Steal My Heart

by RoseGardenTwilight

Summary

Prince Plagg had waited for the day that he could meet his betrothed, but when he does, he is met with a different reaction than he expected. He becomes determined that despite her mistaken assumptions, he will woo and win the Princess's heart.

Meanwhile, Prince Adrien finds himself thrust into an adventure after a brief encounter with a thief named Ladybug.

Notes

Dedicated to: TheNovelArtist
Happy Birthday, Alex!!!!!!!!!! This story is for you, I'm so thankful for our conversations and our friendship. Hope this next year is filled with laughter, joy and great company.

A.N.- So I might have gone a little overboard on this present, but I hope you all enjoy it anyway. This is technically a combination of 3 Au's (among others that I can think of) because my muses love to torture me. I hope you all enjoy. Updates will be once to twice weekly.

A special thanks to Adam for betaing this chapter for me.

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

It wasn’t every day that you got to meet your future wife and Queen. Despite being told this arrangement had been in place since they were three, it didn’t make the prospect of seeing her for the first time any less frightening. What did her laugh sound like, was she as clumsy as he was when he came to dancing, what kind of Queen would she be for his kingdom.

He was gifted a portrait of her when his parents told of the engagement at 15 years of age. Plagg found it curious that his request to visit with her was denied, but in the meantime, the painting had fueled so many questions. Until today, where he stood a couple of steps from the castle entrance. His future wife laid behind these walls.
The second Plagg walked through the arch he was met with a plethora of sights and sounds very different from his kingdom in the mountains. These people seemed full of life and celebrating his arrival; he could only wish that their Princess held the same kind of excitement.

By the time they reached the castle doors, he had decided quickly that his favorite thing about these people were how free they seemed. Children chased and played in the streets with their laughter lingering behind them. Women conversing at the well, one offered to water his men’s horses out of the goodness of her heart. Plagg wanted to visit the fair princess by himself, so he dismissed the knights traveling with him.

His heart was beating wildly inside his chest climbing the stairs to the throne room. Would she be in there, how different would the three years make from when he received the painting? It barely registered that they announced his name and he hadn’t addressed the Queen adequately, a problem that he hoped a bow would fix.

“Your Majesty, I have awaited this day for a long time.”

“As have I.”

Plagg’s heart swelled, he thought he might die on the spot. The Queen of Luominen’s reputation preceded her, and if she was this joyous about their prospects together, then he doubted that little would stand in the way of the marriage.

“Go and fetch Princess Tikki,” the Queen ordered a servant.

Plagg couldn’t help but notice that the royal advisor turned and cringe. He didn’t, however, have much time to dwell on the fact, she would be here soon. What would he say when he saw her, first impressions were above all when it came like this. He wouldn’t want to be labeled a fool because of his lack of mastery of his tongue. He did come to woo after all.

The time ticked by not being fragile with his patience. His heart rate increased with each passing moment, the anticipation building. Thoughts and questions swarmed his mind, and he couldn’t help but think this was taking too long. What if she was ill and couldn’t see him? Not that it mattered, he had set out to stay as long as he was welcomed to make the Princess more comfortable.

The door creaked open, and Plagg couldn’t bring himself to turn fast enough. His heart sunk when he realized it was not his beloved.
“Mother, you summoned me?” A calculated voice asked behind him once more. The second he spun and eyes landed on her; his chest leaped up into his throat. Plagg knew in that second that they should never use that painter again because he minimized the magnitude of the beauty before him.

“Look at him, reveling in the town’s celebration,” Tikki mumbled to herself, “like the whole thing was for him.”

“Is it not?” Tikki’s handmaiden asked as she finished gathering a new set of clothes.

“He doesn’t have to look too happy about it. This is nothing but a hostile takeover.” Her hand jolted the curtains back into place. “They see our kingdom is weak because of my father’s passing and want to pounce on the opportunity for their gain.” And now she was to meet her future husband and dreading every moment.

“He sure is handsome.”

Tikki turned to see Pollen at the window satisfying her own curiosity. “I bet he’s conceited,” she snorted, “and he’s not that handsome with his midnight hair and dashing smile.” Right on cue, Tikki watched him hand the reigned over to one of the servants, he flashed his charm and instantly rewarded with the servant turning away laughter on her lips. A flash of anger festered under her skin. Her future husband was a flirt, which only proved that this arranged marriage was nothing more than a means to an end, just as the kingdom was about to experience their biggest year of harvest. If her father were still alive, he wouldn’t have stood for such an offer. She barely had two months to grieve when her mother told her the news.

She was to be married off, form a union to save the kingdom, especially with the Schmetterling and Pavone kingdom that lay to the north starting to get restless. It would make sense that they would ally with someone to keep the prospect of war away with the strength in numbers. The logic behind their reasoning didn't change the fact that she wanted to marry for love.

"He is welcomed in my home, but if he thinks that I’ll swoon over his presence, then he will live in a state of disappointment."

Pollen didn’t respond, but rather, held up the dress to aid Tikki. It was not her place to say anything; she was just a servant after all. She could only hope that the Princess would keep an open mind about the interaction. She had friends that lived in the Tuho kingdom, and they seemed content in their life there. Pollen trusted them enough to know that if they weren't happy with Prince Plagg, then she would know about it.

A knock on the door gained both of their attention as moments later another servant stuck their head inside.

"A million pardons, your Highness, but the Queen requests your presence."

“And if I refuse?” She questioned with her eyebrow raised. She fully intended to follow her mother’s orders, but such a line of questioning would extend the period not in the Prince’s presence.

The servant stood there gaping at her words, and Tikki decided to take her out of the misery that was sure to be running through her head. "You can inform the Queen that I am on my way."
"Despite how much I detest this meeting," her mind added. She watched as the servant gave her a nod and disappeared as quickly as she came.

"Do you wish that I accompany you, your Highness?"

Tikki smiled towards Pollen; she couldn't have asked for a better handmaiden, she was loyal to a fault and one of the only people that she trusted completely. "There's no need for you to endure the same torture that is ahead of me. You can tend to me this evening, but until then, enjoy the rest of the day."

Pollen curtsied, "thank you, my Princess."

However, the second that her handmaiden left, her stomach started to knot in on itself. Tikki sighed, "let's get this over with." She made her way through the corridors that she knew like the back of her hand. In a matter of minutes, her feet had led her to the throne room. "Mother, you summoned me?"

"Yes, I did. May I introduce you to your betrothed, Prince Plagg of the Tuho nation." Tikki gritted her teeth trying to calm her heart; she hated to admit it, but the Prince was more handsome now that he stood before her. He stood about a head taller than her, his hair groomed back into a ponytail. He wore a charming smile that paired well with his vibrant green eyes. He was leaner than other men she had seen, but Tikki did not doubt that if they were put in a situation, that he would be able to protect both of them without any issues.

She cleared her head of the distracting thoughts that followed as she remembered him flirting with the servant girl. Even if it were too late to stop the union, she would drag her feet every step of the way.

She was breathtaking in every single way. The way that her dark hair cascaded over her shoulder, except for a small chunk tied up in a red ribbon. From that contrast, his eyes traveled to her striking blue eyes that captured his heart. Her lips looked kissable, and he wished nothing but to answer that call. The Princess wore a vibrant red gown that matched the ribbons in her hair and decorated with gold and black in various points along the dress. Plagg didn't know what it was about her, but she gave off this intoxicating air, he wanted to spend more time around her.

Plagg finally found the confidence to use his words and not look foolish, "My Lady, I have counted down the days until this meeting." He grabbed her hand, noticed her body stiffen, but raised her knuckles until they met his lips. The moment was brief and then slipped away as Princess Tikki took back her hand. So far this meeting wasn't going the way he expected at all, it was almost as if she wasn't delighted to see him.

The Queen cleared her throat, and Tikki knew what that meant. It was her cue that she was expected to respond in a way that would honor the kingdom. "I'm afraid that I had less notice of your arrival, but we welcome you to our home all the same." She bowed her head slightly to show him the respect of being a Prince even though he didn't deserve it for their blatant take over of her home. What worried her more was that her mother seemed all for this union.

"You are kind as you are beautiful; your people are lucky that they have such people in charge of their kingdom."

Tikki found herself taken back; it seemed like every time he opened his mouth another compliment for her poured out. He didn't know anything about her and how they ruled, and yet it was one of
the first things that he mentioned. Her heart rate increased despite her anger towards the prospect of the union; he believed that she would be a great Queen. Tikki wouldn't let that go to her head; she would rise to the throne with grace and dignity with or without his approval because she loved her people and they loved her.

"And if I may be so bold, with our impending union, I look forward to my stay here so that I may get to know you the way that your people do. I know that we aren't well acquainted, but I hope that after some time, that you could learn to love me as your husband and your King."

Her cheeks heated under his stare, and she didn’t know how to react to his comment. She expected a smooth talker, but he sounded genuine with each one of his compliments. This didn’t make sense, if the marriage was already good as done, then why put so much effort in layering on the flattery. If he continued to act this way around her, it would be difficult to keep her defenses up. Especially when she had promises to keep, she could not fall for Prince Plagg. Tikki decided that she would not be so easily won over by cheap words; it was actions that matter.

"Excuse me; I must go." She retreated to the door and into the halls. Tikki did not doubt that her mother would be cross and have a word about the proper etiquette of a Princess, but at the moment, she didn't care. The whole experience of interacting with the Prince was overwhelming. She told herself it was because she was inexperienced, but now she knew better. To keep her word, she would have to watch the amount of time that she allowed to be around him, and never alone.

Once she reached the room, Tikki was grateful that Pollen wasn't there, although she doubted that would be the case for long. This world didn't allow her the privilege to be lost in her thoughts. True to form, not even a couple of minutes a knock echoed into her room.

What was he doing here? The Princess's actions made it very clear that she had no desire to see anyone, let alone him. Here he was standing in front of her door instead of lounging around in his room or exploring the grounds. This castle would be expanded to part of his Kingdom after the marriage was complete.

"Who is it?"

He heard her call through the door causing his nerves to tighten in his stomach. "It's me, Princess. I was hoping that you could open the door?" He was worried about the way that she ran away from the throne room. If he did anything to offend her, he would offer an apology on the spot. This couldn't be easy for her, but if she refused his help, then his hands were tied.

"I'd rather it remained closed. I'm sorry for my behavior, but I'm feeling under the weather. I prefer to be left alone."

Plagg's fists curled by his side, how was he supposed to get to know her if she kept herself locked in her room during his visit? He would feel more sympathetic if he believed that she was honest, but it was much more likely that he insulted her somewhere in their conversation. "Would you do me the honor of escorting me around the kingdom tomorrow?" Plagg found that the air sucked out of his lungs as he waited for an answer. He needed a splash of hope, anything that he could cling to.

"Tomorrow morning."

His heart flipped in his chest at the answer sending his mind among the clouds. She agreed, and that was all that mattered. Plagg placed his hand on the door, "until then, My Lady."
“Why so glum, Marinette? I scouted this tavern out myself; you have your pick of men not paying attention.” Alya gestured to their surroundings, but Marinette continued to stew over her drink. "What, not enough of a challenge for you?"

"It's not that; I only want to take from those who can afford to give a little. There would be no point to take from someone as needy so that we can buy medicine for your younger sisters."

"Well hello there, who is tall, blonde and handsome?"

Marinette would usually roll her eyes at Alya's flirty nature, but the second that she laid eyes on him, she couldn't tear her eyes away. Although the cloak covered most of his clothes, she could still see signs of wealth on his person. Her eyes narrowed in on her mark; he was perfect.

He had traveled a weeks' journey so he would have the opportunity to see Prince Plagg and his new Queen. However, he was protective of his childhood friend and came to see what the people thought of the royal family. He knew that Plagg would do the same for him, and besides he welcomed the distraction, it meant he didn't have to dwell on the decisions that he had to make once he returned home. His fingers were just as busy as his thoughts fiddling with a small black bag on the table in front of him.

“You look like you have too much on your mind for a place like this."

A dark-haired girl managed to bring him out of his thoughts. She was rather beautiful, piercing blue eyes and a kind smile. It made him question what she was doing in a tavern like this.

"I could say the same of you," he offered with a smile doing his best to be polite with the beautiful stranger.

"You could, but I have frequented this lovely establishment many times, whereas, this is your first."

Adrien winced, "Is it that obvious?" He had tried to blend in the best he could, and she could spot the difference almost immediately. For him to gain the information that he wanted, he needed to keep a low profile so they would answer honestly.

"I'm sorry?"

"I'm a great listener, you know."

"I'm sorry?"

"For whatever is on your mind," she continued. "Does it have to do with the contents of that bag?"

"My father requires something of me that I do not agree with. I am fearful of how he would react if I defy him." Adrien planned to be vague about his problems because the last thing he needed was for her to realize that a Prince sat before her. She didn't need to be troubled by his love life; it would only paint him as weak. There were certain things expected of him after all. He pushed the bag down into his pocket, so his reminder would be out of sight.

"I say that if you feel that strongly about it, then you should discuss the matter with your father. If he loves you, then I'm sure he would support you." Guilt panged through her as she leaned back on
her hands on the bench. She lightly tapped her finger against the wood, her tell to Alya which pocket it was in. He seemed like a gentleman with problems of his own. The second her eyes landed on his hand; the feeling evaporated, it was the crest of the Schmetterling kingdom. Only those of royal blood would own such a ring; he wouldn't miss whatever was in that bag, he could replace it, especially if he was the Prince after all. She had to keep Alya's sick sisters in mind.

"Thank you for your generous advice, but I'm afraid that it's not that easy."

From behind the stranger, Alya gave her signal that the swap was complete. There was no going back now. "Well, I wish that you find the answer that you are looking for." She had to get out of there quickly; if he realized what had happened, then she would be caught.

"My burden is lighter just by our meeting," He flashed a boyish smiled.

Marinette bit her lip; she shouldn't feel guilty over what she had done, the poor sap would realize that she was nothing more than bad news soon enough. "I'm sorry," she blurted out before she could stop herself. Marinette's internal panic settled in and if she didn't explain her apology, then she might as well shout out that she had robbed him as well. "I truly am sorry," she whispered to herself before she slipped out the door.

Adrien reached into his pocket and pulled out the bag that he had been fiddling with all night now that his company had disappeared. His blood froze when he saw the color; this wasn’t his bag. The color was all wrong; his stuff had been in a black one not red. When he dumped its contents on the table, his reward was a bunch of small rocks. His mother’s jewelry and ring, it was gone. The laugh from a nearby server caught his attention.

"Kissed by Ladybug, I see."

His pulse raced as the room began to spin. "I beg your pardon?" His mother’s jewelry, he needed that, otherwise, his father may as well have his head.

She shrugged, “you’ve been robbed, mate,” she stated before turning back to her table.

Adrien jumped up to his feet, “Why hasn’t anything been done about this?” Swift justice is what the thief deserved. He followed as she pointed to a wanted poster hung on the wall. It was incomplete at best with the main feature being the eyes.

“By the time most people realize they’ve been robbed, they have talked to multiple women. That’s as close of a picture that we have of her.” His fingers sprawled on the parchment, allowing his gaze to linger longer than it should, he only talked to one person tonight, the girl that approached him. She must have known the value of what he carried, but so could anyone watching them interact.

“I’m sorry.”

Her words rang through his ears. He had thought it strange for her to apologize with such sincerity, especially after their meeting...

It was her!

Or at the very least she was caught up in the web of lies and manipulation that this Ladybug weaved. A warmth welled up in his chest. He needed to save her; whatever this thief held over her, he could help in some way; he was a Prince after all.
“I need to find her,” He rushed back to collect his things, threw a couple of coins that weren’t stolen on the table to pay for the drinks and information and practically ran out the door.

"The honor should be yours," Alya tossed the bag in her direction. "You sweet talked that guy in circles. If I were just watching you two, I’d say you two were in love.” Her teasing knew no bounds.

"Isn't that the point?" Marinette shot back. "Besides, he wasn't my type; he'd much prefer royal blood." The words left a bitter taste on her tongue. Even if they did have a special connection, there were only so many things that a Prince would want with a thief, and none of it would benefit her. She was left with the memories of their interaction and made a vow to herself that it wouldn't be a distraction. The bag was passed back between friends. "You should take it; it's for your sisters. Besides, I might have compromised myself; he hasn't seen you though so that it will be safer with you."

Alya cocked an eyebrow, "What do you mean compromised yourself?"

"The way he was looking at me, I think he realized who I was."

"And you didn't abort? How could you do something so foolish?"

"It was my call. Your sisters are important!" They had been friends for as long as she could remember, she wasn't willing to abort for a half-thought out instinct.

"So is my best friend; I’m not willing to watch you die in the quad!"

"Hey!"

The voice caused the two to stop their argument instantly as Marinette recognized the voice immediately; it was him. She whipped her head to her accomplice, "run; I'll distract him. Get help for your sisters."

"But what about?"

"That's an order, Alya." Marinette flipped up her cloak and darted off between the city's corridors.

Adrien had spent the last twenty minutes scouring the city. He vaguely remembered visits of when he was a boy, but nothing that stuck to his memory vividly. He had almost given up when he rounded the corner. In the shadows, he witnessed two girls arguing, one adorned in a red cloak. His gut jerked, she must be Ladybug, and if not, we would simply apologize for his behavior.

“Hey!” At his shouts, the two girls turned and eyed his direction then bolted. Adrien’s feet tripped into a run. He couldn’t lose her, that meant he would lose the last thing that he owned that tied him to his dead mother. It only motivated him to run faster. He dashed down a corridor following his instinct if he could cut her off before she made it too far. As luck would have it, his shortcut put him hot on her heels. He reached out and grabbed hold of her forcing the cloaked figure to turn. He had done what no one in several kingdoms had caught Ladybug.

The second he saw the familiar eyes his blood turned to ice. “It’s you!”
Her captor stumbled back a few steps eyes blown wide. Marinette knew it was her best chance to escape into the night, but she couldn’t will herself to move. After all these years she had finally been caught. She knew she risked it with every theft, but she never imagined the Sunshine Prince would be the one to catch her.

“Where is it?” He grabbed hold of part of her cloak, making it impossible to run off. “I can help you escape from Ladybug.”

“I don’t need any saving, especially not from myself.” She didn’t give him any explanation; it wasn’t as if he would understand anyway, he was a Prince.

“You’re—you’re Ladybug?”

Her smirk grew before she performed a mockery of a bow. “In the flesh, your Highness.” Her eyes memorized the look of shock befalling it. “And I don’t know where your precious bag is, probably on its way to a buyer.”

Marinette was taken back when her body was pushed against the wall eliminating any space between their bodies his emerald eyes piercing through her and a knife against her throat.

“Give me one good reason that I shouldn’t turn you in right now. It would be satisfying to see you at the gallows in the morning.”

“If you do, you’ll never see your precious bag again.”

“And I’m supposed to trust that you’re telling the truth?” He scoffed.

“You don’t have a choice. I’m your only connection to it,” Marinette glowered as neither of them would remove their heated gaze because they knew, the one who won this gained control. The knife was lifted from her neck allowing to gasp for her breath that she didn’t realize she was holding.

“Follow me,” he gripped her arm firmly enough to discourage escape, but not tight enough to hurt. “We leave at first light.” He was either a genius or a fool, and only time would tell.
Plagg found himself once again pacing in his room, all thoughts leading back to the Princess. He had hardly slept the previous night—instead, his body tossed and turned with anticipation. There was no reason for Tikki to change her mind about spending time with him, and yet, she had. Was it to appease her mother? Although, they couldn't have spoken before he asked her. If she still didn't want to see him, was the gesture of changing her mind that much better? He had been waiting for years for this, but she hadn't been the most welcoming of hosts.

"Your Majesty."

He looked up at the knock on his door. He threw all thoughts to her motive into the back of his mind and went to open the door. "Yes?"

"Princess Tikki is waiting for you in the great hall," Pollen replied.

The statement turned his stomach inside out as the nerves kicked in. “Uh—Where is the great hall?”

“Right this way, My Lord.”

Plagg started to follow without question. As his feet found their way, his mind began to wander instead.

“Something I can ease your mind about, Your Highness?”

“The Princess clearly already had her mind made up that she didn’t like me yesterday, and yet, she agreed to see me today.”

“Maybe she realized that there’s wisdom in giving people a rightful chance.” She motioned to the door. “There’s the great hall, if you need anything else, please let us know.”

Plagg stared at the door for a good minute before realizing his company had left him.
Tikki had become lost in thought rather quickly after Pollen volunteered to fetch the Prince. She never spent much time here, especially after her father passed. Looking at his portrait hurt too much. It was too easy to wander into the ‘what would he think of me now?’ whirlwind. Her eyes connected with another picture, one of the royal family. Her parents looked so in love. In the painting, too was her as a little girl, she couldn’t pinpoint the age, but the way that the artist captured the light in her eyes she could tell she was happy back then.

“You’ve really grown up since then.”

Plagg’s voice caught her completely off guard. Had she been lost in thought for that long?

“I don’t even know how old I was when they painted that,” she confessed sheepishly.

“You looked happy.”

“I was,” she reached out almost to touch the frame. A soft smile formed as the sound of memories filled her mind. She ran her hand through her hair to push a stray strand behind her ears. “I still am.”

The silence settled between the pair, neither one knowing what to say next. Plagg didn’t really know what he wanted to do; he just knew he wanted to spend more time with her. It wasn’t that he knew the kingdom well; he hadn’t been here a full day yet. “What’s your favorite spot in the castle?” He asked because, at this point, the castle may be the best place to start. It would allow Tikki to stay comfortable within her home. His heart flipped as her eyes twinkled like the stars he saw every night.

“Follow me; I’ll show you.”

Plagg was grateful that heights weren’t among his fears as they climbed higher up the winding staircase. The further they climbed, the more curious he became. Was there a tower somewhere in this castle or perhaps somewhere hidden away within its walls? He found his jaw drop slightly as they exited onto the stretch of the castle wall. The view was incredible and could match the one from his kingdom, even if they differed greatly. He could see the village square, with different vendors setting up for the day, and the light shift through the crops that lined part of the horizon. He could see why this place ranked among her favorites.

“I stumbled on this section of the wall when I was 14. And although I wasn’t allowed to go out of the castle unsupervised, I could come up here and pretend that I was down there. My father often joined me from time to time, and we would sit up here and talk about everything and anything.”

“You must miss him.”

“More than anything.”

Plagg wanted to do something, anything, to make her feel better. He wasn’t a sorcerer; it wasn’t as
if he could bring her father back. Instead, he reached over, grabbing her hand and provided a reassuring squeeze.

“I wanted to apologize for my behavior yesterday. I made some assumptions about you before I met you. I behaved rashly, and that wasn’t fair to you.”

“What made you change your mind?”

“I remembered the times where my father mentioned the kingdom in the mountains that harbored a great ally. He told me that if the threat of war ever got to great that we should retreat to the mountains where we would be given safe passage and protection.” Tikki turned back to Plagg. “He would always point to those mountains. That’s your kingdom, isn’t it?”

Plagg squinted enough to see the distant mountains; home didn’t seem so far away.

“Yeah.” He breathed out, “it is.”

“The way my father felt towards your kingdom remained steadfast throughout the years, and if he could put such faith in you, who’s to say that I can’t follow in his footsteps?”

It was the uncomfortable position that caused Marinette to jolt awake. Although she used her cloak as a pillow, it didn’t take anything away from the hard ground. Judging by her sore back, she had to have slept on something in order to be in this kind of pain. She could feel her ankles straining against the rope. The Prince still didn’t trust her, not that she could blame him; she had tried to flee twice already and almost got away with it both times. A warmth dusted across her cheeks as she glanced over at the sleeping Prince. He must have stayed up most of the night to keep them safe. With the daylight providing the light, her nimble fingers made short work of the series of knots that he tied the previous night. When her legs were free, she stood. For the first several days she led him in circles allowing Alya to get whatever head start she needed to get the medicine, no matter what the consequences were on her end. She eyed the pouch resting on his hip. It’s what she would need to get out of this mess.

Guilt tugged at her heart again, but she pushed it down so she could successfully lift the bag off his person.

Mid heist, his hand jerked up and caught hers. Marinette’s breath caught in her throat. There was no way he was awake; she had been so careful.

“Chloe, stop.” He mumbled “I won’t-“ He released her hand a few seconds later.

Her mind began to swirl with curiosity. Who was Chloe, and what was he so adamant about? His tone wasn’t fearful, rather angry. Marinette knew that she couldn’t stand there until she figured out his secrets, not if she wanted to run from the Prince in question. If whatever he was dreaming about worsened, then he could jolt awake.

“Goodbye, handsome Prince.” She could acknowledge his good looks to herself when no one else was around. Not that she entertained the idea, a Prince pursuing anyone not of royal blood would be scoffed at across the seven kingdoms. He belonged in his world, and she belonged in hers,
which was why she had to go. There were brief instances where she forgot that fact, and the more time she spent with him, the more lines began to blur. She grabbed anything that she could that was of value and started her escape. She knew she couldn’t pinpoint her position directly on a map, but it wouldn’t take long to reach a small village of some kind, and she could figure out a plan from there. The Prince could fend for himself, he wasn’t in danger, and she was sure he could hold his own against 2 to 3 scouts. She flipped her hood up and started her journey, this time, without looking back.

Adrien groaned as he shifted his position. No matter how much he traveled, he was sure he would never get used to sleeping on the ground. He blamed his bed back home; it was too soft for its own good. He stirred more as the sunlight danced on his lids. When Adrien realized that the prospect of sleep was behind him, he sat up and stretched his sore muscles. He couldn’t remember the last time he had such a rough sleep-

Sleep.

His eyes shot open only for him to realize that he was alone...again. He had reasoned that he could afford a couple of minutes of shut-eye. Now Ladybug had run off for the third time, and he had to get up and find her. Maybe if she had taken him straight to see Laurence, they would have been able to go there and get back to the kingdom safely, but the journey was extending up to two weeks now, and he knew that Chloe would start to throw a fit.

Adrien gathered up his belongings to discover that one of the pouches full of gold coins had gone missing. Instead of allowing anger to overtake him, he found the edges of his lips twitching up in a bemused smile. Whoever she was, no one could argue that she was daring and brave. Luckily for him, he switched over most of the money to another bag hidden so well he doubted that she could find it if she tried. With what she stole, she could afford a day’s worth of food, two if she rationed. There was a nearby small town; he’d bet that she would head there first.

Adrien worked his way through the trees for what seemed like hours, no red cloak in sight.

“Ladybug,” He shouted at the top of her lungs.

Right, his inner voice jeered, like she’s going to come running.

“She’s going to get us killed,” he muttered. If they didn’t watch themselves, they could easily drift into another kingdom’s territory, and they wouldn’t look well upon the Prince ducking through the woods chasing after a thief even if he could prove it.

He wandered further down the path and slowed when he heard some grunting. It couldn’t be her—unless she fell into a trap. It was well known that the woods were littered with traps, and if she didn’t know what to look for then finding Ladybug might be easier than he thought.

When he ventured over the hill, his eyes traveled up to the source of the noise to see Ladybug struggling against a net rope. She hadn’t noticed his presence, so he took a moment to appreciate the satisfaction that she was going to need him to get out of this predicament.

“Are you done trying to run off?” He couldn’t help but allow some of his cheekiness to shine through because, for once, he held all the power.
“Depends,” she sighed exhaustedly, sticking her face against the rope a Cheshire grin sported on her lips. “Are you tired of chasing me?”

“Never,” he grinned, ”and I’ll always find you.” Moments such as this one had occurred briefly over the last two weeks, where he almost forgot the purpose of their trip and their banter morphed into something else. He couldn’t put his finger on the cause of these moments, but he appreciated them all the same.

"Are you going to stand down there all day gawking at me, or are you going to let me down."

Adrien folded his arms across his chest, smile not faulting. "Are you sure that insulting the only one that can get you out of your current situation is your best move."

"Isn't part of being royal that you're required to be charming?"

"I could always leave you here. I'm sure that that the next person that will wander by won't have any problem turning you in and collecting the reward. But I may reconsider if you ask nicely."

Marinette huffed to herself; he wasn't going to make this easy.

“My Fair Prince, would you be so kind and noble to assist a lady, such as myself in cutting the rope and releasing me?” Her word and tone were over the top and flattery tasting of honey on her tongue. He asked her to ask nicely not sincerely, and she refused to bend to that level.

In a blink of an eye, she was free falling until she met a hard surface; the Prince’s arms.

“I do have a name you know.”

Before she could register the world, she was planted on the ground, but her mind was still spinning.

Marinette matched up to him the best she could shoving a finger at his chest. “I thought Princes were supposed to be gallant, how about a little warning next time.”

“I caught you didn’t I? Saved you from landing wrong and injuring yourself.”

He was right, and she knew it. All the anger simmered down in an instant, and her hand returned to her side.

“I suppose a thank you is in order, your high”-

“Adrien.”

“What?”

The charming smile grew to his lips once more. “My name is Adrien.”

Marinette didn’t know what to say, the name danced on her tongue, pleading to be said. If she called the Prince by his first name instead of his title, would that imply that they knew each other deeper than a Prince and commoner usually did?

“Marinette,” she replied. The longer they stared at each other, the more agitated the butterflies in her stomach became. “We should keep walking; we’re wasting sunlight.”

Marinette eyed him as they walked along the path; drowning in the silence. They had some good
conversations during their two weeks, but it was clear that they both still had some walls up. She’d enjoyed spending the time talking to someone; she spent enough time alone as it was.

“Who’s Chloe?” She treaded lightly around the subject, mildly cursing herself. Out of all the topics she could have brought up, that was the worse one she could have chosen judging by the way his body tensed. “You don’t have to answer—I just heard you mention her in your sleep.” Marinette, you’re such an idiot. “You don’t have to answer, I”-

“She’s the Princess of Bourdon. My father wants me to marry her.”

Oh. That must be what he was referring to that night in the tavern. “Do you love her?”

The question earned a scoff, “What does that matter in the duty to my kingdom?”

Marinette had never seen him like this. The notion was silly, to spend the rest of your life with someone that you didn’t love. Marinette decided that she’d rather be alone. “And if you don’t marry her?” It was a foolish thought that she couldn’t take back after it was spoken.

He looked up at her with a soft smile, “Come on, let’s go into the town and fetch some more supplies—that is, if you promise not to run again.”

“No,” she gave a gentle smile in return. “I’m not going anywhere.” He could have turned her in and collected the reward or left her gift wrapped in the net for someone else to find. Their conversations sparked a curiosity, one greater than her need for escape. She started to see beyond his title and look at him for who he was underneath. Her plans did usually change in a moment’s notice, and by now Alya had gotten what she needed; there was no harm in keeping the Prince company for a few more days.

So much changed in the span of two weeks. Tikki could hardly believe that her mood had shifted from dreading spending time with the Prince, to said Prince being the reason she got out of bed early in the morning. Her morning routine would run long as she got ready for whatever adventure he had in store for them that day. One of her favorite parts was ditching the handmaiden, who was sent to bring back word to the Queen. Most of the time it was Plagg who came up with the idea, but he always needed her to do something for the plan to work. Today had been no exception, and this morning as they raced around buildings through the town, Tikki had never felt so free.

“I think we lost them,” Plagg’s breaths were ragged at best. Today’s stunt involved hiding in the marketplace and making a run for it as another stall distracted their handmaiden.

Tikki couldn’t help but notice that their hands had laced together when they ran, and yet, they were still joint at the hand even now. The warmth from his hands traveled through her body before the heat emerged on her cheeks.

“Where would you like to go today, Princess?”
That wildflower field, we visited last week,” she replied without hesitation. “We could sneak food from the kitchen.” That field held so many memories for her. They sat together under a tree with one of the most spectacular views in front of them. They talked for hours, the day only ruined by their rumbling stomachs and the fact that they weren’t alone. It was where the plan to ditch was born. It also was the place where Tikki had to admit to herself that she might have deeper feelings for Plagg. The moment hit her when she had absentmindedly made a flower crown during their conversations. Instead of dismissing it, Plagg placed it on his head just to earn a laugh. He then placed it on her head and called her the most beautiful girl in the seven realms. Mindful of the eyes on him he brought the inside of her palm to his lips and kissed it tenderly. After that moment, she couldn’t deny the way that her stomach burst into butterflies whenever he was around, or her heart pounded when he smiled.

“The first person to get there will choose what food to take,” he proposed.

Tikki’s eyebrow raised mischievously. “Deal, and Plagg”- before he could react she pulled him close and captured his lips with her own. It was in the moment, but this felt real, no peering eyes or titles, it was just the two of them. Nothing could spoil the smile plastered on her face as she pulled back. “Ready, go!” She pushed off into a sprint.

Laughter echoed between the two as they ran through the courtyard, she was in the lead with Plagg right behind her, but at the sight of a herd of horses, she stopped dead in her tracks. Another visitor? Any thought was pushed to the side when Plagg caught up with her accidentally running into her. Tikki was sure he would have fallen if he hadn't gripped her arms for support.

"My My, your reputation must have spread among the lands drawing people to come and see for themselves what a wonderful Queen you will be."

As flattering as it was, Tikki knew exactly who came to visit her, and it left a restlessness in the pit of her stomach. Duusu was the princess and upcoming Queen for the Pavon region. She oozed grace as she dismounted, her raven hair in a perfect braid, despite her long journey here. And her dress! It must have been uncomfortable to ride in it. But then again, Duusu did have a flair for the dramatic. There was no doubt that she was up to something, no matter what excuse she gave saying she wasn’t. Drama and Duusu walked hand in hand while her kingdom was known for their ruthlessness.

"Duusu," She wore a forced smile but prayed that her company wouldn't be able to tell the difference. "It's been years, what are you doing here?"

“Is that any way to greet an old friend?”

Tikki bit back her initial reply; she would have to keep Duusu close to find out what she was planning.

“What do we owe the honor?” The idea that it was her visit was a privilege made her stomach turn. Tikki only wished that if she were to empty the contents of her stomach in front of Plagg, it would be on the Princess herself.

“I come to give my congratulations on your recent betrothal and to speak to the Queen about other matters that need not concern you.” Duusu smile widened when she noticed Plagg behind Tikki. “Your Majesty, I hear that you’ve gotten to know the town well, would you do me the honor of showing me around?”
Tikki further edged herself between the two. To not ask her was a slap to the face, but she wouldn’t have enjoyed any of it if she had shown her around. Judging by the amount of luggage, she intended to stay for a while.

“I’ll show you to your quarters,” Tikki answered before Plagg could reply. She fully decided that she would stick her on the far side of the castle, away from other guests and especially Plagg.

The only sound as the two Princesses walked through the halls, Tikki was thankful that Plagg took her hint and dismissed himself to the room. He didn't need to be bogged down by anything Duusu was planning. Tikki made a mental note to discuss her concerns with her mother, and the visiting princess would be sent away.

"You can't fool me, you know."

Tikki felt her golden gaze on her but didn't remove her stare from the corridor. "I don't know what you mean."

“Don’t pretend as if word hasn’t gotten out about how you feel about a certain union, and I traveled here as a solution.”

Tikki couldn’t deny what she was saying, there was a point where she detested the idea, but the more time she spent around him, the more she was warming up to it. But if she confronted Duusu with that truth, then she wouldn’t find out the real reason she had come into her kingdom. “I’m listening.”

“If Prince Plagg can be—convinced that there are other possible kingdoms that are ready to form unions, he might back out of yours. Then you’ll be free as a bird to do whatever your heart desired.”

She wanted to be the one to marry Plagg? What would that accomplish? It wasn’t as if she was in love with him. The more Duusu talked, the greater the desire grew to keep Plagg as far away as possible. “And who would you suggest in this union, you?”

“Why, me of course, it would only be a matter of time before he agrees.”

Tikki tried to keep her anger from growing further as they reached the room, but from Duusu’s tone, it seemed like she thought that she was the only one Plagg would ever want. “I have been more than generous allowing you into my home, but you have just crossed the line. Plagg is my betrothed, and there’s nothing you could do to change his mind. He will see you for how wicked you are. So I’m going to say this once, stay away from him.”

Duusu’s eyes narrowed menacingly, not pleased with the other Princess’s answer. “Like it or not Tikki, I’m not going anywhere. I will steal Plagg’s heart, and there’s nothing you can do but watch.”
A.n.- Oh look at that plot! Let me know what you think! I can confidently say that there will be two updates as I'm finishing up Friday's chapter.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

A.n. Hello, my lovely readers. I hope your week has been as amazing as you are. I got the gist that Tuesday isn't a great day to update, that has been heard. IF YOU HAVEN'T READ CHAPTER 2, GO DO SO!!! I'll only update once this week, and then I'll try again the following week. Otherwise, enjoy!

Thanks to Blue and Adam for tearing this chapter apart and making it better.

"You may speak your mind, Charles." The Queen's turned to her trusted advisor. "I can tell that you've been beside yourself lately."

It was unusual for the Queen to notice anything about his behavior, let alone that he wasn’t behaving normally. "If her Majesty insists,” he bowed out of respect, “I may have been concerned about the union that’s in place."

“What about it?”

"Are we sure of Prince Plagg’s intentions for our beloved Princess, one would hate to think the sudden betrothal would be to take advantage of the state of our kingdom.” He paused to gauge her reaction, but her majesty could keep a stone face. “I’m concerned as you with the restless kingdoms in the north. What if they saw this union as strengthening ourselves for war?"

“You’ve only been our advisor for the last couple years, Charles, but let me assure you that this proposed union has been planned for years before you came to us. Nothing will stand in the way of it.”

“But think of the rumors”-

“I will not be governed by their opinions.” The sharpness in her voice made him take a step back. He had never seen her snap at anyone the way.

“Maybe if you were to reach out to the other Kingdoms,” he replied cautiously. The stocks were the last place he wanted to end up for angering her.

“Why do you think I allow Duusu to stay? She’s surely not here to wish my daughter well, but right now any plans she may harbor are harmless, and Plagg and Tikki grow closer as each day passes. It wouldn’t surprise me if he asked for her hand any day now, so the preparations for the ceremony can begin.”

“That will be a celebration to behold.” His smile faltered, but within a flicker, his lips twitched upward.
“A celebration: what an inspired idea. Charles, talk to the chefs and set up a feast in Duusu’s Honor. Let’s keep our guest occupied.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” As long as she was the Queen, he had to do whatever she requested.

“You’re dismissed.”

The second the door closed, any smile plastered on his face melted into a scowl. Sending him to arrange a fest like some ordinary servant. He was the advisor to the King for goodness sake. Ever since the King had passed, the Queen had continued to ignore sage advice. It's what ultimately caused his loyalty to sway.

He supposed he should have felt a shred of guilt, but this had been building for years now. It all started when the kingdoms became restless, and he advised the King to act aggressively to put any whispers of war to bed. But he refused. The King declined, saying that he wouldn't sacrifice his men on the battlefield. If that wasn't enough, it was only the beginning. Not long after, he found himself being left out of essential meetings. The distance became too blatantly obvious to ignore. Shortly after the King passed, Charles had hoped that things would be different. But, as his luck would have it, the Queen was even more stubborn as her late husband. He wouldn't let things remain the same. His opportunity was opening up, and he was going to take it.

"This is crazy." The two had come upon a ravine; the only way across was an old fallen log that bridged that gap between the banks. "There has to be another way," Adrien looked back at Marinette for a moment.

"Only if you want to take an extra day to find a spot shallow enough to wade through, and even then that's not guaranteed. Don't tell me you afraid of heights, Your Majesty."

He wasn't, but water on the other hand- they had never been fond of each other. "Of course not, I just don't think that log is very stable." He hoped that he sounded confident enough that she wouldn't question it further.

"I've traveled this way hundreds of times; it's the fastest way to get to your stuff back." She motioned to wood. "Royalty first."

Adrien couldn't stop his nerves from twisting as he climbed up. The log had obviously worn for use, the wood loudly groaning as he took a tentative step.

"How many times did you say you've done this?" His confidence wavered when another creak occurred. "It doesn't seem safe."

"It's not," she called out amused when he started to stumble over his footing at her answer.

Insane could be the only word that could describe what he was doing. His father, not to mention his future fiancee, would not approve trotting through the woods - let alone trancing across a dead log to get his jewelry back.

"Might I suggest that you find a different route for the future." The noises coming from beneath him were less than reassuring. A crack echoed through the air causing him to freeze. He turned back to see Marinette was just as concerned as he was.

"Run," she whispered.
When they broke into a run, the log started to give way. Adrien made it to the other side; Marinette's scream gained his attention rapidly. He managed to turn around just in time to see her make a jump towards the cliff. Instinctively, he reached out and tried to grab her, but they missed each other.

"No!" The word tore from his throat in desperation, and he could do nothing but wait as Marinette plucked down to the raging river below. It was a pure instinct that drove him to jump in after her, his sense of morality getting the better of his natural hatred of swimming. The water knocked his breath out of his lungs; the river swallowing him beneath its surface. He would scream, but he knew it would be of no use. Adrien focused all his energy and kicked until he reached the surface. Nothing around him was familiar, but none of that mattered. When he could find Marinette, they could find their way back. His ears picked up a gargled scream. By the time his eyes found the source, he watched her get dragged under. Adrien thrust forward with new determination. He dove down and wrapped his arm around her waist, bringing her to the surface and taking his own gasping breath in turn. It was a miracle that he eventually found his way to the side as the water quieted.

No, no, no, this can't be happening.

Adrien dragged her to the shore, his worry growing when Marinette didn't respond. "Come on Marinette, breathe." He gently tapped her cheek repeatedly hoping that it would do something. Everything else faded around him leaving only Marinette and himself, no thoughts of his duties as a Prince, or the missing jewelry, or his impending marriage. "I need you." His own words surprised him as soon as they left his mouth. His thoughts were cut short as Marinette gasped for air and coughed up the water she had swallowed.

"You're alive!" Almost out of instinct he pulled her into a hug. He didn't know if it was to warm her up or that he was thankful that she didn't die in raging waters.

"You really didn't think that you could get rid of me that easily, did you?"

The dry comment slipped out, and Adrien could practically hear the smile forming on her lips. As his relief died down, he realized that he was clinging to her wet clothes that hugged her skin. Heat flooded to his cheeks as he released her. It would be a compromise position of a Prince if anyone would have caught them that close, they would wrongly assume their relationship. The next wave of thought circled, what his father would say. Adrien cleared his throat, trying his best to calm the raging heat that flooded across his cheeks. "I'm glad you're ok. Can you"-

Marinette worked her way to her feet in answer to his question. “The river swept us downstream. It will take at least half a day to go back.”

The two began walking glancing at each other occasionally, neither voicing the thought that they were thinking: adding an extra day wouldn’t be all that horrible.

Duusu looked both ways from her room before proceeding down the hall. Most of the castle was downstairs setting up a feast that the Queen was holding in her honor. She had to remain focused and carry out the mission her mother had given her: prevent the union between Tuho and Luominen. The importance had been stressed repeatedly until she could repeat it in her sleep. If the two kingdoms united, their plan would fall to ruin.

"Were you followed?"
She looked over her shoulder to see the advisor emerge from the shadows. Her mother had informed her that they had procured someone to aid them in her mission. She hadn't imagined that they would meet so soon, but when a mysterious note left in her room; curiosity got the better of her.

"Were you?" She shot back annoyed. If this were to be her partner for her duration here, then she would have work fast so she wouldn't have to endure his company for long.

"I ensure you, Princess. If anyone were suspicious of any behavior, it would not be mine under scrutiny, but yours." He shot back haughtily. "Did you bring word from your mother what is required of me?"

"She thanks you for service so far. When we take over the kingdom, you shall be rewarded greatly beyond your years. My mother advises you to continue to speak to the Queen and speak ruin to the union. I will do my share dealing with Prince Plagg."

"I don't see how that's possible. He has already become quite smitten towards the Princess."

"Are you saying that I'm not as fair as Princess Tikki?"

"No, of course not, but"-

"Then let me worry my duties, and you focus on yours." She snapped before taking pause. “Although, it would make my job easier to get the Princess out of the picture. Do you know someone who could achieve that for me?” Duusu knew that the mission might have to come to this before she had taken one step towards the kingdom. Her mother pounded it into her mind in all the ways the Queen and late King had robbed them of opportunities and that this was revenge years in the making.

“Consider it done, Your Highness.”

“Good. See yourself out. No one must know of our plan.”

The advisor did as he was told and the second he left she let out the breath she was holding. Things couldn’t be going better even if she’d planned them herself. Why all this fuss over one kingdom was beyond her. Maybe it had to do with how embarrassingly evident that her mother was in love with the King from Schmetterling, and had been ever since his beloved wife passed away. Duusu was convinced that her mother would do anything for him to take notice; including using her daughter to eventually start a war. No matter the reason, she had her own set of orders: ones that involved placing blame on the advisor and for him to take the fall to remove all suspicions. Not that her ‘ally’ would see it coming.

"I think Camembert is my new favorite," Plagg hummed as he stole another piece of the cheese from Tikki's fingers. "But it could have all to do with who is feeding me." Since their plan to visit the field was delayed with Duusu's arrival, they had made plans to visit today instead. Plagg cherished any time that he had with her. He loved it when they were like this: Tikki resting her head on his shoulder, their hands absentmindedly fidgeting with each other.

"I wish we could stay like this all day," she mumbled.
"We could," Plagg suggested lifting her knuckles to his lips.

"I think my mother would notice if we didn't show up to the banquet for Duusu tonight."

“It just means we’ll have to be really sneaky.” He teased. His smile faded when he noticed that she was staring off at the field. “You don’t find Princess Duusu agreeable, do you?” At no answer, he leaned in far enough, so his nose caressed the outside of her cheek. He placed a peck on her temple. “Tikki?”

“What?” She jumped in his arms before their gaze connected.

“Tikki, what’s wrong?”

What’s wrong? That was the question to answer, now wasn’t it? Although, she would argue what’s right, and the only answer was right here with him. Her mother couldn't see Duusu’s ill intentions and decided to throw her a feast of all things. Meanwhile, her head swirled with the argument they had.

What makes you think that he could love someone like you when you’ve rejected the idea of him before you ever met?

Tikki couldn’t get her voice out of her head. Her mind played out the scenario of Duusu succeeding in what she came here to do. She couldn’t lose him, not when she might even-

She might even love him.

The thought in itself made her pulse race. Surely he could hear it, for it was the only sound she could hear it echoing between her ears. Tikki felt his knuckle under her chin pulling her back into his gaze, and she melted under his emerald stare.

“Everything is fine, Plagg, I”— why was expressing one’s feelings this difficult? “I think I love you.” Her eyes sealed closed with the confession. It had been soft, but she was sure that he heard it, with their bodies in this proximity, how could he not?

“What did you say?”

“I love you.” Her confidence grew as she repeated it for a second time.

“I have dreamt about hearing those words for a long time, but having you say them—“

There was something about the vulnerability in his tone that warmed her heart. Plagg had been open with his feelings the whole time, and now she could finally be straightforward with him.

“Tikki, I love you like the sun loves the moon that he continues to chase her across the sky day after day.” He lifted her palm to his lips and kissed the skin gently. “I love you as the plants love the rain or the battlefield loves the war.” More kisses followed, each one making Tikki’s heart perform somersaults in her chest. “I want to love you with each moment passing so that I can fall in love over and over again.” He moved her hand to cradle his cheek, relishing in the warmth she provided. “I know that you would be the most beloved Queen in our kingdom if you would be mine.”

“Yes,” she breathed out, her lips pushing back into the biggest grin allowing the joy to seep out of
her. “A thousand times, yes.” She tackled him causing them to roll amongst the flowers. When they came to a stop, Plagg hovered over her arms on either side of her face. He leaned down and stole one last chaste kiss.

“You have made me the happiest man in all the lands,” he murmured. Before anyone could stumble upon them in such a position, Plagg stood to his feet and helped her up seconds later. Their hands laced together and remained as if that was how they were meant to be.

“We shall tell my mother after the feast tonight; she will be delighted of the news.” Tikki’s smile grew wider at the thought of it. More importantly, this decision would have made her father beam with pride. Her people would have a fair and just King; one that would rule them with fairness and kindness. She could even imagine traveling among the kingdoms between seasons so she could still see her people.

Plagg squeezed her hand once more drawing her from her thoughts. Tikki was met with another kiss, this one leaving her more thrillingly breathless than the last. His forehead rested on hers.

“I don’t want to leave without you,” he confessed softly. It streamed from a fear that if he were to leave, time would lapse and he wouldn’t see her again for some time.

“Then don’t,” she replied without hesitation. “Send for your parents, and when they arrive, we will have all the preparations completed.”

“I will request their presence immediately-” he hook his finger under her chin, “-and will counting down the days until their arrival.”

For once Plagg wished that it took him forever to get ready for the banquet. At least Tikki promised him that there would be Camembert cheese. It didn’t settle his stomach any less when he reached the party and Tikki was nowhere to be seen. Duusu, on the other hand, was a different story.

“Prince Plagg!” She ran up and clamped her arm around his, guiding him back to the table. “Sit with me; it is a feast in my honor after all.”

An uncomfortable smile bubbled to the surface of his features. This felt wrong and yet he couldn’t free himself; she was like leach who had attached itself to skin and refused to let go. The more he attempted to escape the tighter her grip.

When they sat down, Plagg started to worry when even the food in front of him lost its appeal. If his love didn’t arrive soon, he might flee to find her; anything to get him away from Duusu’s company. He had to assume that she was not utterly repulsive in separate circumstances, and if Tikki wasn’t in the picture, she might stand a fraction of a chance. But what Duusu failed to realize was her reputation preceded her. She and her mother chose to run their Kingdom a certain way. It didn’t sit well with Plagg, and he couldn’t imagine placing himself into a position where he would have to protect his people from their Queen.

The second his eyes landed on Tikki as she joined the feast, anything Duusu said may as well be a different language. She was adorned in a deep red dress that fitted her personality well: fiery passion meeting a warm heart. Her hair tumbled freely over her shoulders curling every which way. On top of her head was a golden crown crusted with rubies. He ripped himself Duusu’s grip and
stood in awe. The smile she wore told him all he needed to know: she’d dressed up to impress him.

“Prince Plagg!” Duusu snapped as politely as possible.

“If you excuse me, there’s something that requires my attention.” He left her without looking back. He grabbed Tikki’s hand and kissed each knuckle as soon as he found himself close enough. “Even the stars must be jealous of how your beauty radiates in this room.”

“Duusu is furious that you left her all alone.”

“She’ll find someone else to keep her company. It was important that I lavish my beloved with attention.”

“If you announce it now, it won’t be much of a surprise.” She teased.

“I’d scream it from every rooftop in both kingdoms if you’d let me,” he shot back paired with a devilish grin.

“Probably wouldn’t be the best first impression of their new King.”

“What could be a better message then I love my Queen?”

“Let’s wait until after we tell my mother.”

The feast itself went by quickly. Tikki took comfort in the fact that Plagg had barely left her side. He insisted that she sit next to him and while they were seated, their hands were joined under the table. From time to time, she would glance over at Duusu, who had a scowl stamped on her face. Tikki resisted the urge to rub it in more that Plagg picked her, but it was not becoming of a Princess. Even if she would have arrived on the same day Plagg did, he seemed smitten on sight. Her plan would have failed just as quickly then. She leaned over to him and whispered in his ear that it was time they made their way to the Queen.

The image of the way her mother’s face lit up when she told her of their plans would forever be burned into her memory.

By far the best part of the evening had to have been when her mother squealed loudly, gaining the attention of the full room. She stood and announced that by the end of the week there would be a royal wedding. The cherry on top was watching Duusu storm out of her own banquet.

Duusu was beyond furious. How dare Tikki take over the banquet that was held in her honor to announce something like her impending marriage. There was a part of her that wanted to give up and go back to her home, but she knew what was at risk and how her mother would respond to such action. She had a reputation for being heartless, and Duusu knew that even though she was her daughter, it would do nothing to save her from banishment.

What use is a failure to me?

She winced as she recalled the phrase that she had heard so many times. Failure and banishment wasn’t an option. The wedding sped up her timetable, but the events to come were still inevitable.

Chapter End Notes
A.n.- All the cheesecake fluff! Everything is so ramping up. Let me know what you think! Again I'm only updating once this week. Then I will try to update the following Monday and the weekend.
Alya clutched the potion close to her chest as she neared her house. He said this would cure her sisters of any illness, but until she gave it to them, it was just an empty promise. By the looks of it, things were worsening. The twins tossed and turned, and Alya didn't doubt that they had both had a fever.

"Alya?" They chimed in unison.

She rushed to their side instantly placing her hand on their forehead. Just as she suspected: fever. Hopefully, she got there just in time.

"Shhh," she hushed. "Save your strength. Drink this."

The medicine went down smoothly enough. Now it was time to wait. Alya wandered over the window and glanced down. She was worried. In the time it took Alya to get the money, potion, and come back, she hadn't heard a word from Mari. If Marinette got caught, surely there would be rumors spread around of the execution. Ladybug’s reputation had scattered throughout Luominen. In this case, no news was good news.

No. She couldn't think like that. Marinette couldn't be gone. Alya had to have hope that she was alright.

"Come on Marinette," Alya whispered. "Please be safe."

As the night stretched into the early morning, Alya's eyes started to droop close. Fear, worry and anxiousness had wrung her dry as she constantly checked on the twin’s condition to see if the plague deteriorated overnight. They seemed to be better, but until more time passed, it would be impossible to tell.

Alya knew that this burden was never meant to be placed on her, but her parents worked day in and day out to cover feeding everyone. Her older sister hadn't been seen in years, so it was up to her to step up and take care of the family.

"Alya!" The pair of voices jerk Alya from her sleep. Next thing she knew she was engulfed in hugs from either side. "You're here!"

Alya smiled to herself before the three of them burst into giggles. Alya hugged them tighter. She didn't want to think of how close to death they were, but that was a thing of the past. They were
alive; that's all that mattered.

"You're home!"

"Of course, I am! There's no way that I would leave you two behind." Unless it was completely necessary, like in the case of gathering medicine.

"You promise?"

She gave another squeeze and kissed the top of their heads.

"I promise."

“What will you do?” Adrien’s voice was the first to cut through the silence. “When all this is over,” he added to clarify.

His words caught her completely off-guard as they had been walking quietly for a solid twenty minutes. The memory of the water filling her lungs wouldn’t be one she’d be likely to forget soon. Marinette had tried to scream, but it’d only caused her to swallow more water. Despite thrashing to stay above water, there was little hope that anyone would save her. When all was lost, and her vision had started to blacken, the one thing she could remember is hearing Adrien’s voice as she drowned in the darkness.

I need you.

Surely, he couldn’t have meant it outside of the necessity of getting his stuff back. He couldn’t propose to his sure-to-be-stunning Princess back home without it. But then again, if that were the case, why was the air flooded with tension? Why couldn’t they speak more than a few phrases at a time to each other? Why did her stomach start to flutter every time she caught him sneaking a glance her way? And even more so, why did she turn away bashfully and allow the heat to reside in her cheeks?

“I—“ The word tipped off her tongue before her brain had a chance to catch up. “I’ve been saving for a while. I want to find my own little plot of land.”

“By yourself? Won’t that be lonely?”

His questioning tripped her up once more, but she quickly shook off any doubt in her plan. If she was alone, she couldn’t get hurt.

“No more than your arranged marriage.”

Marinette was sure that her statement stung, but he was digging into her personal life, and for her sake, she couldn’t let him. After a few more days he would back to his kingdom, forgetting all about this little adventure - and especially her. Being out here in the forest for days on end had made it easy to imagine the possibility of someone like Adrien developing feelings for the likes of —

“Now, wait just one minute.”
Marinette stopped in her tracks, his sharp tone suddenly skyrocketing her heart. She refused to fall for him. So instead, she pushed any thought that said otherwise down and turned back towards him. Her hand rested on her hip, daring him to continue. To her surprise, he obliged.

“I’ll have you know that the marriage to Chloe is my father’s plan for my life, not mine.”

Not she believed a word of it, Adrien was bound to have some say in his marriage. But the man that stood in front of her had rage burning in his eyes and rigid jaw.

“You can’t know the pressure that I’m under to do what’s best for my Kingdom.”

“So, your Kingdom would thrive on a loveless marriage?” Marinette rolled her eyes before taking a seat on a nearby rock. Adrien followed suit on a fallen log across from her, face scrunched and lips in a tight line.

“I can’t expect someone like you to understand.”

“Someone like me,” Marinette scoffed. It was only a matter of time before his real thoughts of her showed through. Enough distance couldn’t be placed between them at that moment. She stood up and started to march away. However, she stopped in her tracks when Adrien grabbed her wrist.

“No- I didn’t mean it like that.”

The contact caused a hitch in her stomach, but it was overtaken by anger. She snatched her hand back. “I think that’s exactly what you meant. At least have the decency to admit it.”

“Sometimes I wish I didn’t have my title. Is that what you want to hear? I would give anything to have one day where everything wasn’t planned out for me. I could do what I want without thinking about the consequences for the Kingdom.” He sighed to himself. “I could have a say in who my Queen is without my father’s input.”

“You want to be like everyone else?” What a silly request for a crowned Prince. He didn’t have any idea what it would be like to be on the other side of the castle walls. He wouldn’t last a day. “You have a chance to make a difference for your people, and you want to squander it so you can what—fall in love? Relinquish your title? You don’t need it to get your heart broken.”

“Is that what happened to you?” He struck a nerve, and she couldn’t hide it. Eyes widening, mouth dropping open against her will, she dashed her eyes away. She could tell she knew he’d misspoken.

“Marinette”-

“His name was Luka. We were in love...once.”

He sat back, obviously not expecting her to answer. She was surprised at herself.

“What happened?”

“It doesn’t matter; one day I thought we were going to be together forever, then next he was gone.”

“Marinette..” Adrien’s voice trailed off.
“I don’t need your pity.” She hadn’t gotten where she was with people pitying her. “Look, it’s getting late, we only have a couple of hours of daylight left. There’s no use in standing around.”

With each step she allowed her annoyance to fester. Right, when it seemed that they were taking two steps forward, then something like this happened. She couldn’t get distracted with thoughts of what happened to Luka or what the Prince thought of her. Marinette’s stomach jerked as she dared to look back to see Adrien running his hand through his hair. Why was she so harsh on him, it wasn’t like he knew her past.

She couldn’t turn a blind eye to the fact that the Prince risked his life to save hers not even a couple of hours ago. Once she came to, the only memory burned in her mind was how he’d hugged her so tight.

“Right, it’s getting late,” Adrien muttered.

When had he caught up to her, but more importantly why hadn’t she heard him coming? Heat traveled from ear to ear, and Marinette wished that Adrien wouldn’t catch her. She turned her head to the side and bit her lip to prevent any explanation she wouldn’t be able to expound upon. Despite their spat, she couldn’t help but hope she wouldn’t deal with the grueling silence.

The Queen had spent the duration of the morning meeting with the cook preparing for the arrival of their company as well as finalizing the details of her daughter’s wedding. Tikki had been clear that she wanted the whole kingdom to be invited. Her mother hadn’t argued with her; it would have been what the King wanted as well. A swell of pride resided in her chest wishing he could have seen this. There would have been numerous conversations around the table with the royalty of Tuho as they watched their kids fall into love. Speaking of her daughter, she needed to discuss the food choices and have Tikki decide what she wanted for the feast. The Queen looked around the courtyard which was the third place she had checked. She sighed; why was her daughter never around when she needed her?

Tikki wandered through the castle in an attempt to find her mother. She had to find her mother to discuss the wedding; after all, three days would fly by faster than she could imagine. She wandered into the throne room only to find it empty- well almost empty.

"Looking for someone?"

The sound of agonized screaming would be preferred to Duusu's voice. Why couldn't she leave the Kingdom already? It was apparent that she was making no headway in stealing Plagg. The respectable thing would be to know when the battle was lost and concede gracefully. It wasn't like she was here to support the union between them. Tikki had it in mind to have the guards keep her as far away on the day as possible. Her wedding day wouldn't be the best time to let the witch run around and wreak havoc.

"Not you," she retorted, folding her arms against her chest. "I don't even know why you're here."

"I take offense to that." Duusu placed her hand against her chest in feigned hurt. "I'm here to offer my sincerest wishes."

"You can drop the act, Duusu. You're not fooling anyone. Your plan has failed. Plagg has no interest in you."
"You seem smug for someone who had no choice in this arrangement. Your parents did all the work when you were a little girl."

"What do you mean?" Tikki cocked an eyebrow. Part of her hated falling for the bait that Duusu dangled in front of her.

"Oh, didn't they trust you enough to tell you? This whole marriage?" She motioned between Tikki and the door. "It had been planned since you were three."

"You're lying." Her parents would have told her—her father would have told her. There were so many opportunities with so many conversations.

"You can ask your mother if you don't believe me, but it's widespread knowledge."

That made it worse. She was the last one to know if Duusu was speaking the truth. It wouldn't make sense for her to lie about something she could easily ask her mother.

"I will."

Tikki knew that she shouldn't run, it meant that she was allowing Duusu to win, but wasn't one thing her father taught her was to pick her battles? Right now, she couldn't care less about what he taught her through the years. They knew about this the whole time, and they decided to keep it from her? What was the point? Didn't they trust her? The distrust upset her more than the arranged marriage, but part of that might have been due to falling head over heels in love with Plagg.

Tears streamed down her face as she ran through the halls wondering where to escape. The outside wall would be nice, although her tears were sure to dim the view. Her room was another option: she could lock herself away not seeing anyone until her anger died down. A pair of arms caught her, stopping her in her tracks.

"Tikki, what's wrong?"

If it weren't for his soothing voice, she wouldn't have realized her beloved was the one who held her. She clung to him, too upset to reply.

Plagg didn't question his Princess needing his strength as she held him, clearly upset. What bothered him was if he didn't know what was wrong? He was unsure if he was in the position to try and fix whatever it was. She would tell him eventually, but for now, he would comfort her the best he could.

A light prodding wouldn't hurt; at least he had the knowledge that whatever was upsetting her probably didn't involve him; otherwise, she wouldn't be in his embrace.

"Tikki?" He gently purred outside her ear. "Is there something I can do?"

"Just hold me," she whispered against his clothes.

Plagg obliged, but shortly noticed that her crying was drawing unwanted attention.

"My love, how about you go to your room and grab a blanket. We will meet up at the wall in ten minutes and continue this away from prying eyes." It wasn't that the servants hadn't seen them
embrace before, but he feared more for any servant that tried to interrupt them.

Tikki peeled back just enough for Plagg to see her puffy eyes and evidence of tears. He wished he could kiss all of that away. His fingers threaded through the loose strands of her hair as the other hand cupped her face, his thumb stroking her cheek.

“Alright,” she agreed. “I won’t be long.”

“I’ll count the heartbeats until you arrive,” he promised, placing a feather kiss on her forehead.

Tikki didn’t want to let go of her Prince completely, especially after her fight with Duusu. It was for the better until they were alone and she could tell him everything. Although Plagg’s touch calmed her for the time being, Tikki still found herself flustered by the time she got back to her room. Tikki couldn’t understand why her parents had kept this from her in the first place. If nothing else, they could have arranged visits while Plagg was growing up instead of thrusting her into this world now. Despite everything, her feelings towards the Prince hasn’t changed. If he were to know of their betrothal since he was that young, it would explain why he was all too comfortable to spout her praises. Their meeting was a manifestation of what he’d waited for. But why had his parents told him and yet hers didn’t give the same courtesy?

Tikki’s gaze snapped up the moment she felt another presence in the door.

“Charles? What are you doing here?” She eyed him. “My mother is not here.”

“I am here to talk to you.”

The request seemed odd; Charles had never come to her about any matter of importance; that’s why he was the royal advisor to the Queen.

"What do you have to tell me?" Her hands grazed over the blanket on her bed before bundling it in her arms.

"You must feel the pressure mounting: meeting your beloved Prince’s parents and the wedding around the corner." He poured some water into a goblet and handed it to her with a kind smile.

Tikki set down the blanket and took the goblet. Taking a sip, she realized she hadn't even thought about pleasing Plagg’s parents, but it added to the butterflies in her stomach, what if they didn't like her? The alliance was resting on the marriage, and if they called the wedding off- she couldn't think about a life without him.

"I hadn't thought about that," she admitted. Not that she needed more things to make her toss and turn at night.

"What if you could make your problems and worries about the Prince go away?"

Tikki paused. As lovely as that sounded, it meant she would lose him, and that wasn't an option. She loved him, and that wouldn't change, no matter what obstacle faced them. There were bound to be things that they would face when they were ruling their kingdoms. Tikki knew that they could conquer anything if they encountered it side by side.

"But I”— Her voice cut out as her vision began to spin and her knees started to wobble.
“Princess, is everything alright? Are you feeling ill?”

“Oh—oh, it’s nothing; I probably just need some air.” She attempted control over her feet to cross to get the room, but they barely lifted off the floor as if they were lead. Why was the window so far away?

"What's happening?"

Her hand flew up to her head to try and stabilize the pounding. Tikki's body hit the floor hard, her voice wanting to scream for help, only for the words to die in her throat. She fought her heavy eyelids.

"No hard feelings, your highness." Charles stepped forward to loom over her. "This plan has been in place for years now, and I can't allow you to step in at the last minute to ruin it."

The hope of anyone hearing her hoarse cry for help was dying with every second. Thoughts of Plagg flashed in her mind, how she wished that he would come in and save her, but he was on the outside wall waiting.

And she would leave him waiting. Who knows what was in store for her once she passed out: if she woke up at all.

Her eyes fluttered closed, and the last thing she could see was her hand reaching for the door.

He found that he could only stare at the princess as reality sunk in. What had he done? If the poison didn’t kill her, she would be able to identify him as her attacker. Leaving her out in the open like this was just as dangerous. Charles took Tikki by the arms and dragged her behind the folding partition screen. At least this way she would be out of sight, and it would take longer to find her.

Panic and paranoia began to set in. He couldn’t stay here if the Queen found out what he had done; it would be the gallows for him and war across the nations.

An idea suddenly hit him: he would ask the Queen for her pardon to leave before Tikki could be discovered. He would flee - and by the time they figured out he was the culprit, he would be long gone. For this plan to work, he would have to act quickly. Without another thought, he bolted out the door.

Pollen walked through the halls unable to keep her lips from tucking back into a smile. Since Prince Plagg came to visit, Tikki's change of mood was quite palpable. She was happier than Pollen had seen in a while. Certainly, it was no doubt who was the source of the Princess's new spirit. Despite being ordered to watch the pair, Pollen had given them their space and only reported back the most important details to the Queen. It was essential to provide the two space to allow love to bloom. Not that they noticed her presence when she did accompany them anyway. Pollen had even caught the exchange of kisses on foreheads, cheeks, and hands. Nothing made her buzz with excitement more than the knowledge that Tikki had found love. With the wedding around the corner, it seemed to only add to her list of responsibilities during the day. She didn't mind, not when it would be worth it to witness such an event.

The marriage would even bring about the opportunity to travel if her Lady wished to continue to be served by her. She could see her friends in the neighboring kingdoms and provide Tikki the comfort of home. There was no doubt in her mind that she would follow her Princess no matter where the path took them.
Pollen neared the door to Tikki’s chambers and noticed it was unlocked and slightly ajar. That was unusual. She was sure she locked it when she left this morning. Her Lady wouldn't leave the door open if she came back early.
"Hello? Princess, are you there?"

There was no immediate reply - but Pollen wasn’t worried. There were times in emotional distress that Tikki remained quiet even if Pollen was right next to her. A shiver shot up her spine as she ventured further into the room.

"Princess?" The odds of Tikki leaving her room open and unattended were low. The reality that someone broke in to steal something seemed more believable, but nothing in the room appeared to be touched. Pollen couldn't shake the nervous twist in her stomach, working its way into knots. She rounded the corner with the divider and stopped dead in her tracks.

No.

"Tikki?" Pollen dared to venture closer. What was her Lady doing on the floor? The maid’s hand reached out to try and stir her awake, but it was useless. Why wouldn't she wake up? The panic inside her rose to her throat and was released in the form of a scream. Tikki’s body didn't move an inch.

Shaking the Princess didn't wake her from her slumber. Chills began to crawl over Pollen’s skin.

“Tikki!” The Princess had never been such a heavy sleeper, but as she continued to shake her, there was no response. She needed to get Plagg - he’d know what to do.

Pollen jumped to her feet and raced through the halls.

"Help!"

She raced down the hall, breathless with panic. Pollen rounded the corner, Pollen ran straight into something— or rather someone.

"Pollen, what's wrong?" Plagg’s green eyes narrowed in concern.

Her breath caught in her chest, keeping her from answering; her mind and thoughts were swirling.

"Ti—" No, she needed to calm down. Tikki depended on her. "Prince Plagg, Something is wrong with Tikki."

Plagg’s eyes widened as his tan skin blanched. "What?"

"She's not waking up."

"Show me."
Chapter End Notes

A.n.- At the end of the chapter is a picture drawn by Bluetreeleaves, there are more to come. Let me know what you think! You all are amazing in every way. (I'll attempt to put out two chapters this upcoming week, but with the new episode, it's not likely.)
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Update on Tikki and Adrienette trouble

Chapter Notes

A.n.- It's Fridays Lovelies, I have a chapter for you all. I'm so excited for you all to read it! I won't keep you.

A lovely thank you to TOG84 for betaing. You are amazing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Have you tried true love's kiss? I heard that would wake up from her slumber."

Plagg didn't take his eyes off Tikki, despite Duusu's jab. It was imperative for him not to allow his feathers to get ruffled, especially by the likes of her. She had been nothing but trouble since she had arrived, and he had been counting down the minutes until she left.

"I have nothing to say to you." Given her interaction, she thought that he would do better creating an alliance with her instead of his beloved, not that he would even give it a second thought.

“Oh, right,” she pointed her finger judgmentally as she took the opportunity to take a couple of steps towards him. “That would mean that Tikki would be your true love, which we both know She isn’t. Or need I remind you that it wasn’t too long ago that Tikki was disgusted at the mere idea of you.”

"That's not true," Plagg growled. He couldn't let her get to him, but his eyebrows were already knitted together and arms crossed against his chest he may as well be holding a beacon declaring his annoyance. It wouldn't be long before she tried again.

"Oh, isn't it?" Duusu sat down in the chair close by, her hand poised in the air. "Then why did Tikki find out about the arrangement so much later than you? Could it be that the King and Queen hoped that there wouldn't be a marriage to Tikki after all?"

The thought provoked his stomach to jerk; it couldn't be true. But it would explain why they hadn't met before a couple of weeks ago, or why she was guarded with their interactions.

“I have known Tikki since childhood, and you two might have a strong relationship in the beginning, but in the end, you’ll have a loveless marriage.”

“That’s enough!” The Queen’s stern voice boomed through the causing the two to jump.

Plagg’s mouth ran dry with an explanation to why they were discussing Tikki’s discontent with the arranged marriage. He hadn’t brought up the topic, but the Queen would draw her own conclusions regardless. Plagg could have stopped her sooner.
"Your Majesty!" he stuttered trying to regain his composure. Not even an apology seemed like it would be enough to cover the embarrassment that he experienced. Was she cross with him?

"Duusu, you are no longer welcome in my home, and I want you to leave- now!"

"But, Your Highness, I was just-"

"You do not want to test my patience; anyone who is an enemy of my daughter has declared war on my kingdom." She stepped forward resting her hands on her hips. "So I suggest you leave before I do anything rash."

After Duusu ran out of the room, Plagg felt his throat tightened. If that’s what the Queen did for the likes of the Princess, what did she have in store for him? Not that he could control what Duusu said about his beloved. But he couldn’t argue that she didn’t get into his mind. Plagg found himself flinching in anticipation of the harshness the Queen could unleash.

“I’m sorry, that you had to hear her spew out any lies about Tikki. I find myself to blame. I knew that she had ill intentions, but I never thought she would go this far. She will be punished, and not bother you again, Prince Plagg.”

Although the apology was appreciated along with the knowledge that punishment awaited her, Plagg couldn’t help the knots in his stomach tightened.

“When did Tikki find out about our betrothal?”

Silence filled the room for far too long. Plagg’s eyes glued shut, he had hoped that this question would have put his mind more at ease, but that was not an option.

“Last year,” the Queen’s voice softly wavered as she turned to her ill daughter. “Right after my husband died. I wanted to tell her before then, but with the tensions among the Kingdoms as they were, he was afraid that it would escalate the war talks.”

“Which is why you kept us apart.”

“Yes.”

Plagg knees weakened to the point that he had to use a chair for support. Although the new information made sense given the circumstances, a war would bring hardship among everyone, and if he knew his father, he would avoid the unnecessary deaths if at all possible.

A hand on his shoulder drew his attention away from the plaguing thoughts.

“I assure you, Tikki’s feelings for you are real. She is happier than I’ve seen in years when she is with you. She would want you to be strong, for her.”

The Queen was right, he would soon take up the throne, and his people would need him, Tikki included.

“I will,” he answered with a half smile.

“Now if you excuse me,” the Queen nodded towards the stairs. “I have a guest to attend to.”

Duusu raced up to her room as fast as her legs could carry her. She didn’t tread carefully enough
not to invoke the Queen’s wrath. To suddenly withdraw her hospitality, it was unheard of among
nobility. She barely had time to catch her breath as she burst into her own room. A time limit in
place, but she didn’t want to test her theories on how patient the Queen was. Charles had fled the
kingdom, which would eventually lead to his own demise. No one could tie this back to her. Even
if he claimed that she ordered him to, it would be his word against hers. Duusu smiled to herself as
she destroyed all the evidence a couple of days ago.

The sight of a bird sitting in her windowsill stopped her in her tracks. Upon further inspection a
scroll had been wrapped around its leg.

Mother sent her something? Did she find out what happened? Was she pleased?

She couldn’t unroll the paper fast enough her eyes devouring each word as they revealed
themselves.

**Well done daughter, I shall join you soon.**

The words made her heart swell inside her chest. She couldn’t remember the last time she heard
those words from her mother, but to have that reassurance made coming here the right decision.
Once her mother arrived then their plan could slip into the next phase.

The door burst open catching her attention enough that the paper slipped from her hands. It was too
late to grab it without drawing suspension, distracting them from the note was her best course of
action.

“Your Majesty, I’m simply following orders, did you not give me time to gather my things before I
depart?” Duusu added an extra bow to sell her sincerity. Once she left, the Queen’s wrath wouldn’t
harm her. If she declared war, then the battles to come to pass would be inevitable.

Much to her horror, a guard spotted the scroll and retrieved it before she could take one step in his
direction. Any color drained from her face as immediately the Queen was handed the message.

“I can explain!” The words tumbled out matching pace with the speed of her heart pounding against
her rib cage. If her behavior didn’t scream of guilt, she didn’t know what did. The note in itself
didn’t damn her by giving away the full extent of her plan, but it certainly didn’t aid her.

“I was informing my mother dearest of my intentions to come home.”

“You’re not going anywhere.”

The words rifted her bones. Had the Queen changed her mind after all?

“I am to stay?” She stumbled over her words in sheer shock. It wasn’t becoming for her title to be
less than eloquent, but for such a shift to occur something had to change.

The Queen’s features hardened, “guards, seize her.”

Duusu had seconds before two guards grabbed her arm, the pressure forcing her to her knees.
Footsteps approached her, but it wasn’t until they stopped and her chin forced her to peer up at the
Queen did panic start to set in. Had she found the others? It should be impossible; she had been
careful.

“If you weren’t a Princess, I’d have you executed for treason. But since Pavone has been a peaceful
nation thus far, I think it’s best to have your mother sort out what is to be done with you. Until she
arrives, the dungeon will be the only one keeping you company.”
Adrien's gaze didn't falter from the horizon; it was a relief to be home among his people. He loved them so much, and he wanted was to be a worthy King. “Is something on your mind?”

A pair of arms slipped over his shoulders causing his lips to tuck up. Adrien turned to see Marinette sporting a smile of her own. “I was thinking about you.” He raised her palm to his lips, his eyes fluttering closed in the process. “I can't believe that you're really here.”

“Of course I am,” she hummed wrapping her arms around his neck, “where else would I be? I belong next to you.”

His finger hooked under her chin and guided her face to meet his. The kiss ended far too soon; he didn’t venture far just in case another opportunity arose to steal another.

“A King is only as strong as his Queen.” A dopey grin formed on his features. "How did I get so lucky?"

"I'd say that I'm the lucky one, that you walked into my tavern that night."

“Your tavern?” He shot back playfully.

“I do wonder, if I didn’t steal from you that night, would you still have chased me?”

“I would have followed you to the ends of the earth. I love you, Mar.”

“I love you too, Adrien.”

Adrien’s eyes squinted open struggling against the sunlight and froze; something was different from how he usually woke up. One glance told him precisely what he needed to know. Marinette was curled up by his side; her head snuggled up on his chest. Her warmth radiated off her sinking into his body spreading to every corner. During his sleep, his arm managed to tuck around her bringing Marinette closer than necessary.

He vaguely remembered her waking up in the middle of the night by a dream. Adrien had calmed her and guess that they fell asleep in the process. His fingertips of his free hand reached out until her hair fell out of his face.

She was so beautiful.

Where did that thought come from?

He didn’t have time to ponder the question further; they weren’t alone.

“Marinette,” he nudged her hoping that she wasn’t a heavy sleeper. “You need to get up now.” Adrien went to grab his sword, but it was too late.

“Stand to your feet.”

Adrien shifted his vision to Marinette in time to see fear flashed over her features. They were edged apart having no choice but to move with the daggers.

“My, my what a beauty we have here, don’t we lads?”

The knife dipped under her chin to force it up to meet their intruder’s gaze. Adrien’s hands bunched at his sides as he could do nothing but watch because of his own predicament.
“I’m tempted to keep you all to myself.” Marinette struggled against the man’s grip, but with his positioning, she didn’t have the advantage.

“I suppose taming would be in order.” The man leaned in only to stumble back seconds later, Marinette’s spit oozing down his face.

“You little brat,” he roughly grabbed her face within seconds the blade had nicked her skin.

“Don’t you touch her!” Adrien snapped forward until his neck met the dagger.

“I wouldn’t be doing that boy.” The man whisperers from behind. “No lover is worth being dead over.”

His eyes snapped to Marinette, who already returned his sure to be panic-stricken gaze. He watched her head fractional shake from side to side urging him not to do something stupid.

He didn’t listen.

In a swift motion, he snapped his arm up catching the man off guard. The dagger dropped to the ground. Adrien kicked back colliding with his captor’s knee. In the process, he picked the fallen knife and lunged forward.

“Adrien!”

Her blood-curdling cry stopped him short. The ringleader had grabbed Marinette yanking her head back by her hair and dagger dangerously close to breaking flesh.

“One more step and her pretty little throat gets slit,” a grin spread lazily on his lips. “And that would be a shame, now wouldn’t it. Having her blood on your hands?”

“Adrien, don’t worry about m—“ the rest of what she was saying morphed into a whimper as he gripped her tighter the knife claiming blood.

“Silence!” He bellowed. “What’s it going to be?”

“Let her go!” he growled. “Then you can do what you want with me.” As long as she was safe, then Adrien could deal with the consequences. His father would pay ransom if needed; money was all these men cared about. Adrien’s eyes narrowed as a hearty laugh filled the air.

“And why would I do that?” His head tilted, features squinted, “who are you?”

“Adrien, don’t!”

His green eyes flashed over to her blue ones, he could understand why she was reacting the way that she was, but he could handle himself. The thought that she could care about what happened made his heart swelled.

“I’m Prince Adrien of Schmetterling, and I demand you release her.”

"I should have been there for you." Plagg squeezed her the hand in attempts to reassure himself, but heat and sweat protruding from her pores didn't help to squash the fears. His mind had brutally been going over scenarios since they found her lying on the ground. If he insisted that he joined her, maybe this wouldn't of happen. Despite being told that it wasn't his fault, he couldn't help but
allow the guilt to wallow.

Duusu was in the dungeon, which was a comfort of its own that she wouldn’t harm Tikki further, but as time slipped away, his beloved only grew worse.

“Please forgive me. I will do whatever it takes to see that you are well again; I promise.” His vow resonated within his soul.

Plagg heart sank into his stomach the longer the time elapsed. Watching her toss and turn, unable to do anything to help her was pure torture. He was used to fighting with a sword, fending off attackers who used blades, being armed with only a wet cloth to fight against a devious opponent such as poison was outside his expertise. He was a Prince! Couldn’t he send for healers that lived in Tuho? By the time they would arrive it could be too late to save her. He trusted the Queen explicitly, but the court physician didn’t look optimistic as he performed his examination; so much so that he pulled her majesty out of the room so they could talk in private.

Plagg wasn’t content sitting there watching Tikki slowly ripped from him. He eyed the door. The information he needed to spring into action was being exchanged right behind the door. If he was quiet, the odds were he could hear every word.

The door slid open a sliver and words filled every corner of the room.

“Enough stalling, do you know what is wrong with my daughter or not?”

Plagg held his breath. Today was not the day to trifle with the Queen.

“She’s was poisoned.”

“You’re a physician of the court! Can’t you heal her?”

“It’s not that simple your Majesty. If I can figure out what was used, then I can begin to prepare a remedy, but if I’m not positive, then her condition could worsen.”

Plagg’s world began to blur as he turned back to his beloved. She couldn’t die. The only thing that brought him back was the physician’s statement.

“Your Majesty, if I may, there is a physician known for his cures who resides near Schmetterling. Rumors have spread that he has a potion that can cure any ailment. He is difficult to find because he travels, but sending out knights to try and plead with him might be her only chance at survival.”

Plagg’s eyes narrowed. Even if it were dangerous for him to lead the charge, he would do so without hesitation. Tikki needed him. His eyes fell to the floor; they took Duusu to the dungeon. If she were willing to exchange information, then he would advocate for a lighter punishment. As long as he didn’t lose his temper down there as he talked to her, Duusu might reveal what kind of potion she used. Time was of the essence, and if he didn’t use it properly, Tikki would be the one who paid with her life.

Adrien’s jaw stiffened as laughter filled the air at his declaration. His fists tightened by his side slowly turning the knuckles white. Marinette’s whimper drew his attention; green eyes met blue.

Don’t, her eyes urged, but he couldn’t let her get hurt. The same surge of emotions and adrenaline flooded his system as when he jumped into the water after her.

“Enough!” The ringleader snapped causing a wave of silence in his wake.
Adrien stood his ground; he wasn’t going to allow fear to take over. If all they wanted were money, then they would make this through safely. The growing knots in his stomach whispered that it wouldn’t be that easy. If they laid one finger on her—

“If you’re a Prince, then what are you doing running around the woods with the likes of her? What is she to you?”

Adrien’s mouth gaped open trying to find a response. There was no doubt that his cheeks tinted with color. What was Marinette to him? They certainly weren’t lovers or whatever the bandits concluded, although it became increasingly harder to ignore the warmth that flowed through his chest when she took her first breath of air after the rescue, or when he woke up with her curdled next to him. Throughout this trip, he relished every smile he could muster out of her or the way her face would light up.

“That’s none of your business!”

“How dare you speak to me in such a way! This is what you deserve!”

A sharp sting scraped his cheek accompanied by Marinette screaming his name. Her voice grounded him instantly. A thick trickle of blood started to drip down his face.

“I’ll enjoy carving up that face of yours.”

“Stop!” All eyes turned to Marinette for her outburst. “Don’t you touch him!”

Adrien could see tears threatening to spill over. Why this upset her this much may as well been a mystery. He would assume that she experienced such negotiations before. It didn’t matter what they did to him; the scars would heal.

“Now listen here, Princess.”

Adrien scowled. He didn't like the way the ringleader allowed his gaze to linger on her or the way that the nickname rolled off his slimy lips. He found himself growing restless as he watched fear flash over her features.

“Why don’t you be a little helper and tie the Prince’s hands.”

Adrien winced as the rope tightened against his skin. The first time, the ropes were too loose for the ringmaster’s liking, so this time, one stood guard to watch as the others raided through their stuff. He leaned his head back while tilting his face so they could talk without prying ears.

“Marinette, if something happens...” His words died in his throat causing her fingers to still in his hands. He wanted to believe that they could make it out of this, but there was overwhelming evidence otherwise.

“How can you say that?” Her voice didn’t crack until mid-sentence when Adrien squeezed her fingers.

Adrien wasn’t giving up, but the plan he formulated was half thought out at best. The one thing he knew is they had to stay together. Judging by how little they carried, it wouldn’t be long before the other men returned.

“Marinette, let me finish. If something happens to us, I just wanted to say —” He paused trying to figure out what to say, but nothing seemed adequate. “I’m glad that we met.” He wished that he
could articulate better, but for now—

“I’m glad we met too.”

Adrien’s heart rate sped as her fingertips traced the edges of his. Marinette’s breath danced across
the back of his neck making it incredibly hard to focus.

“But don’t worry, I have a plan.”

Adrien’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion, “Plan, what plan?”

“Just follow my lead.”

He could practically hear her smirk despite his back turned.

“Do you think you can distract big tall and ugly?”

The words dripped off her tongue like honey; how could he say no? “It would be my pleasure.”

Adrien spun on his feet and plowed into the guard sending him flying back. He turned back in time
to see Mari pull a dagger strapped to her thigh. The commotion was enough to draw the attention of
the others who came running.

He froze in place watching the events unfold before him. He expected Marinette to struggle against
the other four men, but he underestimated how she’d handle her dagger. The first man went down
with one direct hit stealing his weapon in the process. With two swords she stood more of a chance
defending one side while attacking the other.

Who taught her to fight? He had never seen a girl attack like this; she would best some of his
knights. The way she ducked and dodged the blows could only be described as enchanting.

A shiny object on the ground caught his attention; a knife. He must have knocked it out when he
knocked the guy out cold. If he could cut through his rope, he could fight alongside Marinette.
Adrien never got the chance. A couple of steps shy, something hit the back of his head, and
everything went black.

Marinette turned back to her enemies slain in time to see the ringleader leader loading Adrien on
his horse.

“Adrien!” She shouted.

Her adversary turned back and gave one last smirk before taking off.

No!

Marinette’s mind started to race to match her running pace and her heart’s thumping against her
chest. She should have been over the moon, with no Adrien around, she was free. But none of that
mattered, he needed her. Marinette reached down and grabbed the bow and arrow from the ground
and darted off in the direction they took Adrien. There wasn’t any chance that she could catch up
with them on foot. The one advantage she had was she knew these woods like the back of her hand.
If she cut the kidnappers off, then there was a chance she could save him. Marinette flew down this
slope not allowing her tiredness to slow her down. Adrien needed her.

She climbed up a tree hidden from view and drew her weapon; the sound of hoofs grew louder, and
Marinette prayed she wasn't too late. There was one shot; the timing had to be perfect.

Marinette’s eyes narrowed, and in an instant, the arrow went flying. Direct hit. The horse slowed to a stop, and she made quick work of shimming down the tree.

“Adrien,” she whispered to herself. Once she got closer, she heard Adrien release a groan. Marinette quickly untied ropes around his wrist and helped him off the horse. Heat darted across her cheeks as she noticed how his eyes focused in on her.

“You—You saved me,” he gaped.

Her heart flipped inside her chest. It couldn’t be helped with how soft a gaze Adrien looked at her. She hadn't felt like this in years—since Luka. But that couldn't be true; she had only known him for a short period. Instead of addressing the possibility, Marinette pushed it down.

"It seemed like the honorable thing to do." She hoped that her answer would be enough to put the question to bed until she figured out why she'd rather bury her face in her hands than have his intense stare gaze into her soul. Instead, she pulled down at her blouse to calm her nerves.

"I guess there is honor among thieves," he smiled grabbing his wrist where the ropes once were.

"I guess so." Marinette was thankful that her hair covered her red tipped ears. "Ready to go?"

"Go?" Adrien parrotted back.

"We aren't that far from your ring." Her heart sank into her chest at her own words. She hoped that Adrien would say something—anything to keep their journey going.

"Lead the way."

Marinette plastered on a smile, and with every step that she took, her heart cracked more.

Chapter End Notes

A.n.- I'm almost done chapter 6. My sister's wedding is coming up so for the next couple weeks I'll probably only update weekly (If I can, but I have a head start) The next two weeks are crazy for me along with the first weekend of May. You all are amazing, and I'm so thankful for you all. Let me know what you think!
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

A ring, a rescue, and late night talks. All of it Fluff.

Chapter Notes

A.n.- Hello lovely people! I bring you another chapter! I hope you really enjoy it.

Thanks to TOG84 for betaing this chapter and all his hard work and dedication. I appreciate it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This was it. Weeks of tirelessly traveling and peril and his mother’s ring resided in the building in front of him. He took a couple of steps forward only to be stopped by Marinette grabbing his arm. One of his brows rose towards her; why come all this way, only not to go inside.

“What are you doing?”

“Going in to get my mother’s jewelry,” he replied as if it was the most obvious answer. His eyes drifted down to his arm where Marinette’s hand gripped him. Heat invaded his neck, ears, and cheeks. Part of him wished they could stay like this, but his eyes gave him away, and Marinette’s hand flew off him like fire to the touch.

He peeked through his embarrassment to see her turned away clutching her own arm focus locked on the dirt. Whatever thoughts distracted her faded as quickly as it came, Adrien was caught off guard she whipped back in his direction.

“I’ve dealt with these guys before, so follow my lead. Whatever you do, don’t tell them who you are, they hate royals more than anything so keep your head low just in case they recognize you.”

“These guys friends of yours?” Adrien joked trying to lighten the mood. The way that she talked made the danger abundantly clear, but they faced worse yesterday.

“They’re just a means to an end,” all confidence stricken from her voice. “You’ll get your ring and propose to your Princess, and I get what I wanted.”

Adrien had spent enough time around her to tell she wasn’t completely honest with him but now didn’t seem like the best time to question her. He reached out his hand squeezing her shoulder gently hoping that his eyes told her everything his mouth refused to.

I trust you.

He flipped up the hood of his cloak. “Lead the way.”
Adrien couldn’t help but watch in awe at the way she interacted shifted the second she stepped inside. Her face morphed to stone and she spoke with a commanding tone to the man behind the bar.

His eyes wandered to walls lined with animal heads of all types and sizes.

“Who’s your friend?”

Adrien’s face scrunched together. Of course, he got caught, he’d broken one of the three rules that she gave him.

“He’s nobody of importance, just some company I keep.”

The thought urged him to do something to distract himself. She was hiding his identity but the way Marinette said it—made it sound like he was her manservant. He tried to ignore the fact he blindly chased after her beck and call since they started this quest.

“Evander won’t like it.”

“Why don’t you let me deal with him.”

Marinette nodded towards him signaling to follow which he did with no hesitation. The barkeep shouted something, but she kept walking.

As they neared a backroom shouting became audible, and when Marinette opened the door, Adrien understood why. An older Chinese man landed at their feet fear laced in his eyes.

“Help,” his words barely graced his ears.

Adrien’s body went rigid, what was Marinette doing associating with low lives like this? He flinched but remembered Marinette’s rule: follow her lead.

Marinette stood there silently praying that Adrien didn’t do anything stupid. He could sit there and judge her all he wanted, but she did what she had to do at the time to get what she needed to survive. Right now, they needed to get what they came for and hightail it out of there as fast as she could. If her ‘associates’ found out who she brought, they would cut ties with her instantly and without hesitation.

“Since when do you beat up your guests, Evander. I thought you were a better host than that.” Cool, calm, and collected attitude was vital. If she let anyone know she had a problem with how they were beating the man, her negotiation power would disappear. She would do what she could to help him, whoever he was.

“Only to debtors who cannot pay,” Evander replied before his eyes shifted behind her. “Who is your friend? You know I don’t like surprises.”

“He is no threat to you; he just accompanied me on my trip.”

“Your associate was here a couple of days ago, and yet here you are,” Evander crossed his arms
against his chest and scoffed in disbelief. “What do you want?”

That was the question that her journey built up to, wasn't it? She couldn't let Adrien down, not when they had come this so far.

"She brought you something that she shouldn't have. I require it back. Red pouch, inside jewelry including a ring that I have become fond of; after I have what I want, we will be on our way."

"Has the famous Ladybug finally decided to settle down. Going soft on us?"

"It's a family heirloom and shouldn't have been sold in the first place," not the entire truth, but they didn't need to know that it wasn't hers. "I brought money to repurchase it."

"I know what you're referring to, but - I don't want your money."

Marinette stumbled a half step back. Evander always had his mind set on money or how they could benefit him.

"What do you want?"

"I want you to do a job for me. I had my eye on something in the palace that will be transported to Tuho soon, but for a master thief like you, it shouldn't be an issue."

"I'll do it," she replied without missing a beat. Immediately after she felt a hand grabbed her arm and looked back into Adrien's emerald eyes.

"You don't have to do this."

His gaze pierced through her and her breath hitched. Stealing from the royals was no doubt dangerous, and he knew that. He was giving her a way out; sacrificing his mother's ring for her safety.

“I’ll do it,” she squeezed her eyes tight ignoring the wave of nausea to hit her. Evander nodded to one of his men who disappeared, only to reappear moments later to with the red bag in hand.

Mari tossed Adrien the bag to double check for his prized possessions. Not that Evander had shorted her before, but he was a thief after all. Adrien pulled out the ring to inspect it, and Marinette found her mouth dropped slightly open. It was beautiful; she could see why he chased after it, especially since it belonged to his mother.

The ring would look good on any Princess’s hand, her mind quipped. Marinette pushes the voice down, only for it to return stronger, or yours.

The thought was completely laughable. Her marry a Prince? What would she do with a kingdom at her command? The answer eluded her, but it still didn’t stop the buried desire for Adrien to engulf her with one of those soft looks as he slipped the ring on her hand signaling to the world they were each other.

Snap out of it! Marinette told herself. Now was not the time to be distracted, especially with fantasy’s that would never come true. Adrien didn’t see her that way.

“Sir!”

It all happened so fast. Marinette allowed herself not to pay attention. The price, Adrien’s hood fell, and one of the henchmen caught sight of the emblem on his sword.
“What are you trying to pull?” He snarled. “You bring royal blood into my place of business?”

“We want no trouble. All we wanted was the jewelry.” Marinette’s excuse poured out, but by the hardening features of Evander in front of her, he didn’t believe her.

“You showed them where we operate, what’s to say knights don’t storm the place. You’ll pay for what you’ve done.”

Marinette froze like a deer caught in the forest bracing for the blow, but it never came.

“Don’t you know it’s not polite to treat a lady that way?”

Adrien’s words snapped her back to reality to realize exactly why a blow never came. He stepped in with his sword pointed at Evander’s throat.

“I think you should apologize.”

“You’ll never get out of here alive.”

Adrien threw Marinette a smug glance before turning back to Evander. “I think we’ll take our chances. Come now, I have failed to hear your apology.”

Was he mad? If he so much yelled in distress, half the tavern would flock back here.

With a swift blow, Marinette struck him in his neck sending him to the ground. Hopefully, no one heard that otherwise, they wouldn’t have much time.

"Wait!” She grabbed Adrien's arm to prevent him from moving another step. That man, she couldn't leave him here, when Evander came around, who knows what he would do.

"Stay here,” she ordered and took off down the hall despite Adrien's calling after her. A door appeared on her right; this is where they had to be holding him. She burst through the door hoping that the men weren't guarding the room. Marinette received a startled look from the man from earlier.

"Come with me if you want to escape.”

The old man rose to his feet quickly for his age, and as soon as he was close, she grabbed his hand and took his hand and ran down the hall. A warmth exploded within her when she reached where Adrien was and watched the worries wash from his features.

“What do we do now?”

Marinette shot him a smile, “we run.”

The dungeon was among the last places that Plagg wanted to be. It was dark, damp, and littered with vermin that he would consider more enemies than friends. He had to do this for Tikki’s sake. Duusu was hauled off hours ago; she should be primed to spill any secret that she kept.

To his expectations, Duusu’s head shot up the second he rounded the corner only to direct her gaze elsewhere.

“Oh, it’s you.” She sat back to rest on the wall.

“Duusu, what poison did you use on Tikki.” He had to stay focus, time was of the essence, just as
the doctor said.

“You’re wasting your breath.”

“My patience is running thin, tell me what you did to her.”

“What I did to her?” Duusu rolled her eyes dramatically. “The only thing I did was tell her the truth.”

“Liar!” Plagg’s shouts echoed through the cell. “If I had my say”-

“But you won’t.” She cut him off shortly. “When my mother gets here, I’ll be as free as a bird. Why? Because it wasn’t me who poisoned her.”

“They’ve found scrolls in your room proving knowledge of the occurrence. Your hands are far from clean in all of this.”

“You’re too late; the plan is already set in motion. Tikki won’t last much longer. If I were you, I’d spend as much time with her as you can.”

This was useless. How could he think that Duusu would cooperate with him? She had been trying to come between Tikki and him from the second she arrived. Plagg’s fist curled by his side, how could anyone be this eager to hurt someone as sweet as Tikki?

“You’re wrong. And I’m going to prove it.”

Plagg walked out eyes squeezed shut pushing Duusu’s voice out of his mind. It couldn’t be too late. The doctor’s words from earlier crept in. The healer, it was a long shot, but he would do anything to save his love. He would leave at first light to cover as much land as possible. Taking all of his knights would be out of the question. They would just slow him down, but he had to have some protection. What good would be claiming a potion if he didn’t make it back alive? He would bring two of his faithful knights to secure his safety. The only problem; where this healer was now? He would have to visit small villages on the rim of Schmetterling to gather information. His glimmer of hope flickered as the sound of Tikki’s voice filled his head. He had to find this healer; whatever the cost.

“I think we lost them.” Adrien doubled over resting his hands on his knees.

Marinette glanced back from the direction they ran. It didn’t appear that they were followed. If she ever went back there, she would be killed on the spot. There were other people she could use, but Evander was on the noble side of thieves. Marinette never once thought he would betray their dealings. Her decision to help was the right one, even if it meant she had to get more creative in the future.

“We’re not out of the woods yet. His men will come looking for us. We need somewhere safe to hide.”

“Do you think that we could backtrack to Luominen?”

Marinette shook her head. “Without stopping, it’s at least a four-day journey on foot, and that’s if Evander’s men don’t catch us first.”
“Wait, how is that possible if it took weeks to get out here in the first place?”

Marinette’s mouth opened and closed struggling to find an answer. How could she respond without thinking? She couldn’t very well tell him that she expanded their mission at first to mess with him only to realize she liked spending time with Adrien. Stuck with her hands tied, Marinette floundered for anything she could say.

“I might have a solution to your problem.”

Marinette released a sigh of relief internally. The subject was dodged for now.

“Evander doesn’t know where I live. You two are welcomed to rest there as long as you need.”

The offer sounded inviting; she hadn’t slept in a bed in days. Being able to sink into the sheets with a soft pillow sounded nothing short of a dream. As if on cue, her stomach chimed in with a growl. She supposed it had been a while since she had eaten, with all the danger she had encountered, a simple task such as eating fell to the wayside.

Marinette eyed Adrien, who returned a soft grin in her direction.

“Thank you for the offer; we won’t tread on your kindness, just a few days to regain our strength again.”

“Right this way,” Fu motioned.

Marinette had forgotten what it was like to be this clean. She usually used the rivers when she was on the road, but this diversion lasted longer than most. Fu had told her to take as long as she needed and there would be food waiting for her when she was ready. She couldn’t believe the kindness that he had shown for rescuing him.

Her fingers ran through her hair as her feet carried her to the room. She froze when she realized there were more items left than before she went. There was a dress laid out on the bed and a potion bottle sitting next to the bed, both accompanied with a note. The pink and white dress was something that Fu had sitting in his closet from previous guests, and the potion was a gift for saving his life. Supposedly it was a healing potion that had extraordinary properties, but it didn't go into detail. There was one line that kept standing out among the others.

A person can always choose the right path.

What could that possibly mean? Marinette shook her head pushing the possibilities to the side. She would have a much clearer mind in the morning once she had a deep sleep. Marinette's stomach growled causing her to smile to herself. It was a good thing that he had food waiting for her. It would be rude to keep them waiting.

Marinette followed her nose and the smells filling her nostrils that was causing her to drool. It could be raw meat at this point, and she would take down it without question.

"Mar!"

Adrien's voice drew her focus. He had stood the second she entered the room, food on the table forgotten. Why did he keep staring at her like that? Nerves took over, and she pushed the hair behind her ear.

"Marinette, I'm glad you could join us. Please sit. I'll grab some soup for you."
She nodded and took a seat at the table eyes anywhere but Adrien. Even without looking up, she could feel his heated gaze on her.

“So,” she took a sip of soup, what were you discussing before I arrived?” Marinette didn’t expect the question to cause any commotion, but Adrien broke into a coughing fit. She glanced towards Fu, but the only hint he gave was a knowing smile. Marinette doubted that she would discover whatever topic they discussed, but she wouldn’t pry. Even the Prince was entitled to his secrets.

The second the fresh night air hit him, Adrien’s body relaxed. As much as the thought of sleep in a bed was generous of Fu, his mind was far too muddled to think about the comfort of dreams. After wandering a couple of feet, he found himself at a pole they had impaled into the ground with ribbons attached, presumably for the festival tomorrow. Adrien rested against it and let out a sigh. He wondered what his father would say regarding his adventures. Something along the lines of to stop acting like a commoner running through the woods, he needed to think of the Kingdom and people. His father certainly wouldn’t approve of Marinette, even though the only time he felt alive was when she was around.

The sound of footsteps put him on edge; no one knew he was out here, and if whomever with swords then he was left defenseless. If he were taken, they wouldn’t even know until morning when it was too late.

“Oh, I didn’t realize—I can leave.”

Any anxiety melted away at Marinette’s voice, and when he turned in her direction, Adrien’s heart skipped a few beats.

The moonlight outlined her hair giving it an angelic glow, and all he wanted to do was run his fingers through the dark locks until the sun came up. When she turned her head, the shadows danced across her face, shifting as she did, but not before Adrien notice a light dusting of pink.

“Wait,” he breathed out. It was probably for the better; if she ran, he didn’t think he could muster up a louder tone. His hand flew to his neck combating the heat that flooded there. Adrien lost the battle and realized he was sporting his own color due to the fire that danced along his skin. His only hope was that the night concealed his failed efforts.

“Stay.”

Their eyes locked.

A warmth pooled in his chest when she took a couple of steps and joined him.

“The weather is nice.” Although the first to break the silence, Adrien wished he remained silent. He sounded like a fool stating the obvious. By the way, Marinette was staring at him; she hadn’t expected him to say anything at all.

*Say something—anything!* His mind urged.

“Thank you, for allowing us to stay a couple of days. I haven’t been to a festival since I was a little girl.”
“I—no problem.” If he couldn’t figure out what to say to her, then the conversation would be over before he even started. Adrien ran a hand through his hair, silence settling in between the pair.

“Couldn’t sleep either?” Mari chimed in shattering the quiet.

He had tried, but his mind had gone in circles. “I had too much on my mind.” It was a simple explanation without revealing that most of his thoughts revolve around the single topic of her.

“Like what?”

Adrien hadn’t expected her to further her line of questioning and he was not about to mention the conversation with Fu over dinner. But there was one question that still plagued his mind, “why did you take us the long way?” He watched her wince and knew that she hoped he forgot.

“At first I was hoping that I could lose you in the woods if we kept walking around.”

“What changed?”

“When you saved me,” Her eyes flickered to his. “You didn’t have to jump in to save me, but you did. I knew then that I owed you my life.”

“Is that why you stopped trying to run away?”

“The more time I spent with you, the more intrigued I was. You don’t act like anything how I thought a Prince would.”

“I intrigue you?” Adrien parroted with a smug smirk and a twinkle in his eyes. This was new information to him, and he wouldn’t forget it quickly.

Marinette rolled her eyes once more, “Don’t let it go to your head; then you really will become unbearable.”

“I guess I owe you,” he replied after another silence filled the air. Adrien turned his attention back to his hands so he wouldn’t allow his gaze to linger. “If it weren’t for you stealing my mother’s ring, I would probably be back in my kingdom engaged to Chloe.” That reality compared to his experiences these past couple weeks paled in comparison every time. He was willing to marry Chloe before out of duty, but now... his father might have another reason to be angry with him after his return.

“What do you mean? You owe me?”

“I never wanted to marry Chloe; my father struck a deal with hers. Our union will supposedly bound our nations together, making it stronger. At least, that is what my father keeps repeating. I’ve known Chloe for years now, and she has her moments but—she’s not the type of girl I wish to spend the rest of my life with.”

“What would she be like?”

“Pardon?”

“The girl you hope to marry if your father didn’t have his way.”

“Beautiful obviously, but not just on the outside, her beauty would radiate from her heart. She would be kind above all else and strong leader. She would do anything for her people. We would have endless conversations about nothing and everything at the same time. When she smiled, it
would cause my heart to stop. I would never stop falling more in love with her every day. I’-
An image of Marinette smiling flashed through his head caused him to stop mid-sentence. He was
describing her. The moonlight hid most of the color that swam to his cheeks. “If my father didn’t
have his way,” he finished repeating her words back to her. Adrien could feel her eyes locked on
him.

“I hope you find her.”

I think I already did, his mind chimed in, but instead the words, “I hope so too,” slipped from his lips.

“It’s getting late; the festival won’t be enjoyable if I’m asleep.”

Adrien shot up from his position, it may be selfish, but he didn’t want her to go. Not when he started
to see her open up and be honest with him. Marinette didn’t treat him like the Prince, or
have any expectations of his title; she saw him.

“Marinette,” her name tangled with his tongue, but it still caused her to stop in her tracks. Panic
startd to rise in his chest, he didn’t know what he was going to say after he got her attention. Her
eyes locked him in place, and he hoped the color wouldn't be visible on his features.

"Goodnight," his nerves got the better of him, and he bowed to her, feeling completely like a coward. Marinette deserved some sleep; the last couple of days had been rough on both of them. "Princess," he muttered the nickname to himself low enough that she couldn't hear. Marinette might not hold any title with her name, be that as it may, the nickname suited her.

Chapter End Notes

A.n.- Fluff! I hope you enjoyed it. Let me know what you think! I appreciate every one of you.
Marinette’s day started after she stumbled into a messy kitchen with a sheepish looking Adrien. He suggested that they find something to eat among the vendors.

She didn’t argue, how could she when her stomach released a growl. Marinette smiled apologetically. Adrien smiled at her and told her to finish getting ready for the day. As the two walked outside and Marinette stopped, the sights and sounds embracing her, causing her eyelids to flutter closed for a moment.

“Are you okay?”

Her eyes peaked open to see Adrien hadn’t made it more than a couple of steps before he realized that she wasn’t with him.

“Yeah, sorry. I got lost in my thoughts for a second: breakfast.”

“Wait, stay here.”

Marinette wasn’t used to taking orders from anyone, but with the way his eyes sparkled with excitement, her feet stayed planted.

“Why?” A laugh escaped as her head shook gently.

“It’s my fault that I ruined breakfast. I want to see if I can pick out something you’d like.”

Before she could argue, Adrien sped off to the vendors with an energized vigor. What sleep he did get last night must have done him wonders. She hadn’t seen this side of him before, which made her curious to how much more she hadn’t noticed.

Marinette closed her eyes, soaking in the sounds of children laughing and running past her. Maybe finding a town to settle down, it wouldn’t be so terrible. The more she thought about her plan, the more she realized if she carried it out, she would only have herself.

At a tug on her dress, Marinette cracked an eyelid to see a young girl right in front of her holding a pink flower in hand.
She crouched to eye level and smiled.

“That’s a pretty flower. What’s your name?”

“Ebony,” she replied shyly before holding out the flower.

“Is this for me?”

The girl quickly nodded to reassure her. “My momma told me to give it to the prettiest girl here.”

Marinette jaw dropped at Ebony’s confession. A simple flower tugged on her heartstrings.

“Thank you.” Before she had a chance to say anything else the little girl bounced off leaving giggles behind her.

However the second another laughter mingled with the girl’s, Marinette’s blood froze.

She knew that laugh—she had heard it many a time before.

“Luka.” The name hovered on her lips. Her eyes zipped through the crowd until they landed on the laugh’s owner.

He hadn’t changed in the time they spent apart. Jet black hair and blue eyes so vivid they draw you in with a glance. Except his focus wasn’t on her, but rather another fair maiden with brunette hair.

Her insides cracked as she saw him lean in and steal a kiss.

The flower dropped to the ground. Breathing became hard, and she was sure her head was spinning. He hadn’t seen her yet; she could still get away.

Master Fu’s house wasn’t that far away, Marinette decided to make a dash for it. The second the door closed she crumbled to the ground. Of all the places he could have been, he was here— with her no less? Now that the empty house was her only company, tears freely flowed down her cheeks. It had only been a year since he left her, and as much as she hated to admit it, the wounds were fresher than she’d care to admit.

“Marinette?”

She froze as the door opened and closed and Adrien’s shoes came into view.

“I saw you were running back to the house, and—” He stopped mid-sentence. “Marinette, what’s wrong?”

Marinette tried to focus on anything else, but the concerned blond in front of her. The second she caved, she knew she would crack and tell him the whole story. It wasn’t like she could hide it: Luka was here after all. The entire truth was bound to come out eventually, even the parts that she didn’t know; like why he left her.

But she didn’t put forth any struggle when he hooked his finger under her chin and guided her head up until their eyes met. Marinette knew she was hardly presentable to a Prince with her glassy tear-filled eyes and puffy face. She closed her eyes to hide the evidence, but his fingers danced across the edges of her hair as his thumbs wiped away any remaining tears.

“Luka— he’s here, and I”— Her voice caved out as her mouth began to tremble.

Marinette barely processed when Adrien reaches out to give her hands a reassuring squeeze.
“Wait here,” he gently ordered.

Not that Marinette carried any confidence that she could go anywhere if she wanted. Her legs shook to the point she had to grab something to support herself.

The second he returned, her nerves started to calm. It was strange how, in so little time, just the very presence of him gave her comfort. Through all this mess, he’d stuck by her side through thick and thin. The bright red bag in his left hand drew her curious gaze. What was he planning?

Adrien grabbed one item before discarding the bag to the side. He held up his mother’s ring eliciting a gasp from her lips.

“What if you didn’t have to face him alone. We could let them assume that we are...” His voice faded out, and he swallowed the rest of his words.

She waited for a second for any indication that he was joking, but he carried the same soft and caring look he always sported.

“You want me to—“ The words tugged in her throat. “I can’t take your mother’s ring, Adrien.”

“You’re not.” He grinned. “You’re holding on to it for safe keeping.” He grasped her hand, sliding the ring on smoothly.

“Why are you doing this?” If anyone recognized him, Adrien would face trouble when he returned home.

“Because I”— Adrien stopped himself, and Marinette watched his eyes drop to their hands, which were connected before they jumped back to her. “Throughout our journey, believe it or not, I’ve grown rather fond of having you around. You see me as Adrien before my titles. This is the least I could do: escorting a beautiful girl around and doting on her every whim. It shall be my quest to make you forget Luka is there.” He offered a warm inviting smile. “So what do you say, will you be my betrothed? Even if only for a day?”

Marinette’s heart pounded against her chest, and by now, nervous sweat had seeped out to her palms.

The answer “yes” itched on her lips and she wanted nothing more than to say the word. That was a tall promise that she could only hope for him to fulfill. She believed him though, in all the time that they spent together, Luka had barely crossed her mind.

“Yes.” The response tasted as sweet as honey on her tongue. Her blue eyes shifted to the ring proudly presented on her finger. It was just as gorgeous up close as when she first saw it.

“There is one thing.” Adrien shifted his weight to his other foot, rubbing the back of his neck. “If we’re to convince people that we’re—we’re betrothed, we’ll have to act like it. Is that ok?”

Butterflies burst into a frenzy in her stomach at the thought. There were moments where her emotions had gotten the better of her when it came to the blond Prince. To have him openly dote on her could trigger those feelings again, but that was a risk she would have to take.

Marinette pushed down any lingering thoughts. She could do this. Before she could think twice about it, she leaned forward and kissed his cheek. When she realized she allowed her lips to lingered there longer than she intended, she pulled back fast, fighting the heat traveling to her cheeks.
“Come on! We have a festival to attend.” She sped through the door hoping if she put enough distance between them, by the time he caught up she would be sufficiently level-headed not to let any emotions get in the way.

“Adrien, I can't accept it.” Marinette waved her hands in front of her. That didn’t deter Adrien.

He held out the red cloak adamantly once more and took delight when her eyes lingering on it.

“The river stole your other one. Ladybug needs her cloak. It’s part of her mystery.” The only reason her iconic symbol was gone was because of him. If he would have crossed faster or listened to her better, then the river accident would have never happened.

He saw this cloak in chance as he was walking back and he was drawn to it, just like he was the first day they’d met. Adrien had purchased it without a second thought.

“It’s too much.” Marinette caved and allowed her fingers to run over the fabric. She had seen it earlier that day, and Adrien must have noticed her eyes linger.

“Isn’t that up to me to decide?” he teased, guiding the red cloak over her shoulders.

“But-“ Her excuse died in her throat as he lifted the hood in place and smiled.

“It’s perfect on you.” Adrien grabbed both of her hands and kissed the top of them.

It offered him great delight watching her face light up. Watching the blush of pleasure flit across her face, Adrien was captivated. Marinette was such an enigma. She was adventurous; every moment spent with her was thrilling in one way or another.

While he slowly realized what she meant to him, this day would be a day to experience what it would be like to explore those feelings without complications. The more time he spent with her, the more he dreaded their parting.

He could suggest that she return with him.

If he were honest, that thought had preoccupied him a lot lately. He wanted nothing more than for her to live in his castle. They could talk all day when he wasn’t attending to his Prince duties.

The corners of his mouth dipped down in a flicker.

Father wouldn’t approve at all.

His worries disappeared as Marinette’s voice brought him back to focus.

"Look!"

Adrien followed her pointing finger to see a magician surrounded by a crowd. He released a gasp as Marinette grabbed his hand and guided him to get a better look. But he was far less interested in the entertainment and more in the fact that she hadn't let go. Adrien bit his lip, glancing down before refocusing to the show. He took the plunge and wove his fingers through hers. She gasped and looked back at him, but he merely smiled and squeezed gently.

"I shall require a volunteer. How about you, miss?"

The simple question brought Adrien to the edge. If Marinette went up on the platform, it meant that
they would be separated. It meant he would have to fight through the crowd if anything happened to her.

Marinette provided a squeeze before releasing his hand. “I’ll be okay,” she promised.

The second she joined the magician, Adrien couldn’t bring himself to look away. Anxiety melted as her laughs filled the air. It was becoming his new favorite sound.

“Close your eyes,” Marinette ordered teasingly with her hands tucked behind her back.

Adrien obeyed with little resistance. He would do just about anything for her.

“Good.”

He could hear the smile echoing through her tone.

“Now, open your mouth.”

“This is the moment where you kill me, isn’t it?”

“Adrien!”

He felt her hand shove his arm playfully, leaving warmth in its wake.

“Or if you wanted to kiss me, Princess—” he kept his eyes closed but leaned forward closer “—you don’t need to ask.”

After hearing no response from Marinette, Adrien started to wonder if she would take him up on his offer. Before he could question it deeper, a flaky fruity pastry entered his mouth.

“It’s blackberry. My father used to make these all the time growing up.”

Adrien opened to see the light pink tint start to fade from her cheeks.

“Then we should pick some for the trip home.”

“You really don’t have to.”

“I want to. Stay right here; I’ll go get us some.”

Marinette stared befuddled as she watched Adrien trot ahead for pastries. He wouldn’t let her want for anything, would he? Between the pastries and the red cloak, she didn’t want to think about how much he’d spent. She did wonder if he bought into their story as a betrothed couple a little too much. They were still to return and, to her knowledge, he would marry Chloé. Even if he didn’t desire to do so.

“Mar, is that you?”

Her face scrunched as the rest of her body froze. Of course, it was only a matter of time before he found her. She had been called out by the magician after all. She didn’t look at him but rather fixed her eyes to the items a vendor had for sale.
“What are you doing here?” He continued, although she wished he would have just realized that she wanted to be left alone. Their last parting was anything but pleasant.

“I’m just passing through,” Marinette answered. She was on her way home, and with any luck, Luka would be traveling in the opposite direction.

“So are we- Clara and I are traveling through to Schmetterling to”-

“How is Viscountess Clara?”

Luka sighed in frustration. “Come on, Mar. Can’t we be civil?”

Marinette made a mistake and looked him in the eyes; instantly her knees began to wobble. “You can’t call me that anymore.” Her voice wavered with less confidence than she was hoping.

“I did try to fight for us.” Luka raised his voice, only to notice that he was drawing unwanted attention. “But with the pressure to marry within my station.”

No, she wouldn’t accept that excuse. He had every chance to fight for them— for her. “You could have tried harder. Instead, you gave in— like the coward you are.”

“Maybe one day you’ll learn that sometimes you need to pick duty over your heart. Feelings are fleeting, Marinette. Sooner you learn that the better.”

“It sure didn’t take you long to get over us,” Marinette gritted her teeth.

“I could say the same for you.” He nodded towards her ring.

Adrien turned his head just in time to see Marinette and someone he assumed to be Luka talking by a booth. By her body language, she was tense and her lips twisted into a frown. This wouldn’t do, not all.

Adrien found himself marching up the pair and wrapping his arms protectively around her and kissed her cheek.

“Hello Beloved, seems I can’t leave you alone for a minute without you acquiring a friend.”

The stare down started between the males, and if Marinette didn’t place her hand over his arm, Adrien would have every temptation to deck the guy.

“Adrien, this is Luka.”

So his suspicions were proven correct. He wished he had been wrong about this though. Adrien did gain pleasure out of watching the guy’s eyes widen in shock.

“Luka, this is my betrothed and love of my life.” Marinette reaches up and gently cupped one side of his cheek.

If words could cause him to become dizzy, that would do it. Love of her life, he feared his mind could daydream for hours, and he still had a mission; to get Marinette away from Luka.

“You’re-“

“I’m afraid you’ll have to excuse us. I’ve spent far too long away from her, and the music is calling
our names.”

He took her hand and walked Marinette towards the joyful sounds and the dancing.

“Adrien, what are you doing?”

He considered it an accomplishment to gain a giggle out of Marinette with a big sweeping bow. He grabbed her hand and brought her knuckles to her lips.

“Why, asking my love to join me in a dance.” It might be over the top, but if it distracted her from whatever Luka was saying, it was worth it. Through his bangs, he could see her arcing an eyebrow playfully.

“Do you know how to dance?”

His smile faltered. “Well, not really. I've seen people dance before and it looked fun. How hard could it be?” Although the more he watched the dancers, the more the knots tightened in that stomach. It was too late to back out now.

“You haven’t given me an answer, My Lady.”

“Well with such a polite invitation, how could I refuse?”

The two made their way hand in hand to the dance area. After the initial start, it didn’t take long to for him to figure out he had no clue what he was doing. Sure, hushed giggles from Marinette made the situation better, but Adrien was positive he was five moves behind everyone the entire dance.

He stopped when he felt Marinette squeeze his shoulder. “Come on, I’ll show you how.”

They found a nice spot right out of the dance circle to practice the moves before joining once more. Adrien had seen people dancing in the court several times and had to give them some credit. At this point he didn't know if he couldn’t dance at all or if his feet tripped over themselves when Marinette was around.

“Our hand goes here and we make a complete rotation, then we clap and switch directions.”

The second his hand touched hers a jolt of warmth spread through his chest. It had been happening all day, but that didn’t mean Adrien was used to it. His eyes kept darting between his feet and her enchanting blue eyes. For a brief second he allowed them to linger on her lips.

This proximity wasn’t helping. Adrien found he could barely do the moves correctly, let alone well.

“Then we join hands with the circle and continue around.” She pointed to the circle noting when to change. “I spin out, you come up behind me, grab my hips, and lift me in the air.”

“Right here?” Adrien hesitantly, putting his hand on either side of where he thought they should go.

“Right here,” she corrected, guiding his hands with hers.

Adrien swallowed hard when her fingers began to interlace with his.

“Marinette,” he whispered. Even if it was for a ruse, what he was feeling was real.
She turned her head towards him and his heart fluttered when he heard a small gasp. He lifted her anyway, but not very high. If he had they surely would have toppled to the ground.

“Then what happens?” His voice became more breathless because during that move, she hadn’t looked away once.

“I turn towards you and your arm slips across my body like this.”

Adrien’s eyes fluttered as her hand made its way across her torso. He mirrored her and could feel her tremble under his touch.

“And?” he whispered. Marinette didn’t answer. Instead, her mouth started to gape open.

The action meant to help her answer caught his gaze instead.

“Mari?” Adrien breathed, getting drawn in closer.

“Yes?”

Judging by her tone, she was just as affected as he was. Her eyes fluttered close and Adrien took the opportunity to gently capture her lips in his.

It was everything he could have imagined: soft, yet firm. The dance moves completely forgotten as he committed this to memory.

He pulled back, afraid of already crossing the line. His eyes remained closed trying to calm himself down. When he suggested they pretended to be betrothed this morning, he never thought-

“Mar, I”-

He didn’t get any more words out when Marinette crashed her lips back on his with eagerness. The force knocked the two of them back until his back hit the wall and out of sight from most of the carnival. Her hand rested on the back of his neck playing with the tufts of hair. Adrien’s hands rested on her hips.

It was Marinette who pulled away from the second kiss; her hands jumped to cover her lips.

“I shouldn’t have done that.”

Her words splashed over him like the way the river had engulfed him when he’d jumped in. His dazed thoughts came together as he realized what she’d said.

“Marinet”-  

What could he possibly say? He didn’t regret the kiss in the slightest. Throughout the day, it had become very apparent that he held feelings for her. But with this reaction- did it mean that she didn’t return them?

“I need to be alone. Please don’t follow me.” Marinette retreated back in the only direction familiar to them, Master Fu’s home.

Adrien managed to take two steps before he stopped. He had to respect her wishes, even if he was dying to know what he did wrong. With his options being limited, his feet took him begrudgingly back to the festival.
“Marinette, I can explain.” Adrien paced back and forth working a tread into the floor. His thoughts drifted towards she still harbored feelings towards Luka or possibly another man had caught her eye.

He had returned several hours later only to find some food cooked for him and Marinette locked away in a room.

At first, he tried to accept her need to be alone, but with having her within an arm’s reach all day, the distance now seem more like torture.

He had to go to her. Had to talk to her. Apologize for—

Adrien stopped himself short. He didn’t want to apologize. If he did that would mean the kiss was a mistake. And it wasn’t— not to him.

His mind replayed the moment over in his mind just as it had several times throughout the day. She had kissed back—that had to mean something right? Even if she did run away, for a moment she’d indulged in the potential what if.

If he told her how he felt, would that change things? A new surge of courage bubbled up and marched into the hallway. When he had reached halfway, Adrien stopped as the fleeting courage drained away.

What would he even say? Writing a speech for the masses proved easy, but matters of the heart were different. If he would have made it to Marinette’s room and she answered, his tongue would have tied on the spot.

Releasing a sigh, Adrien retreated to the kitchen. He knew if he went back to his room all resolve to talk to her would be lost for another time. He would figure out what to say. Even if it took all night.

“Mari, I’ve come to realize that I—that when it comes to you, I can’t stop— no, that’s not right,” he muttered to himself.

This would be a long night.

Marinette's eyes burst open, a gasp escaping her lips, the air reaching her desperate lungs.

It was just a dream.

She did not doubt that Adrien lay a couple of rooms over lost in his slumber.

Marinette was no stranger to nightmares, even ones involving the Prince. But this one was different.

He’d left her.

They had reached the end of their journey. Marinette was about to pour out how she felt - then a blonde Princess showed up draped in her best attire. She could do nothing as Adrien turned his attention to the Princess and proposed to her. They ran off into the sunset blissfully in love while she got tossed into prison for her crimes.
The whole thing seemed like a cruel trick considering Adrien confessed he didn’t want to marry Chloé, but if it weren’t her, it would be another.

Marinette stilled herself when she heard another voice. It was Adrien? She ventured closer to the door and cracked it open enough to hear what he was saying.

“I wanted to say that I think I might- ugh.”

She peeked her head out enough to see the Prince pacing in the kitchen.

“Adrien? What are you doing up?” She wouldn’t imagine any royalty spending their night worrying about her problems. He hadn’t stepped foot in his kingdom in weeks, unless he was concerned about his return. The words dropped to the bottom of her stomach, fear still lingered from her dream. That couldn’t happen, could it?

Adrien’s eyes shot wide in surprise. “Did I wake you?”

Marinette gripped her overcoat tighter. How could his green eyes make her feel so vulnerable?

“No,” she replied softly. “I couldn’t sleep.” Marinette only hoped that he didn’t dig further into her reasoning.

“Would you like to walk with me?”

Her mouth fell open, her hands started to fidget. She shouldn’t, not after she let her guard down earlier that day. But as Marinette’s head urged her to listen to reason, her heart begged her to live in the moment.

Her heart won.

Despite the cold night air, warmth radiated through every inch of her body as she curled up against Adrien’s arm. Marinette had protested when he first offered, but his smile was so convincing. She eyed Adrien as they continued to walk.

“Why couldn’t you sleep?” Her curiosity got the better of her. “I saw you pacing.”

His face fell and his hand rubbed sheepishly at his neck. “I couldn’t stop thinking.”

“About?” She continued walking but removed her arms as she hugged herself bracing for whatever answer was to come.

“I think you already know, Mar.”

His words stopped Marinette in her tracks. She didn’t have to turn her head to know where his focus was. The air turned thick with all that was unsaid. Marinette’s heart rapidly thumped in her ears.

The kiss.

That had to be what he was referring to. She had avoided him and the topic all evening. Even though she didn’t know how to respond, she couldn’t ignore it forever.

“You can just say it,” she whispered defending her heart from the truth. “That we got carried away, and that it was a mistake. I understand. A Prince has his duties.”

“Look, Marinette.” He guided her to on a nearby bench. “I’m bound to my duties as a Prince and
future heir of Schmetterling, but I can’t ignore what I’ve known for the past couple days.”

“Which is?” She asked as her world began to spin. She was suddenly grateful to be sitting down.

“I want you in my life. Marinette, the last couple days I’ve been driven mad with thoughts of you. How a single smile can brighten my day, or how your laugh is more intoxicating than the strongest ale.” He grabbed her hands in his own and squeezed. “That I’ve almost lost you twice since we’ve met and I refuse to allow it to happen again once we reach Luominen. Marinette, I want you to return with me.”

“But what about”-

“I shall take care of everything. All you need to do is say yes.”

“I will think about it,” she earnestly promised. “Such a big decision requires thought. Until then, I think you should hold on to this so our feelings don’t get more muddled.” Marinette placed his mother’s ring into his palm and gently folded his fingers over it. There were feelings for the Prince, she couldn’t deny that, but the past damage still remained. It was up to her to move past it if she wanted to be with him. She winced, watching Adrien’s crestfallen expression. She didn’t give him the answer he wanted to hear.

“I’m not confused in how I feel about you. I will hold on to this ring until I slip it on your hand for a real betrothal.”

“Now you’re being foolish, Adrien. Maybe you do not wish to be joined with Chloe, but I’m not a Princess. I have nothing to offer you. What if another other royals come along?”

Adrien threaded his fingers through her hair, resting his forehead on hers.

“I don’t want to be with them. I want you.”

“But”-

“What more must I do to prove to you that my feelings are genuine?”

What could she say to that? Marinette wanted to believe him, she truly did, but Luka had said similar things in the past and she lost him in the end.

“I want to believe you,” she confessed. “This will take some time to sink in.”

“I will give you all the time you need.”

Despite her fears, he was still supportive. Marinette would never grow tired of that. “It’s getting late, we should head back.”

The walk back was spent mostly in silence as her mind tried to digest what Adrien told her. He wanted her. The thought itself sent another swarm of butterflies loose in her stomach. Marinette glanced over at him for what seemed like the hundredth time and he still managed to catch her looking. Somewhere along the walk their little fingers had interwoven, flirting with the idea of holding hands.

Marinette felt her heart drop once they reached her room.

“Goodnight.” His voice filled the gap of the quiet between them.
“Wait, Adrien” Marinette grabbed his hand before he could take another step. As their eyes locked, she found herself leaning in. Her eyes fluttered closed with anticipation, but worry if this was the right decision evaporated the second his lips touched her. This kiss was different, their feelings were exposed: the only thing remaining was the undeniable attraction radiating between them.

“Mar-” Adrien’s hot breath danced along her cheek as he dragged his lips to place another kiss on her temple. “I should probably return to my room.”

Such behavior between them would be deemed inappropriate if anyone saw them, but all Marinette could think was she didn’t want to return to her slumber only to have nightmares of Adrien again.

“Stay,” she pleaded, guiding him a few steps into her room.

“Princess,” he whispered amongst another forehead kiss. “You know I can’t, but I’ll sit outside your door for a while and if you require me for any reason, I’ll come running.”

Her breath hitched, with a response like that, she would guess that he knew she was having nightmares. “Alright,” she agreed.

“Get some sleep.” Adrien wrapped his arms around her in a tight hug. “I’ll be right here if you need me, I promise.” The two parted and Adrien ventured to the door, before exiting he turned back one last time and offered a small smile. “Goodnight, My Lady. Until dawn rises for a new day, and I can see your beautiful face once more.” One bow later, he closed the door and she could hear him adjust to the floor adjacent to her room.

With a new wave of security wash over her, it wasn’t long until Marinette drifted back to a peaceful slumber.

Chapter End Notes

A.N- Told you all the fluff. Let me know what you think. We're close to nearing the end so I thank all of you for your amazing support.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

A.n- Happy Friday! I won’t keep you long.

Special thanks to Remasa who beta this chapter for me since life happened to my usual betas. You all should check her writing out. (Especially if you love Gabe).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They had been searching all night, but it was worth it. After four villages they had stumbled upon a man who had been healed by a potion. He gave Plagg directions, and the prince rewarded him for the information. He would get to meet the healer and convince him to save Tikki.

Plagg’s fist banged on the door, and then he waited. And waited.

Could he be hard of hearing? Or worse, illness had snatched him away from the living?

No— he couldn’t afford to think such things, not when Tikki’s life was on the line.

He knocked again and after a couple of seconds, he heard a rustling noise from inside. Of course, he was probably an old man whose days of rapid movement were long behind him.

The door swung open and stole the air away from his lungs. The doctor wasn’t old— he was a young man with blonde hair and a sleepy expression. If he squinted, it kind of looked like-

“Adrien?”

It had been at least two years since he had seen his friend. Some disagreement had occurred between their parents that stopped their visits together. Before, though, they had spent every summer growing up together. Adrien may as well have been his brother.

“Plagg?”

A series of laughter filled the air as the two embraced. What were the chances that they would meet now?

“What are you doing here?” Plagg asked.

“I was on my way to Luominen to visit you and Tikki and then—“ his voice cut out abruptly as his body sent him into a cough. “I got distracted.”

One of Plagg’s favorite pastimes was flustering his best friend. The color that flew to Adrien’s cheeks didn’t go unnoticed.

“What are you doing here?” Plagg’s face scrunched as reality started to set in that the healer was not the man standing in front of him. He opened his mouth to respond-

“Adrien?” The light color on his friend’s cheeks didn’t vanish as a voice broke up the reunion.

“Who’s there?”
When a dark-haired girl appeared right inside the doorway, hair was thrown up into a haphazard knotted bun and clothes wrinkled, Plagg couldn’t help but smirk, his eyes dipping between his friend and the mystery girl.

“So this is why you really never arrived. You found yourself a lover.” He eyed her twice over. “With such beauty I can hardly blame you.”

“Plagg!”

Adrien flushed, which only made the comment sweeter. Ruffled was an amusing state to watch his best friend.

“We’re not— I mean we haven’t...”

As much as his amusement was laughable, he didn’t want Adrien to keep digging himself into a deeper grave, especially if there was something blossoming with her.

“I’m Marinette,” she offered a smile, and a little head nod accompanied it shortly after. “Any friend of Adrien is a friend of mine.”

“Is one of your friends the healer by the name of Fu that supposedly lives here?”

“Oh.”

Just the tone of her tone made his stomach sink; this couldn’t be good.

“He’s not here.” Her tone was soft and when their eyes connected she offered a sympathetic look. “Yesterday he left a note saying that he was needed in another town to tend to an elderly woman there.”

“He was supposed to be here!” shouted Plagg, desperation turning his pleas feral.

This couldn’t be happening! He hadn’t tirelessly searched only to come up empty. This was the last opportunity he had to save Tikki. If he arrived back in Luominen and his beloved had passed away, he would never forgive himself.

“We will search the surrounding villages.”

Even as Plagg utter the words, a growl escaped one of his knight’s stomach, gaining everyone’s attention.

Marinette giggled and waved them inside. “I can whip up something for you and your men to eat. You’ll do no good searching if you’re starving.”

Reluctantly Plagg nodded. She was right; it had been a while since any of them had eaten. He motioned for them to dismount and followed the two inside.

This had better be worth his time. He had distinctly told people he was not to be disturbed when planning for the celebration of the anniversary of Adrien’s birth. Now he was on his way to the throne room because someone had valuable information that could not be ignored. Features stoned in place, he entered the room prepared for anything. Schmetterling was not short of enemies, but at least he had the peace of mind that Adrien was safe in Luominen.
He didn’t recognize the man that stood at the base of the stairs; youthful features and nervous posture. Gabriel started to regret his decision to agree to hold an audience. What could this boy offer to him of importance?

“Who are you?”

“Your Majesty, I’m Baron Luka Couffaine. I’ve traveled all this way to speak with you”-

“Yes,” Gabriel’s eyebrows knitted together. “I heard you have important news that could not wait. Although I don’t have an idea of what possibly you could tell me.”

"I came this way to speak to you about a problem that is spreading throughout "-

"And that is the crucial information. You waste my time. Request an audience and come back when you're notified that I can see you. I'm done." Gabriel turned around and stepped twice before the eager young baron's voice stopped him dead cold.

"I was surprised that you let your son out with his betrothed alone in the countryside, with rumors of unrest spreading throughout the kingdoms and all."

The words caused him to spin on his heels at the bold statement. "What do you mean?" Adrien pleaded for two weeks straight to visit one of his friends. Gabriel had mainly agreed just to stop his persistent request. To his knowledge, Princess Chloé was preparing for Adrien's return so that the proposal for the wedding could proceed. Traipsing across the countryside hardly seemed like an activity in which the blonde princess would participate.

"I saw Adrien and his betrothed Marinette Dupain-Cheng attending the festival in a town no more than a day's journey away from here."

“What?” The question jerked from his throat. “You must be mistaken.”

“I wish I was, Your Majesty. That’s how he introduced her.”

Gabriel held up his hand to silence him. “That is all I can hear today.”

“But Your Majesty, I traveled all this way to seek an audience with you.”

“And you shall get your audience, as soon as I return. For a reward for the information, you shall stay here as friends to the crown. One of the servants will show you the way.”

The boy bowed while repeatedly singing his praises. Once he was out of sight, Gabriel rolled his eyes. It was obviously flattery, something he had no time for. But if what this man said was true and Adrien had run off and done something as foolish as asking for the hand of another—he would have to repair the situation, and fast. His treaty with Bourdon only held if there was a wedding between Princess Chloé and Adrien. Whoever this girl was, she must have bewitched his son because Adrien had left the kingdom knowing full well what his duties were.

“Nooroo!” he shouted, rage edging his voice. “Ready the carriages! We leave at once. Send word to the Bourdon kingdom that we are going to need the princess.” Bringing two carriages seemed a waste, but Gabriel would rather waste then spend many days trapped in the same carriage as the princess.

“Yes, Your Majesty. Right away.”

The courtroom cleared not long after to give the king his privacy.
He sunk further into his throne as his eyebrows melded together.

“He was never this rebellious when you were around.” Gabriel’s gaze rested upon a picture of his late wife that resided on the opposite side of the room. Despite hanging there day in and day out, Adrien hadn’t adjusted to his mother’s death very well. Gabriel didn’t have an excuse to why Adrien decided to make the decisions that he had; his second son reminded him so much of Emilie. Maybe he needed guidance….

Gabriel quickly crossed the length of the room and pushed open the door enough to get the guards attention. “Tell Nooroo to send word to Felix; it’s time for the first prince to come home.”

“So what’s your story?” Plagg asked, leaning against the wall. He saw that Adrien was preoccupied with stories from his knights and took the opportunity to talk to the mystery lady that Adrien had chosen to keep company with. He would have recognized her if she made a pass through the courts. If she didn’t have a title, it meant Adrien met her outside the castle which instantly upped his curiosity.

Plagg watched as she snuck a glance at Adrien who roared with billowing laughter and a soft smile played with her lips.

“I’m a nobody who happened to be lucky enough to cross paths with him. He has saved my life—in my more ways than one.” Another dust of pink grew on her cheeks. “And I saved his.”

“You two must be close. What kind of king do you think he’d would be?”

“I can hardly see how my thoughts matter,” she dismissed it turning back to the dish.

“I’ve seen the way that he looks at you. I think it would matter to him.” Upon his words, she stopped stirring, and their eyes met. Plagg had known Adrien a long time and had never seen him act this way with a woman in the short time he had been here.

“I think he’ll be a strong and just king. Adrien loves his people and would put their well being first. He acts with his heart and his head and he will be the greatest king Schmetterling will ever see. Even though Felix is next in line, Adrien is more suitable for what’s best for his people.”

“You love him.” Plagg’s hushed tone didn’t take the punch out of the blunt statement. He watched her eyes grow big and in her flustered state almost burned herself on the pan.

“My feelings hardly matter.” She snuck another glance at Adrien and her shoulders slumped down. “We’re returning to Luominen, and then he’ll leave. A princess is waiting for a proposal.”

“I’ve known Adrien for a long time; I would give him some faith. If the way he looks at you is any indication of his feelings, then I’d say he would fight for you.”

“And pray tell, how does he look at me?”

“He looks at you like a sailor looks at the sea, full of wonder and awe - like a man who basks in the love of his beloved—“

“A silver tongue of flattery won’t convince me.”

Plagg didn’t continue. It was evident that she wasn’t ready to face whatever Adrien felt for her. He
didn’t want to drive a wedge by insisting he was right. If his hunch was correct, Adrien’s feelings for Marinette mirrored how he felt towards Tikki.

“So you have a someone that you’re that passionate for?”

“Tikki.”

“The princess of Luomine?” Marinette asked.

Plagg smiled softly. “She’s the love of my life.” The truth slipped off his tongue leaving warmth in its wake. Plagg knew that if something did happen to Tikki, he wouldn’t be able to find another like her.

“That’s quite a declaration, and she feels the same way?”

“I’m sure she does, but”— he paused trying to find the right words and the strength to say them, “she has fallen very ill due to poison. The court physician has done everything in his power to heal her, but nothing is working. I overheard him talk of a physician in these parts that wields a potion that some claim as magic. I thought I would be able to plea for a potion—“

“Only to find out he’s gone,” Marinette finished for him.

“I’m afraid that without the potion, she’ll die.”

“Wait a second!” Marinette’s eyes blew wide open. Her sudden outburst caught him entirely off guard. Unless she knew precisely where the healer was, he wouldn’t be able to help. His time was running out, and it was more than a home cooked meal could fix. Her sudden excitement was nothing short of intriguing; when Marinette raced off, he glanced over to Adrien who shrugged. There were noises coming from where Marinette disappeared, and moments later returned a vial in hand.

“Fu left this with me. In a note, he said it had mystical healing properties. Do you think you can use it on Tikki?”

Plagg’s eyes widened. “This is from him?” he asked reaching out, his fingers grazing the bottle gently. “And you’re just giving it to me?”

“She’s obviously means the world to you, and you need to more than I do. Go, save her.”

“I won’t forget this,” he promised, holding it close to his heart. “I’ll set out for Luominen immediately. I insist that you make use of my knights and horses and let them accompany you back.”

The offer was beyond generous. Their feet had to hurt from their journey. If this potion worked, he would be in her debt for life; a simple gesture would not be enough. Plagg ran out the door, and the blonde prince followed.

“Thank you, Plagg.” Adrien replied with a smile.

“I’ll see you soon, my dearest friend.” They shook hands which rapidly dissolved into a hug.

Plagg missed their adventures together, and now that he knew that Adrien didn’t hold a grudge for whatever occurred between their fathers, he would extend the invite for him to visit Tuho often.

“I can see why you’re in love with her,” Plagg stated in a low tone so that Adrien alone would hear
him. “Marinette brings out the best in you. Anyone who watches you can see that.”

“I’m going to marry her someday.” Adrien breathed out before releasing their embrace.

Plagg looked over Adrien’s shoulder at Marinette now standing in the doorway wearing a warm smile.

“Then the kingdom of Schmetterling is lucky indeed.”

Plagg made a couple strides forward, but found his feet frozen as his hands clutched the bottle tighter. He had sped ahead galloping as fast as the horse would allow only to find the seed of fear had grown inside him. If this worked, then she would wake up, and they could continue with their plans for their future together. If it didn’t

Then he squandered away the remaining time he had with her, and he would hate himself forever. He had left Adrien, Marinette and his guards all behind to race ahead alone to give his beloved the best chance that he could.

Plagg’s knees wobbled until they threatened to give out beneath him; a nearby chair had to lend the support that he needed.

“Please wake up,” he pleaded, “I need you.”

Part of him regretted asking to be alone, but he knew that the last thing he wanted was to give the queen any hope only for it to shatter. One hand shifted behind her head to hold it up as he gently forced her lip open so the liquid would flow down easy. His fingers traced the outline of her face slowly dipping into her dark locks.

The only thing to do now was to wait.

He tried to breathe but his lungs crushed against him, and yet his eyes didn't deter from Tikki. Plagg had done as much as he could, but if the medicine didn't work, he didn't know what he would do. Going back to his kingdom would be the obvious step; staying might unearth the painful reflections of what could have been. The easy thing would be to leave, but with all the bonding that occurred over the last several weeks, Plagg wasn't sure he could go and leave the queen in her state. As much as he loved Tikki with every fiber of his being, the queen was her mother. He couldn't even imagine how she would feel. He had a feeling that he would have to stay for a while before it felt right to return home. A mourning period would be perfectly acceptable after all.

Plagg hated that he allowed his mind to go to this possibility, and with a couple minutes with no improvement, his stomach churned. He reached out his hand and took hers.

"Come back to me," Plagg whispered. The exhaustion of the past several days started to catch up as his eyelids grew heavy. Despite his determinization to be there for her, sleep won out and swiftly claimed him.

Marinette glanced over at Adrien as one of Plagg’s knights helped her off the horse. She didn’t know if the blond’s sour mood had to do with the journey back or that she rode with a knight when he insisted in order to give the prince his own horse.
“We’ll rest here for the night and arrive tomorrow morning in Luominen. I’ll get a fire going and then we can get food. Ivan will take the first watch then I’ll switch so the prince and you can get your sleep.”

An offer to help with the food floated on her tongue, but the knights sprung into action leaving her alone with Adrien.

His arms engulfed her and Adrien’s nose caressed the outside edge of her cheek.

“I missed you.”

Marinette laughed at the notion. “I haven’t been more than a horse length away since we left.”

“There was more than enough room on my horse.” He grumbled against her ear.

“But you’re the prince,” she replied teasingly. “Obviously you need your own.”

“I’d much rather be the knight that rode with you.”

“Well,” a coy smile formed, “if you wish not to be a prince then you,” she tapped his chest playfully, “can help me gather berries to eat.”

“As you wish.”

“Mari,” Adrien’s voice brought her back from the edge of consciousness, “are you asleep?”

The darkness surrounded the pair, but as her eyes adjusted, she could see Adrien sit up.

“No,” she answered quietly not wanting to wake the other guard. Truth be told, she had been trying to fall asleep for the last hour with little success.

“I can’t believe that tomorrow, we’ll be back in Luominen…”

His voice faded out, and by his tone, she could hear the wavering doubt laced in between his words. Her first instinct was to reach out to grab his hand. She followed his lead until her body rested against his arm.

“What will happen once we arrive?” It had been the question that had been plaguing her mind since she got on the horse.

"I was hoping that you would come back with me." Their hands laced and Marinette hummed with contentment as he wrapped his arms around her once more.

Adrien’s confession still rang vividly in her mind, the idea that he wanted her to return to Schmetterling still caused butterflies to flutter.

"And if your father disapproves of me?" Marinette had little doubt that she would gain the king’s approval, especially since Adrien would pick her over Chloé.

"Then I’ll stand up to him," Adrien replied without missing a beat. "I’ll tell him that I want to marry for love, and not be forced into an arranged marriage with Chloé."
Adrien's answer only caused her heart rate to quicken despite her protests. When he first brought up the subject, she had put off her answer because she didn't know what to say. Marinette still didn't know what she was going to do. Her heart wanted nothing more, but her mind knew it would take more than just a fantasy to go with him. There were obstacles they would have to overcome.

“I’m sure the princess wouldn’t approve.”

“I don’t care,” he tightened his embrace in support. “When I said that I want my world to include you, I meant every word.”

“This won’t be easy, you know.”

“That’s what makes this worth fighting for.” He leaned in and kissed her cheek in a moment of privacy in the dead of night.

The temptation to turn her head to allow his lips to explore hers was overwhelming, but it was almost time for the knights to swap shifts soon. Marinette was sure she wouldn’t be able to live it down if they caught her in such a vulnerable moment. Once they reached Luominen, this behavior would have to change. The people would view him as a Prince of Schmetterling, and she wouldn’t fit in to that world. The fear was the only reason that she hadn’t given him an answer. But if he believed that they could be together, maybe it was time to close her eyes and take the plunge.

“Adrien?”

“Yes?”

His hot breath dancing across her neck caused her vision to spin even though she was leaning firmly against him.

“Are you sure about your desire for me to return with you?”

“More than anything.”

“Then how could I not join you?”

“Really?”

Warmth fluttered through her body as she heard his breath hitch. The earnestness and eagerness in his voice were hard to ignore.

Marinette melted into his touch as he drew her chin up so their lips could meet. Between kisses and the need to catch her breath his forehead rested on hers so he was never too far away. That’s when she heard it.

“I love you, Mari.”

A single utterance that shut down her brain. He loved her. She closed her eyes at the sensation of his fingertips tracing the edge of her face before gently dragging down the length of her neck and across her top of her shoulder. The fingers curled around the top of her arm in a gentle squeeze.

“I think I love you too, Adrien.” The words tumbled out like water gushing out of a bucket from a well. She hoped that it wouldn’t offended him that she wasn’t a hundred percent sure; these feelings had sprung on her like a thunderstorm on a clear day.

“Oh, sire.”
The two jumped away from each other, embarrassed at being caught in such an intimate moment.

“I’m sorry for disturbing you. I’ll be on my way.” Ivan disappeared as quickly as he came leaving the pair alone once more.

It had been exactly what Marinette had been concerned about in the first place, although after the initial embarrassment faded, it wasn’t as bad as she imagined.

“Marinette.” With just her name he captured her attention again. Even with the darkness she noticed the sparkling radiating off the ring from the moonlight. “I want you to have this; with it you hold my heart.” He placed the ring in the palm of her hand and closed her fingers on top of it.

She didn’t have a chance to protest before he continued.

“Do you know what I told Plagg today? I told him that I would marry you one day if you’ll have me, and I fully intend to keep that promise. As long as you hold onto that ring then I know that there’s a chance for us.” He lifted her hands up until his lips touched her skin.

“I’ll take good care of it.” What else could she say? How could she argue with his wishes? Her hands dipped underneath her hair and unclasped her necklace before sliding the ring on the chain.

“If this is your heart then it belongs next to mine.”

They settled back in side by side and before long they drifted off to a peaceful slumber.

Plagg’s head jerked up, waking from his dream state. How long had he been out? He remembered feeding Tikki the potion -- Tikki! His eyes flew to the pillow. His beloved still slept soundly in front of him.

His heart plummeted. Did that mean that it didn’t work?

The effects should have taken place by now, and if it didn’t work that meant --

The twitching of her fingers out of the corner of his eye broke his train of thought. Hope filled within his heart. He watched Tikki start to stir. He collapsed to his knees by her bedside, unable to tear his eyes away.

"Come back to me, Tikki," the prayer repeated on his lips again and again. "Someone fetch Her Majesty," Plagg yelled towards the door.

He had never been so relieved to see her big blue eyes flutter open. He wanted to scream for joy, but his mouth was dry that he couldn't form another word. Instead, he engulfed her in his arms.

It worked!

"Plagg?" Her voice was weak.

er fingers tangled into his hair as she clutched him tighter. The smell of wildflowers lingered in her hair. He wanted nothing more than to hold her tight with that scent constantly filling his nostrils. It was heaven.

"What happened?" she muttered against him.
"It doesn't matter," he replied, his voice whisper soft. All that mattered was she was alive and would grow stronger day after day. Although thankful, Plagg still had several questions that he needed answered, so he pulled away from her with extreme reluctance. "Do you remember what happened?"

Her stunning blue eyes blinked up at him a few times as she gathered her thoughts. "After you stopped me in the hallway, I retreated to my room." Her brow furrowed as she recalled the fateful moment. "Charles was waiting for me. He offered me a drink. I… I started to feel faint. I don’t remember anything after that." She rubbed one hand over her forehead with a pained grimace.

Plagg snarled as he resisted the urge to call out a search party to bring the traitor to justice. How dare he think that there would be no consequences for trying to kill his beloved!

"Plagg," she grabbed his arm, earning his attention. "I'm alright now, I promise."

Her words soothed his anger instantly, like water dousing the hot flames of his vengeance.

“I’m so glad you’re alright.” His hand cupped her face, his fingers playing amongst the dark locks. “I thought I lost you.”

“But you saved me,” she gently reminded. “Now we can continue with our plans.”

“Plans?” He asked quirking his head to tilt to one side.

“The wedding, silly.”

The wedding. Of course, with his excitement that she was healed it completely slipped his mind. Their wedding day was set for two days time. His parents were arriving that night and now he could introduce Tikki properly.

Before he could respond, the queen burst into the room, tears streaming down her face.

“I heard that—“ her breath caught in her throat as her eyes landed upon Tikki. “I can’t believe it.”

Plagg stood to the side to allow the queen to hug her daughter. He watched as the tears followed freely and he could barely make out the words: “I thought we lost you.”

He should give them some privacy. As he reached the archway his focus shifted back to the reunion between mother and daughter. Tikki’s eyes locked on him. She mouthed ‘I love you’ which shot a spiral of warmth inside his chest.

Once he closed the door, his eyes closed and he slid down the wall until meeting the floor. All the emotions crashed over him as he, too, shed a few tears of happiness.

Tikki was alive and well; everything would be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 9 is already done. Maybe I’ll update early, who knows. Helping my sister with the wedding is time consuming. Let me know what you think!
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

A homecoming of sorts

Chapter Notes

A.n.- Happy Weekend all! I appreciate all your lovely comments last chapter. They warmed my heart. The story is winding down, and I'm so excited to see how you all like it. Enjoy the reading!

Thank you to TOG84 and Blue for Betaing this chapter for me. I appreciate both of you so much.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Don’t be nervous.” Plagg slid his hands down Tikki’s arms until he found her hands.

Tikki giggled back at him. “Strangely that doesn’t make me any less nervous.” The laughter died as her nerves hit her full force. “I mean, what if they don’t like me”-

He cupped her face, and any other excuses died on her tongue.

“That’s not possible.”

She leaned into his touch, grateful that he was still here. Her mother told her that Plagg stayed by her side every second except when he went to retrieve the potion that healed her.

“They’ll love you because I do. You’re perfect for me, my love. And in two days, we will be joined forever.”

“How can you be so calm?”

“Because I know I can handle anything as long as you’re by my side.”

Tikki nodded, looped her arm through his, and they entered the dining hall. Her mother had taken up the responsibility of hosting by chatting and eating with Plagg’s parents until they arrived.

“Tikki!” They stood from their seats. “We were worried, but we’re so glad you’re back to full health.”

Tikki offered a polite smile not sure how to react, but not wanting to insult them. “I am, too. I’m sorry that I scared everyone.”

“Do you... remember what happened?” King Richard asked, ignoring the look from his son.

Tikkie shifted uncomfortably despite Plagg squeezing her hand as an apology. “I don’t know. I was...
talking to Charles, my mother’s advisor, and then I blacked out. I can faintly remember hearing people talking, but”- Her voice wavered until it faded to silence. Since she had woken up, that question had plagued her. Each time it was asked, it frustrated her further that she couldn’t answer what happened. Charles could have poisoned her, or it could have very easily been someone else who had access to her room. Who she angered to the point that they would want to kill her was still a mystery. The knowledge that whoever did this to her was still out there made fear creep on her skin.

“Father, I was hoping I may speak to you alone just for a moment.”

Tikki silently thanked him for pulling the attention off her. The two mothers remained, but she hoped that she could turn the conversation towards her impending wedding.

“I was filling in Jocelyn on the wedding preparations. She was hoping that after the wedding that you would journey to Tuho for the coronation.”

Tikki blinked allowing the request to sink in. A toss of worry flickered at the notion. Tikki had never traveled much growing up. It wasn't a surprise that the coronation would take place in Plagg's kingdom. It was sinking in how much her life would change after marriage. Plagg gave her the strength to face all the challenges that might come up. They boosted each other's strengths and helped with their weaknesses.

"Of course.” How could she not accept the queen's wish? Plagg's people would need her just as much as her own, and the first step would be to get to know them.

She had to have faith in her abilities and that her parents had taught her everything she needed to succeed.

Nathalie glanced out the window to witness the outskirts of the mountains turned thick forest and then rolling farmland. She hadn't heard from her daughter since she'd sent the note that she was traveling to meet her. Part of her worried, but she had to believe that Duusu was trained well enough to survive whatever came her way.

If all went well, then Duusu stopped the union between Luominen and Tuho. The break would allow other Kingdoms to align and seize Luominen. It was nothing personal against the Queen or her daughter, but throughout the years it had become hard to ignore that their region always yielded more crops, pulled in more fish, and prospered in everything they did. It was almost as if the core of luck was woven throughout the land itself.

Nathalie had first pointed out the change between the kingdoms to Gabriel many years ago. He had dismissed her then - or rather Emilie had convinced him to. But after his beloved wife’s death, Gabriel had swung back around amongst his grief.

It was then that they hatched a plan. If they gained Tuho and Bourdon on their side, then Luominen would be overpowered and helpless even if the other kingdoms decided to help.

The one thing that she hadn’t expected was to fall for Gabriel along the way. He had broken through her stone heart after she lost her first love. Nathalie knew that one day his eyes would be open and he would return her affections.

“Your Majesty.”

The voice of her servant caught her off guard. Amongst her reminiscing, they had arrived in Luominen.
“Thank you, Cerdic.”

He offered out a hand to assist her out of the carriage. No more than a couple of steps towards the castle and Queen Felice stood at the top steps of the palace.

“It has been too long, my friend,” Nathalie lied between her teeth. The only reason she stepped foot in this kingdom before it was under her control was to meet with her daughter to move to the next stage of the plan. “But as you can imagine my journey was long and I would like to rest.”

“I’m afraid we have to discuss your daughter, Nathalie.”

“Duusu? What about her?”

“Your daughter seems to be guilty of conspiring with my advisor to poison my daughter and lay ruin to Luominen.”

“That doesn’t sound like a thing my Duusu would do.” By the sound of it, her daughter had gone overboard. If she would have known what she planned she would stress the importance of not getting caught. To think she trusted her with a mission with as crucial as this one.

“I think she had guidance from outside the walls as well.”

Nathalie’s eyes narrowed at Felice. It was enough of an accusation to show where her thoughts were without declaring war on the spot. Her best course of action was to stand her ground. Any less and she may as well surrender the war now. “I shall speak to her at once and let her know that such behavior is not tolerated. Obviously, your advisor took advantage of her and convinced her to act in such a way.”

“I see.”

Victory over Felice for now, but Nathalie did not doubt that she would be cornered once more.

“I’ll leave you to speak to your daughter. Should I prepare a room for you two, or are you not planning on staying for the wedding?”

“Wedding?” Nathalie parroted.

“For Tikki and Plagg.”

If Felice decided to rattle her, it worked. Her facial features failed for no more than a couple of seconds.

“I hadn’t realized that she had awoken. What a miracle,” she replied as well as she could. So not only had her daughter failed in her, but she had done so miserably. She had to confer with Gabriel before her next course of action.

“Show me to my daughter. After I speak to her, you’ll have your answer.”

After several days of rotting in the dungeon, Duusu started to wonder if her mother would ever come. Her shoulder muscles were stiff. She was long past hungry after refusing to eat, and her vision had started to blur.

What if she’s not coming, her mind whispered. You’ve only been a disappointment. You failed.

Duusu tried to ignore the dark thoughts and spend her energy shifting to ease the pain on her body.
This was all her fault. If not for her eagerness to please her mother, she would be relaxing as her maidservant brought whatever she needed on a whim. Duusu was at the point where she would kill for a hot bath.

At the sound of footsteps, she froze. Her stomach released a growl, and this time she wouldn’t turn away food.

“I keep asking myself.” The voice chilled Duusu’s blood and prepared herself for the verbal lashing that would ensue. “How can my daughter continue to be such a disappointment? Any thoughts, Duusu?”

“Mother, I can explain.” The words tumbled out. Allowing the advisor to take the fall was the perfect plan. He hadn’t known that she’d intended to double-cross him, and she certainly hadn’t expected him to run off in the night leaving her in this mess.

“Close your mouth, you insolent girl.” The burst of rage calmed as Nathalie’s voice returned to cold and rigid. “I gave you one job, and you couldn’t even carry it out correctly. Do you know how much scrutiny I’m under because of your mistake?”

“I didn’t think”-

“No, Duusu. You didn’t. If I had my way, you would stay in here so you couldn’t mess up my plan further.”

Tears pricked at the edges of her eyes, but she held them in. To cry would be to show weakness, and she didn’t want to confirm what her mother already thought of her.

“I can do better,” Duusu promised, lurching as far forward as she could. She hoped that her mother would take her words to heart. Otherwise, she would have to keep the rats' company longer.

“For your sake, I hope so.” She glared. “Here’s the plan. I’ll get you out of here once I can speak to Gabriel and make sure you didn’t cause any permanent damage. You keep your head down and mouth shut. We don’t need war; we are not sure we can win because of your failures.”

Duusu flinched at the word. Of course, her mother hated her; she didn’t accomplish her mission. She had tried so hard over the years to gain her approval, but the more she tried, the less she was convinced that it was achievable. After so many attempts, it only left her broken.

*Do you even love me?* The question tantalized her tongue, but she didn’t dare ask. Deep inside, she feared the answer. No one loved damaged goods.

“Yes, mother.”

“Good.” She pulled back. “Maybe we’ll get out of this.” Nathalie turned and made her way to the stairs without looking back.

Duusu sunk back down to the ground soft sobs to escaping her lips.

Was it so wrong that she wished her mother’s plan to fail? If she gave up on this ridiculous plan, they might return to a semblance of a caring mother and a loving daughter. This pending war and Gabriel had been the two things her mother had been obsessing with for the last couple of years.

She couldn’t see that it brought down their kingdom and their people feared the queen and herself instead of loving them. From the moment she arrived, she noticed a difference between the realms. She dared say she was jealous of Tikki.
Even if she wanted to stop her mother, she didn’t know how. No one would believe her.

Marinette found her heart elated the second they entered the city. The excited whispers greeted them that Princess Tikki had awoken. The potion had worked. At that moment, Marinette didn’t doubt she did the right thing by giving it away. Stopping by the castle to meet Plagg’s betrothed was high on her priority list before they left for Schmetterling. By the way Plagg talked about Tikki, Marinette was convinced that they would get along well. All of her interactions with royalty had been much different than she expected and made her question her original thoughts.

"We're back." She didn't know if it was excitement or dread boiling up in her stomach. There were so many questions swirling in her mind making her dizzier with every step. Adrien's voice calmed her instantly.

“I told you nothing would go wrong,” he teased, wrapping his arm around her. “After we check that Plagg and Tikki are ok, I’ll make preparations so you can go back home.”

Home. The word spread more warmth through her than the kiss Adrien planted on her head. She had spent all this time running from the idea until she realized that’s what she wanted all along.

“I love you,” she whispered into his shoulder.

“I’ll never get tired of you saying that,” he whispered back into her ear.

Marinette heard the murmurs start and gently pushed away. The amount of touching between them had become a steady normal over the last couple of days, but now they were back within the kingdom. It had become more taboo. Surely people would recognize him as the Prince, and he was surrounding himself with non-royalty. It would fuel the rumor mill for the day.

As soon as they rounded the corner, Marinette’s blood froze. It hadn’t occurred to her that the whispers and stares had less to do with them and more than King Gabriel of Schmetterling and Princess Chloé of Bourdon were exiting the carriages and blocking the front entrance to the palace. She had hoped they hadn’t spotted them - only to be disappointed when a shrill shriek filled the air.

“Adri-kins!”

In a blink of an eye, he was wrapped in a tight hug from a blonde Princess that Marinette could only assume was Chloé. “You were gone so long; I missed you. Did you bring anything back for me?”

Marinette’s first reaction was to resist the urge to burst into laughter. Chloe was quite the charmer, but one wouldn’t simply ask for—

The ring.

That must be what she was referring to. Her face paled, and her hand flew up to her necklace on instinct. Chloe could claw at Adrien all she wanted, but the only way she would get the ring was off her corpse. She could feel another pair of eyes on her, and when she searched, she met the cold gray eyes of His Majesty Gabriel.

“You can go finish putting our horses in the stable.”
Chloe’s command pulled her back to the present.

Marinette’s mouth dropped to say something—anything, but any idea of how she would respond died in her throat. Adrien answered for her.

“She’s not a servant, Chloe. This is Marinette, my”—

“Adrien, a word. Now.” The harshness rippled through the air sending a shiver to shoot down her spine.

Marinette helplessly watched as Adrien shot her a sympathetic glance before following a little distance as not to be heard.

Chloe uttered complaints with a sulk, but Marinette tuned her out. She found that she couldn’t look away from Adrien’s interaction with his father. Body tense, hands curled by his side, and a permanent frown displayed. Gabriel didn’t fare much better, his blonde eyebrows knitted and jaw rigid. She didn’t have to be close to understand that his father didn’t appreciate Adrien’s disappearing act nor the fact that he’d showed up with her.

Her fingers crept up to her necklace once more, pulling strength from the promise that came with it. They knew this would be hard. Adrien’s father wouldn’t relent to the idea easily.

Even if he did, Marinette doubted that Chloe would give up. Judging from her behavior, she got whatever and whoever she wanted. She wouldn’t accept that the Prince would choose someone like her. Both situations had to be handled differently, as one day she would want Gabriel’s approval. She took a couple steps forward in attempts to eavesdrop inconspicuously.

“Adrien, you’re making a spectacle. Now stop being foolish and follow me so we can pay respects to the Queen and the newly betrothed.”

Marinette’s heart sunk in her chest. She could see why he didn’t talk fondly of his father. The one thing that Gabriel didn’t say but it was evident if you read between the lines.

Leave her behind.

Adrien’s father wanted nothing to do with her and was probably disgusted that his son’s affections lay with her. She wrapped her fingers around her necklace once more, combating the rising anxiety.

“Not without Marinette,” he growled.

Adrien’s fierceness surprised her but reassured her all the same. She hadn’t meant to cause tension. Maybe this is what Luka meant when he said to put duty before his heart. Without her in the picture, it would be a much different reunion playing out in front of her.

“She is a friend of Prince Plagg, and she aided in the healing of Princess Tikki. I’m sure they would enjoy a visit from the woman who made their wedding possible.”

“I see.” Gabriel didn’t say anything more, but he seemed to yield to Adrien’s request.

Marinette reached out her arm to grasps hold of his sleeve before he could take too many steps up the stairs.
“I’ll find my way to you later. There’s someone I have to see.”

“Are you sure, I could come with you.”

It softened her the way his eyebrows narrowed in concern. He treated her as if the King and Princess weren’t with them. It only reinforced the memory of when he said he would fight for her. Is this what it looked like?

“You may have faced thieves and bandits, but I don’t think you’re ready for Alya just yet,” she teased quietly. If Adrien’s father knew half the stuff he did, odds were he would lock him in the castle for the rest of his days.

“I’ll be fine, Adrien. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

The answer seemed to calm his nerves enough that he didn’t protest further. He gave her one last loving glance before falling in line behind his father - with plenty of space between him and Chloe. As soon as he disappeared through the door, the smile she was holding in place fell. She hadn’t expected to meet his father in such a way, let alone the woman that the King obviously preferred. Why else would he bring her here? The time before Adrien returned to Schmetterling was drawing nearer. What if Gabriel didn’t allow her to come with them? Sure, Prince Adrien held some power, but Gabriel’s word was law in their kingdom. He could quickly banish her if he desired and there was nothing she could do about it. Just because they were back safely didn’t mean they were out of the woods yet.

Marinette stopped as soon as Alya's house came into view. It was weird not having Adrien hovering around her, but this was one visit that she rather have on her own. If he came with her, there would be no doubt Alya would bombard him with questions. Marinette couldn't do that to him. It was a fate worse than anything they've ever faced to get his mother's ring back.

Instantly her hand went up to clutch up the ring that she stored next to her heart. Marinette lifted the chain until the ring reached her lips.

Alya wouldn't hate her for her decision to go with him, would she? They had always been together through thick and thin throughout the years. She would like to think Alya would be happy for her.

Marinette took the necessary courage and knocked on the door.

"Marinette! Marinette!" Immediately, she was engulfed in multiple arms.

"It's so good to see you!" She countered, returning the hug. "So full of energy. Do you know where your sister is?"

"She's inside!" They squealed. "Say that you'll stay."

Marinette smiled at their excitement and bent down to their level. "Only for a little while." Their disappointment drowned their features. She couldn't leave them like that. "But why don't you grab your dolls to show me."

"OK!" The twins ran inside, and Marinette's eyes wandered up the door to find her best friend wearing a smirk.
"You really know how to worry someone, don't you?" Alya crossed her arms over her chest. "I was scared that you-" She cut herself off, but Marinette didn't need her to finish the sentence.

"I know, and I'm sorry." She never intended to worry her that much.

“What aren’t you telling me?” Alya raised an eyebrow, “You are terrible at lying.”

Marinette cuddled her arm and her lip curled between her teeth. Of course, Alya spotted a difference in her, even if she didn’t know what caused this change. Marinette had met Alya shortly after Luka left her.

"I might leave." Marinette’s words made the situation more real to her. But Plagg had been right; she was in love with Adrien, she couldn’t deny it. Glancing back to Alya, Marinette braced herself for the plethora of questions.

"Where?" Alya’s eyes shot wide and mouth ajar.

Marinette swallowed hard. "Schmetterling."

Alya started to flounder, "what brought this on? There's a boy, isn't there."

“You remember that guy from the tavern.”

“Him?”

“Turns out he is the Prince of Schmetterling. He wanted the bag we stole, but I had given it to you. He said I could face the gallows if we could retrieve what we stole.”

“Marinette!” Alya chided.

“At first I tried to get away, but the more time I spent with him, the more I grew fond of him. We came to rely on each other, and we make a good team. I’ve never felt like this towards anyone, Alya.”

“Is he just as smitten with you?”

“Perhaps even more so. It was his idea that I return with him.” Marinette bit her lip. “Alya, he wants me to be his queen one day.”

Squeals filled the air as Alya threw her arms around Marinette and spun her around. The high faded quickly as the somber truth meant they would be separated.

"I'm going to miss you." Alya ran her hand through Marinette's hair. "What am I going to do without you?"

She knew where her best friend was coming from. The idea of leaving her behind tore at her heart, but it would be necessary for her to grow. Marinette knew that she couldn’t keep thieving and certainly couldn’t keep to her original plan to become isolated. "You're strong Alya; I know you will survive." She could feel the tears starting to well in her eyes. "If you start to miss me, then come and visit. I'm sure Adrien would agree to you staying at the castle with me."

"Does he make you happy?" Alya asked.

Memories of their adventure flashed through her mind, and each one caused her to smile more.

"More than you could possibly know."
Chapter 10 is already done, so you might get an update monday if you want it bad enough. Let me know what you think! I love and appreciate you all.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Mystery builds

Chapter Notes

A.n- so it’s Monday! A couple days late and for that I apologize. But hopefully it will be worth it.

Thanks to Remesa who stepped in again to beta. Check out her stories.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tikki patted down her dress for what seemed like the hundredth time, but as it calmed her nerves she found she didn’t mind. In just a couple of hours the ceremony would take place, binding her heart to Plagg’s as well as a new start to both kingdoms. Her love for Plagg didn’t eliminate the nerves of standing before her whole kingdom making that promise.

“You look beautiful, Princess.”

“Marinette, I told you that you can call me Tikki,” she replied, the two sharing a smile. Plagg had filled her in of his adventures. She knew that without the girl standing in front of her that she would have died. A simple thank you wouldn’t suffice.

“And I’m sure when I’m walking down the aisle, a certain blonde prince won’t be able to take his eyes off the girl sitting next to him,” she added with a wink.

Marinette blushed and turned her head away, but Tikki has already seen the results of her teasing. She had arranged for Marinette sit towards the front next to Adrien. Princess Chloé has thrown a fit about sharing a bench with commoner, to which she suggested that the princess sit on the other side of the aisle away from Adrien. Chloé wasn’t thrilled with the idea, but she stopped her whining but not before muttering something about not leaving Adrien’s side. It was about time that someone stood up to her.

“Prince Adrien is lucky to have found you.”

Marinette’s eyes fell to the ground.“His father doesn’t seem to share of that opinion.”

Tikki took the opportunity to hook her finger Marinette’s chin to lift her head. “Just because there are challenges, doesn’t mean that you two aren’t right for each other. You are all the prince has talked about since you returned. There is no doubt what he feels for you.” She reached for Marinette’s hands. “All the king needs is to spend more time around you and see how his son dotes upon you. You will win him over yet.” She couldn’t guarantee her words, but deep down Tikki knew it to be true. How could someone not love Marinette?
“I don’t know how you’re so sure.”

Tikki caught Marinette’s arm, stopping her in place. With a warm smile, she said to the girl, “I know because of your character and the love that you two share.” What Marinette didn’t know was what Plagg and she had in store for her after the wedding. A gift—in exchange for saving her life. The nature of the gift would ease Marinette’s burdens, and go with her wherever she might go. Marinette turned and when Tikki opened her mouth and stepped forward to continue, something whizzed past inches from the Princess’s face. Her eyes squeezed shut as a scream ripped from her throat. Yet it failed to drown out the sound of the thwack into the wood behind her.

“Tikki, are you”— Marinette’s voice caught up in a gasp.

When Tikki gathered the courage to peek, she noticed Marinette’s face drained of color and when she fully removed her hands she saw it. An arrow no less than inches from her own face.

Tikki stood there as Marinette raced to the open window.

“What did you see?” she asked.

“Nothing useful,” Marinette replied after a moment of peering in the distance. “He was cloaked in simple garb from head to toe. He ran towards the east side. The guards may be able to cut him off.”

“Princess Tikki! We heard a scream”- the guards froze in the doorway at the sight of the arrow. “What happened?”

“We were getting ready and next thing we know this arrow flew in and almost hit us,” Marinette answered.

“Someone get Her Majesty and the princes.”

“Send guards to the east side of the palace, he headed in that direction,” Marinette ordered frantically.

Amongst all the chaos, Tikki found herself on the calm side. If they intended to kill her, they would have. This was meant to scare its intended target. Wrapped around the arrow was a note. Her fingers worked the knot until the scroll rolled free. The note only had three words.

Do not interfere

"We should hold off on the wedding, just until we're sure that we can ensure Tikki's safety." The queen’s voice boomed as she entered the room.

"No," Tikki gathered her courage as all eyes fell on her. As frightening as it could be, she refused to bend to fear tactics. "I want the wedding to continue as planned."

"But, Your Highness. We have to consider your safety."

"I will not yield to this act of this cowardice. Send guards out to check the grounds if needed. I’m marrying Plagg today.”
Marinette glanced out her window wishing that Adrien was still here. After the attempt on Tikki's life, the two princes led a charge to secure the grounds. While noble of him, it left her alone to fend for herself because the Princess Tikki was shuffled off to a secluded part of the castle. She didn't want to get in trouble for exploring places where she shouldn't be or getting lost among the winding halls, so Marinette stayed hidden away in her room to allow her mind to process what happened. This was the second attempt on Tikki's life, but if she didn't know any better, she swore that arrow was meant for her inside. She had been where the arrow hit only seconds earlier and if Tikki hadn't followed her then it wouldn't have been anywhere near her. Marinette kept her suspicions to herself, there was no need to worry anyone further. Besides, there was no need to fear her—except for Adrien's affection.

“Who do you think you are?”

Marinette cringed to herself. Once you heard Princess Chloé’s voice, you were sure to never to forget it. It stayed with you even in slumber. Who do you think you are?”

She turned to witness the Princess looming in the doorway, and therefore, her only means of escape. “I know exactly who I am, Princess. Although after the traumatic experience I had this morning, it was so nice of you to ask,” she replied hoping that someone would cut the potential nightmare short.

“Don’t think I don’t know what you’re up to.”

The longer Marinette allowed Chloé to talk, the more she could see why Adrien said that he dreaded the potential union. Marinette wanted to roll her eyes, but restrained herself. “Tell me, what is my plan?”

“You want to steal my Adrikins away from me.”

“What Adrien falls for is out of my control, Princess. The blame is not mine if he does not wish to enter into a union with you.”

A loud clap filled the air followed by a stinging sensation. Perhaps she went to far, but it was the truth. Her hand covered the spot of contact, nursing any pain away.

“Now listen here, you wencher. You hold no title, no power or importance.” With each bitter word Chloé took a step forward until Marinette’s back hit the wall and Chloé blocked her only escape with a finger poking at her chest. “And yet you’ve managed to capture his attention.” She lifted up the chain revealing the ring. “Not the mention take things that don’t belong to you.” In one swoop, Chloé broke the chain around her neck, clasping the ring in her hand. “I always get what is mine.”

“Want Adrien all you desire, he will never be yours.” Marinette called out. She figured if she antagonized her further, there would be a chance that she could get Adrien’s ring back. It didn’t belong to Chloé and she would rather drop dead than allow the pretentious princess to wear it. Her eyes fell on the ring and in a moment of courage she snatched the ring back earned an offended scoff from the blonde.

“If he was in love with you, then he wouldn’t have requested that I come back with him, and he certainly wouldn’t have given me his mother’s ring with his intentions.”

“You’re lying,” Chloé sputtered. “You must have stolen it.”

Since she was dealing with royalty, she must be careful. Reclaiming her necklace was a bold move
and she only did because she knew that Adrien and Plagg could vouch that it belonged to her. She needed to get away as fast as she could to avoid any more confrontation with the princess.

“I’m sure we could have Prince Adrien have the last say.” Marinette brushed past her headed for the door with every intention of leaving, until Chloé words stabbed her.

“You might be dressed up as nobility, but underneath that you’re still just a commoner Adrien will grow tired of. There are traditions that must be upheld, the king will never approve of you.”

Marinette still walked out of the room standing tall despite the wounds that the words left. She knew better than to allow the spiteful words to affect her, but Marinette knew that they contained seeds of truth among the hate.

Tears welled in her eyes, but never fell. Marinette’s determination took root that the spoiled princess wouldn’t ruin her day.

She slipped the ring on her hand as a distraction, allowing the memories to flood back. The kisses, the promises whispered among them, it made it easier to cling to the idea they could make it despite the difficulties that faced them.

“Pardon, Marinette?”

Marinette’s focus jumped from the ring on her finger to Pollen standing in front of her.

“I’m sorry to disturb you, but Princess Tikki requests your presence.”

Marinette couldn’t silently thank Tikki enough for needing her. She nodded and followed her gratefully hoping to leave Chloé and her opinions behind.

Plagg nervously tugged on the clothes that surround his neck so he could breathe. The butterflies had been building in his stomach for days and now that he stood in front of what seemed like her whole kingdom, all of his nerves were on high alert. Plagg was confident in his ability to rally crowds or talk to the royals in the realms, but this was something different. The second the ceremony ended Tikki would be his wife, his queen; an adventure of his own.

This day was long awaited, and involved their parents’ wisdom with setting up the union. Plagg only wished that Tikki’s beloved father could have seen it come to pass.

The guards assured him the castle was on high alert with protecting his beloved. He almost wanted to cancel the celebration planned for later, but Tikki convinced him otherwise. It would be her last chance to interact with her people before he whisked her away for the coronation. Plagg had a feeling he wouldn’t leave her side all night.

His gaze wandered to the third row that contained Marinette and Adrien on one side with Duusu and Chloé on the other. Not that Adrien minded, he seemed to be in his own little world, whispering and giggling alongside Marinette. Even though the pew blocked his vision, by their body language he could tell their hands were laced together. His smile tugged tighter.

He was happy for his friends, they had found something that was more rare than gold; Adrien and Marinette had found love in each other. Both had been on the secretive side with what went on with their adventure. But the effect that they had over each other was clear. Plagg couldn’t think of someone he knew that better complemented his friend. He had meant it when he stated Adrien was
lucky to have her; only time would dictate how much.

Music filled the air, and his body stiffened. This was it. The air sucked from his lungs as he waited for the back door to open. When they did, Plagg wasn’t ready for the beauty his eyes beheld.

The dress didn’t take his breath away; instead, it was the glow that seemed to encompass her as she began her walk. Her blue eyes locked with his and Plagg found he couldn’t look away even if he wanted to. Tikki said all she needed to say through her gaze; she loved him and she wanted this more than anything.

Plagg let out the breath that he was holding once she reached him. His hand extended, his fingers seeking hers without hesitation. The heavens blessed him with more time with his beloved, and he would not waste a single minute that he had left with her.

This close to her he had a perfect view of all the light freckles that littered her skin that he loved so much. She probably didn't know how much her beauty took his breath away on a daily basis.

"I love you," she whispered low enough that only he could hear. It warmed his heart to see the wide smile plastered on her face.

"I love you, too," Plagg mouthed back not to disturb the minister in his greeting everyone.

"Does anyone present know of any reason why this couple should not be married?" the priest asked.

Silence never sounded better to the couple. He had been worried that Duusu or Nathalie would have something to say, but instead, they sat in quiet, their eyes peeled to the ground.

After a sufficient amount of time passing the minister glanced between the couple lips pressed back into a warm smile.

"Then we shall begin."

Plagg wasn't even sure if he heard most of the words that he said, his eyes remained glued on Tikki. Thankfully she nodded to signal when it was his turn to speak.

"I do." Plagg meant every word. He would be her rock when they faced tough times and would celebrate during good times; never forgetting to be thankful that they had each other through it all.

"I do," Tikki responding to the prompting.

Plagg slid on ring her finger and took a minute to soak in the sight. This was happening; Tikki was becoming his wife.

After being instructed to kiss his wife, Plagg happily obliged. When he pulled back, she beamed brighter than before. He led her down the aisle until they reached a set of guards who escorted them to another part of the castle. The second that they disappeared from prying eyes, Plagg pulled her back and kissed her with all the passion he held for his new wife.

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Marinette took a couple of steps forward, her fingers pushing back the curtains to see the rows of carriages lined up and people arriving for the party. She could already hear the sounds of music gracing every hall. Adrien had expressed a desire to walk her down into the party, but waiting for
him made the butterflies flutter faster. A knock on the door caused her to turn.

"Adrien?" she called out. To her surprise, it wasn't the blond prince who entered the room but rather King Gabriel.

"Your M-Majesty," she stuttered while curtsying to show her respect. Did he stumble into the wrong room? What could he want with her? "Is there something that I can help you with?"

"I need to have a word with you regarding my son."

Her heart sank. It was only a matter of time before this conversation would occur. She wished that Adrien would hurry to rescue her.

"Is something wrong?"

"Chloé informed me of your conversation earlier today."

Marinette's blood slowed to a halt and the breath caught inside her throat. "Sire, I can explain." She didn't get any more out before he held up his hand to silence her. The motion caused her heart to sink deeper in her stomach. It shouldn't surprise her, facts were facts, the princess's word meant more than hers, and she had the upper hand.

"I didn't come to visit regarding that behavior, although the princess did demand an apology from you, and I suggest you give it."

He folded his arms across his chest in disdain, but Marinette didn't know if the sour behavior was directed towards her or the princess.

"I suppose that my son has informed you that he must marry Chloé to complete the union between Schmetterling and Bourdon, is that correct?"

"He did." For a second time that day a lump formed in her throat. "But Adrien doesn't want to marry her."

"It doesn't matter," he shot back in a huff, before calming himself and adjusting the hair that fell out of place. "He knows where his duties lie."

"With all due respect, Your Majesty, wouldn't Adrien become a better king one day if he loved his queen out of his heart instead of duty?"

"You are unfamiliar with the customs when you are among royalty. One of the sacrifices that occurs is we must do what’s best for our people instead of what we desire. If you’re lucky, much like Tikki and Plagg, then you also find love among duty."

Marinette wanted to ask about his own experience, but held her tongue. Gabriel reached out and pulled the necklace until the ring was uncovered. All of his features softened instantly as he placed it in his palm.

"You’re an intelligent girl, surely, you know things could never work out.” His finger traced the ring around her neck fondly. “You know that Chloé will pursue this union and will not yield. To deny her would mean war among our kingdoms, and Adrien would lead this men out to battle or perhaps volunteer to fight in a duel.” Marinette stumbled a few steps back and her hand went to clutch her necklace once more. It would be like Adrien to do either of those things if it came to war, especially if he felt responsible. He would no doubt call for a duel to save his men’s lives. Adrien was skilled with the blade, but she had only seen glimpses; not enough to rest her
confidence in him.

“The only way to keep him safe is to let the union continue.” He took a couple of steps towards the door, but stopped to twist his head back towards her. “I’m sure you’ll come to the right decision.”

Marinette wanted to call out after the king for further clarification, but any words stuck to her throat as she swallowed the hard truths he laid before her. She was not royalty no matter what nickname Adrien bestowed upon her. Chloé wouldn’t let her arranged marriage go, and by moving forward with Adrien’s intentions— she wouldn’t forgive herself if anything happened to him. Disappearing almost seemed more humane than having him bleed out over the battlefield. Yes, he would have a mostly loveless marriage, but surely, he would learn to care for Chloé eventually.

Marinette didn’t blame Gabriel for being rigid towards her. As far as he knew, before Adrien left he had agreed to the union and then the next thing the king would have heard, Adrien had proposed to someone else—a commoner no less. It seemed the idea was considered highly inappropriate—for everyone but Adrien.

Somehow the thought diminished the joy she received from wearing this beautiful pink dress or the satisfaction the Princess Chloé would be without Adrien the whole night.

She had to snap out of this mood. She wouldn’t let Gabriel’s notions or Chloé jealousy dampen the evening. It was meant for Plagg and Tikki and the joining of their kingdoms despite any odds stacked against them. Tikki has been just as sweet as Plagg described, if not more so. They had spent hours talking from everything from the wedding to her journey with Adrien. It was hard to believe they had only met that afternoon, but it felt more like a lifetime.

“You are stunning.” Adrien’s breathy response caught her attention and coaxed her from all her current problems. She thought it would be weird to have so many strangers waiting in her hand and foot as they prepared her for tonight, and it was. When they finished, she didn’t recognize herself for a moment. She might even mistake herself for a noble if she didn’t know better. The only thing that she insisted on keeping was the necklace with Adrien’s ring attached. Chloé had broken the chain earlier, but Tikki provided a replacement.

“I’d say you look just as dashing and charming,” she curtsied with a little bow to follow customs, “Your Highness.” Her eyes wandered to the door to find that they weren’t alone. A dark skin man stood there with a concerned expression. Marinette didn’t know how to proceed to act around Adrien with a stranger in their midst. After a split second of anxiety, she decided that it would be best to follow Adrien’s lead.

Marinette sucked in her breath when he took her hand and kissed her knuckles all without breaking eye contact. The contact stirred the nerves in her stomach and left a fire in its place. But what caused her knees to wobble and head spin was the intensity of the way he looked at her.

"Only for you," he replied coyly. "I hope you'll save me a dance."

"What if people stare?"

Adrien didn't miss a beat. "Let them."

Marinette’s gaze wandered over Adrien's shoulder to the stranger still in the doorway pretending not to listen in on their conversation. Although the majority wouldn't bat an eyelash while their primary focus would be on the newlywed couple; Marinette could imagine a few individuals that would throw a fit.
Her doubts must have been plastered all over her face because Adrien squeezed her hand.

"Is everything ok?"

"Of course." She stiffened her smile so it remained in place. If Adrien had any doubt that she told the truth, they would stay up here hashing out any counter arguments to Gabriel’s points. The only problem was, the king was right. Adrien would put his life at risk for his people and his family and she would be the sole cause of it.

“Princess, is everything ok?” he repeated for a second time.

His fingers brushed her arm stopped her in place. She closed her eyes at the nickname, a bittersweet reminder at what she wished she could be for him, but never could.

“Everything is fine,” she lied. “The feast has already begun, we should go.” She followed Adrien out the door hoping she could silence her swirling thoughts.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoy it. Let me know what you think! Two more chapters for this story!
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

The aftermath

Chapter Notes

A.N.- Another update. I hope that you all enjoy it! I've worked so hard on it.

I wanted to extend the biggest thank you to BlueTreeLeaves. She is so sweet and puts up with my chapters and all her editing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Marinette looped her arm through Adrien’s as they began their way through the halls towards the music. She caved and looked back at the knight who was following them - no doubt because of Gabriel’s orders.

“His name is Nino,” Adrien said as if reading her mind. “He’s working a debt off to my father. Although, I suspect he’s paid off what he owes and chooses to stay around. He and I have become close friends over the years.”

Marinette nodded understandingly. She was glad he had that kind of company. It was reassuring that Adrien had someone to lean on in her absence.

“Ready?” He shot her a grin as they stopped short of the archway.

She fought the urge to run back to her room. “As ready as I’ll ever be.”

“I believe I was promised a dance.”

Adrien's voice caused her to jump in her chair and almost spill her drink all over herself. The last time she saw him, he was right next to her. How did he move without her noticing?

Her eyes worriedly scanned the room, and she noticed the lack of dancing. With the conversations that she’d had between Chloé and King Gabriel, Marinette didn't want to attract any more unwanted attention.

But the longer she looked in his pleading eyes, the more her reasons to decline started to fade. He offered out his hand, and she took it, letting him help her to stand.

"It would be my pleasure, My Prince."

Adrien let her to a secluded area of the floor and held up his hand. "Let's show my father one of the
many skills that I learned on our adventure together,” he finished with a wink.

Marinette matched Adrien’s movements; her hand mirroring his. The two began to spin in a clockwise circle and then switched directions. The longer they danced, the more other people faded away, leaving her only focused on Adrien.

"Do you remember how our last dance ended?" He asked a mischievous twinkle dancing in his eyes.

Marinette tripped over her feet for a second, the embarrassment catching up to her cheeks. The flustering faded within a couple of steps as she worked up her retort. "Were you hoping for a repeat of that kiss in front of your father?"

"If it shows him how serious my feelings for you are then I’d kiss you right here with no hesitation." His confession stopped her mid-dance.

“Adrien.” Her fingers gingerly grazed the edge of face slipping into his blonde locks. He closed his eyes and contently hummed leaning into her touch.

She closed her eyes briefly to hold back any tears that might come. She was in love with the man in front of her, and yet she could never be with him. Marinette opened her eyes first bracing herself for what followed; although, she wasn’t sure she was ready.

His eyes were filled to the brim with tenderness, care, and love.

Marinette smothered any emotions that would prevent her from doing what was right for Adrien. Despite her selfish desires, she decided to keep him safe and that he would live a long and happy life protecting his new kingdom. She would leave at first light. Before Adrien could realize that she was gone - not that she knew where she would go. Maybe Fu could take her on as an apprentice and teach her what he knew.

“Mari?”

His voice jolted out of her plans, and when their gaze connected again, concern had joined the other emotions.

“Are you sure nothing is the matter?”

She couldn’t lie anymore, her heart aching with the thought of their separation.

“No.”

It was her turn to latch her eyes shut as he took her face in her hands. Her plans poised on her tongue waiting for permission to be spilled out, but she resisted the temptation. If Adrien knew what she was planning, then he would try to stop her

“What’s wrong, Princess? Is there anything I can do to help?”

His earnest questions made her heart sob. To stay with him would be easy.

“Not here,” she mumbled loud enough for him to hear. She eyed a nearby hallway and nodded for him to follow.

When she was sure that no prying eyes were watching, she turned back to face him.

“Marinette, what’s going-”
Before she lost her courage, her hand anchored around the back of his neck and guided him down to greet her. He melted into her touch, which encouraged her further. In his enthusiasm, the two moved together until Marinette’s back hit the wall. The cold stone sensation caused a gasp to escape her lips, and Adrien took full advantage to deepen the kiss. His hand rested on the small of her back, tugging her closer.

“Adrien.” His name honey on her tongue, but to continue any further would make it impossible for her to walk away.

She pulled far enough away that she could witness the pure happiness engraved in every feature on his face.

“Marinette, tell me.” He groaned, his hands reaching for her once more. Their hands linked and he leaned in, his lips feathering the skin towards her ear. “What did I do to receive such a kiss, so I can repeat what just happened over and over,” he purred.

“I just wanted to thank you for standing by my side.”

“Marinette, I won’t ever leave you.”

‘If you only knew.’ Her mind somberly replied for her.

“We better return. Someone might notice we’re missing,” she suggested, eyes glued to the floor.

“You should go first. I’ll follow shortly behind.”

“Don’t withhold your beauty from the celebration too long, My Love.” With one last kiss to her knuckles, he slipped back towards the party.

Marinette’s knees wobbled, and she collapsed to the ground. She had wanted a goodbye kiss, but what she received would be looped in her memory. How did he melt her instantly with one little touch, a kiss, a look? Her hands covered her face, blocking out the world, and a ragged sigh escaped Marinette. It only took a couple of minutes to refocus her energy before she found the strength to pick herself off the floor. Now all left to do was to sneak up to her room, gather her stuff, and slip out before anyone would notice.

"You can do this,” she muttered under her breath. Her eyes scanned the floor to find where Adrien, Plagg, and Tikki were because they would be the only ones to stop her. She also looked for Chloe, who would no doubt want to give Marinette another piece of her mind. Thankfully, the blonde was on the other side of the room.

Marinette slipped from the shadows and started to make a beeline towards a hallway that would lead to her room. In her hurry, she tripped over her own feet and fell to the floor. A hand caught her just before she hit the ground. A thank you rested on her lips, but when she opened her eyes, it wasn't Adrien who rescued her. Bright blue eyes stared back at her, and she couldn't help staring at his brilliant red hair.

"A beautiful woman such as you be careful. I wouldn't want you to get hurt."

"Th-thank you," Marinette coughed as she steadied herself, her head was still spinning. "Who knows where I’d be if you didn't intervene."

She politely nodded in his direction and continued on her way. The hairs on her neck stood up as if she was being watched, but she pushed down the feeling. She wouldn't be pulled off what she had planned if she got caught up in the paranoia.
Once within the safety of her room, Marinette let out a breath. She hadn’t been sure she would get this far. She gathered what little processions she owned and stopped midway to the door- to leave without explaining herself would be cruel. Adrien’s mind may jump to the worst explanation, and even though it would aid in making sure he wouldn’t pursue her, she couldn’t bring herself to be that heartless. She grabbed a parchment and a quill to pour her heart into words. Once completed, she folded it up in an envelope and carefully scribbled Adrien’s name on the front.

She would be embarrassed if someone else would open up to see her heart so vulnerable on the page.

The ring around her neck grew hot against her skin. As much as it provided comfort for her, Marinette knew she couldn’t keep it. Adrien has said as long as the ring was in her possession there would be hope for them. Given that Adrien had to marry Chloé, he certainly couldn’t hold out hope for her.

Her hands trembled to unclamped the necklace. She had written that she was returning his heart in the letter, but she underestimated how difficult this step would be.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized to no one in particular. It wasn’t like Adrien could hear her from downstairs over the joyful music and chattering guests. But the apology felt right given the symbolism of what she was doing.

She rose to her feet, courage running through her veins. Leaving was for Adrien’s safety, she reminded herself. The hallways seemed to last forever despite her quick pace. It ended at the party. Not wanting to be seen, she ducked down a hall. Marinette could barely hear the music over her heart slamming against her rib cage. He could have seen her, but she sided with doubt. If Adrien saw her, then he would have chased after her.

“You can escape through the servant quarters.” A voice caught her off guard. It was the man with the vibrant red hair from early.

“You.” She didn’t mean to gawk; she hadn’t seen hair that color before. “Who are you?”

He ignored her question. “If you slip out now, I’ll make sure he won’t follow.”

Marinette shifted her bag higher on her shoulder, eyes now locked with the hypnotic blue ones in front of her. The bag was a give away that she was attempting to leave, but how did he know she was avoiding Adrien?

“Thank you.” She nodded and took off down the hallway without looking back.

Something about tonight was off. Adrien had made a mental list of what it could be. A chill ran down his spine several minutes ago, and since then he had yet to figure out a cause. His eyes scanned the crowd for Marinette, but there was no raven-haired beauty in sight. He tried to conjure up when was the last time he saw her—their kiss.

Warmth welled in his chest only to evaporate seconds later at the sight of his mother’s ring on the hand of Chloé Bourgeois. He marched straight up to Chloé, who was chatting with a red-haired man he didn’t recognize. Whatever they were speaking about, they were hushed when he approached. The man’s vivid blue stare made his blood run cold, and he slowed his pace. Their locked eyes is a silent battle of dominance. In the end, he won as the man turned towards Chloé, whispered one last thing, and excused himself.

As much as Adrien wanted to question her on who the man was, there was a much more prominent
thing on his mind.

“Oh, Adrien, I see that your company had made herself scarce. You came all this way to ask me to dance?” She placed a hand on her chest. “I accept.”

“What is that?” It didn’t go unnoticed that she instantly snuck her hands behind her back. Adrien reached behind her and jerked her hand from hiding.

“That’s—” The words died in his throat. There were only two ways that Chloé would receive the ring; if she took it by force or Marinette gave it to her—and the second wasn’t an option.

“What did you get that?” He demanded. “That doesn’t belong to you.” He would drop dead before giving Chloé anything remotely that precious. It was the last remaining thing he had from his mother, and the rightful place, along with his heart, was with Marinette.

“Lighten up, Adrikins. I think it suits me much better than its previous owner. It symbolizes our future love and union.”

“No, it doesn’t,” he snapped. “I want my ring back. There isn’t any kind of future between us.”

“I know you’re angry at me now, but you’re making a rash decision.”

“This is anything but rash,” Adrien shot back. He held out his hand to her, silently demanding the ring. Chloé caved and placed the ring in his hand.

“Where did you get my mother’s ring?” He growled, not wanting to draw too much attention.

“Marinette’s room,” Chloé answered with her shoulders shriveled and her eyes glued to anywhere but him. “I saw her leave it there along with a note.”

“What?” Adrien blanched. “Did you see where she went?”

“No, but she grabbed her cloak”-

Adrien didn’t give Chloé a chance to finish. He dashed up the stairs as fast as his legs would carry him. Plagg would understand his need to leave, especially if it involved Marinette and her safety. They hadn’t caught whoever fired the arrow earlier and, with his open affections towards Marinette, she could be in danger. He bounded through the halls not thinking about anything but her. Right. Left. Left. Doorway-

Empty room.

There was no trace that Marinette even inhabited the room for the last couple days. Everything was gone, minus a letter left on the table addressed to him.

Adrien’s hand trembled as he gathered enough courage to pick up the letter and read it. So many words could be contained on the piece of paper; his mind jumped to the most damaging.

He couldn’t handle it if she claimed that she never loved him. With all the time they shared, the conversations, the kisses—he couldn’t bring himself to believe her if that was what he was about to read. With a swift motion, he ripped open the envelope, and his eyes hungrily devoured the words.

My Dearest Adrien,
I know reading this letter must be confusing to you with my absence, but I do assure you that I am safe and left of my own free will. It is best if both of us don’t deceive ourselves with the future that we could have. Luka has said that one day I would have to put my duty over my heart and, at the time, I didn’t understand. But I do now. So regrettfully, I must return your heart to you in hopes that one day you find another girl worthy of such a precious treasure. I do not doubt that you will grow to be one of the best kings this land had ever seen as long as you continue to be the man that I know you can be.

He couldn’t bring himself to read anymore. She couldn’t have decided to leave all on her own. Adrien couldn’t begin to imagine his rule as a King without anyone but Marinette by his side. He had made promises to her, too: he had promised always to find her—a promise he fully intended to keep.

Letter gripped tightly in hand, Adrien stormed through the halls with one person in mind to talk to. Marinette wouldn’t have bent to Chloé demands no matter what she said. He couldn’t imagine Marinette wishing to leave on her own, which meant his father would be the reason she was gone.

He reached the archway and, within seconds, spotted his father talking amongst the other kings and queens. Even though considered rude, Adrien marched straight in that direction. He couldn’t wait until the celebration over to find the truth.

“Father, a word.” Judging by the expression on the king’s face, Adrien’s harsh tone certainly caught his attention.

“You better have a good reason for interrupting my conversation.”

“What did you say to her?” Adrien waved the crumpled letter in the air.

Gabriel’s eyebrows furrowed together. “Who?”

“Marinette.”

The king opened his mouth to respond but was immediately cut off by Plagg and Tikki calling for everyone’s attention.

“We thank you all for coming to celebrate today with us. Words cannot express how happy we are and what this means for our kingdoms. Today would have never happened without the help of one person. Because of her bravery, kindness, and selflessness, we stand tall, strong, and united. For everything she’s done, it seems fitting to provide her a title so no matter where she goes, people will know how beloved she is. For Marinette Dupain-Cheng, we provide a new title: Friend of the Crown.”

When Marinette didn’t step forward, murmurs started to spread through the crowd.

Adrien’s fist tightened by his side. Plagg encouraged the guests to return to the celebration, and he would present the title properly once she was found.

Adrien wouldn’t let his father off the hook.

“What did you say to Marinette?”

“Whatever caused her to depart it was of her own free will, I assure you.”

“So, you didn’t speak to Marinette at all since you arrived?”
“Briefly - after she fought with Chloé.”

“I knew it.”

“Watch your tone when talking to your father,” Gabriel snapped back. “There are circumstances that you nothing of. Everything I’ve done was for your safety.”

Adrien’s eyes widened, and he opened his mouth, but Gabriel continued.

“I didn’t force Marinette to leave. I told her the truth. Chloé will start a war if she can’t have you, and we can’t afford to fight in it. What she decided beyond that was her decision.”

“Then we’re doomed to war, father. I will not marry Chloé.”

“Don’t you understand what’s at stake, Adrien?”

“I’m perfectly confident in our abilities to work out a treaty that doesn’t involve a marriage union between our countries.”

“If that were possible, it would be frowned upon because of her status”-

“Then it’s a good thing that Plagg and Tikki fixed that. I’m sure the people would love a queen who has the title: Friend of the Crown.” A smirk grew on Adrien’s face as Gabriel’s features hardened. “I’m going to find her no matter how long it takes. She’ll come back with me to Schmetterling because I know she feels the same way about me as I do about her. You can do what you want, but we will be together. If you banish Marinette, I’ll abdicate my right to the throne and go with her.” Gabriel’s unrelenting stare bore into his skin, but Adrien held his ground. Silence clung to the air as the tension rose. Adrien had no clue what lay in store for him. Talking back to the king was sure to earn him a verbal lashing about respect. His father was angry with him, and it screamed out between his narrowed eyebrow and lip curled into a thin line of disapproval. Instead of a shouting match, Gabriel ruffled back any hair out of place.

“It seems you’ve decided your path.” He turned his back to Adrien, but threw over his shoulder, “I hope for your sake that you can live with the consequences.”

Marinette’s finger traced around the rim of her drink hoping that if she sat there long enough the memories would get drown out by the alcohol. She flipped up her hood not draw any unwanted attention. It was a mystery how she would make the memories fade that was so vivid in her mind. The tingle still lingered from her goodbye kiss with Adrien. He might never understand what she did was for his safety, but, with her gone, he could turn his focus onto his duties and what was expected of him. She would slip away in the morning and Adrien wouldn’t be able to find her. It’s what was best for both of them. Her fingers went to fiddle with the absent ring just as they had for the past several days. Her heart cracked upon the realization that she had given it back. At the moment, she thought it had been the right thing to do, but in doing so, it left a piece of her heart dedicated to the what-ifs behind.

“I didn’t think I would find you here. Aren’t you supposed to be at a feast with a certain Prince tonight?”

Alya’s unexpected voice caused her to jump. She wasn’t able to hide the disappointment on her face fast enough.

“What’s wrong? And don’t you dare lie to me.”
Marinette flinched. Her wounds were too fresh to rehash fully with Alya.

“T’m leaving tomorrow.” She couldn’t move her eyes off a spot on the table.

“Wasn’t that the plan?” Even without looking, she could vividly picture the confusion on Alya’s face.

“Without the prince,” Marinette finished softly.

"What happened?"

"I think I was fooling myself. Someone like him could never marry someone like me. He needs to think what's best for his people, and that involves ensuring their safety. If Adrien can't come to the right decision, then I need to make it for him."

"Where are you going to go?" Alya took a sip of her drink, no doubt trying to process the news.

"I don't know," Marinette confessed. "I was thinking maybe going and staying with a healer we met and learning what he knows." If Fu agreed to let her stay, she could pour her attention and energy into studying medicine as a distraction. Then she could travel from village to village and help those in need. It would be mostly a solitary life, but a fulfilling one.

Alya's face twitched slightly at the answer, but Marinette chalked it to disappointment that she still decided to leave.

"What would you do if Adrien chased after you?"

The question caught her off guard. What would she do? She had hoped that he wouldn't come after her, but she knew him well enough that he wouldn't let her go without a fight.

"He won't. I left him a note telling him not to," she replied hoping that if she said the words with enough confidence that it would be true.

"Won't you miss him?"

"Of course, I would. I love him, Alya. Maybe if things were different”-

"What if they didn't have to be?" A familiar voice chimed in.

Marinette froze in place. No wonder Alya had been acting strange. She knew that Adrien was behind her for who knows how long.

"I'll just leave you two to talk." Alya excused herself from the pair, but only ventured to a nearby table to get a front row seat to watch their conversation unfold. Adrien took her place across from Marinette with various emotions playing across his face.

"You left the party."

"I'm sorry." Marinette's eyes closed and she swallowed hard. She hadn't him expected for him to find her so soon.

Adrien cleared his throat and took a sip of his drink. “I got your letter.”

“Then you understand why I had to go.” Didn’t he realize how hard this was for her? She didn’t want to leave. He had to understand that.
“No-” he cut in, “-I don’t understand.”

Their eyes connected and she shifted in her seat uncomfortably until he placed his hand in hers. “Talk to me, Mari.”

The evening faded, food was gone, and most guests had returned to their homes after an evening they wouldn’t soon forget. The evening was everything that she’d asked for and more - with some minor hiccups.

“Are you ok? My love?”

His hands laced with hers before wrapping his arms around her torso. Plagg rested his chin right in the crook of her neck.

“I’m just happy,” she replied, a soft smile playing on her lips.

“I couldn’t think anyone else I’d rather be my wife.” Plagg plaited his statement with a kiss on the exposed skin on her shoulder.

The action, though sweet, caused Tikki to paused in realization. This was her wedding night.

Her mother hadn’t prepared her for as much as she hoped. Tikki knew it was her duty to please Plagg, but she wasn’t sure what she should do. She eyed the bed for only a moment before her focus returned to her new husband. It would be expected that they consummate their marriage, but her husband’s loving did ease the butterflies fluttering starting their dance in her stomach.

Tikki gathered all her courage to turn to face him; his eyes glistened with love. She tentatively closed the gap and captured his lips in hers. They had kissed before, but this time was different. Plagg reacted, cupping her cheek and coaxing her anxiousness right out of her.

“I love you so much, Tikki,” he mumbled between kisses. She didn’t realize she had taken a couple of steps back until the back her knees hit the bed. He must have felt her body tense because he pulled away to rest his forehead on hers.

“It will be okay.” His thumb caressed her cheek. “We can conquer anything together.”

She turned away and silently pushed her hair to one side giving him full access to the lacing on the back of her dress. Her eyes fluttered closed once more as he bent down to kiss her neck, his fingers gently tugging until the laces became loose. Plagg helped the dress until it fell to her feet. Heat swarmed her skin as she looked anywhere but him. He hooked her chin with his knuckle to redirect her gaze towards him, and she didn't fight it.

"You're beautiful," he whispered.

More butterflies, but with a new found confidence and enthusiasm, their lips met once more. Her fingers worked at his shirt until his clothes joined her dress on the floor. He placed his hands on her hips and helped her onto the bed. He crawled on top continuing to kiss down her neck fanning the spark further.

"Plagg?" She whispered gaining his attention once more. "I love you, too."

Any remaining nerves evaporated when he crashed his lips against hers and the room radiated with pure love for the rest of the night as their hearts intertwined.
A.n.- One more, one more! Let me know what you think!
Chapter Summary

An end is just another beginning

Chapter Notes

A.n.- Here we are, at the last chapter, my friends. I truly can say that this story has humbled me to my core, and I'm so thankful for each and everyone that supported me through this. Thank you to my writer discord group and all the support they poured out to me.

I hope you really enjoyed this Alex, it was written just for you.

Thanks to Blue, who edited the majority of this chapter and Remesa covered the remainder, I appreciate you a ton!

This wasn’t fair.

Marinette was all prepared to leave, and then Adrien had to crash into her plans with his big, green, pleading eyes. Marinette breathed out, trying to calm her hope-filled heart. Part of the reason she wrote the note in the first place was that she wasn’t sure she could face him and still say goodbye.

To get through this conversation, she would have to keep reminding herself that this was for the best. Although, every time she repeated it to herself, her resolve weakened.

“Alright-” a lump grew in her throat, “-let’s talk.” She had no idea how she was going to convince him to let her go.

“I don’t understand why you felt you had to run. Do you really believe that I’m better off without you by my side?”

‘ No ’ bubbled up inside her, but the word died before it could make it past her lips. Her mouth opened, closed, and opened again. With still no answer from her, Adrien reached out and squeezed her hand.

“What happened?” he pleaded.

“Well...” As much as she didn’t want to rehash the events from earlier, explaining may make him understand. “Earlier today there was a... situation with Chloé.”

“What did she do? Did she threaten you?” Adrien released her hand to slam his palm on the table. His overprotective behavior was endearing but unnecessary.

“No.” The urgency fled out of her, only to be met by confusion sewn into his eyebrows. “Nothing
But Adrien”— She should have known that his stubbornness would be an issue.

“I don’t love Chloé.” His words echoed through her mind, but not louder than the other half of the sentence that wasn’t said.

I love you.

Tears started to escape her eyes before she could stop them. “But I don’t want you to die.”

“Marinette,” Adrien cooed leaning over the table, wiping the tears away with his thumb. “Who put these notions in your head? Was it my father?”

Marinette found that she couldn’t do anything, but nod. Her traitorous tears had given away her true emotions, no sense hiding them now. Part of their relationship was founded on trust. Where would they be if she wasn’t honest?

“Part of what my father said is true. Chloé won’t want to give up the marriage. In the worst-case scenario, it might lead to war. But”- Adrien hooked his finger under her chin, so their eyes met.

“I’m not afraid as long as I have you by my side. I believe our kingdoms can come to an agreement and no bloodshed will have to come of it. Chloé can wait a thousand years, but my feelings towards you won’t wane. No one can change that. Not Chloé, my father, or any force on this earth. You make me want to be better. You are the first thing I think of when I rise and the last thing before I slumber. I fully intend to fulfill my promise to you.” He leaned down and pressed a kiss on her knuckles.

"So, what do you say?" He peeked up through his bangs at her. "Will you come back with me?"

Marinette’s breath hitched as she felt Adrien’s gaze pass straight through her. He had countered every argument that she had. Deep down, she couldn’t deny that she did want to go with him. If everything he said was the truth, then it didn't matter if she disappeared or went with him - he wouldn't marry Chloé. He made it clear that Marinette was the only one that he had eyes for. She would rather be with him than to be away and have the same fate occur.

"Yes." The butterflies that were once dormant fluttered once more. "Yes," she repeated, allowing her answer to sink in.

Adrien shot up from his seat and rounded the table to hold out his hand. Marinette blinked twice before accepting his help to stand. Their hands laced and Marinette found herself mirroring Adrien's movements until their lips met. She melted into his touch only for the kiss to be broken with hoots and hollers.

"I want you to hold my mother’s ring a little longer."

"Are you sure?" Guilt ate away at her insides. After the pain she caused him, Marinette was sure that he would have kept it. Adrien trusted her enough to give something so precious back to her.

"My heart is still yours, Marinette. It seems only right that you have it back." He squeezed her
hand, eyes twinkling. Once more, his hand slipped into his bag and held up a familiar red sack.

"Is that my-" Her voice stopped as the realization settled in. "You stole my bag?"

"Seems only fair," he grinned mischievously, obviously proud. "You stole my heart."

Nathaniel grumbled silently to himself; he was rather enjoying the party before being summoned. He flipped up his hood to blend into the night as he slipped off the palace grounds.

*This was just a job*; he reminded himself.

He needed to eat, after all. Although, now he regretted not asking more questions when he accepted the job in the first place. If he had known that his target was protected under a prince, he would have demanded a higher price. If he were caught, Nathaniel would pay with his life. He slipped into a shadowed alley until he reached his destination. Nathaniel’s eyes widened at the use of a carriage; she was the one who insisted on secrecy in the first place.

A patterned knock swung the door open. Nathaniel eyed the two muscular men on either side of the room, a safety precaution, but regardless, they wouldn’t help his employer if she decided to double cross him. His mind had already sketched out multiple ways to dispose of them.

“‘You’re late.’ Her iced tone slowed him to a halt.

“I had to take the long way to assure that I wasn’t followed from the party.”

“Did anyone suspect your involvement?”

“No, and the target fled the party.”

“You let her go?”

Nathaniel took a step back at the hissed question but stood his ground. “I had received orders”-

“The *only* orders you will follow are mine.” Her blue eyes narrowed. “Is that understood?”

“Crystal.”

“My informants shared that Marinette agreed to go back with the prince to Schmetterling. Here are your new orders. I want you to follow them there, get in the good graces of the prince, make him trust you. When you are alone with Marinette, kill her.”

“Now wait one minute, scaring the prince’s beloved is one thing—killing is”—

“I was told that you were the man I needed to see about anything—is that not true?”

Before Nathaniel could reply, one of the men grabbed him from behind, forcing his arms to his side.

“If you cannot do as I ask, then it appears I have no use for you.”

In a swift motion, Nathaniel reached for his knife hide on his right thigh and spun it before jabbing it into the man’s leg. Immediately, he was released as the bodyguard cried out in pain. Nathaniel took a couple of steps forward, closing the gap.
“Does that answer your question, Your Majesty?”

“If you succeed, there will be a reward beyond your dreams,” she promised before eyeing the door. “I have to be off, I’ve been away far too long, and people will take notice.”

Nathaniel watched through the window as the carriage pulled away. Only then could he drop his defenses. What did the queen have against this girl anyway? Nathaniel had met Marinette twice, and both time, he could feel her kindness radiating off of her.

*Get a grip, Nathaniel.*

If he did this job, he wouldn’t have to want for anything for a long time. He had killed before, what was one more? Although her sparkling blue eyes were etched into his memory. He would gather what provisions that were needed and set off for Schmetterling. If he did his job correctly, then they won’t ever suspect his real motives, and after the deed was done, he could slip in the shadows once more. If he failed—well, failure wasn’t an option.

The next couple of days were a whirlwind, but Adrien had done what he promised and stuck by her side the entire way. They had borrowed a horse from Tikki and Plagg to make the journey, and even though he had the opportunity to ride in the carriage with his father, Adrien insisted that he ride alongside her the whole way. After the first day, she had forgotten that they weren't alone and allowed her walls to crumble. Marinette flirted freely with Adrien and more importantly, let herself be happy when her heart fluttered with the returned affection.

Once they did reach Schmetterling, the pit in her stomach grew. The journey had been a nice distraction for what came next, but she was still in a new place with her only friendly face being Adrien. She had to convince the king that she deserved to be there, and with this transition, there were bound to be obstacles that she would face. The one source of comfort was that Adrien continued to prove his promise.

"Hey," Adrien caught her attention and offered a kind smile, "it will be alright. We're home."

*_Home._

The word resonated within her chest, causing small pools of fire and warmth to appear.

She supposed he was right; this was her home for the moment. Standing there, next to him; words couldn’t describe how she felt other than *right*.

“I like the sound of that,” she admitted. The horses came to a halt, and Marinette’s eyes wandered to the castle. It was hard to believe that this would be where she was living for who knows how long. Adrien hopped off his horse and hurried to her side, offering up a hand to help Marinette. She had only expected him to offer her help her down, so when he grabbed her hips and lifted her, Marinette let out a surprised yelp. The feeling didn’t last as their eyes locked the second her feet hit the ground. His hands hadn’t left their place on her sides.

“Adrien,” she coughed as heat flooded to her cheeks.

His hands jolted back as if they were on fire, and Marinette was sure that Adrien’s bodyguard had witnessed the whole thing.

“Nino, I can help put away the horses,” Marinette offered. She felt terrible that he had to watch all
of her exchanges with Adrien over the last couple of days. No matter how subtle they attempted to be, Marinette did not doubt that the knight caught all of their flirtations back and forth.

“That won’t be necessary, Miss.” Nino collected the reins and headed off to the stables leaving the lovebirds behind.

“I fear Nino might not like me very much.” What other explanation was there to his silent behavior? Adrien’s arms slipped around her waist as he dragged his nose up the length of her neck to her ear.

“Just give it time, my love. Soon he’ll come to love you just as much as I do.”

“Well, hopefully not as much ,” Marinette teased back playfully. “I shudder at the thought of other men kissing me at their whim.” Adrien’s grip tightened for only a moment

“You mean, I can kiss you at my every whim?"

A shiver rippled down her spine from something in his tone. The hair on her neck stood trying to greet Adrien’s lips as he kissed the area right behind her ear. Although her body swam with delight, the quad of the castle was no place for such an activity. She would have enough judgments from others without the servants witnessing the affection.

“Only if you catch me first.” Marinette pushed off Adrien and ran towards the castle doors. It wouldn’t be long before he did catch her; she had no clue where she was going. The butterflies inside her exploded at the thought of when Adrien would claim his victory, but until then, she would keep on running.

Adrien slipped into a position to catch Marinette as she rounded the corner. Reason would say that she could be anywhere in the castle, but he could hear the faint pitter-patter of running. No one in the castle would have reason to run, and needless to say, he’d be embarrassed if the person that he captured was a servant and not his love. He closed his eyes and counted as the sound grew louder. At the right time, he reached out and caught her waist, trapping his catch between him and the wall.

His heart pounded against his chest, desperately wanting to escape as Marinette's wide eyes greeted him.

"You found me,” she breathed out.

More stomach stirring as her promise replayed in his ears. Had she meant it? As royalty, no one would blink an eye if he ordered her to kiss him, but the fact that she would do so willingly brought forth so many emotions.

"I told you that I always would," he replied, biting back the urge to ask about a kiss. His body betrayed him as he started to lean in. Their hands laced by her side, closing the gap further between them. Marinette’s eyes fluttered closed; it seemed she was just as eager for this kiss as he was. This was the first time they had been alone in several days.

“I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that your heart easily distracts you.”

Adrien stumbled back from Marinette at the familiar tone. Acting on instinct, he placed himself between Marinette and the newcomer. He stepped so he was in between her and Felix.
“Lord Brother, I didn’t realize that you had returned.”

“Obviously,” Felix shot back amused. “I know our father taught you better manners, but it seems like the second he leaves, you revert to a fool.”

That was news to Adrien. “Father’s away?”

Felix raised an eyebrow, unimpressed. “He left shortly after he returned, to go and fix the mess you created with that intolerable blonde princess.”

Adrien’s shoulders scrunched as his head fell. Although his father had decidedly dropped the matter for now, Felix would be less forgiving. He didn’t understand why his brother kept pushing him to standards much higher than required of him.

“Who is your friend?” Felix arched an eyebrow, his gaze drifted over Adrien’s shoulder.

“Felix, My Lord Brother, this is Marinette, Friend to the Crown.”

“Such an unusual title, how did she come across it?”

“Crowned Prince Plagg bestowed the title upon her.” Felix didn’t need all the details of what went on in his adventures; the knowledge would make him disapprove further. Marinette already had an uphill battle for the approval of the First Prince.

Felix stepped forward, eyes not diverting from Marinette, “Are you a friend to our crown?”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

His eyebrows furrowed and lip thinned to a line. “I guess only time will reveal your true intentions with my brother.”

"Lord Brother"-

"I'm bored of this conversation," Felix cut in. "I suggest you show more discretion in the future. I wouldn't want the servants to get ideas about you and your...friend."

Adrien opened his mouth to retort, but his brother turned his back and began to walk away before he could. Instead, his hands curled into fists by his side, and if he squeezed any tighter, he swore his fingernails would draw blood. His brother had been away for a considerable amount of time, and now that he was back, he felt he had the right to control certain aspects of his life.

“That was your-” The words died in her throat, and her eyes remained fixated on where Felix had disappeared to moments earlier.

"He's my older brother and first in the line to the throne," Adrien replied. He hadn't expected for his brother to be home and with his father absent for a while, it would prove challenging to have Marinette around. Felix, all things considered, was stiff, stubborn, and didn't care for the complexity of most emotions. He saw feelings as a weakness that got in the way of his duties. Adrien didn't trust his brother as far as he could throw a stone in the nearby lake; Felix could twist situations to his favor. Adrien swore to himself to keep Marinette as far away from his brother if he had his say.

"Mari," Adrien reached for her hand gently rubbing her skin lightly with her thumb. "Don't trust a word that my brother says. Promise me, ok?"
"But why?"

"Please, Marinette, just trust me on this." Adrien couldn't blame Marinette for the confusion flashing across her face. How could she understand without knowing the reason why he didn't trust his brother.

"Alright, I promise."

Relief flooded his body and he pulled her into a tight hug, resting his chin upon her shoulder. It would only be a matter of moments before he was summoned by Felix once more to discuss anything the elder prince didn't think appropriate to talk about in front of Marinette. Since his brother outranked him, he would have to go and leave her. “Follow me,” he whispered, resting his forehead against hers. “I’ll show you to your room.”

Tikki found herself pacing back and forth, waiting for it to be the right time to enter. She had been watching all these people from Plagg’s kingdom pour in and could help but stare. These people, they had stories much as her people did. It would take time, but she hoped that they would accept her as their queen.

“Tikki, it’s almost time.”

Pollen’s voice made her jump from her watching place. She usually would be cross for scaring her, but Pollen had given up just as much as she had to come here.

“You look breathtaking, Your Highness.”

Tikki took the opportunity to admire her dress once more. It was a fiery red which divided in the front to reveal fabric as black as the night sky. Gold swirls were stitched into the bodice and if one peered close enough resembled the flight path of a butterfly. Red had been one of her favorite colors for as long as she could remember, and the dark fabric reminded her of her beloved. This dress represented them both combined - a homage to their union.

“Thank you,” Tikki replied, patting down the dress to calm the nerves. “I don’t know if I could have done this without you.”

“I do not doubt that you could have,” Pollen chirped back. “You’ll make a wonderful queen.”

Pollen’s pep talk was interrupted by another servant guiding her to the door.

The second the door opened all breath left Tikki’s lungs only to return seconds later. All eyes stared at her, and she knew she needed to start the walk. The distance seemed much more daunting than her wedding day. Her people had seen her time and time again, but now, new judgment was cast.

Tikki found the courage to start walking as soon as her gaze landed on Plagg at the end of the aisle. One step after another. It became easier as long as she kept looking straight at him.

Once she reached as far as she could go, Plagg’s hands helped to her knees.

Tikki didn’t remember much of what was said; her eyes were transfixed on her husband. Everything else faded away until a chilling sensation hit her forehead in the form of holy oil. After worry had plagued her this week of different ways she could mess up the ceremony, she was halfway there.
She couldn’t help but watch as Plagg picked up the nearby crown. The light caught the rubies embedded within and made the crown sparkle even more. Red was her favorite color, so Tikki was sure that this crown would be her favorite. There were so many people that were counting on her to rule this kingdom, and even though Tikki knew that she had to take one day at a time.

Her husband’s eyes crinkled in joy as he began to lower the crown.

Tikki released a sigh of relief when the metal rested safely on her head. A weight of anxiety lifted off her at one of Plagg’s beaming smiles. He was proud of her, and he wanted the world to know. Her husband had been reliable support every step of the way. The second they had arrived, Plagg’s parents sat them down and told them that they wanted them to rise to the throne as they took on a role of advisors. This would help them ease into the role when they passed. Although a huge responsibility, the king and queen wouldn’t have suggested if they did not think they were ready. Plagg helped her to her feet and turned her around.

“Long live the queen,” he shouted. The room filled with the chorus of the phrase Tikki’s lips pushed back into a smile before turning to her king.

“I love you,” she whispered under the roar of the room. Plagg’s eyes softened at the comment before he leaned in. Tikki expected him to return the words, but Plagg had other ideas.

“He closed the gap to seal his statement with a kiss. Tikki found herself returning the gesture with fervor.

Despite what problems they faced, they could do it; together.

End Part 1

Chapter End Notes

A.n.- Part 1, yes you read this right, I have a plot lined up for a sequel, but you'll have to wait a while for it. What’s next for me? I'll be posting some one-shots in my mini "break" that I'm taking. Mostly I'm gearing up for my future two stories (yes two). Subscribe to me if you want to keep up with everything I put out. Also, follow me on Tumblr (same user) I'll probably be posting a sneak peek of the stories since I'm already starting to work through them. I love you all so much.

Until next time.

End Notes

A.n.- So not much fluff *this* chapter, but it is coming. Let me know what you think!
Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!