows where Mari is! Get off me cat!” Chat got off and glanced to where Rena was going.
Chloe doesn’t know where Marinette is either? Rena was getting away.

“Look, stay here before you kill yourself. In fact, better plan, go back to the others,” he ordered,
turning and racing for the gap. He barely passed the leap, but made it safely over to the other side.
He checked his sound before giving chase again, not sparing Chloe another thought.

After about another twenty minutes of moving, Rena finally made it to a suburban section of the city,
a neighborhood that was nestled in a nice view of the city proper. She slipped into a house in the
middle of one street, sliding the window shut behind her. Chat perched on the roof of a nearby house
and considered the house. It was about one in the morning at this point. The neighborhood was silent
and asleep. This was as good a time as any.

Chat slipped down to the ground and crept around the house, looking for a dark room. When he
found one, he tested the window. Locked. Made sense. The windows were designed so the only
way he could break in this way was to break the window. A bit too dramatic for his tastes. He made
his way to the backdoor and pulled out his lock picking kit, swiftly moving the metal pieces around
and clicking the lock open. He opened the door and walked in, listening intently. Voices were coming from upstairs.

“…While I’m gone,” Rena’s voice traveled down the stairs. “You know better Marinette.” She sounded upset. *Marinette is here.* Excitement rushed through Chat’s blood.

“I know, but I thought I could do it on my own,” Marinette’s voice floated down. *She’s really here.* It took everything in Chat not to race up the stairs and see her, but he was patient. He began to silently move up the steps, answers within reach.

“They’re confused,” Rena said so softly, Chat almost missed it. Marinette’s reply was so soft he *did* miss it. He made it to the top of the steps and hesitated. Did he want to know? What if it was just that she let her emotions get the better of her? What if he overthought it? He clenched his fists. *I need to know. I need that closure or I’ll never get her out of my head.* He turned the corner and stood in the doorway.

Alya’s back was to him and she was dressed in civilian clothes. Marinette was facing him, sitting down in a chair by the window. She saw him first. Her lips parted and her eyes widened. For an instant, all he saw was happiness on her face, happiness and relief. But that quickly turned to panic. Alya spun around, her own eyes widening.

“Shit. You followed me?!” she demanded, shifting so she was standing in front of Marinette. “What are you doing here?!” Why was Marinette just sitting there? It took his brain a second or two to comprehend what he was seeing.

“Why are you in a wheelchair?” he asked. “Did you hurt your leg?” But her leg wasn’t in a cast or anything. Or maybe her loose sweatpants were hiding the cast. Maybe she misjudged a jump and broke her leg. That made sense. Alya was still yelling at him to leave, but he wasn’t listening. His legs brought him over to Marinette, who finally pushed Alya away. The movement took Chat’s eyes away from Marinette for a moment.

“It’s too late now Alya…” she said, not meeting his eyes. “Give us a minute, please?” Alya pressed her lips together, clearly still pissed he’d followed her but left the room. When she was gone, Marinette looked back at Chat. “You shouldn’t be here Chaton.”

“Am I still your Chaton? Do you hate me or do you not?” Marinette looked away, glaring down at her right leg.

“I didn’t want you to see me like this. I didn’t want anyone to see me like this…” Chat frowned.

“It’s just a broken leg, Princess.” The endearment slipped out before he could stop it. “It’s not the end of the world.” She met his gaze again, her eyes shiny with unshed tears.

“Chat, my leg isn’t broken.” Well, that didn’t make sense. Why else would she be in a wheelchair? “Chat… I have osteosarcoma.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

"I have osteosarcoma." I knew I wanted to end the chapter on those words. I actually
considered breaking the chapter up into two separate chapters, but was like 'Pfft, no. Let's make this as dramatic as possible to make my readers hate me more!' Most everything in this chapter leads up to this line.

So because this arc is Chloe's arc, where she grows and develops and becomes her own person, I knew I wanted to put Marinette/Ladybug on the sidelines. So why not make it as heart-wrenching and painful as possible?

I did a bunch of research on osteosarcoma prior to settling on giving Marinette this and my heart goes out to every single person that suffers from it. It's honestly a horrible cancer that affects mostly children and teens who are still growing, though it can affect people of all ages. It's also fast-spreading, and depending on the severity of it, the patient could lose their leg. I want to make this as real as possible, so if you see I'm doing something wrong, or making a mistake with this condition, please, please, PLEASE let me know! The last thing I want is to accidentally offend someone because my research isn't as on point as it should be. That being said, I've deliberately tried to write more about the mental struggle than the physical struggle, since there's less of a chance of screwing that up.
“Adrien!” Nino called. Adrien turned and smiled at his best friend running toward him with his hand raised in the air. A couple of people squinted as the odd pair gave each other a high five before turning and walking towards the school together.

High school was an odd time for most kids. People were often sectioned off into their own little bubbles. The rich kids, the losers, the delinquents, etc. When Adrien first started going here, people automatically assumed he’d fit in with all the stuck-up rich kids. On his first day, Heather Bourgeois proudly took his arm and proclaimed that she’d happily show him around the school. She was certainly shocked when he politely declined and made his way over to a group of ‘losers’ where his best friend Nino Lahiffe sat. Whispers started, but the two ignored it. People didn’t seem to understand why the rich model was hanging around the computer geek.


“I think the gang had a race planned. He was volunteered for the job. Guess he’ll be missing class again, huh?” Adrien sighed and shook his head. Their group was made odder to other people when it became apparent that the computer geek and rich model were also friends with the gang kid Patrick. Or Plagg, as he preferred to be called. Adrien supposed they were an odd group, but they’d been friends since middle school. Sure, he ended up taking a few years off after his mom’s death, but now he was back and he didn’t care what labels people wanted to place on each other. They survived a year of this place already, they could survive two more.

“If he’s not careful, the school might end up suspending him,” Adrien pointed out. “Or worse, expelling him. He’s been missing too much class.” Nino shrugged.

“Preaching to the choir man.”

“Hey Adrien,” Heather called out, leaning against the building with her friends. She gave an ugly sneer and shoved her fingers through her hair in a way that he supposed was supposed to be attractive. “When are you going to stop hanging out with losers and start hanging out with your people?” Nino tightened his grip on his backpack strap, gaze falling to the ground. Adrien narrowed his eyes and gave her a dazzling smile.

“Probably when people like you get what’s coming to you,” he replied cheerily, slinging his arm around Nino’s shoulders. “Until then, I prefer to hang with people that have a soul.” While Heather scrambled for an answer, Adrien guided Nino into the school. The two shared a glance, then started laughing.

“Oh man, did you see her face?” Nino snickered. “That was great. I didn’t know you had it in you to be anything other than super nice.”
“Well, sometimes it’s nice to just… Be me.” The amusement slowly faded from Adrien’s face as he sighed. “I have to keep my public image clear. Wouldn’t want to tarnish my reputation after all.” Nino winced and shook his head, patting Adrien’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry. Just two years and we’ll be off to college. Then we can be whoever we want to be!” Adrien smiled at that.

“What are you going to study in college?”

“Programming, duh.” Nino smirked and adjusted his glasses. “I want to be one of those hacker guys like from the crime dramas. The guy behind the computer. What about you?” Adrien frowned and gave a shrug, thinking it over.

“I mean, I suppose I’ll just model.”

“But you hate modeling. If you could do anything at all, what would it be?” Adrien’s mind drifted to the kind therapist he saw after his mom passed. “Sometimes, Adrien, it’s time for people to leave this world. It’s okay to be sad. And it’s okay to mourn them. Just don’t let it drag on forever. I’ll be here with you to help you through that process.”

“Maybe… A therapist.” Nino let out a snort.

“A therapist? Man, with your moves, I’d expect you to say something like… Secret agent. Or something.” Adrien laughed and spun the dial on his locker.

“Secret agent? And what fucking moves are you even talking about?” A fist soared towards his face and he jerked his head back, turning to glare at Kagami. She smirked and tossed her short black hair back, causing his teenage heart to flutter in his chest. She was so amazing. And totally out of his league. But it didn’t stop him from crushing hard on her.

“Those moves Agreste,” she teased, giving Nino a wave. “You are second best in fencing after all.”

“I think you mean the best,” he fired back, grabbing his history book. Nino snickered from the sidelines and shook his head.

“You guys are both the best, how about that?” The two glanced at him before looking at each other. They smirked.

“Nope,” they said simultaneously before laughing. Nino rolled his eyes but grinned all the same. The group continued to chat as they walked to class. Kagami expressed her interest in joining the police academy and possibly joining BRI afterward. That much was almost a given though. Adrien was pretty sure her entire family came from a long line of law enforcement, tracing all the way back to Japan. Though she did mention likely quitting all that to take over the family business once her mother retired. She was a bit vague on that part.

All through history, they ignored the whispers and snickers directed towards them. The three released a collective sigh of relief when Plagg finally stumbled into class, a bit of grease streaked across his face. The teacher gave him a disapproving look and he smiled sheepishly as he took his seat beside Kagami. That resulted in more snickers from their classmates. Plagg turned bright red and ducked his head down.

“Ignore them,” Kagami whispered to him. He gave a shrug and pulled out his notebook to take notes.

Later, the four of them sat in the small cafe, sharing a plate of biscuits. Plagg finished telling them
about the race, his eyes lighting up as he talked about driving through the busy streets, avoiding the police, and winning. Then his eyes suddenly darkened.

“What’s wrong?” Adrien asked, frowning at the change in his friend’s expression. Plagg sighed.

“One of the higher ups wants me to take a bigger part in the gang. He wants me to take part in some human trafficking thing,” Plagg said softly. The three froze in shock. “I told him no. He didn’t seem too happy about that. I think… I think I might want out. I didn’t realize they were… I thought it was just street racing, you know? I don’t want to work with murderers and stuff.”

“You’ll be careful, right?” Kagami asked, giving him a look of concern. Plagg nodded.

“You’ll let us know if we can help in any way, right?” Nino questioned, chewing on his lip. Plagg nodded once again.

“You’ll make sure to come back in one piece, right?” Adrien verified, crossing his arms and trying to look stern. Plagg finally cracked a small smile and nodded once more.

“Jeez, you guys are worse than my parents.” Kagami smirked at that.

“If we’re your parents, then we get to ground you. No illegal street racing for a week. No! A month!” Plagg gripped his heart dramatically at her declaration and slumped backward in his chair.

“Maman! You’re so cruel!” he exclaimed, drawing the attention of the other patrons. Nino, laughing, hushed them both.

“You guys are going to make the stuck-up rich girls have a heart attack,” he snickered out, gesturing towards the two girls sitting across the diner who were giving the group shocked looks. The friends considered the two. They were dressed in the uniforms of the all-girls private school. One had long, blonde hair that was pulled back in a ponytail. The other had medium-length black hair pulled aside in two pigtails. Kagami hummed softly at the back of her throat.

“What do you guys think? Stuck up like Heather? Or chill like Adrien?” she asked, tapping her chin. She continued to openly stare at the girls until they turned away to whisper among each other. Plagg cocked his head to the side.

“I’m putting my money on stuck-up,” he announced finally. Nino nodded in agreement. Kagami raised her brow at Adrien, clearly waiting on his answer. He frowned and considered the girls a little longer. The one with black hair was wearing makeup over one of her eyes, a lot. It was uneven from the other side. Like she was trying to hide a black eye. The other was holding her hand in an intimate way, stroking her knuckles as if they were lovers.

“I think they’re more like me. They seem to be in their own little world, instead of judging everyone around them like Heather would,” he stated firmly. Kagami nodded in approval.

“I agree. In fact, I’d go further and guess that they’re in a relationship. I mean, just look at the way they’re sitting together. They’re super close with their heads ducked down together. Everything in their body language screams lovers.” The girls got up from their seats and walked out of the cafe, hand-in-hand. The group watched them through the window as they hurried away, pausing near a corner to share a kiss before continuing on their way. Kagami sat back with a grin. “Called it.”

That night, Adrien woke up to his phone going off. He yawned and squinted at the screen, which was showing a call from Plagg. He answered groggily, his clock informing him that it was one in the morning.
“Plagg? What’s up?” he asked through a yawn.

“Adrien, I need help,” Plagg replied, sounding like he’d been crying and was in pain. Adrien sat up quickly and threw off his covers, suddenly wide awake.

“Where are you?” he demanded, hurrying from his room. Plagg gave him the address and he moved quickly to his dad’s bedroom, knocking on the door before entering. “Dad, wake up, Plagg needs help.” His dad woke up with a start and blinked.

“What’s going on?” Gabriel asked, fitting his glasses on his face. Adrien shook his head.

“I don’t know, but it sounds serious.” Gabriel glanced at the time, hesitated a moment, then nodded. He and Adrien dressed quickly before getting in the car, driving to the address Plagg specified. The young teen was curled up on the side of a building, looking like he was in pain. He was holding his side, tears rushing down his bruised face. Gabriel leaped from the car and hurried over to Plagg, helping him stand up. He helped Plagg to the car before speeding away from the area, heading back to their home.

“What happened?” Adrien asked gently, looking at his friend with concern. Plagg rubbed his face and tried to form the proper words.

“I told the higher ups I wanted out,” he choked out. “They beat me unconscious and I woke up… I woke up to them tattooing my hip. They told me I’d never escape them, that I couldn’t leave.” Gabriel tightened his grip on the steering wheel, anger rippling across his face. Adrien gently lifted Plagg’s shirt to find a rat tattoo, skin still bright red, sitting there against the bone. He hissed in anger for his friend.

“You’ll be staying with us,” Gabriel announced firmly. “I’ll contact your parents to let them know.” Plagg gave a small nod. Gabriel met the teen’s eyes in the rearview mirror. “You’ll be safe there Plagg. I promise. Do you want me to contact the police?” Plagg shook his head violently.

“No. No, then they’ll kill me for sure.” Gabriel simply nodded as if this made perfect sense. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” Plagg started crying again, burying his face in his hands. “I didn’t know who else to call. I’m sorry.”

“Stop apologizing,” Adrien said, hugging his friend gently. “You know I’m always here for you. No matter what.”

“I’ll have Nathalie call a private doctor to check you over once we’re home,” Gabriel said. “And I’ll notify the school that you both will be absent tomorrow. Don’t worry, everything’s going to be alright.”

~ ~ ~

“How’re you healing?” Chloe asked, tightening her grip on Marinette’s hand. The young girl shrugged and gently touched her still-healing eye. She covered the bruise with makeup, but it still looked a bit odd.

“As well as I can, I suppose,” she admitted, slouching her shoulders. “I feel so weak.” Chloe scowled.

“You’re not weak. They’re the weak ones. Jumping someone like they did, it’s disgusting. I wish I could beat them up.” Marinette’s face softened and she bumped her forehead against Chloe’s.

“You’re so bloodthirsty. I love it.” Chloe giggled softly.
“I love you too.” They were interrupted by a couple of people behind them laughing loudly. “Rude people, I swear,” Chloe grumbled, turning to glare at the group. Marinette gave a small smile and glanced at her girlfriend. Chloe’s glare quickly turned to a look of shock. “Holy shit, Marinette, it’s Adrien Agreste!” Marinette’s eyes widened and she turned to see the model sitting there with three other people, laughing and grinning with them.

“No way, what’s he doing here?” Marinette hissed. Chloe gave a shrug. The group suddenly turned their attention to the two girls, staring them down. Marinette felt a slight blush come on as Adrien Agreste met her eyes for a second. The single girl of the group stared at the two until they turned around, but Marinette could still feel them staring.

“I think we may have seemed a bit rude with our staring,” Chloe whispered to Marinette.

“I think so too,” Marinette agreed in a soft voice. “Maybe we should leave?” Chloe gave a small smile and nodded slightly.

“I suppose. You’re just freaking out over the fact that Adrien Agreste is sitting literally, right there. Maybe you should go introduce yourself. You could ask all about his father’s work. And his work.” Chloe waggled her eyebrows. Marinette wrinkled her nose at the idea.

“No way, I’d have no idea what to say! You don’t just walk up to a celebrity and try starting up a conversation anyways! It’s just not how life works. Come on, let’s just leave!” She tugged on Chloe’s hand until the blonde finally got up, grin still in place, and led Marinette out of the cafe. Under the porch, Chloe pressed a tender kiss to Marinette’s lips, giving her a gentle and loving look.

“I love you, Mari. So, so much.” Marinette melted, as she always did when Chloe said something so romantic like that.

“I love you too, Chloe. Always and forever more. Until the end of time.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So basically, I was watching animatics of Heathers and Be More Chill on YouTube. Already had the next chapter half-way written and was relaxing some. While watching those animatics, I was struck by an idea of a chapter to place between the next one and the last one that involved showing some of our characters in high school. I quickly mapped out what exactly would be going on, who I wanted to appear, what they would be doing, and what they would be talking about. Then I just started writing. I just finished and my wrists hurt from typing so much without stopping, but I’m super happy with this chapter. So I decided to give it to you guys early as a bonus chapter. :D
Chapter Summary

Eventually, everyone comes to a crossroad in their life that will shape the rest of it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Chat… I have osteosarcoma.” The words didn’t make sense. Her hands were gripping each other and her entire body was stiff, waiting for his reaction. His eyes swept over every part of her, looking for some sign that she wasn’t being truthful. He found nothing. Osteosarcoma. Cancer of the bone. Usually in long limbs, such as the arms or legs and usually connected at the joints. Fast-spreading. Mainly afflicts children and teens who are still growing, but can also be found in adults. It was on his medical terminology exam this past semester. Osteo meaning bone. Sarco meaning tissue. Oma meaning tumor. Osteosarcoma meaning bone cancer.

“How long ago did you find out?” he forced himself to ask. She glanced out the window and he noticed the window gave her a perfect view of the rooftops leading into Paris proper, the Eiffel Tower glowing in the distance.

“Three months ago,” she finally said. “My leg was hurting and Alya noticed an odd bump just below my right knee that ached whenever she touched it. I saw a doctor at her demand and they ran some tests. I’ve had two surgeries already to try and remove the tumor without further damaging my leg, but the tumor is spreading fast. They think the only way to stop it is to remove my leg.”

“What about chemotherapy?” Why would doctors immediately jump to removing the leg when other treatment options existed? Marinette wrinkled her nose.

“I had a bad reaction to the first couple rounds. It was like my body was rejecting the treatment. Further, it didn’t appear to be making any significant difference, so it was doing more harm than good. Not that I’m complaining much, I like my hair.”

“I like your hair too Princess.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? Why didn’t you tell Luka? Or anyone?” Why won’t you look at me?

“Because look at me.” She gestured angrily to the wheelchair. “I’d much rather you guys see me as the strong and confident Ladybug. Not… Whatever this is.” She took a deep breath, rubbing her hands together as if to warm them. “I picked up the phone so many times to call you. You, Chloe, Luka, and Tikki. So many times. But I wanted to get better first. I wanted to be standing. As the months have passed, it just seemed like that was an impossible goal. So I didn’t want to ruin your image of me. I didn’t want to disappoint you.”

“Marinette, I am disappointed. But not because you’re in a wheelchair. I’m disappointed because you hid this from us.” His throat tightened and he closed his hands over hers. “I love you so much that it hurts. And for the past three months, I thought you were angry at me. Instead, you’ve been fighting this battle all on your own. I’m not going to just stop loving you because you can’t parkour or kick my ass.” That did it. Her face crumpled and she fell against his chest, letting out heart-wrenching sobs. His arms went around her and he held her as close as possible.
“You’re Adrien Agreste,” she sobbed out, clearly clinging to a topic that didn’t have to do with her condition. “Why are you Adrien?”

“Well, originally I was going to steal from you. My own personal brand of revenge. Unfortunately, that did not end well for me.” She let out a watery laugh and he grinned, remembering the deep bow he gave her that first night. “But you’d gotten into my head. I wanted you so bad. I knew I couldn’t have you as Adrien, as we were working together, so I decided I’d have to have you as Chat. Just one night to get you out of my system, then I’d move on. Of course, that was the night I was shot.”

“You know, you don’t do well with pain,” Marinette informed him. He made a face she couldn’t see, his side throbbing briefly at the memory.

“Then it was just the way you cared for me afterward. You stitched me up, kept me safe, nursed me back to health. When I found you in the bathroom crying, I didn’t know what to do. I always know what to do. So I made up some bullshit about not wanting to be alone, just so I could keep you close.”

“You knew something wasn’t right though. You had to have,” she pointed out. He shrugged.

“I knew something was off with Ladybug. There were too many things that didn’t match up. The next morning, I realized you walked silently, just like Ladybug. My brain rationalized that you did it without thinking about it. Once I was in that mindset, I started making other connections. Like you slipping up and calling me ‘kitty’ like Ladybug did.”

“It probably didn’t help to have Luka come over to help out as Viperion.”

“That just made me more convinced that you were Ladybug. It was weird though, I found myself getting jealous over this Luka you continued to talk about. Considering my original plan was to have a wonderful one-night stand before vacating forever, I confused myself with getting all attached. I found I didn’t want to be right because I wanted to see more of you. I never thought I could feel anything other than hate towards you.” He sat her back and brushed his thumb over her bottom lip, giving her a small grin. “If you haven’t caught on yet, I definitely don’t hate you anymore. I found it hard to hate you after finding out about your history. It was all downhill from there.” She gave him a soft look and brushed her fingers over his side.

“How’d you hide the scars for the fashion show?” she questioned. He gave her a grin.

“Friend of the family, Nathalie. Whenever I need to do model things, she covers my scars up for me. Just enough that it’d be hard to notice them unless you were looking really hard.” He lifted her fingers to his lips and kissed them one by one. “You know, I wanted to tell you for so long. But I wanted you to want the information. I wish it didn’t come out the way it did.” His fingers stroked over the scar on her finger, caused by that damned hidden wrist knife.

“I thought I was protecting you by not knowing,” she whispered, reaching out and carefully peeling his mask away. Adrien gave her a small smile. “I suppose I should’ve trusted myself more with the information. I shouldn’t have jumped to conclusions about your reasoning Adrien. I’m sorry.”

“Hey, I put you and six other people at risk by sticking my nose into your business. So I think we’re even at this point.”

“It’s just so much easier to not trust people. Then I don’t have to worry about getting hurt. I trusted Chat so much and it happened so fast, but I didn’t trust Adrien. So when I walked into that bathroom and saw you standing there…” Her face twisted in pain. “It was bad enough believing Chat was dead. Seeing you wear the suit, it just confirmed my suspicions that Adrien Agreste despised me. I
was convinced I was still his hostage. I was hurt, angry, and sad. I thought I had made progress with Adrien Agreste working with him, you, for the fashion show. In the back of my mind, I connected being kidnapped from the fashion show with Adrien working with him.” Adrien frowned, mentally noting how she struggled to say Martin Anders’ name.

“I wish it didn’t come out the way it did,” he repeated, tracing his fingers down her face. She gave him a bitter smile.

“You lied to me by the way.” He blinked in confusion. She smirked. “You told me that you were a psychologist.” He tossed his head back and laughed, shaking his head at her.

“I didn’t, technically, lie. I extended the truth.” She frowned. “I have a Bachelor’s in Psychology. I’m finishing my Master’s now. And I do have a couple of patients under the table that I see every other week.”

“What? Who?” He shook his head at her.

“Doctor-patient confidentiality Purrincess.” She wrinkled her nose but dropped the subject. Instead, she leaned back against the chair and considered him.

“When is your next class?”

“In about five hours. I have a row of midterms all this week.”

“Then why are you here and not sleeping?!” She narrowed her eyes at him and crossed her arms, giving him a look that reminded him of Nathalie’s silent disappointment whenever he got into trouble. Or Mom’s silent disappointment.

“I was studying when Luka didn’t show up.” Her lips started to turn downwards and he scrambled to cover up his blunder. “Uh, he and I were planning on hanging out. He’s usually on time and will text me if he’s running late. When he didn’t answer my calls, I stopped by his place, but it was empty. So I tried calling Rose, but she also didn’t answer. I stopped by her place and heard her crying inside, picked the lock, and found out Luka was missing.” Marinette pressed her lips together firmly as her brain connected the dots he accidentally left scattered all over the place. He saw it in her eyes the moment she came to the realization. But she didn’t comment, instead turned to glance out the window once more. She looked longingly at the rooftops, her hands stroking down her thighs.

“I want to be out there, searching for him,” she admitted softly. “I hate that I can’t. I hate that I’m stuck here in this chair, unable to do anything. Unable to help. Unable to save him.”

Years later, Adrien would still question why he did what he did. He would come to understand that he was at a crossroads in his life at that moment. That he could’ve taken an entirely different path, and the other path would likely not have been filled with nearly as much heartache and pain. But had he chosen the other path, could he say for certain that Luka would have survived? It would be one of the biggest ‘what ifs’ he would ever have.

“You can help,” he whispered. Her eyes drifted back to his. He gave her an unyielding stare. “Teach me how to shoot like you.”

~ ~ ~

Luka positioned the cup on top of the plate in the dark room, trying to remain as silent as possible. The gas was a bit dense, so it would float downwards towards the floor instead of drifting through the air. He assumed this was how they managed to make it easier to clear the room once he was out. If it was dense and sat on the floor like fog, they could clearly see where it remained. It also helped
them control how long he would be out for, as it wouldn’t dissipate as quickly, nor would it linger. A
drawback of this meant it’d be easier for him to get a clear sample of it, he’d just have to trap it. Then
it was just a matter of experimentation with what he had on hand, which was nothing. And all
chemists know the first step to building a tolerance to any drug is to start with small doses.

He’d gotten this sample the last time they drugged him and had hidden it under the bed. They didn’t
seem bothered by the fact that they were missing a plastic cup and a plastic plate. Shame on them for
not being more hostage aware.

He lifted the edge of the cup just enough so a tendril of the gas escaped and breathed it in before
trapping it under the cup once more. Then he stuffed his face into the blankets to muffle his
coughing. His head felt lighter, but not like he was going to pass out. More like he’d just smoked a
shit ton of weed and should probably take a nap, but didn’t like need the nap. He made mental note
of that fact. Then he lifted the cup again and breathed in more. This time, he felt the effects more
strongly. He barely had enough time to stuff the cup and tray back under the bed and crawl onto the
bed before darkness began to overtake him. Small doses, build tolerance, he told himself. Small
doses, build toler…

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So in the previous arc, there was a commenter who wanted Chat to become an assassin.
As I explained to that person, that's pretty much impossible with how I've written the
character. It would be unrealistic for this Chat Noir to become an assassin. I went on to
explain that even the simple act of taking a life would be difficult for Chat and there
would need to be something major happen in order to push him to that point. Now, I'm
not saying that Chat's gonna go taking lives here. I would *never* allude to such things.
Don't be ridiculous. But maybe I'm hinting. Or I'm leading you all on a wild goose
chase. Who knows at this point?

In other news, hey I recently hit 50 chapters! I feel like we should do something to
celebrate, but I don't know what. A friend suggested a Q&A, but I don't know how
many of you guys would be interested in that. Let me know what I should do, if
anything, to celebrate 50 chapters of this shizznit.
Chapter Summary

People do things in this chapter and I'm still sick with a head cold. Also, the weather is shitty here in Ohio. Also, we had a tornado warning yesterday. That isn't relevant, but you try getting six cats and two dogs into a basement without getting clawed to shreds while battling a stupid head cold. It sucks. 0/10 would not recommend.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“So this dial zooms in and out of the scope,” Marinette explained. “And this one adjusts for distance to compensate.” Chat nodded and glanced through the scope, closing one eye. The billboard laughed at him from the distance. “Always adjust to five meters greater if you can’t get it exact. The billboard is 243 meters away.” Chat adjusted the right dial to 250 meters, trying to steady his breathing. “You need to account for wind resistance. At this distance, any amount of wind is going to push your bullet off track.”

“How do I know how much the wind is blowing?” Chat asked, pulling his head up.

“I’m glad you asked.” Marinette grinned. “Look back in through the scope.” He did as she said. “Right at the top is a directional compass that should be flashing with an arrow going left or right. Do you see it?” Chat nodded. It was something he’d noticed before but assumed it was just a compass. “That’s your wind measure. It tells you what direction the wind is blowing. And if you push this button…” Her fingers moved his to the top of the scope and lightly pressed a button. Numbers appeared above the compass. “It will tell you the speed. How fast is the wind blowing?”

“It says 8 m/s,” Chat reported.

“And what direction?”

“To the left.”

“Okay, so that means you need to account for 8 m/s of wind blowing in from the right towards your left. This means the wind is going to push your bullet to the left. 8 m/s doesn’t seem like a lot, but with a small bullet, it’s going to have a big impact. The way you compensate is to adjust your aim just off target so when the wind blows your bullet, it blows it into your target and not off target. Go ahead and take a shot. Remember to pull the trigger on your exhale.”

Chat took a deep breath and rolled his shoulders back, fitting the butt of the rifle up against his shoulder as Marinette dictated before. He adjusted his aim and pulled the trigger back on his exhale, watching through the scope as the bullet completely missed his target and hit the edge of the billboard. He scowled playfully at Marinette’s bright giggles.

“Okay, what am I doing wrong?” he asked, glancing over at her. She gave him a bright grin, shaking her hair back.

“Technically, nothing. Other than not having enough practice.” She held her hands out. “May I?” He
gratefully handed the heavy gun over to her. Even sitting in the wheelchair, she managed to pull the
gun up enough to peer through the scope with the butt resting comfortably against her shoulder.
“You just have to know how much to move the scope off target in order to account for wind speed.
That just takes practice.” She released a breath, squeezing the trigger as she did in such a fluid
motion that Chat was certain the gun hardly twitched. Her shoulder absorbed the blow and the bullet
hit directly on center target. She lowered the gun and gave Chat a smile. “You can’t become a super
skilled sniper with just one shot.”

~ ~ ~

“Take a break Tikki,” Nino said, glancing over at his current unofficial partner. She’d been working
non-stop all night. Even he’d taken a couple of breaks. Once when Alya had come back with a sour
look on her face and once when Plagg got coffee for everyone.

“No, I need to find him,” Tikki replied sharply, face glued to her screen. Nino sighed.

“Everyone else has gone to sleep in some form or another. You need rest too. I can handle things
while you take a power nap on the couch.” Of course, Plagg’s couch left a lot to be desired, but Nino
had a feeling he had a greater chance of getting her to sleep on the couch rather than getting her to go
home and rest.

“No. I need to show Mari that she can trust me again,” Tikki insisted, her voice cracking “I broke the
trust of my best friend in the worst way possible in her eyes. I need to get it back. I have to.” Nino
hesitated, thinking back on what Alya had told him in the cafe. “Mari needs my help with the thing I
can’t tell anyone about.” The look on her face when she’d taken that call, the panic in her eyes. It
was serious. Alya claimed she couldn’t tell anyone because Marinette’s trust in people was shaken,
but what if it was more than that? Why wasn’t Marinette here tonight? Why wasn’t Marinette here tonight? Maybe I should’ve taken that
psych class in college.

“At least go to the bathroom. You haven’t all night. That cannot be healthy,” Nino said after thinking
it over. He casually shifted through the papers on his messy desk, grabbing his favorite thumb drive.
Tikki sighed and nodded, pushing away from her laptop. She stood and stretched before turning and
making her way into the bathroom.

The second the door shut, Nino rolled over to her laptop and inserted the thumb drive. He’d been
working on it ever since Tikki had hacked his system. His fingers flew across the keyboard as he
made some adjustments to the program before finally uploading it. Then he ejected the drive and
rolled back over to his laptop, trying to wipe away his smirk when she finally came out.

It took five seconds. Tikki had sat down and was just flipping through street cameras when her
laptop froze. Nino glanced over to watch her reaction. She frowned and tapped her spacebar a
couple of times before hitting control, alt, delete. The second her finger hit the delete key, the bug
became fully active.

A black cat-like figure with bright green eyes rolled onto the screen lazily, hugging a piece of
camembert. That one had been all Plagg’s idea. The figure yawned and stuffed the piece of cheese in
his mouth, swallowing instantly.

“I think it’s past your bedtime,” the figure said in a lazy voice. “And isn’t sleep just the best thing
ever?” A green turtle-like figure of the same design popped up, glaring at the cat. The turtle had been
Adrien’s idea.

“But there’s work to be done cat!” the turtle lectured. The cat blinked at the turtle.
“I guess, but she’s been working without breaks. Even you can admit that’s not good. I think she should take a nap. A nice, long nap. And she can dream of camembert! My lovely camembert.” The turtle facepalmed as the cat turned to the side and began to snore, but nodded ultimately.

“As lazy as he is, the cat has a point,” the turtle conceded. “Sleep deprivation ultimately causes loss of productivity. I’ve got a feeling that’s something you want to avoid.” The turtle proceeded to curl up at the bottom of the screen and fall asleep. Soon, the screen was filled with Z’s. Tikki turned to Nino.

“If I go home and rest, will you remove this shit from my laptop?” she asked, a small smile on her face. Nino nodded. She gave a small laugh and nodded, grabbing her purse. As she walked by Nino, she squeezed his shoulder. “I’m glad Plagg has friends like you and Adrien.”

~ ~ ~

Chloe stared at the device in her hands, twisting it back and forth. It was like a glove, but had a blade attached to the wrist portion of it. It was an interesting weapon, so why was it labeled with a ‘To Be Destroyed’ sticker? Seemed like it could come in handy.

“I could never get it to work properly,” Tikki said from behind Chloe, causing the blonde to jump in shock and drop the glove. Tikki picked it up and turned it over in her hands. The redhead looked exhausted, like she hadn’t slept in three days despite just waking up from a nap. It clearly wasn’t enough. “For as slim as I need it, the blade is just too close to the fingers. Marinette actually cut herself pretty badly on it when she tried to use it.”

“It looks like a wrist brace,” Chloe pointed out. Tikki nodded and gave a smile.

“Yeah, it has to. Otherwise, people would question why a person’s glove is solid.” Chloe stared at the piece a moment or two longer, trying to solve what Tikki never could.

“If the blade is too close to the fingers on the bottom of the wrist, why not turn it so the blade is on the top of the wrist?” she asked, certain Tikki would have an explanation as to why that wouldn’t work out. Instead, Tikki hesitated and frowned. She stared at the piece from all angles as if trying to map out how that would work in her mind.

“That… Might actually work. But who would be ballsy enough to test it out once I had it finished? Marinette was usually the person who tested my new shit and she’s… Unavailable.” They both winced at that.

“I could do it,” Chloe offered. Anything to take her mind off of Marinette seeing another woman. Anything to take her mind off of the idea that Marinette had outgrown her. Why else would she not want to see Chloe? Chloe had no idea the identity of Chat Noir and still didn’t know it. But like everyone else, Chloe had been shoved off to the side like an afterthought.

“I mean, if you—” Tikki was cut off when her phone started ringing. She handed the weapon back to Chloe and answered the phone. “What’s up Nino?” Chloe watched as her face morphed into an expression of shock and glee. “You found it? Hell yeah! Alright, I’m on my way. Let everyone else know!”

“He found Luka?” Chloe asked, hope sprouting in her chest. She may not like the man, but she did still care about him.

“Kind of, he found out where Luka was taken. He tracked them to their car, which he tracked throughout the city where it made several stops along the way before being dumped. He can’t,
unfortunately, make out which stop has Luka, but we can start sending people out to investigate.”
Chloe nodded, excitement burning through her chest.

“All right, let’s go!” Tikki blinked.

“Um, Chloe.” Chloe paused, her excitement burning out. She knew that expression, that tone of
voice. She knew what was coming. Chat did the same thing to her last night. Marinette did the same
thing to her all the time. Everyone did it. “It may be safer if you stay here. This isn’t really your kind
of scene.” With that, Tikki rushed out the door, not looking back at the dejected look Chloe was
certain was on her face. What was the point of all that training if I can’t even sit in a room with Nino
and Tikki?

She shook the feeling of rejection off and squared her shoulders. Everyone saw her as a delicate
flower that needed to be protected. She’d just have to get stronger, to prove them wrong.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

I'm not late, you're just early. No, don't look at my suspected upload day and time, it
means nothing!

In all seriousness though, if this head cold doesn't fuck off soon, I may have to riot the
weather.
The Fox Shall Play

Chapter Summary

I have no excuse for my lateness.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nino slung his arm around Alya’s shoulders as they walked down the bustling Paris street. His other hand was in his pocket and he was doing his best to remain calm and composed. *I’d much rather be behind the computer,* he thought to himself, choosing not to voice those concerns. The plan made relative sense. Alya had pointed out that she had gotten the sense of being followed herself prior to Luka’s kidnapping and therefore, with her casing one of the stops the car made after taking Luka, it would be much more believable that she and her boyfriend were just walking down the street on a date rather than she just happened to be in the area. “*Not to mention, two people in a crowd acting loving attracts less attention than one person in a crowd who they’re already keeping an eye out for.*” Sure, it made relative sense. However, this didn’t make Nino feel any less uncomfortable with the scenario.

“Babe relax, everything’s going to be fine,” Alya reassured him softly, looking up at him with those dazzling orange eyes. *Easy for you to say, this is literally half of your job.* But instead of saying that, he instead gave a brittle nod. She spared a smile and pulled him close, pressing her lips against his as they stood paused in the street. The softest sound of a camera’s shutter went off. Then the two parted, shared what Nino hoped was a dreamy smile on his end, and continued their walk down the street. “See? It’s fine.”

“I think I need some anti-anxiety meds when we get back to the apartment,” Nino said breathlessly. “How do you handle this stress on a daily basis?”

“How do you handle the stress of keeping Chat Noir out of prison on a nightly basis?” she countered, giving him a pointed look. He shook his head.

“Totally different. I know I’m at least safe. Here, you’re actually out in the field.” Alya laughed a sweet laugh. The laugh that reminded him of the night they met.

“Touche, my dear turtle. Touche.” Nino shook his head at that, still kind of shell-shocked (No pun intended, of course) that the mocking name Queen Bee called him that night so many months ago caught on so quickly. “We’ve got some time before we need to head back and I want to introduce you to someone.”

“Is this the mystical assistant you have?” he questioned. Her eyes gleamed.

“Perhaps. She’s one of my best friends. I think you’ll like her a lot.” He nodded in agreement, his curiosity piqued. He’d met everyone else’s assistant at some point or another. Tikki, Rose, and Max kind of just fell into his lap. Sabrina, he’d met briefly while Marinette had been trapped in Brazil, she’d brought coffee at one point while he and Tikki had been narrowing down Marinette’s location. Ivan and Gorilla he met when they were walking the perimeter after the assassins kidnapped him. But he’d yet to meet Rena’s assistant. No one had even mentioned her name.
Alya led him to their old apartment, which he still hadn’t moved back into. He figured it would be best if they moved forward slowly, giving each other a chance to find out if they could be together as a couple without all the secrets before jumping back into living together. Didn’t mean he didn’t miss curling up next to her warm body at night. Plagg’s couch just didn’t hold the same appeal, oddly enough.

At the door, Alya paused and gave Nino a stern look. “Before we walk in, please promise me that you aren’t going to get pissed off and start throwing around accusations.” He frowned but agreed. With a sigh, Alya opened the door and the two walked into the apartment.

Registered nurse Trixx Renard sat at the couch, sipping some tea from a cup. Her light violet eyes glanced up as if on cue to look at Nino, a small smile spreading across her lips. Her eyes danced with mischief. He stood stunned. The older woman stood with the grace and silence of a fox and stepped over to him, wrapping her arms around him in a hug as if they were the best of friends.

“It’s wonderful to see you again Nino. I do hope Adrien is well, those late night calls were truly concerning. First a gunshot to the side and next he’s beaten to a pulp! Nathalie has been growing a few gray hairs thanks to that boy,” she said kindly, pulling away. He stared open-mouthed. This wasn’t real. This was a prank. It had to be. “Now, don’t give me that face. Alya here had no idea of the… Extra services I provided to people. After Viperion and Riposte saw me at Nathalie’s house helping fix up Adrien, well. The fox was let loose, shall we say?”

Trixx’s graying auburn hair was pulled back into a bun and she was wearing her scrubs. Orange scrubs with little cartoon foxes. Despite her age, she seemed full of energy in the wrong way. Not like she was ADHD, but more like she was always planning and deciding what to do next. Everything about her felt tricky like she had already planned ten steps in advance and figured out solutions for every possible outcome. Nino decided then and there that if an actual fox were to become human, it would be Trixx Renard.

“Trixx is my assistant and has taught all of the assassins how to patch ourselves up on the fly,” Alya reported, looking more and more nervous as time ticked by. “And because she works as a night nurse in the local hospital, she taught Marinette the basics of stitching people up.”

“I’m certain the boy has noticed how specialized the assistants of the seven are by this point. I’m surprised no one has guessed that Rena’s assistant would be the doctor of the group.” It was true, he had noticed that.

Sabrina seemed almost like an events coordinator. She balanced out the assassins’ everyday civilian lives with their criminal lives. Rose did something similar, but while Sabrina focused more heavily on the civilian side, Rose focused more heavily on the criminal side. Tikki and Max also seemed almost opposites in a sense. Tikki handled hacking and creating gadgets on the civilian side with her company. Max, on the other hand, handled hacking and creating gadgets on the criminal side. Max also seemed to handle the legality of their situation on a day to day basis, helping Nooroo on the civilian side. And just like the others, Gorilla seemed to be almost a security guard more focused on the civilian side while Ivan seemed like muscle and clean-up for the criminal side. All the assistants managed to compliment the others perfectly.

Which left Trixx as an even bigger mystery. Where was her balance? If she handled things, as it seemed, from a mostly civilian side then where was the person who was meant to handle the doctoring from the more criminal side?

“Shouldn’t you have someone to balance you out?” Nino asked, finally breaking his silence as the puzzle drifted to the forefront of his mind. He needed to solve this. He’d feel awkward if he didn’t. Like how Adrien was with mysteries and Plagg was with entering a new person’s home and having
a need to look in all the cabinets in the kitchen searching for something to eat, not because he was hungry but because he’s Plagg. When Nino was faced with a puzzle, he felt the need to solve it. Trixx gave him a grin as a reward.

“I should, shouldn’t I? I wonder why I don’t. Such an interesting question.” Her eyes gleamed with the challenge. Alya wisely didn’t blurt out the answer and instead made her way into the kitchen to make herself a cup of tea. Nino took a seat on the couch and thought it through.

It didn’t take that long to come up with the basic reason behind it. Kagami moved to Brazil and stopped being Riposte in Paris. So it was likely that her assistant was the counter-balance. But would that assistant just stop working for the assassins because the main assassin they worked with left? That didn’t seem to make much sense.

“So it was Riposte’s assistant who was the balance of criminal to your civilian,” Nino said. Trixx nodded. “But why did they stop when Riposte left?” Alya sighed and sat next to Nino, handing him a cup of tea.

“He’s never going to guess it,” Alya told Trixx.

“He might,” Trixx countered. But it just didn’t make sense.

“The assistant either retired or something happened,” Nino guessed. Did they retire? There were talks of Nooroo retiring soon, but nothing from the assistant side of things. When Nino asked Max what Gorilla would do after Nooroo retired, Max replied that Gorilla would continue working with the assassins until someone took Nooroo’s place.

“A little of both I’m afraid,” Trixx replied, a sad look overtaking her features. “It was a forced retirement after something happened. We all felt the loss in our own ways.” She was giving him more pieces to the puzzle with her words. And Alya was growing more and more stiff as the puzzle continued. Not as if she was nervous about Nino figuring things out, but more so that she was being reminded of a depressing loss.

If it was a forced retirement, it wouldn’t make sense for it to have been someone like Kagami’s mother, who was killed three years ago by Martin Anders. That would’ve been Nino’s first assumption had Trixx simply said that something had happened. But she made sure to point out that it was a forced retirement. Like the assistant hadn’t wanted to but needed to.

“ Forced retirement is usually caused by injury or illness,” Nino probed. Trixx nodded and took a sip of her tea.

“Indeed. But look at the time, I do need to get to work after all.” Trixx stood and gave Alya a firm embrace, giving Nino a mysterious smile. “If you’d like to crack the code, I’d recommend talking to your pal Plagg. For once, the driver seems to know more than the other two.” Trixx swept out of the apartment, leaving behind a confused Nino and a sober Alya.

“Well, I didn’t expect the conversation to go like that,” Alya admitted. She frowned at Nino. “Trixx likes her games and puzzles, but I can just tell you if you want.” He shook his head.

“No. You’re right, I do like her. She confuses the hell out of me, but there’s something about the way she makes me think everything out. It’s like talking to Tikki, only with more puzzling statements and less computer talk. How did you meet her anyway?”

“Well, Tikki introduced us. Trixx was the assistant of Volpina. When I got the fox mask, I also got Trixx. It was like a package deal.” Nino blinked the slowest of blinks. The age matched up. It made
relative sense. Yet still odd to think that he had been in the same room with the woman who patched up the wounds of Volpina. Then again, he was dating Volpina’s successor, so maybe not that odd.

Still, even as he and Alya finished their tea and headed back to Plagg’s apartment, Nino couldn’t stop thinking about the puzzle Trixx had so skillfully laid out for him to solve. She gave him enough clues that the answer was in reach, but not enough to make the answer obvious. He knew, the second he had time alone, he was going to be combing through every bit of information he had to solve this puzzle. Simply because it was a puzzle left unsolved. Trixx definitely was a person worthy of the underground. With her silver tongue, she could make anyone obsess over anything she desired. Which seemed a dangerous trait for a single person to have. And he admired the hell out of her for it.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

Literally no excuse here other than "I forgot because I was reading a manga and planning a drinking night with my friends." Bad Bratist >:c

So confession time. I had this huge plot thread with a thing from chapters ago, but ended up taking the story in a different direction, so that plot thread was left kind of there... Dangling... Doing nothing... BOTHERING ME. So I found more thread and decided to tie it up here. Now I can cheat and say it was foreshadowing (Even though at this point in the series, it's all messy. If I pull a Fifty Shades, I'll be sure to clean it up ;P I jest).

I'll give you guys some time to try and figure out who Kagami/Riposte's assistant was! I've left you enough clues my darling readers. They are sprinkled everywhere and I'm partially convinced that on a subconscious level, I left the clues in earlier chapters for this moment, even though I only decided on the identity as I was writing this chapter. But after reading back through my earlier chapters, I realized how well it just... Fit.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to go back through and find the identity of this mystery assistant before Nino does. You guys have at least two weeks to figure it out ;3 Have fun my little detectives~
“Based on the information gathered, we can narrow down the location to two buildings,” Tikki stated formally. The assassins plus Chat Noir were paying close attention, though Chloe noted how Nino kept glancing over at Plagg every so often. “The first building is an apartment complex that has been under construction, allegedly, for the past six months. However, while Illustrator walked the area he saw multiple people walking around inside.” She hit a button on her laptop and pulled up a picture Nathaniel had taken. It showed a man passing by a partially covered window with an assault rifle.

“And the second building?” Peacock asked, leaning forward in her chair.

“The second building is an office building. Same basic story. Been under construction, but Queen Bee saw multiple people walking around inside carrying weapons. None of the other buildings came up with any other people moving around.” Seemed cut and dry to Chloe. Half of the assassins would attack one building while the other half attacked the second. They had enough people to cover it, even with Marinette unable to get involved because of whatever arbitrary reason.

“He’s not being kept in either building,” Chat Noir said bluntly. All eyes turned on him.

“What makes you say that?” Tikki demanded. “Last I checked, you didn’t do any recon. Instead, you fell off the grid all day.” He ignored the jab and stretched out lazily, a half smile on his face.

“Purrhaps I didn’t go and take pictures. However, I can promise they’re not in either of those buildings. Think about it. These guys were smart enough to attack Luka quickly in a place with no witnesses out of view of cameras. They then are smart enough to stop at multiple different locations before ditching the car. This gives the impression that they know people are going to be coming after him. So why the fuck would they be dumb enough to station armed guards in view of the public? I don’t know about you, but to me, that seems counter-productive. They want you to attack those buildings.” He makes a good point.

“Then we’ve only narrowed it down to five locations and we don’t have enough people to attack all five locations at once,” Hawk Moth growled, rubbing his temples. Chloe wasn’t sure, but she thought she heard him mutter, “I’m getting too old for this.”

“Seven locations,” Chat Noir said. “Seven. Think about that number. Why seven?” Tikki paled as the realization hit her. It went completely over Chloe’s head.

“Seven masked assassins.” Chat Noir nodded in agreement.

“They have one. So we’re down a man. Let’s assume that they know Luka is Viperion, because why else would they take him, so again we fall back on the ‘why seven’ question.” This time it was Nino
“Six plus Chat equals seven. This all started because Tikki, Luka, and Alya confirmed that someone had been following them,” Nino said, rubbing the back of his neck. Chat nodded.

“Great theory we can’t confirm,” Peacock cut in. “How does that help us find Luka?”

“When I go to steal something from someone, the first step is to learn all I can from the person I’m robbing,” Chat explained. “Nino scours the internet for any information relating to that person. He gives me information that is public knowledge and encrypted information that is not public knowledge. While he does this, I case the place searching for something of value. Something that fits my theme. While I do so, Nino is hacked into the system, but sometimes a system can’t be hacked properly from afar.”

“Like these buildings,” Nino added in. “Neither Tikki nor I can hack into the buildings.”

“So what do you do then?” Chloe asked, genuinely curious to know. Chat grinned.

“I use the skills I do have to blend into the shadows and avoid the cameras. Then I plant Nino’s bug. His bug gives him access to all the cameras connected to that system. We used this when we raided Anders’ boat in order to save Marinette some three months ago.” The plan Chat was hinting at for this situation clicked in Chloe’s brain. Her lips parted and she stood up a bit straighter. He’s offering to risk his life to plant a bug in the five locations that aren’t marked off the box in order to get Nino access to their cameras.

“How are you going to know where to enter and where the cameras are that you need to avoid?” Rena asked. He met her gaze unflinchingly and gave her a look that clearly said ‘You know how.’ And she apparently did know how because she gave a short nod.

“How soon can you do this?” Chloe asked. If he can do this, then we won’t have to wander around blindly, possibly running into a trap. We’ll know exactly who we’re dealing with.

“Tonight.” His certain words were made less dramatic when his phone went off. A hint of color touched his cheeks as he pulled his PDA off his belt to check the message. Then he straightened. “Later tonight, I need to check something.”

“Is it—” Rena cut herself off. He shook his head.

“No, it’s Rose. She got another email from the kidnappers.”

Tell us the identities of Peacock, Illustrator, Ladybug, Queen Bee, and Hawk Moth or Luka will die. It was a simple message. But it terrified Rose. Her fingers numbly texted Adrien and she pulled a blanket around herself. She felt like she was drowning, like nothing she did mattered. In her head, she knew that even if she gave these people the information they wanted they’d still probably kill Luka. That didn’t change the fact that she wanted to tell them immediately. She wanted to respond to the email with the exact information. Peacock is the model Duusu. Illustrator is the artist Nathaniel. Ladybug is the designer Marinette. Queen Bee is the businesswoman Polly. Hawk Moth is the lawyer Nooroo. But sending that email wouldn’t save Luka. Instead, it’d probably end his life prematurely. They were probably trying to get the information from him, so if they were demanding it from her now it made sense that he was giving them nothing. He hadn’t outlived his usefulness. Not yet.

Rose jumped at the gentle knock on the door. She stood from the couch and checked the camera,
seeing Adrien standing there holding a bottle of wine. Wine? Rose opened the door and Adrien gave her a brilliant smile that sent her heart aflutter. It was no wonder the man had been a model. The second the door closed behind him, however, the smile vanished and he walked over to her computer. His eyes scanned the email and he rolled his jaw, a frown on his face.

“As I suspected, this is something personal,” he mused. His eyes turned back to Rose, who was still standing by the door with a blanket wrapped around her. His face softened and he offered half of a smile. “Don’t worry, we’ve got a plan. I can’t tell you what it is for obvious reasons, but we’ve got something in the makings. We have it narrowed down to two buildings.” She breathed out a sigh of relief. Two buildings meant they could divide and conquer at once, giving the people no time to react. Good, that was good.

Feeling a bit emboldened, Rose made her way over to Adrien and pressed her face into his chest, taking the moment to breathe in the smell that was Adrien. His arms wrapped her in a hug.

“Bring him back safe,” she pleaded softly. *And bring yourself back too.* He nodded.

“Of course. Now, I should get this wine in the fridge.” He moved away and she bit back a sigh of disappointment as he placed the wine in the fridge, grinning at her pinched expression. “An excuse to show up. I figured it was a bit clever—if I do say so myself.”

“Definitely clever. I almost expected Chat Noir to show up instead,” she admitted, attempting a smile. He shrugged.

“Might not be the best plan. What would the neighbors think if they saw you getting a nightly visit from Chat Noir?” His eyes warned her not to say anything more on the topic and she bit her lip. Right, the place might be bugged. The assassins went all the way when ensuring her safety. Even this was risking his identity, considering only a handful of people in the seven even knew Adrien Agreste was Chat Noir. And she knew some lower ranking people in the organization were stationed all throughout this complex. Incognito, of course.

“So, you should probably get going then?” Rose asked, trying to keep the disappointment out of her voice. She forced herself to focus on Luka. Adrien nodded but gave her another half smile.

“I’ll see you soon Rose.” As he slipped out the door, Rose sighed and sank down onto the couch. *Rose. Not Princess.*

~ ~ ~

Luka stretched out onto the bed and breathed in the gas they were pumping into the room. He was pretending to be asleep, bordering on fighting to stay awake. If they pumped any more gas into the room, he was likely to be out whether he wanted it or not. At two minutes and counting, the gas shut off and the room began to clear as everything floated to the floor. *So they’re mostly blind while they’re pumping in the gas.* A fan turned on and the gas began to clear from even the floor. His body was already beginning to become used to the gas, and it was clear they didn’t change up the formula at all in order to make sure he couldn’t build a tolerance. He judged that this meant it was something they bought rather than something they had their own chemist make. Of course, why would a gang think of having an experienced chemist on their payroll when they can just buy what they want with their new sponsor? *Fools.*

His ears heard the outer door opening and shutting, excitement rushing through him. So they had started bringing in the food and water once they believed he was knocked out. That would be their downfall. The inner door swung open and a young woman hurried in, carrying a tray.
Fighting the dizziness, Luka lurched up from the bed and brought her into a simple headlock. She squeaked in fear as his foot caught the inner door before it shut.

“Give me the code for the outer door,” he demanded. She didn’t speak, just quietly cried. He growled. “I don’t have time for this lady. Give me the code or I’ll simply break your neck and wait for the next person to walk in.”

“I-I don’t know the code, honest! The guards outside enter the code. I only know the inside one!” Well, that would be a problem then.

~ ~ ~

“I have access,” Nino informed Chat. “Searching through the system now.” Chat began to make his way to the window he entered through, feeling drained. This was the third building he’d broken into and he had a feeling his luck was going to run out soon. He didn’t think it’d be smart to do the other two buildings tonight, not when the sun was threatening to rise in a couple of hours. He could hit the last two places the following night. “Oh holy fuck, Chat he’s there and he’s in trouble.” Chat froze. The plan was to bug the buildings until they found the one Luka was in. Once that was done, Chat would retreat and the assassins would take over. This was their specialty. But if Luka was in trouble…

“Guide me to him,” Chat demanded, pulling his baton from his belt and extending it. This is just another heist. A guard stepped into his path. The man barely had enough time to jump in surprise before Chat’s baton slammed into the side of his head. Just a more intense heist. Oddly enough, he was reminded of the boat with Rena’s song playing over the loudspeakers. He shook the memory away. He had help there. Help he didn’t have here.

“Left up ahead, then straight forward. Two guards with guns. I hope you know what you’re doing Chat.” You and me both.

~ ~ ~

The gas turned back on in the room and Luka dragged the woman into the small hallway, letting the door click shut behind him. There was a small window that showed two guards aiming their weapons towards the door.

“The second that door opens, they’re going to kill us both,” the woman said. Her voice kept shaking. Sure enough, one guard stepped forward and began to input the code. “Even if you somehow avoid getting killed, they’ll just leave us in here to starve to death.” Death by bullets or death by dehydration? I’ll take the bullets. He tightened his grip on the woman, ready. Before the guard could finish imputing the code, a whirl of black fell upon them. Guns blasted, but the person was prepared for it. By the time Chat Noir had finished with the two guards, they were knocked out on the floor, leaving a very pissed off kitty in his wake. His eyes met Luka’s and he said something Luka couldn’t hear. Then the door clicked open.

Luka stumbled into the hallway, barely able to keep himself standing any longer. He dropped the woman, who scrambled away, and Chat caught him.

“What the fuck did they do to you man?” Luka shook his head at the question.

“Later, just get me the fuck out of this place.”

“Wait!” the woman cried. She shoved black hair out of her face and gave them both a pleading look. “Please, take me with you!” Chat hesitated. It wasn’t a good idea. She was working for them. And
yet, this was the Rat Pack. More than likely this was just a scared woman who had been kidnapped and forced to work for them. “Please don’t leave me here.”

“If you can keep up, you can come,” Luka stated. Chat gave him a stern look, which he returned. They had a silent conversation in the span of three seconds before Chat finally yielded.

“Nino says we have a grand total of fifteen seconds before we’re swarmed,” the cat reported. Luka grabbed a gun and checked the ammo.

“Backup?”

“Tomorrow night. This was recon, not a rescue. I would’ve left your dumbass waiting if not for the shit you just pulled. But help is on the way, don’t know how long until they can show up though. Traffic’s a bitch.”

“Surprised milady isn’t waiting on the rooftops with her beloved sniper.” Chat shook his head, sorrow tugging at his features.

“We have a lot to talk about. But we do it once we’re safe.” The words barely left Chat’s mouth when some guards stormed the hallway. Luka turned the gun on them, and despite his muddled head, he made every shot count. Chat was at a disadvantage from the other side, but for some reason, Luka wasn’t worried.

The lights went out and Chat moved quickly, easily closing the distance between their small group and the men. The guards tried to turn their guns on the thief, but he used the darkness to his advantage and ducked around the men easily. I am so glad he held back that night, Luka thought in awe as he realized what the cat was doing. He wasn’t attacking the men head-on, instead, he was using their blindness, lack of discipline, and close quarters to his advantage. They ended up shooting themselves. When it was only a few left standing, Chat made swift work of them, then glanced back towards Luka.

“You coming? Or did you like the accommodations that much?” Luka shook off the shock and gestured to the woman, who slung Luka’s arm around her shoulders. She helped him as they raced after Chat.

A few twists and turns around some corners that made Luka’s head spin. A few more short-lived fights that Chat handled with ease. Then they were standing in front of an open window with Peacock waiting impatiently. Her eyes narrowed on the woman.

“Take Luka, I’ll take her,” Chat said. Peacock pressed her lips together but didn’t question it. She reached for Luka.

“Wait, please,” the woman cut in, suddenly frozen with fear as she stared at Chat. “Can I go with her?” Peacock looked like she was about to argue this when Chat finally appeared to understand.

“Take her, I’ll help Luka out.”

Peacock tossed her hands up in exasperation, but took the woman in her arms, handed Chat something, and slipped out the window, using her chord to lower them down to the street. Across the way, Luka could see Queen Bee perched with a sniper rifle, providing cover fire. Chat held Luka close and the two slipped out of the window. It wasn’t as high up as Luka expected it to be, but it didn’t mean he felt any more secure as Chat clipped the device Peacock handed him to her chord and pushed himself off the ledge.

The device held tight to Peacock’s chord and slowed their descent, ensuring they landed on the
ground safely. *At least the cat didn’t fucking drop me.* Once on the ground, Peacock all but shoved
them into the van waiting. Plagg drummed his fingers against the wheel impatiently as they loaded
in. Once everyone was in, Plagg gunned it.

“Queen Bee?” Luka asked, leaning back against the side of the van in relief. *Freedom.*

“She’s got another way out,” Chat said vaguely. Meaning she was making use of the wonderful
tunnel system.

“Good… That’s good…” Luka muttered before slumping over and passing out.

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“We got him,” Alya reported over the phone. Marinette breathed out a sigh of relief. *He’s safe. My
viper is safe. My Chaton is safe. Everyone is safe. But for how long? Your orders? That’s right,
I’m still the leader. I need to lead.* If she was asked to lead before Chat Noir showed up, she
would’ve had no idea what to do or say. But Chat had reminded her of who she was, with or without
the use of some stupid legs. She might not be able to leap across buildings right now, but she sure as
hell still retained the use of her brains.

“The countryside safe house. I want all of you there. Including Chat Noir and his gang. It’s the one
place that we know is completely safe. It’s the one place where the location is only known by us of
the top. Riposte and her family will be meeting you there. At the moment, we must assume that Paris
is no longer safe.” She was a leader. And so she would lead.

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Chapter End Notes

A lot has happened here. At first, I was going to hold off on Luka’s rescue until the next
chapter, but then my brain was like "BUT WHAT IF INSTEAD I MAKE CHAT
FIGHT A BUNCH OF GUYS SOLO?" And so I decided to make Chat fight a bunch
of guys solo.

Teaser for the next chapter: Remember when Duusu said she’d pay money to see
Nathaniel and Chat Noir spar? I remember. And I've been eagerly waiting for the
opportunity in the story to do so.
Blue

Chapter Summary

Secrets are revealed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Marinette will arrive tomorrow, as I’m told,” Kagami said, addressing the group that had finally finished arriving at the countryside safe house. Though this was definitely more of a mansion than a house in Chat’s opinion. It held two separate wings, with five master bedrooms on each floor. There were three floors in total. It also sported a large training gym, a shooting range, and miles and miles of land. To top it all off, there was an indoor pool and an outdoor pool, both in-ground. The sauna was a bit overkill, in Chat’s humble opinion. Even his own childhood mansion had not been near as grand as this safe house.

“Before she arrives, she informed me that there should be an extent of trust among us all if we’re to be rooming together as such for the foreseeable future.” Peacock shifted uncomfortably at those words.

“So, she would have us unmask in front of the cat and his friends.” It wasn’t a question. But it shocked Chat just as much. From all he’d learned of these assassins, they hid their identities from all under them. Safety demanded that they do so. Any who did not work directly with them with proven trustworthiness were not allowed to know. You let that cat out of the bag when you forcibly unmasked Ladybug, he admonished himself. You could be safe at home still, completely unaware of the darker side of Paris.

“Just as he will unmask for all of you.” Kagami’s words felt only like a nail in his coffin, but he understood the reasoning. They needed to trust each other. If he unmasked, they could sell his secrets. If they unmasked, he could sell their secrets. If they all unmasked and secrets were sold, everyone would lose and no one would gain. It was a dangerous game Marinette was playing, but a required one. Still, he was nervous about removing his protection. Hawk Moth was the first to find his courage, stepping forth.

“Might as well start us off,” he said with a nod. His fingers reached up and he pried the mask from his face. The older man was clearly in his late forties, pushing his fifties, but his gray eyes were still the same as they had been under the mask. The face was familiar to Chat, but he couldn’t say from where. “My name is Nooroo Papillon. I am a lawyer in my civilian life and I represent many high ranking clientele. Not all of them don a mask at night.” He was at the benefit. Chat had seen him from afar while he spoke to Marinette’s parents. The man had exchanged brief words with Marinette before moving away. If he remembered correctly, this man was one of the many lawyers on her payroll.

Queen Bee was next to step up as Nooroo moved to stand beside Kagami. She removed her mask and stared Chat down like it was a challenge. “I’m Polly Abeille. As a civilian, I’m a businesswoman. I’m the CEO of Buzzing Books Publishing House.” Someone Chat didn’t know, though based off of her entire demeanor, he didn’t doubt her words. She was definitely older than him, but definitely not nearly as old as Nooroo. He placed her in her mid-thirties.
Next came Illustrator. His mask came off and Chat did a double-take. This was someone he knew and used to know personally. “Nathaniel Kurtzberg,” he introduced simply. “I’m an artist.” Chat remembered Nathaniel from high school. Always had his head in his sketchpad as the world moved around him. His brain refused to see the meek and shy Nathaniel as the assassin Illustrator. How?

Peacock moved up next. This one was an even greater shock. Duusu Paon. She was speaking, but he knew her story. She was a model, one his father had taken under his wing. She’d lost both her parents in a car accident when she was fresh out of high school. She struggled for years trying to become a model when Gabriel discovered her talent. He rose her up from nothing and she quickly became plastered across every magazine across the world. If Duusu was wearing it, the world was wearing it. He’d met her countless times. They’d had dinners together. She once even admitted to Adrien that she saw Gabriel as a father figure and hoped Adrien would not take offense. He assured her he didn’t. And wasn’t that an awkward confession considering she had just taken my virginity. It was a sweet night right after a shoot they’d done together. They’d both been tipsy from the after party and people kept calling that they’d make the best couple. Most attractive couple by far. Duusu was three years his senior, but even as Chat looked upon her now he could tell just how gracefully she’d aged.

He’d seen her at the benefit but had purposefully avoided her. Seeing her so beloved while he was a wash-up made him feel almost ashamed at the time. When he had spotted her, he’d almost lost his nerve and left the party. It was the whisper of safety for him and his friends that made him move his feet through the party, despite the past they shared. He didn’t think she had even seen him.

Luka and Alya removed their own masks, though there wasn’t much point in any introductions as their identities were already known. And suddenly it was Chat’s turn. Those who didn’t know his identity watched on eagerly, curious to know who was the infamous Chat Noir. Who was the thief who’d stolen the heart of the vicious and cold Ladybug? So with slow fingers, Chat removed his mask and took the cloth Nino handed him, wiping away the black makeup that covered his face.

“My name is Adrien Agreste. I used to be a model and now I’m a backdoor psychologist for those in the underground who need it,” he introduced. He was met with silence as they took in the information and slowly processed it.

“That explains Marinette’s reaction,” Polly attempted lamely. Nathaniel could only blink as he looked between Adrien, Plagg, and Nino. Then his gaze drifted to Kagami. The gang’s back together. Nooroo released a breath and shook his head. Duusu opened her mouth to speak, but seemed to think better of it and turned away, her posture stiff with shame. Chloe walked up to him and stared him in the face for a long while. Then she slapped him, the sound echoing in the silent room. His face stung with the strike, but he accepted it.

“That was for every bit of guilt and pain you placed upon her shoulders,” she hissed, venom more potent than anything Luka could muster in her words. Then she turned and walked away.

~ ~ ~

“Plagg, we need to talk,” Nino said carefully, walking into the bedroom assigned to Plagg. Plagg turned to one of his best friends and gestured Nino in. The room was a mess as Plagg had made a clear effort to try and unpack. But Plagg wasn’t exactly the most proactive when it came to most things.

“What’s up?” he asked with a bit of forced cheer. Since Luka had informed everyone on what he’d endured and learned while locked up, Plagg had retreated into himself somewhat. Nino had caught him on multiple occasions rubbing his hip where the forced tattoo sat.
“What happened to Kagami’s assistant?” Nino asked bluntly. Plagg blinked at him, clearly confused. “I was recently told that you knew more about this than Adrien and I do.”

“Kagami’s assistant?” Understanding dawned on Plagg’s face quickly. And just as quickly he stood and rushed to the door, closing it and locking it. There seemed to be a bit of panic on the man’s face. “This is information I shouldn’t have, how did you know I had it?” Nino frowned, taken aback.

“Alya’s assistant. I asked where her balance was and she gave me a bunch of hidden clues and context before suggesting I talk to you about it. It feels as though she’s testing me, though for what I couldn’t tell you.” Plagg rubbed his face and began to pace.

“From the information I was given,” Given. “Kagami technically had two assistants. Both worked with her mother before her mother retired.” He rubbed his face again. “Kagami doesn’t even know that I know. I have no idea how Alya’s assistant found out that I know.”

“Who gave you the information?” Plagg shook his head and gave Nino a look. The look clearly informed Nino that Plagg couldn’t, or wouldn’t, say. Not yet. But Plagg did give Nino what was given him. And Nino made his way back to his room after making all the promises to Plagg not to speak a word of it to anyone.

~ ~ ~

Adrien swung his baton around the empty room tirelessly, face still stinging a phantom sting. Though he supposed it had been her words that stung more than her hand.

“You’re letting your right guard down,” a soft voice called out. Adrien paused and glanced over, seeing Nathaniel leaning against the wall. Adrien gave a single-shoulder shrug, moving to grab his bottle of water.

“Working out the muscles of my right side. I was shot there you know,” he replied. Nathaniel gave a simple nod, considering him.

“In high school, I’d never have pegged you for someone who’d become a thief.”

“I’d never had pegged you for someone who’d become an assassin.”

Nathaniel’s lips quirked up slightly. “Touche.” He was silent for a moment. “Thinking back on it, it’s kind of amazing that I never figured it out. You, Plagg, Nino, and Kagami were practically inseparable. Then Kagami left. It’d make sense if Chat Noir’s closest friends were the ones who he trusted enough to help with his thieving.” Adrien shrugged.

“People see what they want to. How can a model be a thief after all?” Nathaniel laughed.

“How can one be an assassin? I should’ve seen it sooner. Especially when we had you tied up in our warehouse.” Adrien grimaced at the memory, then sobered.

“I don’t blame Duusu for what she did. With my father, I mean.” Nathaniel gave a slow nod. “How can I? She took what would’ve been a painful death and turned it into something kind and gentle. And it was his decision. He died with a smile on his face instead of staring blankly at a wall.”

“It won’t erase her guilt,” Nathaniel said simply. Adrien nodded in agreement.

“But maybe it will help ease it.”

“I will let her know. Speaking of Duusu though, when we were hiding out here beforehand she had
an interesting thought.” The tone of his voice was enough to spark Adrien’s interest. “Well, she’d just love to see you and I duke it out. To see who would win.” Adrien snorted at that.

“I’ve been training all my life. You were an artist in high school, not a fencer.” Nathaniel nodded in agreement.

“That is true. It’s also true that I have a good eye for small details and that I’m an extremely skilled fighter. You experienced Ladybug and Viperion fighting together first-hand. I’m one of the rare people who has actually managed to beat them both at once. Kagami has as well, but she still can’t beat me.” That made Adrien pause. He remembered the fight well.

At the time, he admonished himself for not putting his all into the fight and ending it quickly. That had been his downfall. Because he didn’t try his side couldn’t take the abuse after a certain amount of time. Now, he was almost glad he lost that one. Had he won, would he have gained the friendship of Luka? Of Rose? Would he have gained the love of Marinette? Would he have lost his heart to her? Probably not. What he gained out-weighed what he lost.

“I wouldn’t hold back with you,” Adrien warned. Nathaniel smirked.

“Good. Because I sure as shit won’t hold back against you. Better hope your side doesn’t give out.” Adrien returned the smirk with one of his own Cheshire grins.

“Better hope that eye for details keeps up. Like I’ve said, I’ve been training all my life.”

“So has Kagami.” Touche.

~ ~ ~

Trixx and Marinette considered the young woman together. It was a queer situation that Luka and Chat had placed them in when they brought out the woman from the Rat Pack’s den. When asked for her name, the young woman would only respond with, “I have no name. Not anymore.” Her eyes were hauntingly vacant as she said it.

“A woman broken,” Trixx said simply. Marinette nodded in agreement. She wished Adrien were here. He’d be able to help with the psychological trauma the woman had faced. Enough so that Marinette could get the answers she required from the woman. However, she didn’t trust the woman to know anything more about those she cared for. No more than she already did. And Trixx could spot a lie from a truth just as well.

“But what if the lies are ones the woman believes to be true?”

“How long were you kept in the Rat Pack?” Marinette questioned of the woman. She kept her identity a secret, not by wearing a mask, but instead by not being seen. Perhaps if she had use of her legs, she’d have been stalking around the woman as Ladybug right now, but she didn’t have use of her legs. So in the shadows she remained.

“I don’t know. The days blend into weeks, the weeks into months, the months into years,” the woman responded meekly, twisting her fingers together in a sign of distress. What would you ask Adrien?

“Do you remember your life from before you were taken?” Trixx attempted. The woman blinked as if confused.

“Was I taken? Did I have a life before? I don’t remember. Everything was given to them. My identity, my life, my face.” Marinette hissed in annoyance. It felt like every answer was a riddle onto itself. But Trixx cocked her head to the side as if she’d finally latched onto something she could use.
“Your identity. Your life. Your face.” The woman nodded in agreement. “Can you elaborate?” Now the woman squirmed as if she feared this was a ploy to test her loyalties. *At least Peacock had the sense to drug her after she was secured in the van. And Tikki assured me that she wasn’t bugged in any way.*

“T-they like the fighters. The ones who fight back. They like to break them for selling. But the ones who prove too difficult, they keep. Not good for selling. Instead, we’re trained. They take the identity first. If you do not answer correctly to their questions, you are beaten. Worse every time.” Marinette’s stomach churned at the idea of that. That would’ve been what Martin had in store for her, she had no doubt.

“Go on,” Trixx encouraged, her voice as gentle as she could make it.

“They take our lives next. They break us. Tell us we are someone we are not. They feed us false information about our lives, then just when we start to believe it, they change things around. Jumble it up. So we are lost questioning what is truth and what is fiction. Did I have siblings? Or did I have none? I couldn’t tell you the answer because my mind believes both to be true. I couldn’t tell you my favorite color because I don’t know it.”

“And your face?” The woman heaved a breath, trembling all over. Her arms wrapped around herself as she shivered, eyes unfocused as she remembered something she clearly did not want to remember.

“Not all the girls survive. Not all the girls have people searching for them. Some of the girls who were sold are returned dead. Then more girls are sold. If there is a dead girl who is not being searched for, they use that girl to make the family stop searching. There was a dead girl who had my shape. She had my height. Her hair was wrong it was wrong, but her eyes were right. They took careful measures. They shaved the girl and cut my hair so short. It was so short. Then they threaded the dead girl’s scalp. They made me watch them do it. They pressed stuff in my mouth and made a mold of my teeth, then gave the dead girl my teeth. But her face was broken and bleeding and mashed up, so after they gave her my teeth, they cracked them. Anything else, a couple of nights in the river suited. Once a body is so bloated, it could look like anyone if your eyes tell it so.” Marinette felt enraged. Trixx looked sick. This woman’s family believed her to be dead. Who knows how long they have had their daughter or sister or wife buried in the ground, believing her to be dead and gone?

“And the police don’t check further into it?” Marinette demanded. The girl winced as if she could feel Marinette’s words like a lash across her skin.

“They get paid if they question. If they can’t be paid, then the next rank up is paid and those who can’t be paid are punished.” *Corrupt cops. They litter every system.*

“Is this your face? Or are you wearing another girl’s face?” Trixx asked. The woman could only shrug. “Do you know how many girls they’ve done this to?”

“Before me? I cannot say. After me, three.” Trixx frowned at that.

“Only three?”

“Only three. And none since that three. After me, they were scattered. They lost a lot of people. Most of the girls were lost to them. So they ran into hiding, taking us with them. Some girls say it was a snake come to eat the rats. Those girls lost tongues if they were heard. But the whispers remained. Always the whispers. ‘The snake is coming,’ the girls would whisper. ‘The snake will eat all the rats.’ Other girls thought them foolish. ‘Even if it is a snake, we are dead. We are no one,’ they would remind the hopefuls. ‘The snake doesn’t know we exist because we don’t.’” *He didn’t know*
“Which side were you on?” Trixx wondered, her face taking on a pinched expression as she considered the story she was hearing. The fox was unraveling a web that was lost upon Marinette.

“I didn’t believe the whispers about snakes. It felt like a cruel joke the men had unleashed to give us enough hope, only to take it away in the end. But then… Then that woman came, offering payment to the men to help them back up and regain what they’d lost. And she talked about a snake, though she called him a viper. I am no one, so they forget I’m there. But I was there, I was acting as the serving girl. I listened to the words. The men wanted the viper so they could punish him for what he’d cost them. It was then I knew the snake was real because they confirmed it with a buyer. They wouldn’t dare let a buyer know their weakness unless they sought to gain.

“Not long, or maybe very long, after I heard more whispers through the girls. They caught the snake. They had the snake. Some girls sobbed, believing all hope was lost now. ‘They will take the head of the snake,’ they cried. Other girls cheered silently. ‘The snake has infiltrated them and is playing them for fools.’ But those who were charged with bringing the snake food first said the snake was a man. And he did not act like a snake. Then the next girls said the snake was sleeping when they brought the food, sleeping so that he could wake and devour the rats.”

“And then you brought him food,” Trixx mused. The woman nodded.

“It was my day to bring the food. He was supposed to be sleeping, the guards told me. They said, ‘Don’t worry, he won’t bite. He’s all drugged up.’ And they laughed.” They aren’t laughing anymore. “But he was only pretending to sleep. He took me into the small hallway, and I doubted him for a minute when it seemed all was lost, but then the cat came and helped the snake. They were going to leave me, I feared, and I would be whipped if I remained while they left. I begged them to take me and the snake said yes! But he was sluggish, so I had to help him follow the cat. The bird waited for us at the window. She didn’t trust me but took me anyway. Then she drugged me and I woke up here.” The girl twisted her fingers together more roughly. “Please tell me, did the snake get away safe?”

“The snake got away safe,” Marinette promised. At once, the tension seemed to leave the girl and relief filled her eyes with tears. For the first time since Marinette had seen the woman, a small smile appeared on her face.

“We are saved then.”

“Snakes, cats, and birds all feast upon rats,” Trixx agreed. As do hawks, foxes, and bugs. And who could forget the artist painting the picture or the sword that cuts off the head?

“You are going to need a name. If you can’t remember your own, then pick one for yourself,” Marinette attested. This girl, as broken as she was, had enough fight in her to provide information that they could use. And maybe one day she’d be healed enough to find her way home.

“Blue. I’d like to be called Blue. I think it will also be my favorite color,” she answered without hesitation.

“Why Blue?” An odd name choice.

“Because the snake has hair of blue.” Marinette shared a look with Trixx, who shrugged.

“Alright, Blue,” Marinette wheeled herself forward into the girl’s view. “My name is Marinette. I’m
pleased to meet you.”

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Chapter End Notes

Okay, so this is *really* late. I have a good excuse though!

I was reading A Dance With Dragons and forgot the outside world was a thing.

I wrote the Marinette scene right after realizing the time (Thanks birds outside!) and almost typed "cruel jape" instead of "cruel joke" like this is set in medieval times. What is life?

Also, I think Nathaniel and Adrien's mini-pissing contest over who will be the better fighter is one of my favorite scenes to date. Just the way they speak to each other was a lot of fun to write, and I wanted to give Nathaniel some more of a personality than just "Random NPC #4" Who shall win in their duel? Place your bets now!
Chapter Summary

This is a bonus chapter I decided to type up on the fly to give a small glimpse into the lives of the girls who are trapped by rats. Spur of the moment thing that I couldn't wait an entire week for. Plus I kind of owe you guys after being so late with the last chapter. So consider this Chapter 54.5 (I know the site says 56 chapters, but 22 and 28 weren’t actual chapters).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The snake will save us,” a hopeful girl whispered that night. “He took she-who-left as he escaped, devouring rats as he left.” A cynical girl shook her head at those words.

“The rats will punish you for saying such things. Do you want to become a silenced girl?” she admonished. The hopeful girl quelled and shook her head. “Speak no more of the snake. Was he ever truly real? Or did she-who-left simply displease the rats? Maybe this is just another game the rats made up to entertain themselves.” A faithful girl scowled from the corner of the dark room.

“She-who-left was one of you before serving the rats and the provider. When she returned from the duties, she changed sides. She confirmed that the snake was real. And you served the snake food yourself on your day.” The cynical girl humphed at that.

“I saw a man, not a snake. She-who-left may have misheard or misunderstood. Even if the snake is real, he could not stand against so many rats. They caught this man before and they will do so again. No one escapes the rats in the sewer.”

“I heard a cat and a bird helped the snake,” a hopeful girl whispered, patting her admonished sister’s hand to earn a smile. “The snake has help. The snake will save us.” A silenced girl nodded in agreement. The faithful girl wrapped her blanket tighter around herself.

“It would do you well to have hope cynical girl.” That made the cynical girl grind her teeth.

“You speak of hope. You pray to the snake every night. And yet you still remain while it was she-who-left who was taken. One of us turned hopeful just before. Why her and not you?”

“No one may know the snake’s plan. Perhaps he left me on purpose to help bring his hope to the cynical girls. We must trust in the snake and pray, asking for his salvation so we may be freed of this nightmare. And when he frees us, we may dance in his halls and eat at his table.”

“You act as though he is a god, but again all I saw was a man.”

“The snake took the form of a man to trick the rats. I am at peace, knowing even if I die, I will return to the snake. One way or another, the snake saves us all. I pray to the snake that I live long enough to watch him strike against the rats and devour them whole, but I know even if I do not live long enough to see it, the snake will take me in the after.”

“Is the snake truly a god?” another of the hopeful girls asked in wonder.
“No,” the cynical girl replied at the same time the faithful girl said, “Yes.” The faithful cleared her throat.

“Come to our side hopeful girl and pray with me. The snake will come to you in your dreams, showing you the truth.” The hopeful girl considered this and looked around at her sisters. She seemed to come to a conclusion and ignored the shaking heads of the cynical girls. She crawled over to the faithful girls, causing the speaker to smile and the cynical girls to groan. Another hopeful turned into a faithful. And the cynical were losing numbers faster than they were gaining numbers.

The new faithful girl bowed her head with the other faithful and the speaker led them in the usual soft prayer that filled the dark room every night.

“Snake, hear our plea and show us the way. Keep us strong in faith and in will. Let us not be led astray. We ask for you to come to our dreams and wrap us in your holy scales so that we may awaken stronger and more faithful than before…”

~ ~ ~

“And when the time is right and your belly is empty, may you devour the rats that plague us all so we may dance in your halls and eat at your table,” Blue finished softly, slowly raising her head. She made a queer ‘s’ movement against her forehead with her fingers and sat back against the seat with a smile on her face.

“I’m… Sorry. What was that exactly?” Marinette asked, confusion all over her face. Blue gave a breathless giggle.

“The prayer of the faithful girls. I was a cynical, but I turned hopeful after the meeting between the rats and the provider. I never thought I’d say the prayer myself, but how can I not become a faithful when the prayer has come true. And now I’m going to meet the snake in truth.” Marinette’s jaw dropped as she blinked.

“So… The snake is a god to you girls?” Trixx asked from the driver’s seat, amusement on her features. Blue nodded. “Oh, that boy’s ego is already big enough. I cannot wait to see the look on his face when he discovers that he’s actually a god.”

“I feel like I need to start drinking,” Marinette grumbled, rubbing at her temples. “Heavily.” She could already picture the slow smirk spreading across Luka’s lips. She could already hear the jokes and comments he’d undoubtedly make.

Blue reached across the seats and gave Marinette’s leg a pat, smiling gently. “Don’t worry, the snake will protect us. So long as we keep faith.” Trixx gave Marinette a smirk in the rearview mirror.

“Yeah, Marinette. Just keep faith in the snake. He’ll protect us,” she joked. Marinette shot the woman a look of pure venom, worthy of the “snake’s” arsenal.

“And who will protect the snake the first time he makes a joke?” she asked in return. Blue seemed confused, which only made Trixx laugh and Marinette roll her eyes. An assassin is a god. I guess weirder things have happened. After all, this is France.

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Chapter End Notes
I was reading over your comments, and reread the last scene when it hit me. Luka is a god. It's so obvious! He's the snake that devours the rat!
I also just finished reading A Dance With Dragons and then watched a bunch of Game of Thrones videos on YouTube, so... The night is dark and full of terrors. Take that how you will.
I think this will be a fun side thing though lol XD
Hope

Chapter Summary

Luka is faced with questions, Nino makes a discovery, and Bratist actually uploads on time. What a rollercoaster of emotions.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Marinette is here,” Kagami called from the hallway. Luka jerked upright.

“She’s finally here?” A wave of panic washed over him. Chat had pulled him aside not long after he’d woken up and softly explained the silence behind the past three months. After Luka got over his initial rage of being shut out of her life for something so insignificant, worry seeped into his bones in place of the rage. And now I’m finally going to see her. Osteosarcoma. He wished he hadn’t looked the disease up on the internet.

“Come on, she wants to address everyone in the main hall.” Kagami shifted the weight of Kaida, her adorable daughter, from one hip to another. The toddler managed to grab hold of Kagami’s short black hair and tugged hard, causing Luka to laugh in spite of his panic.

“That little girl is going to make a fearsome Riposte one day,” he commented, following Kagami out of his room and into the hall. Kagami chuckled and nodded, carefully removing her hair from the girl’s grip.

“That she is. She’s already got a fencer’s grip. It’s in her blood.” Luka smiled fondly at the toddler with her straight brown hair and soft brown eyes. She had clearly taken the best of her parents’ genetics, there was no doubt about that. When Kagami had flown back to Brazil three months ago, he still wasn’t sure if he could truly see her as a gentle and kind mother, she’d always been the calculating and harsh Riposte. Seeing her now, holding her daughter, the way she looked at her husband… It was like looking at another woman. The family life looked good on her, truly, but he also worried if some parts of her Riposte personality would bleed over. Such as when it came to protecting her family.

What would happen when someone came, guns a blazing, looking for Riposte? How would little Kaida react then? Would it happen, or would Kagami hang up her suit for good? She left three years ago to hunt down Martin Anders and left three months ago to return to her family life in Brazil. She only returned on behalf of Marinette and out of fear of her family’s safety. Of course, Volpina had managed to perfectly balance her assassin life with motherhood, as had Kagami’s mother before her. But the difference between those cases and Kagami’s was the absence of a father. Tikki and Kagami were shaped in accordance with their mother’s ideals. How would Kaida turn out with her father’s influence? Only time will tell, I suppose.

But that just raised another question that pained Luka. Did he want a family one day? Could he even attain such a thing? And if he did, could he protect his family? He knew he couldn’t have been the only person having these thoughts either. He saw it on everyone’s face as they watched Kagami and Jim celebrate over Kaida’s true walk without help. He saw it on everyone’s face as they watched Kagami come to tears whenever Kaida gurgled out “Maman” or “Papa.” At least, Kagami had no
lack of a baby sitter… The female assassins were supposed to be these imposing and hardened figures, but they melted at the chance to hold Kaida. And… Yeah, he and the guys melted whenever they got a chance to hold the little youngster too. It was hard not to melt a little. She was a reflection of all they could have.

“Oh let Auntie Peacock hold the little cheri dear,” Duusu said brightly as the trio made it into the main hall. Kagami laughed and nodded, passing the toddler over to the model, who’s entire face lit up as she held the girl. Max joined his fiancee and the two whispered softly in French to the young girl, who’d mostly heard only Portuguese, with specks of English and French, her entire life. Kagami had mentioned making a point to speak to her daughter in English, Portuguese, and French, but not everyone in Brazil spoke French. When Luka asked her why she used English, she replied by stating that it was one of the hardest languages to learn, which Luka couldn’t deny, and as such, she wanted to make sure it would be one of the first Kaida learned.

“Besides, I’m not as good with Portuguese as I should be, considering I lived there for three years. Since most of the people in my town were more or less fluent in English, that’s what we used to communicate,” she had explained.

“May I have everyone’s attention please?” Alya called out, standing in front of the main doors. Everyone turned their attention to her. “Marinette wants to address everyone about the threat we’re currently facing. She and Trixx spoke to the young woman Adrien and Luka rescued at length and discovered quite a lot. But she wanted me to explain her disappearance for the past three months.” Now she definitely had everyone’s undivided attention. Those who didn’t know, the majority of the people there, were anxious. Those who knew seemed sad.

Alya took a slow breath and began. “About three months ago, Marinette noticed something off about her leg. At the time, she was still angry at the situation revolving around Adrien’s identity. At my behest, she spoke to Trixx who introduced her to a doctor who would keep things off the record.” Alya closed her eyes for a moment, steeling herself for her next words. “It was discovered that she had osteosarcoma.” Stunned silence met her. “She ordered me to keep this a secret from everyone while she underwent various treatments to solve the issue. Unfortunately, many of the treatments have failed for one reason or another. As it stands, she has lost the use of her legs and is confined to a wheelchair.”

“Why didn’t she tell us?” Polly demanded, her anger betrayed by the cracking in her voice. Alya opened her mouth to speak, but then shook her head. She stepped aside and Marinette wheeled herself in from one of the side rooms, a stern expression on her face.

Marinette… If Luka was honest, he didn’t truly believe Adrien. Not until that moment when he saw her move out into view of everyone, looking like herself, but not. She was more gaunt and skinny, her skin more translucent. She looked sick, but not as bad as she could have looked if the pictures on the internet could be believed.

“Because I was ashamed of myself,” Marinette said simply. “I’m supposed to be the leader. The strong and confident Ladybug. Not Marinette in a wheelchair. I felt useless and pathetic. I wanted to tell you so many times, but I wanted to be able to be standing. When it became more and more clear that it was an impossible goal to strive towards, I decided I didn’t want to ruin your image of me.” She discreetly brushed her fingers under her eyes. “That was wrong of me, and I admit that. I should have placed more trust in all of you.” Her eyes found Chloe’s in the room and her face crumbled. “And I can never truly express how sorry I am that I hid this from those I love.” Chloe bit her lip as tears escaped her eyes and she gave Marinette a nod and a half-smile, letting the woman know that she understood the decision, even if she didn’t agree with it. Like how Luka and Chat could talk without words, like how Peacock and Max could speak without them, like how Kagami and Jim
could have entire conversations with just one look... Marinette and Chloe clearly had an entire conversation in the span of two seconds.

“Legs or not, you’re still our leader,” Nathaniel stated firmly, straightening. His gaze drifted over everyone else as they nodded in agreement. “We didn’t shove you into the position because you’re the best of the best, despite what we told you. You truly are the best for the job.”

“How do we move forward Ladybug?” Sabrina asked, purposefully using Marinette’s code name to remind the leader of who she was. “With this threat and with your condition?”

“I’m getting my leg amputated. Sooner rather than later. As for the threat, we’re going to stay here for the time being and prepare. This isn’t a single person we can take out to make it all stop. This isn’t the mayor, nor is it someone like Martin Anders. This is a collective group of people. If we want this to go away, then not only do we have to wipe them out, but we also have to end their provider. Thankfully, we have a trump card that they don’t realize we have.”

“But they know we rescued that girl,” Ivan argued, frowning in confusion. Marinette gave a small smirk.

“That’s true. But they don’t know we have someone else with insider knowledge on them. We have a Plagg.” All eyes turned onto the lanky man, who blinked and paled slightly.

“Um, I don’t know how much help I can be,” he attempted, trying to deflect responsibility away from him. “I was just a driver for starters and it was years ago. They probably changed up everything between then and now. They’ve been underground for a long time.” Adrien squeezed his friend’s shoulder and whispered something in his ear. Whatever he whispered made the man straighten slightly, a determined look on his face. “But if it’ll help take these fucks down, I’ll do what I can.” Marinette nodded firmly. Then her gaze drifted over to Luka, her expression blanking. Oh fuck. Whenever Marinette gave him that look, she was about to say something he wasn’t going to like.

“There’s more that you should know Luka. But before we get into that, let me introduce you guys to Blue, the woman who Adrien and Luka saved.” Trixx walked out of that side room, guiding the young woman with her. The woman looked a bit nervous and scared, she was gripping Trixx’s hand like a lifeline as she watched all the people staring up at her. Trixx led her over to Marinette, where the woman took Marinette’s hand for reassurance. Marinette spared her a simple smile.

In the better lighting, Luka got a good look at her. She was tall and fair with long black hair and soft features. Her eyes were a pretty hazel color, but they were haunted. And the reality of what Marinette was going to say next hit Luka like a ton of bricks. No, no, no. I ended that shit! He stared at Marinette, pleading with his eyes for her not to confirm what he’d realized. Her eyes softened in apology.

“This is Blue,” Marinette began carefully. “She was held as a slave, more or less. And she wasn’t the only one. There are at least twenty girls still being held captive there, maybe more and maybe less.”

“Oh shit,” Rose whispered from Luka’s side, her hand finding his and gripping tightly. She cleared her throat and attempted to speak up. “There’s more? But we... We thought...” Marinette shook her head.

“They went underground. They hid themselves well.” Blue tipped her face up and her eyes met Luka’s. And suddenly her entire demeanor changed in a flash.

She stumbled away from Marinette and raced over to Luka, falling to her knees and taking his free hand in a cold grip. Her entire face lit up with joy as a laugh escaped her lips. He blinked in shock.
“You’re here! You’re truly here! I’m touching you!” she cried out joyously. Trixx failed to hide her amused face. “The snake is real and he’s here! I didn’t dream it! The snake is here so we are saved!” Luka blinked a couple more times.

“Um, yes. I am here…” he attempted carefully. Only Marinette and Trixx seemed to know what was going on. Everyone else seemed as confused as he was. Trixx took it upon herself to explain.

“So the girls that are there are divided into four categories. They don’t remember their names, so they refer to themselves by what they believe with a slight exception for some. There are the silenced girls, who have no tongues.” Rose stiffened beside Luka. Luka struggled to pull his eyes from the woman mumbling at his feet to stare at Trixx, her words causing anger to course through his veins. “But the rest are labeled by each other as the cynical girls, the hopeful girls, and the faithful girls. The cynical girls are the ones who don’t believe ‘the snake’ exists. The hopeful girls believe he does. And the faithful girls… Well, they not only believe he exists, but they believe he is a god. Their god.” She gestured to Blue. “Meet a newly converted faithful.”

Silence echoed in the main hall for a few seconds. Then Gorilla roared with laughter, clutching his sides. Luka couldn’t blame him, it sounded pretty unbelievable.

“Wait, I’m a god?” Luka asked, a slow smirk stretching across his face. Marinette glared at him, daring him to make a comment. Blue smiled up at him, then gasped and began to pat down her hair.

“I knew you’d slither into their hearts during your captivity Luka,” Adrien called out with a grin.

“Shut it cat,” he fired back, the ridiculousness of the situation relieving him of some of his anger and frustration. “Blue, you don’t have to kneel in front of me,” he told her gently, helping her to her feet. She flashed him a brilliant smile.

“The snake is truly as generous as he is mighty,” she pronounced. “And he will feast upon the rats so we may dance in his halls and feast at his table.” As amusing as it was, he knew he couldn’t let this go on for too much longer.

“Blue, I’m not a god. I’m just a man,” he told her gently. “My name is Luka Couffaine.” Blue simply smiled.

“Even if you do not understand, you are the snake. If you were not the snake, you would not have survived the rats. No man or woman can survive them.” His heart ached as he thought of Juleka. He shook his head again.

“But I never would have even become Viperion if they hadn’t taken my sister away from me.”

“Luka,” Trixx cut in. He turned his gaze to meet hers. “There’s more… But later. Later. For now, we should finish up the meeting.” He frowned but nodded, attempting to focus on Marinette while Blue clung to his arm.

“For starters, everyone here is going to be training as much as possible in all forms of fighting. If they attack us again, none of us will be without the ability to protect ourselves. While we were on the road, Trixx got a text from Alya with a wonderful suggestion. Alya?” Alya nodded and clasped her hands together in front of her.

“So Adrien and Nathaniel mentioned having a dueling match to sate some curiosity on who would win. Let’s be honest, we’ve all wondered it.” She’s really not wrong. “So when Trixx reported to me that everyone would be receiving training, I had a thought of using their match to help people learn. How better to learn if not from the best?” This was met with rumbles of approval. Naturally.
“With that agreed, let’s set up the gym for this match,” Marinette announced firmly.

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“The match is about to start, what’s up?” Luka asked Trixx. She offered him and Rose a seat, which she took and he refused.

“While Blue told us her story, she mentioned some things that got the wheels in my head turning,” she explained gently. “But I don’t want to get your hopes up in case I’m wrong.” Rose frowned.

“Just tell us,” Rose said, rubbing her arms. Trixx nodded.

“Very well. Juleka may not be dead.” Luka stiffened.

“Trixx… I saw her with my own eyes,” he said lowly, voice laced with threat. “She is dead. I buried her. I tore them apart for what they did to her.” Trixx nodded and sank into a seat herself, seeming older than her age.

“Yes, you saw a woman who looked identical to Juleka Couffaine. However, what if it wasn’t Juleka? What if she was still alive?” She quickly explained to the two what Blue had explained to her and Marinette about using a dead girl no one was searching for to get families to stop searching for the ones still alive.

“She could… Be alive…?” Rose breathed out, her hand covering her mouth. _Thirteen years._ Luka realized. _She could have been alive for the past thirteen years._

“There’s a chance…” he began slowly. “But I ripped that warehouse apart. I released everyone being held there.”

“They managed to get away with Blue,” Trixx pointed out. He glanced skywards.

“I don’t know if I can even allow myself to hope,” he admitted. Because if I allow myself to hope, then that means I _left_ her for thirteen years to those monsters.” Trixx’s hand covered his and he allowed himself to look down at her.

“I can’t tell you whether or not to hope. But what I can tell you is that it still is not your fault. Whatever comes of this, whether she is alive or not, it’s not your fault. Despite what Blue may believe, you are not a god. However, the _hope_ that those girls have in _you_ is what keeps them going. So whether or not your sister is alive, fight. Fight for those girls still trapped. Because that’s what Juleka would want, if she’s any bit of the girl you both say she is.” Her gaze turned to Rose. “That goes for the both of you. Don’t give into guilt or despair. Fight for them.”

~ ~ ~

Nino’s eyes flew over the information on the drive that Plagg had given to him. The more he read, the more stunned he became. _Proof that Adrien Agreste is Chat Noir._ How did Plagg get this? And what more secrets did Trixx have hiding?

“This has been Chat Noir’s most successful heist to date as the scroll is easily worth over fifteen million euro.” A soft laugh.

“Best help money can buy Dad. Just like I promised.”

The voice clip was old. But there was an older one, which Nino promptly clicked on.
“Are you there Marinette?” Gabriel Agreste called out weakly. Some shuffling.

“I’m here Gabe,” Marinette responded gently.

“I want you to buy my company,” he ordered. Silence.

“Gabe, I don’t have enough money. You’d be fucked on finances.”

“I don’t care. I won’t allow my company to fall into the hands of those morons. I talked it over with Nathalie and she agrees. Do whatever it takes to buy my company. Tikki agrees that you need something. A legal leg to stand upon. My company will fulfill that role and I certainly can’t run it. Do not let them take it.” Sniffling.

“Okay, okay. I promise.”

“Marinette?” Nathalie called. “I wanted to let you know now that… I’m retiring. I want to give my all to Adrien right now and I can’t do that if I’m still…”

“I understand. Kagami is gone anyway. You and Gabriel were always a package deal. Seems only right that you both retire together.” Shuffling. “Gabe, don’t forget that Trixx is going to be with you every step of the way.”

“Is the voice recording needed?” A watery laugh.

“Yes. If anyone came after you… Well, we protect our own.”

“Stop those tears now my darling lucky bug. I’ll die on my terms, I can promise you that. Now get some rest before the rest of the hospital wakes up and people start wondering why you’re visiting someone you should have never met before.”

“Goodbye, Gabriel…”

“Goodbye Ladybug.”

The voice clip ended. Nino sat back and rubbed his face. Trixx and Nathalie were old friends. They said so on numerous occasions. Trixx was always coming over to patch up Adrien if Nathalie couldn’t. Hell, he could remember when Gabriel had patched him up once after he tripped down the stairs at their place one day in high school. Thinking back on it with the information he had now, he had to admit it was a bit odd how much medical knowledge the man seemed to have. And then there was the way he handled the aftermath of Plagg and the Rat Pack. Nathalie with her skills of hiding Adrien’s scars. How could a mere assistant to a fashion designer have that much knowledge concerning that? The signs were all there, but it took this… This is what it took to connect everything together and make it clear.

I don’t know what to do with this information, Nino realized, stunned. He didn’t understand why Trixx wanted him to discover this. Now that he had… What was he supposed to do? He understood why Plagg had kept it a secret. This would crush Adrien. Adrien, who held his father and Nathalie up on this pedestal. What do I do?!

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Chapter End Notes
So I decided to write this chapter primarily from Luka's point of view, as this is when Blue really ends up meeting everyone. The next chapter gets into the match between Adrien and Nathaniel, which will be told from Chloe's perspective.

So dammit Sammon, I tried to hide it from you but you saw through all my bullshit! Props to you for almost immediately figuring out who Kagami's assistant was! After conversing with you in the comments, it's definitely helped me learn a lot about twists and surprises in the story and how to set them up, so thank you so much for that! <3

While on the topic of the Gabe-twist though, I want to make it clear: That was never my intention for the character when I began to write this fic. It was a last minute addition when I realized I'd left a gaping plot hole early on in the story when Tikki gave Plagg the thumb drive that proved Adrien was Chat. I had a plan for that originally, but the story just never felt natural moving in that direction I originally planned and I ended up forgetting about it. After reading through my fic a few times, I realized how I could tie that plot thread up in a semi-neat way. If I had a chance to redo everything (Which I won't), I'd definitely clean that bit up and set-up the Gabe twist from as early as the first chapter. For example, have Trixx come in during that first scene with Gabe.
Code Red

Chapter Summary

The duel finally happens! Who is the superior fighter? I hope your bets are locked in because the answer comes in this chapter!

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the brief hiatus, more info on that will be given in the end note.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Adrien took a breath as he wrapped his knuckles with tape, flexing his fingers on occasion. Nathaniel was doing the same on the opposite end of the room. The rules for the match were simple. Anything goes, except lethal weapons, and the first one pinned without escape won. Basic rules. Simple rules. But he knew from just one conversation with Nathaniel that the other man would be bending those rules as much as he could. No lethal weapons. There were many weapons that could be considered non-lethal. The Chat Noir staff being one of them. However, that would be much too obvious. Instead, Adrien had slipped a smaller version into his boot on the off-chance that he became pinned in some way.

Normally he’d never agree to something as asinine as this. This was just asking for an injury. However, he could tell morale was getting low, especially with Marinette’s announcement, and this was just the thing these people needed to lift their spirits. The viewers were actually making bets on who would win. Even Marinette, Kagami, and Luka had placed bets, which made Adrien more than a little nervous. Those three all had the pleasure of fighting him themselves and knew what he was capable of. If they had bet against him… But he didn’t know which way they bet. And so he shook off the nerves and moved to the center of the room where Nathaniel was waiting.

They both wore only the knuckle wrappings and mouth guards, nothing else. Anything goes, he reminded himself as they squared off. He rolled up onto the balls of his feet and turned himself at an angle to give Nathaniel a smaller target, taking in the other man’s positioning. More of Nathaniel’s weight rested on his left side, hinting at some prior injury somewhere on his right. Likely in the leg area. Nathaniel’s body shifted suddenly to the right and Adrien shifted his body to the left, allowing the test punch slip by him.

He took the opportunity to counter with a sharp jab to Nathaniel’s abdomen, which the other man took with a slight grunt, only to be dealt a harsh knee to the back of his knee. Adrien stumbled slightly, but turned quickly to narrowly avoid the fist flying at his face. He ducked around it and snapped his leg towards Nathaniel’s right leg, but the other man danced backward. He wasn’t lying about having an eye for small details.

~ ~ ~

Chloe clenched her fists together and struggled to follow the match. She wasn’t ashamed to admit that she bet against Adrien and for Nathaniel, but just watching them made it clear how evenly
matched they were. She’d trained against Nathaniel. She even managed to land a few solid hits against him. And it was clear how much he’d been holding back against her. She wanted Nathaniel to win though. Everything in her wanted him to win. “Look, stay here before you kill yourself. In fact, better plan, go back to the others,” he ordered, turning and racing for the gap. She didn’t blame Marinette for not telling her about the illness. It was hard to get back to how close they’d been after being apart for ten years, and Marinette always just wanted to protect her. But she did blame him. She wanted to see him in pain, for everything. She was trying to get stronger for Marinette so she wouldn’t be such a burden, and he just kept getting in her way.

But she couldn’t even follow the fight with her eyes.

She had no idea who was winning. They were moving so quickly, dancing around each other, taking and giving hits. It didn’t make sense in her mind. How could they be so quick? How could they be so skilled? She understood now how Nathaniel and Adrien both would be able to best Luka and Marinette, as much as it pained her to admit.

Her eyes drifted away from the confusing blur of black fabric and fell onto Kagami, who was watching carefully. Kagami, who had trained with Adrien throughout their childhood. Kagami, who had allegedly never been able to defeat either one of them. She simply watched calmly, as if she understood exactly how this battle was going to end. Chloe turned her gaze to Luka, who seemed distracted. He watched the duel with a frown, as if he was mentally checked out and thinking of something different. No clues there. She looked to Marinette, who watched with a thoughtful gaze. The woman, despite being in a wheelchair, still looked every bit the leader she was. Chloe sighed internally, wishing she were able to watch the fight like the professionals were able to and turned her attention back to the duel.

In the seconds her attention had been diverted, the tide had quickly turned. Adrien was favoring his right side while Nathaniel was limping slightly. Things had slowed down by half a heartbeat. Nathaniel took initiative and delivered a hard kick against Adrien’s right side, sending the other man down hard. Adrien’s face twisted in pain and he quickly reached for his boot, only for Nathaniel to kick his hand away and yank the small baton from its place in Adrien’s boot. He then slipped behind Adrien and pulled the man into a choke hold, clearly ready for the battle to be over. Adrien slammed his elbow against Nathaniel’s right shin, causing Nathaniel to cry out and relax his hold just enough for Adrien to slip away. Nathaniel gave a smirk and reached into his belt for the blunted knife he was sure to be hiding there. His sudden frown made Chloe frown.

Where’s his knife? He always carries his knife. He’s thrown that damned thing at me plenty of times.

Adrien smirked and flicked his wrist.

Nathaniel’s eyes went wide as he clutched his throat and fell forward, the blunted knife having hit him directly on the jugular. Chloe was stunned. “If this was a real battle, you’d be dead,” Nathaniel lectured her. She struggled to breathe through the pain in her neck, but nodded. This was training, this was a learning experience. She needed to be faster, needed to watch out for the smallest of movements. If this was a real battle, Nathaniel would be dead. Killed by his own knife.

Nathaniel stumbled to his feet and tossed the small baton to the floor, raising a single hand in defeat. The gym was silent. Adrien seemed confused as to why Nathaniel was giving up.

“You hit me with my own knife,” Nathaniel wheezed out. Adrien gave a shrug.

“Rules were that anything goes, except lethal weapons. I noted you had something hidden in your waistband and pick-pocketed you while escaping the hold. While you were distracted looking for it, I threw it,” he replied. Nathaniel nodded.
“That knife is only blunted for things like this. My usual knife, which is always there, is always sharp. Had this been a real battle, I would be dead on the floor. Killed by my own knife. You’ve bested me. And that’s all there is to it.” Adrien seemed stunned. Nathaniel shook off whatever pain was left over and gave a grin, holding out his hand for Adrien to shake. *An assassin bested in battle by a thief. Was it even possible?* Adrien stepped forward to shake Nathaniel’s hand when his eyes rolled into the back of his head and he crashed to the floor.

Chloe, along with the others barring Marinette, lurched to her feet. Nathaniel was, naturally, the first by his side and rolled Adrien over while everyone else crowded around. Blood seeped out of Adrien’s nose and his eyes were shut. Trixx shoved past everyone and fell to her knees beside Adrien, jerking his shirt upwards and hissing at the dark bruising on his right side.

“What’s happening?” Marinette snapped, shoving through everyone. Trixx yanked her stethoscope from her medical bag and fit the pieces in her ears, pressing it down against Adrien’s side. She listened for a moment before jerking it off and slinging it around her neck.

“Someone call Isaac, I need to get Adrien stable in the meantime,” Trixx ordered. Sabrina hurried off to call Isaac, whoever that was. “In the med bay, there’s a cooler with IV needles and fluids, someone get them now. I also need a stretcher so I can move him.” Max and Polly raced off to grab the supplies needed.

“What happened?” Marinette repeated, clutching the sides of her chair. Trixx ignored her and pressed two fingers against Adrien’s pulse, staring at her watch. After fifteen seconds, she growled and yanked a blood pressure cuff from her bag, quickly taking Adrien’s blood pressure. Whatever she saw, she didn’t like. A flashlight pen came out next and she checked his pupils for dilation. It was like the rest of the world didn’t matter in those moments, only the patient mattered.

“What’s wrong with Adrien?” Nino demanded, held back only by Alya. Trixx finally looked up at the crowd, her gaze turning to stone.

“Unless you want this man to die, back the hell up and let me do my job.” Chloe jerked back in surprise, the reality of the situation hitting her all at once. Something happened. There was something wrong with Adrien and he was dying. He needed all of Trixx’s attention or he would die.

“Come on,” Nooroo said softly to the others. “Let’s give her some space to work.” Many people drifted away, except those close to Adrien Agreste. Duusu stayed, Marinette obviously, Plagg and Nino, Alya, Nathaniel, Kagami, Luka and Blue by default. Even Rose stayed. Stay or go?

Chloe looked down at her hands. Then she stepped forward and kneeled on the other side of him.

“I can help, what do you want me to do? What are we looking at?” Chloe asked gently. Trixx gave her a suspicious look, which Chloe returned unflinchingly. “I was training to become a paramedic in America. Was an advanced EMS worker and received my cert in trauma care and CRS.” Trixx squinted slightly before nodding sharply.

“Internal bleeding,” she reported. “Something broke here in his side, which is causing the bruising. I don’t know where, so I need him to become stable. His BP is dropping by the second and his pulse is weak. Until Isaac arrives, all I can do is stabilize him.” Chloe nodded. “I’m going to place an oxygen mask to assist him with breathing, I need you to administer the IV and fluids.”

Polly and Max picked that time to rush back in with the stretcher, a bag of fluids, and multiple different needles. They seemed slightly embarrassed about the needles.

“We weren’t certain which one you needed,” Max admitted. Chloe ignored that and grabbed a pair of blue gloves from Trixx’s bag, fitting them on. This was her comfort zone. She missed this. It was
her little secret she kept from Marinette. The words of her trainer came rushing over her like a warm blanket. “Find the vein in the upper arm and inject the needle. Hold it steady while the tube goes in, then release the needle and tape it down. The needle does not remain in the arm under any circumstance. Taper off the tube when you see blood flow and attach the bag. Keep the bag high and let gravity do its job. Inject a small amount of saline if needed to clear the line so the fluids can flow properly. Your job is keeping the person alive long enough for them to reach the doctor. That is it.” She followed the steps she knew by heart, Ducky’s deep voice filling her head. She had Nathaniel hold the bag up while she pried the gloves off and shuffled through Trixx’s bag. She found a bottle of simple pain medication and an upper, swiftly pulling on a second pair of gloves.

“You’ve got this darling,” Ducky promised. “Minimum amount, just to numb out the pain. Sometimes its the pain that causes people to black out.” She first injected the pain killer, then took Adrien’s vitals again, giving the medication time to work.

His BP was shit, sitting at 87/48. His pulse was weak too, struggling at only 37 BPM. The pain meds weren’t doing much. She injected him with a low dose of the epinephrine and began doing chest compressions, ignoring the crack as his sternum broke in the process.

“We need to move him,” she told Trixx. “I need a more stable working environment.” Trixx opened her mouth, likely to snap about how she was the one in charge, but Chloe stiffened her spine. “You are a nurse, Trixx. I am an EMS with a cert in trauma care and CRS. This falls under my jurisdiction. I understand you’ve been doing this longer, but I’ve been dealing with these kinds of cases multiple times a night for the past eight years. How many times have you dealt with this kind of situation? Right now, I’m in charge and I need my patient moved to the med bay this instant.” Everyone seemed taken aback, especially Trixx.

After a moment or two, Trixx gave a simple nod. Chloe returned the nod and rolled Adrien onto his side enough to slip the stretcher underneath him. This wasn’t ideal, but it’d have to do. He wasn’t code black, but he was code red. She brought the stretcher up and locked it in place so it wouldn’t collapse down. Her gaze fell onto Nathaniel.

“Give the bag to Duusu and follow behind.” He did as she said. Her gaze turned to Duusu. “Keep it above his heart and keep pace.” Duusu nodded. She looked at Trixx. “Keep the oxygen flowing and do not stumble.” Trixx bowed her head. Chloe nodded and began to push the stretcher, rushing through the estate towards the med room. Just like when Lizzie and I had to rush those stupid hikers down the mountain because our transport unit wasn’t making it up. Duusu and Trixx kept up, but as she suspected, Nathaniel quickly fell behind thanks to the beating he’d just taken.

Once in the med room, Duusu hung the fluid bag on a pole beside the bed and Chloe gave a swift count-down, her team of three moving Adrien onto the bed. Chloe swiftly grabbed the breathing machine and replaced the mask so Trixx’s hands would be free.

“Start chest compressions, I need to quickly tend to his other injuries.” Trixx did as ordered while Duusu stepped back. Chloe found a few cuts and bruises across his body that he received during the fight and she patched those up relatively quickly. They may have seemed minor, but anything minor can turn major if left unattended. “Yeah princess, they look like nothing. Simple scrapes when compared to the gunshot in his leg,” Ducky agreed in that steady voice. “But left unattended and what can happen? They can become infected. If there’s a dislocation, that needs to be solved swiftly. Otherwise, blood isn’t properly flowing to that area and the patient risks losing a limb. Then it’s your ass on the line because you failed to properly care for the patient.” One of his fingers were dislocated. She could hear Ducky’s voice, Lizzie’s voice, even Kai’s voice in her head as she counted down. This was always Ducky’s and Kai’s favorite part.
Three, two, she jammed the bone back into place, the crack filling the room like she’d just twisted an empty water bottle. Duusu winced at the sound, but the bone was back in place. Nathaniel stood in the doorway looking sick. Chloe pointed to the second bed and Nathaniel obediently climbed on it. Then she checked Adrien’s vitals again. She needed to raise the blood pressure. He needed a blood transfusion.

“Start another IV on that arm,” she ordered Trixx. “Where’s the O neg stored?” Trixx pulled on a fresh pair of gloves and nodded to the fridge in the back. Chloe peeled off her contaminated gloves and grabbed a couple of bags out of the fridge, walking back over as Trixx finished the IV. Chloe slipped on a fresh pair of gloves and connected the line, flushing it with saline first to clear everything, then hooking up the bag.

“How much do you think the hospital spends on gloves?” Lizzie asked in that off-hand way of hers as they swapped out gloves for the fifth time in the past fifteen minutes.

“Probably more than they pay us, fruit snack,” Ducky responded from the driver’s seat. Chloe smirked and shot Lizzie a wink.

“Well, if they’re so worried about hospital budget cuts, they could save money and just give us hand sanitizer.” Ducky smirked as Lizzie giggled.

“Cute princess. And when you’re sued because the patient got sick due to medical malpractice, you can blame budget cuts.”

There was nothing more she could do for Adrien without cutting him open. And she could cut him open, but she needed to know where the internal bleeding was first. Which meant a CT scan and ultrasound. Which she could not do. This left her with a heavy choice. Administer a blood clotting agent to hopefully slow the bleeding, but risk something worse or just continue to swap out blood bags until this Isaac person showed up, of whom she could only hope was a doctor. WWDD. What would Ducky do?

She stripped her gloves off and called him. “Rain or shine, day or night. You call, I answer.” She was about to hold him to that promise. He was going to be pissed.

“Hello?” his groggy voice answered. Her mouth went dry as tears filled her eyes. Just the sound of his voice, doing what she was doing now, reminded her of... Home. “Princess? That you?” She sniffed and wiped away the tears that had somehow slipped down her cheeks. “Talk to me, Amara. You wouldn’t call me at three in the morning for nothing.”

“WWDD,” she forced herself to say after clearing her throat.

“What’s the situation?” he asked, suddenly seeming wide awake. In the background, she could hear the soft Australian accent of Lizzie.

“Patient has internal bleeding. No doctor on site. Unable to reach a hospital. Emergency service not an option. I’ve started an IV with fluids in one arm and an IV with blood in the other. Minor injuries handled. Patient is unconscious. I’ve injected with a low dose of epinephrine and a mild pain killer. Blood pressure sitting at 88/49, pulse was at 37 BPM but has jumped up to 41 BPM with the dose of the epinephrine. Oxygen mask is on.” Ducky was silent for a moment as he took in the information.

“Okay,” he replied slowly. “How did the patient receive the internal bleeding?”

“Sparring with a friend. Previous injury from what it appears, a GSW that went straight through a few months ago. Patient took a hard kick to the side, seemed fine before suddenly collapsing.”
“There’s nothing more you can do at the moment without a doctor,” he said as gently as he could. Chloe chewed on her lip.

“I considered giving him a blood clotting agent to slow the internal bleeding,” she admitted.

“Do you have a good supply of blood on hand?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t give him the blood clotting agent. That can keep the blood going into him from reaching the area affected. Likely there was scar tissue that never properly healed.” Ducky went silent for a moment. “What have you gotten yourself into?”

“I… Can’t explain now. I have a code yellow I need to attend to. I just wanted to know your opinion on the blood clot.”

“Are you safe?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Stabilize the code yellow, then call me back. I’m going to make a pot of coffee. If I don’t hear from you in some way in the next hour, I’m booking a flight to Paris.” She gave a small smile at the threat. It was so Ducky.

“10-4. India 3 going 10-7,” she teased briefly, using her old call sign.

“Tango 1 and Charlie 8 will be waiting for your 10-8.” He hung up. Chloe turned to Trixx, who was staring at her with a fresh set of eyes.

“Keep monitoring Adrien. Inform me of any changes. I’m going to take care of Nathaniel in the meantime. There’s nothing more we can do without a doctor.” With that, she turned to Nathaniel.

“You were an EMS?” he asked softly as she looked him over, taking care of the injuries as she came across them, going through glove pair after glove pair. She nodded and gave a small smile.

“It wasn’t my plan when I was in America. Not like I needed the money. But I ended up meeting Ducky by chance. Got mugged my second day there and he was the paramedic on scene who treated me. It was pretty embarrassing because I wasn’t that fluent in English at the time and I was struggling to communicate with the police officer. Ducky knows French though, and he managed to take over the conversation to figure out what had happened. I ended up having a break-down on the spot. He calmed me down and promised that the men would be found. Then he asked me what I was doing in America and I ended up telling him, mostly, the full truth.” She talked as she worked, letting it all out. “He listened without interrupting. I couldn’t tell him everything, of course, and I had to use the fake name. But none of that seemed to matter. He was kind and considerate. He told me that I just needed a purpose. That while I could sit around and do nothing all day, I’d end up feeling empty on the inside. He told me that there would have to be more to my life than wasting it away and that if my father couldn’t see that, then he wasn’t deserving enough to call himself my father. The next day I applied to college and spent the next two years to become a volunteer EMS.”

“And that’s what you were doing?” Chloe hummed softly.

“For a little bit. Until I went to the training academy. That’s where I met everyone else. Ducky was one of the instructors, amusingly enough. Training was pretty rough, but we made it through. After that, I upgraded to trainee status and spent about a year under the wing of one paramedic or another to learn the ropes. I was mostly paired with Ducky and Brie though. Primarily Ducky. After I
became a full-time EMS and went from light blue to dark blue, I began working on my cert in trauma and CRS. That’s when Ducky and Boba took over my training. After getting my cert, I was promoted to advance EMS. I was actually working on becoming a full-time paramedic when I came back.”

“You speak of this Ducky highly,” Nathaniel noted. Chloe gave a laugh and nodded.

“We were a family. I road around mainly with Ducky and Lizzie before Ducky transitioned to doctor. After Ducky transitioned, Lizzie and I stuck together and became a team. Though Ducky constantly joked that we were his most frequent patients. Mostly because we sucked at driving. And because of our positions, we worked closely with the cops. So most of our calls were for criminals at the prison or downed officers or things like that. Lizzie had her cert in S&R and CRS. Before I left, she was working on trauma. We were considered the power team because between the two of us, we were able to handle just about any call.” As she finished up the last sentence, she snapped his dislocated thumb back into place, causing Nathaniel to turn white and shout in pain. Chloe smirked. “Lizzie hated setting dislocations. She hated the sound of it.”

“Tell me a funny story to get my mind off this pain,” Nathaniel begged. Chloe grinned at that.

“So there were these two hikers who were so stupid. They decided to go hiking in the bear-infested mountains at night. We got the call at around midnight. Well, our fucking transport unit would not make it up the mountain. It was too big and heavy. We didn’t have access to the helo, so we were forced to climb the mountain on foot with our med bags and two stretchers. There was a cop on stand-by with us to protect us from the wildlife while we moved up the mountain. Dante was his name. Best voice ever, I tell you. We find the hikers and treat what we can on the scene before loading them onto the stretchers and making our way down. About halfway back down the mountain, Dante and I both slipped and we took the express lane down to the vehicles.”

“I’m failing to see the amusement.”

“I’m getting there. So Lizzie is flipping out because now she has a downed officer and a downed medic. She calls it in and races down after us as fast as she’s able while supporting the weight of the two patients. I’m groaning in pain, Dante is groaning in pain, and we’re in bear-infested woods. Lizzie gets so close when her foot slips and she goes down too. She ended up breaking her leg and dislocating her shoulder. Patients are miraculously fine if a bit miffed that their help is all down for the count. So Lizzie gets back on the radio and weakly reports that there’s another 10-14, downed medic, at our location. And, of course, the responding unit is Ducky. Ducky shows up in the helo with another officer and he immediately begins checking over me and Lizzie, completely ignoring the cop and two hikers. The cop with him is pissed, demanding that his officer holds priority.” Nathaniel cocked his head at Chloe’s tone of voice.

“Does the cop not have priority?” Chloe smirked at that.

“Nope. Between a downed medic and a downed officer, the downed medic always holds priority. Which Ducky snaps at the officer with him. ‘If my medics are down, then there’s no one to treat your officers. So shut up princess and let me do my job while you do yours.’” It felt nice to imitate Ducky’s deep voice again. She and Lizzie used to do it all the time. “He gets us patched up and loaded into the helo, then takes care of the officer, before finally taking care of the patients. The entire flight back, all I mumbled was ‘Is my truck okay? Tell me the truck is okay. I need my truck back.’” Chloe laughed at the memory, but Nathaniel stared at her like she was insane.

“I… Don’t understand the humor.” Chloe cocked her head to the side and considered it.

“Hm. Usually, when we tell the story to the other EMS, everyone is rolling with laughter. Must be a
medic thing. On the bright side, you are all patched up and clear to kill people some more. Keep watch over that finger. Ice it on and off to keep the swelling down and take over the counter pain killers as needed for the next three to five days.” She turned her attention back to Trixx. “How’s Adrien?”

“His BP is rising, as is his pulse. I don’t understand exactly, but you have managed to stabilize him somewhat. Everything is still dangerously low, but not ‘he will die right now’ low,” she reported, shaking her head. “I have to admit, I wouldn’t have thought of giving him blood to compensate for the blood loss. I’d just have given him a blood clotting agent.”

“Too many drawbacks,” Chloe replied. She glanced down at her phone and sent Ducky a quick text. Code red is stabilized for the moment. Code yellow is patched up. Still monitoring the code red. Will keep you updated.

“You’ve been doing this for eight years,” Marinette commented from the doorway. Chloe jerked, forgetting they had an audience. She nodded, glancing away. “And you never told me.” Chloe shook her head. “What happened to us?”

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Chapter End Notes

About the hiatus: My college semester is wrapping up to a close and I'm approaching finals week. This means my homework load has increased ten-fold because 15 credit hours of college. It's not necessarily that I haven't had the time to write, it's more that when I take a break from homework and I get a chance to breathe when I finish something, I don't want to write anything. I just want to relax. Now, writing is usually super relaxing for me, but I have carpal tunnel in both my wrists. Because a lot of my homework involves a lot of writing, the last thing I want to do is write more. Keeping my pain levels in mind, I've decided against writing anything for the past couple of weeks while I get through the bulk of what I need to do. This is my last semester and I want to be certain I pass all my classes. So some R&R was/is needed between classes. I can't promise the next chapter anytime soon, unfortunately, probably not until the semester is over and done with. But I did want to give you guys something, as well as an explanation. Hopefully, things will chill out once the semester is done!

About the chapter: I was actually planning on taking Chloe's arc in a different direction, but Chloe said no and surprised me a bit when she revealed that she was an EMS! My fingers had "She stayed for Marinette" typed out when I deleted it and decided to change it on spot. I've thought long and hard about how I wanted this fic to come to an end and I've finally decided (I hope) on an ending that is satisfying and fulfilling. Consider this chapter to be the catalyst to the end. That being said, even though this fic will be ending soon, that doesn't mean we will never see these characters ever again! I do want to write more with these guys, but not in the same story. They've gone through quite a lot I think. Once this one ends, I believe my next fic will be more about those EMS workers Chloe talks about in this chapter. They are actually from another fandom that I'm pretty obsessed with.

Love you guys lots and I hope to hear from you soon! ~Bratist
“I don’t understand,” Marinette said softly. She and Chloe were standing in the corner of the med room, talking quietly so Chloe could remain near her patients in case she was needed, but could still have some semblance of privacy. “We used to tell each other everything. I told you about Chat Noir the second it happened, but you’ve kept this EMS life of yours a secret for ten years? Is that why you were always up at odd hours? I thought you were just out partying.” Chloe winced at that.

“I wanted to tell you about it, but… I didn’t ever want the two lives to collide,” Chloe replied as gently as possible.

“What do you mean? Ten years Chloe. You did this for ten years and never told me. I feel like that trumps me not telling you about my legs for three months. I just want to know why. Was it something I did?” She looked so broken and confused. Lying will only make it worse, Chloe reminded herself.

“At first, I didn’t mention it because I didn’t think I’d really go through with it. I didn’t think it’d become a serious thing. It didn’t seem worth mentioning if I was just going to end up bailing on it in the end. Then after I became a volunteer, and I started riding around with the other EMS, something changed. I became extremely close to them. I always had the intention of coming back, but it seemed like something that was an impossible dream. So I let myself become attached. After the training academy, everything suddenly became real. I was a trainee for the EMS division. They accepted me without question. They didn’t care about my past, they only cared about my present and future and wanted what was best for me.” She took a moment to take a breath and rub her face. Her arms wrapped around herself. “I can remember when I finally came out to them. My EMS family. They all just kind of stared at me like I said something simple, like I had cereal that morning or the sky was blue. Kerrick, one of the instructors, very gently told me that it was nothing new for them. And that none of them would be offended by the fact that I preferred the company of women. And things got so much easier after that.

“Returning here to Paris became a distant dream and I was happy where I was. It became a home and a safe place. They were my family and I loved them all.” She thought over her wording. “They are my family. When I was off-duty, I’d stop by the hospital just to see them while they weren’t busy and they’d do the same for me. We supported each other as much as we could. The thought of any of the drama of Paris bleeding over into that life terrified me because I didn’t want to lose any of them to anything. What if a Ladybug enemy found out her girlfriend was Chloe Bourgeois, hiding out in America while working as an EMS? I couldn’t take that risk, so I kept everything separate. To them, I was and am Amara Hart. My life was stable there. I was stable there. Fuck Mari, I was so happy. I missed you, and I love you, and the separation between us was killing me. But my heart was torn between loving them and loving you.”

“But… You came back…” Marinette looked like she’d been sucker-punched.
“I did. When Luka called and told me that he could get me back to Paris under the radar, it seemed like the obvious choice. My heart was here, clearly. Yet, it was such a struggle leaving them behind. They threw me a going away party, made me promise to call them as much as possible. They saw me off at the airport. And this was the first time I’ve called them since coming back. I wanted to forget them and focus on us. On you and me. Remind myself where I belonged, which is by your side. That’s why I talked to Polly about training me to become an assassin. I wanted to prove to you that I belonged in your life, that I could understand the severity of being an assassin. But seeing Adrien on the floor like that… Treating him like I used to… It brought back all the memories. Everything I had shut away.”

“I need time to think about this,” Marinette stated abruptly. Chloe bit her lip and nodded. Without another word, the woman she thought she wanted to spend the rest of her life with wheeled herself out of the room.

~ ~ ~

“Hey Snow, do you still have that pilot contact?” Duckworth asked the Chief of Police, holding his phone against his ear with one hand while the other held the third cup of coffee he was drinking.

“I do, where do you need to go and why?” Snow replied on the other end. Lizzie wrapped her hands around her mug of tea, her dark brown hair pulled back into a hasty bun. She looked on in concern, her fingers nervously tapping against the side of the mug.

“Remember Amara?”

“How could I forget? She’s saved my life on more than one occasion. Didn’t she go back to Paris?”

“Yeah, but I just got an odd call from her. I think she’s mixed up in something bad. Maybe I’m overreacting, but… You know how I am when my trainees don’t tell me the full story.” Snow laughed.

“I sure do. Alright, I’ll give him a call and get you a flight. Can you be ready to leave in about an hour’s time?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Dante will be joining you. I’ll clear up his schedule. One unit, one family.” Ducky smiled at that.

“One unit, one family.” He hung up and met Lizzie’s eyes. “I’ll text you when I land and when I find her. And I’ll bring her home safe where she belongs.” Lizzie nodded and struggled to smile.

“Good. Try not to get run over while you’re there. Remember, the left side of the road. No street racing either,” she teased, referencing their first “date” when she had somehow convinced him to race her. Him on his motorcycle, her in her car. She accidentally got too close and nudged his back wheel, causing him to 10-50.

“Running me over is your job, fruit snack,” he quipped in return, leaning forward to kiss her. She hummed appreciatively.

“Hm, only when you annoy me.” He laughed and shook his head, tugging on her hair.

“Wow. You know, I had a thing for you…” She groaned at that and gave him the most dramatic eye roll that was much too cute.
“Let it goooooo.” But when you talk in that adorable Aussie accent, how could I possibly? Her eyes flashed mischievously. “Keep it up and I’ll just marry Amara when she comes home.”

“Wow. You’re so mean to me.” She smirked.

“Someone needs to keep that ego in check. And we both know that I’m the best for the job.”

“I’m Dr. Isaac, what’s the situation?” the older gentleman introduced as Sabrina led him into the med room. Trixx took over and gave him a run-down of the situation while Chloe switched out the blood bags. She brushed her fingers over Adrien’s forehead, pushing his hair away. She gave him a stern look.

“You’re a fighter, Adrien Agreste. So you fight and you come back for her. Losing you would destroy her more than losing me, I see that now. I’m not the one she needs, you are. So come back, Chat Noir. This city needs its masked cat to keep it on its toes.” Adrien didn’t respond.

Tikki bent over the device and began working on the modifications needed to switch the blade to rest on the top of the wrist. She glanced over at the blueprints she’d drawn up during the drive up here before turning her gaze back to the blade. Everything needed to be perfect, else it would fail. And she didn’t think she could handle anymore failure at the moment.

A gentle knock came at the door and she looked up to see Plagg standing there, looking drained. Her heart went out to him and she cast aside her work for the moment to extend her hand to him. He took it without a word and let her pull him against her, sitting on the edge of her desk. She rubbed circles against his back.

“How’s he doing?” she asked gently, internally cursing herself for not staying with him while Adrien was laid out on the floor. But how could she without announcing their relationship to everyone? They agreed to keep it quiet for now. Still, she should have stayed.

“He’s stable. That doctor guy showed up and is treating him. Did you know Chloe used to be an EMS in America?” Tikki jerked her head up and blinked. Slowly, she shook her head.

“No, I didn’t. I couldn’t exactly keep tabs on her from half a world away.” Plagg gave a nod before grasping Tikki’s hand and pulling her over to the bed, laying down. She curled up next to him, resting her head comfortably against his shoulder.

“I’m grateful to her. Trixx just about admitted that Chloe probably saved Adrien’s life.” That was a lot for someone like Trixx to admit. “I almost lost my best friend. I wasn’t prepared for that.” Tikki bit her lip, unsure on how to respond. “I mean, every time he goes out I know there’s always the risk of losing him. But it’s different in that scenario. Because there, I’m prepared for it. I know the risks and we know the dangers. We all collectively agree to it. With this though, it wasn’t something that should’ve gone that far. I mean, his side was supposed to be healed.”

“I don’t know how to help,” Tikki admitted softly. “I’m not like Adrien. I’m not a psychologist. I’m not like Nino. I haven’t been in your life as long. I’m not even like Trixx with medical knowledge or any of the others who deal with that risk every day. I’m just the tech geek. My partner is rarely ever in immediate danger because she takes people out from a distance. I don’t know how to help.” Plagg’s hand brushed down the side of her face and lifted it upwards. She met his eyes.

“Just by being here, you help,” he told her. “Sometimes we just need someone to listen.” She nodded.
and kissed his cheek. He managed a smile and kissed her forehead, causing her heart to stutter. She loved it when he did that, when he kissed her forehead over her lips. Maybe it would seem weird to some people, but to her, it showed that he was more interested in her than in the sex.

“I love you. You make me better.” He flashed his adorable grin.

“I love you too. You make me seem more cool than I actually am.” They were both laughing when she smacked his chest.

~ ~ ~

“What are you doing?” Marinette’s sharp voice caused Luka to glance up from packing his bag. He gave a brief shrug towards her and went back to packing the bag.

“They’re out there and we’re just sitting here on our hands. Hiding from them like children. We should be out there taking them down,” he replied, thinking only of the possibility of Juleka being alive. Marinette wheeled over to him and rested her hand down on his arm. He pulled his gaze away from the bag and looked into her blue eyes.

“Being reckless and getting ourselves killed helps no one. You’ve been made Luka. They were asking about the rest of us. We need to be smart about this. We can’t just go in guns blazing, no matter how much we want to.” Her words made sense. Her eyes spoke the truth. So why was he so hesitant to listen to what she had to say?

“When is your surgery?” he asked, running his fingers across hers. Her eyes left his and she took a deep breath as if bracing herself.

“Dr. Isaac was supposed to arrive next week. And I was going to have it done then. But since he’s here now, I’ll see if I can get it moved up after Adrien is okay.” He nodded and released a small breath. This time, he pulled her gaze towards his, giving her a firm look.

“Adrien’s going to be okay and so are you. The both of you are fighters. Isaac, Trixx, and Chloe are with him right now fixing him up. In the meantime, we need to focus on other things. I promise I won’t run after these fucks if you promise not to hide anything like this from me ever again. I should’ve heard about this from you, not from Adrien.” Marinette gave a nod and attempted a smile.

“Now, what’s going on with you and Chloe?” He sat down on the edge of the bed and took her hands in his, waiting for her answer. He’d noticed the look of pain on her face when Chloe was telling Nathaniel what happened in the ten years she’d been gone and the betrayed look in her eyes after she’d spoken privately to Chloe.

Chloe had always been what Luka had wanted to be: Marinette’s rock. Her supporting foundation and who she fought for. Whenever Marinette put on the mask of Ladybug, she was no longer fighting just for herself, she was fighting for Chloe. Slowly, that bubble expanded to include Adrien, or at least Chat Noir. And just when it seemed to include Luka as well, everything went to absolute shit.

“I honestly don’t know how I feel about the situation,” Marinette confessed. “I understand that I kept some things from her that I shouldn’t have, but I always had every intention of coming clean and admitting to it. She never had any plan of ever telling me that she worked as an EMS. I mean, maybe it’s dumb because she was in America for ten years, but it’s hard to wrap my head around the fact that she had a life there. She had a home and a family that didn’t include me. People who loved and cared about her. Maybe it’s selfish, but I imagined her just biding her time there until she could come home to me, where she belonged.”
“I mean, she chose to come back. She chose you over them,” Luka attempted to rationalize. Marinette shook her head.

“You didn’t hear the way she was speaking about it. At first, she said, ‘They were my family,’ before correcting herself and saying that they are her family. It was a punch in the gut and it’s made me question and think about things.”

“What kind of things?”

“Well, ever since high school it’s always been me and her. Always. From the moment we met, we were practically inseparable. It was rare that we did anything without the other. We were constants in each other’s lives. She was all I had and I was all she had. That changed when I met you. When I joined this life, everything shifted on its axis. Suddenly, she wasn’t the only thing in my life, but I was still all she had. Then she was sent away to America and away from me. And this has made me question some things about why. Why did the late mayor fight so hard to keep custody of Chloe if he was just going to treat her like she was nothing afterward? Why demand that she stop seeing me? Why send her away to America? At first, I assumed he was just a close-minded prick and he sent her away to keep her from me. Now, I’m questioning all of that. It just doesn’t really add up.”

Luka frowned and thought that over. Marinette had a point, it was rather odd. There would be easier ways to keep the two separated that kept Chloe in Paris where he could watch over her. If he was simply just a close-minded prick who didn’t want his daughter with another female, why send her to America where she could be with whoever she wanted to be with outside of his supervision? Unless the issue wasn’t with being with another woman, but instead being with Marinette herself. It was something he could ask Nino to look into, as the man had an uncanny skill at digging up information that no one else could gain access to.

“You’re right. It doesn’t add up. But for the time being, we need to focus on the here and now. You know better than anyone that if you aren’t focusing on your primary target, you’re going to miss your shot. And we can’t miss here. Too much is at stake.” The firm nod and steeled gaze gave him all the confidence he needed in her.

~ ~ ~

Police are still investigating the assassination of Paris’ late mayor. This assassination was orchestrated by all seven of the Masked Assassins of Paris. Police have still been unable to identify the identities of these assassins, nor have they been able to identify which assassin it was who killed the mayor. The only information provided to the public is that the mayor was killed with a deadly poison shot into him from the rooftops. Camera footage from that night, however, was lost. It is believed that the cameras that night were tampered with. Witness testimonies claim that the assassins made a bold statement after eliminating the mayor, stating that the mayor was attempting to have the assassins kill each other over a necklace. After making threats to Heather Bourgeois, the mayor’s step-daughter, they left without a trace. More on the story as it progresses.

~ ~ ~

Ducksworth stared at the television screen as the reporter finished up the news segment. Dante, who also spoke French, sat stiffly beside him. The two were sitting in the airport cafe, having just landed. Ducky cleared his throat slightly, bringing Dante’s gaze over to him.

“You good?” he asked, giving the detective a concerned look. Probably thinking of her. Dante nodded and rolled his shoulders back.

“I thought we had an issue with the single assassin we chased around. I didn’t realize Paris was
dealing with seven. Can you imagine seven of her running around, causing havoc?” Dante replied, shaking his head. *Seven Bella Jones*. *We barely managed to survive the one we had. And she didn’t even wear a mask.* Ducky shook his head, before pushing the thought away. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and dialed Amara, trying to focus on the task at hand. They’d made it to Paris, now they needed to meet up with Amara and figure out what the hell was going on with her.

“Bonjour?” she answered in French on the second ring, sounding exhausted and weary. Likely didn’t check the number.

“Amara, it’s Ducky,” he replied in English. “You never called me back and only left me with that cryptic text message.” She swore softly in French and told someone that she’d be right back. After a few moments, she began to speak softly to him in English.

“I’m sorry, things got a little hectic. It slipped my mind.”

“Be that as it may, I told you I’d book a flight to Paris if I didn’t hear back from you with an explanation in an hour. It’s definitely been more than an hour, considering the fact that I’m currently in Paris.”

“What?! No! You need to go home now Ducky!” she snapped. His concern for her raised ten-fold. Dante nudged his shoulder, but he ignored it and tried to focus on Amara.

“I’m not leaving Paris until I see you with my own eyes and get an explanation for what is going on. What have you gotten yourself into Amara Hart?”

“I’m fine and safe, I promise Ducky. But you can’t be here right now.”

“If you’re fine and safe, then why can I not be here?” Dante nudged Ducky again, causing the older man to glance over with a frown. Dante pointed up at the television screen and Ducky froze. Whatever was said over the phone fell on deaf ears as his brain processed what he was seeing and what the news reporter was saying.

“The late Mayor Bourgeois is survived in death by his step-daughter Heather Bourgeois and his biological daughter Chloe Bourgeois...” Two pictures of both girls were being presented on the screen side-by-side. A young woman with long, curly brunette hair and cold, cruel brown eyes flashed a dazzling smile in one of the pictures. The other girl... It was Amara. Her hair was longer and she was younger in the picture, but it was definitely Amara. Those blue eyes, that light blonde hair, the slightly haunted gaze, that forced smile. That was Amara. Amara who was listed as being Chloe Bourgeois, daughter of the mayor who was apparently recently killed by a collective group of assassins over a necklace.

“Ducky?” she asked over the phone, concern in her voice. “Are you there?”

“Who is Chloe Bourgeois and why does she look exactly like you?” he asked bluntly, staring at the screen. The line went quiet. “You’re in trouble, aren’t you? You’re hiding from someone and you’re in danger.”

“I... I guess I owe you an explanation.”

“No shit. And it’s not happening over the phone. Give me a time and a place.”

~ ~ ~

Chloe blinked her eyes open as the car came to a stop inside the garage. Daylight was burning, but she had managed some sleep on the hour-long trip back into the city. After a brief discussion,
Nathaniel agreed to escort her to the meeting with Ducky while everyone else was focusing on either Adrien or on training. Considering the night they had, no one would be looking for them for hours. They figured this would give them plenty of time to get to the city, convince Ducky to leave Paris, and get back. As for why she chose Nathaniel to confide in… They’d gotten extremely close in the mentor-student sense. He had been beaten up in the fight, so no one would be looking for him. He was the most likely to take her side on this. He was one of the assassins they were certain hadn’t been made. And best of all, he didn’t speak English.

Chloe got out of the car and pulled her hair back, rubbing her fingers together. She was about to see Ducky again. Despite the circumstances, she couldn’t help but feel excited. She was about to see Ducky again. The man who’d become something akin to a father to her while in America. She was going to see him again.

Nathaniel walked her into the mansion, where Ducky was waiting. She’d given him the address and the code to the gate before texting Alix and asking that he be allowed inside. Looking around, she noted that Alix had apparently taken it upon herself to clean as well. That woman deserved a raise. The pair turned into the sitting room and there he was. Sitting there with his arms crossed as he waited. Beside him sat Dante Wolf, one of the detectives of the police department.

Ducky’s hair was short and dark brown and he sported his facial hair in his usual short van dyke style. He wore a simple white t-shirt and jeans and his skin was just as tanned as she remembered. His eyes were just as dark brown as she recalled. Dante could’ve been the younger version of him, sitting there with his dark brown hair and dark chocolate brown eyes. His dark skin was a few shades darker than Ducky’s, thanks to his African and Puerto Rican heritage. Black tattoos were scattered about on Dante’s arms. He wore a basic black t-shirt and jeans and was sitting in a much more relaxed manner, eyes framed by his black glasses. Her heart swelled seeing the both of them and her feet were moving before she could tell them to stop.

Dante was the first to intercept her, and he gave her a broad grin. He hugged her tightly and even spun her around, causing a laugh to leave her lips. She hadn’t expected him, but seeing him there brought back even more memories that she’d been suppressing.

“Hey there small fry,” he greeted in his silky smooth voice, speaking in English, finally releasing her. “I’ve missed your hands all over me.” His lips curved in a flirtatious grin. She rolled her eyes at him, but smiled at the familiarity of it.

“Still wrecking your car during chases I presume,” she asked, planting her hands on her hips. He gave a mock gasp.

“Me? Never. I’m the best driver in the city.”

“Don’t let him lie to you princess,” Ducky finally said, his deep and gravelly voice enveloping her. Her eyes turned to Ducky as he stood. “The man constantly finds himself on my exam table after frequently forgetting to buckle up before his 10-50s.” Her feet brought her over to Ducky and she hugged him tightly, her throat closing as his arms wrapped around her. Where Dante was lean, Ducky was more muscular. Everything about him was secure and strong. Being here in his arms made her feel safe. It made her feel, for the first time since returning to Paris, that she was home.

Finally, she managed to pry herself away and sat down across from them, trying to remember the entire reason why they were here in the first place. And regretting the thought of making them leave.

“You look tired,” Ducky noted, glancing over at Nathaniel, who was standing by the door looking ominous. “That the code yellow?” Chloe nodded slightly, knowing Ducky and Dante had both already taken into account that Nathaniel’s thumb was taped up and he had multiple bandages
scattered about, as well as the fact that he was favoring his right leg. Ducky frowned at that. Then his
gaze returned to Chloe. “I believe it’s time you explained yourself and what exactly you’ve gotten
yourself wrapped up in.” And it was. Chloe drew in a deep breath and, making sure she spoke in
only English, began to explain everything.

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Chapter End Notes

CONSIDER YOURSELVES LUCKY! Lol. I just finished writing this earlier this
morning and I /was/ going to wait to post it on Friday. However, a new fan who got into
the series (And I may or may not have been picking the brain of over discord)
requested/begged me to post it now. So because he's been great and has actually helped
give me a few ideas, I'm giving you guys this one early. <3 Thank you so much for your
patience while I finished up this semester of school. And I'm finally done with the
semester! Hopefully, that means updates will become more regular, but you all know me
^_^" I suck at keeping to my own update schedule, even when I have the material
ready.

Also, minor retcon incoming. Nothing too major, and honestly you probably won't
notice when it happens in the next chapter (Ugh I hate doing this because I hate it when
authors retcon something established, but this one is so minor and I think will work
better for the next fic I work on that ties into this one) but I still wanted you guys aware.
Plagg's Past

Chapter Summary

Plagg gives the inside scoop on the Rat Pack and Chloe makes a decision

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So, how skilled are you at driving? How did you even get wrapped up in the Rat Pack back then anyway?” Marinette asked of Plagg. He shuffled under the scrutiny of the assassins, trying not to wilt under so many gazes. He never did like being the center of attention, and so he shrugged.

“I guess I’m decent enough. You guys have seen me drive away from situations to make your own opinions about my driving. So long as I know how the car I’m driving handles, I can get out of any situation with it. Like with the racing, I usually stuck to muscle cars and sports cars. Things that go fast, but handle well. Even if my opponents’ top speed exceeded my top speed, that wouldn’t matter if they crashed mid-way through the race because they couldn’t take a corner as well as I could. As for how I got involved with them, it was kind of by chance.

“My big brother owned a mechanic shop, and there was this abandoned airport landing strip right out back. He taught me how to drive and all about cars. He was my role model. He fixed up their cars for them in return for them allowing him to keep his garage open on their territory. Whenever they showed up in their cars, he always sent me inside and away from them. One day, they showed up while I was racing around in one of his cars on that track. Just having fun, you know?” Plagg glanced out the window, watching the trees sway back and forth in the wind. Those memories were the most painful ones to recall. “They were impressed when I got out of the car and they realized I was just a kid. They kept trying to talk to me and I felt good. I was a stupid kid. Thought it was so cool that this gang was interested in me. My brother got involved and sent me inside, despite how much I argued with him.

“They left unhappy, but they did leave. My brother and I fought a lot that night. I accused him of treating me like a kid, being a stupid punk kid. He tried to explain that he was just trying to protect me, but I didn’t listen. I left in a huff and went home. He tried to call me that night, but I ignored the phone call. I was a stupid kid…” Plagg took a breath and turned his gaze upwards to stare at the ceiling. “They planted drugs in his garage that night and the cops came. The cops arrested him on multiple drug charges and he was sent to prison. He got shanked in prison. My parents refused to go to his funeral because he was a ‘dirty gang-banger.’ But they were there at the funeral. One of them, Simon, pat me on the arm and promised me that they’d protect me. Because he was one of them, I was one of them. And they recruited me. I was an idiot, but the racing was so much fun, the money was nice, but mostly I felt connected to my brother by doing it in a twisted way.”

“After what they did to Plagg, I did some digging and found out that the only connection his brother had to the gang was literally just fixing their cars,” Nino said gently. “They orchestrated Plagg’s brother getting arrested and stabbed in prison as a way to form a bond with a vulnerable kid. It was something they did often. They preyed on young kids who rebelled to recruit. Gave them the gang as the only person that kid could turn to. They usually started with giving the kid something small to dabble in. In Plagg’s case, it was racing. With others, it’d be simple stuff like drug runs. Enough
illegal shit to be used as blackmail if the kid ever betrayed them. Then when they thought the kid was in deep enough, they’d try and bring the kid into the more intense stuff, like the human trafficking.”

“And when someone said no, they were punished and reminded of their place,” Plagg stated bitterly, his fingers rubbing over his hip where the tattoo sat. “I would probably be either dead or still with them if not for Adrien and his dad. They saved me the night they gave me this. I don’t know what Mr. Gabriel did, but whatever it was got me out of the situation. Got me free.” The assassins suddenly seemed to become interested in various things about the room. Kagami especially. Plagg and Nino shared a glance and Plagg nodded to his pseudo-brother. Nino crossed his arms.

“What did Mr. Gabriel do?” he asked bluntly, staring at Kagami. “We know that he and Nathalie were Kagami’s assistants. So what did he do?” Kagami spread her hands towards them.

“I wasn’t Riposte yet at that point,” she explained, despite the shocked glances the others gave her. The others with the exception of Alya, Tikki, and Trixx. Kagami ignored the stares. “My mother was Riposte at that point. I couldn’t even tell you what night it was because she often got calls late at night and had to go to her ‘night job.’” Her gaze turned to Luka, who also shook his head.

“‘I wasn’t Viperion yet. If my timeline isn’t too far off based on what I know, that would’ve been a year too early for me. When I joined, it was right before Volpina had to retire.” He looked to Tikki, who shrugged.

“I’m in the same box as Kagami. Maman got so many late night calls that I couldn’t pinpoint exactly when that would have been. There are only three people still part of our group now who would possibly have enough knowledge about that situation to tell you what happened with that.” She looked to Nooroo, Trixx, and Gorilla. Trixx shook her head and Gorilla gave a halfhearted shrug. Nooroo sighed.

“I do remember something about handling the Rat Pack at one point. Gabe called late at night and said he needed a few people taken care of for personal reasons. Volpina called a meeting to discuss it because it technically broke the code we had all agreed upon. Assassins, plus Gabe and Nathalie, only. We didn’t see the need in getting all of our assistants involved. We had a long and healthy argument about it.” He shot Plagg an apologetic look. “I was against getting involved. The code existed for a reason. It exists for a reason. But I was overruled by Riposte and Volpina. I guess Volpina kept picturing it being Tikki who was in that situation while Riposte was always more vigilante than assassin. We ended up taking out a few choice people and wiping their system. As an added measure, we paid off some higher-ups with the promise that if you weren’t left alone, we’d destroy them from the bottom up and tear them apart, piece by piece. I believe Volpina’s words were, ‘Blood will run down the streets of Paris and none of it will be ours.’”

“Why didn’t you just destroy them if you had the ability?” Luka asked, a slight bite to his words. Plagg assumed he was thinking of his sister, who would have died a year later at the hands of the Rat Pack. He wondered why Luka never questioned them beforehand about this. He probably never even thought about it. Nooroo shook his head.

“It wasn’t our battle. Plus, they kept the police busy. So long as they didn’t get in our way, they weren’t really worth our time. In the grand scheme of things, they were small fry compared to the organization we ran with a tighter grip. If Paris was focused on them, then we were free to do what we needed to do.” He met Luka’s gaze steadily as he spoke, the underlying words clearly there. “Why would we have cared about people who meant nothing to us?”

“When you took out the Rat Pack, single-handed, you caught the eye of Volpina,” Trixx explained. “At that point, Polly and Duusu were being initiated. Then we caught wind of some vigilante killer who was destroying everything they had ever built as retribution. That’s why we approached you. It
was a bit of an annoyance because we lost our distraction for the police, but you had such skill with poisons that we agreed you’d be a wonderful fit. And you were. After Volpina passed, you quickly became the most skilled and proved that you could take her spot, as Hawk Moth didn’t want it.”

“And then you found me a year later,” Marinette said softly, glancing over at the snake. His gaze softened slightly as he considered all of this information. She reached over and grasped his hand, giving him an unreadable look. “I hate to say it, I truly do, but if not for that… I’d still be in their grasp. I’d still be under their control, unable to break away.”

“Nathaniel would still be homeless,” Tikki added. Nathaniel was homeless at one point? “And we never would’ve met Alya.”

“Without Marinette’s logical and calculating mind, we likely all would’ve been arrested long ago,” Trixx stated. “She brought an added structure we needed with so many new assassins. She also made the majority of the suits for you guys, which have saved your lives on more than one occasion.” Nooroo nodded in agreement.

“We went from having three top dogs to having eight. Tsurugi was replaced by Kagami when she retired. Alya took on Volpina’s spot. We added in Ladybug, Viperion, Illustrator, Peacock, and Queen Bee. Things seemed unbalanced at first, and we allowed more people to join in on our meetings. When we were betrayed, it was Ladybug who put her foot down and deemed an end to meetings like this to keep us safe. Without her iron fist, we’d have been fucked long ago.”

“We’re getting off-topic,” Polly cut in. She turned her gaze back to Plagg, who had been rather enjoying the brief respite in having the attention on him. “Is there anything you remember about their structure? Anything at all that could give us a form of advantage against them?” He frowned and thought back on his time with the Rat Pack.

“Well, as I said, I was just a racer. When they wanted to bring me more tightly into their folds, I managed to get out. But if they’re still recruiting like they used to, then they’re targeting young kids between the ages of twelve to seventeen to prey on. Rebellious kids. Kids who don’t fit in. Kids on the streets. Those who are vulnerable. But that’s assuming they’re even recruiting at this point.” He struggled to remember the chain of command. “I didn’t really deal with anyone outside of my sector. I dealt with the other racers and my quote, unquote, boss. Simon was his name. He had his boss, who had a boss, and so on until you got to the top. But I was so bottom of the barrel, I couldn’t tell you much more about that. They didn’t tell me much about the human trafficking portion of the gang when they tried to bring me into that. Just that I wouldn’t have to worry about being caught because everything was organized neatly. They explained briefly how they picked girls on the streets, which is what I would’ve been doing, that they would then investigate for at least a month before deciding on when to take them. I didn’t want any part of that, clearly.”

“What’s the significance behind the tattoo?” Trixx asked, cocking her head to the side.

“Well, the tattoo symbolized that you were one of them forever. The design was the same for everyone and it’s always in the same place. It was like a secret password too. When doing a deal with someone in the gang you didn’t know, you’d just flash the tattoo to each other. I’d watched Simon do it a lot and I’m ashamed to admit I used to be excited to get the tattoo for myself… Until I did finally get it.”

“There’s our advantage,” Marinette said suddenly, perking up. Plagg gave her an odd look, confused on how his tattoo, his shame, gave them any sort of advantage. But Trixx and Tikki were nodding in agreement. Tikki was the one who took mercy upon him.

“Anyone connected to the Rat Pack has this tattoo on that part,” she explained. “That means if we
see anyone or know anyone with that design on their hip, we know they’re connected to the Rat
Pack. That gives us an in.”

“It is a prime time for swimming,” Duusu said with amusement. “We wouldn’t even have to do
much digging. If our tech geniuses go through the police database, they can find criminals with that
design on their hip while those of us we know haven’t been made can simply go to the pool or the
beach and keep an eye out.” A sense of pride filled Plagg as he realized he had actually been helpful
in having a hand at taking the Rat Pack down once and for all.

“We really only need one person,” Marinette mused. “Someone we can use.” Her eyes flashed about
the group as she considered the assassins before her, a plan clearly forming in her mind. “Nooroo,
just get back to work as usual. Your firm deals with criminals. Keep an eye out for anyone coming or
going with the tattoo. Duusu, I want you and Max on beach patrol. You’re a model and it would
make sense for you to be lounging about with your fiance. Polly, I’m going to put you in charge of
pools around your area. Tikki and Nino can work on getting into the police database from here.
Everyone else, I want to stay here and work on training as planned.”

“What about you?” Tikki asked softly, giving Marinette a pained look. Marinette looked at her best
friend and smiled softly. Plagg watched as tension swept from Tikki in one fluid motion. That smile
conveyed everything Tikki needed at that moment. The forgiveness and the reassurance that
Marinette did understand the decisions that had been made.

“Trixx and I will be going back to Paris with Dr. Isaac for my surgery. After that, I’ll come back one
leg short. We’d do it here, but that’s simply unrealistic. Trixx and Isaac have both assured me that
Chloe can keep Adrien stable. He’s in good hands with her.”

“When do you leave?” Luka asked, concern on his face.

“As soon as Chloe wakes up.”

~ ~ ~

“So he is one of these assassins then?” Dante asked Chloe, his eyes flickering over to Nathaniel,
who’d taken it upon himself to sit on the floor and sketch. Chloe nodded, twisting her fingers
together. “And you trust him with your life?” Chloe nodded again, her suspicions rising. Dante
wasn’t speaking to her like a friend, he was speaking to her like a detective. He leaned forward and
stared her down. “Then why did you tell the entire story in only English when you know both
Ducky and I speak French? It’s quite clear that man doesn’t understand any bit of English.”

“That’s a very good question Dante,” Ducky agreed, leaning back against the chair, his arms
crossed. “Why did you not want him to hear what you had to say if you trust him with your life?”
Chloe let out a breath and shut her eyes for a moment. She wasn’t sure how they were going to react
to her next statement. She opened her eyes and met their gaze.

“Because while I trust him with my life, and I know he’d never hurt me or allow harm to come to
me, I don’t trust him with your life,” she stated bluntly. Neither made any sudden reactions. “If he
knew I was telling you all this, I can’t be certain he wouldn’t simply kill you both and call it a day.”

“You say that as if he’d be able to kill us both, especially considering his condition,” Dante argued
softly. She nodded gravely.

“He would. He’s very skilled at what he does. Not that I lack faith in either of you, but I know better
than to not place my money on him if it came down to it.” Dante rubbed his jaw and considered this.
“You’re coming home with us,” Ducky stated firmly. “I’m not going to allow you to stay here where you’re going to be in constant danger at every turn.” Home… Marinette…

“I can’t just leave Ducky.”

“And why not?” Dante asked, reaching out and taking her hand. “Do you truly belong here, Amara?” He paused and cocked his head to the side. “Chloe. Who is it that you want to be? Los Angeles is where you belong. At home with your family. One unit, one family. You say you came back for this Marinette, but answer me this: Are you in love with her, or are you in love with the idea of her? Which is the truth? Are you happy where you are right now?” Chloe hesitated and looked down at her hands. Am I happy? I was when I first came home. Then I started to feel… Less so.

“I can’t just abandon them. Not now when they need me.” She spoke softly, thinking over the situation as a whole. Am I in love with her or the idea of her? Who do I want to be? Chloe or Amara?

“We’re not asking you to abandon them,” Dante clarified. The look on Ducky’s face clearly disagreed with that, but he knew better than to push leaving at that moment. He knew how stubborn Chloe was. “But as soon as this initial situation is over and done with, you need to make a decision. And I hope you make the correct choice. Not for us, not for them, but for you.”

“But Paris isn’t safe for you. You need to go home!” she cried out, causing Nathaniel’s head to snap up and stare harshly at the two men in front of her. Ducky shook his head.

“If it’s not safe for us, then it’s not safe for you. And we aren’t going to let you stay here, in danger, without us.” She sniffed and rubbed under her eyes. She turned her full attention onto Dante.

“I can’t ask you to do this,” she spoke gently. “Not after what you went through before.” He shook his head and gave her a halfhearted smile.

“It’s because of what I went through before that I can’t let you stay here and deal with this alone. You say they’re no Bella Jones, but they’re of the same vein. I wouldn’t leave you alone in a room with Bella Jones, and I sure as shit won’t leave you alone with them.” His eyes took on a haunted look. “People like them are master manipulators.”

“They’re different,” she attempted, knowing it was a fruitless argument. After what they all went through in LA, she knew they wouldn’t bend nor break in this.

“We don’t know that,” Ducky countered. “So you’re just going to have to suffer our presence princess.” Chloe turned her gaze skyward and took a breath, before nodding. “Besides, if you have injured, you’ll need the help of a Ducktor.” She laughed softly at his pun, something Lizzie had come up with ages ago when they first found out about Ducky’s transition from paramedic to doctor. His lips quirked up in a smirk. She turned her attention to Nathaniel and switched back to French.

“We’ve finished Nathaniel,” she told him. He cocked his head to the side.

“Yes this mean they’re leaving?” he asked, closing his sketchbook and folding his hands in his lap. “Because we’re running out of time. They’ll be looking for us soon, if they’re not already.” She sighed.

“No, they’re not leaving. They’re coming with us.” His gaze hardened.

“That isn’t happening. Marinette will never approve and neither will I. These are outsiders.”

“To them, you are the outsider who can’t be trusted. To you, they are the outsiders that can’t be
trusted. To me, you both are family. I’m not asking you to trust them, I’m asking you to trust me.” She took a breath. “Leave Marinette to me, I’ll handle it.” Nathaniel held her gaze for another five, long, seconds before finally conceding with a nod.

“Very well. Keep in mind that if they step out of line, I will take care of the situation myself.” And with that threat, Nathaniel stood and jerked his head towards Ducky and Dante, pointing towards the garage.

“We speak French quite well,” Dante said smoothly, standing. He grinned at the surprised look on Nathaniel’s face. “No need for the caveman interactions.” Nathaniel frowned and glanced over at Chloe, clearly figuring out that the conversation in English happened to keep him out of the loop. But he didn’t mention it.

“Understood. Let’s go,”

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Chapter End Notes

So the slight retcon is where in America Chloe actually resided. I mentioned like... Once in a much earlier chapter that she was in New York, but I'm switching that to Los Angeles. If it triggers you too much, let me know and I can write out an explanation for the change in universe. Out of universe, it's simply because it works better with what I have planned for the next fic I'm writing that uses those characters and that story.
Chapter Summary

Two worlds collide. 'Nuff said.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rose sat beside Adrien, holding his hand. Her thumb stroked over his knuckles and she sighed, running her fingers across his forehead through his hair. He still hadn’t woken up, but everyone had been told that the internal bleeding had been patched up and he was going to be fine. He wasn’t looking healthy, but in Rose’s eyes, he was still perfect. Why oh why did Trixx have to drop that bombshell on me? She sighed once more and leaned forward, kissing his temple.

“You’re going to be okay,” she told him softly. “You’re going to wake up and be okay. Okay?” She tuck a strand of his hair behind his ear and rested her head gently against his chest. She closed her eyes and just listened to his heartbeat.

“What are you doing?” Marinette’s voice cracked through the room like a whip, causing Rose to jerk her head upwards and turn bright red. She looked over to see Marinette sitting in the doorway with a dark look on her face. Rose gulped. Marinette looked pissed, which was understandable considering Rose had just been curled up on her boyfriend’s chest.

“I was just sitting with him,” Rose attempted, dropping Adrien’s hand and pulling away from him. Marinette raised a single brow and rolled herself forward.

“Sitting with him involves cuddling up next to him, fiddling with his hair, kissing his temple?” Marinette asked, crossing her arms. How long has she been sitting there?

“If you were just sitting there, why is your face beet red?”

“Adrien has just been there for me with all this and we’re good friends. I didn’t mean to overstep my bounds,” Rose replied softly, lowering her head. Marinette gave a hmm sound and jerked her head towards the door.

“I believe you have a job to do.” The tone of her voice left no room for argument. Rose gave a quick nod and escaped the room, hurrying out with her head lowered. Once she was out of view of the room, she took a quick breath to steady her pounding heart. If there was one thing she learned from her time working with the assassins, it was that you do not fuck with what was theirs.

A few years ago, a woman had taken an interest in Max. It was some woman that Nooroo’s firm had represented. She had run into Max in the halls and for one reason or another, had decided she wanted Max, despite him telling her that he was already in a relationship. When he told Duusu about it, she was not happy. In fact, she was furious. Rose wasn’t certain on the exact fate of the woman, but she did know that Duusu promised she didn’t break the assassin’s code. She also knew the woman was still missing.

Rose peeked back into the room and felt her heart break some. Marinette was sitting beside Adrien, tears rolling down her cheeks. Her eyes were glued to Adrien’s face and her hand was resting gently
on his side. Rose was about to walk away when Marinette began to speak.

“I’m sorry. I should’ve gotten you proper medical care the moment it happened instead of just patching you up myself. This wouldn’t be happening if I hadn’t been so wrapped up in my own identity. I should’ve called Trixx right away. This is all my fault. It’s always my fault.” She lowered her head down onto his chest, her shoulders shaking with her silent sobs. Adrien groaned and shifted a bit. Marinette raised her head in surprise and he gave a soft smile. His hand came up and brushed her tears away, giving her a tender look.

“It’s always nice waking up to a gorgeous woman crying over me,” he joked weakly. “Not so nice hearing how she blames herself for something out of her control.” She sniffed and wrapped her hands around one of his.

“It is my fault though,” she argued feebly. He shook his head slowly and captured her chin with his free hand.

“You can’t keep this shit inside. It’s not healthy. It’s not your fault and I won’t allow you to blame yourself for it. I love you too much for that.” He guided her head down and claimed her lips with his.

Rose pulled her head away and leaned against the wall, her heart-shattering. She felt the sobs rising up in her chest and she quickly moved around the corner before bolting away, her tears blinding her. She ran through the estate as break-neck speed, sobs bursting through her lips as she heaved. She turned a corner and slammed into a hard chest. Luka stumbled back and held her at arm’s length, frowning down at her.

“Rose? What’s wrong? What happened?” he asked, concern in his voice. She didn’t speak, instead just threw herself into his arms, sobbing heavily. He didn’t pry anymore, as she knew he wouldn’t, and instead just held her as confused as he was. Adrien would pry. Adrien would’ve made me tell him everything before talking me through the situation. And he’d hold me close like I needed him to. She imagined him then kissing her the way he kissed Marinette and began to cry harder, clutching Luka’s shirt. He rubbed her back, hushing her awkwardly.

Why can’t I have him? Why can’t I have him? Marinette has Luka and Chloe and she could have literally any other person in the damned city. Why him?

~ ~ ~

Chloe stretched in the car and suppressed a yawn as Nathaniel pulled up to the estate. Ducky and Dante pulled up behind them and the gate slid shut. Chloe had gotten in another quick nap on the drive back, but it’d only left her feeling more tired than before. Not that it’d matter too much, Marinette would know she snuck out considering she was coming back in with two random people.

She got out of the car and glanced over at Ducky and Dante, who were both looking around the estate with shocked expressions. She tried to see the scene from their point of view.

After moving to Los Angeles, she lived in a small apartment that her mom bought her. After she got her job with the EMS, she started making the payments on the place herself. Her EMS family never really saw her dressed up as she used to dress. She used to always be wearing the latest fashion, having a mother who worked in the industry, but when she moved to LA she began to realize how little she cared. When she came back to Paris, she did her best to dress how she used to, but she knew she’d never be able to dress like that again.

Looking at the estate now, something that just simply didn’t phase her because of how she was raised, she understood what was so shocking. They were used to humble abodes. In LA, money often meant corrupt in some way, shape, or form. This was anything but humble. Of course, there
was a reason the place was as grand as it was. It was meant to be able to house multiple people at the same time for security reasons. The place was as secure as secure could get. It was large with everything a person would need if they were to be stuck in a single place for a long period of time. And naturally, if it was meant to be a safe house for millionaires, it was going to have every expense they desired. Added onto that, it was made for assassins. If you were going to keep millionaires who were assassins locked up in one place for longer than a week, they were going to have the different rooms they needed to keep in shape and entertained.

But Ducky and Dante wouldn’t see that. They would see an abnormally large estate that seems much too grand for no apparent reason. Something bought with dirty money. This would not help improve their opinion of the Organization. Likely, when she said “safe house” to them when they all left the mansion, they imagined something smaller and more humble. Nothing like this. In hindsight, she probably shouldn’t have called it a safe house. Hindsight is twenty-twenty.

“Come on, let’s head on in,” she said with forced cheer, leading the way inside through the front door. When she and Nathaniel snuck out before, they left through the secret underground exit before doubling back through the gate to get a car. The plan for coming back was to use the same way. Made using the front door now feel a bit odd.

As they walked inside, Ivan’s head snapped up from the front desk they had set up for security reasons. He blinked at them before raising his gun and pointing it at Ducky and Dante. Ducky stood there with his arms crossed while Dante immediately reached for his sidearm, which he did not have. Chloe moved to stand in front of the both of them.

“Stand down Ivan,” Nathaniel ordered softly. Ivan looked to his partner with a frown, but lowered the gun and holstered it. “Do you really think I need you to protect me from them?” Ivan shook his head. Nathaniel nodded and walked towards Ivan, extending his hand. Ivan shook it before sitting back down and propping his feet up onto the desk. This is off to a fantastic start.

“Well, this is off to a great start,” Ducky stated sarcastically in English. “I cannot wait to meet everyone else I’m supposed to trust you with.” Nathaniel and Ivan both frowned in confusion. Chloe sighed and gestured them forward.

“Just wait until you meet my fiancee,” she replied in English with false cheer. “Then you’ll really trust my judgment in people and won’t think I need a 51-50 at all.”

“What’s a 51-50?” Kagami asked in English, walking into the main hall with Kaida on her hip. Jim was standing beside her, his hand on her lower back. Chloe understood immediately why she asked in English instead of French. These were strangers, who came into their safe house, and spoke a language many of the residents did not know. She was proving that she did know the language and that they couldn’t have any private conversations with her around.

“Psychiatric hold for up to 72 hours,” Chloe explained begrudgingly. If she’d known Kagami was right around the corner, she wouldn’t have made the comment. The only assassins and assistants who spoke and understood English were Kagami, Marinette, Tikki, Trixx, Sabrina, Luka, Duusu, Max, and Nooroo. She wasn’t sure if Adrien, Nino, or Plagg spoke or understood English, but she imagined that at least Adrien and Nino did.

“Why would you need a psychiatric hold for up to 72 hours for being engaged to Marinette?” Jim asked with his brow raised. Chloe winced, forgetting that Jim’s first language was indeed English.

“What’s going on here?” Marinette asked, the French flowing smoothly from her lips, wheeling into the room. She blinked in surprise at seeing Chloe and frowned at the two strangers behind her. “Chloe? Nathaniel? I thought the two of you were asleep.” Chloe bit her lip before gesturing to
Ducky and Dante.

“This is Ducksworth and Dante Wolf. Ducksworth is a doctor from the Los Angeles division. He was my trainer when I was training as an EMS. Dante is a detective with the LAPD and is a very good friend of mine,” Chloe introduced.

“Great,” Marinette replied flatly. “What are they doing here?”

“We’re here because I got a concerning call from my trainee roughly about a day or so ago,” Ducky replied in fluent French, his voice gruff. “She was informed that if she did not call me within an hour with an update and an explanation, I would be on a flight to Paris. She failed to call me within that hour and I followed through on that promise. Dante is here because I wasn’t coming alone.”

“You can be in Paris all the fuck you want,” Marinette stated calmly. Her eyes shot to Chloe. “But why are they here Chloe? Why would you bring them here?” Her eyes turned upon Nathaniel. “And why did you allow this to happen?” Nathaniel raised his hands in surrender.

“Chloe made a convincing argument and I trust her judgment,” he replied simply. “Considering the fact that they are outsiders from LA, I doubt they would be involved with anything we are dealing with.”

“Considering the situation with Martin Anders, an outsider, can we be certain on that Nathaniel? Or could the Rat Pack possibly have reaches in America? We don’t know their reach,” Tikki commented, walking in with her arms crossed.

“Not to defend them, but I doubt the Rat Pack could expand that quickly to America. Even in their prime, they were unable to spread outside of Paris. And from the information we have, their contacts never left France,” Kagami cut in. “Besides, if they are involved with the Rat Pack, we can solve this relatively easily.” She handed Kaida over to Jim and kissed the child’s forehead lovingly. She then crossed her arms and approached the two. “Raise your shirts and expose your left hip.” Ducky shrugged and showed off his bare hip. Dante, oddly enough, did not. Instead, he leaned back against the front door casually.

“And why do you want us to do this? What information do you have that would require for us to do so?” he asked. Tikki blinked in shock at his voice, which was the usual response he got whenever someone heard him speak for the first time. Chloe had the same reaction herself. Everything he said just always seemed to come off as sexual in some way, even when he was doing something as straight-forward as calling out street names over the radio during an active chase. Lizzie and Chloe used to joke about ‘Dante ASMR’ whenever he did so when they were on duty. Marinette, however, was unphased.

“So are you refusing to show us what we want to see?” she asked.

“Not at all,” he replied. “I simply want to know why. What do you expect to see?”

“A tattoo.” A tattoo? Is she referring to Plagg’s tattoo?

“Interesting. Tattoos are rather popular, so I hope mine doesn’t send off any red flags for you.” He raised his shirt and pushed his pants down a bit, showing off his wolf tattoo. It was beautifully designed and colored. Marinette gave a firm nod of satisfaction. Dante dropped his shirt.

“You haven’t answered my questions, Chloe.” Those blue eyes stared firmly at Chloe.

“Because they wouldn’t leave without knowing that I was safe and I wasn’t going to allow them to be in danger by staying in Paris unprotected,” she said softly. She pleaded with Marinette using only
a gaze, conveying without words what she meant. Their silent conversation lasted maybe three seconds. In the end, Marinette understood.

“Very well. If they do anything to jeopardize us in any way, they will die. And that is final.” Marinette rubbed her leg slowly, barely masking the look of pain on her face.

“You’re running out of time on your leg,” Ducky said softly. Marinette gave him a steady look before nodding.

“I know. I’m leaving here shortly to get it taken care of.” She looked towards Chloe. “Adrien is awake by the way. He wants to speak to you. I’m entrusting him to your care while I’m gone.” Her eyes spoke what her lips did not. “Because I trust you.” Chloe nodded and walked up to Marinette, leaning down to kiss her softly.

“Come back to me safe,” she whispered, her heart splitting even more. Marinette gave a half-smile and a shrug.

“I’ll be back, just not in one piece.”

~ ~ ~

“You wanted to speak to me?” Chloe asked from the doorway. Adrien struggled to sit up, the pain in his side leaving him gasping for breath. She hurried over to his side and tsked at him, helping him sit up properly and rearranging the pillows behind him. She was clearly exhausted, and yet still made sure to keep him comfortable and out of pain. Based on what little interaction they shared, Adrien was certain she didn’t particularly care for him. And yet she still helped save his life, something no one knew she had the ability to do. She could’ve done nothing, he would’ve died, and none would be the wiser. She could’ve had Marinette to herself. Despite that, she still saved him.

“I wanted to thank you,” he said carefully. “I know you don’t like me, and yet you still saved my life. So thank you for that.” She gave a shrug.

“I almost didn’t,” she admitted. “I battled with the decision internally, trying to decide what to do. I guess my internal medic took over. When I was in LA, I wouldn’t refuse treatment to a patient because they were an asshole criminal who had threatened my life just minutes before. I couldn’t just leave you dying on the floor when I knew I could do something to help. I was trained to ignore personal feelings when it comes to medical aid.” He shrugged.

“I’m told I’m only alive because of your treatment and knowledge. So I’m rather glad that you dipped into your training and put aside your personal feelings.” He gave her a weak smile. “I want you to know, as well, that I’m not trying to take Marinette away from you. And if you told me to back off her… Well, I’d at least try to remove myself. I know how much you two care for each other and how much you need each other.” Chloe gave a watery laugh.

“Then you don’t know as much as you think you do,” he frowned at that. She sniffed and gave him the saddest smile. “It’s not me she needs. I understand that. It’s you. Everything she and I have is based off a relationship that began in high school. You’d think that over the years, we would’ve solidified our relationship, but I was gone for ten years. While I am polyamorous, and I’m not opposed to a relationship involving a man, I wonder if I’m what Marinette needs. Or if I was ever what she needed.”

“Explain it to me,” he asked gently, trying to understand what point she was trying to get across. Chloe extended her hands.
“I think if Marinette were to lose me, she’d be sad… But she’d be able to move on in the end. But if she were to lose you, it’d destroy her. She just doesn’t realize it yet. So no, I won’t be asking you to back off because I do love her. Instead, I’ll tell you that if you wanted me to back off, I would. Because I love her. And I don’t want her heart to be split like mine is. I never want that and I never wanted that.” He frowned at that.

“You love her.” She nodded. “But are you in love with her?” Chloe turned her gaze upwards, pain stretching across her features.

“I’m trying to answer that question myself. I truly am.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

When inspiration strikes and your fingers don't stop writing.

So I'm really tired while posting this, but: The original scene with Rose and Marinette is not meant to bring hate down upon Marinette. If you don't understand the purpose of the scene, that's alright. Ask and I'll explain what I can after I've slept.
What happens when a duck and a wolf go sniffing around in an organization consisting of primarily assassins?

“Osteosarcoma is an unusual cancer for someone of your age,” Ducksworth commented to Marinette. She paused in the hall and glanced back at him, suspicion clear on every part of her face. “It usually only affects those who are still in the growing stages of their life. If you’re having your leg removed, I’d assume that the other methods didn’t work out. Fast acting?” She didn’t reply, only gave him a steady look.

“Are you always this suspicious of other people?” Dante asked smoothly. She turned her gaze towards him and narrowed her eyes.

“Do you always ask this many questions?” she countered, crossing her arms.

“Yep, yep. Part of the job,” he replied.

“I don’t see a badge.”

“Maybe you’re not looking hard enough.” She rolled her eyes at that. “Listen, we don’t trust you and it’s clear you don’t trust us. But for the sake of Amara, let’s at least try to get along. Alright?”

“Chloe.”

“Excuse me?”

“Her name is Chloe. Not Amara.” Marinette sat back in her chair and sniffed at them. Dante rose a brow and leaned his shoulder against the wall, meeting her gaze unflinchingly.

“I believe that would be up to her to decide,” he countered. Ducky hid a smile at the flash of anger on her otherwise blank face. Dante was good at getting under people’s skin.

“What exactly is up for debate here?” she demanded.

“Who she wants to be. If she wants to be Chloe Bourgeois or Amara Hart. That is her decision, is it not?” He had a point. Ducky’s trainee might be Chloe to these people, but for the past ten years, she was comfortably Amara. And it wasn’t Marinette’s place to be correcting them on the name used until the woman in question said one way or another.

“If you’re both done with your verbal pissing contest, I think they’re waiting for you,” Ducky said, jerking his head towards the door. Marinette glowered at the two of them and began to wheel away.

“One last thing before you go,” Dante called out. She paused and tilted her head back. His eyes flashed dangerously. “I’ve dealt with people like you before. If you harm Amara in any way, I will
pay it back in full.” She narrowed her eyes.

“The same goes for the both of you.” With the final word, she continued on her way with them watching her carefully as she left. She might’ve been in a wheelchair, but they knew better than to underestimate an assassin who was skilled with a sniper rifle.

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Tikki frowned at the information on the screen in front of her, her face closed off with utter concentration. The man she was looking at in the police report had a tattoo of a rat on his hip, as the report stated, but there was no picture that accompanied the report. The report also didn’t say which side of his body the tattoo was.

“That report was written by a cadet. Someone in training,” a silky voice stated behind her. She jumped and swiveled around quickly, coming face-to-face with Dante Wolf. He was reading the report over her shoulder. His dark eyes flicked down to look at her, a hint of a smirk on his face.

“How do you know?” she asked hotly, feeling a bit flustered by his sudden appearance behind her. She didn’t even hear him walk up in her concentration. She wasn’t sure which unnerved her more: him sneaking up behind her, or the fact that he was obviously fluent in French.

“Because it’s lacking in information. A trained officer of the law would have all the evidence and information neatly listed. This is written like a bad fanfiction instead of a report. The corrected report would be updated alongside it, but it’s not. If you look at the date…” He tapped the screen where the date and time was. “You’d see this is a brand new report. The field training officer has yet to update the report. It’s useless to you until it’s updated.”

“This is the first lead I’ve found,” she argued, tossing her hands up in the air. He laughed softly. At her? With her? It was relatively unclear, but she was pretty certain he was laughing at her.

“You’ve been working at this for what? Three hours? I’ll be fine with you complaining about having shitty leads when you go at it for days and days on end only for all your hard work to go down the drain because you don’t have enough evidence to use. I’m saving you on time. Until that’s updated, you have no use for it. Best to keep searching.” She hated it, but he had a point. With a grumble of annoyance, she saved the report to check back in on later and continued her search through the police database. Dante leaned back and left the room without another word.

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Adrien eyed the doctor suspiciously as the man went over the notes from the previous doctor. He was silent as he looked over everything, methodically reviewing every bit of information that was available while Chloe slept in the room next door.

“So you got shot. The bullet went straight through. And you didn’t immediately see a trained professional?” Ducksworth asked. Adrien shifted and gave a shrug.

“I’m a wanted criminal. Seemed a bit foolish to just waltz into a hospital for a gunshot wound,” he replied, trying to get a read on the man. Thus far, nothing. It was like the guy had two modes. Dry sarcasm and dry, sarcastic doctor.

“How’d that work out for you princess?” he asked dryly. “You had a bullet shard stuck in your body for quite some time, slowly damaging your internal organs until it finally did enough damage to endanger your life.” He raised his hands briefly. “But I’m sorry, your freedom from the law is more important to you than your life.”
“Are you lashing out at me for a particular reason, or is your automatic response always to be an asshole?” Adrien countered, cocking his head to the side. Ducksworth gave a smirk.

“Nice try, but I dated a psychologist for years. You’re not going to be shrinking me out. And for the record, I’m always an asshole. I’m just more of an asshole to dumb asses like you.” Adrien shrugged a shoulder, not bothering to attempt enough care to be offended. Why argue with the guy who’s currently in charge of your health? “I don’t know how things are done in France here, but in America, we have a system in place where we as doctors don’t report criminals to the police unless they are a potential danger to themselves or others. You only steal things to my understanding. You could’ve taken off your disguise, walked in, been treated with no questions asked, and walked out again.”

Adrien shook his head at that. “Maybe for a normal civilian that would’ve been fine, but as someone who has eyes on them, it would’ve been questionable for me to walk into a hospital with a gunshot wound.” Ducksworth cocked his head and considered that.

“Seems like a shitty situation all around, but as a medical professional, I can’t support the decision you made. It did, after all, lead you to be in this situation in the first place. I can see where you’re coming from though, and that’s all I’ll be giving you in terms of that.”

“I’ll take it.” Adrien flashed a grin, to which Ducksworth shook his head with a small grin.

~ ~ ~

Rose watched the detective with obvious suspicion as she held the firearm in her hand, ear protection over her head and goggles on her face. He was leaned back outside the shooting range watching her. It unnerved her the way he watched. She did her best to shake off the awkward feeling as she aimed down her sights towards the target. It’d been some time since the last time she’d fired a gun, but Luka wanted her to start practicing again, just in case. He had said it was because he didn’t want to risk her getting caught again.

She squeezed the trigger, her eyes shutting as the gun fired. When she peeked her eyes open again, she realized she had completely missed the target. She sighed and rolled her shoulders back. She’d never been particularly good at this, but she hadn’t felt it was needed. After all, she had Luka who would protect her. But what if they took Luka again? She needed to get better.

“Keep your eyes open,” the detective said, walking into the room. She frowned at him, her tongue heavy in her mouth. He selected a gun off the wall and aimed down the range, firing quickly and efficiently. He hit all the targets dead center in the chest in under five seconds before swiftly reloading and emptying his clip again, this time in the targets’ head. He turned to her with a grin.

“Eyes open. Makes a huge difference. Also, you’re too stiff. You need to be more relaxed with the gun.”

“I don’t… Guns…” she mumbled, shifting away from him. She wanted more space between them. More space between her and the strange male. She did not like this situation. What if he attacked her? Would anyone hear her scream?

“How does he know that?” she mumbled, shifting away from him. She wanted more space between them. More space between her and the strange male. She did not like this situation. What if he attacked her? Would anyone hear her scream?

“Guns are simply a tool. It’s the people operating the guns that you have to be concerned about,” he stated, not moving closer to her. “From my understanding, you have already been trained how to use a firearm.” He returned to the gun wall and lifted a different handgun. This one was smaller than the one she was using. He set it on the table between them before backing away, gesturing to it. She hesitated a minute before sliding forward and placing her gun on the table and lifting up the new one before
hurrying backward again.

This gun was lighter and felt less weird in her hands. He didn’t move, instead gestured for her to try shooting it. She chewed on her lip before aiming down the sights towards the target. She loosened up her body as much as possible with him watching her and squeezed the trigger, doing her best to keep her eyes open. This time she hit the target… Barely, but she did hit it. A smile tugged on her lips.

“You just need to practice more. Just remember to keep your eyes open and your body loose,” he commented, returning the gun to the wall and exiting the room. She watched him go, confused as to why he helped her. She pushed off the confusion and turned back to the range, firing off more rounds.

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“I honestly don’t know what to think about them,” Alya commented, tossing her hands in the air. “That doctor guy asked me earlier about my knee. How the fuck does he know I have a bad knee? Wouldn’t leave me alone until I told him about it, then gave me recommendations on how to care for it when it bothers me before walking away.” Luka shook his head.

“The detective guy asked me about when I was locked up with the Rat Pack. He took a shit ton of notes from what I described before just walking away without a word,” he grumbled. “I don’t understand what he got from what little information I had.”

“They both asked me questions,” Blue said softly, playing with her hair. “What I had to put up with while I was there. If I needed medical assistance. How long it had been since I was tested for anything. If I was tested after I was free. A bunch of stuff.”

“One minute they act sketchy as hell and the next they’re helping us out,” Nathaniel noted, looking exhausted. “This doesn’t add up.”

“I think it comes down to trust,” Nino added in. Eyes turned towards him. “They don’t trust us, so they’re not going to give us any more information than we need to have. However, they want us to win in this situation for the sake of Chloe, so they’re doing their best to help where they can. In order to help, they need information. Both have separate skills that are useful in some way. A detective and a doctor. A good combination. But because they don’t trust us, they are going to be on their guard. We do outnumber them.”

“That does make sense,” Tikki conceded. “Still, I don’t like their mocking nature. As if they think they’re better than us.”

“They do think that though,” Adrien said. “They’re both lawful men. We’re unlawful. If it weren’t for Chloe, they would be seen as our opposition. I believe they’ve also had their own fair share of dealings with assassins. Likely to a more extreme extent based on how they act around the assassins as opposed to us who aren’t assassins.”

“Chloe did mention something about them having to put up with a worse version of Ladybug,” Alya admitted. “I guess that doesn’t make us anymore trustworthy in their eyes.”

“Exactly. Try to look at it from their point of view. They want to keep someone they care about safe, just like the rest of us. But doing so puts them in a position where they are going against their own personal morals. They’re conflicted about it and yet, they’re choosing to help. They could be dicks and lounge about while we fumble around for answers.” Adrien nodded firmly. “But instead, they’re choosing to help. If we show them more respect than suspicion, they’ll be more likely to return the favor. As it stands now, we are just as much the enemy to Chloe’s safety as the Rat Pack is.”
“Leave it to the shrink to tell the rest of us how to act around new people,” Kagami said with amusement. “Personally, I like them. They’re giving good advice while keeping a respectful distance. They’re helping where they can, but also staying out of our way. They’re making sure not to overstep their bounds too much. It’s not like they’re trying to steamroll our current operation. Besides, two extra hands are better than two fewer hands. I say we take Adrien’s advice and do our best to be less suspicious of them. Chloe trusts them for a reason. She knows them. She’s known them for ten years. If she trusts them, that’s good enough for me.” Adrien nodded in agreement.

Slowly, yet surely, the rest of the people present nodded in agreement to each do their absolute best to try and give the doctor and detective a fair chance.

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Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter here because I’m tired ^_^" I meant to have this finished earlier, but I put it off and ended up having to take Benedryl earlier, so I’m sleepy. But I wanted to make sure I got a chapter up today before I pass out. <3
Plagg walked into the office and frowned at the sight before him. Tikki was bowed over her work as she combed through the police reports. He sighed and shook his head.

“Tikki, it’s three in the morning. You need some sleep,” he scolded lightly. She waved him off. “I need to do this. I’m fine, Plagg,” she stated absentmindedly. He sighed and turned to walk out of the room. When she got like this, it was nearly impossible to pull her away from her work. The last time she put aside her work… He paused in the doorway and glanced out the windows. In the distance, the Eiffel Tower gleamed in the dark of night. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and loaded up the song, placing his phone on the side table.

As the beginning orchestra started, he walked slowly over to her. Her fingers paused over the keyboard. His fingers brushed down her shoulder, down her arm, across the back of her hand. His free hand gently turned her face away from the screen, showing her closed eyes and a dreamy smile. She allowed him to pull her from her chair and he pulled her into his arms.

His right hand clasped her right while his left settled on her waist. Her left hand settled on his shoulder and he spun her in a slow circle in time with the song. Her eyes opened as she gazed into his eyes, amazement shining there. He gave a half-smile and released her waist, raising their right hands to spin her in front of him before pulling her back into his arms, resuming the dance. After a couple more turns and spins, he grasped her waist with both hands and lifted her in a spin before slowly lowering her down, feet stopping. Her hands slid down his chest, their eyes locked.

“I didn’t think you remembered,” she said softly. He shrugged and brushed his knuckles down her jaw.

“How could I forget? It was a big deal for you, we practiced so much for it. You looked gorgeous that night in that dress. The most beautiful woman at the ball,” he replied, lowering his head and pressing their foreheads together. She breathed out a laugh.

“It was so long ago though.”

“You’re impossible to forget Madame.” She bit her lip and ran her fingers down her chest, toying with the rings on the necklace she wore.

“As are you Monsieur.”

“I don’t think I’ve seen a couple waltz in real life in a long time,” Dante Wolf commented from the doorway. The couple broke apart and faced the door. Dante raised his hands in surrender “I didn’t mean to interrupt. I was having issues sleeping and noticed your light still on Tikki. I was coming to offer my assistance going through reports.” His eyes landed on the necklace and understanding.
seemed to flicker in his eyes. Tikki glanced down and quickly tucked the rings under her shirt. Plagg squeezed her hand reassuringly.

“We’re not announcing our relationship right now,” she said carefully. Dante nodded and gave a bow. He mimed zipping his lips before giving a smile, sadness passing over his face.

“No one will hear it from me.” He stuffed his hands into his pockets. “But I recommend not keeping it from them forever if I’m allowed to give advice.”

“We won’t,” Plagg said with a nod. “But right now we don’t want to distract them.” Dante nodded and began to back away, giving them one last smile.

~ ~ ~

Rose rubbed the heel of her hands into her eyes. Sleep was not coming for her, no matter how hard she tried. Hearing music echo down the hall, she slipped from her bed and started walking towards the sound. As she rounded the corner, she nearly walked directly into Dante. He was walking away from Tikki’s room and glanced down at her in surprise. His hands came out of his pockets to gently rest on her shoulders to steady her. She reeled away at the sudden touch, a shiver wrenching through her.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you,” he apologized, raising his hands as if to show he meant no harm. She nodded mutely, rubbing her arms while she tried to get the feeling of multiple pairs of hands grabbing at her, pawing at her. His eyes took on a concerned look. “Couldn’t sleep?” She shook her head. “Me neither.” They stood in an awkward silence for a moment before Dante stuffed his hands back in his pockets. “These people you’re hunting, you’re one of their victims. Aren’t you?”

“How did you know?” she stammered out, rubbing her arms. He gave a simple shrug.

“You show all the signs of an abused victim. And any time they’re mentioned, you get a haunted look. Your arms wrap around yourself to comfort yourself. You don’t like strangers. Amara told me and Ducky about how Luka and you had been hunting them before. It’s personal for you.”

“Are you a psychologist or s-something?” He laughed at that.

“Not in the slightest. Just a detective. I’ve had experience with abused victims.” There it was. That sad and haunted look that passed across his face. She’d noticed it several times now. Feeling a bit emboldened, she blinked up at him.

“Someone close to you? Or… You?” she asked before she lost the nerve. His lips parted slightly in shock before he composed himself and gave a simple nod.

“It took me a while to get over what she’d done to me. The therapy helped. But some of the damage is not too easily repaired.” He glanced towards the kitchens and gestured with his head. “Would you like a cup of la café?” Rose gave a small giggle. Dante cocked his head to the side.

“And here I thought my French was perfect.”

“Feminine and masculine pronouns are very important when separating meaning. Otherwise, you run the risk of using the incorrect word.” Dante chuckled again once they made it to the kitchen. Rose slid onto a bar stool while he pulled out the coffee mugs and set them into the machine.
“No wonder the server at the airport gave me an odd look. I was pronouncing coffee all wrong.” Rose gave a shrug.

“You speak French very well for an American. Better than Jim and he’s been with a Frenchwoman for over three years now.” He turned back to her as the coffee brewed and cocked his head to the side.

“Do you speak any English?” he asked. She shook her head. “Would you like to learn some words?” She thought it over before giving a small nod.

“Well, we are about to drink some amazing coffee.” He spoke the word slowly for her, pronouncing each syllable.

“Caw-fee,” she repeated slowly. He gave a nod and pulled a pen out of his pocket, grabbing a paper towel. He wrote out the word onto the towel and showed it to her.

“Coffee.” He tapped the word. Her lips parted as she read over the words. Then he wrote ‘Je voudrais un café’ and underneath that he wrote ‘I would like a coffee.’ He spoke the words slowly and she repeated after him just as slowly. He corrected her ‘would’ a couple of times until she got it down. When she had it, she glanced up at him with triumph. His eyes sparkled back with pride.

The coffee machine dinged just as the window exploded from a bullet firing through. Rose’s eyes widened in panic and she let out a scream, ducking her head down. Dante’s hands were suddenly on her shoulders as he pulled her down and behind cover. He checked over her for injuries swiftly. More shots came through the window and the alarms went off. He cupped her face in his hands and stared at her intently.

“Listen carefully, we’re going to run to the gun range okay? Okay?” She nodded shakily, tears spilling over her cheeks. “We’re going to be fine, I’ll keep you safe. Stay low to the floor.” She nodded again and he released her face to grab her hand. After the next round of bullets, he yanked on her hand and they began to run from cover to cover towards the gun range.

Every so often, when he wasn’t certain about what they were hiding behind, he would cover her body with his before they continued. Her heart raced in her chest the entire way, certain she would be shot at any moment. But they made it to the gun range safely.

Once inside, Dante grabbed a handgun from the wall, along with a holster. He quickly strapped on the holster and fit the gun in its place before also grabbing an AR something or other and some spare ammo. When she finally registered the AR in his hands, her mind filtered away into assistant mode. Her spine straightened and she grabbed a black duffel bag and took the spare ammo from him. She stuffed it and more spare ammo into the bag. Then she grabbed spare ammo for the handgun, along with a shotgun and spare shells. She slid open one of the drawers and snatched up a scope that she tossed to him. He attached it to the AR.

Next, she slid a vest over to him before fitting one on herself. She slung the bag over her shoulder and gave him a firm nod. He seemed slightly surprised before nodding in return. She slipped over to the door, grasping the handle. He raised the rifle and she pulled the door open. And out they went.

Men in black were making their way through the safe house, the alarms blaring loudly through the place. Dante opened fire on those in his eyesight, efficiently taking them down before the two of them slipped behind separate bits of cover when the return fire came. Dante waited before peeking out and firing more rounds off with killer accuracy. When he started to eject the empty ammo cartridge from the AR, Rose grabbed a full one and tossed it over to him. He snatched it from the air and reloaded smoothly before rolling out of cover and clearing the rest of the room.
They moved towards the medical room next, moving as if they’d choreographed the entire motion, clearing as they went. They moved as one and in sync. On occasion, he would rotate his body around to check behind them as they went through the house. But they needn’t have worried because the assassins were awake at that point. And the assassins were a bit testy.

Rose’s trained eyes caught sight of the familiar Viperion teal as he stuck to the shadows and killed swiftly with deadly accuracy. Gunmen dropped screaming in pain as they breached the windows, his poison darts finding weak points in their armor. A flash of Illustrator white and red as he moved about killing silently with his knives. The haunting echo of Rena Rouge’s distracting flute filled the halls.

Dante cleared the rest of the way to the med room and the two of them hurried inside to find Chat Noir leaning heavily on his extended baton, face twisted in pain. Four gunmen lay on the floor dead, likely by their own bullets. A fifth was knocked out cold.

Ducksworth and Chloe entered from the side room, apparently having just woken up. Chloe’s eyes widened at the bodies, but Ducksworth simply grabbed one of the spare guns from the side room and loaded it quickly while Chloe hurried to attend to Chat. The door swung open suddenly and Dante swiveled to face it. Viperion slipped in, looking less-than-pleased. Blue hurried in behind him, face pale.

“You need this,” he growled in his usual fashion, handing Rose her mouse mask. She fit it on without question. “Blue was shot in the shoulder. How did they find us? Why are you out of bed cat?” Chat winced as Chloe more or less shoved him back into bed, pulling up his shirt to check his side with careful fingers.

“Didn’t feel like being mowed down by assholes. Thankfully, I managed to get my mask on and grab my baton before they came in. How many are left?”

“Not certain. We’re moving the assistants into here. It’s the most defensive location. Rena hit a few with hallucinogens. The fucks are in panic mode.” Ducksworth moved to check on Blue, leading her over to a bed so he could work on her shoulder.

“If you need to get back out there, Ducky and I can cover people in here,” Dante reported. Viperion glanced over at Dante, looking like he wanted to argue. Then his eyes landed on Rose once more. He took in her appearance, then took in Dante’s appearance. After careful consideration, he nodded.

“Stay safe,” Rose demanded, giving Viperion a hard look. He gave her that cocky grin that he knew annoyed the shit out of her.

“Always do. Expect Ivan with Nino, Plagg, and Tikki next. Then it should be Riposte with Jim and Kaida. We’re moving in awkward shifts and doing our best to keep their fire on us instead of those who aren’t armed.” With that, he slipped out of the room.

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Chapter End Notes

Since the last chapter was about half of what I usually give you guys, I decided to write up what could be considered to be the other half here. The assassins really needed some bonding time with Ducky and Dante. And what better way to bond than to be shot at?
It has come to my attention that I should probably have my twitter listed somewhere, so I posted it on my profile (@OGBratist because just Bratist was taken >:c). Feel free to send me art, suggestions, questions, or just to bug me about random shit. Warning: I suck at social media, so please don’t be offended if I don’t respond right away if you send something to me there.
Chapter Summary

What would you long to see over anything else?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chloe checked over Blue’s bandages while Ducky checked over everyone else. Riposte stood rigid in front of the door in her full outfit, waiting for someone to dare come knocking. Jim had taken a crying Kaida into the back room where the beds were to hopefully calm the child down. As for Blue… She was silent and shaking, her eyes haunted as she stared at the man Dante had bound and gagged in the corner. She didn’t speak, but instead kept rubbing her arms as she shivered. She’d barely allowed Ducky to care for the gunshot wound in her shoulder.

“He’s not going to hurt you,” Chloe said softly to the frightened young woman. Blue didn’t respond, just stared at the man. He stared back at her with narrowed, hate-filled eyes. Dante glanced back and forth between the two before noisily pulling a chair up beside the man, pulling almost everyone’s attention towards them. He casually unholstered his sidearm and checked the ammo before snapping the full clip back into place.

“I’m going to recommend you to avert your eyes,” he suggested without a hint of malice. But he didn’t need to sound threatening with his words. His actions were enough to make the message clear. While Chloe knew that Dante wouldn’t actually do anything, this man did not. So Chloe wasn’t surprised when the man paled a shade and jerked his eyes away from Blue. Ducky gave a low laugh from the corner as he dealt with a cut above Nino’s right eye.

“Things have quieted down out there,” Riposte reported. Rose nodded firmly, pressing a button on her earpiece.

“Ivan, contact Illustrator and verify the information Viperion is giving me,” she requested, stretching her arms upwards with her fingers linked together. Chloe gave a slight frown as she watched Dante’s eyes.

His eyes followed Rose’s every movement like a hungry wolf that was barely tamed. He held his gun carefully in his left hand, but his right hand, his dominant hand, was twitching every so often whenever his gaze passed over her mask covered face. She knew an internal battle when she saw one and after sharing a look with Ducky, she knew she wasn’t missing the mark. She made a mental note to sit down and talk to him later to figure out what was going through his head concerning the small, blonde woman.

“Illustrator is giving the all-clear as well,” Ivan reported. “The attackers are all dead, save this one.” He gestured towards the man Chat had knocked out. “The three are cleaning up the main house.” He stood and cracked his neck. “I’ll get out there and assist them.” He was met with nods from the other two assistants.

“I’ll be getting the cleaning supplies,” Tikki said, standing up from her seat on the floor. She brushed herself off and adjusted her reverse ladybug mask on her face.
“I’ll get the bags,” Rose piped up, hopping to her feet.

Plagg glanced over at the bound man and swallowed before standing as well. “I’ll help... Wherever I can.” As he moved to leave the room with the others, Chat caught hold of his wrist. The thief gave the driver a long look before muttering something in his friend’s ear, low enough so that Chloe couldn’t hear it. Plagg gave Chat an uneasy smile and nodded. Chat released the man and Plagg left the room.

“Are you not joining them?” Ducky asked Riposte. She gave him an amused snort.

“Of course not. I’m not going to leave those in here vulnerable. Someone, as unlikely as it is, may have slipped under the radar,” she replied, her voice thick with amusement. Dante scowled.

“I believe I am quite capable of protecting those in here from anyone. It’s the four who just left who would need protection if someone were still at large.” Riposte cocked her head at him. It was hard to tell based on her eyes alone what was going through her head at his words. Even more difficult by the fact that she had her face mask down.

“They have sufficient protection,” she replied evenly. “Not only are there three assassins who would never allow anything to happen to them out there, but Ivan is very much skilled at what he does for us.”

“And what is it exactly that he does for you?” Ducky asked as he finished placing a butterfly bandage over Nino’s eye. He moved over to his next patient, being Chat, and swapped out his gloves. Chloe left Blue’s side for the moment to assist him, swapping out her gloves as she moved. She could feel the rising tension in the room as the matter of trust floated between those in the know and those not in the know.

“That’s on a need to know basis,” Riposte began. And you don’t need to know, Chloe finished in her head, suppressing a sigh. Was there ever going to be a chance for Dante and Ducky to prove themselves trustworthy? “And that one doesn’t need to know.” Riposte gestured towards the captive. Chloe snapped her head up in shock as she looked at the assassin vigilante. Ducky raised a surprised brow.

“But…?” he inquired softly. A small chuckle came from Riposte’s mask.

“But I’m not the one you need to prove yourself to when it all comes down to it. The one you need to prove yourself to isn’t even here at the moment.” Riposte gestured towards the captive. Understanding passed over Dante’s face as he gave a nod. Ducky gave a shrug and focused on Chat’s side as he peeled the bandages away.

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About an hour passed as Ducky, with the help of Chloe, repaired the damage Chat had done to his side. Nothing was seriously damaged by some stretch of a miracle, but there were some internal stitches that needed to be replaced. The cat had specifically asked for them not to give him morphine,
so Ducky settled on a localized anesthetic that would only numb the pain in that area. Just as Ducky was finishing up the final stitching, Viperion entered the room.

“Everything is clear. Tikki is working on the security measures, trying to figure out how they found us and got in without triggering anything,” he reported. Nino hopped up, apparently eager to leave the room.

“I’ll go help her!” he announced, hurrying out. Chat gave a chuckle from the bed.

“He doesn’t like blood.” Chloe blinked at that before glancing down at her blood covered gloves. She gave an exhausted laugh before nodding.

“I suppose we may have made him a bit uncomfortable then. Cutting you open in front of everyone and getting to work,” she replied. Dante chuckled at that.

“He could’ve gone into the back room with the crying child.” Riposte rolled her shoulders and turned towards the back room.

“On that note, I’m going to enter that back room to check on my husband and child. I assume you don’t need me around while you question the rat, Viperion.” Viperion shook his head.

“We have it covered.” His voice was thick with the threat of violence and a cold shiver raced down Chloe’s spine. His voice was dark and threatening and his face was unreadable. But his eyes… His eyes burned with a fury she’d never seen before. She recalled all the times she thought he was too laid back, all the times she accused him of taking nothing seriously. That was why she had refused him because he didn’t seem to truly care about any one thing. But this… This he cared about. Maybe too much. It almost… Scared her. The intensity in his gaze she wasn’t certain she could handle. This wasn’t just about protecting those he cared for or himself. This was about vengeance, plain and simple. And she realized that she was missing a piece of the puzzle, something she likely would’ve been given had she been around for the past ten years instead of in America.

With a nod, Riposte faded into the back room and Ducky finished taping up Chat’s side. Chat gave Viperion a steady look, which Viperion returned. The two seemed to have mastered the art of silent conversation the way Chloe and Marinette had mastered it. The way Chloe and Ducky had mastered it. In the short time that Chat and Viperion had together, they managed to become close enough to have these silent conversations and, for whatever reason, that made Chloe sad.

She blinked away tears as she thought of the other people in her life that she was able to have such conversations with. Lizzie, without a doubt. Kai, definitely. Pixie. Sara. Tori. So many people back home. So many people she’d left behind. Those people she used to interact with on a daily basis. And she’d left them all for the future she thought she wanted. Since coming back to Paris, what had she gotten in return? Yes, a brief moment of relief and happiness when she got off the plane and found herself in Marinette’s arms again. But then depression and unhappiness as she felt out of place among everything. She supposed that was her own fault for making LA her home instead of treating it like a temporary residence. She knew she loved Marinette… But she wondered, not for the first time, if she was still in love with her.

When Marinette proposed, they were all the other truly had. They were two lonely fish abandoned in the greater ocean. And they were still so young. Now, ten years had passed. Ten long years that they didn’t even share together. And they weren’t alone anymore. Marinette had found her real family here and Chloe had found a family in L.A. Perhaps… Just perhaps it was time to let the past go. Perhaps it was time to make a decision on who she wanted to be going forward. If she stayed, she could continue training with Polly. She was good at it, as Polly, Nooroo, and Nathaniel had assured her. She could quickly climb the ranks and take over the mantle of Queen Bee for herself. If she left,
she could become Amara Hart once more and continue doing the thing she’d fallen in love with. She could climb the ranks in EMS and get a few more certs, ascending to the rank of Paramedic, perhaps even an Instructor. Was there no middle ground? No choice that didn’t break her heart or hurt those she loved?

~ ~ ~

“How did you find us?” Viperion growled, crossing his arms over his chest. The man didn’t reply. Illustrator pulled a knife from wherever and approached the man, twirling the knife in his fingers. The artist didn’t speak, but he didn’t need to. The threat was better served silently. The man edged away from the knife.

“Here’s a tip,” Rena spoke up brightly. “You think if you don’t talk, we’ll torture you for a bit before giving up. Then we’ll just kill you. But we won’t. We have all the time, money, and resources to keep you as contained as you kept those girls you like to sell. If you think we’ll end up feeling bad for hurting you, think again. Because all we need to do, if we start getting cold feet, is to just look at the face of that girl who you kidnapped years ago. The girl you beat and raped and brutalized. The girl who doesn’t even remember who she is because of what you’ve done to her.” Rena squatted down in front of the man and ran her gloved fingers over his thighs in almost a seductive manner. “I can make you see whatever you want. Your best dream come to life.” Her voice darkened. “Or your worst nightmare come to haunt you. So if this extends beyond one session, don’t think you’ll ever get a moment of reprieve. Because when we take a break from torturing you, I’ll be giving you my special hallucinogenic. Have you seen that movie about the teens who are killed by the monster when they sleep?”

“We followed the girl,” he blurted out, his fear-filled eyes locked on Rena’s.

“What girl?” Rena demanded.

“The blonde one. I was told by my higher-ups that she was important and that she would lead us to you, where you were probably holding our property. They weren’t happy that you guys had managed to rescue him.” He nodded in Viperion’s direction. “And they were pissed that you’d made off with one of our more popular girls. We were supposed to kill everyone and return with the bodies. They wanted as many women alive as possible. And him if able. The rest we were to slaughter.”

“How did you know to follow the blonde one?”

“They were informed by the benefactor that she shouldn’t be in France right now. That there was no way she should be in France right now. Her being in France timed with something else was too suspicious and likely meant she was related, considering who he is under the mask. And who you are. And your friends.” Rena jerked her head back slightly.

“Who I am? How do you know who I am under the mask?” He gave a hollow laugh.

“We know Viperion is Luka Couffaine. Chat Noir is Adrien Agreste. Tikki Coccinelle is Tikki Rossi. And Rena Rouge is Alya Césaire. We’ve been following you for months.” Rena sat back on her heels, feeling sick to her stomach. If they’d been following her, that meant they knew about Nino. That meant Nino’s life was in danger. And she would never allow them to harm Nino.

“Why do they care who Chat Noir is?” Viperion demanded. The man shook his head rapidly.

“I don’t know, something about a necklace! I swear! They don’t tell me much of anything! It was part of the bargain with the benefactor!” Rena scowled and stood slowly, pulling a needle from her
pouch. She uncapped it and stabbed it into the man’s neck, pushing the plunger down. His eyes glazed over as the hallucination overtook him.

“We have the information we need,” she reported simply. “But he could still be of use to us. Lock him up while I go speak to Blue.”

“What would Blue know that she hasn’t already told us?” Illustrator asked softly. Rena gave a deadly grin.

“Schematics.”

~ ~ ~

“I sent a notification to Trixx about what we learned,” Tikki reported, leaning back in her chair. “We’re just waiting to hear back from Marinette on how best we should proceed. Luka, obviously, wants to storm the place and kill everyone, but Trixx believes that would be poor planning. Alya, oddly, agrees with Trixx.”

“Why is that odd?”

“Because Alya is usually on the ‘storm the place and get it over with’ end.” Tikki gave a sigh and tugged on a piece of her hair, trying to think things through logically. “It would be one thing if it were only them. But they essentially have hostages.”

“Which changes things significantly.”

“Exactly. Despite wanting to kill this threat and eliminate it forever, they have hostages. We don’t want to risk the lives of those girls. I don’t even know how best to proceed at this point. They have to be taking some precautions now.”

“Perhaps you’re not looking at every solution before you.” Tikki frowned at that, cocking her head to the side.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you keep looking at it like there’s only storm the place or somehow sneak in. However, your best fighter is currently bed-ridden from a serious injury. Your most skilled assassin is getting her leg removed. You said it yourself just the other day. You don’t believe you’d have been able to rescue Luka if not for the help of Chat Noir. If you want to rescue those girls, you’re going to need to think of a new solution. Something they won’t expect.”

“What do you have in mind then?”

~ ~ ~

“Are you certain?” Alya asked of Blue. The young woman nodded. “Are you certain that you’re certain?” The woman nodded again.

“I don’t want to fear them anymore,” she replied softly. “If your things can somehow make me, in any way, not fear them anymore then I’ll take it. The snake showed me this in a dream.”

“I can’t guarantee what you’ll see,” Alya warned. Blue gave a simple smile at that and relaxed against the bed.

“I promise, even if it’s anything worse than what they did to me, then it will have succeeded in what
it’s meant to do. I’m not afraid. I’m ready.” Alya gave a nod and carefully injected the mysterious woman with her hallucinogenic, stepping back as her eyes glazed over. Alya pulled up a chair from the edge of the room and sat down, keeping a close eye on the girl as she waited for her to ride out whatever it was that she was going to see. She hoped beyond anything that, for the girl’s sake, she would be affected as Gabriel had always been affected… By seeing the thing he wanted to over anything else. For Gabriel, it was his late wife. For Blue, Alya couldn’t even begin to imagine what lay trapped behind the years of mental abuse and torture. What would Blue long to see over anything else? And if it went the other way… What would be more terrifying than what she’d already encountered?

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

This is late, but you all expected that :)

So this chapter is a bit shorter than usual simply because A) My wrists hurt. And B) I did feel like this was a good and solid place to end the chapter. Because if I don't end it on a cliff-hanger, how am I going to get you guys to yell and rage at me in the comments? Your rage is what gives me life <3
Who Are You?

Chapter Summary

And now I answer one of the questions I get flooded with!

How come Luka doesn't recognize his own sister?!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Blue’s lips parted as she walked down the long corridor. Though it was a bit odd in the way she walked, as though she weren’t actually moving. In the back of her mind, she knew that she was under the effects of Alya’s drugs, but that didn’t seem to make sense. Everything was so real. The corridor itself was dark and held an air of malice. But there were pictures on the wall. Pictures of laughing faces. People she felt she should know, but didn’t. The faces were distorted in a sinister way, like her mind was warning her not to remember. That’s right, she thought. I can’t remember or else I’ll be punished. Laughter came from the end of the corridor. She hurried down and found herself at a T section.

Two awkward signs were posted at the end, each directing her either left or right. The one pointing towards the right suggested that she head that way for the truth. The one directing her towards the left suggested she go there for reality. But both were paired with question marks on the end of their statements. Which way to go? What to choose? Left or right? Right or left? Both seemed like a good choice. She wanted the truth and she wanted reality.

The choice of reality was lit with a bright and blinding light. Laughter came from down there. The laughter that she’d heard when coming down the hall. The choice of truth was the exact opposite, covered in darkness with a somber appearance. Not a sound could be heard from down there, and the air was thick with misery. The choice of reality seemed to pull her towards it while the choice of truth seemed to push her away. With a deep breath, she made her choice and walked to the left, towards the safety of the laughter and light. She wanted to know what was reality.

As Blue stepped through the light, it blinded her for a moment, causing her to squint in pain. When the light cleared, she was surrounded by men. They laughed as she stumbled into the center of them, balancing precariously on the stilettos she wore. Her hands were chained together and she was wearing nothing more than a black thong and a black bra. Her hair was cut short and her face, she knew, was painted up like a showgirl’s face would have been.

“I’ll take it for fifteen,” one man proclaimed, sneering at her. Her stomach churned in disgust. The man wasn’t ugly, by any sense of the word. On the contrary, he was quite attractive. But his eyes, his eyes were sick and twisted.

“Sixteen,” another man called out. “It would be a wonderful party piece for a time.” More laughter ensued from that statement. This man was objectively unattractive, at least in her eyes. But his face promised pain and torture would await her.

“Twenty,” a third shouted. “I could use something… More.” The bids went on and on, laughter filling her ears. Her feet hurt and her head hurt. She was starving and thirsty. Her wrists were
bleeding from the way the chains cut into them. And from when she struggled. She knew, she knew without a doubt, that if she were sold tonight she would not survive. She would die.

_This isn’t real!_ Her mind yelled this, but she couldn’t even trust her own mind. Fight or flight kicked in, but she could do neither. She was bound and paraded about like an object. She _was_ an object. Nothing but a toy for these men to use and abuse until they tired of her and threw her away.

“I’ll take her for free,” a dark voice stated. Her eyes flicked up as the other men fell into silence. She couldn’t see the man, he was shrouded in darkness. Only his eyes showed in the darkness, bright teal eyes that blinked oddly. “She will not be bought, nor sold. Instead, after the auction is concluded and she is brought to her new owner, she bites him. He slaps her down, but she continues to fight with all her strength until she is eventually knocked unconscious. She is not sold because she is too free-willed, still. Instead, she is moved back with the other girls for further training.

“That is what saves her life, in the end. Because three days after this auction, the main warehouse is attacked. I kill everyone inside that warehouse and free all the girls held prisoner there. She is one of the girls you fucks manage to escape with. Years will pass and she will become complacent in her life, becoming cynical, yet obedient. She becomes the shiny example of what the other girls should strive towards. Then, you will capture me. She will hear stories. She will serve food and drink for you and your benefactor. Following this, she will serve me food when I’m meant to be drugged. But I’m not drugged and I use her to help free myself. And when I get free, I take her with me. In the end, it is her actions here that ultimately bring her freedom in the end.” A wicked smile stretched across the man’s face as he leaned forward. “Because she’s ‘not good for selling’ of course.”

“Snake, hear our plea and show us the way,” Blue whispered. Her chains were jerked and she stumbled forward, but continued the prayer. “Keep us strong in faith and in will. Let us not be led astray.”

“Someone shut her up!” one of the rats complained, covering his ears. A couple of men rushed her, but the snake hissed in annoyance and his tail coiled around them to yank them away. The snake’s eyes granted her permission to continue, and so she did, her voice rising as she finished off the prayer.

“We ask for you to come to our dreams and wrap us in your holy scales so that we may awaken stronger and more faithful than before! And when the time is right and your belly is empty, may you devour the rats that plague us all so we may dance in your halls and eat at your table!” As she finished with a shout, the snake’s human form melted away and he hissed, rising up. He was larger than man, his fangs the size of her forearm. His teal scales flickered in the light as he slithered around, devouring the men. Some tried to scream and run, but the snake’s body was blocking the doors. None could escape him.

As he devoured the final man, the chains that had shackled Blue dissolved and she collapsed to the floor. The snake slithered around her, eyes taking her in. She cried in relief as he coiled her up in his body. She rested her head back against him while he lay his head down in almost a lazy manner.

“You’ve done well. But you chose wrong,” the snake admonished her in a sleepy voice. “You chose your reality in the light, instead of the truth they hid from you.”

“But… I thought…” She trailed off after a glance from the snake. He let out a long sigh and blinked slowly. He was full, she realized. Snakes slept after eating their meals.

“You thought wrong. Always remember that light does not always mean good while darkness cannot always be attributed to evil.” He closed his eyes and fell into a long sleep. She glanced back at the doorway she’d walked in through as indecision slammed into her. She could leave and change
her decision. She could see what truth had in store for her. Or she could stay with the snake, in the safety of his arms. Nothing would harm her while she was with him because he’d protect her. But she’d never know who she was or who she left behind.

The snake’s words came back to her as she struggled with the decision. “You chose wrong.” With a deep breath, she slowly stood and climbed over the snake’s body, making her way towards the door. As she moved and climbed, her hair grew out. Clothes appeared on her body. The stilettos were replaced with comfortable sneakers. The thick makeup on her face vanished. Finally, she stumbled through the door, leaving the safety behind and heading into the unknown.

~ ~ ~

Alya gritted her teeth as Blue shook and cried, her eyes wide in horror. The girl was clawing at her own wrists as if trying to struggle against what was keeping her contained. Everything in her wanted to rush to the girl’s side and try to wake her up, but Alya knew that would harm more than help. No one could be woken up from a hallucination by force. The drug had to make its way through the person’s system naturally. By involving herself, she could become part of the hallucination in the girl’s mind and make everything worse.

“They’re bidding on me,” Blue sobbed. “They’re going to sell me to the highest bidder and I’m going to die.”

“What the fuck is going on?” Luka demanded, stepping into the room. His eyes landed on Blue and he began to rush to her side. Alya intercepted him, shoving him away.

“Are you stupid?” she hissed. “If you interact with her, you could make everything worse!” Luka shook his head in confusion.

“Why did you drug her?!” he demanded, his hands closing into fists. Blue continued to sob over being auctioned.

“She asked me to! She wanted to no longer be scared of the Rat Pack and told me that either way, this would help. I warned her that she may see something horrible. I warned her of all the risks, but she didn’t care.” Luka’s mouth firmed into a hard line as he stared over at Blue’s shaking body and fear-filled eyes. Tears continued to fall down her face.

“I can’t stand here and just watch this,” he growled. Alya tossed her hands in the air and sat down with a huff.

“Fine, but if you make things worse, don’t blame me. Just don’t touch her.” Luka nodded and kneeled beside the bed, taking a deep breath. He leaned in close to her ear and began to speak softly, steel in his voice.

“I’ll take her for free,” he murmured. “She will not be bought nor sold…” As he continued his speech, Blue slowly began to relax. Alya watched in amazement as relief rippled through the young woman’s body. When Luka concluded, Blue began to whisper that prayer she would whisper all the time. Finally, Blue shifted to the side and rested her head on Luka’s arm, causing the man to stiffen in surprise. He glanced back towards Alya for help, but Alya only smirked at him and shrugged.

“Better get comfy. You know how dangerous it is to physically interact with someone under one of my hallucinations. You could harm her mental state.” He scowled at her and she laughed softly before standing and moving her chair over for him. Together, they managed to get him seated comfortably without jostling Blue.
“I guess I’ll watch over her for now,” he said in a tone that seemed more like he was asking a question. Alya nodded and wiggled her fingers at him in a goodbye before quietly slipping from the room. If it were anyone else, she would’ve remained, but she trusted Luka. He knew enough about drugs and the likes to watch over the girl. His initial outburst had emotion written all over it, but she believed now that Blue was settled down, his chemist brain would take over.

More than that, it gave Alya relief to know that if Blue fell into another bad hallucination, Luka could talk her out of it.

~ ~ ~

Blue walked into the somber darkness, her vision vanishing. For a moment, she could see nothing. Fear skittered down her spine, but she forced her feet to keep moving. Light isn’t always good and dark isn’t always bad, she reminded herself. The snake is wise. Finally, after ten hard steps forward, her vision began to clear and she walked into an unfamiliar scene.

“Congratulations!” a girl cheered at Blue in a language that wasn’t her own. This wasn’t French, but Blue understood every word. “I can’t believe you won!” Blue found herself laughing and nodding, doing a little dance. In her mind, she frowned as confusion filled her.

“I can’t believe it either! When I tripped at the end, I thought it was all over,” her mouth was saying while her mind demanded to know who this girl was.

“I don’t think the judges cared about the little stumble. Everyone stumbles at some point. Your dance was perfection.” The girl gave a jealous sigh and hugged Blue tightly. “You better send me a lot of pictures from France!” Blue hugged the girl back and grinned.

“Of course, Sadie.”

The scene shifted and Blue blinked in confusion, glancing down at herself. She was younger. She wasn’t her own age. Was this real? Who was Sadie? What did she win? Did she dance? Another scene faded into existence.

This time, she was staring at a long line of people. She gripped some papers in one hand, a backpack slung across her back. Her other hand was holding the hand of another person.

“I want calls every night,” an older woman said, tears thick in her voice. Blue turned her head to look at the woman who spoke and internally, she jerked in shock. The woman looked so much like her, it was uncanny. Blue wanted to demand the identity of the woman, but instead, she smiled and nodded in affirmation. The woman pulled Blue into a tight hug, which Blue returned. “I’m so proud of you sweetie. And I love you so much.” Emotion was thick in Blue’s throat as she clung to the woman.

“I love you too, Mom. I’ll be back before you know it,” she promised. No! You won’t! Blue shrieked in her head. Don’t leave her! Don’t go! But it was no use. The woman released her with a smile and handed her off to a man with a kind smile and soft hazel eyes. Eyes that Blue had on her own face. The man hugged her gently and kissed her on the cheek.

“I love you baby girl. You better get through TSA, don’t want to miss your flight,” he advised gently. She nodded and gave him a smile.

“I love you too, Daddy. I’ll call every chance I get and when I’m safe in France.”

“See you in two weeks.” She grinned and stepped away, walking towards the TSA agent. As she handed over her ticket and passport, she glanced behind her and gave her parents one last wave
goodbye before turning back around.

“Where are you headed and what is your name?” the lady asked. Blue gave a confident grin.

“I’m headed to Paris, France and my name is Jessica Monroe.”

~ ~ ~

Rose let out a deep breath as she stretched in the gym, trying to push away the fear that plagued her mind. Everything was easier when she worked as an assistant. When she worked as an assistant, she was able to ignore all the emotion of her life. It boiled down to working to keep her charge alive and out of jail. Keep her charge just as safe as he kept her.

“How are you holding up?” Dante’s smooth voice asked her. She turned and spotted him leaning against the doorway, his eyes watching her. A flush spread down her chest as she took him in. Last night, he’d become her charge. It’d always been Luka, but somehow it’d become Dante. She still wasn’t sure why exactly she had that kind of reaction towards him. Was it because they shared similar experiences with abuse? Or was it because they connected over caw-fée?

“I’m doing okay,” she replied. “No bullet holes at least.” He frowned at that and shook his head.

“That’s not what I meant. I know you’re fine physically. I meant how are you mentally. You had to help clean up those bodies… I can’t imagine how horrifying that had to be.” Rose blinked in confusion.

“I’m fine. Why would cleaning up bodies be horrifying?” That didn’t seem to make sense. “This is the life I chose, Dante. I begged to be part of it.” His frown deepened.

“Why would you ever choose this life?” he asked. She cocked her head to the side.

“Why would you ever choose to be a cop?” she countered, crossing her arms. “I chose this because I wanted control back. I wanted to help Luka punish those who hurt me and took away the woman I loved. I wanted to make sure my pseudo-brother was safe. I wanted to help keep him safe.”

“By wearing a mask?”

“I chose the mask! They called me a scared little mouse. They used her against me as a weapon. He freed me when the police could do nothing, even though he had no reason to truly do so. Juleka was long buried at that point. *If that was Juleka.* “And yet he still came for me and all the others. Do you know how many lives he saved that night?” Dante didn’t reply. “Twenty-seven. Twenty-seven young women from the ages of fourteen to twenty-five. He saved all our lives when the police could do nothing.” She stepped towards Dante, anger bristling through her. “And he didn’t stop there. Between the assassination contracts, he continued to find them and end those connected to the human trafficking. He ended up saving so many lives by doing what he did. Young men like Plagg were freed because of his actions.”

“Plagg?” Dante blinked in shock. Rose shook her head at his lack of knowledge.

“You judge without all of the details. Plagg was wrapped up in the Rat Pack when he was a teen as a street racer. When they tried to convince him to become deeper involved with that side of the business, he said no and tried to get out. They beat him up and forcibly tattooed that damned rat on his hip. I can’t even begin to imagine how many young men they brainwashed into joining them. What Luka did freed those boys. Luka broke the gang up and hunted them down to almost nothing. They would be nothing…”
“But he missed the few that mattered,” Dante concluded, shaking his head. “You should’ve gone to the police with your information instead of fighting them yourself.”

“The cops are corrupt,” she snapped. He cocked his head to the side.

“Not all of the cops are corrupt, Rose.”

“You hear about corrupt cops on the news all the time,” she countered, tossing her hands in the air. He raised a single brow and shook his head at her.

“Yes, you do. However, that is a very small minority of police. That does not reflect upon the police as a whole. Most cops who are corrupt find themselves without a job very quickly. I don’t know how it’s done in France, but in America, we have a system in place specifically to weed out corrupt individuals working within law enforcement.”

“This isn’t America.”

“You’re right. It’s not.” He cocked his head towards her as she realized what she said.

“T-that’s not what I meant,” she sputtered, her face burning red. “Of course France has a system in place.”

“Then maybe you should trust in that system.” Rose snapped her mouth shut, feeling her argument beaten. She’d been trying to defend her actions, but he managed to turn it against her. And she had a feeling if she tried to argue her point any further, he’d simply continue to turn it back around her. This is a detective. He does this with criminals and lawyers all the time. That information saddened her. With a sigh, she shook her head.

“We’re always going to be on two opposite ends, aren’t we?” she asked. “You on the side of the law and me on the side of the assassins.” He gave a small chuckle and a shrug.

“It looks like it. Though it may shock you to know that this is a dynamic I’ve seen before, on more than one occasion. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn’t.”

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

The answer: Because it's not his sister you scrubs. :) That would be way too convenient. The question you /should/ be asking is: Is Juleka even alive or not?

Concerning the speech Luka makes in the real world: It's almost word for word with what Blue hears, with some information skewed. Luka doesn't know the time frame of which Blue stood "for auction." He would've said something like: "After she is brought back for fighting out, I kill everyone, blah, blah blah." I would've rewritten the speech from his/Alya's P.O.V. however the speech he does make is so similar, it felt a little pointless. But I know people will ask about it, so there's the answer here. <3
The Truth

Chapter Summary

Guess who's back?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Blue wandered through the darkness through what was essentially a maze. The information that had been given to her confused her more than she thought possible. Jessica Monroe. This was her name. And yet it felt weird to think of. Having a name when for so long, she’d been without a name. Until recently, she was only referred to as one of the cynical girls, and then a hopeful girl for a brief period of time. It wasn’t until the snake freed her from her shackles that she actually took an actual name. Blue. It fit and it felt right, but it wasn’t her real name. Her real name was Jessica Monroe. So why didn’t that name fit like Blue did? Why wasn’t it more like the movies where all her memories and past came flooding back to her once she remembered a couple of key memories?

She supposed she didn’t truly remember anything. She was shown scenes from her memory, but those were memories that she didn’t truly have access to. It was more like watching a movie through the eyes of one of the characters. It almost didn’t feel real. Though she wouldn’t know for certain unless she found the exit to this endless maze.

She felt like she’d been walking forever. No matter which way she turned, or how many times she back-tracked, she couldn’t find the stupid exit. The maze was endless and the sound of hissing surrounded her completely, never leaving her alone. What if there was no end and she was left in this eternal darkness forever? The thought made her heart pound in her chest.

“Darkness isn’t always bad like light isn’t always good,” she reminded herself. It was only the quote that the snake had gifted her that kept her from falling into a panicked state. Despite anything, even if she were to be lost in this darkness forever, she took comfort in the fact that life went on. She may be lost, but her sisters would be freed. There was hope for them. The snake would find the rats and destroy them. He’d save her sisters.

With that thought in mind, she finally stopped walking. The sound of hissing grew louder as she leaned against the wall and took a deep breath, her exhaustion finally catching up to her. Slowly, she slid down the wall and sat onto the floor. She kept that reminder in her head as she curled up and finally closed her eyes, letting the darkness sweep her away.

~ ~ ~

Luka watched as Blue finally shut her eyes and fell asleep, causing him to sigh in relief. The hallucination went on for a bit longer than he expected and his arm had fallen asleep an hour ago. He slowly slid his arm free and readjusted her on the bed before leaning back in the chair, feeling drained. His eyes felt like he’d been rubbing sand in them. He supposed he was woken up in the middle of the night to handle the break-in. And he hadn’t gone back to sleep since.

At a glance outside, he sighed again as the sun began to peek in through the windows. Everything was slowly coming to a close, he could feel it. One way or another, he was getting closure for his
sister.

Marinette blinked at the scene in front of her. Her mind tried to process exactly what was going on, but it didn’t seem to quite make sense. Of all the things she expected to find when she finally made it back, this would definitely never have crossed her mind.

Nathaniel, Nino, and Ducksworth were sitting around the kitchen table drinking coffee and joking back and forth. Tikki, Luka, Alya, and Dante had their heads ducked down together as they discussed their plans for how best to handle the Rat Pack. Even Trixx was confused as she stood behind Marinette. No one had even noticed their presence in the kitchen yet.

“What’s going on here?” Marinette finally snapped, getting the attention of everyone in the kitchen all at once. Luka jerked into a standing position at the sight of her, his eyes falling down to her blanket-covered bottom half. Looking for the evidence of my surgery my viper?

“You’re back!” Tikki cried happily, jerking up and rushing over to give Marinette a hug. Marinette blinked as her friend gently squeezed her into a hug. Alya was close behind Tikki and also made sure to give Marinette a hug, which warmed Marinette down to the core. It made her feel good to know she had people who missed her and were glad to see her back safe and sound. It was almost enough to distract her from whatever she’d walked in on. Almost.

“We had a few minor complications to handle while you were gone,” Nathaniel explained briefly. She rose a brow in his direction, leaving nothing out. He listened with a blank face, not allowing her shock to show. They knew Chloe wasn’t supposed to be in France because of this… Benefactor. That makes things almost too easy. There was only one person with the means, motive, and money who knew Chloe was not supposed to be in France. However, would she really work with the Rat Pack in order to get her revenge on the Organization? It was one thing to be a self-centered bitch. It was another thing to work with people involved with human trafficking.

Once Nathaniel finished his report, Luka finally spoke up. “Why are you back so early?” he asked gently. “We were under the impression that you’d be gone for at least a week, if not more.” Tikki stiffened up behind Marinette while Marinette herself gave a calm smile to her viper. Her wonderful viper who’d been there for her since she was a lost teenage girl crying in the rain on a bridge.

“Because they didn’t take her leg,” Ducksworth said. All eyes flickered to him in question. He rose a brow at Marinette. “They didn’t, did they?”

“No, they didn’t,” Marinette confirmed. “The cancer spread too quickly for that to remain a viable option. Even if they took my leg, it wouldn’t help anything.”

“So what are they going to do?” Tikki asked, a frown stretching across her face. Her arms crossed over her chest in an almost defensive manner. Marinette forced herself to take a breath and meet Tikki’s questioning gaze.

“They’re going to make my last few years as comfortable as possible,” she managed to say. She was met with stunned silence. “Enough about me though, what plan have you come up with concerning this immediate threat?” Her family stared at her in shock, as if they couldn’t believe she would brush this off so simply. They didn’t realize that she had to. She couldn’t focus on the finality of her situation without completely breaking down into pieces. She needed to focus on something she could solve and fix. And only a couple of people in the room seemed to understand where her head was.
“We’re going to get the police involved,” Dante replied, his eyes holding a steady understanding that she appreciated. “This gang is still relatively small. A police raid could disrupt everything for them. Thanks to Blue, we have the basic schematics of the location they’re hiding out in. Nino and Tikki have been able to confirm that they haven’t had the time to switch locations yet.”

“And with all the girls they have locked up, moving isn’t going to be easy,” Nino added in, picking up on the silent message. “While the police raid them and they’re busy trying to handle that, a few of us are going to sneak in to help those who are captive escape to ensure nothing happens to them during the raid. This also removes the chance of them using those girls as hostages.”

“Who is going in to get the girls?” she asked, frowning.

“Luka has to go in as Viperion,” Nathaniel stated. “He’s our best chance of the girls trusting us enough to let us lead them to safety. Alya and I will be joining him while Kagami covers our escape. Since her outfit is the BRI outfit, she has the best chance of not being questioned should anyone see her from the outside.” This made relative sense. No civilian or news reporter who caught sight of her would question her being there because of the outfit. And any actual member of BRI would be too busy to look into it further.

“Makes sense. Who will be covering the rooftops?” The question was met with silence. Something they hadn’t considered.

“I will,” a new voice stated firmly. Marinette turned her head to see Blue standing there, clutching a fist against her chest. The young woman had a determined expression on her face. “You don’t need someone to do more than watch. I can do that.”

Marinette was silent as she considered the woman. As she looked the woman up and down and considered the woman’s experiences, she was hit with a bit of shock. It may not be raining, and they may not be on a bridge, but Marinette felt she was looking at herself as Luka had seen her years ago on that bridge. Blue’s heart was playing the tune of a fighter, as Luka would say. Adrien’s words from a few weeks ago came back to her. “Teach me how to shoot like you.”

“You’ll need a mask,” Marinette said. “And I think I have one that will fit you perfectly.”

After all, the plans had been set in stone and the arrangements were finally made, everyone began to file out of the kitchen to go about their respective duties before the raid. Marinette caught Nino’s arm before he left, her eyes asking him to wait a moment. He frowned, but nodded. Once the kitchen was clear, Marinette finally released his arm.

“I have a favor to ask of you…”

Chloe stood in her room and looked at the decision she’d made. Her suitcases were neatly packed on the bed, ready to go when the time came. She didn’t regret coming back to Paris. She’d learned so much since coming back and she’d grown as a person. But it was time for her to go home. And Paris hadn’t been her home for the past ten years. Her home lay in the west. Her family was an odd mixture of people from different backgrounds who’d all come together to form a cohesive squad to save lives. That’s who Chloe was. She saved lives, she didn’t end them.

She saved lives… She didn’t end them…

She scowled at the ‘gift’ Tikki left on her bed.
Adrien met Marinette’s eyes as she finished explaining what the doctors told her what they found when they went to remove her leg. “The cancer has spread too quickly and too far to make removing my leg a viable option. They went ahead and scraped away what they could, but it’s only bought me time, not saved my life. There’s not much left to be done now other than making me comfortable.” The universe couldn’t be this cruel, could it? He’d found the woman he loved, the one he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. And she was going to die.

“And there’s nothing that anyone can do?” he asked, clenching the covers of the bed in his fists. Marinette shook her head slowly before attempting a small smile.

“I’m going to make the most of the time I have left though. I refuse to waste away in a bed or spend the rest of what I have left hiding away from the world.” She reached over and gripped his hand, her thumb brushing over his knuckles in such a way that made it feel like she was reassuring him. Shouldn’t the roles be reversed? Shouldn’t it be him reassuring her that everything was going to be okay?

“I can’t lose you,” he admitted, staring down at their linked hands. “I just found you. I’ve already watched my parents die to a sickness they had no control over, and now I have to watch another one take you too?”

“I have something else I need to tell you though… Something I probably should’ve told you beforehand, but it didn’t seem real. I still don’t understand it, but I talked to the doctors about it and they’ve explained best they could.” She seemed more nervous now than she did when she explained her dire circumstance beforehand. He frowned at her, waiting for her to pull herself together and figure out the wording she wanted to use. In usual Marinette fashion, she took a few moments to think about what she wanted to say and how she wanted to say it. So when she finally did tell him, the only thing he could do was stare at her in shock and confusion.

“Adrien, do you have a minute?” Nino asked one of his best friends. Adrien rose his head and stared at Nino. The hacker glanced nervously at Marinette and shifted awkwardly. What more information can be given to completely turn my world on its axis? Adrien wondered to himself. He numbly gestured for Nino to come in.

“What do you need?” Adrien asked, feeling shaken. Nino swallowed stiffly and pulled a flash drive from his pocket, twisting it around in his hands. Marinette’s eyes fell onto the flash drive and her eyes widened.

“Is that what I think it is?” she demanded suddenly, causing Adrien’s head to snap towards her. She sounded… Scared. Completely unlike Marinette. Nino nodded in response. “Where did you get that?!?”

“It doesn’t matter. He deserves to know,” Nino replied. Marinette shook her head in response.

“Know what?” Adrien asked, trying to figure out what he was missing.

“Don’t do this Nino. Don’t ruin that for him,” she pleaded. Nino scowled.

“What if it were you?” he countered. “Wouldn’t you want to know the truth?”

“Know what?” Adrien repeated. Nino turned away from Marinette and faced Adrien head-on. He took a breath, his face utterly serious. There was no trace of humor, nothing for Adrien could later point to and explain it all away as a sick joke they were all pulling on him. No way to truly deny the
“Adrien, your father and Nathalie were both involved in the Assassin’s Organization,” Nino said firmly. “This flash drive holds the proof of that.”

“You’re joking,” he attempted. “That’s ridiculous.” Adrien shook his head. “No, there’s no way. There’s no way my father and Nathalie were involved with a group of assassins.” Maybe if he put enough emphasis onto the words, it’d make them true. “No, this isn’t real.” His eyes found Marinette’s. “Tell me this isn’t real. Tell me this isn’t true.” She couldn’t meet his eyes.

“It’s real,” Nino told him grimly. “It’s true.”

“No, it can’t be! If Nathalie was involved with assassins…” But he trailed off as he recalled when Riposte and Viperion brought him to Nathalie after he’d been kidnapped by Anders. The odd way they acted around each other. The easy way she interacted with Trixx. Trixx. She’d been his father’s night nurse since he’d been hospitalized. She and Trixx had been friends for as long as he could remember.

The way he handled everything with such certainty. The way Nathalie had always been able to patch him up when he got injured as Chat Noir. The easy way the both of them had taken to him becoming Chat Noir. The way they accepted it as fact and never really questioned his decision. The way Nathalie had jumped to offer her assistance. The facts added up, no matter how much he tried to deny them.

“Please, don’t let this be real,” he pleaded with Marinette. She still didn’t respond. “Say anything! Shake your head! Anything! Just… Anything… Please.”

“I’m sorry Adrien,” she managed. He pulled his hand out of her grasp and shook his head. She looked heartbroken. Nino took a step towards him but backed off when Adrien shot him a warning look.


~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

So as those of you who are in my discord already know, I’ve been having issues being able to sit down and write properly for the past week or so. My carpal tunnel has flared up and it’s extremely difficult to sit down and write when my wrists are hurting as they do with the flare-ups. While my wrist braces help with the pain, it’s too awkward to fluidly write while wearing them. So I took a short break. :
I managed to sit down today and, taking my time, I did get this chapter finished up! Hope you guys enjoy! <3
Lieutenant Roger Raincomprix released a small sigh of exasperation as he walked into the police station. The public was getting more and more nervous with the more frequent reports of gunshots in the city. Based on the reports he’d gone through, it’d been pretty obvious that the old gang from years ago was making a return. The Rat Pack. The thought of them made Roger’s skin crawl. They preyed on young men for initiates and kidnapped young women for their human trafficking trade.

Some vigilante had managed to wreak enough havoc on their operations years ago enough to make them vanish into the underground. The public applauded the police for the work and the police took credit, but a few knew the truth of what happened. The “leaders” that were arrested years ago were mere scapegoats so the police didn’t look like utter fools, upstaged by some kid in a mask who’d gotten his hands on explosive chemicals and other dangerous substances.

The girls that had been saved that night… Roger was constantly reminded how it could’ve been his Sabrina sitting there with haunted eyes, refusing to allow any male officers to touch her. And now they were back. And Sabrina refused to take his calls. His little girl had grown up and found her own path in life.

“Lieutenant!” a younger officer called as Roger made his way to the locker room. He turned and rose a brow at the young woman. She excitedly hopped up, waving a package in the air. Her eyes were bright as she handed him the package she held. He looked over it with a frown. It was a plain brown package with his name scrawled on the top in bold, black lettering. Every letter in his name was capitalized, an odd detail. “This came for you this morning.”

“Did you send it to get checked over?” he asked, eyes spearing into the officer’s. She flushed lightly but nodded. He bit back another sigh and tore the package open, wanting to get it over with. He’d gotten a lot of hate mail over the past few months. Most were sent in through the tip line, which made the younger officers excited as they all thought he was getting good information. The poor young lady in front of him probably thought he was helping. He was fully expecting another dead fish or something of the same vein.

Oddly enough, the box contained just a simple flash drive with the letters “RPL” written on the side. RPL? The hell is that supposed to stand for? He waved away the officer and turned toward his desk, forgoing the locker room for the moment.

Absentmindedly, he placed his things on his desk and sat down, still staring at the flash drive. With a shrug, he signed onto his computer and plugged the flash drive in. A video popped up.

“Good evening Lieutenant Roger,” a distorted voice began. “By this point, you should know who’s back in town. If you don’t, then I hate to break it to you. A certain gang is making their come-back.” Roger sat up straighter and paused the video. He found headphones and connected them to his
computer, not wanting anyone to overhear what he was hearing. He hit play once more. “The Rat Pack is back.”

The video changed to an image of an abandoned-looking office building. The voice continued, “This is where they are hiding. Of course, I know you can’t just take my word for it. So here’s an inside look of that building.” The image flickered and changed to an inside view. Gangsters were walking around the building, smoking and talking. Mingling in various ways. “I know this doesn’t prove it’s the Rat Pack. So let’s take a closer look into their rooms.” Another image flicker and Roger was looking in a bedroom. A man was getting changed. He pulled his shirt off, revealing the rat tattoo on his hip. “And just to make you understand how vital your actions are…” The image flicked to a dark room.

Women were huddled in together. There had to be at least twenty women in the small room. There were no beds, only blankets that the women were huddled under. They seemed to be segregated into different groups. Roger felt himself growing more sick the longer he looked at the video, but he couldn’t tear his eyes away. After a minute or so, the door opened to allow light to come into the room. He sucked in a shocked breath as the light illuminated some of the women’s faces. A few of them he could recognize, despite being older. Those he recognized were supposed to be dead. They’d been reported as dead.

A woman was shoved into the room and she stumbled forward on heels. Her face was bruised and bleeding, an eye swollen shut. She scammed over to some of the other women, who bundled her up in their arms in almost a protective manner. The woman was crying. Was… Was that blood coming from her mouth? The video went dark.

“You have the location. You have proof. I hope you were the correct man to send this information to Lieutenant. I’d say you have about twenty-four hours before they realize their security is compromised and they decide to move locations. Then they’re lost to the both of us. Good luck.” The video ended.

~ ~ ~

“We’ll be leaving in about an hour,” Kagami told Adrien. He ignored her. She scowled and crossed her arms, shooting him a glare. “Oh get the hell off your high horse Agreste.” He glared back at her.

“Cheap coming from you,” he snapped. “You knew the shit my father and Nathalie were involved in. They were involved in your shit. And yet you never let me in on it? We were supposed to be friends.”

“Yeah, and you think Gabe wanted his son involved with something that could get him killed?” Kagami shot back. “He lost his wife, he couldn’t lose you too.” She released a small breath, clearly trying to calm down a bit. “He wanted more for you, Adrien. He wanted you to experience life in the way you wanted to without his influence. Mostly, he wanted to protect you. He didn’t want you to make the same mistakes he made. He hid away from the public eye, not because he was depressed over your mom’s death, but because he wanted to ensure he wouldn’t be an easy target for someone looking to hurt me. He asked us all to hide the truth from you. That was his final request for us all.” She sat on the edge of the bed and rested her hand on Adrien’s arm. “Don’t blame us for his decision. Don’t hold it against Nathalie. Don’t hold it against Mari. And definitely, don’t hold it against Nino and Plagg.”

Adrien groaned and rubbed his face, trying to clear his head. “Why do you have to be so reasonable?” he asked, shooting her a less heated look. She responded with a simple smirk.

“It comes with being a mother. Children will always ask why something isn’t allowed and why
they’re getting in trouble for something. I have to be able to reasonably explain it in a way they can understand.” Adrien let out a laugh at that and gave a nod.

“I guess I have been acting a bit childish with this,” he admitted. Kagami shrugged.

“I don’t think anyone blames you for it. It was a huge bombshell and now probably wasn’t the best time for the news to be broken to you. Now, I do need to go get ready for the raid tonight. It’s most hands on deck after all.” She moved to get off the bed when Adrien gripped her arm tightly, causing her to pause.

“Stay safe Kagami. You’re not just living for yourself anymore.” She nodded and leaned forward, kissing his cheek.

“I’m probably the safest one that’s going to be out there. Not only is my outfit secure, but I’ll also just be sitting on the outside blending in. I’ll see you soon Adrien. Get some rest and focus on healing up.”

~ ~ ~

Blue blinked at herself in the full-length mirror. The ladybug outfit fit her like a glove. It was comfortable and airy while hugging her curves. She’d bundled her hair up in the way Marinette showed her, her bangs pinned back against her head. Marinette’s bangs were shorter in the front, but Blue hadn’t had the time to really get her hair styled. The mask was comfortable on her face. The only thing she lacked was Marinette’s cool demeanor. Blue felt as nervous as a rabbit.

Jessica Monroe. The name didn’t really fit her anymore. Though she supposed that made sense. Jessica Monroe was dead. Tikki had searched the name up for her and showed her the news report. Jessica Monroe was killed by the Rat Pack at the age of seventeen, her body discovered in one of the many rivers flowing through Paris. Her body was returned to her family in America for a proper burial. She’d been in Paris for a ballet competition and had caught the eye of a member of the Rat Pack. When returning to her hotel after the ballet competition, she was taken off the streets. She left behind her parents, one older brother, and one younger sister.

She had the current number of her father. Tikki had loaned her a disposable phone. All she had to do was hit enter on the phone. After staring at herself in the mirror for a second longer, she hit the call button and placed the phone against her ear.

“Hello? This is John Monroe,” a male voice answered in English after a few rings.

“Um, hi,” she attempted, trying to think of what to say. What could she say? He thought his daughter was dead. He’d gone the past thirteen years believing his daughter was dead. He had thirteen years to come to terms with that and to move on with his life. “I just… I wanted to say I’m sorry for only making the third place.” She clung to information that made sense. According to the news report, Jessica Monroe hadn’t won the competition, but she did make the third place. She’d apparently gotten a small trophy for that ranking.

“I think you have the wrong number,” he replied with a laugh. Blue sat down and bit her lip.

“I don’t. Paris is really pretty by the way.”

“Who is this?” His voice had turned to steel. A couple of tears slipped from her eyes.

“Blue. My name is Blue. I’m sorry for your loss.” She pulled the phone from her ear and hung up. Pain bloomed from her chest and she pulled in an uneasy breath. A small memory tickled in the back of her head. She remembered practicing her different stances and her daddy watching on with pride.
as she finally mastered one that had given her so much trouble.

She had a home she could return to. She could return.

~ ~ ~

“It’s time,” Illustrator said, earning a nod from Viperion. The snake checked his things before making his way out to the van where Rena Rogue and Blue were already waiting. Riposte gave Jim a kiss goodbye and tickled Kaida’s belly before fitting her helmet on her head. She was dressed for a police raid. Only her foil ruined the image, but she assured them that she’d leave it in the van. Plagg was sitting in the driver’s seat, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel.

Right before Viperion could get in the van, Tikki ran out of the house and toward the van. She yanked open the door and grasped Plagg’s face in her hands, kissing him firmly, shocking Plagg and everyone else.

“You’d think we were leaving for our final battle or something,” Rena muttered, rubbing her arms. Illustrator gave a shrug and climbed into the van. Blue looked like she wanted to say something but apparently decided against it, choosing instead to climb in without a word.

“This one is different,” Viperion commented to Rena. “There’s more on the line here.”

“I suppose. Which is why we have all the angles covered.” With those words, Rena climbed into the van as well, leaving Viperion as the only one standing there. He glanced back towards the house and gave Marinette a wave. She attempted a smile and waved back, pain on her face.

I’m doing this without my lady beside me, he realized. This would be the third raid he’d ever done without her beside him. The first was to save Chat Noir. The second to save her. And now this… To make matters worse, he wouldn’t even have Chat beside him. Instead, he was placing his life and safety in the hands of those he hadn’t worked with nearly enough. With that knowledge, he climbed into the van.

~ ~ ~

Chapter End Notes

This is the beginning of the end of this fic. It's been so much fun and the ending is so close. It's a weird thought for me too.

So this chapter is shorter because e m o t i o n and shit like that. I've explained this in previous chapters, but basically I want it to punch you in the gut as much as possible emotion-wise, and that's easier with shorter chapters. So suffer my lovelies <3

End Notes

Keep in mind: I will only answer questions that aren't explained in future chapters to keep from spoiling you guys and ruining the experience. Feel free to comment with suggestions. If
I like a suggestion, and I use it, I'll and give the commenter credit in the end note. Now, I'll do my absolute best to update it once per week, but please remember I suck at keeping to my own schedule. :) I'll do my best to get at least a chapter posted on Fridays around 11 pm EST.

**Special thank you to BFG in the comments who's left those wonderfully long and detailed comments posting their own theories and reasons behind the things that happen!*
**Special thank you to SAMMON/5AMMON who's been fantastic and has kept me on my toes in how I go about writing things. I have loved our interactions!**
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And thank you to everyone else who has given this fic so much love, comments, and kudos. You guys truly make this worthwhile!

Check out my twitter if you wanna send me stuff or generally bother me in some sense. My twitter is listed on my profile.
Oh hey, this is a thing now: Discord! https://discord.gg/JJKUW9X <--- Come rage at me :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!