the reports associated with my existence have been significantly misconstrued

by davidstennant

Summary

It is a truth universally acknowledged that two people, who have only had a single meeting, must evidently be associated somehow. Of course, this universally acknowledged truth is founded on the public's audacious and insatiable curiosity to know everything, except what is worth knowing. But, this still is, in fact, a universally acknowledged truth.

(Or: The climactic, synthesized-pop soundtrack of Marinette's Class Trip to Gotham City, America — complete with the communal and online reaction.)

Notes

Why in the legitimate hell would I spend two hours writing a story based off of an idea in a cross-ship AU that I literally found a while ago, including details from a universe I don't have much knowledge on? All while i'm still studying for exams? With my habit of just starting fics based off of ideas that have no describable ending?

I truly just don't give a fuck, it seems.

In addition to the above inspiration, the idea for this fic came primarily from ozmav's au on
tumblr. This entire concept and ship is just??? it's completely out there in terms of crossovers, but I love it?!

I also have no idea how to write for the characters within the Batman Universe so this'll be a fun and research-filled experience. (Though, that's not gonna happen again until after exams are over) Woooo.

- Inspired by [The reports about my love life have been greatly exaggerated](https://www.tumblr.com/search/The%20reports%20about%20my%20love%20life%20have%20been%20greatly%20exaggerated) by Amerna
- Inspired by [#OnlyInGotham](https://www.tumblr.com/search/OnlyInGotham) by Eat0crow
Now, the average age I'm making all the teenagers is sixteen. In France, they would be in lycée around that age, not collège. Yes, I am aware that Collège Françoise Dupont is only a middle school in canon. So, why am I still using it, you may ask?

Well, since Marinette's school is confirmed to be based on The Lycée Carnot (a public middle and upper secondary school/secondary and higher education school merged into one) and this is a canon-divergent story, I'm completely modeling the school after its inspiration. Why? Cause I can. The school is still called Collège Françoise Dupont.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Truly, it had been the picture perfect occasion.

Wayne Enterprises announced that it would be holding tours of its different departments and buildings for high-school children, in a attempt to "broaden the technological, artistic and medical horizons within the young public." It was a hope that the experiences would inspire some of these children to work under the company one day, and to further the research and development into the
various fields. The tours would have a student seminar, admission plans should they want to apply for internships after they graduate, and note that scholarships and grants through the Wayne Foundation would be offered if the school continued to implement any of the organization's small-scale projects. All high-schools were eligible, both nation-wide and internationally.

Subsequently, the announcement had made its way to one Marinette Dupain-Cheng, who, after reading more into the news, decided that it would be a great experience for her class. She brought it up with her teacher, Madame Bustier, and they talked over the details with administration before deciding that it would be a great experience for the school. Marinette, together with Madame Bustier, had sent in an application for a tour. And, out of the thousands that applied, Collège Françoise Dupont was one of the schools in the batch that had been selected, and would be the first school on the list for this year.

Numerous multimedia houses under Wayne Entertainment, and those who were not, were allowed to capture the opening ceremony and the opening speech by Bruce Wayne, C.E.O. of Wayne Enterprises himself. Outlets such as The Gotham Gazette, The Central City Citizen and The Daily Planet questioned the billionaire on his passion for this venture, and the opening was recorded to be broadcast later that evening.

Afterwards, Mr. Wayne had gone to personally speak with the teacher of the touring class, who had a student beside her. The two had quickly turned around from whatever they were doing upon noticing him, and the teacher immediately started the conversation, clearing her throat.

"Merci beaucoup pour l'opportunité de visiter Wayne Enterprises. C'est vraiment un honneur."

His translator relayed, Thank you very much for the opportunity to visit Wayne Enterprises. It's really an honor, and Bruce smiled.

"Think nothing of it. I'm glad that you found the oppurtunity inviting."

The woman, Madame Bustier, smiled after his translator repeated what he said. "Nous n'aurions jamais su s'il n'y avait pas eu mon élève ici." She nudged the young girl forward. "Elle a vu l'annonce et a été le principal contributeur à l'application." We would never have known if there had not been my student here. She saw the announcement and was the main contributor to the application.

The student seemed immediately alarmed at being put in his attention, and had cast her teacher a pleading look for a moment. He couldn't help but smile, and the girl attempted to compose herself.

"Thank you very much for allowing us to tour Wayne Enterprises." While there were numerous French translators on standby, and a French translator beside him, she had decided to attempt speaking in English. Bruce admired the effort, because she had clearly practiced when she hadn't needed to, and it sounded perfect.

"Thank you for showcasing an interest." He extended his hand for her to shake. "Miss Dupain-Cheng, I was looked over your application myself, and I was impressed with the accomplishments your class have achieved. The numerous fundraisers, the environmental projects in partnerships with Eco-Schools and the UN's integration of Environmental education with French schools...it truly is good to know that young people such as yourself are being proactive."

The words seemed to have unsettled her, given that she most likely hadn't learnt that much English, and her teacher had simply settled for nodding politely and smiling. The translator quickly interpreted, and their looks of confusion shifted to understanding.
"Ah, Marinette est l'un des leaders de l’école. Elle est très assidue et a supervisé plusieurs de ces projets pour notre classe. Je dirais qu'elle a inspiré cette attitude proactive chez mes étudiants." The teacher replied, the girl looking flustered once more. The translator transcribed, **Ah, Marinette is one of the leaders of the school. She is very diligent and has supervised many of these projects for our class. I would say that she has inspired this proactive attitude in my students.**

"Non — je veux dire — no...non?" She mumbled to herself in French for a moment, and he casts a look towards the amused translator.

"She's trying to say refute what her teacher said in English."

Bruce smiled, "There's no need for that, Miss Dupain-Cheng." She promptly brought her head up, and the translator quickly relayed what he said. "Like I said, it's good to know that someone as young as you is taking charge of situations like this. You hadn't detailed that you were in charge however, how modest of you."

After hearing the translator, Miss Bustier patted her student's head. "Marinette a toujours été modeste de ses propres réalisations." **Marinette has always been modest about her own achievements.**

Marinette bashfully smiled up at him. "Ce n'était vraiment pas grand chose." **It really wasn't much.**

They spoke a bit more until they went their separate ways: Bruce, having gotten a call concerning a matter on Floor twenty-three, and Marinette back towards the tour guides with the rest of her classmates and Madame Bustier. It was a fleeting moment really, as Marinette probably would've only remembered the conversation due to prompting from one of her classmates who happened to see. Bruce might've remembered the day after when his employees reminded him that the French class would be exploring the Wayne Biotech Building, but then would have forgotten about it.

Neither of the two had thought that the media invited there would be a concerning issue. And neither of them would have even conceived that one Michael Keaton, an interning employee for *The Daily Informant*, would have found their exchange intriguing. And compelling. And reportable.

And therefore, as any reputable investigative journalist would, he caught the entire exchange on camera.

And story on the newspaper's website just an hour after, would depict multiple high-definition pictures in colour of Bruce Wayne smiling down warmly at a black-haired child with blue eyes. And the story attached to them would read as follows:

**Not-so Secret Love Child?**

*Is This Black Haired Blue-Eyed Girl A Long Lost Wayne?*

by Michael Keaton.

*Numerous reports of Billionaire Bruce Wayne acquiring another child seem to have some truth to them! While the Philanthropist has kept the details about his child about of the public eye, an intrepid Daily Informant reporter caught candid shots of the young, and as-of-yet unidentified child — a daughter. The two were all nervous smiles and laughter as they talked with each other for a brief moment, but the connection and fatherly love was clear as day! She repeats a pattern of his other children — black hair and blue eyes, though she sounds as if she hails from France.*
While it may take a while before he fully introduces her to the Gotham public, if we could get anything from these pictures, we know that their relationship is heartwarming.

This report would prove to be tumultuous. Because while this newspaper company didn't have the credentials of *The Gotham Gazette*, or any other Wayne Enterprises recognized media house, it had an advantage: the ability to play into the public's invasive curiosity. While crime and destruction constantly played on Gotham's televisions, or reported in their newspapers, there would be additions to help brighten the bleak outlook. And while their company had been trying to play the games of other newspaper outlets, without much luck, they had finally found a better target audience: an audience who thrived off of their personal entitlement to people's private lives. The secrecy surrounding Bruce Wayne's personal life was something this public constantly wanted to know, and, if Michael updated quick enough, would be satisfied until the next surge of interest.

And as luck would have it, the unexpected story of Bruce Wayne's *fifth* previously-unknown child was additionally taken up by other news outlets. The name and birth place of this young girl was searched for, her birth mother was identified, a timeline of when she could have possibly been conceived was developed, and a nickname was affectionately bestowed to the young girl. All in the matter of an evening.

And all while the two subjects were none the wiser.

Chapter End Notes

yup. that's it.

i have no idea where this surge came from, but uhhhhh here ya go i guess. i hope you enjoyed it.

(also i know that canonically bruce knows french, but shhhhh for this fic he doesn't.)

cool thanks, i'm gonna stay up until four studying so see you in the next one.
again, if you told me that i would be writing a fic for this specific cross-over universe, i....would've believed you, to be honest. very on brand of me.

enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
@TheGothamGazette
This just in! Billionaire @BruceWayne’s daughter has been finally spotted in public at the 2019 Wayne Enterprises Student Conference. Read more on the story here theggazette/7gILsVu 6:00 PM - 15 April 2019 5k 43k

The Long-Lost Wayne

SamSamBrown
Admin | 20,937 posts

So after those pictures from the Wayne Enterprises Grand Opening for the Tours were released online yesterday (confirming a theory I, like many people had), I decided to do more digging and found much more information concerning his newest daughter. It was hidden in plain sight, really.

According to what I've found on the internet, I managed to find out that:

1. Her full name is Marinette Dupain-Cheng (Magazine prints that list it, x, x, x; Interviews that list it, x, x, x).
2. She's 16 years old, and her birthday is July 9th. (Source 1 from an interview she did, Source 2 from her Instagram)
3. She's from Paris, France.
4. Her parents have a bakery called The Tom & Sabine Boulangerie Patisserie (Pictures from her Instagram that show them and their bakery, x, x, x)
5. She goes to Collège Françoise Dupont. (Source)
6. She's got a loooong list of achievements like, holy shit. French Magazines like Vestoj, Crash, Purple, etc. have interviews about her and her work. There even a mention of her in Elle's "Upcoming Designers to Look Out For". She's been interviewed for being a hand-chosen designer for Jagged Stone as mentioned before (Source 1, Source 2, Source 3 and Source 4), she won a contest from Fashion Designer Gabriel Agreste (Articles with her name and picture included, x, x, x, x) and countless others. We'd be here all day if I continued.
7. Before actually/publicly being credited with her full name for her designs, she went by the pseudonym M.D.C (the initials of her full name) due to her age at the time, and not wanting the spotlight on her as yet. Celebrities would use this name to refer to her whenever reporters asked for the designer of specific outfits. (Source 1 from the Interview "Unmasking Jagged Stone's Hidden Designer M.D.C." , Source 2, Source 3 and Source 4 from Magazine Interviews and Shoots.)

If she's currently 16, that means she was born in 2003. And I have no idea whether there is public
record of Bruce Wayne leaving Gotham to go to Paris during that year, but meh. The tabloids will answer that for us.

Posted today, 5:55 pm.
3,308 comments. Sorted by: Time

Re: The Long-Lost Wayne

SamSamBrown
Admin | 20,938 posts

She appears multiple times in Jagged Stone's Behind the Scenes of his "Sort-of" World Tour. Whoever edited the footage together always notes that the ones she's prominently in were filmed a while before they were posted, but only uploaded them at the time they were because Marinette allowed it (or possibly because she wasn't sixteen at the time these were filmed, France child-working laws and all). However, even if she's not prominently in it, you can always catch in the background doing something, or playing with the camerapeople.
And, since she helped with the outfits for London, Barcelona and Paris, he'd always take her out as a thank you. These pictures match up with the timeline of when the vlogs were filmed:

If you wanna check for yourselves, there are multiple pictures on her Instagram that line up with Jagged Stone's appearance in those cities for his tour. That's way too many for me to compare.

Posted today, 6:10 pm.
3,308 comments. Sorted by: Time

Date: 2019-04-16 06:13 pm (UTC)
What. The. Fuck.

Why are you dragging a sixteen year old kid into the spotlight like that? First of all, you're basing your research on an assumption. For all we fucking know, that reporter may have been jumping to conclusions and created this entire story. There's no confirmation from Bruce Wayne yet, or his company's Public Spokespeople. She already has fucking parents. You're stalking a minor. You're invading her privacy.

This is pretty shitty of you, especially when you know what Gotham's fucking like.

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Re: What. The. Fuck
Date: 2019-04-16 06:14 pm (UTC)
(SamSamBrown)

First of all, the newspapers have already done what I have, in much greater detail. Take that shit up with them.

Second of all, all of my information was found from publicly-accessible online sources. She's been in fucking magazines and newspapers, with all of her information listed. How could I have invaded her privacy when all that information wasn't even private?! Literally fuck off.

Third, I know that you know that adoption's a thing. Her father in that picture could be her step-father. Bruce Wayne could still be her real father.

This information is, once again, being reported by official news outlets. Like they said, you cannot be famous and then expect your life to completely be private. People are gonna want to know. I literally just did my own research, putting public information together and making conclusions. What anyone does with that information is their own business.

Now, get off my back.

Re: Re: What. The. Fuck
Date: 2019-04-16 06:14 pm (UTC)
(Anonymous)

"What anyone does with that information is their own business."

You literally put a fucking bulls-eye on a child. Yes, the media's currently doing that too, and I'm upset at that as well, but that doesn't excuse you doing the same. You're a piece of shit.

Yes, she been featured in the media before. But Parisian publicity is way fucking different from Gotham publicity. She has never been featured or connected to a family like the Waynes, who have a lot of targets attached to them by various evil people. Remember Jason Todd? Remember when he was kidnapped and presumed murdered? You bringing light to her is gonna set her up for the same fucking thing.
The fucking nerve of you.

Link Reply Thread from start Parent Thread Hide 200 replies

Re: Re: Re: What. The. Fuck
Date: 2019-04-16 06:21 pm (UTC)
(SamSamBrown)

I'm done talking about this, dude.

Link Reply Thread from start Parent Thread Hide 223 replies

Re: Re: Re: What. The. Fuck
Date: 2019-04-16 06:23 pm (UTC)
(Anonymous)

Yeah, well guess what? I'm not.

If the media, and people like you, had taken the fucking hint when Jason was first reported murdered, instead of continuously reporting on their private lives, the Wayne family would have to go through shit like this. Barbara Gordon, who is just a fucking family friend, was paralyzed by the fucking Joker. If she is his daughter, ever wonder why he's never talked about her to the media? Imagine what he, or other villains in Gotham would do to someone they suspected to be Bruce Wayne's daughter.

I'm not gonna "get off your back" when you're making a 16 year old a fucking target. You said in yourself in your fucking research: she from France. I have a bone to pick with the fucking media as well, because they damn well know what a nightmare Gotham fucking is, for tourists and citizens alike. But now that she's visiting a whole new country, in a city she's never been in before? It's even worse.

If something happens to her, her blood is on the hands of the Gotham City media, and on the hands of people like you, who think that sharing her information isn't an issue. Especially if it turns out that he isn't her father. You all would have flashed this girl's information for nothing.

I hope he sues your asses. Hell, I hope they both sue your asses.

Link Reply Thread from start Parent Thread Hide 196 replies

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The Long-Lost Wayne Unmasked - A Secret We Already Knew

By Vicki Vale

GOTHAM — It was the typical April day, complete with the usual broadcast of robberies, gutsy murders and reports of villainous schemes around the city. And yet, something much lighter took the interest of the citizens of Gotham City. Sunshine penetrated the bleak depths of the
consistently reported news, and it all has to do with a well known figure of the city: Bruce Wayne.

Billionaire Bruce Wayne has kept numerous secrets concerning his personal life, most notably his children, and has taken his time letting the public know of them — just nine months ago, he finally revealed his biological son, Damien Wayne. But rumors kept circulating that he adopted yet another child. This time, a girl. A young girl with black hair, but no discernible face. When were we going to see this daughter? How long would it take before they were ready to reveal her to the Gotham public?

Those questions were answered just yesterday, though, not by the billionaire parent. In fact, the evidence came from the opening ceremony of the Wayne Enterprises' Student's Conference, when a reporter managed to snap pictures of Bruce Wayne with a young girl and now — we have a face and a name to attach to the mysterious daughter.

That name is Marinette Dupain-Cheng.

Ever since those heartwarming pictures of the two hit the public, many reporters and common folk alike have been trying to find out more information on the adorable teenager. But we have an extensive profile on the newest Wayne daughter, or, as the internet has lovingly dubbed her, the "Sunshine of Gotham":

Marinette Dupain-Cheng, a French native, was born on July 9th, 2003. Research has found that her mother is a woman by the name of Sabine Cheng from Wenzhou, China, and her stepfather is a man by the name of Tom Dupain, born in France. She has a significant amount of credentials attached to her name — having been a designer for French-American rock star Jagged Stone, and winning a contest under famed French Fashion Designer Gabriel Agreste just to name a few, all at the age of fourteen.

Insider sources note that the young teenager is quite close with her father, Bruce Wayne. "He's known about her ever since she was born," a friend of her mother tells us. "He didn't want to introduce her to the citizens of Gotham yet, not until she was much older, but he always visited Paris whenever he had the time. And when he can't do that, he video-chats with her. He absolutely loves her, and there's no animosity between him and her step-father. She calls him 'dad'." How adorable!

Yesterday, she was attending the ceremony as her school — Collège Françoise Dupont was one of the first schools to be selected to tour the Wayne Enterprises Affiliated Buildings in 2019. And it seems that Bruce Wayne couldn't help but say hello, as he was reported to have gone over to her first.

At the time of writing, Wayne Enterprise has yet to give an official comment on behalf of its C.E.O. But we think we can say on behalf of the Gotham public that we can't wait to see more of the father-daughter duo.

Follow Vicki Vale on Twitter at @ViVale

The Kane Hotel· Gotham City, New Jersey
6:00 am.

Here's what Marinette had planned for her one week field trip to America.
The first week was going to be specifically catered to the Wayne Enterprises' departments and affiliated buildings. Yesterday was spent touring the Wayne Research Institute, where the tour guides explained that many decorated, highly credited researchers try to solve future issues that can affect future generations. Today's tour was going to be exploring the rest of divisions in the Wayne Enterprises building, such as Wayne Biotech Building, Wayne Medical, Wayne Aerospace, Wayne Technologies, among others. The rest of the week before their inevitable return, the class was supposed to go with guided tours to Gotham Zoo, the Gotham Museum Of Art, Gotham City Opera and various other stores around the area. Within this week, she was looking most forward to the Gotham Museum Of Art, where she'd take multiple pictures for reference and future inspiration. Aside from that, maybe she'd buy something nice from the stores. She promised her parents she'd bring something back for them.

So when she awoke Tuesday Morning, groggily stopping her alarm, she hadn't expected much. She had to go shower, get dressed, have breakfast and meet everyone in the lobby by eight-thirty. Like a normal teenager, still half-ridden with sleep, she palmed for her phone to scroll through it in bed for about ten minutes. Tikki burrowed further in her hair, glad that the alarm was no more of a disturbance.

Upon seeing her phone blown up with countless messages and notifications, her first presumption was that someone had to have died, because some of the first messages indicated that the senders were from France. However, as she scrolled further, there were new friend requests on her Instagram and Twitter, and emails from people she had never heard of before. Confused, she began listening to the voicemails, and her bewilderment increased when in the first one — Penny questioned if she needed her help navigating the rumors that were popping up. She listened to another one, and she still got no answer when Kagami kept questioning what had she gotten into over there in Gotham. Luka's text messages said that her name was trending all over Twitter in France....what?

Her emails hadn't provided an answer either, since most were apparently from people offering their services. For what, she had no idea, the whole thing was in English. She could only make out that it had something to do with Bruce Wayne. Her other voicemails, from what she could discern, were just people asking her for a comment concerning, once again, Bruce Wayne. What the fuck happened between yesterday to now? How did strangers get her number? What rumors? Why was she being linked with Bruce Wayne? It was too early for this confusion.

She went to Google and ran her name through the search bar. And then promptly screeched.

Tikki jumped out of her sleep, and then narrowed her tired eyes towards her chosen. "Marinette, wha — " She shoved the device towards the kwami, and the creature quickly shut her eyes against the brightness.

Her search delivered her numerous results, mostly online news stories discussing her being Bruce Wayne's daughter. What the fuck? Where the fuck did this come from? She had only met the man yesterday, and it wasn't even that long — she couldn't even speak English, they had needed a translator. How did that conversation lead to her being the supposed daughter of a billionaire? She tried the first online article about it, and saw the pictures attached. She translated it into French so she could understand.

So someone managed to capture pictures where it looked like he was invested into what she was saying, which was kind of him, considering he always had to wait to understand what she and Madame Bustier had send, and had assumed that she was his daughter because....she had black hair, and blue eyes? She really tried to understand it from the perspective of another, but she could not for the life of her make the correlation. That was a ridiculous assumption to base a whole article
on? They really just thought up an assumed father-daughter relationship with Bruce Wayne? *What the fuck?*

She exited from that link and went to another, and found some article that said that she and her supposed father were "apparently close." A "friend" of her mother was listed as a source which, wow, okay. A lie. Her details were listed for everyone to see, her full name, her school, her age, her social media...

Now, she had been through this before. When she encountered Adrien through the streets of Paris hiding from his fans, she had been linked to him as his girlfriend. It had been similar to this, people had found her name, her social media, and what she did in her daily life. But *this*...this was in America. She was getting attention from strangers in a whole other country. What was she supposed to do? When that incident with Adrien happened, his father simply dismissed the claims, and she followed suit on her social media. Eventually, it died down. But *this*? She couldn't just call up *every* single media house to tell them that they were wrong. Maybe the people on Bruce Wayne's end would do it for her? But was he even aware of this yet? Maybe this would eventually go away? Would this go away?

She numbly held her phone in her hands, staring at nothing while Tikki called her name, until there was a knock on the door.

"Marinette?" Madame Bustier's voice rang out behind the door. "Marinette, I'm just reminding you that you need to get ready for eight-thirty."

She blinked, and quickly rushed over to open it. The teacher was startled at the force of it, and her confusion quickly turned to concern at the hysterical glint in her student's eyes.

The noirette held up her phone, "Something's happened."

"So, let me see if I understand all of this correctly." Madame Mendeleiev's words were slow, looking as disorientated as Marinette herself felt, after hearing the recollection of events that happened from yesterday morning to now. They sat together in the dining hall, breakfast on their plates. "You spoke to Monsieur Wayne yesterday...."

"Yes."

"Some half-witted reporter took pictures of you talking with him...."

"Mm-hmm."

"And now *everyone* in this city thinks you're his daughter? Actual acclaimed Gotham-based reporting agencies are reporting the same thing?"

"Yep."

Madame Mendeleiev blinked. She glanced at her other teacher, who leaned back in her chair, just as bewildered, even after they had spent forty-five minutes in her hotel room going over it all. She glanced back towards her, eyes narrowed, "And you did absolutely nothing else to start these rumors?"
"Mendeleiev," Madame Bustier interjected flatly. "We couldn't even have a direct two-way conversation. He needed a French translator."

Marinette exhaled, "We only spoke for like, a minute. Then he went off because of some problem elsewhere in the Wayne Enterprises building, and we came back to you guys."

The elder woman ran a hand through her dyed hair, "Sorry, sorry. I'm not accusing you, Dupain-Cheng. Really. I'm just trying to make sense of all this."

The noirette slumped in her chair, "You and me both."

Madame Mendeleiev glanced around the hotel's dining room. The rest of the class were speaking amongst themselves, some on their phones, others simply talking to each other, some listening to Mlle. Rossi. The teacher frowned, the girl was becoming an issue. Monsieur Haprèle was keeping watch over them, as he was the third school-assigned chaperone. She eyed Madame Bustier significantly, who nodded in understanding. She spoke lowly, "How far has this reached? If this is well-known in Gotham...."

"I've gotten messages from friends back in Paris," Marinette frowned, poking at her pancakes. "It's trending on the internet there as well. People also have found my business email and my phone number, but that last one isn't public."

Madame Mendeleiev's eyes widened in alarm while Madame Bustier took a swig of her tea as if it were something else, and muttered, "You are a minor. We already took a chance coming to Gotham, what with its climate — "

"Thank Monsieur Damocles for that." Her co-worker lowly grumbled, but Marinette heard anyway and grimaced.

"— and now, there's the possibility of a target on you. There already was the possibility of everyone here being a target given that we're visitors, but now..." Madame Bustier trailed off, and Marinette's eyes bore into the desk.

"I'm sorry."

"Hey." She picked her head up to see Madame Mendeleiev pointing her fork at her. "Where in this mess did we say that it's your fault?"

Madame Bustier's teal eyes appraised her, horrified. "I didn't mean to sound as if I'm blaming you, Marinette." She placed her hands on the girl's, "Sure, this trip was your idea, but it was a good one. You and I sat down together and weighed the pros and cons of coming here, and you even said that if it was too risky for us to go, you wouldn't mind. But administration thought it would be great for the school."

The other teacher snorted, "I see where they're coming from. It'd make the school look good, and if we started implementing their projects, that'd be even better. But that's not the point. This mess, where people are invading your privacy and giving you a whole new identity? That's the issue. You had nothing to do with that, so stop blaming yourself."

The young girl smiled in thanks, and Madame Mendeleiev, seeing as her mood had changed, went back to her eggs. She gestured with her free hand, "You have those pictures on you?"

Marinette unlocked her phone and flinched at the new influx of notifications. She opened google, searched her name once more, and went into the images section. Finding the one she was looking for, she handed her phone over. The woman surveyed the screen for a moment, before eyeing her
incredulously. "This? This is what this whole mess is about? Are these people stupid?"

"Apparently, they've been seeing a young girl with Bruce Wayne multiple times. She has black hair, like mine, but have never seen her face. So, I guess that just assumed..."

"Their assumptions are moronic." She went back out into the images, and her eyes found one that had another young girl with the billionaire. She clicked it, and read the short summary of the picture. "This is who I'm assuming they think you are." She showed it to them. "This girl doesn't even have your hair length. It's black, yes, but not as long."

Madame Bustier frowned, leaning forward to see. "That was taken a while ago. They would think that her hair would have grown."

"Ridiculous." She exhaled. "So, what should we do? We can't really contact anyone, seeing as we're in another country. I don't even know who we'd be contacting."

"Marinette and I have been talking with a woman named Penny Rolling, Jagged Stone's assistant."

Mendeleieff's eyebrow flicked up in surprise. "Marinette's worked under them before and she's heard about this mess. She offered to reach out to Wayne Enterprises for us as Marinette's "representative", considering she has the legal know-how about all this. Also, she can speak fluent English. She'll be contacting me when she hears from him. Aside from that, I have no idea. We're really stuck until Monsieur Wayne's representatives say something about it."

Madame Mendeleieff frowned, "I suppose you're right. He is an important figure here, right? His team most likely has some sort of plan for this. They'll put out a statement denying what the media is saying, and that'll be it. I'm pretty sure this will blow over eventually."

Marinette took a bite out of her pancakes, eyes roaming over the dining room again, and she froze upon making eye-contact with someone. He's staring at her hard, and she takes another moment to realize that he has his phone out, and has it pointed towards their table, not even caring that she's discovered him. She pales, and grabs onto Madame Bustier's arm. The two women pause their conversation to look over at where she facing, and Madame Bustier's eyes widen. Madame Mendeleieff's eyes narrow.

The woman stands up, and yells in accented English. "What the fuck do you think you're doing? Video-taping a minor?!"

Her voice catches the attention of everyone in the room, including the security guards, and the man immediately runs for the hotel's doors, fumbling with his device. The security guards chase after him, and the occupants in the hotel's dining room are left staring in the aftermath.

Madame Mendeleieff eyes Marinette, "Do your parents have any idea about all this?" When the girl shook her head, and attempted to gather her bearings to call them, she held up a hand. "We'll talk to them, don't worry. They should know."

"I wanted to talk with you first." Madame Bustier exhaled, glancing back towards the doors as if the man would return. "Go sit with the others, Marinette. But don't let anyone know what's happening just yet."

"Madame Bustier? Madame Mendeleieff?" The three turned to see Alix with her phone in her hand, along with Kim and Max behind her, looking extremely concerned. Max questioned, "Is everything okay? What happened with that man?"

The two teachers eye each other and Madame Bustier waves a hand, "Oh. It's, uh, nothing. It's
nothing, kids. How can we help you?"

"Well," Alix's phone screen was then turned towards them, lit up with familiar pictures, and Marinette falters. "We were just on Twitter, and for some reason, the people here think that Marinette's related to Bruce Wayne. Her name is trending and everything. We thought that Marinette, and you guys, should know. We just saw this."

"We as in you three?" Mendeleiev raised an eyebrow.

"We as in everyone." Kim gestured behind them, and their eyes widened as they realized that the entire class was now attentively observing their table. Marinette shrinks down in her seat, until only the top of her head is visible. Madame Bustier releases a heavy breath, pinching the bridge of her nose.

"So much for not telling them yet."

Wayne Manor · 1007 Mountain Drive, Gotham City, New Jersey
7:30 am.

It was supposed to be a normal, quiet morning within his home.

Key words: supposed to be. Because a few moments earlier, he had gotten a message to his answering machine from one of the employees of the Wayne Enterprises PR Department, asking if he wanted to proceed with the usual "No comment" policy whenever questions surrounding his personal life came up. And that wasn't the alarming part, oh no. He wasn't worried about that, because that was usual in his life. What was alarming, was that upon checking his second message for the day, the same woman made sure to note that every single major media house wanted some personal answer from him. That made him alarmed, because there's was absolutely no reason — that he knew of anyway — for increased press and public interest.

But, it was still very early in the morning. Therefore, he would deal with it after he had his coffee.

As he walked down the stairs, and nears the dining room, he can hear the sounds of other occupants from inside. They're talking, Jason's voice carrying from beyond its doors, and what sounds like Tim responding equally as loud. But there in itself lay another anomaly for the morning: Tim had never been one to be up before eight in the morning. And if he was, he was never this energetic. Damien didn't sound as if he was present inside, there certainly wasn't any responding bickering, and Dick didn't sound present either, most likely still upstairs.

Alfred simply opened the dining room door for him, though, not before appraising him with a tiny smirk on his lips. Bruce blinked, but before he could question it, the butler had left for the kitchen.

As he suspected, Jason and Tim were the only ones present at the dining table. Both looked up at his entrance, and a slow grin began to form on Jason's face. That wasn't a good sign. Tim simply looked at him for half a beat, before dropping his head down in this morning's edition of the Gotham Gazette on the table. Bruce couldn't make out what the headline said, though. What Tim did do, additionally, was elbow Jason harshly in the side, sparing him an amused glance.

For another moment, Bruce hesitates, before eventually sitting down. "Good Morning," he says, attempting to have some form of normalcy.
But he doesn't get it, as all Jason says is, "Morning," still failing to hide his amusement at God knows what. Tim concurs with "Good Morning," without looking up from the paper, but there's a smile growing on his lips. He frowns, until a cup of steaming coffee is placed onto the table. He glances upwards at Alfred, who ominously says, "You're going to need it, Master Bruce."

He stares after the butler as he walked away, and he could feel the stare of the other two occupants at the table. So, with a great deal of hesitation, he grasps his and took a long sip. His eyes blearily scanned them both; raising an eyebrow at their continuous silence. But then neither of them started the conversation, which meant he was going to have to. Of course he was. He exhaled, "What is it, Jason?"

"Oh, nothing." He offers after a moment, and his eyes are alight with glee and a small bit of superiority, at the fact that he knew what Bruce didn't. "I'm just wondering how many secrets you've managed to keep from us. Must be very exhausting."

Bruce taps his fingers on the table top, to fill in the silence that follows after. When nobody continues, Jason simply waiting for him to broach the conversation, he exhales for a moment, and tries, "What are you talking about? What did you do?"

Jason scoffed, "I'm hurt that you thought that I've done something. Haven't I been the quintessential model of good behaviour these past months? Ensuring that I was nowhere near the public eye until you said it was okay? Couldn't have everyone know that I'm undead until it was the right time." Tim snickered. "Tim hasn't done anything either. Or Dick, or Damien. Not even Alfred. Oh no, my dear Bruce, this is all on you."

He downs his cup and turns to call Alfred, only to find the man already there with the pot. He pours him another, and goes back off to the sidelines. Bruce closes his eyes for a moment, slowly counting in his head. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. "You have five seconds to explain, Jason."

"Then again," he went on, as if he hadn't heard him. "You've somehow managed to keep Damien out of the media's eyes for so long, until recently anyway. So, I suppose you've done the same with her. But, I guess you can't always hide your children from the watchful eyes of the media forever."

A nonchalant shrug of the shoulders. "Now your newest one is out there."

Bruce paused. And stared.

"What?"

"Your daughter?" Tim finally decided to join in, eyes still down in the newspaper. "The one who you've....what was it: "managed to conceive during a rendezvous in Paris, France."

"The Long-Lost Wayne daughter, which honestly, I thought Cassandra filled that position."

Bruce continued to stare. "I don't have a daughter. And I haven't been to Paris for the last six months."

"Well, according to multiple news publications and the expanse of the internet, you do. And you occasionally go to Paris to ensure that she's doing well out of the public eye." Tim chose that moment to turn the newspaper to show the article he had been going over for the past few moments, and Bruce absolutely froze.

His eyes immediately fall to the big, bold headline that was blazoned on page two: THE LONG-LOST WAYNE UNMASKED — A SECRET WE ALREADY KNEW. Beneath it, and printed in full-color were photos of both him and the young girl he had met yesterday, as well as another picture
of only Miss Dupain-Cheng. The picture of the two of them were taken during their short, short conversation, but whoever had taken them had carefully selected the ones where it seemed as if he was looking down at her warmly. He started to feel the beginning of a headache, right by his left temple.

Bruce dragged his eyes upwards once more, and Jason took that moment to raise an eyebrow at him, "Does this mean that we're trading the demon spawn for her? Please tell me we're trading the demon spawn for her."

"Why didn't you tell us, Bruce? I'll admit, the secrecy is in your nature. But this? I would've liked to know that we were getting another sister." There's an alerting beep from his phone, and he eyes the messages on the screen before he says, "Duke says and I quote "You have a problem". Stephanie is currently laughing at you."

He raised a hand to his face, "You're not."

Jason blinked. "The whole of Gotham seems to disagree with you on that. They're calling her the "Sunshine of Gotham"."

"This is what the PR Department was calling about?"

The statement was murmured to himself, but Tim responded with "Oh, so you did get her messages. She relayed everything to me when she couldn't get you immediately. Something about wanting to handle it quickly without going through the hierarchy."

Bruce extended his hand for the newspaper, eyes demanding and Tim didn't make a fuss in passing it to him. "As funny as I think this is, because it is a little, there's a lot of media traffic headed this poor girl's way."

He skimmed through the article, but noted that her personal details were published: her name, her age, the school she's travelling with, supposed details about her parents back in France. The fantastical information concerning his relationship with Miss Dupain-Cheng made him clench the newspaper. "Are these people mad?"

"Are you trying to say that those pictures aren't believable?" Jason forked his eggs, and pointed at the paper. "Look at that face of fatherly love. You've never looked at me like that."

Bruce aimed a smoldering glance towards him while Tim cut in, "This has actually given me work to do since, well, you're usually not one for harrowing PR situations. I've narrowed down when exactly the first appearance of those images happened, and figured out who started it all." At Bruce's blink of surprise, at thinking about how early he must have been up to catch this and work it out, Tim raised his cup of coffee. "You didn't hire me to work for Wayne Enterprises for nothing."

Alfred poured him a cup, "What'd you find, Master Tim?"

"The newspaper that posted it online was The Daily Informant. The writer's name is Michael Keaton, which, I found that he used to work under The Gotham Gazette, but then they fired him for not producing content fit for the company."

"So then, he started writing tabloid nonsense?" Jason hummed. "Makes sense."

"She's a child. She's — " Bruce glances down at the paper again. "Sixteen? What are they thinking broadcasting her information when they know what Gotham's like? Over ridiculous conjecture?"
"That's the most insane part to me. They're really pushing this just because she has black hair and blue eyes." Jason shook his head, "I'd say this was just like Vicki Vale's fashion, but she's already done just that."

"I've also taken a note of the multiple media houses that's been reporting on this. This has already reach all over Gotham, as well as outside. This poor girl has a high level target on her."

Bruce glowered at nothing, eyes on the paper. He stares at the incredibly young student in the picture, looking ever-so nervous as they spoke and he says, "We need to make a statement to stop this in its tracks. They're supposed to be coming back to the company today, I want increased security. I also want to find some way to contact her. She's going through this on her own."

"Someone got way ahead of you on that last one," Tim typed away on phone. "A woman by the name of Penny Rolling called the PR department around fifteen minutes ago saying that she wants to know if you have any intention of producing lawsuits. Checked her out, she's the manager of Jagged Stone, and Marinette's worked for him before. She certainly isn't afraid sue anyone, what with the poor girl being under eighteen." Oh, he intends to. Not for him, but for the student wrapped up in this mess. "They transferred her to me, and I told her I'd get back to her on that. I figured that you wouldn't stay in bed too long. If you did, I'd just send Alfred to wake you up."

"Give me her number," Bruce sighed. "I want to talk with her personally."

"No problem. Concerning that statement, we would craft it up for you, but something tells me that you want to do it yourself." At the man's nod, he continued. "I've already notified head of security about all this. Dick also knows, by the way. He's gathering any evidence of other charges this girl might want to add to this whole mess: stalking, breaking and entering, anything really."

So that's why he wasn't present. "Damien's at school already?"

Jason nodded, "He might have all this shoved in his face though. Oh, he's gonna hate it." There was no sympathy in his tone though, only delight.

Bruce downed his second cup of coffee, before rising. "Come with me, Tim. We need to release this statement as soon as possible."

Tim gets up from his seat, yawning, and moves to get the entire pot of coffee before following Bruce. Jason snorts at the action, before waving a hand after the two, "Good luck."
jay jay abrams

@thecityofjules
@investigativereporterray so y'all stalking teenage girls now? thanks for providing evidence for the police and BW's PR team for the future lawsuit. LEAVE this poor girl alone 8:05 AM - 16
[the video in question is of the supposed newest Wayne daughter, Marinette Dupain-Cheng, seated at a table eating with two older women. The cameraman who filmed it, @investigativereporterray, seems to be a few seats away from her, but still close enough to visibly discern the young girl's face. The video takes a turn when the young girl catches the camera, and the attention of her two occupants. One of them, a woman with purple hair stands up and yells in accented english: "What the fuck are you doing? Video-taping a minor?" The screen quickly goes black, but the audio showcases that the cameraman is running, and one can hear the sounds of people yelling at him to stop.]

Replies to this tweet:
so i'm just gonna.....save this video when Wayne
riri williams

@reginawilliams
@thecityofjules @investigativereporterray the fear on her face when she realized you were taping
her.....drop your location, i just wanna talk 8:10 AM - 16 April 2019
40

@justdameron @thecityofjules @investigativereporterray so people really out here stalking this baby and putting her info out there and making it worse?? chair, but make it electric 8:11 AM - 16 April 2019
As much as Marinette wanted to ignore the mess that this whole situation was, the ride over was filled with curious, theorizing and probing questions from her classmates.

"Just to be be sure, he's not actually your dad, right?"

She aimed a flat look towards him, "Kim. You've known me since we were six. You've *seen* my dad."

"To be fair, I've forgotten a lot of things from my youth."

Alix glanced at him similarly, "You forgot your phone in your hotel room *this* morning. That's 'cause your brain's too small to remember a lot of things."

Squabbling then arose between the two, while Alya folded her arms. "It's still weird though. They only thought you were related because of your hair? and your eyes? What kind of conclusion is that? That's bad journalism."

Marinette stayed silent in her seat. The relationship between her and Alya had become a bit strained due to Lila's presence, and Alya's insistence that Marinette simply had a grudge over her because of jealousy. She'll admit, it first started off that way. But then she saw Lila for who she really was, she got over herself and had tried her best to warn the girl, with no luck. So now, their friendship had taken a bit of a break. And there was awkwardness, but she had trudged through it.

There was also awkwardness through the entire class. Because most had believed that Marinette, for some reason, was being standoffish to Lila. They weren't treating her terribly, however, they were just pretty awkward whenever conflict arose and Lila turned on her tears. Only a few were definitely in her corner: Alix, Kim, Max, and Nathaniel and Juleka to an extent (the two didn't like confrontation). Even Chloe called out Lila whenever she could, though, not due to any solidified friendship between her and the blonde. Chloe just hated her.

Speaking of: "I mean, I knew immediately that the press jumped to conclusions." Lila's self-assured voice chimed in, unwelcomed. "I've met his family before, and they've definitely never brought her up."

*Here we go.* She must've been upset that attention was finally on Marinette for once. The noirnette shared a weary look with the ones who knew better. She would give a significant look towards Adrien, but his father hadn't allowed him to come on the trip.

"You know the Wayne Family?" Alya gasped, leaning forward in excitement. The rest of the class followed suit.

"Oh," she giggles, as if their attention wasn't what she wanted. "Yeah. They're all my friends. I met his son Damien Wayne when we were seven. He was so cute."
Alya narrowed her eyes, a grin on her lips. "Sounds to me like there's some fondness there."

"Well..." Alya, Mylène and Rose squealed. The others simply smiled at the story. "You guys won't tell anyone, right?"

_Sweet Jesus._ Marinette rolled her eyes as Mylène responded, "Of course we wouldn't, Lila."

Lila smiled, "Okay. So, Damien and I are actually dating." Gleeful gasps sounded as a result, and the girl continued. "We just don't spread it around because the family's worried I'll be a target. You know how influential they are in Gotham."

"Childhood friends turned lovers," Rose sighed. "That's so _cute._"

Lila opened her mouth to conduct some more nonsense, but Madame Mendeleiev's voice cut in, having paused her conversation with whoever on the phone. "Mademoiselle Rossi. Need I remind you, what Monsieur Damocles said about your...'condition'. We're not in Paris anymore, we're in America. And these people will not think twice about your age, or your supposed condition."

Madame Mendeleiev handed her the phone, "Your mother, Dupain-Cheng."

Marinette grimaced at the device as she accepted it, and hesitated before putting it up to her ear. "嘿, Maman. 你好嗎?" Hey, Maman. How are you doing?

"Apparently, I had a child with a billionaire, it seems like." Her mother answered, absolute mirth in her voice, and Marinette relaxed a little. "Penny told me everything this morning. She's going to be representing you all the way from here, and will be getting a lawyer if necessary."

The girl frowned at the insinuation of a lawyer getting involved on her end, but questioned, "Are you and Papa okay though? No one's come by the bakery to take pictures or anything?"

"If they so much as _dare_, they'll deal with me. And I know that you're not asking that when you're facing it much worse over there."

Marinette exhaled, "Nothing's _really_ happened."

"什麼都沒發生. 我的腳." _Nothing really happened my foot._ Her mother's growing ire could be felt over the phone, and she groaned. "Marinette, those people are giving you a whole new identity! As if I didn't know who I had my daughter with. As if I didn't go through giving _birth_ to you with your father by my side. I even have it documented. They want evidence, I'll give them evidence."

She hissed, "Please do not show them the birth video. No one needs to see that."

She hears a sigh on the other end. "I won't, sweetie." _Thank god._ "But really, this entire thing is
"I will, I promise. I just didn't this morning because I was caught off guard over...everything. It was a lot."

"I can imagine."

When they finally arrived at their destination, there were numerous photographers waiting at the front entrance of the building, only divided by the side barriers preventing them from swarming the doors. There were multiple security guards, who seemed to be on the lookout for anyone attempting to cross the borders. Marinette raised an eyebrow. Who were they waiting for? Was Bruce Wayne going to be exiting the building and they were looking to catch him? Madame Bustier was more alarmed at the sight of them, and she called for the driver to pause from driving up any further.

Madame Mendeleiev said something that was most likely a curse, but she didn't catch it. She murmured to Madame Bustier, "Any chance they're looking for some other famous person?"

"God, if only."

The rest of her class got up to see the multitude of people in front of the entrance. A "Whoa" escaped from Alix. Monsieur Haprèle's eyes widened. "With Marinette's situation, how are we going to get in without any of them seeing?"

Madame Bustier was already on the phone, "I'm calling the building."

A little after she hung up the phone, they watched as a man exited the building, and the mass of people started flashing their cameras. Even though they accurately couldn't discern what was being said from inside the bus, shouts of questions were definitely being sent his way. He ignored them, only pausing to speak with a security guard, before walking towards their bus. He knocked on the bus' doors, flashing a Wayne Enterprise badge, and the driver allowed him inside after glancing towards the teachers.

The man exhaled as he entered, lips tilted in a comforting grin. "Good morning, everyone. I'll be your tour guide for the day." He spoke in French. "I apologize for the sudden influx of paparazzi that's greeting you all today. They've somehow found out that Gotham's new person of interest would be at the building again today. But we did the best we could in the short amount of time."

Marinette exhaled heavily, Max patting her shoulder in comfort, and the man's eyes found hers. "Now, we're going to get you all through those people into the building. The security guards will hold them off from actually surrounding you. But all you have to do is just walk up the pathway into the building. It'll be over before you know it."

The teachers reiterated what the tour guide ordered, while the bus fully drove up in front of the entrance. "Remember," he repeated, "Just walk up the pathway and ignore them." The doors opened, and they quickly descended onto the pathway. They quickly spotted her out of her classmates, and the shuttering of cameras sounded.

"Over here, Marinette!"

"Marinette, are you going to be meeting your dad later today?"

"Smile for the camera, Marinette!"
She forced her feet to move as she walked behind her teachers, eyes firmly fixed onto Madame Bustier's back. Someone reached their camera over the border to flash a camera directly in her face, and she squeezes her eyes shut, coming to a halt. A security guard harshly pushes the person backwards while Madame Mendeleiev urges her to move from behind, and she blinks to rid her sight of the dark spots.

"Almost there, Marinette."

It seem like a thousand steps before they all reached the entrance, the security guards stationed at the doors, quickly opening them. Once they were all in, and the doors shut, the tour guide glanced over them all, fixing his hair. "Is everyone okay?"

The rest of her classmates were as flustered as she felt, many looking backwards at the swarm outside. Madame Bustier called for everyone to come closer, eyes surveying them all. "I'm going to take role, and I want everyone to answer when they hear their name."

She called everyone's name individually, and Marinette was jolted by a hand resting on her shoulder. Madame Mendeleiev gave an apologetic look before softly questioning, "You okay?"

It took a bit before she nodded numbly, running a hand through her hair. The response clearly hadn't satisfied the woman, but she didn't push. When Marinette's name was called, Madame Mendeleiev simply raised a hand before the girl could answer. Madame Bustier frowned as she assessed Marinette, but sighed, continuing down the line.

The noirnette glanced around the entrance floor, trying to gain her bearings. Other Wayne Enterprises employees were looking their way, eyes directly on her, filled with recognition. Some paused from walking to whenever they were going, to stare for a few moments. Marinette released a deep breath. Regarding the situation with Adrien a while ago, she could at least understand what people were saying to her. Back out there, the only she she could discern was her name. The language barrier made this much more claustrophobic. The eyes of American strangers watching her every move made her fixated to the spot. Did Penny get onto his representatives yet? She knew that billionaires were possibly busy people, but shouldn't some kind of official statement been released? Were those people going to follow her every move? Was she going to have to deal with this for the entirety of her trip?

The tour guide cleared his throat, casting narrowed eyes towards the watching employees. They quickly went back to whatever they were doing before, though not before taking a couple more looks at her. He exhaled, "If you'll just walk up to the registration desk, you'll receive your visitor badges. Those will identity that you have Level One clearance for the day."

Marinette released another breath, jostling her bangs. She held back the whimper in her throat. She guessed that that was it, then. It was just a waiting game.
@BuzzFeed
@BruceWayne releases official statement concerning rumors of another child.
Wayne Enterprises

@WayneEnterprises
@BruceWayne: An Official Statement regarding the rumors devised by the media.
It has come to my attention that multiple media houses have conducted an assumption regarding my private life, my children and linking it to one Miss Marinette Dupain-Cheng. What concerns me, is the cornucopia of national and international attention that is being directed this young girl’s way, especially when many Gotham citizens know of its climate, and the disastrous target all this attention can create.

Therefore, I will set the record straight: Miss Dupain-Cheng is not my daughter.

In fact, this young girl is currently present in the country due to taking part in the Wayne Enterprises' Student's Conference. She has absolutely no relation to me, and the narrative conceptualized by the media is absolutely false.

This unwanted media coverage towards an innocent is absolutely horrifying. For the past twenty-four hours, her private information has been distributed across the internet. Her private life is being invaded and questioned and discarded by persons who want this theory to be true. She has been bombarded by numerous reporters at her current temporary residence, and wherever she goes. Strangers have stalked her simply to get a picture. This is exactly why I have been hesitant over to years to introduce my own children to the media, and why I am so stringent on any media coverage concerning them. Miss Dupain-Cheng is only a child, and should not have to be subjected to what the media is putting her through. I will not even mention what could have happened to her, but you all know what Gotham's villains are capable of, and the fact that this was ignored is quite reprehensible. This could have ended in a tragedy, and I am thankful it has not.

Therefore, if she sees fit for anyone to have legal consequences, those responsible will be held accountable. I will be in contact with her and her legal team to discuss further. I also would like to extend my sincerest apologies to Miss Dupain-Cheng and her family for the attention and harm this has brought them. Furthermore, I ask that you all please respect that Miss Dupain-Cheng is a child, and do not make this worse than it already is.

Yours Respectfully,
Bruce Wayne.
Replies to this tweet:

james

@JamesTheBrand
@BruceWayne okay that's that. can we stop bringing this girl in the public eye now? 9:02 AM - 16 April 2019

16  143
@vinnie
@BruceWayne okay but he literally HAS to say this. his PR department isn't going to let him own up to #LostWayne, so his statement proves nothing. 9:05 AM - 16 April 2019
@poefinnrights
@BruceWayne Yeah, she's definitely a Wayne. They're only denying it because they didn't want this out from the start. 9:06 AM - 16 April 2019
that hand flex from p&p 2005

@eleanorsarchive
"Good news, Marinette," Penny started from Madame Bustier's phone, while the three were seated in the cafeteria, the tour having released the attendees for an hour break. "An official statement has been released by Monsieur Wayne debunking everything. I think it's safe to say something on social media now, though, I want to see it first."

Marinette sighed in relief, "Thank you so much, Penny." She had been authorized not to say anything yet on her social media, given that many people were hyper-aware of her existence, and would have pushed for more answers, given that out of the two people implicated in this mess of paternity, she would be easier to project their theories onto.

"Don't thank me yet. The real mess is what happens after."

"Still. You were a big help."

Madame Bustier frowned, "What do you mean the real mess is 'what happens after'? Since an official statement's been given, shouldn't everyone accept it as is?"

Penny's sigh rang from the other line. "If only it were that simple."

Marinette just groaned, exasperated. "When I was assumed to be Adrien's girlfriend a while ago, the buzz surrounding me didn't leave for a while. And I'm guessing that since this is on a larger scale...."

"It's gonna keeping buzzing. It will die down eventually, but it's gonna take a while. Probably even after your trip." There was the sound of pages being flipped through, meaning Penny was still at work concerning this. "Also, Monsieur Wayne and his representatives will be meeting with you later today. This is where we're gonna discuss any legalities and such. While I and your parents will be there video-wise, I've already told your teachers that one of them will have to physically be with you."

The noirnette rolled her eyes upwards for some strength to be magicked into her. She was going to have to be in a meeting with businessmen while not having a goddamned clue about what they were saying. And as harrowing as the past few hours have been, she wasn't sure if she wanted anyone to actually get a lawsuit, or lose their job.

"In the meantime, keep to your teachers. People are going to be looking at you wondering if the statement was just a cover-up. Some people may be bold enough to approach and question you about it, assuming they already haven't. We'll go over it in the meeting, but this is just a heads-up."

Madame Bustier shook her head, but her eyes were serious as she murmured, "There's always something, isn't there?"
The Internet fell in love with the theorized daughter of Billionaire Philanthropist Bruce Wayne, and it turns out that it wasn't true. We have the complete timeline as well as some Twitter reactions.
you have no idea how long it took to implement every single one of those tweets. who told me to be so ambitious? the nerve of me.

if you want the tutorial that i used on how to create tweets, you can find it here by aerynevenstar.

(also, all those twitter handles are imagined)

now, i am aware of the very complex, very angst-ridden relationship that Bruce and everyone in the batfam have with each other, most notably Jason with Bruce and Tim. but i'm taking from the DCnU!Verse, where it's highly implied that Jason's relationship with Tim is cordial, therefore i'm applying it with everyone. here, they all get along. additionally, the media here knows that Jason is alive after he was presumed dead (taken from the DC Rebirth!Verse).

also, having Sabine speak Mandarin to Marinette instead of Wenzhounese (which i recently found out she came from Wenzhou) was intentional. the dialect (nicknamed “the devil-language”), is known for its complexity and difficulty, and has little to no mutual intelligibility with other Wu dialects or any other variety of Chinese (i.e. it is known as being the least comprehensible dialect). a lot of its vocabulary consists of classical Chinese and I could not find any translation sites on it. but due to Marinette's great uncle speaking Mandarin, i'd imagine that Sabine speaks it on a regular.

Edit: Before, I would've had some pictures of IU being used as a face-claim for Marinette. I did say before that I didn't like using someone with the wrong ethnicity or race (and that it wasn't a fancastcast), and even though I just needed some pictures where Marinette's face showed up and to show what her face looks like, I should've used someone else. Someone even commented on it, saying that it still made somewhat of a statement (about the racist conception of how Asian people look the same), and therefore, I changed it because I never want to imply anything like that. I apologize about that.

I've been searching since I uploaded that last chapter, and finally ended up on this lovely tumblr post that has five chinese actresses one can use for a face claim. The OP notes that it's quite hard to find Chinese actresses with bangs still, so hopefully this would be useful to anyone else who needs it.

The person I'll be using for the majority of Marinette's pictures (where her face is shown) is Xing Fei (邢菲), other-wise known as Fair Xing, a twenty-five year old actress who is best known for her roles in Master Devil Do Not Kiss Me (2017), Put Your Head on My Shoulder (2019) and Forget You Remember Love (2020). If I use anyone else specific, I'll say. With pictures where Marinette's face isn't shown, it's usually a faceless girl, or someone else.

thank you so much for reading and i'll see you in the next one!
while this is meant to be imagined in their animated/comic-book style selves, i couldn't help but add real-life face-imagines for their Twitters, and whenever people reference them (mostly Marinette) so yeah, have those pictures.

(and yes, the realistic Marinette doesn't have her signature pigtails in this fic, or those pictures, because she's decided to switch it up a bit. because i personally believe that Marinette would have different hairstyles, and different outfits since, you know, she's a fashion designer who makes her own clothes. she'd be absolutely fashionable, which includes hairstyle changes)

and i know that i originally said that making those tweets in the last chapter was tiring;;;;but now i'm loving doing it lmaoo

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Damn, a Wayne child so lost that I've never met them. That's crazy. 11:00 AM - 16 April 2019
Welcome, Gothamites!

Now, you've seen the title, your first reaction probably is: "What? Another one? How many kids does Bruce Wayne even have?" And the answer? I couldn't tell you, he has as many kids as Batman has sidekicks. And all of them have black hair and blue eyes (save for Damian Wayne, who has green eyes), it's weird. But his newest reported daughter is the subject of this post today, given recent public interest.

And yes, I know that Bruce Wayne sent out a statement saying she isn't related to him. He could be telling the truth, or he could just be barring the public from finding out any further. But unfortunately, the damage has been done, and people have been digging. And here's the thing, this post isn't going to be dissecting that official statement, or theorizing whether or not they truly are related. I'm not going to be presenting evidence from by wall-fastened cork-board about how Bruce Wayne could have been in Paris around her birth. If she is his daughter, then they'll say whenever they're ready.

Really, regardless of whether or not she's Bruce Wayne's daughter, I just wanna talk about how iconic she is.

Now according to the internet, and the papers, her name is Marinette Dupain-Cheng. And if you don't know what she looks like, here are some pictures (all very recent-ish pictures taken from her Instagram @marinettedesigned):
She's adorable!

She's a sixteen year old fashion designer from France. And yes, I say fashion designer because she's worked with the likes of Parisian Fashion Designer Gabriel Agreste, and the fashion magazine *Style Queen*’s director Audrey Bourgeois credited her work in a few issues. The biggest accomplishment for her is consistently working under Rock star Jagged Stone, *the* Jagged Stone. I wished I was that creative and sought for work by such big names at sixteen. Hell, she even lampshades it on her twitter @marinette.designed (and yes, I know that many fake twitters in her name are popping up, but this is her real, official one. It was originally in French since she speaks, well...French, but I've translated it):
Despite her achievements, at her core, she's still a relateable Gen Z kid. The rest of her Twitter is filled with hilarious tweets from her self-noted 'ramblings', that have gotten attention from both French and American Twitter:
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinette.designed

how do you ask people out without uhhhhhhhh dying 12:34 PM - 04 July 2018

5k 100k
Marinette Dupain-Cheng
@marinettedesigned
told a boy i liked him and he said thanks....well it's been fun, time to go drown myself in the seine

02:39 PM - 04 July 2018
300 12k
okay but how did british censors allow The Hand Flex™ in the final draft of pride and prejudice? the fervent eye contact, the gentle caressing of his thumb on her knuckles, the intimacy of it all....this movie should have been rated R and required an accompanying parent or adult guardian
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinette.designed

what else, pray tell, is my purpose in life if not to be told "you bewitch me body and soul" by my future significant other? 1:30 AM - 22 December 2018

(We see she's a woman of culture as well.)
Marinette Dupain-Cheng
@marinette.designed

the way i asked for an iced coffee this morning and the barista said "iced? are you sure?"....i know

what im about sir 8:05 AM - 27 February 2019
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinettedesigned

you are in her dms but her period cycle is synced up with mine.....we are not the same. 2:58 PM -

05 May 2019 400 3.9k
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinettedesigned
me: can i get a gay film?
hollywood: yea sure
me: can i get one with non-white characters, no abusive story-line, the gay characters not dying at the end or a creepy age gap?

hollywood: movie machine broke 4:29 PM - 07 January 2018
46.6k

(We love a bisexual queen! The direct translation for that last tweet was actually "the movie machine is broken", which is much cuter.)
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinette_designed
i may be small.....that's it. i'm very small and cannot survive on my own please have mercy 4:20 PM
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinettedesigned

after realizing that talking badly about myself is not actually...good for my life, i've been attempting to speak about myself a little nicer. it's nice so far. 9:00 PM - 28 September 2018

嫣 300  £  1.2k
Marinette Dupain-Cheng
@marinette_designed
please do not compliment me, i have no idea how to act when complimented. i will be absolutely flustered and will not be able to speak for two hours and you do not want to see that 9:10 AM - 04 January 2019

We can see why she's amassed a significant following of 28k (her following before), even before the whole "Bruce-Wayne-might-be-her-dad-thing". Her most popular tweets on French Twitter all have to deal with something called 'akumas' and 'Hawkmoth', and while I don't understand, Parisian citizens feel at one with these tweets:
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinettedesigned
it's all fun and games until Hawkmoth sends out an akuma at 3 am that prevents you from cramming for your physics exam that same morning 3:30 AM - 21 February 2019
do you ever just deal with someone and just...know that you have a high chance of being
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

i swear to god if there's one more early morning akuma that fucking disrupts my sleep im gonna find hawkmoth and kick his ass to the astral plane 1:00 AM - 07 May 2018
But her adorableness really comes from her mostly using Twitter to just scream about Fashion. And trust me when I say that if I included all her tweets where she raves about fashion, we'd be here all day:
after seeing bits of the LoveYourself!Tour.... @BTS_twt please give me the info of your costume designers. the Truth Untold shirts and blazers. J-Hope's Jeweled Cowboy combo. Jin's all white ensemble. the sparkly military-inspo suits...PLEASE im begging 6:00 PM - 07 April 2019
@marinettedesigned
hi hello does anyone else want to scream with me about @rihanna’s Zac Posen's fitting? or Zac Posen's work in general? 6:00 PM - 07 March 2017
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinettedesigned

the immersive fairy tale-esque designs of Caroline Hu's new collection....the blurry tulle silhouettes, the warm golden tones, the crescendo-ing red, the aloof blue hues, the vines and flowers intertwined with the fabric...let that woman have everything she wants she is an ARTIST

6:00 PM - 08 February 2018
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinette.designed

gabriel agreste's new line....that's it. that's the tweet. 11:30 PM - 08 November 2017
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinettedesigned

why are the men dressing as if they are going to prom and not the Met Gala?? the lack of imagination. the lackluster attempt. the mediocrity 6:00 PM - 06 May 2019
So yeah, I can see why she's being dubbed the "Sunshine of Gotham".

At the end of the day though, regardless of whether or not she's Bruce Wayne's kid, I love her. She genuinely seems sweet and I hope she gets everything she wants in life. I'm high-key thinking of following her on Twitter, even though I cannot for the life of me speak French.

What do you guys think?

memebigboy I get off the internet to actually study and stop procrastinating and Bruce Wayne gets another kid lmao #how many kids does this man HAVE? #i swear to god he gets a new one every six months #i'm glad he's giving kids a new home but JESUS 3,035,204 notes

hunterschaf I better not see anyone stalk this girl and try to find out whether or not this news is true. If I HEAR anything of the sort, I will square tf up and come after your asses. Leave this kid alone. #i am actually fucking serious #i just found her twitter shes adorable and she doesn't deserve to be thrust into this #i hope she's doing okay throughout her trip 19,712 notes
remanence-of-love so let me get this straight, some reporter believed that bruce wayne had another kid, published her info online, got everyone and their mother to believe this thought (that had no legitimate backing) and now, it's gotten to the point where this girl's face is EVERYWHERE and bruce wayne himself is saying that she's not related to him and is threatening to get involved legally? lmaoo, y'all are really something. #y'all are now getting sued#and for WHAT #i'm glad both of them are suing people cause y'all were disgusting 13,549 notes
beckygs okay but the newest Wayne child is pretty hot and i would die for her #i'm her age so don't worry you guys it's fine#like?? why are all of bruce wayne's kids attractive?? #it's hard living in gotham 5,204 notes

sjeanna

film-bro
Okay but imagine you going to another country for a field trip, and its citizens mistaking you for some billionaire's daughter.
sjeanna not even that, but she's French, right? she probably only speaks french and has no idea what the fuck us Americans are even talking about. imagine millions of cameras being shoved in your face, everyone shouting english at you and you're just like??? what the fuck?? Source: film-bro

#if people swarmed me and started yelling at me in another language id be scared shitless#i really hope that poor girl's okay #i don't even want to get into the possibility of 5,035,204 notes
jinsworldwide only in gotham will you have people spreading a child's info and connecting her to a billionaire knowing FULL WELL what gotham's villains are like #idiots#all of you who participated in that are IDIOTS #and you wonder why bruce wane is careful with anyone close to him 11,204 notes

anolts okay but what if she's not his daughter and is actually the girlfriend of one of his kids?
The strength she had wished for earlier hadn't been bestowed onto her yet, unfortunately.

The tour had continued as normal, well, as normal as a tour could, given the circumstances. No reporters had tried to barge their way into Wayne Enterprises, or create a fake identification badge to enter — the security at the company was much too airtight. And despite the sophisticated air throughout the multiple departments, employees still gazed at her for a second too long whenever her class passes through the different floors, curiosity too strong too ignore. However, one look from the tour guide made them scrabble back to their various devices. It helped somewhat.

While the tour guide went in-depth into the memoir of the company, Lila spent a small part simultaneously relaying to the classmates who were listening how she and Damian Wayne were so in love. And how Bruce Wayne considered her an honorary daughter. And that the other Wayne children considered her their honorary sister.

"Hopefully we get to see each other in person. I mean, he's very busy being a billionaire's son, but we're both hoping we get time to see each other."

Alya smiled, "Aw. Hey, even if you don't get to see each other in person, you can still video-chat, right?"

Lila sniffed, plastering a small, deceivingly hopeful smile. "Yeah, you're right."

She rolled her eyes. The teachers had injected multiple times to remind them that they were all on a
tour, and Madame Bustier had given one look at Lila when she started speaking her lies on Monsieur Wayne, which immediately made her shut up. But only for a moment. Afterwards, she was much more quieter when speaking her lies. The tour guide had originally noticed as well, Lila most likely forgetting that he was conversing to them in French, and he simply narrowed his eyes, making a note on his clipboard. She wondered if Monsieur Wayne would be hearing about her.

But then she wanted to use the bathroom. The three teachers visibly hesitated to leave her alone, most likely thinking about Penny's instructions, but Marinette assured them that she'd be fine. It was just the bathroom, which was a couple feet away from them, down a hallway. If they were that worried, they could wait a little away from the restroom. She'd only be a few minutes.

(She was also getting tired of being constantly monitored. Her teachers had taken Penny's words seriously, and she appreciated it, but she didn't want to be directly under one of them all the time.)

Madame Bustier eventually allowed her to go, though, not without the order to not take too long. And she didn't. She took like, two minutes tops, inclusive of washing her hands and her face. Marinette glanced at her reflection in the mirror, and frowned, moving to fix her braid, and adding some water to it. It had unraveled into something truly reflective of her state earlier, given the ambush at the Wayne Enterprises' entrance. When it looked just as how she styled it much earlier, and she moved a few stray hairs out of her face, did she move to leave.

She flapped her hands to air dry her hands further. The noirnette spots her class a good bit away and she smiles. See, she wanted to say to her teachers, it wasn't so bad that she couldn't go on her own somewhere. Especially in a business formal-oriented building like Wayne Enterprises. Sure, people had recognized her, and were definitely looking at her when she passed, but it wasn't as if they were going to ambush her. When they left the building, sure. But definitely not Wayne Enterprises —

"So what's your deal?"

The statement, intentionally loud enough to capture her attention, makes her jump. She glanced over to her left: An older person, possibly in his late teens or early twenties, was leaning against the wall with his phone in his hand....hopefully to take advantage of the Wayne Enterprises' free internet. But with the way he was watching her, it didn't seem like it. The prickle of apprehension made its way up her back....he definitely wasn't there when she walked in — had he actually been waiting for her to leave the bathroom? He had a Wayne Enterprises badge around his neck, but that detail hadn't relaxed her.

She inwardly sighs, she just had to jinx it.

Marinette clears her throat, attempting to speak English. "I'm sorry?"

"What's your deal? With Bruce Wayne, I mean." He lifted himself from off the wall, and walked towards her, and she stepped back so he wouldn't be too close in her space. "Is it a PR thing? Like, I'm not gonna pretend as if I understand the inner workings of Public Relations — hell, I'm only an intern, but I can tell when something's intentional."

The young girl just looks up at him with a frown, not sure how to respond. She eventually settles on saying, eyes apprising him warily, "I do not speak fluent English."

He gives her a dubious look, "Right. Sure. Really though, is it a ploy to make him more likable? 'Cause he has other kids, but only one of them is around your age. And he may be in the media plenty, but we don't really...know him, if that makes sense? Bruce Wayne does his best in keeping media attention off of most of his kids."
She blinked once. Twice. "Uh — "

"That's why it's so weird with you, y'know? If he's so hellbent on making sure that his kids aren't hounded that much by the media, why is it so different with you? There's only a few pictures of the two of you, and it's left for everyone else to figure it out. What does he want out of it? What do you want out of it?"

The conversation went well over her head, and she wanted to withdraw from this encounter as much as possible. She clears her throat nervously, eyeing her group, still waiting on her to return. "I am sorry, I do not understand what you just said." She attempts a polite smile through her anxiety. "I am afraid I have to get back to my class, so excuse me."

He was quick in following her movements, intercepting her from leaving, and she was backed into a wall. Warning bells blared in her mind, and she looked for any small exit. "Whoa, I'm just asking a couple questions. Or....are you really his kid? Does that mean that he really had a sexcapade in Paris and it resulted in you? Did he actually know about you, or did your mom just try to cash in on his riches?"

For one second, she tried to understand — there were only a few words she gathered from his spiel, and she wanted to know why her mother, sex and Paris were connected together. The next second, the boy was immediately pulled away from her, and pinned against the wall by an older man. The boy's eyes narrowed, and he quickly opened his mouth to protest — but then his eyes widened, and his voice became more squeaks than anything else. "Mr. Grayson! I was just — "

The older man, Mister Grayson apparently, cut in before he could continue, voice low and threatening. "You were just harassing a sixteen year old in order to prove your stupid little theories correct." The intern snapped his mouth shut. "You, a twenty-one year old, were just blocking a sixteen year old — who doesn't speak English, by the way, from getting away from you when she started to feel uncomfortable. You were just trapping her against a wall, well away from anyone who could possibly stumble across you two, while she was failing to understand you and could have easily thought that you were doing something else. And even if you didn't mean to do all that, you clearly followed her to get her to answer your dumb questions, when she clearly wasn't expecting you. Did I cover it all?" He immobilized the boy with a simple look, daring him to contradict. When he didn't, eyes still wide with fear, he snorted and twisted his grip on the intern's polo shirt even further.

A yelp escaped him, and Mister Grayson snarls. "I have half a mind to beat the shit out of you."

Marinette, while not understanding his words, could sense that a fight was about to break out, and she quickly reached for the adult's other arm to restrain him. "Sir. Please don't. I — "

He didn't take his eyes off of the intern, but spoke to her, in French. "He was harassing you, wasn't he? Preventing you from leaving?"

She frowned, "Yes. But I'm sure he wasn't intentionally trying to be. I couldn't understand everything he was saying, and I was just getting really nervous because of it."

Mister Grayson glances over at her then, blue eyes looking at her for a moment. Whatever he finds makes the disgust fade slightly from his gaze and he exhales, reluctance clear in his demeanor. He grasps the boy's Wayne Enterprises badge for a moment, surveying its information, before harshly releasing the boy from his grasp with a throw. The intern fumbles for balance, while Mister Grayson calls out, "Get back to work, or I'll let Mister Wayne hear about this."

The boy scampers off in a hurry, and Marinette stares after him, unsettled by the entire encounter.
"Are you sure you're alright?"

She cuts her gaze back to Mister Grayson, who looks down at her searchingly, eyes full of concern. She gives an attempt at a smile, but if she goes by the look on his face, it isn't convincing.

"I'm alright. It just really unsettled me since he was just...there when I left the bathroom. And then he started speaking, but I didn't understand." He cuts his gaze back to where the boy last was, glaring at nothing, and she tries to change the subject. "Thank you very much for stepping in when you did, Mister Grayson."

He brings his gaze onto her once more, and it takes a moment before a gives her a smile, extending his hand. "You don't need to thank me for that, Ms. Dupain-Cheng."

Marinette pursed her lips, taking his hand to shake. "Please call me Marinette, Mr. Grayson. I've never been one for being formally addressed." He chuckles, nodding, but then she freezes after realizing something. She slowly, hesitantly, comments, "You...know who I am?"

He gives a wry smile, but his eyes attempt to tell her that there was no need to be worried. "According to the internet and Gotham media outlets, we're siblings."

"You're..." Marinette paused, she knew nothing about his children. Only that Bruce Wayne was very hesitant on revealing their existence to the public at first. "I'm sorry, I don't really know anything about his kids. Since he called you Mister Grayson, is that your first or last name?"

Her cluelessness visibly amused him, "Last name. It's Richard Grayson, Bruce just adopted me. Call me Richard instead of Mr. Grayson, though — I've never been one for being formally addressed."

She giggled at the callback to her earlier words, and he smiles but his voice goes back to serious. "Were there any more incidents like that guy? Has anyone else at the company been making you uncomfortable? Taking pictures? Following you? Anything that makes you uncomfortable?"

Marinette deflates, going to answer his questions when her name is loudly called. She turns her head to see Madame Mendeleiev running up to her. "There you are, Dupain-Cheng. I didn't realize it took you five hours to use the bathroom." Her eyes then catch Richard, and her voice goes cold, as she says in English, "What are you doing with my student?"

The noirnette waves her hands to placate her teacher, "No, no. He wasn't doing anything wrong, Madame Mendeleiev. He just — "

"I came across a Wayne Enterprises' employee who seemed to have been waiting for her to come out." Richard cut in, speaking French. "He was trying to get her to answer his questions concerning the whole paternity thing." He shrugged, "I stopped him."

Madame Mendeleiev hadn't yet relaxed. She glanced over at Marinette for confirmation, only dragging her eyes back to Richard when Marinette nodded in agreement. "And who are you?"

He extends his hand, "Detective Richard Grayson, from the Gotham Police Department. I'm actually here concerning Marinette. Mister Wayne and his associates are working with me concerning any further charges to be discuss in this afternoon's meeting."

The woman exhales, "Right." She shakes his hand, "I'm assuming you just got another name to add to that list?"

He nods, "I took his information. I promise you that he will be dealt with accordingly."
Madame Mendeleiev gave a simple "hmph", and narrowed her eyes. "He better be." At Richard's agreeing nod, she released his hand. "Come along, Dupain-Cheng. We still have the tour to finish."

Marinette nodded, "Uh, thank you again, Richard."

He waves a hand, "Think nothing of it. I'll be seeing you later this evening." He eyes Madame Mendeleiev. "Both of you?"

The purple-haired woman shook her head, "You'll be seeing another teacher with her."

"Ah," he simply says. "Well, see you later, Marinette." He gives her a parting wave, before walking out the direction Madame Mendeleiev came from, and bending the corner.

The two Parisian citizens watched after him for a moment, before the teacher aimed a look towards Marinette. "You do realize that this means we're definitely not letting you out of our sight."

The girl sighed, "I know."

In spite of the three years that she's dealt with the business practices and harrowing atmosphere whilst "working" under Jagged, entering the board room full of adults, much older than her, in neat suits hadn't failed to unnerve her. Sure, she wasn't alone. Madame Bustier was currently with her (everyone else having gone back to their hotel), and her parents and Penny would be part of the meeting, but she was still anxious.

The assistant who had led them to the meeting room closed the door behind them, and all of the adults stood up at their entrance. Monsieur Wayne wasn't present, most likely still doing other things around the company.

"Mademoiselle Dupain-Cheng, Madame Bustier," the man closest to the door began in French, extending his hand to shake. She shook it after Madame Bustier, as he continued, "I'm Timothy. Thank you for coming. Monsieur Wayne will be here in just a moment, he's currently in his office."

Her teacher nodded, "Thank you all for arranging this meeting. It's...been a concerning day."

The man — Monsieur Timothy, another Wayne son apparently, narrowed his eyes at his brother. "Why are you like this?" The question was spoken in English.

"Because it's fun."

"Why are you pretending as if you're not a fan of her employer? We're both fans of him."

"Because this is about you."
"Literally fuc —"

"Excuse me?" The two pause their banter, looking down at the young girl. "You're a fan of me?"

Monsieur Timothy exhaled, looking a touch embarrassed. "Well, I'm no artist but I really liked your work on Jagged Stone's multiple albums, and his stage outfits. You're pretty accomplished for someone of your age. He talks about you pretty much whenever he has a chance to."

"Oh." Marinette huffed, glancing downwards, bashfully, "Yeah. I always tell him that he doesn't have to, but he refuses to listen to me."

Madame Bustier pats her head, "Be proud of your accomplishments."

Richard eyes her with a calculating look for a moment, "We've been keeping you two standing long enough, how about we sit?" He directs them to where their seats would be for the evening, and before they sit, the two Parisians politely shake the hands of the Wayne Enterprises' associates: Monsieur Wayne's lawyer, his head of communications, and a French translator. Once they sit down, he continues. "I think it's a beneficial thing for you. You're a young talent, and if you want to get your name out there, he understands that he should put a constant word in."

The noirmette still seemed uneasy, he realized, her eyes surveying the big office room and he questions, "What's it like working for him?"

"Jagged?" At his nod, she smiles. "Oh, he's great. He never demands anything from me, since I'm still young and still go to school. But whenever he wants me design anything for him, and I have time to do it, he always pays for any materials I would need."

Monsieur Timothy was fiddling with a computer, most likely for connecting her parents for the meeting. Richard leaned back in his chair, "Is fashion your main passion?" Madame Bustier realized what he was doing, and she sent him a thankful look. He winked, and she started speaking with Monsieur Wayne's lawyer, with the aid of the translator.

"Yeah, it is." Marinette played with her braid. "I usually make my own clothes, or alter them. I want to be able to develop a brand for myself in the future. Or a boutique. Which ever one i decide."

"And what's your signature? Your style, I mean."

Marinette hummed, "Well, right now I'm experimenting in everything. I haven't exactly found a specific style that I constantly want to design with, you know?" He nodded. "But recently, I'm liking combining prints with modern silhouettes. And adding modern details to traditional fashion designs. And I've always wanted to experiment with Chinese fashion designs or trends and incorporate them with French ones. Like a chic, street style with a hint of traditional prints. Ooh — but at the same time, I want to make it something that everyone can wear, you know? I love runway clothing but I still want everyday people to have a chance to purchase it. And — "

She snapped her mouth shut, realizing that she was speaking for too long; and she gave a sheepish smile towards Richard, who simply watched her with a smile, entertained.

"I'm sorry, I can get carried away sometimes. I forget that not everyone really understands what I ramble about."

Richard shook his head, "Never apologize for something that you're passionate about. Seeing as you've already been hired by big-names, maybe you'll be commissioned by someone in America."
She snorted, "That'll be the day — "

The entrance of Bruce Wayne made her pause, and she quickly stood up (after saying an 'excuse me' to Richard) to address him. "I apologize for my lateness. There was an urgent matter that had to be dealt with."

The translator quickly reiterated, and Madame Bustier waved a hand, "It's alright, Monsieur Wayne. We understand that being a C.E.O demands every bit of your attention."

His eyes then met Marinette's and he exhaled. "I apologize, Miss Dupain-Cheng. Your trip here shouldn't have been filled with you being tied to my name. This absolutely should not have happened, and I personally will do my best to ensure that no harm comes from this."

The translator explained his words, and Marinette gave a small smile. "The fact that you are meeting with me is enough."

Bruce shook his head, "Trust me when I say, it isn't." He made his way to the head of the table, "Have you finished setting up, Tim?"

The screen lit up with the image of her parents as a response, and they called out a polite greeting, given the formal situation. Penny makes her way onscreen as well, sitting beside Tom. Bruce replied, "Good afternoon, Mr. Dupain, Ms. Cheng. Good afternoon to you as well, Ms. Rolling."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Wayne." Penny called. "Thank you very much for agreeing to arrange this meeting to discuss this."

"It was no issue at all," he waved a hand. "And Mr. Dupain, Ms. Cheng — I apologize for any negative attention this rumor might have given you two. Have you all been doing okay?"

Penny spoke in French, translating and her father shook his head. "It hasn't been so bad. Really, it's just been relatives calling to question whether or not it's true."

After what he said was translated for Bruce, he frowned. "Still, I apologize. Let's get into it then."

And get into it they did — Bruce did a formal introduction of everyone in the room, for the sake of Penny and Marinette's parents back at home. He then gestured for Tim to take the lead in explaining exactly on how far this rumor had spread, given that it had already reached France in today's earlier hours. And then, they got into possibly charging people:

"Dick, are there any charges we can put on those reporters?"

He sighs, "They haven't done anything more than report a story, which they will claim is in "public interest". They haven't trespassed in Wayne Enterprises, or in the hotel that Marinette and her class in staying in. They stay outside of the buildings, which is public property, so we can't."

Penny's voice chimed in from the computer screen, "What about the video taken of her at the hotel? Would the recorder get a charge?"

"Well," he gestures to Tim, who pulls up the video of Marinette and her teachers filmed in their hotel. "With this one, New Jersey is a "one-party consent" state, meaning: under the New Jersey Wiretapping and Electronic Surveillance Act, it's illegal to record a private, in-person or telephone conversation unless one party consents. But unfortunately, the Wiretapping Act does not apply to videos or photos. It's legal to videotape and take pictures of people in public areas — there's no reasonable expectation of privacy, and that's what everyone responsible for recording or taking pictures of her is going to say."
The translator explained Richard's words, while Penny explained it to her parents and Bruce watched as Marinette deflated. He raises an eyebrow, knowing there was more to it. "But....?"

"But, we could possibly get him on grounds of stalking." Richard frowned, "It sounds like a stretch, but I looked into the guy that filmed that video: Name's Ray Penders." Tim pulls of a picture of the man in question. "He checked into the Kane hotel the afternoon this rumor came out, when Marinette and her class would have already been inside. He actually works with The Daily Informant."

Tim scowled, "Of course he does."

"He had no other reason to be within that area, and I'm convinced that he was there to get some footage of Marinette. Especially because he never stayed that long in the hotel. He checked out twice for long intervals — once around seven, and again at midnight. I called his wife and she says that he was home the majority of the night before leaving at five, back to the hotel. I'd think he was just having an affair but he was always alone, and the security cameras don't show anyone else entering his room. The hotel was really a placeholder so he wouldn't be hit with trespassing."

Bruce's lawyer tapped her pen, thinking. "The charge is reliant on the "course of conduct" where he repeatedly maintaining a visual or physical proximity to a person directly, or indirectly."

Richard pointed his index finger, "By any action, method, or device. If you wanna go with the means part of the charge — surveilling, observing..."

She frowns, "But the repeatedly part of that charge means on two or more occasions. Do you have — "

Richard holds up a hand and gestures to Tim, who collapses the video and pulls up another. In it, the occupants of the room, and on the computer, watch as Ray Penders starts speaking into a camera, akin to an online video log. In it, with the helpful French translation at the bottom, he speaks on how he's waiting to catch a glimpse of the newest Wayne daughter, and that he intentionally rented a hotel room just to see her. Marinette and her teacher watch, horrified, as it jump-cuts, and he says that he'd be coming back to the hotel to see if he could find which room she's in, as well as possibly get her in the morning if he doesn't see her closer to midnight.

Richard watches as the young girl closes in on herself, understandably fearful, and he says in French, voice soft, "I'm sorry that you had to find out that it was this bad like this. But, we're gonna charge him. Okay?"

Madame Bustier squeezes her hand, and she returns the action, grateful for the comfort. The noirnette nods, and tries to steel herself to continue. Richard grimaces at the attempt of strength and cuts his eyes to her parents for a second. They, like their daughter, are horrified, and her father has her mother in an embrace.

He exhales, "As you can see, he fits the repeatedly part of the charge, given that he did this on two occasions. Also," he gestures a hand towards Marinette. "This action caused "a reasonable person to fear". Given this whole rumor situation, Marinette would be fearful of anyone trying to come up to her, understandable under the circumstances."

The lawyer casts sympathetic eyes toward the young girl, "I think this also falls under the effect of emotional distress on the victim. So he can be charged for that. She could get a permanent restraining order." She makes a note.

"宝宝," her mother's voice calls from the screen, before switching to French. "What do you want to
do?"

Everyone turns to look at her, and Marinette slightly sinks down at the attention. Bruce softened, "Marinette? Do you want to press charges? This mostly affected you, so it's only right that you decide. We could also have some of their jobs taken away."

Richard translates before the appointed translator does, and the noirtette frowned. "I don't want to get anyone fired."

Tim blinked, "As sweet as that is, your privacy was invaded. They plastered your name everywhere. If any one of Gotham's villains decided to try to come after Bruce, and wanted to supposedly hit him where it hurts, they would not have hesitated to attack who they thought was his daughter."

Richard nods, "They're all adults, and they know better." He doesn't want to be so harsh, but he needs to drive the point home. So he continues, voice low. "I don't know if Paris has any experience with super-villains, but the villains here show no mercy. They wouldn't just attack you, they'd kidnap you, torture you and if it came down to it, they would kill you. Without any sort of mercy and an incredulous amount of brutality. Your blood would be on their hands if something like that happened to you, all because they facilitated a rumor that had no foundation."

Marinette's eyes were wide, while her teacher looked absolutely sick. Richard hadn't looked across to the computer yet, but the silence that followed after his words gave him a clear idea of their reaction. Tim glances at him, eyes saying you couldn't broach that a little better? But he shook his head, this was Gotham they were talking about. They needed to know how serious this was.

"We have our own constant super-villain back in Paris," Madame Bustier whispered, which, Richard straightened, because what? He was somewhat exaggerating when he said questioned if Paris had any experience with super-villains because, they've never heard anything of the sort. And a constant super-villain? He eyed Tim and Bruce, who were similarly surprised. But the woman continued, "But as horrific as he is, he's never escalated to murder. Or — or torture. You could argue that what he puts us through is a form of it but..."

Marinette was similarly grave, as her teacher squeezed her hand. "Marinette, I think you should press charges. Nothing's happened, and I'm glad for it but imaging what could have..."

The young girl was silent for a moment, before exhaling. "I — we don't have any money. We would need a lawyer and — "

"Marinette," Tim frowned, while the translator reiterated her words to the Bruce and his lawyer. "It won't cost anything to serve any papers against him. You deserve to keep him anyway from you for the rest of your trip. Hell, we could probably serve it to the entire publication company for running this story in the first place. We were gonna do it regardless, but you definitely should."

"It won't cost anything to file for an order of protection either, or to take this to court." Bruce cut in. "And even if it did, I would cover the costs. You didn't ask to become a part of this, and it isn't an expense too much for me."

Penny added, "And even if he didn't want to, you know Jagged and I would help in any way."

Marinette nodded slowly, seemingly thinking it over, while her father's voice interjected. "Order of protection?" He looked concerned, eyebrows furrowed. "Like...a bodyguard? Do you think that she needs that?"
Richard translated, and nodded. "I would say so. A visible wall of security might make the public think the security is for another reason, but it will prevent anyone just coming up to her, given that that's already happened for the day." Marinette exhaled at the reminder of the incident with the intern, and he eyes her, "He's been fired, by the way. An appointed bodyguard would also report anything that could possibly happen to her directly to us."

Bruce waited until Dick's words were translated, "Again, I'd cover the cost, of course. And it would only be for the duration of her trip. But it all depends on what you all want."

Her parents looked at each other for a moment, before her father spoke up again. "We want that bodyguard."

"Papa! Maman!"

"Marinette, I know constantly being looked at and watched over is something that you don't want. Especially for a one week trip. But we'd feel better if you had one."

"I agree." Madame Bustier says, eyes serious. "I don't want anything to happen to you on this trip."

She opened her mouth again, but closed it. Her dad was absolutely right, her teachers had been keeping watch on her for the whole tour and she quickly grew tired of it. Having someone appointed to watch her for the whole week? She grimaced at the thought. But she didn't want to worry her parents, even if she didn't think it was necessary. "Okay," she murmured in English.

"And the stalking charge?" Tim questioned.

"...do I have to be present?"

Richard nodded, "You will, it's necessary for a charge to happen. But, given how long settling a libel case takes — one to three years give or take, it won't be concluded before you leave to go back to Paris, even with Bruce's authority and money. You'll most likely have to return to Gotham should it go to court."

Marinette exhaled, "Okay. I'll press charges against him." The translator reiterates.

"Good." Bruce nodded approvingly. "I'll call in a bodyguard for you so they'll be with you when you leave here. I'll remind them of what their duties are, and how much of an eye they should keep on you, but they will be with you everywhere you go. Since your tour is over and you're staying until Sunday, I'm assuming that you'll be spending the rest of your time here sight-seeing?" At Madame Bustier's nod, he continued. "Right. They'll be with you for those outings. I'll arrange further security details with The Kane Hotel, and pay for their accommodation. We'll also help concerning transportation to the various places you'll be going, I'll need a list. I'll also get you a lawyer and be in constant contact with your parents for the entire trip updating them with the libel case, and your general well-being. Granted, you can do that, but I'll also be included."

Marinette nodded along while the translator spoke, though her disposition was overwhelmed, and the same could be said for Madame Bustier. While Penny explained to her parents, Tim snorted and questioned, "You feel steamrolled, huh?" At Marinette's sheepish smile, and Bustier's wide eyes, he grinned. "Yeah, he does that to you."

The meeting was essentially brought to a close, Marinette's parents and Penny calling their goodbyes (with a promise that their daughter would call upon arriving at the hotel) and Bruce's lawyer and translator taking their leave. Marinette and Madame Bustier waited for the bodyguard to arrive, while Tim collapsed the equipment.
"Are you sure that you don't have any further questions?" Bruce looks at the two of them, expectantly.

Marinette glanced towards Richard, who now sat in one of the plush chairs. "Should I say something? Since he already gave a statement, should I give one too?"

"She's asking if she should say a statement like yours on this whole thing."

"You don't have to." Bruce shrugged. "But if you want to, you can."

"You'll have to let me know what you're going to write though." Tim chimed in. "Not that I don't trust you, but just to make sure that it can't be interpreted in any other way."

Marinette nods, while Bruce fishes out his phone and says, after surveying its message. "There won't be a swarm of reporters outside the building. Unfortunately, I know that some reporters may be lingering, but just not so close to the company — they'll just be out of the boundary that will get them fined. They will capture you leaving the building."

Madame Bustier makes a face after his words are translated to her, "Still, you got them to stay away a great margin. Thank you."

Bruce waves his hand, "Not a problem."

When Damian Wayne arrived at Wayne Enterprises for this afternoon's board meeting, he could spot various reporters trying their best to be inconspicuous. They pulled out their cameras and cell phones when they saw him, and it took so much to not send a look directly towards their devices. Instead, he sighed heavily, rolling his eyes.

Apparently, within the last twenty-four hours, some girl's been dubbed as the "Long-Lost Wayne Child". The girl had become a minor celebrity, with multiple people fabricating stories about her life, her mother and the "heartwarming relationship" she had with his father. It shouldn't surprise him, given that he knew what the tabloid industry could unearth and invent, but reading about the alleged passionate vacation his father had with her mother that resulted in her birth made him absolutely uncomfortable. Even with the playboy persona his father had.

And the thing is: Damian hadn't even known about it until Jon produced today's edition of the Gotham Gazette and started with his endless, endless questions.

He called Grayson, of course, to figure out what the fuck was going on. But, all he told him was that the rumors weren't true, and the press was just having a field day over nothing. And essentially, he, along with Tim and the company, was working to find evidence on who they were going to sue.

So now, even if he was going to see Wayne Enterprises' board members, he was going directly up to his father's office to have a direct answer on what the fuck was going on.

When he reached the entrance door however, he instantly collided with another body. The person stumbled backwards, trying to regain their footing, and he quickly grabs them at the waist, pulling them forward before they could fall. Their hands land on his chest to steady themselves, however, the momentum of the pull caused their head to crack into his mandible.
Damian scowled at the slight pain ringing in his chin, and is about half a second from shoving the person away from him. "Will you —"

But any biting remark he had ready, along the lines of them needing to watch where they were going, diminishes and he falters. Because at that moment, he caught a full look of the person who collided into him: A girl. A young girl, who gazes up at him in alarm, eyes wide, a hand reaching up to rub her head. And he recognizes her — she's the young girl who the media has labelled as his sister. And he stares at her — because of the familiarity. Not because he's thinking about what a gorgeous shade of blue her eyes are.

She seems to snap out of the shock first, and she stutters, in French, "I'm so sorry!"

The statement makes him blink, and reminds him that not only are they still interlocked, standing in front of Wayne Enterprises, but that he's been staring at her for longer than he probably should be. And he's hyper-aware of the way her hands are still firmly against his chest, as well as the crutch his arms are at her waist. For some, sudden reason, he cannot seem to string together any words in his mind to form a coherent thought and he can't work his mouth to say a single word.

Her expression turns concerned, and oh — he recognizes what's happening. Because he's had a crush before, fleeting moments of hero worship mixed in with uncomfortable burrowing in his stomach whenever he interacted with them. But so quickly? That couldn't be possible. At least with his past infatuation, it developed over knowing them after a while. But instantaneously? When he's never met her before? Absolutely not. He was just...he was just like any normal person with eyes who can recognize attractiveness when they see it.

— she questions, attempting to switch to English and but was finding trouble, "Est ce que ça va? Je veux dire...Est...you..." She gave up, face red in embarrassment as she tries, "Okay?"

There's a pause before he answers, and it definitely not because he's taken aback by the absolutely...cute display of her floundering, absolutely not. But he takes a moment to realize just what she's asking.

"Yes." he says, breathless. And he quickly repeats it in French, "Yes. Yes, yes. I'm okay. Are you..." The dull ringing from the impact of her head was forgotten, and he stared in her eyes, searchingly.

She nods, seemingly take note of whether or not anything hurt from the collision. "I'm alright," she gives a smile, and he blinks at how blinding it is, despite how small it is. Her eyes then connect with where her hands have ended up, and she swiftly moves back, attempting to separate from him. He promptly releases his hold on her, but the phantom touch of her hands still lingered, as well as how she felt against him, and Damian clears his throat, willing himself to get a grip.

He drags his eyes away from her, and — well he doesn't jump, of course, his training has molded him to never showcase just how startled he is, but it's a close thing — at realizing that there are others watching them: one he immediately recognizes right off the bat, a Wayne Enterprises bodyguard who was currently leaning down to murmur something towards another woman, who was staring at them, at him, wary.

Damian supposes he understands. The girl had been a mini celebrity in the city for the past few hours, and he was sure numerous prying people had approached her throughout the day. The woman must have been her guardian for her trip, so naturally, she'd be worried.

He nods towards the bodyguard, "Ms. Catalina."
The woman returns the gesture, and he redirects his attention to the teenager. She's staring at him, and he swallows, absolutely needing to get inside and away from this and that look because he has no idea how to deal with it.

So, he says in French, loud enough for her guardian to hear, "Sorry for bumping into you."

She shakes her head, eyes kind, and he straightens. "It's alright. It was an accident."

Yep, he just needed to leave this situation. He clears his throat once more, "Right. I hope you have a good day." And he immediately speed-walks past the two adults into the building, dimly hearing the returning call of "Oh! You too!" And he doesn't know what he looks like to the employees walking past, but they immediately stray from his direction, a few sending him concerned glances.

He doesn't linger in the entrance floor, but stares at nothing in the elevator ride up.

What was that?

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[Marinette Dupain-Cheng's tweet in response to Bruce Wayne's tweet, containing his official statement posted on 16 April, 2019. Her words were typed in English.]
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinettedesigned
@BruceWayne Thank you very much, Mister Wayne. 5:50 PM - 16 April 2019

[Marinette Dupain-Cheng's own statement on the matter, in the form of tweets from her official Twitter. The tweets were originally typed in French, and what is being seen is the English translation of all three tweets.]
Hello. I truly do not know Mister Wayne personally, and I am not his daughter. I'm currently in Gotham because of the Wayne Enterprises Student Conference and we simply spoke at the opening ceremony — (1/3) 6:00 PM - 16 April 2019
Marinette Dupain-Cheng
@marinettedesigned
— because he wanted to be nice and speak with the class that was the first chosen for this year. I thank him for being so accommodating for me and my family throughout all this. I do ask that
people not try to find my hotel — (2/3)
Marinette Dupain-Cheng

@marinettedesigned
— and please do not try to swarm my parents back in France. They truly have no idea how this even came about. Thank you for understanding. ❤️~ (3/3) 6:08 PM - 16 April 2019

Replies to her Twitter Thread:
I can’t even imagine how scary this all must’ve been for you. You shouldn’t have gone through that :(

6:10 PM - 16 April 2019
@vinnie
@marinette.designed Yeah, you're still a Wayne. This is just Bruce and his PR Department scrambling for some sort of control over this 6:09 PM - 16 April 2019
176320
marinette sweetie im so sorry, im so sorry that ugly ass bitches in gotham

would even conceive this thought 6:10 PM - 16 April 2019
I see damage control is in effect. 6:10 PM - 16 April 2019
a marinette dc stan account
@Marieplease
@marinettedesigned i wanna fight everyone who put a target on this girl who's with me? 6:10 PM -

16 April 2019  ▪️ 7  ▪️ 169
Bruce Wayne

@Bruce Wayne
@marinettedesigned This situation should never have happened in the first place. You don't need
to thank me. 6:20 PM - 16 April 2019
I'm sorry that you had to deal with it while on your trip. We're gonna do our best to make sure that the rest of your trip will be okay.

6:25 PM - 16 April 2019
Pretty interesting how @BruceWayne and @dickgrayson started following her. 6:30 PM - 16 April 2019
@riagarcia_
@poefinnrights oh my goooood. Bruce said it wasn’t true. Dick said it wasn’t true. for fuck's sake, the girl said it wasn’t true! what more do you fucking want?? 6:34 PM - 16 April 2019
christine

@poefinnrights
@riagarcia__ i want them to say the truth. anyone with eyes can see that there's more to this

PM - 16 April 2019

10 160
@TheDailyInformant
This just in! Damian Wayne was caught canoodling with the supposed #LongLostWayne. Perhaps, we got their relationship all wrong? Read more on the story here thedailyinform/7gCBNu 10:00

PM - 16 April 2019  9k  123k

Reply to this tweet:
@poefinnrights
@TheDailyInformant to everyone who doubted me on this, i accept apologies in the form of
money to my cashapp 10:35 PM - 16 April 2019

Chapter End Notes
Edit: Before, I would've had some pictures of IU being used as a face-claim for Marinette. I did say before that I didn't like using someone with the wrong ethnicity or race (and that it wasn't a fancastcast), and even though I just needed some pictures where Marinette's face showed up and to show what her face looks like, I should've used someone else. Someone even commented on it, saying that it still made somewhat of a statement (about the racist conception of how Asian people look the same), and therefore, I changed it. I apologize about that.

I've been searching since I uploaded that last chapter, and finally ended up on this lovely tumblr post that has five chinese actresses one can use for a face claim. The OP notes that it's quite hard to find Chinese actresses with bangs still, so hopefully this would be useful to anyone else who needs it.

The person I'll be using for the majority of Marinette's pictures (where her face is shown) is Xing Fei (邢菲), otherwise known as Fair Xing, a twenty-five year old actress who is best known for her roles in Master Devil Do Not Kiss Me (2017), Put Your Head on My Shoulder (2019) and Forget You Remember Love (2020). If I use anyone else specific, I'll say. With pictures where Marinette's face isn't shown, it's usually a faceless girl, or someone else.

have a happy holidays guys, gals and non-binary pals!

thank you so much for reading, and i'll see you in the next one.
Happy New Year! Sorry for the bit of a dry spell, being a university student has been eating up most of my time. A lot happens in this chapter, and well;; I hope you enjoy it.

In this chapter, the class is going to the Gotham Museum of Art. In the live action Batwoman TV-series, Vancouver Art Gallery is used as the filming place for the Gotham Museum of Art. However, I've decided to use an amalgamation of the look and size of the The Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as Vancouver Art Gallery for the museum in this story.

While the Met does exist in this universe, think of it as a filming location for this story. When movies use known places for movies and, if you've been there before, you'll recognize it immediately, despite the filming location having a different name in the show. Does that make sense? Hopefully. But yeah, that's why many known Met paintings show up in here. However, to make it a bit different and set it apart from the Met, Gotham Museum of Art is the owner of a lot of pieces that (when researched) are in a private collection, or have always been talked about.

Anyway, my head hurts. I hope you enjoy this chapter. Thank you ~

See the end of the chapter for more notes
anolts okay but what if she's not his daughter and is actually the girlfriend of one of his kids?
anolts I CANNOT BELIEVE?? I WAS JOKING?? Source: anolts #should i start guessing the lottery numbers now holy shit #still hoping she's okay #this entire situation is wild 2,035,204 notes
Love In The Air? — The Shocking Relationship between the "Sunshine Of Gotham" and Gotham's "Ice Prince"
By Vicki Vale

GOTHAM — This week has been full of unexpected revelations, mostly centered around the parentage of one Marinette Dupain-Cheng, the sixteen year old French native who Gotham has seemed to take a liking to. Gothamites have been keeping a close, suspicious eye on the teenager, given that assumed parent and billionaire Bruce Wayne has dismissed the claims of being her father. The teenager herself has denied them as well on her social media, but there have been multiple instances of public figures giving disingenuous statements on shocking situations concerning them. Are the two telling the truth? Or is this just a cover up?

Just yesterday afternoon, however, candid shots have surfaced that seems to contradict the "Lost-Wayne" rumors. And we have to say, it's incredible surprising, but undeniably adorable.

It was noted by media-houses that Marinette Dupain-Cheng hadn't been with her leaving class when the tour was noted to have concluded, and — at first — we believed that she possibly had some matters with Bruce Wayne. Damage control, perhaps? But then, much to our surprise, pictures were taken of her and one of Bruce Wayne's sons, Damian Wayne, right outside Wayne Enterprises.

[pictures: two very clear and high definition images of Marinette Dupain-Cheng and Damian Wayne in what seems to be a passionate embrace; Marinette is smiling up at him, while he gazed down at her lovingly.]

Those pictures are bewildering since, well, we never would have expected Damian Wayne of all people to have a girlfriend — especially one seemingly as sweet as Marinette. While the youngest Wayne has been in the media before, he is well-known for being quite frigid. Therefore, you can imagine our confusion. But apparently, research has uncovered, Damian Wayne has a much more heartwarming side, melting whenever it comes to his girlfriend.
"They've been childhood friends," a trusted source tells us. "He's always been soft for her, even before they got together. He absolutely fell first."

Insider sources also note that he confessed by taking the young girl on a sight-seeing date at Giverny in France in late 2016, while visiting the country with his father, and she is reported to have been overjoyed. How romantic! Pictures from Marinette's social media seem to confirm this outing (although, not mentioning whom she was with on that day).

If our calculations are correct, that means that they've been dating for almost three years, which is quite serious. And apparently, it is.

“They know the attention this relationship would get them, and more specifically, her.” A friend of Marinette Dupain-Cheng disclosed to us. "That's why they've been quiet about it. But they've been able to spend time together despite that distance and secrecy: they have picnics, coffee dates, art museum dates, and even the cliche movie-date. She doesn't care about who he is. Or who his father is. She just really likes him. It's very much mutual."

With this news, it explains so much why Bruce Wayne was captured speaking with her at the Wayne Enterprises Student Conference on Monday — he was greeting his son's girlfriend.

Further details on the adorable couple are still unavailable, as well as a statement from official sources, but it seems as if the youngest Wayne is off the market! It's no surprise that the people want to know more about them — hey, everyone loves a good "Opposites-Attract" couple — but details on their relationship are scarce. But, it's no surprise. Bruce Wayne is quite secretive when it comes to his children — and it seems as if Damian Wayne has followed in his father's footsteps.

"It's in their nature to be secretive," an insider tells us. "Obviously, they want to come out about the relationship on their own terms. They didn't want it so publicized. So, his father is helping to try and keep them out of the public eye. And they're glad for his help. They like their privacy, and are determined to keep everything in their little bubble."

But, as has always been the case: You can't keep a relationship with a public figure hidden forever. Especially when it's a happy one. And as those pictures indicate, they seem to be very happy. We hope the two have a long, happy relationship together. We're rooting for them!

Follow Vicki Vale on Twitter at @ViVale

The Kane Hotel· Gotham City, New Jersey
8:49 am.

Nino wouldn't consider himself to be a person who fought against the tide. On the contrary, he was very much one to go with the ambiguous flow of things. Not that he doesn't have any principles or standards, or that he will stay quiet with everything, per se. But, if a situation can be handled as easily as it was formed, then he'll let it be handled without interjection from himself.

The whole situation that Marinette managed to have been roped into was...surprising, to say the least. When he reassured his reluctant mom that he'd stay out of trouble, and out of sight from any criminal on this trip, he couldn't have never thought of this. He himself knew that the press had gotten it wrong, given that he's known Marinette for years now, but the rumour was out there. The press wanted to watch her every move, which led to media attention on her and the rest of them.

It had been claustrophobic for a bit, and everyone kept staring after her and whispering while at the company — as if they expected Bruce Wayne to appear and check in on her any minute — but it had died down a bit by the afternoon, given that the billionaire gave an official statement on it. The
remaining reporters had taken note of Marinette's absence when they left Wayne Enterprises, and he heard two reporters theorizing about how she most likely stayed behind to "meet her dad away from their eyes." So, it was safe to say that not everyone believed the statement. Marinette and Madame Bustier eventually returned with a Bruce Wayne appointed bodyguard, since they thought that she needed to have extra protection, given Gotham's high crime and the implications it could have with this situation. Not just that, people in suits had appeared in the hotel to speak with the manager and staff. What about, he had no idea. But he was sure it had to do with the rumour.

Sure, it was weird, what with Marinette's new bodyguard standing watch behind her when they were relaxing in the lobby, but Nino could roll with it. They basically had five more days within the country, the attention on Marinette would dwindle and they'd go back to France. This would probably be something that they all would have a laugh over collectively as a class.

But then, it was reported that Marinette was apparently dating Damian Wayne, one of Bruce Wayne's sons. The issue? Given that Lila had said that he was her boyfriend yesterday, only to have the media label him as someone else's, she was a bit upset.

They're all currently gathered in Alya's room. They were all supposed to be going to the zoo today, but given that further attention was onto Marinette, their teachers wanted them to stay in their rooms until they made some phone calls and figured it all out. Only a small number from the attending twelve students were in here — Madame Bustier's class already holds a small number of students, so it was easy to notice when a good few were missing. They weren't roaming the halls either. Maybe they were with Marinette? He frowns, how was she doing? This must've been even more stressful for her, having already been under media attention she didn't want.

Mylène, Rose, Sabrina, and Ivan closely surround a distraught Lila, which, Nino didn't quite understand. Sure, it must suck that your boyfriend was publicly linked to someone else, especially when your relationship was kept a secret, but....wouldn't his father just disprove it like he did the first rumour? Maybe he was being too objective about it? If he and Alya were in this position maybe he'd also be upset, but he'd just immediately call Alya and figure this thing out. Why didn't he call Lila and reassure her that it'd be handled? He had to have known by now, right?

He watched as Alya motherly comforted Lila with...something turning in his stomach, tears forming in the girl's eyes. "I just — I can't believe Marinette would do this to me!"

That rubs him the wrong way. Because...what did Marinette even do? If she knows that the dating rumour isn't true, then it sounds as if she's implying that Marinette intentionally fabricated this. Which is laughable, because...it's Marinette. The girl hates any massive amounts of attention. And given that she'd been through it like...forty-eight hours earlier, he doubts that she'd do something like this. Even if she disliked Lila. But he doesn't want to think badly of the girl, maybe it was just forming jealously over the situation, and she was just placing misdirected distress.

Alya frowns, and moves Lila's hair out of her face. "Hey. Marinette may have an issue with you — hell if I know why," That last part was murmured, and she continues. "But she'd never intentionally do something like this to hurt you. Especially since she'd never want attention on this scale."

Lila sniffs, tears streaming down. Rose reaches to pat her on the back in comfort. "You saw the article, Alya. A trusted source said? Who else would have that information? It's obvious that she took what I said yesterday and sold it to them!"

Nino suddenly feels the urge to interject — even though he was fine with being on the side in solidarity. "Lila. This is the same paper that spread the rumour about Marinette being related to Bruce Wayne. It makes no sense that she'd go to them to bring more attention to her after yesterday. Plus, there's no way that Marinette would even get time to sell some rumour to a
newspaper. She and Madame Bustier were meeting with him to figure out the legal stuff, like
Mendeleiev said."

The rest of them eye him in shock, and he realizes that his words may have come across a bit
harsh. Lila sobs more at that, and Alya eyes him pointedly. "Don't be so harsh, babe. She's upset."

"I get that, Alya." He glances at Lila. "And I'm not trying to be, dudette. But you're blaming
Marinette for something she didn't do. It's more likely that the media fabricated this story just like
they fabricated her being related to your boyfriend's dad. Don't blame the wrong people, even if she
doesn't like you. Marinette's not that kind of person. And she's the one those reporters outside are
here for. Imagine what she's going through in her room."

Lila stares up at him for a moment, tears still shimmering in her eyes. She opens and closes her
mouth multiple times, as if she's speechless. Nino watches her flounder for a few seconds,
bewildered. Had she just...not thought about how Marinette was feeling throughout all this? But
then, Alya speaks again.

"Anyone would be upset, Nino. Hell, I'd be upset if it was reported that someone else was dating
you. Just because Marinette's at the forefront, doesn't mean that Lila can't be upset."

And just when he thinks that Lila's understood, when he's discerned the glint in her eyes for what it
was, surprise, she shifts back to dejected. "My feelings matter too."

And for some reason, that irks him. He wants to be sympathetic, he really does. But that last
comment, like her earlier words, doesn't sit well with him. No one said her feelings didn't, but the
only person who should be this upset, is Marinette. Who no one seems to currently be focused on
for the right reasons.

His gaze sharpens against his will to stay gentle with the crying girl, and he continues with caution.
"Again, I'm not saying that Lila can't be upset. Your feelings also matter. I can't imagine what your
experiencing, but you're blaming someone else for something that she didn't do. You're upset, and
blaming someone who doesn't deserve it. I'm not hating on you for it. I'm just saying, that's not
right."

Mylène hesitates, before speaking up. "I'm not blaming with Marinette, but maybe Lila felt that
way because Marinette doesn't like her. And when she found out about this..."

"Right!" Alya defended. "I'm not blaming with Marinette, either. But that's why Lila keeps talking
about Marinette. She's not intentionally being mean. She's just upset that she can't publicly be with
her boyfriend."

"Exactly." Lila sniffs, wiping under her eyes. "It's just so hard that I can't be with my Dami-boo
right now. You're coming across as a little mean right now, Nino."

The rest of them give him admonishing looks. He stares only at her, mind blaring because that last
statement comes across a little too manipulative for his tastes. He's been around Gabriel Agreste
enough to know manipulation when he hears it. He's not sure if his mind's just overreacting, but
Lila's been focusing on the wrong thing this entire time, even though she seemed to grasp what he
was saying earlier. He knows she did, but for some reason, she's going back into being sad for
herself.

So he eventually says, "I'm sorry, dudette. I'm not trying to be." His classmates' gazes seem to
soften at that. "And I understand. So, since you know that the story's not true, and instead of being
upset over Marinette, call him right now and figure this out." Because he wants to take note of her
reaction, to confirm or deny what he's thinking.

And with their interlocked gazes, he sees it. He sees her eyes widen and her posture straighten. "W — what?" She manages to get out, and Nino —

Nino stares her straight in the face.

"Call him. I'm saying this as a boyfriend, he should've called you when this news first broke out. But since he hasn't, maybe he's busy or whatever, you call him. He can reassure you over this whole mess, and you find out what he and his family plan to do."

The others brighten at the idea, somehow not having heard him when he first suggested it, and Alya shakes her slightly, smiling. "See? That's a great idea, Nino. We can call him right now, and he can talk to you. Even though he really should have called you, since you're the unknown girlfriend in it all."

Lila gives a smile in response, and now that Nino's realized what's up, he sees the anxiety in it. The terrified glint in her eyes. "He's a billionaire's son, Alya. I'm sure he's busy dealing with all this to spare some time to calm his silly girlfriend."

*She's trying to redirect their attention somewhere else.* Nino dimly recognizes. Even though just a few minutes ago, she couldn't stop crying about it. And he comments, "You're emotions aren't silly. Given how upset you were a few minutes, maybe it's best that you call him."

Rose nods, her countenance soothing. "Yeah! Call him right now, Lila. We'll be right here for moral support." The rest of them nod in agreement.

Lila's eyes narrow the slightest bit, her gaze shifting to something more...menacing for a split second, before it turns deceptively appreciative. "Thanks, you guys. But I'll just call him later. I don't want to take him away from fixing all this. I'll just talk with him later, if he doesn't call me first."

Alya frowns, clearly not happy with the decided plan but undoubtedly supportive. "Okay. Hey, if we end up staying in, we can order some comfort food and watch something. Okay, chérie?"

"Thanks, Alys." What absolutely sells him though, is the way Lila then heavily exhales, nonchalantly saying, "I hope we end up leaving the hotel. It would suck if this whole entire mess with Marinette prevented us from having a good time."

The quick focus switch from calling Damian Wayne to offhandedly blaming Marinette once again (Had Lila's words always been negative when referring to Marinette? Had he now just realized it?) made him leave the room, giving some excuse that he needed to get something to eat. Because she's lying. *She's lying she's lying she's lying. How long has she been lying?*

There's someone he needs to see.

---

When Nino walks up to Marinette's room, he's greeted by the intimidating figure of her bodyguard standing at attention in front of her door. The older woman's eyes immediately catch him, and he clears his throat, nervous.
"Is Marinette in there?" And he immediately winces, because that's a stupid question, of course she is. The woman wouldn't be here if she wasn't. Ms. Catalina simply looks at him, waiting for him to start over. How nice of her.

"Uh, I mean....could I see her for a moment? This whole thing might be getting to her and..." He rubs the back of his neck. "I just want to make sure she's doing okay."

The woman stares at him for a moment with assessing brown eyes, Nino resisting the overwhelming urge to fidget or look away, because he feels as if this whole thing is a test. But then she speaks, voice low, "What's your name?"

He blinks, "Nino Lahiffe."

A hum comes from her, and he's not so sure what that mean until, she opens the door behind her and pokes her head in. His eyes widen when her voice loses its stern edge, becoming much more soft as she speaks, "Marinette. There's a Nino Lahiffe who wants to speak with you. He says that he wants to see if you're doing alright."

There's a pause as they both wait for some sort of answer, and yet, he still doesn't hear anyone give a verbal response. Perhaps it was too quiet for him to hear. But Ms. Catalina says, "Alright" and steps aside, pushing the door open. "You can go in."

He hesitates for a moment, because despite his resolve to go see her, it's been a while since he's truly checked in on her. The whole thing between Marinette and Lila had affected their friendship dynamic, and he wasn't sure if he was truly wanted. But her allowing him entry had to account for something, right? He needed to meet her all the way.

So he walks into her hotel room, and is immediately greeted by the sight of a teary-eyed Marinette wrapped up in the arms of Kim, clutching him like a lifeline. There's others surrounding her too: Juleka, Max and Alix, who all stare him down when he appears. But he focuses on Marinette because....well, she looks awful. But in the back of his mind, he had a feeling she'd be like this. She had never been one to embrace the spotlight (even if her work had gotten her recognition), and the past few hours had forced her into it. And then with more coverage of another rumour, it made sense that the hysteria finally caught up with her. She had been handling it a little too well yesterday. And given that whole incident with some American reporter filming her in the dining room yesterday, it makes sense she'd be afraid.

But now, she looks as if she's descended from the spiral in the making. And her eyes peer up at him while he just stands there.

It takes Alix's question to break the silence, phone in her hand. "What do you want, Nino?" Her eyes were narrowed, and if Marinette hadn't allowed him entry, he wouldn't doubt that Alix would have confronted him by the door.

It all starts to spill out from him, "I'm sorry." Marinette blinks, as if she wasn't expecting him to say that of all things, but that makes him feel even worse and he goes on. "I — the rest of us were in Alya's room, and they were comforting Lila. She's....she's been making it about her and started to blame you for everything."

Their faces turn to various forms of disgust and Alix scowls, "Of course she fucking did."

"I kept saying that you had nothing to do with it, because, y'know, you're currently being hounded by reporters and then I said that she should stop blaming you. I just couldn't understand her
reaction, since, this really isn't hurting her, and I said she should call Damian Wayne since they're supposed to be together. She tried to do everything but that, I just...I realized that she was lying. And then that got me thinking about how much more she had been lying about. But no one else seemed to be concerned about how you were doing, only Lila and I — "

He exhales, "I'm sorry. I really am, Marinette. I don't expect you to forgive me, because well..." he rubs the back of his neck. "I haven't really been that much of a friend lately. But I just want to know how you're doing."

Marinette stares at him, seeming to gauge just how truthful he was being. So he stared right back at her, unwavering. And then, she fumbles her way in between Kim's grip to extend a hand, gesturing over to a free spot next to Juleka on the floor. "Have a seat." Her voice isn't hoarse, and doesn't give away that she's been upset for a while, but he knows better.

He quickly makes his way over, unceremoniously plopping down next to her. When he winces at his harsh landing, done awkwardly in his haste, Juleka sends him a concerned glance. He waves her off with a slight smile. Everyone goes back to what they were doing before his entrance: Kim playing with Marinette's hair, and Alix, Max and Juleka on their phones. When the room is still tinged with an air of uncomfortable, he clears his throat, having never been one for silences. "Where's Madame Bustier?" He hadn't seen the teacher for the morning.

Marinette exhaled, "Most likely calling Monsieur Wayne to figure out how to proceed with this. She didn't want to discuss it in front of me." There's a pause before she softly questions, "Are there still reporters outside the hotel?"

He wouldn't know. Mendeleiev and Monsieur Haprèle had told them not to venture downstairs yet, but he didn't doubt that they were. So, he settled on, "Most likely."

The noirmette groans, burrowing back into Kim who simply patted her head. Alix skimmed over whatever was on her phone, her face annoyed. "Americans are stupid."

Juleka sighed, "Don't say that, Alix."

"But they are! One second she's Bruce Wayne's kid, the next she's dating his son? Pick a backstory and stick with it."

Max hummed, glancing over his own device. "They managed to present it in a way that makes it believable. Of course, we don't believe it. But anyone who doesn't know Marinette will. She's pretty much....a blank canvas for anyone to paint on, if you will. From my deductions that's probably why the first rumour about her happened."

"Also because he gets around a lot." At the admonishing look Juleka gives her, Alix aims one right back at her. "I'm not shame him, Jules, come on. You know me better than that. I'm just saying it happened because he's had multiple girlfriends in the past so dumb people are obviously going to make that conclusion."

The other girl frowns, "At least they're....nicer with this one? There's no weird theories about how she was born, and how he and her mom met — "

"I'm surprised no one said that she was selectively, genetically constructed in a lab like all his other kids." The statement makes them all laugh, and manages to gather a giggle out of Marinette, so Kim continues. "Black hair and blue eyes? You're telling me all of his kids are like that?"

Max points a finger in his direction, head still down towards his phone. "Not all of them. Damian
Wayne's eyes are green. Plus, all of his children except for Damian are adopted."

"'S still weird."

Nino wants to get back to what Juleka was saying, because he hadn't really heard much about it aside from what Lila was sputtering. Hesitantly, he ventures, "What are they saying now?" He pauses, because what if they had been trying hard not to really speak too much about it and he just ruined that? He wants to ask more about her and Lila, but he knows that now isn't the time.

But then Alix answers, "They're painting it as a sort of a "Frigid-Ice Prince meets Sunshine Girl". Apparently, they've known each other for so long, since they were childhood friends, which — what gives, Mari? You're friends with a billionaire's son and you didn't reap any benefits from that?"

She wetly snorts, and Alix continues. "— but yeah. Childhood friends, blah, blah, blah. He's always so cold in public but when he's around her, the so-called "Sunshine of Gotham", he melts, blah blah. He fell first and confessed to her by taking her on a sight-seeing date at Giverny while he was visiting France with his dad — "

"You gotta admit," Kim pipped up. "That's pretty romantic, even if it didn't happen. We all know how much Mari loves artistry in nature." The noirtette flicks him in response, and he rolls his eyes at the weak gesture.

Nino blinks, "Weren't you there before though? Your grandmother took you a few years ago, and you took pictures."

"That's where they're getting the date idea from." Alix chuckled. "Because Instagram posts definitely mean a date happened. But, yeah. They've been dating for like...two, three years. Madly in love obviously. When we all came to Wayne Enterprises and Bruce Wayne went up to her, it was because he was saying hello again to his son's girlfriend. And then they're really amplifying those pictures from yesterday."

Juleka shows him her phone screen, which contains the two pictures and, okay, yeah. He understands why they're making a big deal about this. Marinette and the guy, who Nino assumes must be Damian Wayne are interlocked in an embrace. With the way Marinette's mostly slumped forward in the first picture, he'd guess that she most likely fell before these pictures were taken. And whoever took these pictures were strategic enough to capture them when they were both looking into each other's eyes. Huh, he thinks, as he assesses the expression on Damian's face.

If he didn't know any better, he'd think these were legit.

Juleka allowed a smile, despite the situation. "It is pretty adorable. In a meet-cute kind of way. And if you ignore the overbearing press."

"What it is, is ridiculous." Marinette finally speaks up again, her words bordering on distressed. Kim pats her head once more. "I didn't even know who he was when I bumped into him. Why is this my life?"

Max frowned, "This week is pretty hectic for you isn't it? Not only have you been intertwined with a billionaire and his son, but you also have that court case on Friday."

Right. Nino had overheard the teachers talking about it and wanted to ask her but, well...their friendship had changed a bit. Plus, he wasn't so sure she could disclose so many details.

An amused snort came from Alix, "Just like you to draw trouble wherever you go."
A pitiful noise came from the Marinette heap in Kim's arms, and Nino tried to reassure her, "Hey, you'll get through it, dudette. It'll all be over in a week. And we'll be right behind you through it all." He hoped his unsaid *I'll make sure to be right behind you* made it through his words.

The rest of them gave similar sentiments, and Nino felt relieved when Marinette picked her head up and gave him a thankful smile, her eyes shining with understanding. "Thanks, Nino."

Comfortable silence spread around the room after that, and a few minutes passed before Kim broke it, questioning, "I wonder what he's doing now? Damian Wayne, I mean."

They all thought for a moment. "Probably nothing," Alix shrugged. "I would think that this is something that his dad's taking care of. This is probably just another Wednesday for him."

She might be right. Being a young, rich public figure, there had to have been multiple instances where the press have attempted to connect multiple girls to him. Nino's seen it happen with Adrien before. And every single time, his father was the one to handle it. This whole thing probably was just another passing breeze for him.

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**Wayne Manor · 1007 Mountain Drive, Gotham City, New Jersey 9:39 pm.**

When *this* news hit the Gotham News mainstream, it hadn't taken that long for everyone else in the manor (save Damian) to find out about it. For you see, Tim had already been keeping track of what was being reported on Marinette after Bruce's statement. But the afternoon— late afternoon into evening, really — had been a slow one; there initially hadn't been anything much else to consider alarming. People were still theorizing that the statement had been a cover-up, and had only been put out because Bruce wanted to introduce her on their own terms.

Tim snorted in the quiet of the research room. The young girl was adorable, and while she may have a few things off of the Bruce Wayne Adoptable Checklist™, one of the notable things missing was some sort of tragic backstory. Had she had everything, perhaps the billionaire would have practically adopted her.

Either way, he still was keeping an eye out. They all knew that regardless of whether or not she was related to him, the villains in Gotham wouldn't give so much of a fuck. Bruce had already dispatched Dick à la Nightwing to keep an eye out on her hotel, and he also hired Sasha Catalina to be her bodyguard should anything happen. He'd also mentioned that they'd be watching over her class during their trip to the zoo tomorrow. So, she'd have some sort of protection. Therefore, he stationed himself to check the internet for anything noteworthy.

And then, around ten o'clock, there was a sudden flurry of activity on the internet. Tim took a long swing of his coffee, typing her name into the search bar and loading the latest news about her.

The thing is, he was expecting to find something continuing off the foundation of Bruce's parental rumour of Marinette. Pictures about Marinette leaving Wayne Enterprises after her class did. Some half-baked deductions of Bruce's trip to France (which hadn't been since 2018) and how he could have snuck in some passionate one night stand. Degrading suggestions about how this was a half-baked plot by Marinette's mother to get some off Bruce's riches (as if they wouldn't have figured that out by *now*). And while opinions like that hadn't been in the majority (Marinette was currently
well-liked by the Gotham and international public surprisingly), they still existed. But the amount of articles that came up were almost higher than the earlier news coverage of Bruce's supposed child, so he was a bit wary.

What he wasn't expecting, were headlines connecting her and Damian of all people, in a relationship.

In somewhat of a daze, he went the furthest he could possibly go in his search, trying to figure out how it all had started to begin with. He found some of the earliest articles (from the same publication that started this mess in the first place), and within seconds he had several pictures of the two, taken earlier today right outside the Wayne Enterprises' entrance. This was interesting, considering that Damian hadn't even mentioned coming across Marinette when he came to find out whether there was any truth to the rumors.

He gazed at the pictures, analyzing. The two had been in some sort of embrace, though, she seemed to be heavily leaning of him for most of them, so maybe she had almost fallen? He pauses, however, at the way they were both looking at each other. There was surprise in their gazes obviously, but there was something else there, especially in Damian's gaze. He goes to the one where they're still interlocked, but she's sending a bright smile up at him and....okay, he could see why they were going with this angle. It had an air of innocent intimacy, and anyone who didn't know any better would believe that they were two young people meeting after a long time.

Tim leaned back in his chair. There was absolutely no way that Damian had hidden a relationship from them. He knew the risks involved in that, and he knew it was mandatory that background checks had to be made with anyone around them. But there was that tiny bit of doubt at the back of his head, that said that Damian was clever enough to hide this from them if he wanted to. He was more inclined to believe that he hadn't, but —

— he glances at the picture where Marinette smiled up at Damian once more.

He exhaled, getting to work to copying multiple articles to present. He'd figure out what truly happened in the morning from Damian, but until then, he had to tell Bruce.

"None of this is true." Damian looked scandalized at the insinuation, which had been presented to him the next morning while they were all congregated at the dining table for breakfast. He eyed this morning's edition of the Gotham Gazette on the table, the newspaper flipped to show Vicki Vale's article about it, slightly affronted at him being labelled an "Ice-Prince".

Tim raised an eyebrow, "You didn't say anything about meeting her yesterday." Bruce had allowed him to start the line of questioning, staying silent for the majority of it. Alfred simply poured him a cup of coffee, the mug in hand, waiting until he downed it. Today, the butler was mercifully being lenient concerning his drinking.

"Because I didn't think that it was the least bit important!"

Jason pulled his own copy of the newspaper down from his face, eyeing Damian disbelievingly. "You came to the building yesterday to find out, and I quote "What the fuck was going on", and you didn't even off-offhandedly mention that you saw the personified rumour in question? Forgive me if I don't believe you."
Damian closes his eyes for a moment, possibly to refrain from losing his temper and impulsively reaching for the knife on the table. The kid's come a long way from the impulsive, arrogant and easily infuriated ten year old. Now, he was still impulsive, and hard-headed. But, not as easy to get upset. The homicidal tendencies were still present though.

"Damian," he raised his head to look at Dick, who hadn't too long returned from surveying The Kane Hotel for the night. His voice was soothing, "We just want to make sure that this is something that the press just ran with. And if it's not, we're giving you the opportunity to share anything that we don't know." At the annoyance that gathers back in his expression, Dick adds, "We don't think that you were hiding something this big, baby bird. We're just making sure."

"There's nothing." Damian forcefully denies. "I was just coming to the company for the board meeting that afternoon."

Tim produced full-sized copies of the pictures taken of the two onto the table. "And these?"

He watches the pictures for a moment, gaze specifically drawn to the one with her smiling. Interesting. "She collided with me on her way out. I caught her from falling flat on her face." There was a pause as he took in the faces around him and he cleared his throat. "You can ask Ms. Catalina to corroborate. She would have seen it."

It lines up with what he originally thought, but something's off about Damian's demeanor. Tim glances around at the others at the table, and their expressions convey the same thought. Bruce exhaled.

"And you're sure that's all there is?"

"Father," he begins. "What reason would I have for keeping this a secret? I have never met her before then."

"So you didn't take her out on a date to Giverny while you were with Bruce in France? You haven't been dating for two years?" Jason's statement was clearly meant to be teasing, but it only gained a growl from Damian.

"I already told you I'm not dating her."

He shrugged his shoulders, "Those pictures say otherwise, but sure brat. I'm just sorry that the poor girl has to deal with being called your girlfriend. She seems sweet."

Damian's eyes narrow even further, "Fuck off and die, Todd."

"Already tried that, demon spawn." Jason gave an incredibly sharp grin. "Didn't have that much fun."

"Alright," Bruce interjects. "Thank you for confirming what we suspected, Damian." The teenager simply looked down at the images with disdain, muttering what sounded like "goddamn journalistic vultures". "However, with this new attention, she's going to need more surveillance on her now."

Dick exhaled, "The fact that she's been connected to both B and Damian? It doesn't matter the truth — anyone's gonna think that she has a definite connection to us, regardless of what that connection is."

"They'll be going to the Gotham Museum of Art today." Bruce said. "They were supposed to go to the Zoo, but I felt that having that open space would be detrimental. So I organized for them to go
to the museum for the day."

Damian raised a disbelieving brow, "If anyone wanted to kidnap that girl today, they'd do it regardless of where they go for the day. Even if they stay back at the hotel with increased security, you know there's a high chance someone can still kidnap her."

"I know. Which is why we do it on our terms." Bruce stood up, taking his coffee with him. And before he left the dining room, Alfred opening its doors, he called out. "And that's why, you all will be with them as well."

"What?" Tim analysed Damian's demeanor with skepticism. He wasn't incensed, nor was he irritated. With the way his eyebrows were subtly widened, Tim would dare said he was...surprised. But why? It wasn't as if he had never been on a stakeout before. What was so different about this one? School wasn't a problem either. Not only did he not have school today, but he would always gladly ditch school for missions.

Dick nods, Bruce having already discussed it with everyone except Jason and Damian (Jason because he was out doing god knows what, and Damian due to wanting to wait until morning to confront him about this). "B's right. If we're already there, we would have the advantage of time. Or, at least, we'd save the trouble of being there instead of rushing to get there. We'd scope out the area, check to see if there are any suspicious individuals, and immediately report if we notice anything. So, family day trip."

Jason scrunched up his face at those last three words, "Or....we could not do that."

"Family. Day. Trip. Don't you want to see who the fabled Marinette Dupain-Cheng is?"

"Bold of you to assume that I haven't already."

"Have you?" Dick took a bite of his pancakes.

"....no."

"Right. So you're coming with."

"I literally could just survey the perimeter from outside. Same thing with the brat's girlfriend."

"And yet," Dick eyed him. "You're still going to be coming along, aren't you?"

They stared at each other for a few more seconds, before Jason exhaled, "How committed are we being to this stakeout? Are we watching from afar, or integrating into the crowd?"

"I was thinking more integrating into the crowd. We'd just have to make sure that we aren't that recognizable."

Jason snorted, "I'm going to be doing a Clark Kent level disguise — the bare fucking minimum."

"I'll just need to send out a statement about her and Damian." Tim yawned, extending his cup for Alfred. "What time are we leaving?" Alfred simply glanced down at the awaiting cup, before sending Tim a flat look. He pouted, "Aw, c'mon Alfred."

"You've already gotten enough leeway for the morning, Master Timothy. I'm cutting you off." To everyone, he said. "You all should get ready for eight forty-five. That should give you all enough time before the class arrives to scope out the area." Alfred then departed to the kitchen, ready to clean the dishes.
Dick clapped his hand, "Alright, we have a game plan. Let's move."

"Don't tell me what to do." Jason got up to leave anyway, though not before sending Damian a "Pick out some nice clothes for your girlfriend, you brat."

Tim waited for some sort of quip back, or even the sound of a knife hurling through the air. However, there was nothing, and Tim eyed Damian carefully. He had heard it, if the annoyed expression on his face was anything to go by, but the fact that he hadn't retaliated made him frown.

What Damian did do, however, was get up as well. "I'll be down in ten minutes."

"Yeah, no." Dick stopped him. "You have no idea how to dress, and you're gonna need assistance in the outfit department if you don't want to get recognized. I'm coming to help you."

A grimace graced his features, "If you put me in something as childish as that ungodly outfit I had to wear in one of the last missions...."

"That mission was years ago, and it's not my fault ten year old you could've passed for an eight year old." Dick walked up to him, giving him a slight push. "Now, go on. Move."

The kid rolled his eyes, but followed the instruction. Tim waited for a few seconds when he knew he should be out of earshot, and then cleared his throat before Dick could accompany him, "Dick."

The man held up one finger, watching after Damian's exit for a moment. Then, he replies, "I know. He's telling the truth but he's conveniently leaving something out. We'll question him when we get there."

Fair enough. Tim reflexively drank from his cup before pouting at the lack of coffee. He could hear the whine in his own voice, "Alfred..."

"No, Master Timothy."
[Transcript of the Official Statement from the Wayne Enterprises publicist, 17 April, 2019]

It has come to our attention that it is now being reported that one Marinette Dupain-Cheng is involved in a romantic relationship with Damian Wayne.

Just as before, in the midst of the other rumors that have also been disproved, we will set the record straight once again: Miss Dupain-Cheng and Damian Wayne are not in a relationship.

These rumors are being posited by companies who do care about the welfare of a young girl, who can have something disastrous happen to her should the wrong individual(s) hear of this. Once again, just as Bruce Wayne has said just yesterday: This young girl was here for the Wayne Enterprises' Student's Conference. She has absolutely no relation to anyone in the Wayne family, and any narratives conceptualized by the media along any of those lines are absolutely false.

Legal consequences are already in the works, for the companies responsible. We would like to ask that the public not continue to create any more falsehoods that may lead to tragic consequences.
Miss Dupain-Cheng isn't dating my brother either. Calm down people.
@slowmo
@dickgrayson damn sir. that shit was actually cute 8:29 PM - 17 April 2019

8 620

no thoughts. only jo haseul

@chuumoon
@dickgrayson press x to doubt 8:30 PM - 17 April 2019

@oliviatendo
@dickgrayson you can pry this crack ship from my cold dead hands sir 8:35 PM - 17 April 2019
@minjoonie
@dickgrayson i'll be real, i ship this. but if y'all don't leave this girl alone.... 8:35 PM - 17 April
"Keep together everyone. It's very easy to fall into another group."

Their tour guide called out in French, leading the group up the museum's wide staircase. And she had a point, there were multiple people streaming into the gallery. Kim calls from next to her, "Hear that Alix? It's gonna get crowded in here. You should be careful — someone as small as you is bound to get pulled in another group."

From her other side, Alix's eye-roll doesn't quite temper the grin materializing on her lips, and she says, "Shut up, you blaireau."

They enter into the main hall, swarming with people, turning left into a wing and Marinette inhales sharply. The interior was quite imposing with its size, but altogether magnificent. This area held ornate stonework, white limestone pillars bordering the middle. Busts, statues and other artistic
pieces of multiple — Marinette reads the wall's marble plaque — Greek and Roman figures litter the floor, remarkable in their details. Some pieces are so abstract, they seem almost modern. There was a black-blueish marble pool in the center, surrounded by pieces. No wonder this museum is revered in the country, it was the largest museum in the state, with The Newark Museum of Art just after it. She's understood the fascination and romanticization with art museums — such as many do with Paris' Louvre — it's something that most wouldn't mind getting lost in, surrounded by art pieces. She's itching to sketch what she's seeing. Despite her tour guide's warning, she truly wouldn't mind exploring the museum on her own.

The movement of Ms. Catalina in her periphery made her deflate slightly. Yeah, there was no way she'd be able to do that.

People crowd the large classical wall paintings in hustling semi-circles, peering at the descriptive plaques. Her classmates start with the sculptures, reaching for the built-in audio guides, while their tour guide additionally explains. Some of them take pictures with them (she sees Kim posing like the statue of a woman jutting her hip out and Rose whispering to another statue while being held up by Juleka), which, honestly she should be doing. She catches Lila posing with one, the marble statue of Eirene which was missing its head, and Marinette snorts. If she's remembering her mythology correctly, aside from being associated with the fertility of the earth and the nurturing of children, Eirene is also meant to be the personification of peace. The clear juxtaposition makes her shake her head.

Marinette gazes into the eyes of one of them, the bronze head of a Roman man of the first century A.D., and wills herself to gain the solid strength visible in his eyes. These past few days have been harrowing, to the point where she really considered not leaving her hotel room. But she didn't want to keep the class from having fun, and she definitely didn't want to keep any of the teachers back at the hotel with her while everyone else was out. As much as she wanted to talk with Tikki, there had been way too many eyes on her. So the kwami was designated to remain in her small tote bag.

"Marinette!" She snaps out of her thoughts to catch Nino. He gestures to the bust, "Want a picture?"

His words from back in the hotel room make her glance towards where Lila and Alya were, her former best friend taking multiple pictures of her. "Are you sure you don't want to be with them? I'd understand."

"Marinette — "

"Nino. She can make life pretty hard for you. She's vindictive enough, and seeing you being friendly with me after arguing against her? She's going to target you."

A glint of sadness flickered in Nino's eyes and he immediately shook his head. "I meant what I said, dudette. I know that i'll take some time to fix, but I want to be a better friend." He seemed to remember that she hadn't really said that she had forgiven him — verbally anyway — and he coughs, "That is, if you'll let me. If not, I totally understand."

He was so incredibly nervous, and she smiles. "Well? You offered to take a picture of me?"

He returned a relieved grin, and reached for his phone. She mimics the expression of the bust, standing next to it, and Nino takes a bunch, eventually showing them to her. Madame Mendeleiev called out over the surrounding chatter of the other gallery viewers, "Remember guys — no uploading any these pictures online until we reach back at the hotel." Multiple voices answered back in the affirmative. Marinette sighed at the reminder; her teachers were forewarned that people may be taking note of who her classmates were online to gauze wherever they, specifically
Marinette went during the course of their trip.

Juleka notices her expression, and softly calls, "Hey." When Marinette's attention turns to her, she continues, "You're checking off the art museum list of every tourist."

Alix grins, joining in, "Fulfilling that art gallery aesthetic you've always maintained."

Marinette relaxes, laughing. "My Instagram is going to look great. Thanks, Nino."

They continue through the wondrous blur of rooms, everyone taking pictures along the way, and end up in the European Paintings Wing. Their tour guide gestures to the first painting on their left, with a gentleman washing his hands in a see-through room with sculptures. "This is a painting attributed to Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer. Originally, there had been thirty-four known paintings under his name, given to multiple different art museums — yet he is noted to have done around seventy-four pieces. Many historians have used documents or auction records to note what some of these pieces where, and many of them are still destroyed, hidden from the public, or wrongly attributed to other artists. However, three of the known missing pieces have finally been found, and were given to the Gotham Museum of Art."

Notes of amazement carried through their group, and she gestures to the other two: "This one, "Jupiter, Venus and Mercury" was originally a penned misnomer, as Virtue or Psyche is visualized in it instead of Venus. Because of its mythological theme, it's believed to have been painted quite early in his career. The other is very similar to his "Little Street" painting, titled "A View of a House Standing in Delft."

The woman then went on to Vincent Van Gogh's works, starting with a summary of his life, up until his unfortunate death. "We have all of his works during his stay at the Saint-Paul Asylum, in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in France — at least, all the ones that weren't already given to other museums. These were in high demand to purchase though, but The Gotham Museum of Art got them first." Most of them depicted the trees in the garden of the Saint-Paul Hospital, save for his landscape depiction of Mount Gaussier, with the house of Saint-Paul, which was usually seen from from his room or the grounds of the hospital. Some of Van Gogh's other works that they had were two self-portraits, one of the many works in his sunflower series, one from his Olive Trees' collection and a few of his paintings from his time spent observing and appreciating wheat fields.

Marinette stops in front of a Edouard Manet piece, titled "Lilacs and Roses" which originally was in his private collection. She catches movement in her periphery, and jumps at seeing Ms. Catalina beside her. The woman glances down at her, "Sorry."

"It's okay." The woman was dressed quite casually, much different from the formal attire she had when they had first met; she looked like one of those football moms. She takes a couple of pictures of the painting, no more conversation between them, and Marinette waits a moment before questioning, "Do you ever get a chance to come here?"

"It's my job."

Marinette frowns, "That doesn't seem like a fun way to live. You should take some time for yourself. I'm sure Monsieur Wayne wouldn't mind, since it doesn't sound like you take vacation days." Then, she winces. Maybe you shouldn't say that to the woman acting as your bodyguard.
However, the woman clears her throat. "Thank you for thinking of me. However, I'm not really interested in this type of art. I prefer music, classical if we're being specific."

She couldn't picture the stoic woman in that type of setting, but smiles all the same. "We should be going to the Opera House tomorrow, right? It'll be right up your alley."

The woman says, deadpan, "I can't wait."

Marinette giggles at that, though, she trails off upon hearing Lila's voice: "I've always loved this painting." Marinette turns her head to see her, Alya and Mylène in front of a painting of a bridge over a lily pond. "This was where Damian first told me he loved me."

The other two cooed, and Marinette scoffed. The painting was the same location where she and Damian where said to have gone on a date, the same place she went with her grandmother, right in Monet's property in Giverny. And she was sure that it wasn't a coincidence.

"Is she talking about Damian Wayne?" She glances up at Ms. Catalina, who was staring at the girls incredulously. Marinette cringes.

"Yeah, she's been lying about how the two of them have been dating. And apparently when the press reported that I was dating him, she got upset. She's also been talking about how Monsieur Wayne considers her an honorary daughter."

"...how long has this been going on?"

"Since Tuesday. The lying thing has been going on for years though. Madame Bustier and Madame Mendeleiev had tried their best to get her in trouble for it, but our principal is letting her off. They've been strict on letting her lie like that in public."

The bodyguard folds her arms, "If Monsieur Wayne were to hear about this, she could very well be slammed with a lawsuit. Especially in your situation. Anyone who claims to be close to Monsieur Wayne can draw the attention of villains who wouldn't care that she's a child."

Her eyes widen. This was not the first time she'd heard of a lawsuit being made against the girl. Jagged and Penny had discussed it with her right before she left, and were absolutely planning on serving her. Lila's claims on being so close with Jagged could very easily be taken the wrong way; the girl's words of him loving her so much could be misconstrued to be much more sexual than it was, especially given her age. Long story short, both Penny and Jagged weren't having it, especially after hearing how long the girl had terrorized her. So the possibility of her being served twice....

"Is he going to hear about this?"

The older woman simply looked at her, "I report everything directly back to him. So yes, he is."

"Oof. Marinette frowned, "You should at least tell my teachers though. They most likely won't stop you, but I'm sure they'd like to be notified before Wayne Enterprises employees just show up at the hotel."

"Hm." Was all she said at that. "I've been concerned since yesterday when we arrived at the hotel. Has she always been so aggressive towards you?"

The noirnette clicked her tongue, "I wouldn't say aggressive..."

"Then what would you call someone who constantly and negatively speaks about you to
everyone?"

Oh. She didn't realize that the woman was *that* observant. "I'm used to it."

"You shouldn't be."

Marinette huffs, "Well, I am. She's been like this for a while at school — "

"And your principal has been letting her off, as you said. Is that usual for him? To allow or ignore bullying like that?"

Marinette shrunk at the smoldering look the bodyguard was giving her. "I — "

"Marinette?" Madame Bustier's voice made them both look away from each other. She frowned in concern, eyes shifting between them, but gestured to the rest of the class who were following the tour guide, save for her friends who were just behind her teacher. "We're about to go to the Asian Arts Wing, and I don't want you too far behind."

"Coming!" Marinette quickly walks to the others, who immediately engaged her in conversation.

Ms. Catalina however, sighs, and redirects her attention to the teacher, who was giving her a questioning glance. "Do you mind answering some questions I have?" At her slow nod, she continues, "What's the deal with Rossi and your school administration?"

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"Anything so far?"

"Not from my end." Jason's voice answered from his earpiece. "Nothing that suggests that Dent or Nigma's been here, though, we'd never be able to figure out with Nigma. And the Joker's still in prison."

"Was his cell thoroughly checked?"

"Definitely. Alfred just made another check and he's still in there."

"Hmm." Dick's eyes surveyed the crowd of people in the current area. They were currently in the Department of Asian Art, a long, thin room, dotted with numerous sculptures, paintings, ceramics and other pieces. It contained achievements from places such as Afghanistan, the Indian subcontinent, and Southeast Asia. He hadn't noticed any suspicious characters surrounding the entrances, but better safe than sorry. "Keep checking. Tim, what about you?"

He was currently taped into the museum's cameras, surveying all the floors. "Haven't seen anything out of the ordinary yet. But I finally received the security footage from the museum — it's definitely been tampered with. There's a huge gap between five to seven am, but nothing indicating why."

Dick exhaled. It could very well have been nothing, maybe whoever was on watch last night could have gotten rid of the footage for whatever reason. Or maybe, it was an indication of *something* foreboding.

"Why could Bruce be more hands on with this again?"
Tim answered for him, "He's speaking with his lawyer and sending out another lawsuit to the company that started this whole thing."

"Serves them right for allowing their employee for doing that on their website right after the first one."

Dick tuned them both out, eyeing Damian. He was currently peering at a hand-scroll with the ink painting of some mountains. He hadn't protested against the outfit he had chosen for him, giving a backwards compliment about how he "actually had some taste for once". And, he had gone back to acting like he usually did, as if what he was hiding hadn't happened.

Well, time to test that.

"So...." He drew out the word, causing Damian to immediately stiffen, and regard him with a wary gaze. "Wanna tell me why you're not saying everything?"

"What are you talking about?" Dick simply gives him a disbelieving look, and Damian scoffs. "For the last time — "

"Before that, take your comm out for a second."

Protests rang out from the other end, and Damian winced at the volume, yet gazed up at him in confusion. "Why?"

"Oh, okay. Then I'll continue talking about this and let them have their loud, loud input — "

The headset is immediately removed, and switched off. Dick smiles at the offended gasp from Jason, before switching off his own earpiece. He raises an eyebrow, "Well?"

"Well, what?"

"Would you rather keep making this a guessing game, or are you going to say what you're not telling us?"

"I would much rather pay attention to this Qu Ding piece, if it's all the same to you."

"Tragic. Now talk."

"There's nothing to talk about, Grayson." He walks over to another Chinese painting, but Dick easily follows him.

"You sure? You know you can tell us anything, right?"

"So I keep hearing, and yet, there's nothing that important."

"Hmm." Damian's choice of words stuck out; it wasn't that "nothing happened" anymore, but now it was "nothing important". "I see."

Damian spared him a tired glance, "Do you? Because I am becoming a broken record at this point."

"Mm-hmm." Dick allows about thirty seconds to pass between them before he starts again. "So, what did you think about her?"

"Who?"

"Marinette Dupain-Cheng."
Damian blinked, and then narrowed his eyes. "Why?"

He shrugged, "Just asking. I had to be in the meeting with her before you came to meet us." He glances up at the painting, a landscape of trees, pretending to be interested. "She's sweet. If not terrified that all of this is happening to her."

There's a pause before he answers, and Dick has no doubt that it was due to Damian trying to decipher what he was doing. "She's...okay, I suppose."

"You suppose?"

"Ten seconds isn't enough to figure a person out, Grayson."

Now they both know that that was a lie, especially for them both. But that clued him in: Damian wasn't looking for anything in her, despite having known about her before he arrived at the building. Why was that? He immediately would've questioned what her motives were, if it was intentional that she was being connected to Bruce. Interesting.

But, he says instead, "I guess. She's a pretty cute kid, though."

Damian scoffed, "She's way too...jovial for my taste."

The quip was almost like Damian, much like when he had first asked him about his friendship with Jon. Dick raises an eyebrow, "I thought ten seconds wasn't enough to figure her out?"

Damian scowled, "I couldn't. All she was doing was smiling. And clumsy — she was the one who bumped into me. And she rambled too much."

The teenager crossed his arms indigently, and Dick snorts, "Careful Damian. If I didn't know any better, I'd almost think that you'd found her cute with the way you're talking about her."

He hadn't seriously meant it. It was meant to be a little crack that would have Damian yell at him for even coming up with something so inconceivable. But he catches how he stiffens after it's said — a minuscule thing, but he catches it all the same — and he notes how quickly he tries to relax, and come off as if it hadn't happened. But, it did.

Dick pauses. And assesses him.

And when he hasn't said anything to fill the silence that follows, Damian slowly lifts his head to view him. He sees the tiny silver of fear in his eyes, and remembers the way Damian watched the pictures of him and Marinette on the table. Dick blinks, "Do you — "

"No." It was much too quick. And, with the way Damian immediately winces, he knows it.

"Damian..." he softly breathes, and he feels the grin growing on his lips. Was that what it was? A crush?

"God, you're insufferable." Damian gazes at him in disgust, but his red ears were betraying him. "Only you could come up with something so moronic."

"Baby bird." Damian glances skyward, as if wishing for something to strike his brother down. "Having a crush isn't a bad thing."

"Good thing I don't have one then." He glances around to gauze the distance between his current position and the entrance, and Dick quickly grabs his arm. Damian glances down at the hand for a
moment, before hissing, "You have five seconds to unhand me before I stab you in full view of the patrons here."

"What's wrong with having a crush on her?" Dick ignores him. "She seems nice enough, and we've already done a background check on her so she's clean — "

"Ten seconds is not ample time to fall in love with someone, Grayson." Damian's voice caught the attention of a nearby woman with her child, and he flushes at her amused expression. Voice much lower, he continues. "That's not what this is. You're being ridiculous."

Dick grins widely, "You're right. I never said anything about you being in love with her." He watches as Damian's eyes widen, and quickly stops his other arm from reaching into the pockets of his jeans.

"I will excavate you."

"Damian." The teenager freezes at the now serious tone Dick's voice gained. "Really. Why is that such a bad thing?"

He eyes the other gallery occupants, "Must you do this here?"

"It'll only be problematic if you raise your voice any louder, and then you'll have only yourself to blame."

A frustrated growl emitted from him, but Dick knew he wouldn't actually try anything with all these people around. "So you find her cute? What's wrong with that? Attraction is a normal thing for someone of your age."

Damian immediately wrenches his hand away at that, but doesn't leave. And very quickly, Dick realizes his error. Because Damian wasn't a normal teenager. From an early age, he was raised and trained to become a skilled assassin, as well as a formidable hand-to-hand combatant. There was no concept of love taught to him, not too mention that his parents were Talia and Bruce. Hell, it took an eternity for Damian to regard him comfortably, much less Jason and Tim. So of course, when confronted with this, something as simple as finding someone attractive, he would be freaked. "Oh."

Damian sneers, "What?"

*But the problem with that was...* He frowned, "It's just...you've had crushes before."

"I have not!"

"That little thing you had for Kara begs to differ."

He ignored Damian's offended scoff and really thought about it. What was different about this crush and the ones he had before? Well, truthfully, Damian's "crushes" were solely hinged on the fact that the girls were strong and equipped enough to handle themselves in combat. Not to mention, Damian was much younger when these crushes occurred and they would have formed after knowing them for a while. So really, they formed from initial hero worship and respect.

But this one though, he only met her once. Probably under a minute. So maybe it was too quick to call it a crush. But, he definitely found her cute. What if that was the issue? The fact that he admired so quickly without knowing a thing about her. Damian's never believed in that type of thing whenever it showed up in movies, so to have it happen to him? Of course he'd want nothing to do with it. He even defensively insulted her, as if he didn't think those qualities were cute.
Dick hummed, "Okay, I think I got it."

"Have you?" Damian spat, but Dick knew it was just a front.

"This is a bit...alarming for you since it's never happened like this before." He gazes upon an early twelfth century ink and colour painting, showcasing Finches. "The others? Sure, you could logically explain it. Psychologically, even. But this? Something that probably wasn't even a minute? It's weird for you. Especially since you pride yourself on not being so easily emotional. Plus, there's the whole "Talia being your mom" thing, and being brought up in the League of Assassins — that didn't do good for your social interaction and relationships."

Damian just hmphs, but he continues.

"But — you've been doing really well despite that. When you got here, you were a mess at interacting with people. And now — well, you're still a mess. But you've gotten better!"

"What is the point of all this, Grayson?" He was pinching the bridge of his nose.

Dick answers, "It could really just be nothing. It truly just could be split second attraction." He shrugs. "It's pretty common, actually. Multiple people have found people attractive enough to want to see again, even though they never even spoke to them. It's just a thing. That doesn't mean anything has to come from it."

There was a pause, where Damian mulled over his words. And then, he flatly says, "It's stupid for happening in the first place."

A snort escaped him, "Yeah. Humans are weird."

"I wasn't expecting anything to come from it regardless." Damian frowns. "There's no chance of us interacting again. I never expected anything. It's just — " His arms gestured vaguely — at the painting, the floor, Dick himself — before he folds them. "It's weird. It happened, and I should not be thinking about it but I have been. And I hate it. Because it's nothing."

The older man thinks for a moment. "Did you want something to come from it?"

Damian rolls his eyes, "Be realistic, Grayson."

"I am."

It really is a testament to how much Damian's grown as a person. Because if he were the same ten year old kid, he would've adamantly refused to hear anything on it further, and just pretended like it wasn't an issue. And even though that had clearly been his default reaction with this, he allows Dick to see his true thought process: where he blinks up at him, before eventually saying, "I...have no idea. Not really? I...I don't know."

"I mean," Dick attempted an air of indifference. "If you wanted to, I could probably arrange something. See if that little thing could evolve into a bigger thing and have it go somewhere."

Damian paused, "Not that I'm agreeing..."

"Of course not."

"But how the hell would you be able to arrange something? She's only here for a week — which is practically over."
"Well, in addition to the fact that we'll be discussing the libel case with her on Friday against *The Daily Informant* — you know the ones who started this whole thing — "

A scowl, "Journalistic vultures."

"Which I'll be going with her for — "

Damian narrowed his eyes, "It would be sordid of me to take advantage of her situation that's causing her fear, Grayson. I'm not doing that."

"I'm not insinuating that you do, Damian, that's awful. Back to what I was saying — in addition to the libel thing Friday, Bruce and I were thinking of asking her some questions related to her supervillain situation in Paris."

He freezes in surprise, "There's a super-villain in Paris? How have we never heard about it?"

"That's what we're hoping to figure out." Dick frowns. "B's also checking up with the league to see if they had an inkling of it and somehow ignored it."

Damian thinks for a moment, "Okay... but how does that connect to...?"

"You can join us for the questioning if you want. Have a proper introduction this time, since the last one was full of you gazing lovingly into her eyes."

He rolls his eyes at the quip, but ultimately shakes his head. "No. I'd still be taking advantage of the situation, and I don't want that. And... I'm pretty sure it's nothing anyway. Just a weird... thing."

Dick deflate at his decision. He thinks for a moment, trying to see if there was some possible way he could make this happen, until his eyes catch a familiar face. And then he remembers the entire reason they were all at the museum in the first place. He slowly ventures, "What if you could test whether or not it was actually a weird thing right now?"

Damian turns to glance at an intricately designed dish in the shape of a leaf. "I highly doubt I could."

In response, he quickly pulls him back, gesturing to the direction of the entryway. And at first, Damian scowls, an insult on the tip of his tongue at the forcefulness but he stills when he see what his brother's gesturing to. Or rather, who.

Marinette Dupain-Cheng was surrounded by others, who he could assume were her classmates, laughing and invested in some sort of conversation. She aims a smirk at a much more petite pink-hair girl, and he unconsciously inhales at the sight.

Dick doesn't hide his amusement. "What if we went over there?"

Damian jump-starts, "Absolutely not. We have a job to do, Grayson."

"We can multi-task, baby-bird. That's what we've been doing with that little heart-to-heart." Dick touches his ear-piece. "Speaking of which, put yours back on."

The teenager frowns, and says "I'll miss the silence" before placing his earpiece back into his ear and switching it on. As soon as it is, Tim's voice opens with, "Finally! What secrets were you two discussing?"

"None of your business."
Dick's eyes find the camera tucked upwards in one of the room's corners. He knew Tim could have very well hacked into either of their headsets to switch it back on if he so wanted to, but hadn't. "Actually, we're gonna go talk with some people near the entrance."

Jason's voice is etched with curiosity, "Who?"

There's a moment before Tim answers, most likely surveying the video stream for this room. "Oh. You mean Marinette and her class?"

"Yep, we're just going to say hi." Dick pushes Damian forward, who tries his very best to steel himself to be unmovable.

".....why?" Jason slowly questions. "I thought we were keeping a low profile — "integrating into the crowd" like you said."

"And we are." Dick eventually just pulls Damian by the arm. "What better way to integrate into the crowd than to talk with the people around us?"

"........staying out of sight and not talking to anyone?"

"Let go of me!" Damian hisses, trying to pull his arm out of his brother's grasp. A man that had been skimming the plaque under the leaf dish observed them warily, and Dick gave him a hopefully convincing smile that said that nothing nefarious was happening.

"Any louder and you'll cause a scene," he said through his grin.

"Me causing a scene would be if I stabbed you in full view of everyone here." Damian scoffs, but settled to not seem like a panicked teenager being kidnapped, pitching his voice low. "You should be damn grateful I haven't done that."

Tim inquires, "Why is Damian almost causing a scene?" His tone is clearly suspicious, and it makes sense — Tim had been closely analysed Damian's demeanor from earlier this morning to now, and he's definitely picking up on the fact that Damian shouldn't be "making a scene" at going to say "hi" to a girl that he was adamant that nothing had happened with.

So, Dick eyes him pointedly. "I don't know, Tim. Damian, why are you almost causing a scene?"

The teenager huffed, understanding. "Because you're being annoying."

"So you always say." Dick replied, but continues pulling him over to the group.

Damian exhales heavily, preparing himself for this interaction.

Marinette gasped as she came across an elegant burgundy dress, taking multiple pictures from different angles. It was undoubtedly an outfit from Britain, something seemingly around the era of the eighteen hundreds, so she was confused as to why it was in the Asian Arts Department. She read the plaque beside it, and realized that it was made of Chinese patterned silk.

She hummed. She had known that Asian textiles were used in Western fashion for specific occasions, such as private ceremonies, or robes and banyans. There was always this "exoticism" associated with using those type of fabrics back then, something about the "mystery of far-off
lands”. She rolls her eyes, and circles it, examining the fabric closer. When she peered at the back waist (and all around the garment, actually), the selvage had various stitched Chinese characters. The sleeves were flared, with what she knew to be dubbed the "Pagoda Style”. She snapped a few more pictures of the garment close up.

Marinette attempted a quick sketch of the dress, trying her best to nail the pleats. She sighs, "God, if only we didn't have to leave here."

"You look like you're having fun."

She jumps, fumbling to catch her sketchpad before it falls to the floor. When it's secured in her grip, she eyes the source of the sentence, and blinks at the sight of a man smiling gently down at her. He had someone younger with him, who looked as if he wanted to be anywhere else. The sentence actually registers: it was said in French.

Marinette glanced backwards towards where her bodyguard was, not that far away, who had absolutely noticed the people conversing with her and was making her way over. "Uh, I am."

The man blinked at her blatant hesitancy, before clarity entered his eyes, and he winces. "Oh whoops, sorry." He takes off his hat so she can fully see his face, and she relaxes when she recognizes him: Monsieur Richard.

"Oh, Monsieur Richard." She places a hand over her heart. "I didn't realize it was you."

"Yeah, sorry about that. I know better than to sneak up on you with this whole situation." He glances towards Ms. Catalina, and waves the cap. "Hello, Sasha. You looked relaxed for once." He refers to her simple way of dress.

"Mister Grayson," The woman sends him a simple nod, and she eyes the younger person with him, assessing them for a moment. "Mister Wayne?"

Marinette squints at him. At first, she thought that this must've been another one of Bruce Wayne's sons, as she doesn't recall meeting him: he was much smaller than Monsieur Richard and Tim. But then, she notes his sharp green eyes under his hat, ones that she remembers so well from yesterday, and her heart lodges in her throat.

The thing is, she hadn't spared much time to decipher the meeting between them, what with having to focus on her newfound situation. She had immersed herself in conversations with her friends to take her mind off, and finally had a good cry over it this morning. And while she hadn't known at the time that the person who had crashed into her was, in fact, the same guy she was rumoured to be dating, she could admit one thing during their collision: he was very attractive.

The crash had hurt — oh it absolutely had — but when their eyes had met, it took a moment before she could form the thought in her head to apologize for not watching her step. When she finally did speak, a fumble of an apology, it took her a moment longer to realize that one: there was a possibility that he didn't speak French; and two: he was staring at her, silent. She tried her best to switch to English, but had couldn't string a translation fast enough. And then he answered back in English, quickly switching to French, and the concern and sincerity in his voice made her feel as if she was floating. Marinette hadn't wanted to worry his handsome face anymore by not answering, so she attempted a response.

She had grown out of her crush on Adrien a while ago, not to the knowledge of most of her classmates. And strangers have caught her eye since — connecting eyes and receiving beautiful smiles have resulted in her thinking about each stranger far longer than she should have. But the
eye contact they shared was quite charged (she feels, from her end anyway), giving her the same breathlessness she feels when she reads or watches the interactions between characters from a Jane Austen novel. The phantom touch of where his hands had been still lingered, and she wondered if this was how Elizabeth felt when Darcy's thumb softly brushed across her knuckles. While she hadn't focused on it much, the encounter was still in the back of her head.

Marinette feels her face become red, and she clears her throat, extending her hand. "Uh. Hello. I'm Marinette."

Damian Wayne raises a slow eyebrow, "I know." She winces at his response, because of course he would, why would she say a stupid thing like that? Monsieur Richard nudges him sharply, and he similarly winces. He reaches for her extended hand, respectfully shaking it. His grasp was firm, and she quickly tries to fill in the silence and not focus on it.

"I'm...I'm sorry for this whole...." She waves her other hand vaguely. "Mess? I didn't know that the press would make that connection. This must be really annoying for you."

He blinks in surprise, "It...is, but that isn't your fault. Those fools should know better than to come up with a conclusion like that. I'm more concerned about you."

She pauses, "Me?"

"No one from Gotham, or anywhere else, would willingly connect themselves to my father or myself." He answers. "If they did, they'd have to be incredibly dense, be able protect themselves or just have a death wish."

Marinette laughs awkwardly. "Yeah, that'd be pretty bad."

Ms. Catalina said nothing, although she hadn't needed to. For at that moment, Lila's voice carried over from where she was speaking with Alya and the others: "You have no idea how glad I am that this whole dating rumour mess has been over and done with."

Alya tapped on her phone, "Did his father's company finally give a statement?"

"Yep! And then Damian called me while I went off to the bathroom. He was so sorry that he didn't call sooner. He didn't want the public to think that he was dating Marinette too long, that's why he was so focused on it." Lila held a hand over her heart. "He's always thinking of me."

Marinette snuck a glimpse at the two brothers, and, for once in the years she's known the girl, felt sorry for Lila — Monsieur Richard took in the nonsense with disbelieving wide eyes, while Damian was also surprised, but mostly, visibly disgusted. They definitely wouldn't let this go.

"I'm glad he finally called you. At least he knows that he should've done it earlier."

"He even said that he hopes to see me before we leave for France." Lila grinned, flipping her hair. "I hope it happens. Oh! Maybe we could slide in a date at Chez Vous. That's where Dami-boo took me for our first date."

Marinette shrunk slightly in embarrassment, and grimaces when Damian fixes a glare towards her. "Who is that? Is she with your class?"

However, she wasn't going to try to help the girl. This had been going on for far too long, and she had been warned by their teachers more than once to not "let her condition" take over where Americans could hear her. She didn't even have to go out of her way to expose the girl. Ms. Catalina answered for her, "She is. Her name is Lila Rossi. Apparently she has a long history of
lying about her relationship with public figures. I was going to report to Monsieur Wayne later today, but she's saved me the trouble."

Monsieur Richard expression shifted to eyeing her with calculation. "So she did. How deep are these claims? Is Damian the only thing she's lying about?"

"Not from what I've heard. Marinette knows more than I do, but she's said things about being close with all the Wayne children."

Damian scoffs at her audacity, "And how long has this been going on?"

Marinette releases a heavy sigh, "The lying thing in general? Or the specific lies about you?"

He looked very close to marching over to where Lila and the others were, and doing something about the lies right there and then, but Monsieur Richard suddenly jumps at attention, glancing searchingly towards the entrance. Marinette blinks, "Is something wrong, Monsieur Richard?"

Damian had paused as well, and she couldn't discern why either.

"Ah...I just remembered." It takes a moment before he turns back to her, and he waves his hand. "I need to meet with a colleague of mine, so I'm going to have to cut this family day trip short. Sorry about that, Damian. I know how much you wanted to have this."

Damian gave him a dry look, but answers, "It's fine. You can go ahead, I'll stay and..." He waves his hands vaguely around the gallery. "Watch the art. And I want to find out more about this Rossi girl. I can get home on my own." His eyes cut to Marinette and she straightens.

He eyes Damian seriously, "Right. It's better if you stay here. Talk to me in case anything." As he was walking away, Monsieur Richard ends with. "See you Friday, Marinette. Until then, Sasha."

"Au revoir." Marinette calls out after him, Ms. Catalina simply giving him a parting wave. They all watch him quickly walk off, until Damian glances over back at her.

"So." He starts. "What's the deal with Rossi?"

"Yep! And then Damian called me while I went off to the bathroom. He was so sorry that he didn't call sooner. He didn't want the public to think that he was dating Marinette too long, that's why he was so focused on it. He's always thinking of me."

The hearing range of the ear-pieces was quite far, so it picked up Lila's words. Tim's voice was incredulous as he questioned, "I'm sorry. Is she talking our Damian?"

"Why are so many people obsessed with either dating him, or his dating life? Jesus Christ." Jason was in a similar state.

"I'm glad he finally called you. At least he knows that he should've done it earlier."

"He even said that he hopes to see me before we leave for France." Lila gave a ridiculous flip of her hair, and Dick softly scoffs. "I hope it happens. Oh! Maybe we could slide in a date at Chez Vous. That's where Dami-boo took me for our first date."

As expected, that last tidbit amused the hell out of Tim and Jason:
"Dami-boo?"

"Goddamn brat, how many girlfriends do you have?"

As expected, that last tidbit aggravated the hell out of Damian (Tim and Jason's comments didn't help either):

"Who is that? Is she with your class?"

Jason interjected, "Take deep breaths, Dami-boo."

Sasha aimed a tired look towards the lying girl, "She is. Her name is Lila Rossi. Apparently she has a long history of lying about her relationship with public figures. I was going to report to Monsieur Wayne later today, but she's saved me the trouble."

Dick appraised the young girl. This wasn't the first time someone had claimed something like this, but was this just some stupid young girl who couldn't see the harm in her lies, or was this much more serious. "So she did. How deep are these claims? Is Damian the only thing she's lying about?"

"Not from what I've heard. Marinette knows more than I do, but she's said things about being close with all the Wayne children."

Tim sighs, "Everyone's getting a Bruce Wayne lawsuit this week, huh?"

Dick snorts at that, but his amusement dims when Tim gravely says, after a moment of clicking, "Dick, Damian. There's someone suspicious around by the entrance."

He quickly casts a glance towards where Tim directed, and it takes a moment to spot the person in question: a plain-dressed man, that would not have caused concern had it not been for how he was just standing there, surveying the room. He was clearly analyzing the room and its occupants, and took some device out of his pocket to type away. He looked familiar, but he couldn't question Tim about it, as it would hint that he was wearing an ear-piece.

"Recognize him?" Jason asked the question for him.

"Running it now," There was the sound of the Batcomputer configuring from Tim's end, most likely a quick-search criminal profile on the guy. A curse escaped him, "That's one of The Riddler's goons."

Shit. "What the fuck," Jason swore. "I know that we'd never be able to tell with Nigma, but it'd be nice if my search provided something."

Marinette's voice made him glance away from the goon. "Is something wrong, Monsieur Richard?"

"Ah...I just remembered." He tries his best to not seem alarmed. "I need to meet with a colleague of mine, so I'm going to have to cut this family day trip short. Sorry about that, Damian. I know how much you wanted to have this."

"Not your finest excuse to leave the room, but sure."

He could hear the frown coming from Tim, "That could've been a little more convincing."

Damian sends him a deadpan expression, as if to agree with Tim's words, yet he says, "It's fine. You can go ahead, I'll stay and..." He waved his hands vaguely around the gallery. "Watch the art. And I want to find out more about this Rossi girl. I can get home on my own."
While his plan did make sense, it was interesting how he originally hadn't wanted to come over, only to further stay. Dick thought for a moment: he'd be killing three birds with one stone. Not only would he be able to point out anything else shifty while he followed the Riddler's strong-arm, but he'd be gathering information on this Lila girl and — Dick watches Damian give a glance towards Marinette, and smiles — deciphering this little crush he had. It made sense. He got back to business, "Right. It's better if you stay here. Talk to me in case anything." At Damian slight nod, he ends with a, "See you Friday, Marinette. Until then, Sasha."

"Au revoir."

He waits until he's out of their earshot to say: "Track him for me, Timmy."

After Dick departed from them, Ms. Catalina allowed the two to continue along in the museum and discuss Lila without direct-behind supervision. She noted that she would be making the teachers aware of their newcomer, given that, out of all three supervisors, both Madame Bustier and Madame Mendeleiev immediately saw when Dick and Damian came over. The woman would obviously still be keeping an eye on them.

Her classmates, while focused on taking as much pictures as possible, had eventually realized Damian's appearance as well.

At first, Alix was worried when Marinette was conversing with two strangers who she assumed were American — one a much older white man, and the other seemed to be around their age, with tan skin — but she figured that since her bodyguard was with her, nothing had to be wrong. However, the older guy left, and then Alix was very confused when her bodyguard simply left Marinette alone with the teenager, watching from a distance, seeming not the least bit worried.

She exchanges a look with the rest of them, and they gesture for her to be the one to question the woman. Alix clears her throat, and waits until the woman simply raises an eyebrow, "So, uh.....how come you're not over there dealing with that?"

The bodyguard redirected her attention towards Marinette and the boy. "He isn't a threat."

Her short statement makes them exchange another look, and Kim steps up to attempt to get more answers. "Who is he, anyway?"

The woman paused for a moment, before eventually settling on, "Marinette's telling him important information. He's with Wayne Enterprises."

That clearly wasn't all, but her voice told that she wouldn't brook any more questions about it, so they collectively dropped it. But seeing as Lila, Alya and the others weren't included in that small conversation, she wouldn't have gotten that memo, and her voice chimed from behind them, "Shouldn't Marinette be careful? You know, what with the whole rumour at all. She shouldn't just go talking with just any American. That's so unsafe. She should be much more mindful of it."

An "Oh, please" escaped Nino, while Kim, Juleka and Max sent her various exasperated looks. Alix softly scoffed, "Like you actually give a shit."

However, Madame Mendeleiev interjected. "If there was a problem, Mademoiselle Rossi, we would obviously intervene. And to say that Marinette isn't aware of her own situation is, quite
frankly, ignorant of you to assume. The situation is fine, everyone. Leave it alone."

Lila shrunk at her tone, and Alix grinned. They could always count on Madame Mendeleiev to put her in her place.

Juleka frowned as she watched the two, before eventually saying, "I guess we leave them alone, then. It might have to do with her court case, or giving more instances of people following her."

Max grimaced at the reminder of how terrifying her situation was, "I suppose we do. If she's able to disclose what she was talking about, she'll tell us. And if not, that's fine." Their little group nodded in agreement, and went back to surrounding their tour guide.

Meanwhile, with Marinette and Damian, a long, detailed explanation was being outlined for him, all while his brothers listened along.

"So, let me get this straight," Damian pinches the bridge of his nose.

Marinette took some pictures of a Chinese silk garment, classified as main Women's wear. "Take your time. It's a lot."

"This..." Damian tries to find a nicer word than the one in his head. "Girl, came to your class after a trip around the world — "

"— really long time spent away from school for whatever reason, and to see how many times it would take for people to realize that she could change the background of her bedroom. Which, by the way, a lot didn't at the time."

"— tried to lie about having a hearing disability, saving a celebrity's cat, countless environmental endeavours and achievements, being close friends with numerous public figures and saving someone's eye from being gouged out from a napkin?" His voice was incredulous, and his eyes were disgusted.

"Yep."

"That last one is just sad." Jason muttered.

Tim felt the same, "Do these people not know that Google exists? How do you believe these things for so long without fact checking? Jagged Stone doesn't even have a cat." Damian exhaled heavily.

"Who in their right mind would believe all of that without the slightest bit of proof? Are your classmates stupid?"

Marinette frowns, "They're not stupid." He gives her a disbelieving expression, and she narrows her eyes. "I wouldn't call them stupid. I'm not sticking up for them, because they were absolutely wrong, but...she's taken advantage of their friendliness. And, a lot of them have realized that she was lying. Some of them still are believing her, but it's definitely her fault. Don't insult them."

"This girl is being way too nice about this."

Damian wasn't so content to agree with her, and found Jason's words correct, but continues, "And...she's bullying you?"

Marinette deflates ever so slightly, and Damian clenches his fist. "I...yeah. It wasn't much, not at first, but since I constantly pointed out the holes in her lies, she's had it out for me. She cornered me once in the school bathroom, and promised me that she'd take all my friends away from me.
And she succeeded for a bit. She took Alya, who was my best friend. She gestures towards the person in question, who was chatting with Lila. "She hasn't been downright nasty to me, but she thinks I just hate Lila for a stupid reason and always believes her, and we don't really talk anymore."

The others were silent at that, although, a "Jesus Christ" came from Dick. Damian narrows his eyes as he regards Lila.

"How much has she tried to underhandedly insult you around your classmates?"

Marinette snorts, "Always. I was the bad guy for a long while before my friends realized the truth. The others just don't like to get into it, and they just don't want conflict."

"Your classmates continue to sound so outstanding."

She opens her mouth to say something, but he swiftly cuts her off, "Yes, they may have been taken advantage of by a pathetic liar, but if they've been treating you horribly, that's on them. You've known them longer than they've known this girl, and you're telling me that they immediately believe her, and don't question why your behaviour is different? You can't tell me that you didn't feel betrayed."

There's an indignant glint in her, and he stands his ground, maintaining eye-contact with her. Eventually, she exhales, her disposition dispirited. "I did. I was. And I still am. Even my friends now know that they assumed the worst of me before. But, I did."

"So, stop excusing them." He folds his arms. "They were wrong."

"Could've been much nicer telling her that, you brat." And Damian grimaces, he didn't want to be so harsh.

Marinette frowns, gazing at a Korean ink-painting on a hanging scroll, depicting a grapevine and squirrels. "I know. I just...I keep falling into the habit of thinking that I was the wrong one."

Damian falters at her now despondent state, and doesn't know how to comfort her, despite the sudden urge to. Instead, he coughs, "Her level of lying is too...calculated to be a situational thing. She's the dangerous type of pathological liar. What about your administration? Have you never talked to your teachers?"

"Two of my teachers are trying to form a case for administration. But Principal Damocles hasn't really been dealing with Lila as he should. When she lied about me and got me expelled, I only got back in because she said that she has a "rare disease that sometimes causes her to lie compulsively". At Damian's disgust, she gives a sardonic smile. "He's never really been an advocate for his students. Numerous times, he's sided with the mayor's daughter when she's tried to bully us."

"What the fuck kind of school is this?"

Dick hums, picking up right after Jason, "So, the principal of her school may be in the pockets of the mayor of France. Good god, the layers in this."

Damian questions, "What kind of principal panders to bullies instead of thoroughly investigating?"

The noirnette shrugs in response, "Either way, he believes Lila." She continues softly, glancing down at her flats. "It's...been a lot."
He gazes at her in contemplation. "Marinette." When she picks up her head, he continues, "I would like to apologize. While it is important for me to get as much information as I can on Rossi, I didn't mean to make you...upset." He rubs the back of his neck, feeling uncomfortable and awkward. Marinette gapes in surprise.

"Oh, no. No, no. It's not your fault." She tries to reassure him. "It's just been so tiring how she's been getting away with all this. I'm just glad that people are becoming aware and she's gonna get in trouble. There was one person who knew she was lying when all my classmates didn't but...he didn't think we should have done anything. He kept convincing me that it would be best if we didn't do anything, since it wasn't hurting anyone but I just...couldn't."

Damian blinks, "He's an idiot."

She winces, "It's not his fault. There's a whole...thing concerning his family and the way he was brought up, but I do think he's wrong. He never even defended me around everyone despite knowing she was lying, and it did hurt since...well, I liked him." Damian freezes. "And I thought we were in it together. But, I've gotten over it. If anyone should be sorry, it's should be me, for unloading everything on you."

"It's fine." In his testing of figuring out whether or not his attraction was a one time thing, he has found out that it was, in fact, not a one time thing. Their conversation about Lila hadn't felt as if it was just for business, he was genuinely enjoying talking with her. Sure, she was very...forgiving. Too forgiving. Much more forgiving than he's ever liked in people. However, he wasn't annoyed (at her anyway). She truly seemed genuine in everything she was telling him, and he couldn't understand how so much nonsense could happen at once. To someone who seemed so nice.

"And it did hurt since...well, I liked him." He grimaces. The possibility of her liking someone, having a boyfriend, made him wonder whether he was just feeling this...weirdness alone. She was cute, he'll admit that, to the point where he's sure others would recognize it. So, she would most likely have a boyfriend, wouldn't she? Was this truly nothing?

"...amian." He snaps out of his thoughts, he registers that there's was an overlap of two voices, Marinette's and Tim's. He finds Marinette's eyes on him, and from the look on her face, she must have been calling him for a while. Tim must've been trying to get his attention because of it. "Damian?" She peers closer at him in concern, and he feels his warm at the proximity. "Are you okay? You zoned out for a minute."

"Fine." He quickly steps back. "It's fine. I'm fine. I was just thinking."


Damian watches as she nods, placing some fly-away strands behind her ear, and he glances away, covering the bottom half of his face. The heat in his cheeks wasn't going away, and he mutters a curse under his breath so Marinette wouldn't hear. He hated this.

He opened his mouth to say something, but his mind drew a blank. In all of his years, there have only been a few selective moments where words have failed him, but he never would have expected this to be a cause. Nevertheless, he scrambles for something to talk about, something to not focus on his internal dilemma. "So..." he gazes around them, and land on the wall paintings. "Art."

Marinette raises an eyebrow, and he internally winces as she slowly says, "Yes? Art."

"What the fuck am I hearing?" Jason's voices sounds in his ear, and he grimaces further.
"I just... you were drawing something when we came up to you. Are you a connoisseur?"

"Oh." Marinette laughs, waving a hand. "I wouldn't go that far, but I can appreciate good art. I'm more into Fashion Design rather than painting."

Damian nods, "Right. You've worked for that musician."

Marinette pauses, "How... right. Sorry. I didn't think you would know about that. I guess you seen it in the articles."

She wasn't wrong. Her accomplishments were in those articles. Truthfully, however, he didn't know about it until he did his own background check the evening he met her. "I have. That's pretty accomplished for someone your age. How did it happen?"

She ducks her head, a smile on her lips. "Thank you. He had a contest where you had to design a poster, and the winner got two free tickets. I ended up winning. He eventually requested me personally, and I became one of his designers ever since."

"Is that... legal?" Because, to his knowledge, the minimum working age in France is sixteen.

"It only became official when I turned sixteen." Marinette reassured. "Before, they were just contest projects and well paid commissions. Penny and Jagged have always been strict when it comes to paying me properly, since I'm young. They even made sure my parents and I got a lawyer to overlook the outlines of his commissions."

"Noble of them. Most would take advantage of a teenager."

She sounds proud, "Yeah, well. They're pretty noble people."

Damian was not the only one trying to decipher their thoughts and emotions. The slightly awkward air present in their conversation was purely because (she believed) Marinette had no idea what to say. He was mostly steering the conversation, and she wondered if he found her lack of talking annoying. Or her oversharing. Or her in general.

She sighs. She didn't really know much about Damian Wayne besides being the handsome stranger she bumped into. From what Alix talked about earlier, he seemed to have a reputation for being frigid. But, he didn't seem like it. Why did Gotham media houses think that? Should she ask? Would that be too rude of a conversation starter? Probably. And yet, she's asking it anyway.

"Can I ask you something?"

He blinks at her call, seemingly wrapped up in his own thoughts. Great. She was so boring that he's trying to focus on anything other than her, and he had been doing that multiple times throughout their conversation. "You can."

"I'm sorry if this comes off as rude," Marinette prayed to the gods that this wouldn't make things more awkward. "But why do people think you're cold? You don't seem like it."

He pauses in surprise, and Marinette immediately assumes the worst.

"Sorry! I'm sorry, I just — well okay, I haven't really read the articles about me, I was ordered not. But my friends have, and they pointed out that they're painting our whole meeting as a "Frigid Ice-Prince" meets "Sunshine-y Girl" kind of thing. Not — Not that I think you're frigid. I totally don't. I'm just confused since you seem pretty nice. I mean, I'm only basing it off of right now. I don't, uh, really know you. And, I don't want you to think I'm trying to get to know just because of who
There's a noticeably weight on her shoulder that makes her cut off immediately, and she sees that Damian's simply watching her, eyes wide. "You ramble a lot."

She swallows and glances down at her feet. That was a little too much rambling.

"I...didn't mean to insult you." He hurries to say. "To answer your question....I can't speak on their stupidity. I'm not covered on that much between me and my father, but they do keep a close eye on all of his children. There's ridiculous....preconceptions of who I am. And my name brings forth attention I could care less for. When I have appeared in public, I would have liked to be anywhere else."

Marinette gazes at him for a moment. "That must horrible, constantly having so many eyes on you."

"I've experienced worse. Both in Gotham and otherwise," he waves her off. "But, it's a sentiment shared by all of his children. Truthfully, it's just...that's just how I am."


He blinks, "Thank you."

She gets the feeling that he must not hear that often from people, and she makes sure to send him a smile. It takes a moment, but he eventually sends her one as well. It's small. As if it's not a habit for him, but her heart swoops, and it's ticking another box on her "Damian Wayne is Absolutely Not Cold" List. The thing is, she wants him to talk to him more, so, she's gonna have to put on her big girl pants and initiate the conversation.

"So..." She drawls, and he eyes her. "How much do you know about this museum?"

The question is clearly something he wasn't expecting her to ask, but he thinks for a moment, "I mean, I wouldn't know more than the appointed tour guide who's trained to know this back and front, but I do know a lot."

Marinette glances around for her group's assigned tour guide and snorts. Her teachers were being pretty understanding, letting her separate this long. "What about your knowledge on painters and artists?"

"Definitely more than I know about this museum."

She smiles up hopefully at him, "Can you tell me about it?"

Damian seems to pause at that, but quickly recovers, immediately glancing off to the side. She frowns at not being able to read him, but her mood changes for the better when he nonchalantly answers, "I...I suppose I can. If it won't bore you."

"Trust me, it won't."
following Tim's directions for a while now.

"What the hell is this guy doing?"

"He was checking out the room. But your guess is as good as mine as to why he's room hopping."

Dick huffs, "Jason? What about you?"

"Still trying to find some other hint of The Riddler being here. Still coming up empty. Haven't found anything in the American Wing."

Tim was still keeping the line open on Damian, but was more focused on directing him and Jason. He takes his hat off to run a hand through his hair. "I know I said that us being here early would help in scoping out the place, but this is helping nothing."

"What if that guy's just assessing the good art in here?"

Tim snorts, "You do have a point: we don't know if the Riddler's going to strike here today of all times. This stakeout was a precaution, really."

Dick would have said something in response, but then the man finally makes an appearance, only this time, there's someone else with him. They root themselves in the entrance to this wing, and are doing the same as the single goon was doing before: analyzing the room. Again, he recognizes the action for what it was, they were taking count of all the occupants in the room. He frowns, doing the same. There weren't that many people in this department of the museum, and there were definitely more people earlier than at this time. So why....

"Tim. The west entrance."

It takes a moment before he answers. "Another one of The Riddler's goons. You punched him unconscious once."

"I've punch a lot of his henchmen unconscious." Dick moves closer, pretending to look at the breastplate of Italian armor. His apprehension is sky high, and he murmurs, "Jason, any henchmen on your end?" How many henchmen did they have around, and where were they stationed?

"....Three by the armory. Check 'em to make sure they're The Riddler's."

"....Fuck. They are." Tim's voice is low. "What is the Riddler going for?"

Dick knows it's not a genuine question. They know very well why they were here in the first place, and as much as they didn't want to just assume the're here to get Marinette, it sure would be one hell of a coincidence if The Riddler wasn't here for that. But he says anyway, "Robbery? He's gotten pieces from here before." He watches as one of them plays on a phone and he stiffens — they're waiting for something.

"Drake? I've got some people crowding around the two entrances. I've counted four."

Damian's voice comes through, low, and Dick imagines he scanning the area. Tim clicks his tongue, "It's not just four. I've counted seven."

So, this was definitely happening now. "Tim, check the other rooms."

"Been doing that." He quickly reports back. "There's more of them, but they're only near the rooms where you, Jason, and Damian are. Most of them are where Damian is."
And by extension, where *Marinette* is. Dick starts, "Call Bruce. Jason, you're gonna need to — "

But then, he watches as the two henchmen send each other a nod. One reaches from behind, and the other reaches inside his jacket, but both pull out what he immediately recognizes as guns.

"Dick — "

The men point them towards the ceiling, and the sound of gunfire erupts.

The American galleries are quite intermingled, that is to say, there are many cross-ways leading to a gallery. They chose one, and enter a room where the ceiling seems to tower above them, littered with multiple statues and sculptures and decorations and furniture before going up the stairs into a gallery. Within the red-painted room, most of the paintings that decorate the walls are portraits, but there are a few scenery and landscape paintings, with some painted still-life.

Marinette and Damian, as the tour continued, had made an activity of picking a painting and interpreting it. It had helped for the two to become much more relaxed and acquainted, which hadn't gone unnoticed by her classmates. Many of them were confused as to why he was still tagging along with them, and Lila had attempted, multiple times, to try and interrupt them. Alix, Kim and the others had intercepted her efforts, however, and the teachers had kept Lila towards the front, much to her displeasure. Her friends may not understand why Damian was still there, but Marinette was seeming happier than she had been previously, throughout her daunting situation, and they'd let her have it for as long as she wanted.

"Which one would you like to start with?" he asks, and Marinette stands in the center, scanning — she considers the portrait of a woman in a pink dress, seated and glancing off painting, with a rose behind her, and the one of an upper-middle-class woman who was drinking tea. She pauses on a scene of a black family — a man with a child in front of him, and a woman holding a baby to her chest — riding on a horse but ultimately stands in front of a painting of what must be a dozen people, because...well, it doesn't fall into the realm of any of the other portraits. "This one." She'll decipher the other one after.
Damian analyses the plaque, "Eastman Johnson. I'm familiar with him. He usually paints portraits of very wealthy and influential people, like one of the American presidents, philosophers and poets. He also likes to paint people in everyday situations, creates a candid air." He gestures to the painting she was planing to go to after. "He also did this one. He's also known for paintings focusing on slavery, and the lives of African-American people around the Civil War."

She hums, contemplating the painting. The fourteen people in the portrait were apparently three generations of the Hatch Family, and none of them seem to be aware that they're being painted. Not an uncommon detail in portraits, and in her opinion, it's much more natural.

Damian waits, "What are you thinking?"

She ignores the obvious elder adults in the painting, and eyes the children and younger adults. The three children around the center are focused on a baby in a ginger-haired girl's lap, the infant's head supported by her hand and propped up leg. They seem fond, enamored with the baby reaching a hand out, as most would be with any newborn. She eyes the two who seem like toddlers, one bunching a hand in a woman's skirt — possibly her mother — and the other — possibly her brother — both gazing at the baby with.....

"She doesn't seem to like the baby." She gestures to the one holding the skirt.

Damian hums in agreement, "I'd say that too. She's somewhat shielded behind this boy. Possibly jealous that she's not the object of affection and attention anymore. He — " He gestures to the boy in front of her. " — seems more confused as to why they're focusing on the baby."

She nods, and eyes the girl staring at the eldest people in the room — most likely the grandparents — with a book in one of her hands, the other crossed below it. "It looks like the grandparents are irritated at something, but by the way she's looking at them, they were probably talking about it loudly. She looks like she wants to read without them being so...crotchety."

His lips tilt upwards at how she says it. "They do look grumpy, don't they?"

"The grandfather's squinting at the paper. He should be wearing his glasses." She eyes the boy by the door, seemingly looking to depart the scene. The two people, who she assumes are the mother and father, are gazing at him sternly. "He looks like he's in trouble."

"He does." Damian nods. "So tell me, why did you pick this one?"

Marinette shifts on her feet. "It's just...not like a portrait. I mean, there are many portraits where the subject isn't looking at the painter, but this seems much more...intimate." She shrugs. "I don't know. It could've been a portrait where everyone's in their best outfits and they're all sitting in hard chairs, but they're just....sitting around. It gives a sense of the family just acting like they usually do, and the painter just capturing all their personalities."

"Exactly. The man at the desk was the one who hired Johnson to paint his family. By painting them like this, it seems more than just painting a portrait. It seems like the type of painting one can come back to and remember fondly, because they are his family. Even after their deaths, you feel acquainted with the family because you can get their personalities from this painting."

Marinette smiles, "It doesn't seem to be a meaningful painting at first glance, but it is. It's sweet."

"It is." And then he gestures to the painting of the family on horseback. "What about this one? You were really eyeing it."

She looks the plaque — the painting is called A Ride for Liberty — The Fugitive Slaves. It looks to
at the brink of dawn, and seems to be a battlefield, with light on bayonets in distance. "I don't know much about American History, but many slaves during the American Civil War fled the south to the north?"

"Yes. The Confederate States of America had an economy heavily dependent on the plantation system and the slavery of African-Americans. They were convinced that their system was being threatened by the American president at the time, Abraham Lincoln, which is what led them into rebellion against the United States. The bayonets there indicate the union lines of the north."

Marinette reads the quote that's included with the painting description by someone named Alexander H. Stephens, who describes the ideology of The Confederacy to be "upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition." She grimaces in disgust, and then contemplates the painting once more.

Everyone was looking in a different direction. The woman, holding the baby close to her chest, was looking behind them. The father was looking ahead, while the child was glancing downwards. "The mother seems to be worried about the possibility of anyone perusing them, or maybe she thinking about the fact that they're leaving those horrible conditions."

"Mm-hmm," Damian points towards the man. "One could say that him facing forward is to signify he's looking forward to the promise of a better future. The child staring down could be because he seems to be focused on the fact that they're on a horse."

She frowns, "He doesn't understand the importance of them fleeing." He shakes his head, looking similarly saddened.

They glanced at other paintings with a lighter air depicted in them, and Marinette frowns along with a young girl — possibly around six or seven — who was wearing an orange dress. "She's hating the fact that she has to sit down for this. I would be too, that colour is horrible."

Damian gives a huff, that almost passes for a laugh. She grins. She has no idea what he'd look like when he laughs, but it seems as if he doesn't do it much, and she feels her cheeks get warm. If that little thing makes her giddy, what about when he actually laughs? "What do you have against the colour orange?"

"It's not a bad colour, but it's not my favourite." She sends her condolences to the young girl in her thoughts. "Poor Margot."

Damian had heard the commentary of his brothers, mostly Tim directing Dick to where the man kept jumping too, but none of them had commented on the fact that he was still with Marinette. He didn't know if his line was silenced, but he wasn't going to question it. He watched as Marinette observed a painting of a young girl, with a knowing glint in her eyes. She takes a picture, tilting her head as she analysed its description with interest and he smiles. Damian's never been one to find people cute — attractive from an objective standpoint, yes — but today's events had been full of surprises.

"Would you like me to take a picture of you with it?"

She turns, confused at first, and then his question registers. "Oh! Um, sure. Thank you!"

Marinette hands him her phone, rests her bag at her feet, and turns her back to the painting. He takes two: one where she's simply smiling towards the camera, and another where she's mimicking the girl's expression, making a tableau of two girls who were suggestively talking with their eyes.
This was the second time he's seen her look somewhat mischievous, and their conversation before had her being much more shy, and the hint of it makes his cheeks warm. Clearly, he'd wouldn't be able to know everything about her today, but the intrigue of Marinette being snarky made his stomach feel odd. He wants to know more.

He clears his throat, checking the pictures before handing her back her phone. "Here you go."

She flips through the pictures, smiling in satisfaction. "Thank you, Damian."

Damian returns a smile, but begins to feel unsettled with feeling a stare on his back. He spares a quick glance behind him, and softly scoffs when Lila Rossi quickly turns her head. "Why is Rossi staring at us?"

Marinette's expression immediately sours. "I'm sorry about her. She's most likely upset at the fact that she can't be nosy."

"Tragic." He rolls his eyes. "She'll understand when she gets that lawsuit."

Marinette snorts. "I kind of feel bad for her, but at the same time, I absolutely don't. She's gonna be getting another lawsuit from Jagged."

"Two lawsuits from two public figures are gonna to set off a chain reaction of the others she's conduction fabrications about. Again, quite tragic."

The rest of the time is filled with Marinette quickly sketching a couple of different things in the room, all while Damian notes her talent. She's bashfully humble about it, and he watches her technique, asking her a couple of questions about her history in art. He finds out that her first fashion drawing was when she was around five or six, and has been drawing ever since. The accomplishment she's most proud of is the launching of her website, as it had been in the works for a long time. Her favourite design ("for now," she said, because "there's always room for improvement.") is a derby hat she designed for a contest judged by Gabriel Agreste. That piece had gotten her the attention of Audrey Bourgeois, and even her invitation to work with her in New York. ("There's still so much for me to do, and learn, you know?" Marinette had said, a far off look in her eyes. "It wouldn't have been good for me yet.") He was content to let her speak, because he could see just how much she loved fashion, how passionate she was about it.

But, of course, nothing could ever be that nice for him. Because, he was nothing if not observant. And in the midst of catching Rossi glancing away from them for the umpteenth time, he spots two, suspicious looking individuals waiting in the western entrance. He watches them for a moment, an uncomfortable feeling beginning to spring up. There was already the one of The Riddler's lackey's that Dick went off to stalk, how many were there? He grimaces. It was easy to forget why he and his brothers were at the museum in the first place, Marinette had made it easy to forget, but the sight of the two immediately reminded him.

Speaking of his brothers, while they had been talking, he wasn't really that focused on their back and forth. They hadn't said anything too worrying at the time. But now, Grayson had spotted the same man he went after, now accompanied by another.

"Jason, any henchmen on your end?"

"....Three by the armory. Check 'em to make sure they're The Riddler's." That last sentence was directed to Tim, and Jason's sounded every bit as apprehensive as he felt.

"....Fuck. They are." Tim's voice is low. "What is the Riddler going for?"
He spares a glance towards his unassuming companion, still sketching. There was a minuscule chance that The Riddler wasn't here for her. A very, very slim chance. He scans the room again — he doesn't want to miss any hint of there being more henchmen. And it takes a moment before he spots two more, standing in the opposite entrance. *Fuck.*

"Drake?" He keeps his voice low, not wanting to alert Marinette just yet. "I've got some people crowding around the two entrances. I've counted four."

He feels his body tense when Tim responds back, an uneasy murmur, "It's not just four. I've counted seven."

Marinette blinks out of her concentration, "Damian?" There's worry dancing in her blue eyes. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." He flits through the numerous people in the room. There's definitely those four in the doorways, but...he curses under his breath. There are two around Marinette's friends — the pink-haired girl and the one with a tattoo by his wrist. He finds the other near one of her teachers, the auburn haired one.

Tim's voice reaches his ears, "There's more of them, but they're only near the rooms where you, Jason, and Damian are. Most of them are where Damian is."

But he hears what went unsaid: Most of them are where Marinette is.

There's a hand on his shoulder, and almost reaches to bend it to hurt. but realizes that it's Marinette, who still looks concerned. "Really, Damian. You look unsettled by something. What is it?"

Dick begins to, just as he'd usually do whenever he's in Nightwing mode, command them all, "Call Bruce. Jason, you're gonna need to — "

Two of the men in the entryway behind her, glance across the room once more before giving each other a glance, and then reaching behind their backs. His eyes widen as he quickly recognizes that they've pulled out weapons, and then dread begins to pool in his stomach.

Tim starts to say "Dick — " the same time Marinette questions once more, "Damian?" and tries to see what he's looking at.

They point their weapons towards the ceiling, and the sound of gunfire ring throughout the gallery. Damian quickly tackles Marinette to the floor, shielding her head as well as her landing.

The swiftness with which Damian's grabbed her and brought her to the floor knocks the wind out of her. It takes a moment for her to realize what's happening, to connect the screams that she's hearing belong to the rest of the occupants of the room, some of them strangers who just wanted to have a good day, others her classmates and teachers. They're scattering like a pack of frightened seagulls, away from the eastern side of the room. She wants to pick her head up, to make sure that no one that she knows is injured, but Damian's tightening hold above her makes her still.

"Don't move."

She whimpers at the sharp instruction. Marinette's almost used to hearing the screams of terror
whenever there's an akuma. She's almost used to the frenzied running of Parisian citizens. But she's never been close, let alone in, a shooting before. She's never come in contact with guns before. A few more shots ring out overhead, the screams immediately silencing, but her thoughts are running rampant, wondering if any of them hit someone, if they're bleeding out right now, and the silence is due to everyone staring in horror. There's a welling pool of anxiety flowing in her stomach, even as it's pressed against the art gallery floor, and another frightened noise softly escapes her. Damian's close enough to hear it, and rubs a hand up and down her arm.

"What's happening?" Her voice sounds off, incredibly airy and almost as if it's edging into hysteria. But, she gets her answer in the form of a cackle, dipped in pure enjoyment and heinousness at the situation that her entire body, as compressed as it is, flinches. A heavy weight settles in her chest, at the realization that yes, this was happening, although, there was still the question of what *this* was. A robbery? They were commonplace in Gotham, but here?

Damian's head lifts a bit from where it was on hers, and she does the same, her mouth immediately going dry at what she sees.

A man stood, triumphantly surveying the room. Everything on him is green: his smart business suit, his bowler hat, even the length of his cane, which had the hilt of a question mark. His eyes were pleased, and Marinette dimly wonders what kind of person could derive pleasure from the sight of people fearing for their lives, cowering in all corners of the room.

"Well then," the man drawls. slow and mocking. "Good morning everyone."

Chapter End Notes

Now: onto the after-chapter notes.

(1) I don't remember if I've ever said, but Sasha Catalina is based on the second version of Sasha Bordeaux as "Black Queen" in terms of looks: dark-skin, black bob cut.

(2) I initially wondered if to have Nino be on Marinette's side when it comes to Lila, or still try to stay out of the conflict. Eventually, I landed on him figuring out that Lila was lying after seeing her attempt to slander Marinette to the class.

(3) Yes, Marinette had a breakdown-fueled cry due to the situation she's found herself in (This is what Nino walks in on when he visits her room.) I've hadn't shown that much of her emotions (in my opinion anyway)/spent enough time seeing her be terrified about the whole thing, only showcasing little bits of it. I plan to have her have another breakdown in the future, so;;;;yep.

(4) I really struggled on how to portray Damian, as well as how he and Marinette interact. My first thought was to have him be absolutely incensed with the situation, and initially not get along with her. However, as I really thought about it, seventeen year old Damian wouldn't react the same as ten year old Damian. He wouldn't be as surly, but would still have an issue with it (since it's still people pushing their noses in his business). But then, I didn't want them to get in a relationship too fast/have their meeting progress too fast, but still wanted a foundation for it.

Therefore, I arrived on a suitable solution: have him find her attractive at first glance,
have him be absolutely unsettled by how quickly it happened (because out of all the Wayne children to do that, it would be Dick), let him interact with her and see whether or not his seconds of attraction is actually legit, and then build from there.

(5) Out of all the Wayne kids, Damian seems (according to what I've seen in the comics) to be the closest to Dick, and actually sees him like a brother. Thus, while Tim is one of the people to realize he's acting weird, Dick's the one who would get through to him the quickest.

Really, when I read it from the first chapter to now, it seems really fast, which — I actually wanted it a bit more slow paced, but I also don't plan on this story being too long. I have a specific ending in my head for how I want this to turn out, so, we'll see.

Thank you so much for reading, and i'll see you in the next one!
Hello!! I haven't abandoned this story! I'm just trying to adjust with the shift to online learning and teaching and living given the covid-19 pandemic right now.

Hope you guys are surviving during this mess of times. I'm not going to comment on how much this is affecting everyone socially, economically and emotionally because, I'm sure no one wants to focus on that too much. but, i hope you're doing okay.

Y'all better be complying with your area/territory's stay-at-home orders (social distancing while going out to be with your friends and family, travelling via plane, going to the beach/the park/the playground is not social distancing). Wash your damn hands.

That's about it. Enjoy???

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the midst of the arrangements for the class trip, and aside from the scheduled itinerary for Gotham, one of the other important items was educating the class on Gotham's high crime rate and its villains. Everyone had heard about the typical big-bads of Gotham, the villains that had a reputation that preceded them outside of their city: The Joker. The Penguin. Scarecrow. Two-Face. Catwoman. Harley Quin. Poison Ivy. (even though those last three were more currently considered anti-heroes).

Another villain they made sure to discuss: The Riddler. Or, L'Homme-Mystère as they referred to him in France.

His modus operandi was the integration of riddles and gimmicks and puzzles in his heists. According to their research, he first started out as a playful, but sane trickster, someone who loved utilizing puns in his line of work. But then, there was a noticeable shift in the way he conducted crimes: he seemed much more intense. He was still playful, but the articles had pointed out that it almost seemed as if the usage of puzzles had become compulsive for him. He started forewarning Batman and the Gotham Police Department of his missions with clues, constantly overstating his "intellectual superiority". He kept devising life or death traps that people had to figure out in order to save their lives.

Madame Bustier made sure to point out his trademarks, complete with pictures captured during his exploits: his green suit, green bowler hat (Marinette had grimaced in disgust at the abundance of green), the question mark cane, and the question marks left behind at the scene of a crime to show he was there.

Compared to the Joker and others, he was much more ostentatious. And his level of violence usually wasn't as barbaric as the Joker. Usually. At least there was some sort of balance (no matter how deranged it could be) with his riddles. Same thing with Two-Face, who usually flipped a coin to decide what to do. With the Joker, he did what he wanted. Anything could set the man off.

Seeing him now, as he walked around the room, the welling pool of anxiety turned into a much
heavier weight of dread. While he had targeted the museum before, what was his reason today?

Damian had slowly risen up, and brought her with him into a huddled position. He still had a grip on her, placed slightly behind him as a barrier, and was eyeing the Riddler's every move attentively. She was grateful for it, but was a bit unnerved by the emotionless stare he currently wore. She glances around the room.

Many of the American civilians with children are shielding them from view, and from the way their mouths were moving, she could only assume they were trying to calm their kids down. Her classmates were experiencing various waves of fear. Mylène was in the midst of hyperventilating, with Ivan trying his best to calm her. Rose already had panic induced tears in her eyes, and Juleka was murmuring reassurances to her, while cautiously eyeing the Riddler. Madame Bustier, while clearly pale with fear, was ensuring that some students were huddled behind her. Madame Mendeleieiev and Monsieur Haprèle did the same, and he was worriedly glancing over towards his daughter. Madame Catalina, like Damian, didn't seem the least bit fearful. Perhaps it was due to the years dedicated to her job, but she simply eyed the villain with visible enmity.

The henchmen present in the room were blocking the two routes of escape, pointing their guns threateningly. A small sob escaped from Rose, and it was loud enough to gain the attention of one of the goons, who immediately pushes the gun closer to her face. It results in her cowering further in Juleka's arms, and her girlfriend pressing further back into the wall. Marinette flinches, wanting to calm the girl (she knew better than to move though), but Damian's arms tighten, as if sensing that she wanted to leave.

The fear within the room was overwhelming, and as much as she doesn't want it to consume her, it was hard to resist it. But, she needs to calm herself. She couldn't be Ladybug right now, she couldn't reveal her identity. And as much she wants to do something, the Ladybug in her wants to do something, she was incredibly out of her element. Now wasn't the time to gather her bearings to engage in a fight where she was severely outnumbered, and would most likely be shot.

Marinette exhales at that last thought. She — she needed to calm down.

"I'm so sorry to drop in announced," The Riddler fixes the right cuff of his suit, and his voice is airy. "Art is something to be at one with, and having someone interrupt that zen would be infuriating, I imagine. Especially this museum, ha ha haa — beautiful place, lovely place. I stole from here once, you all know that. But, I assure you, my little hostages — I'm not here for all of you. There's something — or someone — specific that I'm here for."

The language barrier is a significant issue at the moment, and Marinette doesn't understand what he just said. But, by the soft and recognizable curse that left Damian's mouth, she can't imagine that it was good.

The villain's steps are quite animated, and while she may not be able to understand him, her skin crawls at how giddy he is. "You see, someone's become a little celebrity right here in Gotham — someone who's quite close to the family of good ol' Bruce Wayne." He swings his cane, "One could only imagine what the Wayne family would do to gain her back. What Damian Wayne would do to get back his dear, sweet girlfriend."

Marinette's breath catches, and she feels as if ice water has been thrown on her. She understood half of his little monologue, but it was enough for her to draw the right conclusion. She shrinks further behind Damian and he draws himself up even taller.

The Riddler's close to where she and her classmates are, and she stiffens in wait. A henchman follows him, gun in hand. "Really, I thought it's bit a bit...underwhelming for her." He moves
closer. "Us Gothamites haven't given her a true taste of what Gotham's capable of." And closer. "She deserves a warm welcome to our beautiful, little cesspool." And closer.

He and his goon finally stops in front of where she and Damian are, up against the wall, him mostly shielding her, and a successful grin emerges on his lips. Damian still attempts to hide her, and the villain's grin takes on a sharper, much more vitriolic edge at the attempt. Marinette's mouth goes dry.

"Good thing I have just the welcome."

He reaches for her, but multiple things happen at once: Damian sizes up, causing the henchman to immediately focus his gun on them. There's movement in her periphery, a little way away from her, and it causes multiple of his other henchmen to target their guns at the culprits. Horrified gasps ring out, and she recognizes that they came from her classmates.

The Riddler sighs, as if all of this was tedious for him, and straightens. "Unfortunately," he starts, a frown on his lips, and Marinette glances over to see that he was aiming it at Madame Catalina and Madame Bustier. She feels sick at seeing the gun pressed against her teacher's head, and the petrified gazes of Alix and Max behind her. Kim and Nino's eyes were glazed over, trained on the weapon, and she thinks they've frozen. "This welcome is only catered for one person. I'm afraid neither of you will be able to join in."

Her teacher is trembling, but her face is defiant, and her eyes flit occasionally to Marinette, clearly not wanting his attention back onto her. A growl escapes the henchman in front of her, and he nudged the gun roughly in warning. Another points his weapon towards a tearful Mylène, who was surrounded by Ivan, Alya and Lila. The action makes a cry escape both Lila and Mylène, Lila shielding herself behind Alya, and the teacher falters. Madame Bustier bites her lip before shakily exhaling, and draws back.

Madame Catalina, who also had a gun pressed against her forehead, simply eyed the henchmen with contempt. Her eyes were surveying every one, as if analyzing pros and cons of attacking the ones close to her, and Marinette hopes she doesn't get herself killed. The woman eventually backs down, but is clearly unhappy about it.

The Riddler watches them for a moment, "Thank you." He turns back to her and Damian, and his widened, almost eager stare makes her involuntarily straighten. He clearly picks up on it, if the grin forming on his lips is any indication, and continues, "Now then, my dear. I'd like you to come with me."

Damian doesn't relax to allow her to get up. In fact, he only narrows his eyes at the villain, his stare filled with defiant fire. The Riddler stares down at them, giving another long exhale. "We don't have all day. Let go of her before my henchman shoots your arms off."

Marinette only understands "shoots" and quickly gets alarmed at the thought of Damian getting shot protecting her. She goes to move, but Damian snarls, and spits out "She can't speak English. Whatever you're planning to do, she won't be able to understand what you're saying. You're putting her at an disadvantage — how's she supposed to solve your puzzles?"

There's a significant pause, where The Riddler contemplates his words for a moment and considers Marinette. "You do have a point. I'd like to think of myself as a benevolent man. And it wouldn't be as fun if she didn't have a leg to stand on."

Marinette hesitantly eyes Damian, for some sort of explanation, but he continues to stare straight ahead.
And then, the villain slams his cane onto the floor, having come to a conclusion, and the sound causes everyone to jump. "Very well, then! You'll come along with us."

That causes Damian to falter slightly, his eyes widening. However, there wasn't the slightest bit of surprise in his stare, nor the dawning horror one would expect a civilian to have when being preposition by a criminal. "Me?"

Marinette pauses. She may not understand what was happening, but she notes just how fast a shift his countenance was, from the wary ire he held before. Was he acting?

The Riddler's features indicated his amusement at Damian's words, and the man raises an eyebrow, "You were practically hiding her from me a second ago, and now you don't want to come with us? Since you're so protective, you'll be a wonderful asset in what I have planned."

Damian exhales, and says to Marinette in French, "Let's go."

There's blood roaring in her ears, and she's beginning to feel nauseous from the looming danger of the unknown, knowing that she has no idea what trap she's about to be placed in. "What's he planning?"

"I don't know yet. But, if we stay here, he'll get impatient." He murmurs back. "And I don't think we should test his patience, at least in here. We can try to stall for time when we're not around anyone he could potentially use as leverage for you."

The images of her petrified classmates, and the weapons trained on her teacher and Madame Catalina made her slowly nod. "Okay." But, she doesn't move.

Damian frowns. He's probably picked up on her internal distress, and his eyes are uncertain, as if he doesn't know what to say, whether to reassure her or be truthful. He eventually lands on saying "Come on", and Marinette feels a small once of appreciation that he doesn't attempt to lie to her.

He gently nudges her up with him with one hand around her back, and Marinette gets up to her feet. When they step forward, guns are immediately aimed at them — one digs into her back, and she shudders from the heavy, cold weight. Her class watches her with pale faces, and when she eyes her teachers, she notes the overwhelming dread in their expressions.

"The rest of you," The Riddler raises his voice. "I'm sure that Batman and his bat-brats will be here soon. But, none of them will be able to enter or do anything until I make arrangements. If they do — well, it'll be just horrible for everyone, since I've left a lovely little bomb in here."

That last part goes off as you might expect. The gallery's occupants erupt into panicked exclamations, some openly crying out of fear and some glancing around wildly in search, as if the bomb was somewhere in the room. Others press themselves up further into the walls, as if they would be able to phase through them and get away from the situation. A bullet embeds itself into the ceiling, and the gunshot quickly gets the room to hush.

"Thank you." The villain doesn't even look at the henchman who shot the gun. "Now then! Don't go anywhere." He releases a little giggle at the irony, and gestures for the henchmen bordering Marinette and Damian to follow him. "I won't be long."

The gun in her back pushes inward slightly in command, and she follows behind The Riddler. Madame Bustier and Madame Mendeleiev look as if they want to run up to her, and she doesn't want them to do anything rash, doesn't want to see guns trained on them as a result. So, she draws herself taller, and eyes the two women significantly. I'll be okay. Please don't do anything.
Their expressions don't falter. In fact, they seem more sickened that Marinette's attempting to reassure them. Damian was still leading her forward, holding her arm, and she squeezes his hand. He was nice enough to allow it, probably knowing that she was trying her best to stay calm, and needed a physical hold on things.

Tikki was in her tote bag, which was discarded on the floor in the midst of the commotion. She feels even more nauseated.

There was no chance of her turning into Ladybug.
To my followers in Gotham City, there's currently a robbery happening in the Gotham Museum of Art. Stay clear of the area and stay safe guys! 11:05 AM - 17 April 2019

144
600
vivi supremacy

@vivipng
to anyone in gotham city, the riddler's holding up the gotham museum of art in a robbery rn. stay clear of the area guys! 11:09 AM - 17 April 2019
The Riddler's struck again at the Gotham Museum of Art. Even though the roads are already blocked by the police, people should stay clear of the area. Be safe! 11:11 AM - 17 April 2019

There are many police cruisers scattered along the facade of the art museum, with barriers erected to keep the crowd that had amassed from swarming closer. There were also, reporters. Journalists along with camera-people giving updates on what was currently happening, and some even taking
pictures of the scene.

When Batman arrives at the scene, Red Robin in tow, they make an immediately beeline to Commissioner James Gordon, who had been commanding a group of officers on what to do. Upon seeing them, he sends off his subordinates with one last order, and focuses solely on the vigilantes. "You're here quicker than you usually are."

Neither of them explain that it was due to them having been surveying the museum earlier, or that they been expecting this. Instead, Batman questions, "How much do you know so far?"

Gordon gives a weary sigh, "So far? I just got here. All I know is that The Riddler's taken some hostages in there. Due to the amount of people that managed to escape, I believe he's holding down specific room or rooms, none close to the main entrance." He eyes the gallery's main building. "We have no idea where in the building he could be, and I've just sent my men to scope out the openings."

Batman follows his gaze, "We're lucky. We've got eyes in there." When Gordon's attention swirls back to him in surprise, he answers the silent question. "Red Hood decided that he'd check out the gallery today." He specifically leaves out the detail that Dick's also in there, since depending on how things turn out, Dick might have to leave there as either a detective or as Nightwing. And he doesn't want to chance anyone connecting Dick and Nightwing together, even if Gordon would never attempt to do so.

"Hmm — never would have pegged him be an art enthusiast. But, thank God for that." The Commissioner exhales. "What do you got?"

Red Robin produces a physical map of the museum, three places marked with marker. He gestures to the map, "We know about three definite rooms that The Riddler's holding down. They're all very close to each other: Galleries 779 and 795 in the American Wing, and Gallery 781 in the European Wing of Art."

Gordon processes the three rooms on the map. "Any idea as to why he's decided on the museum?"

"I don't suppose you've been paying attention to the news?" At the raised eyebrow, Batman continues. "Do you recognize the name Marinette Dupain-Cheng?"

"The French teenager that everyone thinks is either related to Bruce Wayne, or dating his son? What about her?"

"She and her class are in there. And she's the one he's focused on."

The Commissioner blinks at that, and then he visibly thinks it over. "So, a hostage Situation? Given that this girl has had too much media attention on her, maybe he's thinking there's a definite connection to Bruce Wayne or his son."

"That's what we're thinking." And Batman would've continued, had it not been for what they heard over their headsets, which causes him to suck in a breath. The words also cause Red Robin to quickly stiffen, eyes unseeing.

Gordon watches them for a moment, before venturing, "What is it?"

And just then, a gunshot rang out through the air, causing them all to glance towards the museum. The civilians on the street let out a collective screams, clearly terrified of what they weren't seeing. The officers and vigilantes all wait for other shots, but no more followed. Gordon quickly eyes the vigilantes, and Red Robin supplies him with, "I'm not hearing a report of anyone being injured. It
was probably a warning shot."

"What about the thing before that? What did you hear?"

"If they do — well, it'll be just horrible for everyone, since I've left a lovely little bomb in here."

Red Robin manages to answer, "He's got a bomb."

The elder man's eyes widen, "A bomb?" Multiple people around freeze at the word, and swivel around in sync, and Gordon releases a soft curse at the new attention. He glances around once more, before lowering his voice, "You're sure there's a bomb? This is the Riddler we're talking about. That man speaks in half-truths."

"That may be, but he also can't tell a permanent lie. Which means that he either actually has a bomb that's already in place, or to be implemented later — or something else is going to blow up."

"He's gonna make a negotiation." Red Robin speaks up after Batman. "The bomb threat was said to the civilians under the condition that we storm in there."

Gordon huffs, "Always something with Nigma." He calls over a few standby officers, and switches on his transceiver, bringing it up to his mouth as he gave off a few orders — most specifically to not enter under any circumstances. He additionally told one of the present men to call for some French interpreters, and commanded another to get the bomb squad down here.

When they set off to do their tasks, Gordon takes out two more transmitters, and hands them to the duo. "Keep me updated with any new developments." It was an understood feature of their partnership. Gordon always understood that the Dark Knight, and his partners did things their way, and he his own. Therefore, while Batman and Red Robin already had some clear surveillance on the situation via Red Hood, he'd never fight for his officers to be connected to the vigilante, or to be present for all of their communications. All he wanted was cooperation.

Batman takes the devices, "Of course, Jim."

Only when they were a good bit away from the reporters, scared civilians, and police officers, and within the safety of the Batmobile, did Batman speak. "Alfred, has anything changed in those past few minutes?"

"Nightwing and Red Hood are still stalled in Gallery 779 and Gallery 78. Robin and Miss Dupain-Cheng are still walking with The Riddler."

The Dark Knight growls, pinching the bridge of his nose. "He just jumped into it." Oh, they had all heard Damian plead Marinette's case to Nigma; and therefore, subsequently heard him get brought along with her.

"That he did. I do wonder where he gets it from."

Red Robin stares, "Would you rather him not be able to give us direct audio of what's happening on his side?"

Batman frowns, "You know that's not what I mean."

He sighs, "Yeah, I know." He starts pushing buttons on the Batmobile's computer, giving them footage within the museum from the Batcave's mainframe computer. "But, he was right to do that. Not only does it help Marinette, we'd immediately know The Riddler's next movements and act accordingly."
"Precisely. Although, it is still up in the air who exactly he'll be asking for. And if it's the young lad...."

Red Robin grimaces in understanding. The Dark Knight stares straight ahead, "We'll cross that bridge when we get to it."
IT'S A CAT-ASTROPHE

Two City Officials Asked To Resign Their Posts

The facts regarding the situation remain the same. Adequate notices were given to the officials involved. The city council will take due notice of these facts. The officials have been asked to resign. A new investigation will be launched into the matter.

Paralegal Action Successful in

Justice Teeters on the Oldest Fine Points

Residents feel that they keep losing control of their lives. They feel that the fines are excessive. The city council is considering a new resolution to address these issues.

NEWLY-ZONED AREA RESULTS IN 150 MORE BUILDING PERMITS

The facts regarding the situation remain the same. Adequate notices were given to the officials involved. The city council will take due notice of these facts. The officials have been asked to resign. A new investigation will be launched into the matter.
The Gotham Globe

@GothamGlobe
The Riddler terrorizes citizens once more; The Gotham Museum of Art surrounded

https://ggblohenews/1pAlsKi 11:25 AM - 17 April 2019
The facts were these:

1. One Marinette Dupain-Cheng, who had been looking forward to viewing The Gotham Museum of Art much more with her fellow classmates, was caught in the midst of a hostage situation — masterminded by The Riddler;
2. The Riddler, for reasons only he and his entourage knew, wanted her;
3. The Riddler targeted her specifically, because he thought that she was connected to Damian Wayne;
4. Said teenager just so happened to be with her when the ambush broke out (unbeknownst to everyone aside from her and the adults), and The Riddler was now taking him with her;
5. They were being walked quite a ways away from her classmates and her guardians, heavily guarded with goons flanking them from behind; and
6. She couldn't turn into Ladybug. Tikki was left in her abandoned bag.

Taking a deep, reassuring breath, Marinette attempted to take note of her surroundings. There was a painting of a young girl at a piano, one depicting a group of people on an estate — they ducked into a gallery on the right — a painting showing the loser of a fencing match, in the midst of being stabbed, a girl with a red...pioneer bonnet? ridding something, a man with a book and a dog on the floor — they took a left, and then quickly pushed to a gallery on the right, and then right again —

She inwardly scowled. Just her luck; they couldn't even be nice and not pick a base with so many twists and turns. The constant haphazard directions was definitely enough to confuse her. She discards her focus on trying to remember the path to wherever The Riddler was taking them, and directed to the man himself.
From what she's observed, in her research on The Riddler, he was not that much of a physical fighter. The multitude of henchmen today proved that. He usually made his getaway before Batman, or any of his partners could attempt to fight; they were always caught up in whatever riddle he sprung on them. Marinette may not have Tikki, but she'll have to make due; if push came to shove, she'd have to find some way to make the jump on him. No one here knew of her fighting prowess as Ladybug, so she could very well use the element of surprise in her favour — so long as she didn't blow her civilian cover. Especially —

She glances to her right, watching Damian glancing around them as they walked. *Especially* with someone else with her. She wondered how well Damian could fight. In fact, she wondered if he's ever even been in situations like this before. It may have been Gotham, but he seems *way* too calm, all things considered. He *was* a billionaire's son, people must have attempted to kidnap him before and he's worked up a calm pretense. But that's good — she couldn't have a frantic person with her. He needed to be calm.

The gun digging into her back hadn't been forgotten. *She* needed to be calm.

Marinette exhales shakily, bringing her eyes back in front, and *jumps* upon seeing The Riddler's eyes on her. He chuckles lowly, facing them and walking backwards. "You seem very at ease for someone who hasn't been commanded at gunpoint before."

Damian translates and — She thinks she's earned the right to be *a little* snarky; she's about to be subjected to whatever the hell The Riddler's planning. And snarky was sadly her default in fearful situations. They wouldn't be able to understand her anyway. "Not by gunpoint, but I've been kidnapped by someone like you before — awful costume and all." Hawkmoth's costume design for most of the akumatized victims were *horrid.*

Damian blinks, with actual surprise this time. The Riddler frowns, before eyeing Damian. "What?"

To his credit, Damian lies with ease. "She said that she's *trying* her best to stay calm."

"Aw." He grins, turning back around and saying over his shoulder "How brave of you."

She can feel Damian's eyes on her, but she doesn't look at him. His statement wasn't wrong — she *was* trying her best to stay calm. And she could feel her hands shaking from where she was clutching his arm, so he must be able to tell. His presence was incredibly grounding, and she tries not to wonder what it would have been like had he not been brought *with* her.

They finally arrive at where he had clearly been waiting until he felt right to strike. The room was undoubtedly British, a quaint dining room painted in aquamarine, with intricate rococo designs in the ceilings and walls. There were multiple statues erected in the wall carvings, and there was one statue of a woman draped onto a marble chaise-like chair. There was also a fireplace at the front of the room, under a painting of the room's initial owners. Everything aligned with the room's ornate nature, save for the very modern camera standing on a tripod in the middle of the room. The sight of it made her pause.

"We're in the Architectural Wing."

The words were soft. She turns her head to Damian, but he's not looking at her. Instead, his eyes survey the room — for what? She doesn't know. Marinette questions, "The Architectural Wing?"

Damian blinks, "Oh. The museum's had it closed off for a while for alterations. We're in The Dining Room of the Fitzmaurice House." Marinette catches a glimpse of what the room was supposed to look like when construction was finished on the wall adjacent to them, along with a
tiny summary of the room. They're led to stand in front of the fireplace, directly in the camera's view.

"Marinette," his murmur brings her attention back to him. "This may be frightening — " He eyes her hands on his arm, and she flinches. He absolutely could tell. " — but I need you to stay calm. The Riddler's going to be observing you, and he will be using your reactions to — "

"Now, now." The Riddler's voice makes Damian trail off. "If you're going to be talking, you'll have to share with the class."

The man was watching her. And Marinette realized his stare to be an assessing one — possibly to decipher what type of captive she'd be, or just how much to leverage her for. As much as she wants to flinch, she understood what Damian was attempting to say — he'd be noting her every reaction. Then again, if she allowed some fear to show, it would increase the surprise factor when she finally thought of a plan.

So, she straightened. However, she intentionally didn't meet his eyes in a pretense of fear. When she did sneak a glance up at The Riddler, he was smiling.

"Life's full of questions," He calmly circles around the marble statue laying down. "And I'm sure you have some questions about why I've got you here today." She watches as one of his henchmen start to fiddle with the camera, while two others walk to the exhibit next door. "Go ahead, my dear — ask."

She watches after the two men for another moment, a sudden bout of wariness surfacing, before answering. "What are you going to have me do? You clearly took me for a reason — is it a ransom situation?"

Damian quickly translates, and The Riddler raises an eyebrow. "No question about why I took you in the first place? I thought that you'd surely ask that. Unless, of course, my hunch was correct?" He seemed satisfied at the realization. She keeps her voice and her expression neutral.

"Your hunch couldn't be further from the truth, you egoist. And considering that I've been hounded by your stupid reporters, I'd be an idiot to not know why you're taken me."

Damian pauses, once again clearly surprised, and quickly relaxes to clear his throat. She feels for him — he probably thought she had a death wish, being sarcastic in a time like this. As nice as their earlier painting critiques had been, nothing during that had given him the impression that she was capable of being like this. However, they'd only know how disrespectful she was being if he said anything about it. "She says that she understands why, but that there's been a misunderstanding."

"A misunderstanding?" He dusts off his hat, placing it on the statue's head, and starts to walk towards them. "You see, sweetheart; I have some hostage negotiations I need to get to in a few minutes, so let me save us both time by saying — I don't quite believe that's true." The two henchmen return, one carrying a bundle in his arms, and Marinette feels the dread amplify. "As for what I'm going to have you do, well.....I'd like for you to send your boyfriend a little message." He tapped the top of the camera.

So, most likely a ransom message. But that still didn't explain —

Marinette didn't receive a translation from Damian, and glanced over to find him staring at the bundle as well. His green eyes were sharp, the slightest bit of wariness appearing in them for the first time since they were in his clutches. He questioned slowly, "And what is that?"
The Riddler grins, and rubs his hands before unveiling it with a flourish. The previously concealed item seemed like a large metal handcuff, big enough to put her own head through. A rectangular shaped compartment was connected to the back of it, with a time panel installed on it. She...hadn't the faintest idea what the contraption was, but was unnerved either way. Damian however, drew a sharp breath upon seeing it.

The Riddler was further pleased by their reactions, "How do you feel about riddles, my dear?"

There was an intercepting signal on multiple news channels, broadcasting live from within The Gotham Museum of Art. Everyone quickly tuned in; Commissioner Gordon have been notified immediately from the vigilantes, and civilians and journalists on the street accessing it from their various devices. And it was there, that the whole of Gotham could see The Riddler, staring in the camera with a grin. Red Robin mutters, "The background matches The Dining Room of the Fitzmaurice House. They're still in The Architectural Wing."

Batman hums.

"Greetings, citizens of Gotham." He tips his hat. "I know that many of you are on the edge of your seats here, and worry not Commissioner Gordon — I'll be making negotiations soon enough. But for now, I want to give a little message." The Riddler chuckles, "I will admit — this was an impromptu situation, and I am a methodical man. You can imagine how stressful this was for me."

The man places a weary hand to pinch the bridge of his nose, and Red Robin growls under his breath.

"However," he snapped back to his previous liveliness. "I am a believer a fate, and I just couldn't pass up this chance — especially when I've had my eye on her ever since she became known to us here. I'll have to thank the media for that, their reporting has been top-notch!"

Batman scowls. Of course, they had been expecting it. Damian was right in saying that the change in locations wouldn't deter any criminals wanting to kidnap her. Even so, The Riddler's words made it seem as if he had been already been at the museum (possibly to rob it again), and had seen Marinette when her class got to the museum — an unfortunate coincidence.

"But enough about me, there's a young girl that I'm sure a certain someone wants to see — the bell of the ball...." And it's after this he presents Marinette, and the air within the Batmobile shifts. Batman clutches the armrest of his seat, and he doesn't even have to look beside him to know Red Robin's reaction, as a harsh curse escapes him. "The absolute sunshine in the rain — Miss Marinette Dupain-Cheng!"

The thing was — Marinette seemed fine; there were no visible injuries anywhere on her face. But, she's now outfitted with what was undeniably a collar bomb. The Riddler had definitely given a half-truth; there may have been a bomb within the museum, but it wasn't one that would harm all the hostages, only one of them.

Inside The Gotham Museum of Art, the message was also being seen on the overhead televisions, and all of the hostages stared in horror:

Her classmates became even more distressed upon seeing Marinette on-screen. Alix lets out a low whine, because she doesn't want the attention of the henchmen back onto them, and fights back her
tears. Kim was repeating something consistently under his breath, and if one were close enough, they'd hear a wavering stream of no no no no no no no. Rose released another sob, though was very muffled as she was buried in Juleka's grasp, and her girlfriend had tears streaming down her face.

Caline Bustier pulls in a ragged breath. The sight of her tiny, tiny student in that...that thing, combined with The Riddler's amusement causes panic to claw its way up to her throat. She scans her face for any sign of injury, and there are none, but her eyes keep lingering back to the metal device around her neck. Marinette's gaze is resolute, standing tall, just like she was as she was being led off to wherever she is now and Caline tightens her grip on her students' hands — oh god, you don't have to pretend Marinette...please don't pretend —

The criminal settles a hand on her shoulder, the other to pat her head, and a sweeping burn smolders within her when she see Marinette attempts to shift away, the only evidence of the fear she was experiencing. Get away from her.

Mendeleiev's blood runs cold. She doesn't look away from the screen, her expression tight, and her fists clench. There really wasn't much they could have done before. Guns were stationed at their heads as soon as they attempted to move, and they had threatened her other student's lives to get them to back down. But god, does Mendeleiev wish that she could've done more. Because now, Marinette wouldn't be on-screen pretending to be strong, like she had been doing, throughout their stay here.

Sasha Catalina frowns at the display. As admirable as it was to see the young girl attempting to be brave in a horrific situation, it was just so apparent that she shouldn't have to be. And she was realistic — she wouldn't have been useful if they shot her in full view of the gallery's attendants, so she needed to stand down. Still, it didn't make her any less displeased.

Jason releases a breath upon seeing her. He'd already knew what she looked like, obviously. But now, seeing her attempting to keep a composed front with a fucking collar bomb around her neck, it was so much more evident that this was a kid. A mere, tiny, blue-eyed child that couldn't speak fluent English and was in this mess because people couldn't mind their own fucking business. He clenches his fists, as The Riddler continues to speak.

"See," he croons. "Word on the street is that Miss Dupain-Cheng here, is in an adorable, lovey-dovey, disgustingly cute relationship with Gotham's own Damian Wayne. And as much as she tried to deny it, I know better." He pats Marinette's head, "It was a good attempt though, dear. Really." Marinette's eyes narrows at his placating, yet condescending tone. "As I was saying, it's been a long time for you two, hasn't it? Two, three years? Pretty good for a couple of kids. But of course, any long lasting relationship means that you need to be there for each other. And I wonder....whether Mister Damian Wayne has proven that he'll always be there for his sweet girlfriend."

Dick's horrified eyes are glued to the screen, because he knows what that mean. He knows exactly what The Riddler's planning because he's concocted emotional-warping mind games like this before.

"As you can see, Miss Dupain-Cheng is wearing something I've designed myself. Something that, should anything else try to cut through it, will detonate and leave itty, bitty, little bits of her all over the floor." He says lightly, his head tilting to the side. "And no one wants that. I'm sure Damian Wayne doesn't want that. He's the only one that can stop it from happening. So, he'd better find his way here before that happens. Or else...." He makes the sound of an explosion.

And Damian Wayne, bracketed by The Riddler's henchmen outside of the camera's view, watches in horror as The Riddler cackles in glee. "Anything you'd like to say, dear? Before we sign off?"
Have a few words for your love?"

The question was obviously to Marinette. And the girl, in a show of defiance, visibly steels herself and slowly says in French, "Your disgusting outfit is a crime to my eyes, you overachieving, narcissistic piece of shit. For the last time — I am not in a relationship with Damian Wayne. And, I hope Batman beats you up so hard that your ass limps to jail."

The Riddler blinks, "I was expecting something a bit more tearful, but I suppose beggars can't be choosers." He shrugs, "Anyhow, you heard the little lady. And you better hurry — " He turns her around, and presses a button on the side of his cane. The timer on the bomb's panel lights up to show **02:00:00**, and then starts counting down. "— because time's a ticking." He imitates a ticking clock, waving his cane back and forth.

The transmission ends, though, not before a final maniacal laugh from The Riddler and Marinette's brave countenance dropping to truly showcase her raw, unbridled terror for a few seconds.

Chapter End Notes

Now: onto the after-chapter notes.

(1) From what I've seen from The Riddler, his modus operandi now has been characterized to be something so deeply ingrained into everything he does; it's so compulsive. He never just kills people; they need to be put in a death-trap so they can intellectually figure their way out. So, with that, I wondered just how was The Riddler going to trap Marinette. I didn't want him to simply ask her riddles to answer, I wanted to include The Riddler's usual technique into it.

(2) The Riddler's characterization is mostly based on Jim Carrey's version of The Riddler (I just re-watched Batman Forever and even though the movie wasn't the best or didn't add up to much, it's certainly entertaining. The Riddler's scheme, and the man himself, is one of the most amusing aspects of it.)

(3) The Riddler using a collar bomb has been done before, specifically on Catwoman in the video game **Batman: Arkham Knight**.

(4) The Dining Room of the Fitzmaurice House is based on the Met's recreation of The Dining Room from Lansdowne House.

Thank you in advance for reading! Leave a comment if you want to and I'll see you in the next one!
This chapter did not want to be written. It was like pulling teeth. But, we're here kids.

Hope you guys are taking care of yourselves inside your house, and if you still have exams, sending good lucks your way!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**Trends for you**

4 • Trending Worldwide
#MarinetteDupainCheng
425k Tweets

5 • Trending Worldwide
#DamianWayne
296k Tweets

6 • Trending in Gotham City
Gotham Museum of Art
107k Tweets

7 • Trending in Gotham City
#TheRiddler
106k Tweets

**What's happening**

*News • 58 minutes ago*
Marinette Dupain-Cheng slams The Riddler during his live television broadcast

*News • 1 hour ago*
Gotham Museum of Art under lockdown
viola davis' oscar

@gardenintro
No I'm fucking upset. Because you put this child in the spotlight for your dumbass gossip articles and conspiracy theories and now she could fucking die. DIE! IS IT CLICKING NOW? 11:45 AM -

17 April 2019  ▪️ 365 ▪️ 945
it is simply too much
@dspielman
@TheGothamGazette @TheDailyInformant your days are numbered. 11:46 AM - 17 April 2019

moonchild
@princessofcolour

some of y'all project your need for scandals onto innocent people and now look where that got her.

i'm so fucking mad and terrified for her. 11:46 AM - 17 April 2019

1.2k
"I am not in a relationship with Damian Wayne".....so she's stuck in a bomb, waiting for someone who isn't even connected to her in any way???

11:46 AM - 17 April 2019
@daisydukes
To the people who kept trying to prove the rumours, I better not see your ass back on this turkey
the astronomical volume

@peachesandcream
whatever happens to that kid is on the media, and on y'all
@arabprincess
The fact that Marinette Dupain-Cheng only came here for a field trip and now she's been taken hostage because of the media gossiping....yeah I'll never forgive y'all fr. 11:47 AM - 17 April 2019

haseul respecting juice
no matter what happens i'll never forget that y'all stuck your asses in something that didn't concern you, refused to relent when asked, and that it ended up with her actually getting targeted. fuck y'all.

Damian could feel himself buzzing from the inside out, as he waits for a surge of adrenaline, an idea, something to push him out of his frozen state and do something. His thoughts tumble over each other, just as they had been earlier, while he had been analyzing their surroundings to find some sort of escape. And well, he hadn't thought quick enough. Because now, Marinette was stuck. Caged. Resigned to wait in a ticking death trap for someone who was already in the room with her.

"Damian," His father's voice reaches his ears, slow and measured. "Damian, can you hear me?"

He softly clears his throat.

"Okay. Okay, good. Now, let's think about what you're doing before you do it."

There's the obvious solution, of course: Reveal that he was, in fact, Damian Wayne. That would surely speed things along and he'd know what exactly Nigma wanted him to do. The criminal was clearly planning to leave them to make negotiations with the Gotham Police Department, and would be expecting to see Damian show up from the museum's entrance — there was no time. Marinette didn't have time. And he — he couldn't let her suffer by not revealing his identity. She was....she had so much more to do. She needed to make herself a staple within the fashion industry. She wanted to go to university and fine-tune her skills. She had the ability, with her passion and drive, to be seen by any notable figureheads and taken to be mentored over. She couldn't — she couldn't die like this.

" — I'm not taking her safety lightly, Red Robin. I'm just saying that we need to know what we're doing before we jump head-first."

"We don't exactly have time, Batman!"

That makes him pause; that makes him swallow the sudden fear at that possibility and think for a moment. His father was being cautious for a reason: If he revealed himself there and then, there was no telling what Nigma would do with this information. Sure, he might give some insufferable speech about it all made sense, and that he knew that she was lying. But, what if he didn't? What if
he decided to up the stakes because of how far they'd gone pretending that Damian was just her classmate? What he he decided to half the already decreasing time for them to solve his riddles. They couldn't have that.

He eyes Marinette. The other two henchmen went to take off the camera, while Nigma releases her. Damian sees the way she slightly trembles once she's out of his grip, taking in deep breaths. She's been trying her hardest to seem fearless, not giving Nigma the satisfaction of seeing her upset. She had even been insulting him, emboldened by the fact that, save for Damian, no one else could understand her. But, he had realized right away that it had been for her own comfort. It was definitely admirable. Most hostages wouldn't be so daring, especially when they've never been in a situation like this before. But....

The split second of fear in her blue eyes before the connection ended made him clench his fists.

...she was cracking. She couldn't hold it up much longer.

He needs to think of another idea.

He needs to get them out of there.

His father and Drake were still arguing on what they should do. Damian's allowed to go over to her just then, and extends a hand. She had been comforted by physically touching him before, and right now, he knew she absolutely needed it. Marinette watches it, but eventually takes it. Her hand is small in his; she grasps his thumb with the entirety of her hand, and he fully covers hers, his fingers enclosing around her wrist. He searches her eyes, and softly questions, in French, "Are you alright?"

It was a nonsensical question, because he knew the answer, but he asked it all the same. She stares back up at him, and nods after a moment. Damian frowns and opens his mouth to say no, no you are not, but she interrupts him, lowly questioning, "What are we going to do? If you reveal yourself, there's no telling what he's going to do."

So, she was on the same wavelength as him. He narrows his eyes, and contemplates his options. Say Nigma left them in here — he wouldn't be able to just break their way out of here. While he would be able to get directions from Drake, or even Alfred, he wouldn't be able to free her. If Nigma was honest in his spiel before, anything that tried to cut through it would cause it to detonate. But, Nigma is only a simple man, and he would only be able to count for known physically-freeing means. What if something otherworldly could cut or phase through it? Something superhuman maybe?

"What if we called Superman? Or hell, even Superboy?"

"We have no guarantee that that would work, Red Robin. We could cause it to still detonate."

Damian closes his eyes, clenching his jaw. They were right — that option was a maybe. They couldn't risk it. They needed another plan.

Revealing himself was the last resort, only when it was clear that Nigma wouldn't budge. The man was most likely going to leave them in here, guarded surely, but depending on the number he could take them out quickly. Therefore, they needed to know what puzzles they had to decipher before he left. They wouldn't have a chance otherwise. But, would Nigma just...tell them?

As soon as the suggestion enters his mind, he exhales. Absolutely not. It would be incredibly illogical and detrimental for the man to simply tell them. He'd possibly prefer to wait until Damian
got there, for the sole purpose of seeing how much this affected him. Although, Damian pauses — Nigma was all about proving that he was intellectually superior; reveling in the fact that someone is unable to crack something he created. What if....what if he took advantage of that? He'd been trying to tell Marinette to not reveal her true emotions, but what if she did? Would Nigma take that bait and tell his plan? All for the sake of disgustingly feeding his self-satisfaction?

The thing was, this could backfire on them. Nigma could very well be satisfied, but that was no guarantee that he would just reveal everything. That would be wishful thinking. It'd be incredibly stupid of Nigma to do it. And yet....

Damian's eyes drift back onto the collar around her neck, and they narrow. This was the only other plan he had. Father and Drake were still fumbling for a course of action. He had to try. And, if that failed, then — and only then — would he reveal himself.

Marinette had been as lost in thought as he was, pursing her lips as her thoughts visibly ran a mile a minute. Damian takes a deep breath, determination coursing through his veins and brushes his fingers around her wrist to gather her attention. When she blinks at attention, he quietly and hastily ventures, "I have an idea, but it requires you to follow my lead."

She raises an eyebrow, but says, "Okay. What are you going for?"

"We need to know the puzzles to unlock that collar bomb, and we need to get him to tell us. I'll figure out the way put of here after."

".....how?" Her eyes were wide, and questioning. And, while he kept a composed front, inwardly, he grimaced at the lackluster solution he settled on. "He isn't going to just tell us. I doubt that he's that stupid."

Once again, she was thinking along the same wavelength as him. "The other option is revealing myself, and we both have no idea what he might do." He eyes her, "I need you to play the part of a distressed hostage. You need to look scared, and in order for this to work, I need you to not say anything until I speak to you." Marinette's brow creases. She clearly doesn't like not knowing what's happening, and he wants to reassure her before he starts, but he has no idea what to say. When the silence persists, Damian lets out a gusty sigh. He doesn't know how he's going to do it, but he has to.

"Now," The Riddler's voice cuts through the quiet. The camera is now in the arms of one of his lackeys, and he stretches, dusting off the non-existent dust on his suit. "Be nice children and wait until I get back. I have a date with Commissioner Gordon, and when the young Wayne decides to show himself, I'll send for you."

The man's gaze stays on the intertwined hands for another beat, before he eyes Marinette.

"Hopefully," his words are slow, tone mockingly sympathetic, "He's quick about it, for your sake."

Damian tries his best in not immediately dropping her hand, instead slowly releasing his grip on it. The man turns to leave, his henchmen bordering him, and Damian exhales, "Wait."

"Damian, what are you doing?"

The henchmen part for Nigma to view them, an eyebrow raised. "What is it? I don't have all day. You certainly don't have all day."

He doesn't know if it's apparent that he has nothing to follow that up with, but they can't let Nigma
leave the room. That would land them in more trouble. He glances at Marinette for a second, and ultimately says, "She...she doesn't know what's happening."

The man simply watches him, and Damian inwardly winces at the absurdity of his own words. "Isn't that your job as the translator?"

"Damian, what are you doing?"

Damian closes his eyes at his father's insistent question; clearly he couldn't answer in the moment. He raises himself higher; he can do this. He's been in similar situations with higher stakes, and has gotten out with far less. He has to focus, "Yes. And, I've told her. But, she keeps insisting that — "

"Hey," he freezes at the sharp intrusion. "Didn't you hear me the first thousand times I told you? You deaf asshole!"

Silence accompanied the outburst. Everyone's focus was now on Marinette who, at the moment, wore an indignant glare. She stood straight, eyeing Nigma dead in the face, her hands fisted at her sides. Her stare was unwavering, and Nigma's eyes widen slightly.

Damian's mouth grew dry. "Wha — " He started to say, but cut himself off after mentally reminding himself that she hadn't spoken in English. He grits out, in French, "What are you doing?"

This wasn't going how he planned. Sure, he didn't exactly have one, but in the fragments of his idea, Marinette had to play the part of a terrified hostage. What was she doing?

"He isn't going to give us what we want so simply," Marinette doesn't take her gaze away. "And you know that. So, I got a last minute idea."

Damian was well aware that Nigma was attentive to their exchange, so he tries to curb his growing frustration and incredulity. "To what — agitate him?" He hisses, "Are you an idiot? Do you want him to shoot you?" Try being the key word. He doesn't succeed.

Nigma makes a clicking sound with his tongue, something that was likely supposed to sound disappointed, but only came out entertained. "Now, now — what's this? I may not speak French, but I know what an argument sounds like. All of a sudden?"

The man visibly contemplates her; mentally comparing her fearful demeanour from before to the girl refusing to cower now. Damian forces himself to take several deep, even breaths. As much as Marinette is making this difficult, he can't have Nigma's attention on her. "Marinette — "

"Translate exactly what I say."

He pauses. Stares at her.

Only when there was a long silence after she spoke, did she take her eyes off Nigma. "I said, translate exactly what I say."

"I heard you," he works his jaw to speak, reliving some of the tension that had gathered there. "But, I'm not going to do that."

Marinette's eyes narrows. And Damian bristles at her misplaced annoyance, because where had this sudden bout of irrationality come from? He may have only known her for a handful of hours, but his judgement of character was usually correct — she hadn't previously given any indication that she'd be like this. She was terrified, he knew she was. So, why she intentionally riling Nigma up?

"I'm going to help you get out of here, but I refuse to do it by any illogical, moronic or suicidal
means. We had a plan." He doesn't want to be mean, not to her, but if it'll get her to realize her foolishness he'll do it. It's frustrating that he can't read her now, it's like trying to read braille in sand, and he'd like to understand what exactly she had hoped for this to result in. Every second they wasted would be her detriment. One wrong move would be her detriment. They did not have time. She did not have time.

Marinette fixes her mouth to say something else, but Nigma interjects. "As captivating as this is, I really must be going." The criminal turns to leave once more, but Marinette jump-starts forward. A henchman aims his gun at her, which halts her from moving any more, but she does speak.

"Idiot!"

That was said in English. And dread pools in Damian's stomach as Nigma pauses. He eventually, slowly turns back around, and his eyes are narrowed infinitesimally. "What?"

She looks at him once more, eyes challenging. "Translate. what. I say, or I will find some way to say what I mean in English."

She has a death wish, Damian breathes, eyes wide. This thoughtless, reckless —

Nigma glances between the two, and growls when neither refuse to speak. "Well? You've gotten my attention now. Stop conspiring and speak up. Has your smart mouth vanished all of a sudden?"

Marinette speaks, "Tell him I said that he's a coward."

Damian jerks, but fights to keep his face blank when Nigma eyes him. "Are you in —"

She quickly waves him off, and gives Nigma the most scathing look she'd given in the past few hours, refusing to cower. "You are coward."

He just stops himself from drawing in a sharp breath. Nigma's fingers tighten around his staff. The henchman aiming at her pointed the gun at the side of her head threateningly, a warning growl emitting from him. Nigma walks towards her, and Damian moves, only to be halted by the other henchman with his hands free.

Nigma looks belligerent as he stares down at her, and it takes a moment before the frown on his lips dissipates, and shifts to a irate grin. "Oh come now, where is this coming from? I even gave you beautiful waiting accommodations. That's no way to thank me." Damian quickly translates, nerves heightened at the fine-line that Nigma was tip-toeing before he released his rage.

"You expect me to be grateful? I'm trapped here for an assumption, and for someone who's not coming. You just expect me to sit here — you haven't even given me a challenge."

"What the hell is she doing?" Red Robin echoes Damian's thoughts. Nigma slams his staff on the floor, and Damian realizes that he hadn't followed up her words with a translation.

"What did she say?"

Marinette waits for him to answer, eyes narrowed. He frowns at her, it's not as if she'd know whether or not he translated correctly. But given the past few minutes, she may very well speak if she suspected he didn't do so. "She said that she isn't grateful, because she's trapped and waiting for someone who's not coming. She doesn't like that she's simply waiting, and..." he contemplates continuing, and when Marinette opens her mouth, he exhales. "She said that you haven't even given her a challenge."
"You know, Damian," Red Robin mutters in his ear. "You didn't actually need to translate exactly what she said. You literally could have lied." It wasn't as if he hadn't considered it. His father had yet to say anything, and he could just sense his displeasure just simmering.

"A challenge," Nigma breathed. He was clearly affronted, but there was a minuscule bit of interest lurking in his brown pools. "And pray tell, what do you mean by a 'challenge'?

"Damian Wayne is not coming for me." Nigma gains a skeptical look at the translation. "I'm telling the truth. He won't be coming through those museum doors. And I think that waiting for someone until this bomb inevitably kills me is unfair."

That made the man laugh, a loud, hard and hearty one that rang in the room and Damian waited. He waited for Nigma to fully think her words through, and what his decision would be. He leans forward on his staff, arms crossed.

"Is that so? And what do you suppose I should do?" He shrugs. "Since, of course, I'm putting you in an 'unfair' situation."

Marinette says, confidently, "Give me the chance to save myself."

Damian's eyes widen, as he quickly understood what exactly she'd been trying to do all this time. Everything made sense now. Her sudden decision to antagonize him, asking for a challenge, disregarding his instructions....they had both been on the same wavelength all this time. She was attacking his intelligence, the superiority he held over his schemes, in hopes that he'd take the bait and reveal his riddles, 'forcing' them to solve it. She may not have taken the route he had planned to utilize, her true emotions, but it was more carefully calculated than he thought. He translates for everyone.

"You? You?" The request made another chuckle escape him. "That's very brave of you, Sunshine. Really, it is. But, I think we both know that it's all for show. Especially," Nigma snatches her left hand, and his fingers press almost painfully into the pulse on her wrist. Damian inhales. "When your heart's pounding like this. And your eyes get wide like that."

Marinette stares up at him, saying nothing at that, but Damian sees it. It was minute, but she was trembling, and the sight of it made a bolt of panic hit him. Her defiant words from before were masking her fear, and it was the same now. But with the antagonizing, there was no telling what the consequence would be.

And then, Nigma squeezes her even harder. Not a sound escapes her, even though her brows furrow in pain. She would definitely bruise, as Damian's sure that he's crushing her wrist. "Not to mention," he lowly muses. "You don't even speak fluent English. That definitely won't translate to reading English. Moreover, there are three riddles you need to unlock that bomb, riddles that I've devised to be complex, intricate and difficult to decode. I specifically wanted to see the acceptance in the eyes of Damian Wayne when he realizes that he can't save you. Now, taking all these variables into account, how could you save yourself?"

Damian hesitantly relayed it for her. As much as he wanted to break free and stop Nigma, that may make things worse.

Marinette nodded over to him, speaking through the pain. "I have a translator. And since Damian Wayne won't be coming to the museum, that only leaves me to save myself."

"There's Batman."
Marinette slightly falters at that, and Nigma looks a little too pleased and having *that* over her. He cackles once more, and the hairs on the back of Damian's neck stood up, because that meant that he had come to a conclusion, and made a decision.

"Very well then, you've won me over." Nigma releases her hand, and she immediately cradles it. "This isn't even my real focus. I suppose I can grace you with this, at least." He straightens, and takes out a scroll of paper from his inside coat pocket. He eyes Damian, "Pay attention, cause this is all for you to translate after. First thing's first — that bomb on your neck needs *three* keys to unlock it. The location of the keys lie in *these three riddles*." He waves the paper. "And each location, is a painting."

Ice flooded Damian's veins. Aside from the more than two million works in its entirety, The Gotham Museum of Art has over *fifteen thousand* paintings across all the curatorial departments. Finding the locations of *three* paintings under a diminishing time limit....Nigma catches whatever expression he has on his face, and grins at his comprehension.

"My riddles give clues pertaining to the painting's composition, and two even include clues of their artist. If you don't find the keys, or the time runs out, well," He glances towards Damian. "I don't think you want to show your friend here what happens to a head when a bomb detonates. And I don't think Damian Wayne wants to see his girlfriend's head explode either." The man sees the way Marinette's face turns at the mention of his name. "You say he won't be coming. We'll see. Either way, I'll know when the bomb's been unlocked, or when it's detonated."

A breath leaves Damian. He hadn't been much help during this situation, and if it wasn't for Marinette's quick thinking, he doesn't even want to know what would've happened if he tried to salve his snippets of a plan. He'd promised himself that he'd help her escape, get that bomb off her neck, to be fucking *useful*, and he was planning to keep it.

Nigma throws the scroll, and Marinette fumbles to catch it. Nigma snaps his fingers, strolling towards the one visible exit. All of his men fall in line, including those who had guns drawn on the two teenagers. His parting words are, "Since you've been so...spirited in the past few minutes, you'll have thirty minutes to stew over the riddles first before you'll be let out."

Damian's hands clench into fists, glaring after them. *Not if he had anything to say about it.*

Marinette watches them leave, and exhales heavily when the door slams shut, letting herself shudder freely.

She was very aware of how close she'd come to a point where they wouldn't be able to get those riddles from him. And The Riddler was no fool; he'd lain her fear out in the open, shoved her pathetic attempt at being brave in her face. She gingerly thumbed her wrist, wincing at the pain that flares up at even the slightest touch. The past few moments had taken so much out of her, and she was starting to feel nauseous.

She takes a deep breath, and turns to view Damian.

He meets her eye, expression ever so frustrated and frosty, and *there's* the frigid ice-prince people know him as. She understands now, why people tend to be wary of him, because he looks angry. And she wonders what his anger is like. Is she going to get a taste of it? Marinette frowns. "You
don't seem too pleased", she says honestly, and Damian only gave her a dry look.

"No, really?" His voice was practically dripping in sarcasm, quiet but thrumming with such a fierce anger, however there was an undercurrent of weary distress in his words as well, and it made her straighten. She must've had a strange expression on her face, because Damian doesn't hold his irritated countenance for long, pinching the bridge of his nose as he sighed heavily. "Sorry. I'm sorry, it's just — "

He steps forward with a hand extended, eyes questioning. After watching his eyes dart to her wrist, she realizes, and allows him to take her hand. His touch is gentle, and it's amazing seeing the numerous times his face flickers. Comparing the Damian of now to a few seconds ago, she contemplates what the different bits of Damian Wayne are like. She's seen hints, of his amusement, his anger, his snarkiness — she wants to see all of it, at its full intensity.

He stares at the bright red on her skin, face pinched when he catches Nigma's fingerprints. Marinette opens her mouth to say something, but can't decide on what to say. She eventually settles on, "I know you said to follow your lead, but I saw that you were struggling and — " His face got darker at that, and she fumbles to change the subject. "I'm okay, it doesn't hurt that much — "

"Yes, it does." Damian says, voice firm. "Don't lie to spare me."

Marinette silences herself, "Right."

He exhales, and meets her eyes. "I don't mean to be so short with you. It's just...you're the hostage here. You're not supposed to force yourself to antagonize him. Not when you're clearly struggling to hold it together." The reminder makes her flinch. "I don't mean to embarrass you either. I'm just..." His thumb ghosts her wrist. "I should've done more to help."

"You couldn't reveal your identity," Marinette frowns, not seeing his logic. "I know you couldn't; who knows what he would've done? That's why I did that."

"You're going to need medical attention." For another moment, he still looks conflicted. And then, his face smooths out. "I'm going to get us out of here first, and then we'll start finding those keys."

She lets it go, eyeing the door. "We should get rid of the men guarding the door first. If we leave without doing that, they might come in and tell him that we've escaped."

Damian nods at her suggestion, and contemplates the exhibit. "This room is mostly finished, but still under construction. And, the pathway to here is somewhat accessible to the rest of the museum." He carefully releases her, walking around. He pokes his head quickly into the exhibit next door, and places a thoughtful hand under his chin. "And this room is bare of construction equipment, excluding rope. If they're not utilizing the next room to store their equipment, there must be another entrance to here."

His eyes then land on the fireplace, considering it for a moment. Marinette does the same. The path to here would've been blocked off in the room's earlier stages of construction. And, the walls may not all have been here when they started. So...

Marinette walks over to the fireplace, and kneels to stretch a hand. She feels a slight breeze hit it, a sort of air pocket, and she turns affirmatively to Damian. He sinks down to her level, pushing his hand against the very back of the fireplace, feeling around for anything...and then he finds success. There's a knob much higher up into the fireplace, and he twists it, causing the door to fully open.

She grins, "Nice job."
"You realized it as well," She's sure he's attempting to go for nonchalance, but he looks rather pleased. She ticks another box on the "Damian Wayne is Absolutely Not Cold" List. "Now, let's deal with his lackeys."
awkward connoisseur

@notsarah

does anyone know what she said in french? 11:47 AM - 17 April 2019
234 980
vivi supremacy

@vivipng
does anyone have a translation of what she said? because that look she gave him made my bilingual
rina sawayama supremacy

@sierareads
Why do I feel like she shit talked him in French? 11:46 AM - 17 April 2019
@literallycalypso
Translation of Marinette's message: "Your disgusting outfit is a crime to my eyes, you overachieving, narcissistic piece of shit. For the last time — " (1/2) 11:46 AM - 17 April 2019
seek therapy

@literallycalypso
"— I am not in a relationship with Damian Wayne. And, I hope Batman beats you up so hard that your ass limps to jail." (2/2) 11:46 AM - 17 April 2019
seek therapy

@literallycalypso
I know this is a serious situation, but I have been wheezing ever since that broadcast ended. 11:46 AM - 17 April 2019

1k • 32k
the manager normani needs
@angelblush
"Your disgusting outfit is a crime to my eyes, you overachieving, narcissistic piece of shit." that wasn't even directed at me and i felt that 11:46 AM - 17 April 2019 685 3k
"Your disgusting outfit is a crime to my eyes, you overachieving, narcissistic piece of shit." it's the calm way she said it for me

11:47 AM - 17 April 2019
@tailiadeen
not this child having a bomb around her neck and yet still being brave enough to tell the riddler that
his outfit is trash and call him an "overachieving, narcissistic piece of shit" — queen shit. 11:47
tonya

@sketchesbykezia

"I hope Batman beats you up so hard that your ass limps to jail." oh my GOD?? 11:48 AM - 17 April 2019 897 3k
only a gen z kid would be so bold in the face of danger. this is more evidence that we should start calling gen z kids guilloteens since they always be coming for heads 11:48 AM - 17 April 2019
Fatima

@Fatimahere
"I hope Batman beats you up so hard that your ass limps to jail." PUT THAT SHIT ON A SHIRT

I'LL BUY IT 11:48 AM - 17 April 2019
"I hope Batman beats you up so hard that your ass limps to jail." an icon. inspirational 11:48 AM -
"Holy fucking shit," Red Robin breathed. "I can't believe that worked."

He listens to Damian and Marinette speak, and frowns. That entire back and forth between the two, while The Riddler was in the room was strange. For one, Damian wasn't acting right. Not only is he not one to just yield when things weren't going the way he wanted, he wouldn't have let any civilian antagonize a criminal just like that. It clearly wasn't planned, and he had put up a fight, but it wasn't at the intensity he'd expect from him.

The way he was acting with Miss Dupain-Cheng was strange as well. He'd reassured civilians before, but not like that. Not to mention, he was spilling apologies left and right for her — something he'd never done. It usually takes a while before Damian willingly gives the apology "I'm sorry", he usually goes for an "unsaid, but obvious" approach. He was being very...soft, if he had to name it. What he landed on as an explanation for his behaviour was something that not only did they not have time for, but he couldn't fathom it yet.

Instead, he thinks of Miss Dupain-Cheng. Her course of action was, in all honesty, very fucking stupid. Yet, very incredibly brilliant. Had it not been for The Riddler relenting, that could've gone a very tragic route. Red Robin passes a hand through his hair. He wouldn't be surprised if this incident left her traumatized in some way. Any civilian would be, especially when time's ticking down. The Riddler's given them a space to plan an exit, and —

He sucks in a breath, "Gordon."

He hadn't heard Batman relay to him that The Riddler was on his way to make negotiations, and
when he glances over, the caped crusader's deep in thought. His eyes were narrowed behind his mask, and while he'd think he was simply displeased with Damian's refusal to wait until they came up with a plan, he doesn't think that's the reason for the man's state. Red Robin frowns, reaching for his communicative device, switching it on. "Commissioner, Nigma's on his way down. Get ready to do some negotiating." The man answers back in the affirmative, before cutting the feed.

Red Robin watches Batman for another moment, before snapping his fingers. The man doesn't jump, but he blinks at attention, turning his head towards him in askance. "What are you thinking?"

Batman's fingers drum on the console, before silencing the six-way communication feed. At his sidekick's questioning gaze, he questions, "Doesn't this entire thing seem overly...ostentatious to you?"

"What?"

"Originally, I thought his reason for taking Marinette was due to the media circus surrounding her. In fact, I still think that's why he chose her. But, his words earlier made it seem like an impromptu situation; like he'd already been at the museum, saw her and her class, and acted. And, Nigma's not a man of coincidences."

His protégé frowns. "He did say that he's had his eye on her ever since she came here, because of the media. I think it was a coincidence — not him holding her hostage, since I'm sure he's been planning to do it, but he didn't know she'd be at the museum."

"Right," Batman says. "But, what's the reason for taking her hostage? We all thought that it was because of the unsubstantiated connection to either me, or Damian. And then, he specifically asked for Damian. But, from what we just heard, he only wanted him to attempt to save her. That's it."

Red Robin stares at him, "Yeah? Remember, everyone's paying attention to this. They're watching to see if Damian's gonna show up, and if he does, whether he'll be able to save her. That'll lead to even more of a media focus on them. Side note, we need to figure how we're gonna explain him not appearing at the museum."

"That's just it, Red Robin," The dark knight emphasizes. "Everyone's attention will be on this. But, there's got to be more to it than that. Especially when all he wants to do is make Damian save her. He didn't even ask for money. Nigma's particular about his puzzles, he wouldn't go through all this trouble, and use this height of theatrics for nothing."

"I wouldn't say it's for nothing — every news show is focused on this. Gotham's focused on this." At the older man's silence, he huffs. "What are you suggesting?"

Batman eyes him, "I don't believe this is his true plan."

".....what?"

"Think about it: from what we just heard, everything's too easy isn't it? His plan is apparently to wait until Damian showed up, and then he'd give his riddles. However, he deviated from his initial plan; he gave Marinette the riddles beforehand — something he's never done so easily. He also didn't say the riddles out loud, which means they're on paper. Regardless of if he waited for Damian or not, he was prepared to send them on a scavenger hunt."

When no understanding shows up on Red Robin's faces, he elaborates. "If they're on a scavenger hunt, he's not planning to watch them closely. Or, at least physically. He might watch them on his own feed, or have sensors that indicate when they've found a key. The bottom line is: if this was
his only plan, he would not have relented the riddles so easily."

His charge mulls over Bruce's words for moment, before the man's insinuation finally clicked. "Nigma's used bombs before, but never a collar bomb. That, coupled with who Marinette is.....it's to feed into the public interest. Because not only is it a new mechanism by him, but everyone's been wondering when she'd be targeted by a villain. And he just answered that." At Batman's nod, he continues. "So, he's using Marinette, and the public's interest on her....as a pawn? Him trapping Marinette is just a front?"

"With the citizens and law enforcement focusing on this, they won't notice if he were doing anything else."

"So, this is all a ruse," Red Robin exhales. "A dangerous one, but still a ruse. The question is: for what?"
Damian, about to open her mouth to signal for them to tie the men up, she pauses.

Damian's eyes are wide, his eyes flickering back and forth between her and the man she subdued. Marinette winces; she possibly used more strength than was necessary, no — she used more strength than someone who should not have any formal martial training, and caused him to go down easily. Not to mention, the plan for Damian only to subdue the two. She waits for Damian to say something, but all he eventually says is, "You can fight."

She gives a sheepish smile, "I can."

He stares at the one she took on for another moment. "I didn't realize you had martial arts training."

Marinette laughs nervously, "I never said that I did." When his eyes meet hers, visibly trying to figure her out, she smiles mysteriously, attempting to come off nonchalant. "You know how Paris is." No, he wouldn't. "Maman really made sure I knew how to fight." She quickly goes for the rope discarded behind the door, having grabbed it from the other room before they started their attack.

Damian, at the moment, was having a crisis. Once again, predicting what she was about to do was a challenge. And her immediately overpowering the man made multiple questions rise up: one, how often did she fight opponents more than twice her size, given that she had done it so effortlessly? Two, where had she gotten her training from? Was she...a child soldier? He can't tie her fighting style to anyone specific. Nothing in his background check unearthed anything about her having done any martial arts, or self-defense classes. Three, why is the knowledge of Marinette knowing how to attack someone more than twice her size intriguing him so much? His cheeks were warm and he growls, attempting to wave it away.

"I'm sorry, what?" Red Robin had said over the comms. "What do you mean she can fight?"

Batman held his one of his sentiments, "Odd. Nothing in our background checks showed her connected to any martial arts or self-defense classes."

Marinette came back with the rope in her hands and they work to tie the men to the pillars. They firmly tie them so there's no chance of wiggle-room, and he notices her knots are very intricate. Interesting. They also search them, removing their communicative devices off them and disposing them in the next exhibit room.

After ensuring to lock the door, Damian waves her over to the fireplace. "Okay, let's go." The space is big enough for them to fit through, even if they have to duck while entering. He enters first; the open door leads to another bricked wall, but upon looking both ways, he realizes that it's a sort of tunnel system. It's big enough for people to walk to and from different departments, and bring some specific equipment through, so that confirms his theory. He reaches a hand to help Marinette inside, and she blinks at finding the space much bigger than they expected. "Woah."

"Yep," Damian agrees, ensuring to close the door behind them. "Now to figure out which direction to go..."

It was a signal to Red Robin, who was thumbing over a map of the gallery. "Let's see — you're in The Architectural Wing....go right. I'm gonna try to lead to two to one of the rooms in the Department of Islamic Art. It's a dead end, but there should be a grate opening right at the end."

Damian points to the right, "Let's go this way. If I'm right, it should lead us to one of the rooms in The Department of Islamic Art." He turns on his phone's light, shining it down the dark pathway, to ensure that there's nothing that they could trip over, or collide into. However, all there are is
forming cobwebs. Marinette's right behind him, as they creep along the moderately grungy corridor. The only thing that fills the silence is the *tick tick tick* of the collar bomb.

After a moment, Damian ventures, "You're very...proficient in handling hectic situations. Uh...I...you — " He softly exhales when he can't say anything else, eventually landing on, "You fight good."

"Thank you," Marinette can't see his face, and she bats away a spider web. "I could say the same about you. Did you have to learn how to fight? For your own protection, I mean."

"Essentially," He's not about to reveal that he's a skilled assassin. "What about you? Did you learn how to fight for your protection?" Even if it was meant to simply protect, that was *too* fluid and powerful just for someone to make a getaway.

She's not about to tell him that she's a superhero in her home country, "Essentially." She gazes upon the scroll in her hand, and is ever aware of the weight around her neck, and the counting down of the bomb. "We should take a look at these riddles."

"Right, we don't have that much time." Red Robin adds, *you've got one hour, forty-two minutes and fifteen seconds*. Damian realizes that he maybe shouldn't have reminded her the severity of her situation, and clears his throat. "Sorry." They finally reach the end of the pathway, and true to his brother's words, it is a dead end, but there's a grate by their feet. He rummages through his pockets, taking out his *multi-tool*, and bending down to observe the opening. It definitely opens to the gallery, he can see some dishes and vases in glass cases, and there's no sign or sound of anyone. Upon noting that there's no screws on the inside, he decide to laser the grate open.

Marinette looks over his shoulder, gazing at the action incredulously. "You're pretty prepared."

He meets her eyes when he's finished, "You need to be, here in Gotham." He pushes the grate outwards, poking his head out to ensure there's no one. Just to be certain, he gets out first, signaling to Marinette that she must wait until he gives her a signal. Red Robin's voice answers it for him, *"You're okay, Damian. Everyone's mostly in the rooms held down by Nigma and his goons, or have fled when the museum was been taken under siege."

He eyes the top corners of the room, finally landing on the camera. He nods to it, and extends an arm to the opening.

"Be careful coming out," He warns, and Marinette gives him her uninjured hand. She ducks her head so she doesn't hit it, and climbs out, dusting her clothes off. He picks off cobwebs off her low ponytail and her cheek, and she ignores the heat in her cheeks, focusing to study their surroundings.
The walls were a muted blue, and portions of the walls were carved out to hold dishes and rugs fragments, contained by a glass barrier. The walls were decorated with numerous carpets. and as Marinette peers at the white plaque, they were wool and silk, asymmetrically knotted, intricately etched carpets made for a court. The floor matched the most of the rugs on the walls, tiles brown and glassy.

Damian appreciates the room as well, before glancing at her. "The riddles?" He gestures for her to follow him, eyes sharp as they exit the gallery to duck into another one. Marinette unravels it, eyes surveying the words. It was typed in English, not handwritten, thank goodness. She didn't know what they would do if The Riddler's handwriting was undecipherable. She can see that the riddles were neatly numbered, but can't understand what she's reading. She hands it over to Damian, who immediately takes a look:

**Riddle One:**

The more you take, the more you leave behind. When you've found out what I am, instead of going Dutch, pool it all together. What was left behind, didn't obstruct the piece when brought to light. This will bring you ahead, standing in holy light.

**Riddle Two:**

It can't be seen, can't be felt, can't be heard and can't be smelt. It lies behind stars and under hills, and empty holes it fills. It comes first and follows after, ends life and kills laughter. It looms over half-brothers; one the essence of Thanatos, the other bathed and slumbering in the light of Hypnos. The unfortunate tale of two regular johns, drenched in the personification of the two in their house.

**Riddle Three:**

Round like a apple, deep like a cup, yet all the kings horses cannot pull it up. A unmarried woman, five times wedded, comes to draw from it at about noon. She meets a waiting man, sitting in his chiton and covered with his himation. A revealing conversation is had between her and the divine, unbeknownst to her, until he discloses it.

Damian frowns, trying to make sense of them. "The more you take, the more you leave behind?" Marinette looks over his shoulder, and he attempts to share it evenly between them. "The more you
take, the more you leave behind. When you've found out what I am, instead of going Dutch, pool it all together. What was left behind, didn't obstruct the piece when brought to light. This will bring you ahead, standing in holy light."

Marinette looks similarly perplexed. "The riddles hold clues to what the painting is, and its artist, right?"

"Two of them have clues about the artist. All of them note what the painting is about, or looks like." At the growing despondency entering her features, he gently placed his hands on her shoulders. "Hey, it's okay. Let's try to break each riddle up in sections. He tends to have every part of a riddle answer each other. Once we figure out each part, we'll combine it and get our answer."

Marinette was already nodding, exhaling as if she willing her emotions to leave her. "Right. Right. What's the first part?"

"The more you take, the more you leave behind. When you've found out what I am — " Damian points. "Okay, that's the first part; 'The more you take, the more you leave behind'."

"The more you take, the more you leave behind...." She hums, arms folded. "What do you take that makes you leave something behind? Or is it specifically focused on the thing you leave behind?"

Red Robin was similarly in thought, "Footsteps? That doesn't make sense with the riddle, though. It's not food, even though you'd leave crumbs behind..."

Damian peers into another gallery, made of arches and cream walls. Tiles tessellate in repeated patterns across the bottom third of the walls, the ceiling covered with intricately carved geometric patterns. Judging the area to be clear, he brings her along by their joined hands, thinking. "I think it's more focused on the thing you leave behind." They pause for a moment upon reaching the next gallery, and he eyes the corner to ensure that there's nothing out of place.

Marinette groans, eyes falling on a pierced jug inside a glass case. It's beautifully made; there are designs of what looks to be harpies and sphinxes, and some other four legged creatures. It's painted with cobalt blue, and has a turquoise glaze, and she can make out bits of black underneath it. She touches the glass case for moment before releasing her hand, and notes how her fingerprints catch in the light. There are multiple others as well, from past gallery viewers who also touched the case, but her brain is locked on it because it's significant, something about it is important....

Red Robin gasps in understanding. "It's DNA." Damian blinks at attention, eyeing the camera in place of him actually asking a question, and his brother elaborates. "It's DNA. At crime scenes, when you've touched or taken anything, your DNA's always left behind. Well, most of the time anyway. Skin cells, Hair, but the most common indicator of DNA is noted by someone's — "

"Fingerprints!"

Damian doesn't jump at Marinette's exclamation, but it's a pretty near thing. He can hear the grin from Red Robin, "Yep, she's got it."

She looks thrilled to have figured it out, voice fast as she talks. "The more you take, the more you leave behind — when you touch anything, you always leave your fingerprints behind."

He thinks it over, nodding after a moment of contemplation. "Fingerprints. Great job, Marinette." She gives him a smile, and he returns it, as they continuing walking. His brother scoffs, "You didn't even thank me for my contribution. We figured it out at the same time." When her attention is onto the side of the room, he aims a middle finger at the camera. "Rude."
"What does the second part say?"

He glances at the paper, "When you've found out what I am, instead of going Dutch, pool it all together." He frowns. "Instead of going Dutch....related to the nationality of the painter, maybe?" He can hear typing from Tim's end, most likely on the Batmobile's computer. When she continues to think it over, saying nothing, he continues. "What was left behind, didn't obstruct the piece when brought to light."

Marinette raises an eyebrow, "Those two sentences are connected. I mean, the "Instead of going Dutch" part. I think we need to put the next sentence together."

"What was left behind, didn't obstruct the piece when brought to light..." Damian blinks. "The fingerprints?"

"Didn't obstruct the piece when brought to light..." She clicks her tongue. "I guess, because fingerprints on a painting would be small in size. But, where does the 'pool it all together' part come in? Is that in reference to the entire riddle, or this part of it?"

Damian had an inkling that, while it applied to the riddle's entirety, it was more of the latter. Instead of going Dutch...was it truly about the artist's nationality? Or was it just a clue? If Nigma meant what he said, only two of these riddles contained hints on the artist. Maybe this was one of them? Green eyes kept running over the sentences, instead of going Dutch, pool it all together. What was left behind, didn't obstruct the piece when brought to light.

"Going Dutch" meant that everyone paid for their own thing, instead of one person defraying the cost for the entire group. And if this riddle is saying to not do that....What was left behind, didn't obstruct the piece when brought to light. What was the part they had to pool together? The "obstruct the piece when brought to light" part, or the "left behind" part?

Red Robin speaks up, "There are multiple Dutch painters whose works are in the Gotham Museum of Art: Johannes Vermeer, Van Gogh, Rachel Ruysch, Rembrandt — "

Wait a minute...He eyes the latter part of the third sentence once more. Didn't obstruct the piece when brought to light. What if "going Dutch" wasn't simply a clue about the painter's nationality, but also another clue to bring the sentences together? Perhaps it held the author's name? He mentally ran through his knowledge of Dutch vocabulary. Obstruct in Dutch could mean belemmeren, or versperren — not rem, which meant brake in Dutch. Maybe it's a synonym? The synonyms of obstruct are block, jam, congest, clog....wait — more translations for rem were drag, foot-break....and clog.

Marinette blinks at his expression, "What is it?"

He holds up a finger, and continues to think. Brandt in Dutch could mean steken, which was sting; schroeien, which was singe, or gloeien....which was glow. Glow is a synonym for light....put the two together....

"It's Rembrandt." Damian's eyes catches Marinette's waiting ones. "That's the artist of the painting, he's Dutch. Rem in Dutch can mean belemmering, which is clog in English, which is a synonym of obstruct." At her growing understanding, he continues. "It's the same with 'light'; brandt can mean gloeien, or glow....which is a synonym for light. Put the two together..."

Marinette gaped, "That's brilliant." Then her nose scrunched. "I mean, for a riddle. The Riddler can choke for all I care, so I'm not praising him. But, I would've never thought of that. I don't really know of Rembrandt as an artist, or Dutch for that matter." Disgust at even commending the
criminal for something showed up on her face, and Damian's lips twitch, shaking his head in amusement.

"Don't worry, I'm not praising him either." So they knew the artist, but what did fingerprints have to do with it? Red Robin asks, "What's the last part of the riddle?" Damian looks at the riddle again, sharing the paper between them. "This will bring you ahead, standing in holy light."

She frowned, "Ahead, or a head? Like a portrait?"

"Rembrandt's got multiple portraits.....but the 'holy light' part....God? Jesus?"

Damian scoffs, "Nigma's the last person that should be referencing god."

Marinette blinks, "God?" She analyses the line, muttering under her breath. "This will bring you ahead, standing in holy light.' A head standing in holy light....maybe it is God. Or Jesus."

He mentally tries to note Rembrandt's works. He did have a portrait of Christ, several actually. One was in Louvre Abu Dhabi, another was in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, one was in the possession of Brigham Young University — there were a dozen known portraits of similar heads, all in various poses and profiles. One of them was actually in the possession of The Gotham Museum of Art.

She glances at him, "But what do the fingerprints have to do with it?"

"Actually, two of Rembrandt's portrayal of Christ were incredibly sought after because conservators noticed that they had his fingerprints. One of them was the Study of the Head and Clasped Hands of a Young Man as Christ in Prayer, and the one here."

Damian's eyes widen, "Rembrandt's portrait of Christ is famous for having his fingerprints etched into it."

"We got one," Marinette slowly says, before a squeal escapes her. "We got one!" She doesn't hug him, instead hopping in place, and connecting her giddy energy to him with one hand. Damian cracks a smile, because he understands her reaction; he understands that this entire situation is draining her. And, now that they've gotten at least one of the riddles, it's a beacon of hope. "We just need to figure out where it is."

"It's in Gallery 964 of Department of European Paintings. That's on the second level of the museum, so you'll only have a little bit of distance between you, Nigma, and his men."

Damian frowns over his brother's words. He doesn't want to chance running into the man, or any of his henchmen. "It's on the second level, and we're a large distance away from that gallery."

Marinette thinks for a moment, "Should we figure out all the riddles first, and then look for the keys?"

"I think that's the best course of action. That way, we'll know which galleries we should be at beforehand, and it'll reduce the possibility of us running back and forth. If we don't, we might lose more time."

"Okay," Marinette nods, but her stare indicates that she's miles away, cradling her injured hand. Damian reaches for her arm. She jerks at the touch, but he doesn't release it.

"How's your hand?"
"It's fine. Doesn't hurt as much."

"We'll get those keys," His voice was soft, and he stares her directly in her blue eyes. If he had to reassure her multiple times throughout this mission, then he'd do it. "We're doing great. You're doing great."

The way she held herself, composed and assured, deflates at his words. "Don't lie to spare me," She smiles weakly. "You know I haven't been."

"I don't lie needlessly like that," He says, holding his stare to get his point across. "Furthermore, I would disagree. Were it any other civilian, they'd be having numerous panic attacks before they could actually figure out his riddles. You're clearly upset, but you're doing exceptionally well at keeping calm."

Marinette snorts, "Actually, that's me attempting to shelve the panic attack until a later, more convenient time."

"God, what a mood." Damian ignores Red Robin's words, raising an eyebrow, "That's not the least bit healthy but, sure. Whatever works for you."

"I do a lot of that aren't healthy for me," She shrugs, with a smile. "Hasn't stopped me before. One time, I survived forty-eight hours on coffee alone because I needed to finish one of my outfits."

Damian stares, looking faintly alarmed. "You...is that something you routinely do?"

"Depends on when I get time to do my projects," She muses. "Or when my school work allows me to breathe. So...yeah, it is."

He's dimly aware of the budding similarity between her and Drake, and immediately shoves it at the back of his mind. He does not need that in his thoughts whenever he looks at her.
boo boo the fool

@archangel
okay where the fuck is damian wayne 12:15 PM - 17 April 2019
4.9k
jay jay abrams

@thecityofjules

damian wayne still hasn't shown up fuck 12:14 PM - 17 April 2019
1.5k • 3.2k
WHERE is this rich kid omg 12:16 PM - 17 April 2019
@poefinnrights
@BruceWayne @WayneEnterprises y'all were quick in denying these rumours. where is he? 12:16

PM - 17 April 2019  ▪️ 265 ▪️ 800
that hand flex from p&p 2005
@eleanorsarchive
people being like "where's damian wayne??" bitch he's trying to figure out what the fuck is going on because the media fabricated this entire thing and now a girl's life is in his hands. i'd be a lil late too

Down with Shaun King!
@tweetsbyhanna
I'm feeling for Damian Wayne rn. Obviously I feel more for Marinette, but he has to try to save her life while against the clock. One wrong move and it's over for her. 12:17 PM - 17 April 2019

"You think this is a ruse?"

They were currently sat in a Gotham City Police car, under the pretense of seclusion. The shouts of officers near the car, and the constant chatter of civilians still against the barricades were muted, the tinted car windows drawn upwards. The Caped Crusader had left Red Robin a while ago to continue following what Damian and Marinette were doing, and he decided the use the small window before The Riddler decided to initiate contact to bring the Commissioner up to speed on his suspicions.

Batman sighed heavily, turning back to stare out at the museum entrance. Nigma still hadn't appeared, and it had been almost a full hour. "Think about Jim — he wouldn't kidnap someone with this amount of media focus on them without taking it into account. Nigma wouldn't go through all this trouble for nothing."

"I wouldn't call this headache nothing — every damn news show is focused on this." Commissioner Gordon mutters, but his eyes are narrowed behind his glasses as he processes Batman's words. "Say him holding this French student hostage is an elaborate ploy, what for?"

"That's what I can't figure out yet. But, I think he's banking on the one-track focus of your officers, and by extension us, on Miss Dupain-Cheng. With everyone focusing on her, that way — "

"We wouldn't notice if he were doing anything else." Gordon finishes, tone grim. Batman doesn't say anything to corroborate his statement, but his silence is answer enough. The man exhales heavily, taking his glasses off to rub his eyes. "Always something with Nigma." After he places his glasses back on his face, he continues. "I did think it was odd when he said that this was an impromptu situation. Nigma's not a man of coincidences. They may happen, but he sure as hell isn't going to announce that. Then, that means that he'd been at the museum beforehand. But, what the hell for?"

"Not to mention, he only asked for Damian Wayne. There's still his negotiation request to make, but I don't think he's going to ask for anything further."
At that moment, a knock knock sounded from Gordon's side, on the GCPD car window. A dark-skinned woman was on the other side, face serious. Gordon exhales, "Looks like we'll find out." He presses the control on the car down to bring his window down, the sirens and voices becoming distinguishable once more. "What is it, Procjnow?"

The officer, whose nameplate read Dagmar Procjnow, clears her throat. "Sorry to interrupt Commissioner. Batman." The Dark Knight says nothing at her greeting. "It's The Riddler, sir. His call was transferred to our PSAP."

The two men promptly exit the car, casting a quick glance the museum's entrance once more. There's still no Nigma emerging from the shadows. As they walk over where a group of officers and some French interpreters are, Gordon raises an eyebrow, "Any sign of him?" Reporters attempt to go closer at the sight of the two, but are prevented by appointed officers.

"Negative, sir. He's still inside, but hasn't shown up anywhere near the entrance."

"Caught glimpses of some of his men though," Another officer answers, Detective Tommy Burke, happening to overhear the conversation. "Most likely trying to figure out where we're all stationed."

Gordon extends a hand for the phone, and once it's in his grasp, he gives the surrounding officers and the interpreters a look. An instruction of silence. They all abide by his wordless request and, while locking eyes with Batman, he speaks. "Hello?"

"Commissioner Gordon! How are you?"

Terse silence is his response, and the criminal chuckles into it. "I don't suppose Batman's with you?"

"He is."

"Rude of him to not even say "hi". Oh, Batman, Batman. Whither art thou, Batman?"

Batman's patience was wearing thin, but Gordon saved him the trouble. "What do you want, Nigma?" His voice was calm, smooth.

"The same thing you all do, Commissioner Gordon. All these people can leave the museum safely once neither your officers, or Batman enter." Batman attempts to listen to the background sounds, and notes the steps of multiple people. Interesting. "If you barge in prematurely....well, the outcome won't be so great."

Gordon eyes the vigilante significantly, "And what about the french student? Marinette Dupain-Cheng?"

"Ah, right!" He says, as if he's forgotten. "Sunshine's still waiting for the Wayne kid. Still hasn't shown up yet, interestingly."

"Will you allow us to speak to her? I just want to ensure she's okay." One of the interpreters step forward, ready to translate should the phone be handed over to Marinette. But, it was all for naught, Batman knew. The criminal had left her a while ago, not to mention that she was in the midst of searching with Damian.

"Unfortunately, I won't. I can assure you, however, that she's fine. For now." That confirms that he has no idea that the henchmen guarding the two were taken out yet. The officers glance at each
other, reminded of the fact that she was stuck with a bomb.

Batman mentally runs over the criminal's past answers, and speaks up, "What do you mean 'the outcome won't be so great' if we come in early?" His question makes most of the officers jump, the response a mixture of not expecting him to talk and being unnerved by his low tone.

"Ahh, Batman!" The Riddler croons. "How lovely it is to finally hear you." At the vigilante's awaiting silence, the man cackles, making the surrounding officers frown in disgust and alarm. "A nightmare for some. For others, a savior I come. My hand's cold and bleak. It's the warm hearts they seek. What am I?"

Detective Tommy Burke murmurs to Procjnow, careful not to allow his voice to carry too far. "The cold cruel hands of fate? Taxes?"

"Death." The answer made everyone straighten, watching as The Dark Knight eyed the phone with an unnerving intensity. "You'll kill her."

"Right on the money, Batman! It won't take any time at all to activate the fail-safe on my device, or to reduce the time on it." Barman and Gordon knew that any deaths that occurred in the crossfire of Nigma's schemes weren't any concern to him. In his neurotic mind, even if he pressed a button, Marinette's death wouldn't be his fault. It'll only be the blame of Damian, for having not come to her rescue, or anyone else who went against his instructions.

Gordon exhales, "So, just so we're in agreement: you'll let the people in the museum leave. There's no need to activate any fail-safe; we won't enter until you give the okay."

"The moment when the mouse ran down the clock...that's when you can enter."

A clear nod to the nursery rhyme "Hickory Dickory Dock". But, that could go one of two ways: either they could enter when the last of the hostages was ushered out the museum, or when the clock struck one. It was close to one in the afternoon, but....

Gordon frowns, "When all of the hostages are out? Or when it's one o'clock?"

"When all the mice run out until there's no more."

Batman folds his arms, "And there's nothing more you want? Money? Anything?"

Nigma tutted, a 'tch' noise,"There's nothing you can offer me. Besides, I've already gotten what I've wanted."

Commissioner Gordon exchanges a grim look with the vigilante. That gave them all the confirmation they need to corroborate his actions with Batman's line of thinking. However, it still didn't answer the question of what this was all for.

"I do hope you have a good day, Commissioner. And you as well, Batman. Remember our little agreement."

And with that, the call ended. A breath left the listening officers, and the silence was broken by one of them, a Detective Andi Kasinsky. "God, he never fails to make my skin crawl."

Commissioner Gordon returns the phone to Procjnow so suddenly that it startled the officer, then taking out his transceiver. "Bartlett." At her answering call, he says, "Keep an eye out on the other entrances. Anyone coming through there that isn't a civilian, you know what to do."
Batman stares, "You think he's gonna use the regular exits?"

"Absolutely not. I know damn well that we're not getting him today. But, it's better to be prepared for nothing than to give him the chance to make a laughing stock out of me and my department." The elder man then eyes the nearby officers. "Kasinsky, Procjnow, Burke — you and the rest of officers will be coming with me once those hostages leave. Same thing with the bomb squad."

"Yes, sir!" They nod, going off to relay Gordon's instructions.

Gordon eyes Batman, "What about you?"

"I'll find my own way in. Should anything change..." He taps one of the transmitters Gordon gave them earlier, having stored his in the hostler around his belt.

"Right," he murmurs. "Right."

They go their separate ways, waiting for The Riddler to execute his side of the agreement.
Established as an independent curatorial department, the museum's Department of Photographs houses a staggering collection of sixty-four thousand works ranging from the when the art form
was developed, to the present. Marinette's eyes catch the wall designated for introducing the exhibits in this department, leaning her head up to internally read the description on the label.

The museum prided itself on opening a dialogue on the power of images, and capturing significant moments. It held numerous exhibitions, education programs, community outreach, and public programs — something that she's appreciated museums for doing. Many metropolitan art museums bring about elitist opinions on who should have access to art. She's always held the belief that art should be appreciated and introduced to everyone, and her eyes land on a quote from the founder of the department:

*Photography is the most contemporary of art forms. When words fail, when the stories cannot be told through word of mouth or writing, we turn to photographs. Universally, it is the most vital and effective way to capture the humanity of the moment, in all it's depth, emotion and magnificence.*

— Nickolas Copus.
Photographer and Department Founder.

Marinette considers the photos that line the walls, stopping on a picture capturing a woman and a child glancing out of a window, the placard reading “Woman and Child in Window, Barcelona,” 1932-34, Dora Maar. Were the situation different, she'd be fully enjoying the exhibits, taking pictures of her own. Something wells up in her chest. Anger mostly. Anger that she wasn't able to appreciate this field trip. There's fear in there too, and it's what she's been feeling for the majority of this fucked up scavenger hunt.

*But,* she thinks as she walks to keep up with Damian, *I've got to keep moving. There's no time.*

They had walked around for a bit up until this point, Damian reassuring her that they wouldn't be bypassing any of the painting galleries as they were a long ways away from painting exhibits. He'd been completely focused on the riddles, making notes with a pencil he found on himself. He also used the museum's free WiFi to go onto the their official website, where they had records of the thousands of paintings they possessed, as well as which galleries they were in.

"It can't be seen, can't be felt, can't be heard and can't be smelt. It lies behind stars and under hills, and empty holes it fills. It comes first and follows after, ends life and kills laughter." He reads. "It looms over half-brothers; one the essence of Thanatos, the other bathed and slumbering in the light of Hypnos. The unfortunate tale of two regular johns, drenched in the personification of the two in their house." A 'tch' noise escapes him, "God, his riddles tend to be so tedious."

*Break it up into sections. Every part of a riddle answers each other. Combine it to get the answer.* Marinette frowns, thinking. "It can't be seen, can't be felt,...empty holes it fills,...comes first, follows after..." Her first thought was death, but that wasn't quite...correct. Death wouldn't fill empty holes. You could say dead *bodies* fill an empty plot of land, but not death itself. Plus, you could see and feel death: in someone's lifeless eyes and in checking whether someone has a pulse or not.

So, she tries again. *It can't be seen, can't be felt,...lies behind stars and under hills, and empty holes it fills. Kills laughter...*she suddenly thinks of those American murder-mystery shows and movies, where multiple strangers of different backgrounds gather at a house and one of them is a murderer. While they're in the midst of having fun, the lights go off and someone is murdered, and
continues until the murderer is revealed. But the thing that kills their fun, aside from the dead body they discover is —

Marinette snaps her fingers, "The dark!"

Her statement is echoed by Damian, who clicks his tongue and writes it down. "At first I thought it was death —"

"But it wasn't quite right?" She nods, eyes drifting over a photograph of two people looking over a balcony. "Same. We're mind-melding. Actually, we've been mind-melded for a while now." Marinette finger-guns him. "Soon, we'll be constantly finishing each other's...."

He's silent at her expectant countenance, eyes drifting left and right when the silence drags on. He raises a confused eyebrow, gesturing for her to keep going with one hand, "Continue your sentence." At that, her expression is disbelieving, and he's even more confused.

Tim's sigh was grating against his ears, "It's a joke, Damian."

Oh. Damian winces, opening his mouth to save his case, but pauses. For the second time that day, words fail him as he takes her in; Marinette sucking in a sudden, wheezy laugh, as if she was sucking in breaths too short and too hard, for much much was leaving her. On one hand, he's a bit embarrassed. However, she was a pleasant sight; a pink tinge to her cheeks as she tries to gather her composure.

"You," she manages to squeeze out through her laughter. "You're being serious, aren't you?"

He frowns, eyes narrowed. "I don't quite see how that's funny."

Her snickers taper off when she notices a bit of aversion appearing in his tone. Her eyes are serious, but there's a tilt to her lips which betrays her amusement when she clears her throat to say, "I'm not trying to embarrass you, Damian. Seriously." The curve to her mouth increases as she continues. "It's just really cute."

It was obvious that she didn't mean to say that, if her wide eyes and the instantaneous slap of a hand on her mouth is any indication. Damian's similarly surprised, blinking multiple times as he attempts to comprehend the past few seconds, his mouth dry. Tim is as struck as the teenagers are, as he mutters "Oh my god."

Damian stiffens, because Tim's tone is a little too understanding for his taste. He opens his mouth to say something to continue the conversation along, but then Marinette's waving her hands wildly.

"I mean — " The words gush out of her, her eyes filled with panic. "That is to say that...." Her eyes dart around them frantically, as if the rest of her words would materialize out of thin air for her to say them. "Well, I'm sure you've heard that before right?"

"Oh my god," Tim repeats himself, louder and Damian's eye twitches.

"No, I actually haven't." His tone is a touch more frantic than she expects, almost as if he was forcing it out, and Marinette's face burns. He probably thought she was being ridiculous right now, saying something like that in a time like this. She hadn't intended to, her mouth has a mind of its own sometimes. And the thing is, she could have just passed it off as no big deal. But, she was always a very expressive child.

"Oh." Is all she can say, and she forces her eyes to the photos next to her, a black and white picture of a young boy, and a picture of a woman looking past the camera. Damian quickly notices her
downhearted demeanour and he clears his throat, keeping his eyes downwards so they don't meet hers. He has no idea how to comfort her.

"So. The riddles?"

"I cannot fucking believe this is happening right now." Damian's eye-twitch comes back at full force, and he listens as his father berates him simply for the language. He had no idea that his father was even there; he hadn't heard a word from the man for a while now, and Drake had said that he left to discuss something with Commissioner Gordon. He clenches his fist, because he knows that one of them is going to attempt to talk to him about it after this is all over. He scowls at nothing, clenching his fist tighter. I swear to God...

" — amian?" He blinks to attention at Marinette's voice, and realizes that she's stopped him from walking. There's a warmth on his hand, and realizes that her hand's over his fisted one that's clenching the now crinkled sheet of riddles. He releases a soft curse, attempting to iron out the paper. She frowns, "You okay?"

"Fine." His tone is short, and he isn't looking at her. "Just musing over something pestilent." When his eyes do flicker over to catch her expression, he finds himself quickly forcing out, "Not you. I don't mean you."

"Oh," There's a relieved glint in her eyes, and he relaxes. She coughs, "The riddles?"

Damian ignores the wheeze that rings in his ears, and glances at the paper. "We've already figured out the first part: the dark. 'It looms over half-brothers; one the essence of Thanatos, the other bathed and slumbering in the light of Hypnos.'"

She raises an eyebrow, "'It'? The dark?"

He nods, rereading the sentence. "Thanatos and Hypnos in Greek Mythology are the personification of death and sleep respectively. If the dark looms over them, it might signify that death is approaching. Actually — " He ruminates over his past sentence. "It might signify that death's already claimed one of the half-brothers, the one 'in the essence of Thanatos'."

Marinette eyes the paper, "What's the last part?"

"The unfortunate tale of two regular johns, drenched in the personification of the two in their house." Damian blinks. "So death's claiming both of them."

She clicks her tongue, " That doesn't necessarily tell us which painting it is. And there are a lot of details sprinkled in here that I feel are intentional, but don't make sense. Why is it important that they're half-brothers? Why the usage of Greek Mythology figures?" The unfortunate tale of two regular johns.... "Why does he use 'two regular johns'? Isn't the American saying 'the everyday Steve' or something?"

Tim snorts in his ear, "She's close. It's the average, everyday Joe."

Damian relays the saying for her, and she frowns. "Exactly. Why use 'regular Johns' instead of an actual saying that means the same? I thought Americans were fond of their sayings."

"You're putting an incredible amount of emphasis on details that may not help the overall riddle."

"If there's anything I've learned to remember in my literature classes," Marinette eyes him. "It's that everything must have a meaning pertaining to the overall story, or its structure."
"If there's anything I've learned in my literature classes," he counters. "It's that teachers tend to emphasize and interpret details that have no connection to the overall story." He rereads the riddle anyway, to see whether anything escaped his understanding.

Marinette goes over the riddle in her head. If the first riddle was any clue, it had to be intentional. *The unfortunate tale of two regular johns.....drenched in the personification of the two in their house....*

Her eyes widen in sudden realization. There's multiple things that jump out at her. "What if that's a clue of the artist?"

Damian pauses, contemplating. She points at where she assumes the part she's referring to is, "Not mention; 'drenched in the personification of the two' — that's redundant, isn't it? Since you already said that Thanatos and Hypnos are already personifications of death and sleep, and the riddle already indicates that the, what was it?" She eyes the riddle's third sentence, clearly asking him to read it.

"It looms over half-brothers; one the essence of Thanatos, the other bathed and slumbering in the light of Hypnos."

"Right! The riddle already indicates that the two are the personifications of whatever Thanatos and Hypnos represent — 'the essence of Thanatos' and 'bathed and slumbering in the light of Hypnos'." Damian stares, the dots connecting. "Also, 'in their house' is very specific. Why not in their room? I guess it could just be a thing to signify comfort? Y'know — because they're in the safety of their house while death looms over them...."

"*Is now a good time to say that I've found your painting?*" Red Robin questions, fingers typing away on the keyboard. "She's been asking all the right questions, and paying attention to the right details. However, it took a simple google search of 'Thanatos and Hypnos half-brothers' to see which one it was. It's titled Sleep and his Half-brother Death by John William Waterhouse."

A harsh exhale leaves him, as he takes out his phone, immediately going to the museum's website. Marinette raises an eyebrow, "What is it?"

"Your approach's been accurate and meticulous." At her visible confusion, he elaborates. "*The unfortunate tale of two regular johns, drenched in the personification of the two in their house*....'Johns', 'drenched', 'house'. You put them all together: you get the painter — *John William Waterhouse.* You were right about the redundancy as well — it's to emphasis that we were to focus on the 'personification' part." He searches the painting's title in the museum's search box, and it's the first result. He shows her the painting, tapping the screen, "It's called *Sleep and his Half-brother Death*."

She gaped at him, then going to survey what was on his phone, "And the gallery?"

"Gallery 800." He immediately makes a note of it.

Marinette grins as they start to walk again, passing through some enlarged photographs that hung from the ceiling, on her left a picture of a woman in a fur coat, and on her right people at the bottom of some stairs, waiting for a train, "Okay, okay. This is great. We're doing great! Just one more riddle." She glances back at the hanging fixture, catching the photos of a man, whose face is only illuminated by a lamp, a man in trench-coat leaning against a wall, New York's Wall Street, two barefooted young boys and a woman posed with cards in her hand and around her.

Damian drifts slightly behind her, eyeing the bomb's timer. *One hour, eight minutes and fifty-two*
That was record timing. If they took one full hour to decipher everything, the next hour should be perfect, as they already knew the locations of these paintings. "We're doing great," he reiterates, as they duck past a curving glass pane, photographs hanging on it. He glances at the third riddle.

"Round like a apple, deep like a cup, yet all the kings horses cannot pull it up. A unmarried woman, five times wedded, comes to draw from it at about noon. She meets a waiting man, sitting in his chiton and covered with his himation." His mind's already surveying his knowledge of clothes, as he's certain that's some form of tunic. "A revealing conversation is had between her and the divine, unbeknownst to her, until he discloses it."

Marinette traces the photo of a man, taken in a three-quarter profile. "'Round like a apple, deep like a cup, yet all the kings horses cannot pull it up.' If the woman's coming to draw from it....a water well?"

He thinks over her answer, nodding when it seemed to make sense. "Makes sense," he aims a small smile at her, which she returns. "'A unmarried woman, five times wedded, comes to draw from it at about noon'....all I getting from that is that she's had five husbands. 'She meets a waiting man, sitting in his chiton and covered with his himation.'" If he was correct, a chiton was a simple tunic garment from ancient Greece, which typically fell to the ankles of the wearer. A himation was also worn by ancient Greek men and women, but played the role of a cloak or shawl.

"That's ancient Greek clothing," Marinette points out, and Damian remembers that she has a history is fashion design and possibly history. "A himation was made with heavier drape, and was used as a shawl. It was often with the chiton, a tunic that's fastened at the shoulder, and was made from wool or linen. That dates the painting a bit..."

"Possibly fourteen-hundreds. Or, later." Many paintings depicting ancient Greece life, or religious scenes were mostly done during the Renaissance period. However, some were done around the eighteen-hundreds. And that's only counting the Renaissance transformation in European countries. Damian reads the last of the riddle, "'A revealing conversation is had between her and the divine, unbeknownst to her, until he discloses it.'"

Tim groans, "Is that another biblical reference?"

For a moment, he's confused at older boy's words, until he frowns in distaste. "'Divine' — that is another biblical reference."

Marinette blinks, thinking it over. "Yeah, divine's a synonym for God. Or, another name rather. This is a painting of a biblical scene? There's a story about Jesus meeting a woman at a well and they have a conversation?"

"There is!" Red Robin answers. "The story of The Samaritan woman at the well. It lines up — the currently unmarried woman who's had five husbands before, her not knowing he was Jesus until he reveals it to her."

Damian pretends as if he was thinking it over, and not like he's been listening to Drake explain for that long. "There is, but there's multiple versions of that scene painted by multiple people under different names." He unlocks his phone once more, typing "Woman at the well" in the search bar. When that brings up a multiple of art pieces, most not even paintings or even depicting a well in it, he attempts to narrow it further with "Samaritan woman".

A sharp inhale in his ear makes him flinch, "Shit." When the results load, Damian understands.
"Shit."

Marinette takes a peak at his phone screen, and the air between them stills when her expression shifts into understanding. The museum website listed six different paintings of the scene, all by artists of different nationalities. Nigma gave no hint of the painter's name, nor their nationality; going back and forth between all these galleries would reduce their time drastically. He eyes the reducing timer — One hour and fifty-five seconds.

"Okay," is all that leaves her, before she exhales heavily. "Okay."

Damian immediately recalls the locations of these paintings. Painting one was in Gallery 964, Painting two's in Gallery 800.....When factoring in these six new paintings, they'd have to check Gallery 963, 769, 768, 803, 967 and 989. They would have to duck into these galleries on the way, but it was doable. He writes them all down, and Marinette watches the numbers for a moment, thinking.

He looks at her seriously, knowing that certainty was what she needed to hear, "In my opinion, I think we can do this."

She holds his gaze for a long moment, before her eyes glance at the phone screen once more. "Even if we couldn't, I have to — regardless." The out-of-focus yet fiery stare her blue eyes held made him stare in a mixture of surprise and respect. She had the look of a vigilante, the aura of someone who knew that time was slim, but they'd be damned if they didn't at least try. She was not going to die today, and he wasn't going to let her die either.

"The thing is, Damian," Red Robin's voice makes him pause. "Nigma's in the middle of letting people leave the museum. Once they're all out, we're able to go inside, we can help you guys."

Damian nods to himself at the reassurance, immediately downloading the maps of the museum straight from the website. When it's successful, their eyes meet, and his is as resolute as hers.

"Let's go."

"Mommy, how long are we gonna be here?" The kid in her mother's arms is asking the question that everyone, even Jason, is asking themselves. But, he knows that Nigma does what he wants. Which means, law enforcement and by extension them, can't be hasty in any decisions they make. Self-important bastard.

"The police will get us out of here soon, honey," Her mother places flyaway hairs behind her ears with a finger. "We just have to wait a while." He's sure that it was meant to come off as comforting, but he's sure that even she can hear the hesitance in her voice. The girl frowns, but says nothing more as she hugs her mother.

Jason hates inaction as much as the next person, and he's only resigned himself to wait because he has to. He's itching for his gun, and if the situation were different, if they weren't in a location that could end up with multiple casualties and his vigilante identity being discovered — he'd solve this situation with a few gunshots of his own. But, Bruce and the others had it covered. In fact, they were releasing the hostages right now. So, all he has to do is wait. Which, is what he's been doing for the better part of an hour now. Exhaling heavily, he leans his head against the wall he's reclined against.
His eyes track the henchmen in the room. They had been communicating on their devices constantly, most likely taking some time of orders from Nigma. As much as he wants to contribute to the conversations he's hearing, there was a goon directly next to him. Being silent has its perks, however, because the commotion he's heard in the past — he checks his watch, forty-eight minutes — has been interesting, to say the least.

Firstly, the Dupain-Cheng girl had some balls for a sixteen year old. He never would've expected that, or connected it to the girl in the collar bomb that he saw in the television broadcast. She was smart, too. Sure, she was limited on information, any other hostage placed in this situation would be. People usually didn't have an extensive knowledge in Art. But, with what she did know, she immediately tried to draw some sort of connection. And he wonders if it's all bravado, if the second this is all over, whether she's going to have a significant traumatic response. Maybe she will, maybe she won't. Most hostages would, after all the adrenaline leaves them and the dust settles. He clicks his tongue, attempting to reign in his temper. If Nigma stuck around after this, he would not hesitate to shoot the fucker for forcing a child in this situation.

At least it wasn't the Joker, his mind supplies, and he shudders at the memories of an incident long past.

He wouldn't wish that shit on anyone.

Secondly, he'd had his suspicions while hearing her and Damian actually interact earlier, but their little conversation while walking through the wall passage cemented it for him — the kid had a little crush on her. And then it was reaffirmed once again when the Dupain-Cheng girl commented that he was cute. He would've laughed had it not been for the henchman beside him. Whether or not Damian knew was a whole other thing entirely, but it was definitely there. Surprising, considering that Dick was the type to fall in love so quick. If you asked him yesterday whether it was likely for the brat to gained a crush on an actual girl, he would've laughed in your face. He wonders what's going to happen with that after this is all over, after the dust settles and the danger wears off.

He watches the henchman closest to the gallery entrance as he's on the phone, nodding along to whatever the person on the other end was saying. The guy then looks around the room, not saying a word, but Jason catches that the rest of the goons understand the wordless exchange. The one beside him stepped away from him, and he realizes what's happening — they're going to start letting them go.

"You," he points at the group closest to the entrance, a couple of young girls. "Come with us."

Worried murmurs start to bubble among the rest of the hostages, and he points his gun to the ceiling, the shot silencing it swiftly. "Jason," Tim's voice starts in his ear. "That gunshot — anyone hurt? Cough once for yes, twice for no."

Jason coughs twice.

"Okay, good."

"You want to leave here, don't you?" The henchman then aims the gun at the group, who shrink away from it. One of the girls, who served as a shield for the rest of them, hesitantly nods. "Well, we don't have all day. Let's go."

Jason raises an eyebrow. If the henchmen are taking them all out in batches, then he had to ensure that he was the last person in there. That would give him a window to deal with these henchmen, and to sneak his way around the museum. There were only two men left with them, and the other
two were leading the group to an exit. He frowns; if he wasn't the last person there, if they chose him next, he could still take the two henchmen that would be flanking him. But, that might complicate things, and he doesn't want Nigma to catch on that someone took out two of his henchmen just yet.

As there's no one next to him now, he shuffles more into a corner, eyeing the camera pointed towards the other end of the room, voice low. "Tim?"

"Talk to me."

"You're not seeing me whatsoever, right?"

"Not unless I move the camera." Jason watches as it turns to land on him, and he clicks his tongue. "I'm going to need you to not focus on me when it's my turn to be forced out." Then again, they would probably delete some of the museum footage after all this. He'd already examined the gallery for any other exits other than the obvious one, and came up empty — he'd have to leave the way he came in.

Tim hums a tune in response, bringing the camera back to the other hostages. All he says is, "Don't shoot them."

A soft scoff leaves him, "Don't tell me what to do. I'll shoot who I want." It was all for the sake of banter. Jason knew he couldn't do as he pleased in this situation.

"I can tell you what to do when bullet-ridden henchmen are going to be hard to explain for the GCPD, and a bitch to clean up. Don't shoot them." Tim shoots back, understanding his need for conversation.

He leans back, and waits. The rest of the hostages were eventually chosen, and taken to leave. The mother and her daughter, along with more adults and children, were taken in small, even numbered groups. And then, it was only him. There had been an uneven number of hostages in this gallery, and the henchmen were idiots to not take him along with them, even numbers be damned. He wasn't alone however, the two henchmen were still in the room with him, waiting. When one of them gets another call, he straightens, and waits.

"Yeah?" The man responds, silent as the person on the other end speaks. "Nah, you guys can go ahead — we'll deal with the last guy here. We'll meet in the hole after."

Big mistake, you dumbass. Jason frowns when the guy continues, saying "Yes, I'm sure. You know the boss isn't planning on sticking around too long." Bruce already theorized that Nigma wouldn't be sticking around after he got what wanted, but then that begged the question; what was he looking for? Also, the hole?

"Yep," He ends the call, eyeing his partner. "After this, we're ordering some food."

His partner looks relieved to hear it, "Thank god. I've been starving for an hour now."

"Well, maybe you should've eaten before we left."

That momentary distraction is all Jason needs to strike; with not a second to pause, he launches from his crouch, kicking his foot out to catch the closer goon in the face, a harsh crunch sounding as the side of his face is hit. He doesn't wait for the other henchman to react in surprise, or for him to reach for his gun. While the other man staggers in pain, he quickly subdues his current target, landing blows that make wheezes escape him, and he finishes by clipping him above the center of
his chin.

With him unconscious, Jason aims a clean kick to the side of the other man's head, putting all his power into it. He falls harshly, and Jason quickly listens to see if his fighting garnered any attention. When no footsteps seem to come towards the room, he promptly sets to leave.

"Lead the way, Boy Wonder."

Dick hasn't the slightest idea how long he's sat in the same spot — if Tim's time checks were correct, an hour and five minutes maybe — but he's growing hungrier and hungrier as time passes by.

He's never been one for hostage situations. As a detective, he'd always have to walk a fine line when negotiating with high-strung and trigger-happy people. It's a skill every detective has to work on, because one wrong statement can end multiple lives. As a hostage himself —

He stays silent, even as there are about a dozen venomous threats he wants to say, as the barrel of a gun is pressed against a wailing child's head. His mother is doing her best, but there's only so much you can do when dealing with child who was terrified for a proper fucking reason. "Shut that brat up," the gunman orders, having it poised just above the kid's forehead, ready to fire at any moment. Only a child and these bastards have already given the kid a traumatizing experience they'll remember for years.

— as a hostage himself, he hates staying put. He opens his mouth to take the attention off of the kid, but the kid quiets down, cries trickling down to muffled sniffles as he burrows into his mother's chest. His fists clench, and an angry huff leaves his nose.

Speaking of children being put in traumatizing experiences they'll remember for years, Marinette's doing...okay, considering the circumstances. She was letting her true feelings out, emboldened by the language barrier. She was brave enough to bargain her own rescue, and succeed. Not to mention, she was doing her best attempting to figure things out with Damian, figuring out the initial part of Nigma's riddles. But, there were a couple of instances where he could hear Damian reassuring her, no doubt getting bouts of anxiety.

He couldn't imagine what the result would be, had Nigma not allowed her to rescue herself and wait for someone who was already there with her.

But that was it, wasn't it? Nigma clearly allowed her to do so for a reason, one that escaped him, Bruce and Commissioner Gordon. She was a gear working along with the rest in The Riddler's grand plan. Would they find out exactly it was? Probably not until a few days after this museum holdup. He already knew the man was going to slip away from them, most likely leave behind a clue for them to figure out. He had the jump on them today, and they'd need to figure out his plans so they could do the same.

He'd already heard that Nigma was starting to let the hostages go, and the henchmen keep relaying and listening whatever on their communication devices. So, it's only a matter of time until —

"Alright. You — " The henchman points to a group of two, and then three other people huddled people. " — and you. Let's go."
Dick frowns. Were they going to let the hostages go in batches? That...that was so fucking stupid. If anyone wanted to take advantage of their oversight, of the limited number of people they can subdue, they absolutely could.

Guess what he was going to do.

He hums, doing a headcount of the henchmen in the room. One, two, three, four.....two of them were going with the hostages, which left the other two with the rest of them. If he's going to attempt to help Damian and Marinette, he has to be the last person in here. He has to take advantage of the window between escorting every batch of hostages. If he didn't....well, he'd just end up outside and then find his way back in. It would just take longer.

Dick watches as the hostages are taken in groups, and counts the leftover people along with him. An uneven number. So, either they do the smart thing and take him with the last batch, or they leave him to be escorted last.

The numbers dwindles, and soon there's only a few more people aside from him. When the henchmen turned ushers return, glancing over the remaining hostages, one of them jumps in place as something vibrates in his pants pocket. That man fishes his communicative device out, leaning away from them to answer it. Dick strains to hear the conversation.

"Yeah, boss?" A pause. "We're almost done here, just a few more people." Another pause, and the man rolls his eyes. "Got it, boss."

When he gets off the phone, he eyes his fellow employees with slight annoyance. "Boss wants us to hurry up."

"He's not the one watching over the hostages."

"Alright, alright." One of them waves his hands. "Let's hurry up. You two — " He points at the two that had originally been left behind with them. "Handle that one," He points at Dick, who tries his best not to look surprised. "While we take those over there. When you're done, go to the hole." Dick blinks, the hole?

"Why should we handle one guy?"
"Cause fuck you, that's why."
"It's payback for eating his calzone."
"I said I was sorry!"

He points a gun at the group across from him, ushering them to quickly stand. "Sorry doesn't bring it back, Jimmy. Do your job."

He and his accomplice leave with the group, while Jimmy's partner scowls. "I don't understand why I have to pay for that along with you. I'm tired of you eating people's food."

"When have I ever eaten everyone's food?" At his partner's stare, he waves a hand. "Aside from Tony."

Dick watches the two as they get into an argument for a moment, shaking his head. Nigma needs new goons, because this is ridiculous. He inches closer to the two and, when they haven't noticed his close proximity, slowly reaches for his Escrima Sticks. When they still haven't noticed, he strikes; jumping up to strike the two with the sticks. They both stumble in pain, and are somewhat
disoriented from being hit with a metal object, which he takes advantage of. The thing is, he's only using the sticks to heighten the chances of a quick deliverance of unconsciousness. With a few more hits each, ensuring that at least one is at the back of the head, they're quickly taken out.

He surveys his work for a moment, and jumps when his earpiece comes to life. "Good job."

Dick eyes the camera in this gallery, that's now focused on him. "Wasn't expecting you to use the escrima sticks, but it got the job done."

"They didn't have enough time to look at my weapon, so I'm safe." He says, referring to Nightwing. Placing the sticks back in their hiding place, he says to Tim, "We're gonna have to remove some footage across all the cameras."

"Won't be too hard."

His lips tilt at the reassurance; Tim was nothing if not efficient. He searches their pockets, finding their communicative devices. After dropping them down a suit of armor, he dusts the metaphoric dust off his hands and walks towards the gallery entrance.

"Where to next?

There were multiple advantages to being a powerful god-like being.

Aside from levitation, and an inability to be filmed, Kwamis had the convenient power of passing through physical matter.

And in the midst of panicking, caught up in wondering just how much longer were they going to be held hostage here, no one noticed when a small head peaked out from the tote bag. It had ducked back in when someone reached for it, to keep it with them, but that wasn't a hindrance. It was easy for her to phase through the tote bag and underneath the gallery floor. She had only one thought on her mind: finding her chosen.

It wasn't hard to find her chosen's location either; she could figure out the location of the earrings. It was faint, but discernible.

She sets off, phasing through walls, ceilings and floors to find her.

Chapter End Notes

Now: onto the after-chapter notes.

(1) Would Damian's plan have worked? Yeah, I would've made it successful, but Marinette had other plans.

(2) I'm characterizing Damian as someone who likes a girl that has the ability to kick his ass. And yes, that was a Mulan reference.
(3) I know Marinette's a bit more anxious and emotional here than most Miraculous/Gotham crossover stories like to portray her but — she's a child. As much as I show her being the quick-thinking, stoic Ladybug, she's also still a sixteen year old girl who's never been put in a situation like this before. Not to mention, Miraculous Ladybug puts her in a lot of emotionally devastating and self-esteem reducing situations, and never show just how harmful they can be to a teenage girl.

(4) Rembrandt's Head of Christ truly does have multiple versions of the same subject. But, since Gotham is a fake location, I'm embellishing a bit. That detail where Rembrandt's portrait of Christ is worth millions because his fingerprints are etched in it is true, but it's only on one portrait so far, the Study of the Head and Clasped Hands of a Young Man as Christ in Prayer.

(5) PSAP stands for Public Safety Answering Point. Correct me if I'm wrong, but from what I researched, 911 call centers are known as a Public Safety Answering Points, which can be separated into two categories: Primary PSAPs and Secondary PSAPs. A primary PSAP is where the phone rings when you call 911, and a secondary PSAP is where a 911 call may be transferred (if the call needs to to a specific department for a specific situation.

Based on my (limited) understanding, given that this is a known, ongoing hostage situation, the 911 operators within Gotham would redirect this call to the Secondary PSAP in the Gotham City Police Department.

(6) Dagmar Prochnow, Tommy Burke and Andi Kasinsky are actual characters within the DC Comics Universe. They're GCPD officers who first appear in the stories "Happy Birthday Two You..." (Detective Comics Vol 1 #747), "Urban Renewal, Part One" (Detective Comics #748) and "Officer Down, Part One: These Are Your Rights" (Batman #587) respectively. Bartlett is meant to be Joely Bartlett, another GCPD officer.

(7) Nickolas Copus is a reference to Nick Copus, a British cinematographer and director who has worked on the Gotham television series. His quote is also based on the words of Cornell Capa, the founder of the International Center of Photography.

(8) In keeping with my characterization of Jason and Tim having a somewhat friendly relationship, I found out that Jason actually refers to Tim by his name/somewhat affectionate terms, which is something that many fanfics don't really do. Many works have Jason call him replacement, when he's actually referred to Tim as "Tim", "Robin", "Kid" (Teen Titans 29, Batman: Battle for the Cowl 2, Batman: Battle for the Cowl 3, Robin 177), "You idiots/You boys" (also referring to Dick, in Teen Titans 47), "Drake" (Batman: Battle for the Cowl 3, Robin 182-83) and even "Boy Wonder".
Ergo, I'm keeping that tone.

Thank you so much for reading, and I'll see you in the next one.
Pacing? I don't know her.

Another chapter that did not want to be written. But, we have persevered.

I hope everyone's staying safe and taking care of themselves inside your house....let me repeat that again, inside your house, and are heeding the stay-at-home and social distancing policies. I am seeing too many people in America and other European countries just...not heeding the fact that we're in a pandemic. If you're being forced to work through this pandemic (whether because you need money so you can actually survive, etc.), I'm sorry for you, and I hope you all stay safe out there.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**Trends for you**

3 • **Trending Worldwide**
#MarinetteDupainCheng
675k Tweets

4 • **Trending Worldwide**
#DamianWayne
456k Tweets

5 • **Trending Worldwide**
#WhereIsDamianWayne
296k Tweets

6 • **Trending in Gotham City**
Gotham Museum of Art
212k Tweets

7 • **Trending in Gotham City**
#TheRiddler
106k Tweets

The universe was conspiring against them, Mendeleiev thinks. To show them that, no matter where they went, the people of Collège Françoise Dupont would always become tangled in tumultuous situations. They hadn't even been in America for a full two days before things went to shit.

Firstly, early Tuesday morning had been filled with discovering that one of her students was linked in a widespread belief that she was the daughter of a wealthy philanthropist....simply because she
spoke to him. That led to invasive attention on mostly her, but their group as well. She and Bustier had to train themselves to become attuned to the constant, real time news updates concerning Marinette.

The same day, even when the businessman had released a statement debunking the claims, the public had switched — believing that she was instead dating one of his sons. Apparently, as Caline and Marinette were leaving that legal meeting, they had stumbled (yes, stumbled. Because Dupain-Cheng was destructively clumsy) upon the Wayne kid. Reporters had caught them, and that was that.

And now, this attention landed them to be tracked by a criminal who put the Gotham Museum of Art under lockdown, when all they wanted was to have a great time. A criminal who, put her into a bomb and broadcasted it to call for the same son of Bruce Wayne to come rescue her. Marinette was at the mercy of this supervillain and this Wayne kid who just so happened to be taken away with her. It was only Wednesday.

Oh yes, Mendeleiev thinks, as she and some of her students were finally picked to be let go, the universe was conspiring against them.

The walk out of that gallery was a long one, but it looked as if they were being led to the main one. Mendeleiev stiffens when the gun digs in her back, clenching her jaw and holding herself back from saying what she wanted. It doesn't stop her from cursing inwardly though. At Monsieur Damocles, for allowing this trip to happen in the first place in hopes to build up their credentials. At the local reporting agencies, for being so hungry for a story that they would jeopardize a young girl's safety. At Bruce Wayne himself, for being so newsworthy that people are pining paternity claims on him. Hell, she even curses Hawkmoth, because he must be doing something in Paris.

They're a little away from the museum entrance, she can hear the noise of Police officers barking orders, when the two men trailing them give them some sort of breathing room. The one with the gun trained on her says, "Keep walking. Any of you look back, it'll be unfortunate."

The woman narrows her eyes, because there was no need to say that. They weren't going to waste their bullets on them. She knew that. All it served was to make her students upset: Mylène doing her best to hold in her sobs, Ivan doing nothing but rub her shoulder; Lila shudders, looking for the first time like a teenage girl who actually feared harmful consequences; Alya says nothing, but her eyes are glazed over. Mendeleiev snarls, and walks them forward.

"Just a few more steps, kids." She reassures, wanting to put as much distance between them and the men as possible. "We're almost there."

When they finally pass the doors of the museum entrance, and the outside air hits her face, Mendeleiev breathes a sigh of relief. It's echoed by her students, because she feels the strong grips on her loosen just a bit.

Down on the street below, past the museum steps, she catches the sea of paramedics, officers and civilians. The American police have their weapons in hand and pointed towards the entrance, when she, and her students emerge from the shadows. She hears a sharp inhale from one of them, most likely from having noticed the guns pointed their ways. She feels them burrow more into her side, and when she spares a tiny glance, one of them is Mylène.

Mendeleiev contemplates whether to call out to them, to tell them withdraw their weapons because even she is uncomfortable at the sight of them. But, the group notice them in sync and an elder man immediately calls outs to his officers, "Hold your fire! Hold your fire."
Officers gesture for them to come down quickly, and Mendeleiev waits until they're actually on the staircase to encourage them to sprint down. They're led away from the museum's entrance, more towards the emergency services, and she spots Caline and more of their students. They're bundled in disgustingly bright orange shock blankets, while some are being tended to by paramedics.

One's placed around her shoulders as well, and more of the paramedics descend upon her kids. Panic enters her at the sight of them leading them off, but relaxes. They need to be checked.

"Excuse me, miss?" Someone's in her view, voice low and soothing. "Do you mind answering some questions for me?" Someone repeats it in French for her, and she watches as Caline immediately looks over the rest of their arriving students. Only when they both make eye contact does she fully focus on the officer.

"I can speak English," she says, sinking more into the embroidered fleece. Her voice is slightly hoarse from disuse, and she clears her throat. The translator nods and backs off, going elsewhere where he may be needed.

"I'm Detective John Blake," She doesn't know how old he is, but he looks young. "Can you tell me what happened in there, miss...?"

"Mendeleiev."

"Mendeleiev. I know it may be hard, it could really help us. No detail is too small."

Perhaps, but she's not planning on detailing every single thing. She glances back at the museum entrance, "We were just in a gallery when shots just rang out. The...Riddler, was it? Made a beeline to one of my students, Marinette Dupain-Cheng. He...he must've known she was already there."

Mendeleiev trails off, unsettled by the realization. Somehow, the thought hadn't occurred to her back in the museum. Officer Blake clears his throat.

"So, he came over to her..."

"He came over and took her away by gunpoint." She wonders if it's important to include that she wasn't alone, that the Wayne kid had been dragged along with her, but she decides it isn't. "And well, the broadcast happened...everyone saw it in there. Have...have any of you seen her? Marinette?"

Officer Blake says, "We're doing everything we can" and she knows that they haven't yet. Meaning, she was still in there. "What about before you came out? Did you hear them say anything weird? Anything at all?"

Mendeleiev frowns, "No. We were just sitting there waiting for more than an hour and then they started to take us out. They took us in groups. There were about seven in the gallery with us, but only two henchmen were leading hostages out."

"During the broadcast," And the new voice makes her jump, whirling around to find Mlle. Catalina, eyes serious. She must've been brought out a few seconds ago, because she remembers the woman still being in there. "The Riddler was shooting from The Dining Room of the Fitzmaurice House. The Architectural Wing."

He nods, "Thank you." The woman nods, and walks towards the direction of Caline and their students. Officer Blake then looks back at her, "Thank you, too, Miss Mendeleiev. Your account was very helpful."

She knows it wasn't; it was just a formality to say so. "Thanks. Can I go over to my students?"
"Of course. If you remember anything else important, call for an officer, okay?"

She nods, but knows that she has nothing more to say. Mendeleiev walks over to where the students have gathered around one of the ambulances, where Rose was being checked over by a paramedic. Juleka was by her side holding her hand, most likely allowed to as a comfort to her, so long as she didn't get in the way. She starts to count heads, one, two, three, four, five....

"Most of them are here," Caline interrupts her, a knowing glint in her gaze. "Monsieur Haprèle is over there — " she gestures with her head over to where another paramedic is checking Mylène, Ivan at her side as well. " — with Mylène. They're all okay, if not incredibly shaken. The only one missing is Marinette."

She looks over Caline for a moment, "What about you?"

"I'm here, aren't I?" But, her voice is soft, and the young woman's gaze is far away as she burrows more into the shock blanket. Her fingers were wringing themselves together in anxiety, one of her common tells. Akuma attacks may have been common with them, but guns and being in a hostage situation were another thing. "I'm just worried about her." She didn't need to specify which her she meant.

They watch over their students for a moment, as they all speak and comfort each other. The two women grimace as they watch Mlle. Rossi wail to whoever was listening, as if her fellow students were doing her a disservice by not focusing on her. Her tears were genuine however, even if she was going about it in a self-centered way. The tears running down her cheeks left her skin blotchy and red. She was being comforted by Alya though.

"She's with the Wayne kid, right?" Caline raises an eyebrow at Mendeleiev's question. "That's what that Joker wannabe wants, isn't it?"

"Right," her co-worker exhalas. "Right. What do you think he's having them do? From what I've read, he's keen on riddles. But, that bomb..."

There was silence for a moment, where all thoughts over what could happen should that bomb go off while still around Marinette's neck were brought to the forefront, and Mendeleiev closes her eyes for a moment before she says, "Alright, none of that. We're not focusing on that anymore." Easier said that done, obviously. "We'll drive ourselves mad if we think about it anymore."

She knows that the woman had been thinking about Marinette as they sat waiting to be released back in the museum, because she was.

"I got into contact with the person who Monsieur Wayne placed with us and asked for the bus to return and pick us up. He said that he'd already called for the bus to return, but didn't want to call in case we were hostages as well. Either way, the driver will be here in three minutes. After everyone's checked out, the kids should leave." Caline gestures, her tone grim. "They shouldn't stay here."

She's right. Overhearing the constant back-and-forth chatter of what could be happening inside the museum by civilians and police officers wouldn't be great for the children to hear. Mendeleiev pitches her voice low, gaze flickering around their surroundings. "Good. When we get back to the hotel, we'll need take their phones so they won't be tempted to find out what's going on."

"Okay," Caline nods, and hesitates before questioning, "Which one of us is staying?"

There was a beat, and then Mendeleiev penetrates it with a, "I'll stay." The younger woman brought
her eyes up with a jerk, and she continues, "You and Monsieur Haprèle can hold the fort back at the hotel and make sure that they don't escape to the televisions in the lobby or dining area. I know English much better than you and can better communicate with anyone if I need to. Not to mention," She stares at the woman seriously, "You shouldn't stay here."

Caline stares for another second, before her eyes narrow, ready to plead for the opposite. "Mendeleiev — "

"Caline," Mendeleiev's voice was pitched soft, a feat in it of itself, as she rests her hands on her shoulders. "You shouldn't stay here."

Because, she knows that out of the two of them, the woman is much more antsy to see Dupain-Cheng. However, just like their students, it wouldn't do her any good to stay here and wait. It was a bit of a gamble as well, because if she were to return, she'd be left to her own horrific thoughts whilst she waited and waited and waited for Mendeleiev to call her. There was even a chance she'd look at the television herself so she'd be updated. But, it was more likely that she'd concentrate doing anything to prevent their students from worrying. That would keep her busy, and any temptation to keep updated on her part won't help anyone. She had the ability to quickly pull herself together.

There's a flicker in her eyes — most likely reaching the same conclusion she did — and Mendeleiev knows that she agrees. The woman deflates as she pinches the bridge of her nose, and she levels a serious look at her. "You'll update me. Anything you hear — "

"I'll update you with anything significant." Mendeleiev is just as serious. "Periodic updates of anything important. Like if I need to go to the hospital or something."

She could visible see the woman consider the reasons why she'd need to go to a hospital, and Caline briskly shakes her head clear before she says a simple "Okay."

Mendeleiev drops her hands from her shoulders now that her co-worker is calmer, although not entirely content with the agreed on situation. She adds, "I don't need to tell you to stay away from the TVs as well, right?"

Caline allows her lips to tilt upwards, only slightly. "No. It wouldn't do me any good." She sucked in a slow, shuddering breath, closing her own eyes for a moment, before steeling her shoulders to walk over to their students. Mendeleiev follows her, and watches as she opens her arms for Max and Alix to dive into. She stands with Sabrina, Kim and Nino, doing the same. Rossi is there as well, but she doesn't take the teacher up on her offer. As much as she isn't fond of the student, she wouldn't be so cold as to ignore her throughout all this. Mendeleiev calls for a paramedic, gesturing towards Rossi, and they do so, even though she knows the kid's been checked out before. Alya goes with her.

Mlle. Catalina seemed calm, if not for the intense stare she held on the museum. Mendeleiev stretches her arms to hold all three of them, and while she watches the police moving all over the place, the teacher prays that Marinette's doing okay.

The plan, as devised by Red Robin and Batman, was quite simple.

1. Marinette and Damian would search for paintings one and two in Galleries 964 and 800.
Along the way, they would check the galleries close to those two for painting three: Galleries 963, 967, 989 and 803.

2. Simultaneously, Dick and Jason would check Galleries 768 and 769. If they were finished before the teenagers got to Galleries 800 and 803, they'd check it on the way.

The plan was structured in such a way where Marinette wouldn't immediately realize that they were getting outside help. If Jason or Dick found the key first, they'd pretend that they simply found it while looking for her. Due to their current location, they were much closer to the galleries within the nine-hundred range than they were in the seven-hundred range. Therefore, they'd work their way down.
They walked through a court-esque gallery, the foyer-like area channeling into numerous galleries. The walls were cream-coloured, portions of the walls made into arches. Some of the arches were connected by white pillars; the crown held an intricate design, while its middle was painted with a muted currant-red. Sculptures were spaced out on the brown vinyl-floor, while busts were positioned near the pillars. To the left of them, a bronze entry-way vestibule held two seats, yet the door beyond the vestibule was non-openable. Higher up on the walls, spaces were carved out to hold more busts and sculptures. The ceiling had a light fixture in the shape of a globe, bright even at the time of day.

"This is the King's sculpture court," Damian mutters, eyes analyzing the layout displayed on his phone screen. Marinette takes her eyes from observing the paintings on the walls to do the same. "So since we entered from over here..." He eyes the archways that lead to the different galleries. "Nine-hundred and sixty-six, nine-hundred and sixty-five..."

Past one of the archways and through a smaller doorway, Marinette sees a gallery ahead of them,
with cadet-blue walls and some paintings hung up. Pointing, she says, "Nine-hundred and sixty-four."

Upon walking into gallery nine-hundred and sixty-four, the room didn't just have paintings, but sculptures and other pieces. Some were encased in glass casings, some were not. They walk into the center, Marinette immediately glancing over the paintings on the walls. Some were in reach, while others were much taller than she could climb. One was even above the doorway. And, while Damian was notably taller than her, she doubt he could reach them either.

Damian peers into the red-painted room connected to this gallery, glancing at the map on his phone. "Here's gallery nine-hundred and sixty-three. I will check over here while you check this room."

She nods, glancing around for their painting. Rembrandt, Rembrandt...portrait.... Her eyes drift over a young woman whose despondent expression was focused off to the side, with some sort of altar behind her, adorned with garlands. There was another with a gap-toothed skull on top of two books with a toppled glass beside it; a scene of disorder with a large group of what seems like drunk people on a terrace, there's even a dog in it; a painting of what resembles the Nativity Scene of Jesus' birth, where a woman and her baby are surrounded by three men; and a painting of a warrior riding with some horses while a woman was just....hovering.

Marinette exhales, eyeing some more paintings. She passes one where a mother was in the midst of lace-work and her baby was seated in a high-chair, a painting of the northern landscape of Brazil and a portrait of a woman who held her robe closed.

And then her eyes land on a portrait where the figure held almost a half-view profile. The man's fair face was the brightest thing of the painting. But even as the darker paint, shadows, were prominent throughout the piece, she could still make out his shoulders, where his hair came to rest. She immediately glances at the placard, catching the inscription of Rembrandt van Rijn. Head of Christ, c. 1655. Oil on oak panel, 23.8 x 19 cm. Her shoulders relax, just a bit.

Damian comes up behind her just then, and he glances up at it before eyeing the complementary picture alongside the painting's placard: it's zoomed into the bottom-left corner of the piece, a visible picture of Rembrandt's fingerprints. "This is the one," he says, even angling the phone for her to see herself.

The relief spread further, even though she already knew it. "And the next room?"

"No key."

She assumes that the key must be behind the painting, so she reaches up to lift it from where it's hung. Damian latches onto her arm before it could go far, however, his eyes narrowed. "Wait."

He walks to view the painting from the side, where he could also see the gap behind it. He presses his head against the wall to discern whether there was anything out of place aside from a key at the back of it, but doesn't see anything immediately. Damian frowns, reaching up to gently lift the painting off from its hook. There's indeed a key taped at the back of it, but nothing else.

"Odd," but he removes the gold key. It has an ancient sort of design. "I thought there would have been something else." He eyes the room for good measure, but once again, nothing immediately stands out to him. There's the overhead camera in the top-left corner of the room, but that was it.

"What are you looking for Damian?" But, he doesn't answer Red Robin's question, his eyes still roaming around the room.
Marinette follows his gaze, raising her eyebrows. "What did you say?" Damian's words had been muttered in English.

He shakes his head in place of an answer, and eyes the collar-bomb — fifty-one minutes. He bends to eye the front of the bomb under her chin, and finds three keyholes. He reaches to place the first key in, but pauses. What if they had to fit the keys in at the same time? Or immediately after the other? Nigma hadn't said anything of the sort, but he's not going to chance it. Damian quickly stands up, grabbing her hand.

"We should keep moving."

"What about — "

"I don't want to chance tripping the bomb off. That neurotic fool hadn't specified on whether the keys needed to be put in all at once or not." And the last thing he wants is to accidentally kill her.

Marinette says nothing at that, but mimics his fast pace.

The next location was gallery eight-hundred, as well as gallery eight-hundred and three. Aside from galley nine-hundred and sixty-three, galleries nine-hundred and eighty-nine and nine-hundred and sixty-seven had already been crossed off. The teenagers had already extensively checked for the third key there and came up empty. They took the quickest way to that floor, by elevator. He hears commotion on Jason and Dick's end a few times, and based on the conversations, he guesses that they successfully took out a few of Nigma's men.

As they walk, Marinette murmurs, "Hey, Damian?"

He eyes her, and sees that she's cradling her injured and bruised hand once more. He'll ensure that she gets medical attention as soon as they leave this place. "What is it?"

She's looking ahead, in somber and far-away thought. "You've seen my teachers, right?"

He fails to see where this conversation is leading but answers, "I have. Why?" He does remember their faces, the auburn haired one and the other with their hair dyed purple.

"If...If something happens," she breathes, "Can you give them a message for me? For my parents?"

Her words make him go cold, and he halts his steps, his body tensing despite himself. A heavy exhale sounds over his commlink in his ear, followed by a low, lamenting 'Jesus Christ'. Marinette stops walking when she realizes he has stopped, and straightens when she catches the expression on his face.

They watch each other for a long moment before Damian goes back to walking, passing her, "You can tell them yourself."

"Damian — "

"Are you giving up?" He spins back to look at her, and a very unfamiliar feeling is causing him to bristle; his fist was clenched. "Is that what this is? I thought you said that you were going to get these keys regardless of the slim chances? I thought you wanted to make a name for yourself? I thought you wanted to go to university and broaden your skill-set? You are giving up now when we haven't even gotten the second key?"

Her eyes were wide, and she speaks slowly, carefully, almost as if she were speaking to a five year-old. It only infuriated Damian more. "That's not what this is. I just — "
"We have better things to do." He isn't yelling, but his words are cutting and harsh. "I'm sure you remember that you have a bomb around your neck? That is currently ticking down? I know you do."

"Damian — "

"No," he turns back around to continue walking. "Whatever ridiculous sentiment you are currently thinking of, can be saved for when you get out of here."

"Will you just listen to me?"

His jaw tenses from him gritting his teeth, but he silences himself. An aggravated noise escapes her and before he can turn to face her, she's gotten back to walking again, and is forcibly pulling him along with her. He stumbles at first, as he hadn't expected it, but quickly regains his footing. He tries not to lean onto her so much, so the collar won't dig any further into her neck.

She doesn't glance over at him, but her eyes are narrowed. "You, need to work on verbalizing your feelings more."

Out of all the things he was expecting her to say, that wasn't one of them. "What?"

"You are very lucky," she continues. "That I can read between the lines very well and understood what you really meant. Because if I didn't, I would've absolutely yelled at you. Still thinking of it actually, because how dare you? If we're going to be friends, or even situational near-death-experience acquaintances, you gotta work on that."

"Oh, do I?" That gains him a dead-on stare, with a set jaw and smouldering eyes. He makes the executive decision to shut up.

"As terrified as I am," she marches on, and he swallows, because he knows that. He witnessed it multiple times. "I'm not giving up. I refuse to die by a man whose clothing palette consists of colours a scene kid would happily use for their next choice of hair dye. I'm not giving up."

Damian scowls, "Then — "

"However," she quickly cuts him off. "My brain isn't exactly agreeing with me right now. It's telling me to cry, especially since this is the first time in years that I can cry without fear of being akumatized."

"...wha — "

"So, yes." Her voice simmered to something soft, "I asked what I asked because....because I know that life is unfair, and anything can happen. And I — I don't want my parents' last memory of me to be that phone call I had with them this morning. They don't deserve that." Even if Damian hadn't been looking at her, her voice tells that she quite close to tears. And he watches as she inhales for a second, and releases it, as if that split second of emotion hadn't happened. As if she was used to doing it. That unnerves him.

"I know that — that you don't want to carry any message in my stead, because that means that I wouldn't be able to do it myself. I know that it's unfair to ask that of you but....please indulge me? For my piece of mind."

As they continue walking, the air is silent after her words. Aside from the lack of background noise of museum occupants that would've occupied the space, Damian doesn't say anything immediately. In his ear-piece, Red Robin says nothing either, nor does anyone else that would be
on the line. Marinette almost deflates when he abruptly yet gently steers her into the right gallery.

"Fine," his soft assurance cuts through the silence. "If you must." He then walks away from her after they cross the entryway, looking over the paintings for the one they're looking for.

She watches after him, before turning to look for herself. "Thank you."
Gallery eight-hundred had a high ceiling with glass paneling, that allowed the sunlight to enter through the room. Many of the paintings were quite large, though they were bordered with smaller ones, neatly arranged all around the four walls. The room contained sculptures as well, placed between the provided gallery seats and between the paintings on the walls. The cushioning of the gallery seats matched the baby-blue walls, as do the pillars that some of the sculptures rest on.

She passes a portrait of a fair woman against a background of the outside, a painting of a fishing boat etched into the sand, and a still-life composition of some shoes. "Tell them that I didn't want them to keep thinking about what my last moments must've been like," she pauses for a moment to gaze upon a painting of a family encouraging a baby's first steps. "Between the two of them, Papa's most likely to fall into 'what if's' and spiral into worrying. And I don't — I don't want him to make himself sick with that."

Marinette eyes the placards of the paintings, because as much as she doesn't remember exactly what the painting looks like, she remembers the name. She passes a woman who's gazing off into the sea's distance, a group of girls and a young boy lounging on the grass, and a woman consoling another whilst still dressed in their Parisian evening gowns. "Maman's a bit different with her emotions, but it's the same for her. I don"t want her to make herself sick with the possibilities of what might have happened."

"I'd want them to remember the happier moments of me, and I want them to always hold the happier memories of me with them always. I know it would be hard, but I'd want them to live and
be happy for me since I wouldn't be able too. There would be times where it gets too much, and things might get out of control, and that's fine. I just never want them to carry that grief to their graves."

Marinette hugs herself with her arms as she ruminates on the words, and adds something that she knows would make them laugh, "Oh, and tell them exactly what I said to the Riddler. And that I kept cursing him to the end. Yep, that's it."

A tap to her shoulder makes her turn, and she sees Damian with a painting in one hand, and a key in the other. He gestures with his head to follow him, and she's one step behind him. He places the painting back onto its hook, the scene of two seemingly-slumbering boys, one coated in the light, and the other in darkness. She glances at the placard, John William Waterhouse. Sleep and his Half-brother Death, c. 1874. Oil on canvas, 70 cm × 91 cm (28 in × 36 in).

He exhales, and eyes her. And Marinette knows that he truly was listening. She hadn't thought otherwise, but the look in his eyes confirmed it. "You had that prepared."

"I did."

"Have you regularly thought about what would happen to your parents should you die?"

She has. Many nights where sleep has evaded her and she goes out for some fresh air have ultimately gone down that road. Given that only one person knows her identity at the moment, she has often wondered what would happen if Hawkmoth's reign ended up killing her. She can't die, because...she can't. Paris depends on her. But, if she did, what would become of her parents who were waiting on their daughter to come back home?

"I have."

Damian's eyes are inquisitive as they assess her, "Why?"

She aimed a smile at him — a strained, aching sort of smile. "I think every person in Paris has thought about that." It's something that's definitely been pondered back when she, Alya, Nino and Adrien were still close. When they've had sleepovers at Alya's house and the topic comes up when it's past two in the morning. What if Ladybug's miraculous cure didn't work on people? What if Hawkmoth brought out something worse that Ladybug and Chat Noir couldn't fix?

There's a beat that passes between them, where understanding eases across the lines of his face. Not complete understanding, there's still some confusion swimming in his eyes. Yet, something still hovered in the edges of his face, something like anguish, but not quite. And, she can tell that he's not going to ask just yet.

Marinette gestures with her head towards the doorway, "Third key?"

They walk in sync out of the gallery, and there's another bout of silence between them before Damian speaks once more, "I would like to apologize."

Her lips tilt upwards slightly, "Oh, would you?"

Damian's a bit disgruntled at her clear amusement, but eyes her seriously. "Yes. I did not mean to make it seem as if you didn't care about your situation. Of course you are aware of how drastic this situation is. I know you are. And, I know that you are attempting to claim to some sense of normalcy. The way I reacted was wrong of me to do and I apologize for being so...." He frowns until he lands on the correct word, "Excessive."
Marinette smiles, "It was my fault for asking that of you in the first place, but I forgive you." She pats his shoulder, "I meant what I said though. You need to work on actually verbalizing your feelings. Because I was a split second from cursing the *fuck* out of you." A slight grimace crosses his face, and her grin turns much more amused. "I don't mind you being blunt. I meant it when I said that you're nice. But, it can be very easy to misunderstand you."

"It's not the first time I've heard something along those lines," Damian admits. "I'm...adjusting that."

"At least you've realized it and are working on it," She smiles. "If you've done that, it's a step in the right direction."

Damian opens his mouth, and thinks for a moment before he says, "If we are discussing emotional responses that need to be worked on, I think it applies to you as well."

"My emotions? What about them?"

"You have a habit of suppressing them." She pauses, before continuing to walk. "I cannot imagine why, but that isn't the best for anyone. Everyone is entitled to their emotions." He pushes away memories of intense training long past.

Marinette frowns, not really wanting to get into how that simply isn't true — not in Paris, France. So, she hums and questions, "Where to next?"

His lips tilt downwards, taking note of the fact that she intentionally didn't continue the conversation. Still, he gently steers her to their right, into another gallery. "Gallery eight-hundred and three. We will quickly check whether the third key is in here, and if not, we go to galleries seven-hundred and sixty-eight, and seven-hundred and sixty-nine."

She nods as she takes in his words, "How much time left?"

He steps back to view the timer, "Forty-two minutes."

Marinette exhales, "Alright, let's go."

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**Is This Damian Wayne in Disguise?**

*SamSamBrown*  
Admin | 20,939 posts

[UPDATE on the Museum Hostage Situation] There's a video floating around that just....appeared out of *nowhere*. The only reason I found out about it was because of Twitter. But, it was definitely uploaded by someone who's either hacked into the Gotham Museum of Art's security cameras, or they have their own feed set up to film this. Either way, *holy shit*.  

It's pretty eerie because.....we're being direct viewers to a hostage's actions while she's trapped. And well, there's a very high chance that this may be her last moments. And it's covered on film. However, what's truly surprising is that: *there's someone else with her.*
Check around 0:25 to see. Someone, who looks male and around her age, walks into the frame and has a conversation with her, but it's in French. Damian Wayne still hasn't shown up to the museum yet, but what if this is why? What if this is him? What if he was already in the museum? But then that brings up more questions — why was he there in the first place? Why is he dressed like that? Was he hanging out with his girlfriend in disguise?

*Posted today, 1:10 pm.
2,224 comments. Sorted by: Time*

Date: 2019-04-17 01:11 pm (UTC)
(Anonymous)

This...doesn't help the dating allegations one bit.

I mean, sure. I'm glad that he's there to help her, but if that's actually Damian Wayne, then he's definitely in disguise. That's not his usual sense of style. So, then the question becomes, *why* is he in disguise? The only reason he'd be in disguise is if he didn't want people to know his identity. So...he's hiding his identity and just so happens to be in the same location that his rumoured girlfriend is? Yeah okay.

*Link* *Reply* *Thread from start* *Parent* *Thread* *Hide* *59 replies*

**Re: This...doesn't help the dating allegations one bit.**

Date: 2019-04-17 01:13 pm (UTC)
(SamSamBrown)

*Exactly. If he just so happened to be there, then that's one big fucking coincidence.*

I'm interested in what his PR people are going to say in response to all this.

*Link* *Reply* *Thread from start* *Parent* *Thread* *Hide* *66 replies*

Date: 2019-04-17 01:12 pm (UTC)
(Anonymous)

*Are...are you fucking serious?* Are you people seriously focusing on these kids' supposed love life when one of them has a *literal bomb* around her neck?? Are you truly that disgustingly uncaring?

*Link* *Reply* *Thread from start* *Parent* *Thread* *Hide* *25 replies*

**Re: Are...are you fucking serious?**

Date: 2019-04-17 01:14 pm (UTC)
(SamSamBrown)
Now, I would like you to show the class where in my words did I type that I didn't care about her situation? I do care. I hope she doesn't die. But I'm just saying, it goes against everything his family was saying. Then again, the game of PR and all that.

Date: 2019-04-17 01:14 pm (UTC)  
(Anonymous)  
I thought I had seen it all in terms of a lack of empathy and common sense, but then I remember that you're the same person that was stalking and posting her information back when the media first thought that she was Bruce Wayne's daughter.  

Y'all make me sick. She's in a fucking bomb. She could fucking die because of people like who, who kept spreading her information even when others told you to stop. It's obvious that she was targeted because of people paying attention to her now. Someone, who is completely fucking deranged (I'm thinking it's The Riddler himself but that's not important right now), posted her going around the museum looking for whatever the Riddler set her out to do.  

But what do you care more about?  

Ooh, this must mean that Damian Wayne was in disguise to be with his girlfriend for a day! Ooh, they must've been on a date!  

Y'all make me sick.

Date: 2019-04-17 01:16 pm (UTC)  
(Anonymous)  
It's the way you don't even know if that's truly him for me.

Date: 2019-04-17 01:16 pm (UTC)  
(Anonymous)  
If that's him, then thank god. Because I've been wondering how she's going to understand The Riddler if she speaks French, unless she also speaks English (though, I doubt she does). At least he's helping her.

Date: 2019-04-17 01:16 pm (UTC)  
(Anonymous)  
I don't understand. Regardless of whether or not it is Damian Wayne, he's supposed to be there.
Cause, y'know....The Riddler wanted him there? Why is there a big commotion about this?

Re: I don't understand.
Date: 2019-04-17 01:17 pm (UTC)
(SamSamBrown)

I literally outlined why.

If it is him, how did he get there? He definitely didn't arrive after the broadcast because we would've heard about it. So if he didn't get there after, that means he was at the museum before. And you should ask yourself, why?

Re: Re: I don't understand.
Date: 2019-04-16 01:19 pm (UTC)
(Anonymous)

We shouldn't ask ourselves anything. Because, guess what? That's literally not important.

"He must've already been there." So what?

"They must've been on a date." So what?

"He's in plain-clothes so no one will recognize that he's with his girlfriend." Literally, so fucking what?

Regardless of the reason he was at the museum, Marinette Dupain-Cheng is still a hostage. She's still under the control of the Riddler. That bomb could fucking go off and blow her head off, but sure, at least she was on a date with Damian Wayne before it all happened.

"Was he hanging out with his girlfriend?".....yes, of course. Because the only reason he'd already be there is if he wanted to go on a date with his trying-to-keep-secret girlfriend.

Actually, you know what? Let me provide plausible explanations for this situation:

"Why was he there?" He had a day off from school? He likes Art and Paintings so he went to the museum on his day off?

"Why was he in plain-clothes/in a style different from what he usually wears?" I mean, regardless of if he's truly dating anyone or not, the media's focusing on him way too much. Common sense dictates that he'd want to ensure that he's not recognized so he can enjoy his time at
"What if they were on a date?" Just because they were at the same location, doesn't mean that they knew that the other would be at the location that they were going. It's not even confirmed that they're dating.

People have been saying this already, but there are more important things to worry about.

"Commissioner," Detective Andi Kasinsky's voice was urgent as she ran towards him. "You should see this."

Said man deflates at the dread in her voice, because given their current situation, that meant nothing good. He sends off the officer he was previously speaking to with a final order, and Kasinsky immediately hands over the tablet in her hands. At first, Commissioner Gordon frowns in confusion at the device being shoved into his grasp. But then, his eyes grow wide as he stares at the screen. "What is this?"

The this in question, was video feed from within the museum. Based on the angle, and the dark layer above the camera, the camera's vantage point must be from a hidden place within the room. However, instead of an empty art gallery, the screen displays the french student, Marinette Dupain-Cheng. The young girl was walking around, eyes roaming the wall, with the collar bomb was still locked around her neck. Kasinsky doesn't answer his initial question, because well, it was obvious.

Commissioner Gordon eyes her, "Is this — "

"Live? No." She folds her arms. "We discovered this three minutes ago, and it's re-playable. Even though it's clearly inside the museum, tracing the uploading location is proving difficult; it's bouncing all over the place — there was a hit in Hudson County, then in Granton, in Freehold, in Haysville — "

He cuts her off, "So, within the Gotham City area."

"Yes, sir. But, that's the thing — if Nigma's the one who uploaded this, that means he's watching them. Does that also mean that we should we expect more videos?"

Gordon exhales heavily, he wouldn't put it past the man. If this entire thing was an elaborate ploy, he'd need something ostentatious to keep everyone in Gotham invested. What better thing to feed the media attention on the french student than video updates of her progress until the bomb went off?

He watches as a taller figure walks into the frame, another teenager he looks like. Gordon frowns; he was under the impression that Nigma only took Dupain-Cheng away from the hostages. The second person glances up at the painting Dupain-Cheng had stopped at, and he hears him say "C'est la bonne." The kid even shows her the phone in his hand.

Kasinsky pauses the video, "We don't know exactly who that is, but people online are thinking it's the Wayne kid."
"Online theories are not conclusive evidence, Kasinsky." But, he analyses him — the person was the same height as Damian Wayne, although the clothing choice was something he'd never imagine the teenager wearing. And, if this was indeed him, that meant he was already in the museum beforehand.

"Perhaps, but witness accounts of hostages who were in the same gallery as the french kid note that Nigma took a boy with her as well." Kasinsky passes a hand through her hand. "Got a translator to give us a transcript of this whole thing. Earlier, he said "this is the right one." Here, she's asking him about the gallery next door to the one they're in, and he says there's no key."

She unpauses it, and true to her word, Dupain-Cheng looks up at him when she asks "Et la pièce voisine?" The other person responds with "Pas de clé." And then, the young girl reaches up to take the painting off from the wall, and is quickly stopped by the other person. The boy instead inches across to see behind the painting, and eventually lifts it off of its hook.

"I have no idea what he was looking for."

"If they're following Nigma's instructions, he's probably ensuring that it's not rigged with some sort of trap." The kid's next words, spoken in English "Odd — I thought there would have been something else", followed by the way he looks around the room carefully confirms his belief. Flipping the painting over produces a small key, and Gordon's eyes narrow.

If the french student, and by extension whoever her accompanying partner is, wasn't being subjected to a three-chances round of answering riddles to unlock the bomb, then the criminal must've sent them on a scavenger hunt. Hence, why the two were alone and searching paintings. That's...inconsistent with Nigma's past hostage situations; the man personally deals the riddles against his victims. So, him sending them off on their own devices...that had to have been pre-planned and not a impromptu situation. Batman's theory was sounding more and more correct.

"Be on the lookout for any more uploads," He hands the tablet back to Kasinsky, and regards her significantly. "Anything important, make a note of it and get it to me." He immediately takes out his transceiver to update Batman.

"Yes, sir."

Back with Batman and Red Robin, still within the vicinity of the Batmobile, they were already aware of the uploaded video.

"There's a five minute delay with the upload," Red Robin drums his fingers on the door's handlebar, the footage in question playing on the Batmobile's computer. "Right now, they're leaving gallery eight-hundred."

Batman was in the midst of scoping the levels of the museum out with thermal-signature detection goggles. "Shouldn't we make Damian aware?"

His ward exhales, "In a minute." Tim had immediately understood Marinette's request, as vague as it was, and decided to mute Damian's line for a minute for everyone else — for the sake of giving her some sort of privacy. His line was still open, it had to be. There could be the chance of something happening to them if the line was silenced completely, and they wouldn't know until it was too late. Which meant, he had to hear everything.

Tim passed a hand through his hair. This is the second time Paris has come up in the conversation, and he would like to know what the hell is causing its citizens to contemplate existentialism and the probability of their deaths. No teenager should have to think about that, especially as often as
Miss Dupain-Cheng insinuated. That was something to be talked about with a therapist. He eyes the water bottle in the car's cup-holder and wishes it was something stronger.

He decides to focus on other things, "The internet is having a field day with this. They're focusing on the fact that this must 'prove' that they're dating, since the only reason for Damian to have been there already is because he was trying to be with his girlfriend in disguise." He drums his fingers on the door's handlebar, to distract from the anger welling up in him because there were much more serious things to focus on, but sure. He exhales hard, before continuing. "Then again, we still needed to figure out how to explain Damian not showing up at the museum. Nigma did it for us without truly knowing."

"We still need to explain it."

Tim hums, "Does "Damian Wayne had a day off from school, decided to go to the Gotham museum of Art for art watching and ended up being in the room when it happened" sound believable?"

Dick's voice chimes up just then, "You'll have to make sure that it lines up exactly with what we heard, since any witnesses would've told the GCPD what happened. Plus the surveillance footage of them throughout the museum — "

"In the middle of doing it, and half of it was delegated."

"Anyone luck, Red Hood? Because, I'm coming up empty." Dick was currently checking gallery seven-hundred and sixty-nine, while Jason was searching gallery seven-hundred and sixty-eight.

There was a beat before Jason spoke, "We're looking for a key, right? About yea big, gold in colour?"

He couldn't see Jason's hand measurement, yet was absolutely sure he was doing one. "If there were any other keys stuck behind paintings, I'd be concerned." The painting Jason should've been looking for was Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well by the artist Guercino.

"That is the correct key, Red Hood." Alfred's voice chimes up. "The painting is also the one listed on the museum's website for this room."

Tim deflates in his chair. Good, this was good. All they had to do now was get the last key to the two teenagers, and unlock the bomb. He eyes the timer he synced up with the collar bomb timer — thirty-seven minutes. He amplifies Damian's line as he says, "Dick, Red Hood — I need you two to meet up with Damian and Miss Dupain-Cheng at gallery...well, you guys aren't that far from each other. Keeping running until you two meet." They had thirty-six minutes, that was enough time.

There was still one little fail-safe to put in place, and he fishes for his cell-phone, dialing a certain number.

When the call connects, Tim frowns. "Cutting it a little too close here, aren't you?"

"Sorry!" the young voice on the other end hisses, and Tim can make out the murmurs of other voices in the background. "I'm waiting for the right moment to leave. I'll be there in a second."

When Tim called him earlier, the teenager had said that he'd be there, but was currently in a situation where it would be obvious if he left too early. He watches as Batman walks back towards the Batmobile. "Anytime within next ten minutes would be great, kid." Tim ends the call just as The Caped Crusader bends to look inside. "Got our way in?"
"All of them," When Tim blinks in confusion, he continues. "I watched many of the heat signatures vanish into the lowest level of the museum, most likely to that "hole" they kept referring to. There are only nine I'm catching that are still within the museum. Either way, we can try the side entrance since most of Gordon's officers are going through the main one, the back entrance or the side entrances.

A quick head-count of the people they're keeping tabs on makes him pause, "Who are numbers five to nine?"

"Two of them are where Damian and Miss Dupain-Cheng were first taken to," He sighs. "They were losing heat, though." Tim grimaces, that means that The Riddler killed them, most likely for allowing two teenagers to attack them. "The other three — worse case scenario is Nigma and two of his men." Batman grabs his transceiver, and brings it up to his mouth as he discusses his plan with Gordon. "It may also just be three of his henchmen. Either way, they were closer to the ground level."

"It better be Nigma," Jason snarls. "I have someone I wanna introduce him to."

He personally hopes it isn't. Tim clicks his tongue, starting to close down things in the Batmobile. "Remember what I said about killing people in there."

"There are other ways to get the job done, y'know."

"Maiming's not an option either."

"One day you'll dislodge the stick from your ass."

Tim wordlessly, exaggeratedly mimics the words as Batman returns the communicator to his holster, "Keep walking to Damian and Miss Dupain-Cheng. Dick, same thing. We'll secretly take the west-side entrance with Gordon's officers, and try to intercept those three people. Where's — "

"On the way," Tim says. "I told him ten minutes."

"Doesn't that kid have superhuman speed?"

Tim shrugs at Jason's question, "Something's holding him up. But, he's coming."

Batman nods, eyes narrowing in determination beneath the cowl. "Time to go."
@tailiadeen
idk french but that part where the boy speaks in english — yeah, that's damian wayne. 1:16 PM -
Yep, that's Damian Wayne. I'll bet $50 on it. 1:16 PM - 17 April 2019
897: 3k
iman

@haseulsdove
"I am not in a relationship with Damian Wayne".....so that's a lie, considering that the only way he could be in there is if he already was in there. Were they on a date and then this happened??

PM - 17 April 2019

basic bitch

@daisydukes
So, he was already in there. Because no one reported seeing him come to the museum after the broadcast. Either way, I'm glad she's getting help. 1:16 AM - 17 April 2019
@sataliteorbit
him being in clothes that definitely out of his style....why does that seem like something someone who's on a date and doesn't want to be noticed by the public would do? 1:16 PM - 17 April 2019

@afroblaze
Okay but, WHERE did this video come from? Who uploaded it? Who is filming them/hacked into the museum security cameras rn? 1:16 PM - 17 April 2019
"Were they on a date?" what if he just really likes art? like i know we have a bunch of questions but
that's literally not what's important rn 1:17 PM - 17 April 2019
769
it is simply too much
@dspielman

oh thank god he's in there 1:16 PM - 17 April 2019
Am I really seeing you lot focusing more on the fact that he must've been on a date with her than the fact that she could fucking die?? Are y'all SERIOUS?? 1:17 PM - 17 April 2019
whew, okay. does anyone have a translation of the conversation in that video? 1:16 AM - 17 April
Boy: "This is the right one."

Marinette: "And the next room/room next door?"

Boy: "No key."

When he holds her back from picking up the painting:

Boy, in English: "Wait.....that's odd. I thought there would have been something else."

Marinette: "What did you say?"

Boy: "We should keep moving."

Marinette: "What about — "

Boy: "I don't want to chance tripping the bomb off. That — "

[The rest of his words get softer and harder to discern, since they're walking away.]
THAT'S LITTERALLY DAMIAN WAYNE'S VOICE. THAT'S DAMIAN FUCKING WAYNE
@poefinnrights
so he was at the museum after all @BruceWayne @WayneEnterprises care to explain? 1:18 PM -

17 April 2019
they were absolutely on a date in that museum and then she was taken hostage. yep, i refuse to hear anything different. WHY else would he be in plain-clothes?
@seulflix
i know i'm not seeing you people focusing on the fact that that might be damian wayne instead of
the fact that she's in danger. i know i'm not. 1:77 PM - 17 April 2019
890 ∙ 2k
@gardenintro
It literally doesn't matter whether that's Damian Wayne or not. What matters is that she gets out of there safe and free, the fuck's wrong with y'all 1:15 PM - 17 April 2019
365 ∙ 945

Shaun King can choke!
@tweetsbyhanna
So...that official statement is gonna be thrown in the trash now, huh? 1:17 PM - 17 April 2019

390   1k
that's....not how he usually dresses...why was he in disguise? why does he feel the need to dress different unless he absolutely doesn't want his identity known? 1:15 PM - 17 April 2019
jay jay abrams

@thecityofjules

yeah i really don't give a fuck if it's damian wayne or not because i've been worried sick thinking about the fact that she's french and would've had to solve the riddler's english puzzles. i'm glad

she's getting help. 1:16 PM - 17 April 2019
@reginawilliams
Oh, thank god she has help. I've literally been wondering how's she supposed to solve his puzzles if she doesn't speak English. 1:16 PM - 17 April 2019
that hand flex from p&p 2005
"He must've been on a date with her." Y'all never heard of off-days from school? What about enjoying a public museum since, you know, that's what museums are for? 1:18 PM - 17 April 2019
"Are you hungry? Because, I'm really hungry."

"Not particularly."

"Ugh," Marinette grumbles, holding her stomach over her pink shirt. "I could really go for some steak-frites. Like, some really really juicy steak. Do you know any place nearby where that you can get that? Maybe I could get Madame Bustier or Madame Mendeleiev to take me to a restaurant after this."
"I wouldn't know," he frowns as he looks at his phone screen. "I'm vegetarian. And I only eat from specific places around Gotham. Not to mention, I doubt that your teachers would even allow you to walk around Gotham after today."

Red Robin had let him know that they had been filmed back in gallery nine-hundred and sixty-four and, after scouring the internet, there was another upload of them in gallery eight-hundred. He knew that that couldn't have just been it — this was Nigma they were dealing with. Unlike the first upload, this one didn't have audio. And well, Damian's content with that, because it was best that the world didn't hear that. He hadn't told her yet, since it would most likely upset her. He'd let her find out on her own.

"Oh," she blinks, and then pouts. "You're absolutely right. They're never going to let me leave the hotel until that court case Friday. Ugh, fucking Riddler — that tête de nœud."

"Tête de nœud as in idiot, or tête de nœud as in the same way you'd say lèche-cul?"

"Which do you think?"

Damian smirks, "Just making sure."

She folds her arms, looking even more upset as her lips thinned. "If I were in Paris right now, I'd go to Jean-Pierre's after this day I've had — close to my house and he sells the best steak-frites. And then I'd be able to relax and bury my face in a cat in Le Café des Chats. Do they have those in America? Have you ever been to one?"

Yeah, he doesn't think he's going to get used to her rambling. Or how quickly she can shift topics. But, he would be lying if he said that seeing her so huffy didn't leave him wanting to indulge her. "They do. America has over a hundred cat cafés. I know of three cat cafes in all of New Jersey, and one of them is in Gotham City. I have never frequented any of them, though. I have enough animals at home that I'd prefer being with."

Marinette raises an eyebrow, "How many pets do you have?"

"Well," Damian counts on his fingers. "There's Titus, he's a Great Dane. Then, there's Alfred, my cat. I also have Bat — "

He swiftly cuts himself off, inwardly groaning in despair as Marinette looks at him in confusion. He hadn't realized that his indulging her had resulted in him becoming so loose-lipped. In his earpiece, a snort sounds from Jason. "Oh, this outta be good." He could even hear the weariness in Tim's voice, "Goddamn it, Damian."

"Bat? You have a pet bat?"

"I — " He quickly contemplates the consequences of him answering correctly, and decides that in the grand scheme of things, it won't lead a trail to his family's vigilante life. He sighs, "No. She's a cow."

"....a cow? Like, the type that produces milk?"

Damian says, deadpan, "I hadn't realized there was another kind of cow."

It took another moment for it to process in her head. "How...how do you get a cow as a pet?"

"What else was I supposed to do?" He questions, indignant. "I rescued her from a slaughterhouse. I couldn't just get rid of her!"
The incredulity eased out of her features at that, and her voice was soft as she asks, "What's her name?"

Damian is quiet for a moment, before he exhales, "Bat-cow." He was determinedly looking straight ahead, while quiet laughter sounded through his ear. His eye twitches when he realizes that it's Dick.

"After the superhero?"

"Vigilante." He corrects, before he brings a hand to rub his forehead. "I was young, and with my eleven year-old thinking, I thought that it was an accurate name for her since she has a bat-shaped patch on her face."

Her gaze turns to something tender, her lips forming a smile as she says nothing. Throughout the silence, Damian attempts to fight the warmth spreading through his cheeks, his eyes narrowing, "What?" Her stare was just as blinding as when they had first met, and he's just as overwhelmed by the suddenness of his reaction.

As warm as her words are, there's a hint of teasing in them when she says, "You absolute marshmallow."

His face screws up as if he'd suddenly sucked on a lemon, "What."

"You're a softy." Her words are definitely teasing now, since she catches how displeased he sounds. She ticks yet another box on the "Damian Wayne is Absolutely Not Cold" List. "A big, mushy softy who cares about animals."

He frowns as he takes her in, her growing amusement at his inability to say anything in response. Eventually, Damian clicks his tongue and says, "I'm walking away from you now." He quickens his steps, and she lets out a surprised, genuine laugh, slightly running to catch up to him.

She pats his shoulder in apology, even as there's a grin on her lips. He narrows his eyes. "At least you have all those animals. I've always wanted a pet. At first, when I was much younger, I wanted a dog. Now, I totally want a hamster. They're so cute! If I ever get one, I'll name them — "

Marinette pauses, when her eyes catch a strange flash of red disappear behind one of the a museum benches ahead of them. At first, she thinks she's seeing things, that her brain is creating images of who she wishes was with her. But then, a little head pokes out behind the front leg of the bench, and she catches familiar blue eyes. Tikki?

"Marinette," The clear confusion in Damian's voice snaps her out of her thoughts. He glances to where she was looking at, but of course, he sees nothing. "What is it?"

She smiles, "Nothing. I'm sorry, I tend to space out sometimes."

"Uh-huh," The raised eyebrow told her he didn't believe it one bit, but drops it, even as his own eyes roam around them. "What were you saying about your dream hamster?"

"Oh, right! If I ever get one, I'd name them — "

Marinette feels the moment when her kwami enters her skirt pocket, and she gingerly rests her left hand in to embrace her, her mind a bit more at ease now.
When Gotham City Police officers storm into the museum's west-side entrance, they all separate spread out, going off on the orders of their lead detective. Three detectives carefully stalk down the gallery walkway, and despite it being just afternoon time, it didn't make scouting the area any less unnerving. It was silent, and they attempt to make their footsteps match.

It takes a bit, but then they are met with the sight of Edward Nigma standing calmly with the foyer-area. Two of his accomplices, a man and a woman, stand behind him, not the least bit bothered either. Guns are immediately drawn and pointed at the three criminals.

"Well, well, well," The Riddler grins, staff in hand. "You've caught me in the nick of time, I was just about to leave. I hope you all are camera ready."

The detective leading this group, whose nameplate read Detective Fields, narrows his eyes as he orders "Freeze, Nigma!" His backup officers eye their surroundings, aware that the man had been filming the french student as she roamed the museum and, due to his words, might even be filming them now. No one else emerges from the shadows, and the criminals present level them flat looks at the command.

"Where's the kid, Nigma?" Detective Fields questions. "The french student. Where is she?"

"On her way to get the last key, I'm sure." The man's features twist as he recalls. "A little spitfire, she is. Annoying, bold little thing. But, unfortunately, as brave as she is, she can't follow instructions."

Detective Fields tries again, "Where is she supposed to go?" They had gotten a museum attendant to identify the rooms shown in the uploaded videos, but they needed her current location. He eyes one of the detectives across from him wordlessly, and the man's eyes glint, understanding. Slowly, so he wouldn't be noticed, his partner switches on his transceiver. The other officers in this area wouldn't dare speak back within their own, lest they give away that they're listening, but they would hear the conversation. They would know that they found him.

The man continues on, looking as if talking about this exhausted him. "I told her, and her little friend that they had to wait thirty minutes until they could leave the room. Upon checking up on them, they've somehow escaped my henchmen and subdued. Of course, I had to dispose of them immediately." The man tsk in mock-disappointment, ironing the wrinkles of his suit. "Speaking of those who can't follow orders, your squad made a fatal mistake."

The detective changes tact, asking, "What mistake did we make?"

"Didn't I say," Nigma eyes them, words slow, as if they were toddlers. "That the outcome wouldn't be so great if you lot barge in prematurely?"

"All of the hostages are out," the detective behind Fields points out, her face in a scowl. "That's what you said: "When all the mice run out until there's no more." We followed what you said."

A loud, hearty cackle emerges from the criminal at that, and instantly, the officers get the idea that they've done something incredibly wrong. The officers eye each other slowly, unnerved.

Nigma catches their confusion as he leaves his laughing fit, eyes alight with delight. "Isn't the french student a hostage? What about the kid with her? Aren't they both hostages?" A breath leaves the officers at that, their faces hinting as to how sick they were suddenly feeling, and he pouts mockingly. "I guess you didn't think about that, did you?"
"So," The Riddler croons, his voice airy and their skin crawls at his carefree demeanour. "That's one, two things, so far. Speaking of the kid with her, I thought it was suspicious that a kid would defend someone who clearly wasn't from here, when he was. And then, after observing them, I grew even more suspicious. And then, imagine my surprise when I see that people are reporting that he must be Damian Wayne."

There was a pause, as if he was expecting one of them to speak. When Detective Fields looks, the man is eyeing him expectantly. He clears his throat, "I wouldn't know. His face isn't clear."

"Hmm," Nigma hums. "Perhaps. But, I'm willing to bet that it is. Especially since it's been long past an hour, and that brat hasn't shown up to the front of the museum yet, like I ordered. And if it is him, that means that he's been lying to my face, and not revealing his identity. Which, I will admit, is clever. But, what it also is, is cheating."

The criminal's voice has gone low, harsh, and that was worse than his initial attitude. Detective Fields exhales, finger trained in the trigger of his gun. "Nigma, let's not do anything hasty here, alright? Where is she? Where's she supposed to go? What gallery?"

"That's what? Three things?" Nigma counts on his fingers. "Three detrimental things that deserve consequences. What do you propose?"

The female officer snarls, "We propose that you let us take you to prison the easy way, and not the hard way." Where were the rest of their squad?

"Let's see — what if we make every instance equal ten minutes?" Nigma's brown eyes are alight with sadistic glee. "Ten times three would equal to...thirty minutes, wouldn't it? Should we take thirty minutes off it?" The criminal's fingers flick up a small panel at the base of the question mark at the crown of his cane, and it reveals two small buttons, a yellow and a red one.

At first, Fields doesn't understand, take away thirty minutes of what? And then, his brain remembers the only thing that would have a time attached to it. The air leaves the room as the rest of the officers make the connection as well. He inwardly swore, "Nigma — "

Without a second to spare, before the man even finishes his name, he presses the left yellow one. The Riddler eyes the man in amusement, taking in the horror in his eyes. "She isn't dead — not yet. But, there isn't much time anyway."

"You're quite right that's enough, but I'm definitely not leaving with you."

And at that, many more officers pile into the space, guns drawn immediately at the three criminals. The Riddler eyes the newcomers, a smirk on his lips, "We've got a lively crowd now. But, I'm afraid that's all we have time for."

He waves his free arm in a flourish, bending as he says, "Until next time, Ladies and Gentlemen, I bid you — "

And then, something suddenly explodes. None of the officers had seen Nigma or his accomplices set anything off, but all of a sudden — green, suffocating, opaque smoke rose up from the ground, and quickly enveloped the room. In the midst of the yells, huffs and harsh coughing that resulted, they could hear Nigma's finishing word " — adieu."

The criminal and his associates used the veil of the smoke bomb to escape, and make their way to their planned means of a getaway: the museum's basement. And, he knew that the police weren't
alone within the museum. He knew that Batman and his brats were right behind him, most likely having had their ears peeled and listening as he spoke. He'd planned for that too.

So when Batman descended down to run after The Riddler, he'd heard the clang of a door being closed, and was halted at the weird-looking device on the basement doors in place of a lock. He snarls, looking at the device more closely, and realized that it was a combination lock. He slams a fist on the door, just as Red Robin comes up behind him. The Caped Crusader knew they weren't going to get him today, but it didn't make it any less infuriating.

"Just enough to slow us down."

The two teenagers were still making their way down, and in the midst of their conversation — well, Marinette was doing most of the talking, Damian was present but at the same time not really, seemingly focused on something else — when Damian suddenly goes rigid, feeling his veins go cold. Marinette frowns at his sudden stop, "What's wro — "

And then it happens: Beeping blares from the collar bomb — insistent, piercing and rapid blips of shrill noise that make them both wince and place their hands over their ears. At first, Marinette's confused as she thinks through the ear-splitting noise, there's no reason for the bomb to be wailing like this. They had about thirty-two minutes left.

And then, it registers — there was no reason for the bomb to be wailing like this, unless, of course, Nigma had something to do with it.

Slowly turning to glance to her side, she meets the green eyes of Damian, and finds the dread that she feels reflected in them.

Damian quickly jump-starts into action, going to check the timer. She holds her breath as he does, and every nerve of her being freezes at the sight of him immediately looking alarmed. The emotions in his eyes transform and alter in the span of a second, and then in the next, he takes her by the arm and shoots off without a word as fast as possible. Marinette sputters as she's fighting to match his speed at first, but then she's able to keep up.

The adrenaline pulsing through her is making her feel jittery, and her thoughts are all tumbling over each other as she wonders what could've caused the bomb to react like that. Had Nigma truly done something to it? Was this payment for leaving earlier than they were supposed to? If that was the case, then why hadn't he done it much earlier instead of in their last thirty minutes? Just for the sake of being sadistic?

She raises her voice to question, "What's happening? What's wrong with the bomb?" The beeping had disappeared at this point, but she wanted to ensure that Damian had heard her.

"We've lost thirty minutes," He returns back, and that instantly makes her feel sick. "There are only two minutes left on it."

There's no where else to go but to the elevators, and when they arrive to it after so much running, Damian slams the button to make it open. It takes a moment to long for the doors to separate, but once they do, the two teenagers bolt inside, and he doesn't hesitate to press a floor button. And they go down.
As they pass the floors, and the silver of light emitting from the minuscule crack between the elevator doors flows up and past their faces in achingly slow motion, Marinette feels herself start to tremble. The fear from before, while she had taken a great effort to subdue it, returns full-force, overwhelmingly so. She tries to quell it, her stomach wrenching in vertigo but her thoughts are reminding her that *there's no point, they were out of time, the elevator was taking so long and you're going to die.*

Damian must feel her shaking, because he says, squeezing her hand, "We're almost there. We just need to be quick."

No, they weren't. They had two galleries to search, and while they may be right next to each other, the process of actually searching for the painting was going to diminish the little time they had left. Damian might have trying to reassure her, and she's thankful for it, but she can also hear him curse under his breath as the elevator took forever to reach the floor they needed. They were out of time.

She knows that if they attempted to continue, she was going to die. She was truly going to die and he really was going to have to deliver her message to her teachers for her parents. Paris was going to be left in Hawkmoth's clutches and Chat Noir was going to have to handle it *alone.* Paris was going to be doomed because *she'd be dead. She was out of time.*

And then, she remembers Tikki in her pocket. And, as if she read her mind, the kwami shuffles out of her skirt pocket to look up at her. Her blue eyes are serious, and they hold the same idea that she's thinking.

Kwamis have the power to *pass through physical matter.* If Tikki could phase through the bomb, she could try to dismantle it from the inside. Or, she could transform into Ladybug, and use a lucky charm to get it off her.

Marinette places her injured hand over her pocket, over Tikki's head, wincing as pain flares up. She hadn't expected to be revealing her superhero identity in an instant such as this, but Damian could keep a secret, couldn't he? After the short amount of time they've spent together, she feels like he would, if she asked. She wouldn't let him watch the bomb kill her in front of his eyes, he didn't deserve that. She softly inhales through her nose for a few seconds before releasing it, her nerves slowly relaxing.

*Dying today was never an option.*

Finally, they arrive on the floor. The doors take another eternity to open. There are windows just outside the elevator, though it's too high up to look into the street below.

Damian exhales, and begins to pull on her hand. "Let's go."

They only make it a little away from the elevator before she digs her feet into the ground, attempting to make herself strong enough to stop them from moving. Her resistance is successful, and Damian wildly glances back at her in confusion.

"What's wro — " He catches the look in her eyes, and his features pinch. "Marinette — "

"It's okay," She cuts him off, and although her voice is soft, it's strong. He watches in horror as she squeezes his hand in a vain attempt of comforting *him,* and he dimly realizes that he's trembling — due to what, he has no idea. "It's okay, I promise." She says, her hand burrowing in her pocket.

He's frozen under the wight of her stare, unsure what to make of it — the glint in her eyes was unwavering, purposeful. But, for what reason? He refuses to accept it as her — her final farewell.
They were running out of time. She was running out of time. They almost had the third key with them, they just had to keep running.

She opens her mouth to speak again, and Damian starts to pull on her hand tighter, planning to make her move himself. And then, something speeds in his peripheral vision and he only has a moment to react when one of the windows close to them shatters.

Tightening his grip on around her wrist, he pulls her towards him, using his back to shield her against any flyaway glass. He quickly pulls his head up to see what threat this was now, who the hell was about to attack them, and when he sees exactly who it is, he stares in astonishment.

Marinette's head inches upwards so she can see who it is as well, the top of her head and her wide eyes visible over his arm.

Jonathan Kent, Superboy, shakes away bits of glass off of him, dusting his black hair of glass fragments. Shaking his right hand, possibly the tool to help him enter, he then glances around his feet, wincing at the glass that litters the vinyl floor as a result of his entrance. He sucks in air through his teeth, carefully stepping to ensure that glass doesn't pierce his feet. "Hopefully they don't find out that I did this, that's a lot of money." And then his voice becomes perky, a grin on his lips. "Sorry I'm late, miss. But, don't worry! Superboy's here to — "

The super-powered teenage boy blinks when he realizes that it isn't just Marinette. "Damian?"

His friend is similarly surprised, "J — uh, Superboy?" The fact that Marinette is there isn't lost on him, and he's quickly to stop himself from revealing Superboy's true identity. He does remember Tim suggest they bring in the boy, but he hadn't realized that they'd actually done it. Mentally, he laughs. It was just like him to show up in the nick of time. Damian slowly releases his grip on her, as Superboy comes closer to them.

He glances over Marinette for a second, before fixing Damian with a look. "I thought you said that there was nothing going on with her."

And just like that, his relief is replaced with annoyance. Marinette's eyebrows raise, and Damian's eye twitches, "I have no idea what you're talking about, Superboy — seeing as I'm simply a civilian who shouldn't know you personally." Jon winces when he realizes his slip-up, and Damian takes a deep breath. "Can you get her out of this? There isn't much time left."

Superboy's already analyzing the metal contraption. "Twenty-three seconds. That's more than enough time." After fully taking in the mechanism for a couple more seconds, he steps back and gives Marinette a reassuring smile.

"Don't worry, Miss Dupain-Cheng." His voice was confident, and his sapphire eyes never left hers. "I can get you out of here in a second. But, I need you to not flinch."

Marinette's still somewhat surprised, a bit dazed even, but gathers herself enough to say, "I'll try."

"Good." And then, his friendly blue eyes glow bright red.

Unfortunately, she cannot help the small flinch she emits when — what can only described as a laser beam — shoots from his eyes, but it isn't detrimental. The heat she feels below her chin is immense, and for a moment, the heat conducting within the metal starts burning her skin from where it's wrapped around her. Suddenly, the bomb start to beep loudly once more, much more urgent and shrill this time, and for a second, her stomach hollows out in fear that The Riddler's words about nothing being able to cut through it were true — that it's truly going to detonate.
But then, the heat vision leaves Superboy's eyes before it has a chance to char her skin, and the collar snaps off, the sharp beeping eerily chokes off. It, and its panel falls to the floor with a thud, and Marinette quickly steps away on the off chance that it may explode at her feet, Damian pushing her backwards as well. After waiting a few more seconds, and nothing happens, Superboy picks up the contraption with both hands.

Thundering footsteps sound from behind them, and the teenagers turn to see Red Hood and Dick — sans Nightwing costume, running up to meet them. As Dick was a little ahead of Red Hood, he is the first to notice that A), that Marinette had the bomb removed from her neck already and B), there was a broken window that had been hit from the outside. Pausing and panting whilst catching his breath, he quickly extends an arm to stop Red Hood from running into the shards of glass scattered along the floor.

There's a beat where all of them, save for Superboy, just watch each other silently, the adrenaline still coursing through them. And then, Red Hood questions, "You okay, kid?" The eyes behind the helmet slits were focused on Marinette.

She doesn't quite know the answer to that question, as she's still trying to catch up mentally. She settles on giving the man a thumbs-up, even as her hands are shaking.

Superboy watches her for another moment, lips tilted in a concerned frown. "I hate to say it, but — welcome to Gotham."

Chapter End Notes

Now: onto the after-chapter notes.

(1) Detective John Blake is an officer of the GCPD who appears in The Dark Knight Rises. He's played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt. Instead of him being Robin here, he's just a simple officer.

(2) The Riddler plotline is based on the Batman: Riddler one-shot titled "The Riddle Factory" (1995). While not in the same vein/having the exact same scenes, I liked the idea of this hostage situation be a theatrical front to distract the police from his real pursuit. You can read the comic here.

(3) If anyone was confused as to why it alternates between Tim and Alfred on who has an eye on the museum's security cameras, Alfred only gets control when Tim/Red Robin has to step away, or is about to step away. Hence why Alfred only has an eye on the cameras in two instances.

(4) Le Café des Chats is an actual cat cafe in Paris, France. While it does have more than one branch (one in the Marais district in the 3rd arrondissement and the other near Bastille in the 11th arrondissement), it has yet to set one up in the 5th arrondissement (as if Marinette were to live in the real Paris, France, her house would be in the 5th arrondissement across the Seine from the Notre-Dame Cathedral in the 4th district).

It would take a long time to figure out where exactly Marinette lives (since the 21st
(5) The literal translation of the French curse 'Tête de noeud', "head of knots/knothead" matches the insult 'dickhead' in English, although it's usually used when you want to call someone an idiot/moron/dumbass. It can also be used when you want to call someone a 'fuck-face', 'shit-face', 'prick' or even 'numbnuts'. Someone was kind enough to add that while it was quite a derogatory term back then, nowadays, it's more used for scolding children.

Lèche-cul in French literally translates to 'ass-licker' in English. When Damian's asking if she meant tête de noeud in the way one would say lèche-cul, he's asking if she meant it as a derogatory, vulgar curse.

(6) Detective Fields is meant to be Charlie Fields, a GCPD officer who first appears in the story "Judgment Day" (Nightwing #75).

(7) I had always intended for Marinette to only get two keys before something happens to prevent her from getting the third one. Truthfully, I was at a crossroads on whether to have Marinette reveal Tikki thus revealing her secret identity, or have the other backup plan work for them. Ultimately, I decided on not revealing her identity just yet.

(8) Would they have reached Dick and Jason in time if they continued running? Yep, because the two would've been on the floor Marinette and Damian landed on. But remember, Marinette has no idea that they've been getting outside help. From her perspective, they still need to get the last key by checking two rooms. With only two minutes left, realistically, they wouldn't have been successful — hence, her considering revealing herself.

(9) According to a DC Wiki, Kryptonians have the power of Heat Vision that has a temperature that can exceed over 50,000,000 degrees Fahrenheit (27,777,760 degrees Celsius), making it capable of burning through the toughest steel, material and armor. Instead of Jon using his heat vision at full power, he brought it down low enough that it wouldn't kill her, but was able to cut through it quickly.

The Riddler may have designed the collar bomb to detonate should anything cut through it, but Nigma would only have access to and base it on non-superhuman resources to use in order to make the bomb impenetrable.

Thank you in advance for reading! Leave a comment if you want to and I'll see you in the next one!
Before, I would've had some pictures of IU being used as a face-claim for Marinette. I did say before that I didn't like using someone with the wrong ethnicity or race (and that it wasn't a fancastcast), and even though I just needed some pictures where Marinette's face showed up and to show what her face looks like, I should've used someone else. Someone even commented on it, saying that it still made somewhat of a statement (about the racist conception of how Asian people look the same), and therefore, I changed it because I never want to imply anything like that. I apologize about that. I'd also like people to correct me in the future concerning any face-claim usage that isn't accurate.

A possible choice for me was French-Chinese model Estelle Chen, but she didn't look like Marinette to me. So, I've been searching since I uploaded that last chapter, and finally ended up on this lovely tumblr post that has five chinese actresses one can use for a face claim. The OP notes that it's quite hard to find Chinese actresses with bangs still, so hopefully this would be useful to anyone else who needs it.

The person I'll be using for the majority of Marinette's pictures (where her face is shown) is Xing Fei (邢菲), other-wise known as Fair Xing, a twenty-five year old actress who is best known for her roles in Master Devil Do Not Kiss Me (2017), Put Your Head on My Shoulder (2019) and Forget You Remember Love (2020). If I use anyone else specific, I'll say. With pictures where Marinette's face isn't shown, it's usually a faceless girl, or someone else.

I hope everyone's staying safe and taking care of themselves inside your house....one more time, inside your house (unless you have to go back to work), and are heeding the stay-at-home and social distancing policies. Wash your hands and wear your masks!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Trends for you

3 • Trending Worldwide
#MarinetteDupainCheng
625k Tweets

4 • Trending Worldwide
#DamianWayne
496k Tweets

5 • Trending Worldwide
#SunshineofGotham
296k Tweets

6 • Trending in Gotham City
Gotham Museum of Art
What's happening

News • 18 minutes ago
Gotham City Authorities rescue Marinette Dupain-Cheng from the Gotham Museum of Art unharmed

News • 9 minutes ago
French student unharmed by bomb threat
@France24_en
French Student held hostage in America rescued after almost two hours. f24.my/6qSk.t 1:15 PM -

17 April 2019 □ 3k □ 20k

[Tweet from French News Channel CNEWS (formerly i>Télé). The tweet was originally typed in French, and the English translation of the tweet is: French citizen taken hostage in Gotham City, Marinette Dupain-Cheng, saved from a bomb threat]

@CNews
Citoyenne française prise en otage à Gotham City, Marinette Dupain-Cheng, sauvée d'une alerte à

la bombe CNewstv.my/3qJk.d 1:10 PM - 17 April 2019 □ 7k □ 24k
French Student in Gotham City rescued by authorities from bomb threat. bbc.in/37OPMLv 1:20
attrape-moi dehors papillon

@aimée
Dieu merci
dieu merci, marinette va bien
ok mais ont-ils arrêté la personne responsable? 1:21 PM - 17 April 2019
20k: 56k
ils ont dit qu'elle avait été emmenée à l'hôpital. qu'est-ce qui n'allait pas avec elle?
pourquoi devait-elle encore aller à l'hôpital? est-elle blessée?
elle est meilleure que moi si elle ne poursuit pas la personne responsable

1:21 PM - 17 April 2019
Commissioner Gordon strides with purpose past the multitude of officers and down into the basement of the museum. The room wasn't completely made up of cobwebs and dust brought on by disuse, but it is dingy; according one of the museum attendents, the basement is usually locked off. It was a storage area for older pieces and antiquities to add to future plans for collection displays. The basement was a gallery on its own, and Gordon shuffles around an encased shield-shaped, ceremonial palette to get deeper into the room.
Multiple areas were bordered off as well, and Gordon shines his flashlight to see around the area that wasn't lit up. A few feet away, the forensic team were within set up lights on as they work.

"Over here, Commissioner!"

Despite already seeing them, he follows the voice of one of his officers, Detective Tommy Burke, as well as the numerous flashlights clustered in one area. Multiple things register at once when he reaches them:

There are two white slits — eyes — visible in the darkness, that stands just behind the group of officers. His heart skips a beat for one second.

He notices Red Robin, who's a little in-front the white eyes, peering downwards.

Given that Red Robin's there, there's only one person who those eyes obviously belong to.

He notices his detectives gather a little behind the forensics team, who were taking samples around a massive hole for the geologists back at the lab. Whether the hole had been made from beneath the floor or above it, he had no clue.

And finally, he notices the stench emitting from said hole.

Gordon recoils, "What the hell is that stench?"


He peers as much as he can over the hole, without crossing the taped off barrier they made, "They tunneled out of here? Figures — like a pack of rats."

Batman's voice sounds from the shadows, causing multiple officers to stiffen in fear or surprise, and a snort to leave Red Robin at the display. "They broke into an old sewer main. Nigma must've known it was here."

"There's a man hole about a hundred yards down from here," Red Robin adds. "They most likely had a vehicle waiting."

"I'll gather any CCTV footage from around that area." Kasinsky says, before Gordon can even open his mouth. She sends him a triumphant grin at his slightly disgruntled expression.

"Take a look at this, Commissioner," Batman's voice wasn't a suggestion, as he shone his own flashlight onto more evidence of raised ground. "Fresh diggings."

When Gordon does look, the man is right — They did seem recent, spaced out around the room and decently sized. The holes were already borded off by forensic tape, meaning the Caped crusader made the team aware of their existance. But, if the other wide opening was their entrance and escape route, then...

Batman continues, "If that tunnel was their escape route, what were they looking for here?"

When he casts the flashlight into one of the holes, Gordon raises an eyebrow — they weren't that deeply dug, but they had burrowed enough to have clearly been expecting to come across something before they drilled into the sewers below. He frowns, they had to have been doing all this in the midst of the French student and Wayne searching around the museum.

The Dark Knight regards him significantly, and he returns the pensive look: If today was only a
"Okay, honey," The paramedic starts, her voice soothing. "Tell me when you can feel me touch your fingers." Mendeleiev translates for Marinette, currently seated on the floor near the rear doors, and she nods. The paramedic checks each finger one by one, starting with Marinette's thumb. The young girl has no problem feeling the ends of her fingers.

"Good, good. Can you move your hand around for me?" She knew that the issue lay in the girl's wrist, having A) checked her circulation against her uninjured wrist, B) noted the swelling and the skin discoloration around the area, and C) her wincing when she was moving her hand. But, protocol dictates that she must make sure. "Move your wrist around if you can, wiggle your fingers, anything."

Of course, when Marinette attempts to move her wrist slightly, she can't hide the pained grimace as her wrist erupts in pain. The woman hums, not hinting anything but glances up at Mendeleiev, her eyes reassuring to the worried teacher. "Your hand is going to take some time to heal, but lucky for you — we have some of the best doctors here in Gotham City. They'll take great care of you. But, in order to make their job easier for them, I'm going to need to split your wrist."

"And then what?" Mendeleiev frowns, one hand moving the slipping shock blanket back onto Marinette's shoulders, the other holding a trenchcoat that had been draped over her shoulders previously. Apparently, the coat belonged to that detective fellow. "We have to go to the hospital?"

"Mm-hmm," The other woman says, looking around for a padded support splint and adherent bandages, and then relaxes when the other paramedic within the vehicle assures her that they'd splint the girl's wrist. "Don't worry, we'll take you there in the ambulance."

"You need an ambulance to transport someone with only a wrist fracture?"

The woman hesitates, and remembers that Marinette wouldn't understand English, so she says, "Truthfully, the fracture isn't the worrying part for me. She's oddly calm at the moment. And, we'd like to monitor her vitals some more, especially her blood pressure. Earlier, it was very high — which is expected after the day's she's had. Stressful and panic-inducing situations can temporarily increase it. However," The paramedic glances Marinette's way for a moment. "There's now a significant drop in her blood pressure. Earlier, she said that she was feeling a bit dizzy — which is most likely because she hasn't eaten for a while, combined with the panic of the last few hours. We just want to make sure that it's not a hint of anything serious."

Mendeleiev frowns at the implication of something worse to worry about, but nods all the same. The paramedic returns her attention to Marinette, who was in the process of getting her wrist splinted. "Are you still feeling dizzy? Or bad in any other way?"

After a translation, Marinette frowns to herself, almost as if she's self-assessing. "I'm kind of feeling sick."

Mendeleiev pushes, "Like I'm going to throw up' sick?"

The girl hums instead of shaking her head for an answer, most likely to not agitate her growing nausea. "I still want some steak-frites, though."
"Later." When the girl pouts, her teacher chuckles, despite the situation, "I'll order some for you when we get back to the hotel. Let's get you checked out by a doctor first." She relates Marinette's state to the paramedic.

After everything, Marinette was discreetly led out of the museum through one of the side entrances. Due to the immediate swarming of officers, as well as Damian's instance that she get treated by one of the few Emergency medical services on site, the two were separated without another word. Mendeleiev had quickly raced over once she caught sight of her, and was only allowed to get through to the paramedics treating her with the insistence of "I'm her guardian."

Damian's taken away to give a brief statement to an officer not too far from her. His face wasn't obscured by the hat designed as part of his disguise, having been inconspicuously told by Dick to ditch it given the current media knowledge of his existence with Marinette. It would help with the official statement to sate the public's insistence of answers, and wouldn't make the media houses paint him in a negative light (as if he hadn't come to rescue her when there was a widespread, public ransom addressed to him) since, he was right in front of their eyes. Superboy goes along with Red Hood and Dick with another officer, staying to answer a few questions before he returns to Metropolis.

"And how did you get out?" Officer Blake questions, notepad in hand.

"We went through the fireplace in The Dining Room of the Fitzmaurice House." Damian recounts. "And we walked left until we ended up at the dead end of the corridor. I saw that there was a grate in the wall, so we entered the gallery through there."

"Why didn't you go through the door? And how did you know that that was a way out?"

"There may have been more of The Riddler's henchmen past the door, we had no idea. It was just to make sure that we were not caught trying to escape beforehand." Damian clicks his tongue, "I knew it was the way out since it was clear the room was under construction, yet the pathway to that room was still accessible to the public. Since they hadn't been storing any construction equipment in the next room, there needed to be another room close by with construction equipment in it, and another entrance to that room."

Detective Blake hums, "Smart of you." When Damian simply stares at him, unamused, the man clears his throat. "Walk me through the rest of your time in the museum — how did you and Miss Dupain-Cheng get to the riddles?"

"We solved them between us first, and then looked up the locations of the painting on the museum's website." He fingers for the riddles sheet in his pants pocket, and hands it over to the officer. "I also downloaded maps of the museum on my device so we wouldn't get lost. There was enough time to get to the rooms, so we believed it would be fine."

The officer eyes the paper printed with Nigma's riddles, and etched with Damian's handwriting. "The last riddle," he points at it, specifically at the multiple numbers underneath it. "These are what? Galleries?"

"We had six possible locations of that painting, since The Riddler hadn't specified which painting it was, only the general premise of it." Damian frowns, running a hand through his hair. "Many of those six locations were close to each other, so I believed that it wouldn't diminish our time so significantly."

"And how many keys were you successful in getting?"
"Two. We were on our way to the last one when the bomb starting beeping."

"Beeping?"

Damian exhales. He recounts how the bomb around Marinette's neck started emitting loud beeps and then, and once he checked, there were thirty minutes taken away from their overall time. He notes that once he realized that Marinette had only two minutes left on the timer, they ran to the floor that had the last two galleries until they were intercepted by Superboy. When prompted on what happened after, he says that the Superboy melted the collar off around the back of Marinette's neck.

"And that's all?" When the teenager nods, the officer pockets his notepad. "Alright, thank you very much for your statement, Mister Wayne. Your account was very helpful." The man's eyes drift behind the teenager, and he nods in greeting. "Grayson."

There's a hand on his shoulder, and Damian tilts his head to see Dick, most likely having just finished giving his own statement. "Blake. Just came to get this one." He shakes the teenager slightly, who scowls at the jostling. "What's going on with the rest of the afternoon?"

Detective Blake exhales heavily, eyeing the crowd of journalists more towards the front of the museum. The brothers glance over themselves, and their faces collectively go blank when they catch the tail-end of a camera flash.

"Given the media circus on this whole thing, GCPD's gotta do a press conference to curb the rumours — small updating one today, and a bigger one on Friday. Then, someone's gotta get the French kid's statement, and the entire squad's gonna have to figure out if today was an isolated incident, or part of multiple ones."

Dick grimaces, "That's a lot of paperwork to dig through." At the officer's similar look of despair, he hums, thinking. "Tell you what, lemme make it easier for you — I can get Miss Dupain-Cheng's testimony." He gestures to the ambulance that she's seated in. "Simple x-ray. I can get her statement there if she's up for it."

Blake raises an eyebrow, "You speak French?"

"Fluent."

"Why did I even ask, of course you are." At Dick's responding boyish grin, Blake snorts. "You're sure? Today was your off-day, wasn't it?"

"May have been," he shrugs. "But, as today's proven — crime waits for no man. Not to mention, I was somewhat caught in the crossfire. I'd like to help anywhere I can."

The other man nods, giving Dick a parting two-finger salute. "I'll let Commissioner Gordon know."

Dick gives a parting wave, and opens his mouth to signal for Damian to come along with him, but stops himself. The teenager's gaze is far away, clearly thinking about something else, and when Dick looks, he's focused on where the ambulance holding Marinette is. The vehicle's getting ready to carry her to the hospital, having closed the back doors with Marinette and her teacher inside. Dick watches it for a moment, before glancing down at him and softly asking, "You okay?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" But his body language is withdrawn, even as he's knocked out of whatever stupor he had been in.

Dick frowns, "Well," he draws out the word. "Jon had to leave as soon as he was done giving his
statement, but he said that he'll talk to you later — something about getting information out of you."

It was meant to be teasing, as he knew what Jon had truly meant. And he was expecting Damian to give his usual annoyed reaction specifically reserved for his friend. However, he doesn't roll his eyes, nor do his lips twitch in disgust. Nothing scathing leaves his mouth either. Instead, he stays silent.

Dick pauses. And assesses him.

He sees the tiny silver of contemplation in his eyes, as he considers the ambulance. And then, the glint in his eyes shift to some sort of finality, where he seems to have come to some sort of conclusion with his thoughts. And something about how resolute he looks rubs him the wrong way.

Damian's focus was clearly on Marinette but, as the older man observes his demeanour once more, the look in his eyes didn't hint to anything good. He's reminded of the earlier days back when Damian first came to live with them, when the kid wouldn't truly divulge anything with anyone, secretive and stubborn on whatever impulsive decisions he believed were the right course of action.

The thing is, that doesn't explain what that had to do with Marinette. He saw how the two were immediately separated once they arrived outside, so Damian would obviously want to talk with her, or at least ensure she's doing okay with her injury. His eyebrows furrow — he needs more information.

Dick clicks his tongue, "Want to come with me to get Marinette's statement?" He ruffles the teenager's hair, and pitches his voice to that teasing lilt that he knows Damian hates. "I'm sure she wants to see you, and I know you want to see her."

There's a moment, before Damian eventually answers. "No, you should go on your own. There's no reason for me to go, and I'm sure she won't want anymore excitement for the afternoon." Yet, his eyes are still on the ambulance when he speaks. "I'll go home with Father and the others."

Dick stills at his decision, and his mouth opens and closes a couple more times before he questions, "Are you sure? Don't you want to make sure that she's okay?"

"It's fine," is all he says, and he breaks away from his brother's hold. Damian doesn't refute his words, but he doesn't confirm them either. "I'll see you back at home."

He watches as the teenager walks away from him without a second glance, and he frowns.

Damian understandably, evidently, wants to see Marinette. Yet, he's purposefully not coming with him. Why? There's no reason for him to go? The hell? There was nothing exciting about simply going to make sure she was alright, what the fuck was he talking about?

There's a tiny, miniscule inkling of a thought that suddenly develops. And although his first thought is to discard it, he considers it for a moment:

For some reason, he's reminded of that trope — something that's commonplace place in the romantic-comedies that Kory tends to love, and one trope that they both incredibly hate — where two people avoid each other because of their own personal desire to give the other what they think they deserve, which, of course, leads to a long misunderstanding where both people think the other hates them. But...that has nothing to do with Damian — he's a smart kid; he'd logically want to avoid anything that can lead to a misunderstanding. Of course he would. He wouldn't do this.
And yet... Dick narrows his eyes at his brother, in the midst of speaking with Jason. Damian's in a situation where he has no idea what to think, in a situation he's never emotionally dealt with before, where the girl he may have something for got targeted because Nigma thought she was in a relationship with him. She could've very well died today had Jon not showed up when he did. And they've talked about it before, they all have very few civilian friends. Should any of their enemies find out about their civilian identities and those close to them....

Dick closes his eyes as he gathers some strength. After a moment, he says, knowing damn well that Damian and everyone else would be able to hear him through their earpieces, "One day, you people will learn to talk about your feelings without prompting from me and that is the day I will truly know peace." He ignores the sputtering that sounds in his ears in response, and walks off to discuss some last minute details with another officer before he heads to the hospital.
it is simply too much
thank god she's okay 1:21 PM - 17 April 2019
jay jay abrams

@thecityofjules

i actually haven't stopped crying thank god she's alive 1:21 PM - 17 April 2019

5.2k 14.2k
the #SunshineofGotham is okay 1:22 PM - 17 April 2019

moonchild
okay she's out of the museum and is going to the hospital for treatment for something else what the hell else happened in there??

haseul respecting juice
@seulflix
oh thank god i've been sick since this all went down. i'm glad marinette's okay 1:22 PM - 17 April
the manager normani needs
@angelblush
yep can see her being checked out by paramedics. she's alive 1:22 PM - 17 April 2019
boo boo the fool

@archangel
she looks so small under that shock blanket jesus 1:22 PM - 17 April 2019
seek therapy

@literallycalypso
So her guardian? teacher? asks her if she's feeling dizzy, and she says yes, but she's still hungry for some fries and steak. As serious as this is I'm laughing cause hat even?? 1:22 PM - 17 April 2019
seek therapy

@literallycalypso
Iconic things: Asking for food despite needing medical attention after having a bomb around my neck. 1:22 PM - 17 April 2019
awkward connoisseur

@notsarah

oooh yep, damian wayne was there. his outfit matches the outfit the boy in the videos was wearing.

i'm glad he was able to help her 1:22 PM - 17 April 2019
marinette dupain-cheng, after being held hostage by the riddler and having a bomb locked around her neck: mannn i could go for some FOOD 1:22 PM - 17 April 2019
12.2k 48k
carpet muncher

@tailiadeen
not people being shocked at marinette saying she wanna eat after being held hostage....she literally told the riddler that his outfit hurts her eyes and that he's an "overachieving, narcissistic piece of
Saying that she just wants to eat after a life or death situation...Marinette Dupain-Cheng truly is a Gen Z kid.
like i said before: an icon. inspirational 1:23 PM - 17 April 2019
2.5k
@gardenintro
not y'all being surprised at this child saying she wants to eat after being held hostage for around two hours

1:22 PM - 17 April 2019
@reginawilliams

oh thank god the rich kid came in time 1:23 PM - 17 April 2019
126k

Down with Shaun King!
@tweetsbyhanna
Damian Wayne's there, sans the hat he wore in the museum. 1:24 PM - 17 April 2019
and what do you know? damian fucking wayne 1:23 PM - 17 April 2019
265 800

christine
@poefinnrights

i wonder what hospital marinette's going to 1:25 PM - 17 April 2019
123  500
vivi supremacy

@vivipng
please don't try and track down what hospital marinette's going to. give her that at least 1:25 PM -

17 April 2019 □ 10.7k □ 88k
nana

@arabprincess
If I see anyone try and stalk what hospital she's going to....I will have to intervene 1:26 PM - 17
that hand flex from p&p 2005

@eleanorsarchive
DO NOT look for the hospital Marinette's being treated in or her hospital room what the fuck 1:26 PM - 17 April 2019
jay jay abrams

@thecityofjules

anybody who tries to stalk this girl after today and the past few days.....you're getting jumped that

is all 1:27 PM - 17 April 2019

282k 632k
Jay Jay Abrams

@thecityofjules

Yes I am a shooter for Marinette Dupain-Cheng. What about it? 1:30 PM - 17 April 2019
The trip to Gotham City General Hospital, or Gotham City Medical Center as it's also known as, hadn't been too long. However, the slight nausea Marinette had felt before they drove off crescendoed to the point where she actually did throw up in the back of the ambulance. They passed her an emesis bag and attempted to reduce any chance of motion sickness — encouraging her to not look out the window, or at anything swinging inside the ambulance.

When they got to urgent care, the waiting time before she got assistance hadn't been too long either. Her doctor, who looked to be a thirty-something year old man, had Marinette X-rayed straight away. It took around five minutes before the doctor could receive the image for review and explanation, but once he did, he drove straight into it.

Marinette's injury was a closed, distal radius fracture. He explains that specifically, it's a minor
Extra-articular Fracture — where the fracture was above the wrist joint, and didn't extend into the joint itself. Therefore, there wasn't any significant deformity or displacement of the radius bone, significant enough to warrant surgery anyway. Therefore, it would have to be treated through immobilization. She would have to wear a cast to stabilize the distal radius for six weeks, however, she'd have to consistently be x-rayed by a doctor when she goes back to France every three weeks. Afterwards, she'd get a removable, comfortable wrist splint and once the cast is removed, she'd have to go through physical therapy to reduce stiffness in her wrist. The doctor explains how Marinette would have to look after her cast for six weeks, and prescribes antibiotics should she get any pain.

Simple enough, right? Mendeleiev hadn't had any issues explaining everything to Marinette, and had even taken some notes for the girl to keep as a reminder. And, Marinette had understood everything fine. Oh no, the issue came in the form of the hospital bill.

"How," the teacher struggles to get out, her eyes stuck on the bill's total on the printed fee sheet. She had been brought outside by the doctor to discuss 'something important', which was this. "How exactly are we supposed to pay for all this?"

See, the acculmation of the ambulance ride — which had been six-hundred dollars; the X-ray — which was one-hundred and sixty dollars and the non-surgical treatment of Marinette's wrist that required a cast — which was two-thousand, five-hundred dollars, all added up to three-thousand, two-hundred and sixty dollars. Without insurance, of course.

Usually, French citizens registered with the French healthcare system would need to own a carte vitale and carry it with them to any health appointment, in order to access any sort of healthcare within the country. When it comes to accessing healthcare outside of France, citizens would need to have an European Health Insurance Card — which grants the owner access to healthcare services across all countries within the European Union, places within the European Economic Area, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Given that they were in the United States, there was no possible way French insurance would be able to cover it.

"Does Miss Dupain-Cheng have travel health insurance?" The doctor simply questions, voice polite yet grating in the moment and she thinks — did she? In order to come on this trip, they were all covered under the Visa Waiver Program, where they didn't need to apply for a Visitor Visa in order to enter the United States. Concerning health insurance, many of the students on the trip did, but not all of them did. It wasn't mandatory for visitors. Given where they were going, they had to make a note of which students had travel insurance. But, from her memory, Marinette didn't.

He continues, "If she doesn't, there are many finacial assistance programs that can help with any out-of-pocket costs. We have multiple programs on file, if you'd like me to bring it to you. There, you'd be able to discuss discounts or some sort of payment plan." That doesn't...that doesn't help. Regardless of a discount, she would still have no money to pay for it.

Mendeleiev needs a drink. Something strong and disgusting that would make her forget the events of today. But before she did so, she'd have to check with Caline first about Marinette's insurance. Then, based on her answer, she'll decide what drink she'll choose, as well as whether they'd be able to leave the hospital without getting arrested for not paying. They'd probably need to call her parents again as well —

"Excuse me," a voice interrupts her thoughts. "Is this a bad time?"

The two adults turn to see another man, his eyes glancing between them questioningly, and
Mendeleiev recognizes him. "Depends. What news have you come to add to my stress?"

Detective Richard Grayson snorts at her dry comment, but she hadn't been joking. "Actually, it doesn't concern you specifically." He shows his badge to the doctor, who relaxes once he realizes that he's an officer. He extends his hand to the doctor, "Detective Richard Grayson from the Gotham Police Department. I'm here to see if Marinette Dupain-Cheng is currently well enough to have her statement taken."

"Ah," the other man says. "I've already treated her concerning her injury — a broken wrist. From my view, she's fine to be questioned. However, I have no idea whether she's up for it."

When he glances at Mendeleiev, she exhales. "I'll allow it — but it all depends on her." Despite the sickness she had felt on the ride over, she seemed fine. Even asking for one of them to buy her food since the woman refused to roam Gotham with her in public after today. And that was it — she had been oddly calm about everything. She doesn't know if the girl's blocking it out until later, or has planned to never deal with it, a result of dealing with Hawkmoth for three years. The woman frowns at that last thought — she'll have to monitor her, and let her parents know of that possibility.

"Of course," Detective Grayson nods. "Once she's up for it, I can interview her today. If not, I can get it another time."

"Then by all means, you can question her within the hospital room." The doctor turns to leave, and says to Mendeleiev. "I'll bring a list of all the assistance programs for you in case."

The woman says nothing as he walks off, her eyes narrowed with the return of her earlier stress. Detective Grayson raises an eyebrow, "Assistance programs? As in, finacial assistance programes?"

She frowns as she eyes him, "Why does it matter?" It's none of his business, nor does he have any reason to care about this — that's not what he came here to do. She'd rather not let this stranger know that they have no other means to pay for Marinette's hospital bill.

The detective voice goes low and placating, "Aside from me getting Marinette's statement, I'm also here to ensure that everything goes well with paying the bill." He takes out his phone and extends a hand for the hospital bill, "Do you mind if I see the total?"

Mendeleiev narrows her eyes, because she does, thank you very much. What the hell does he mean by "ensuring everything goes well with paying"? To arrest them if they don't pay?

He senses her underlying wariness, and sends her a charming smile, "What if I told you your hospital bill could be taken care of?"

She stares at him, "I'd say I wasn't born yesterday."

Detective Grayson laughs, loud and amused at her response and she's absolutely confused. But, Mendeleiev gets her answer when he says, "You remember Bruce Wayne, right?" He fingers his phone screen as he continues, "I hadn't said it the first time we met but, I'm one of his sons. On the way here, he asked me to find out about your hospital bill so he could pay it for you."

Mendeleiev stares at nothing, eyes wide, "I — I'm going to need verification on that."

He waves his phone, the screen displaying a forwarded call in progress. "Already ahead of you."

Once the call connects, Dick brings the phone up to his ear. "Hey, B!" After a moment's pause, he
speaks, "Yes, yes, they're still in the hospital. I found Marinette's hospital room and her teacher. But, can you verify that you're actually...you know...you? To reassure her that I'm not scamming her." After another moment, he hands her the phone, almost succeeding in holding back the grin on his lips. "Here you go."

Mendeleiev blinks down at the device, and then brings it up to her ear. "Hello?"

The man's voice sounds the same as when she heard it from the student's conference, if only a bit deeper and laced with concern. "Madame Mendeleiev, was it? I've been keeping track with the news broadcasts. How is Marinette and the rest of your students? Is anyone else hurt?" The background noises indicated that he was in the middle of driving.

"Ah..no." She eventually settles on, "Marinette's the only one that's physically hurt."

"Right," a heavy exhale leaves him. "Although I'm sure it won't be enough, and it won't mean much, I'd like to apologize for all of this. I'm sorry that Marinette had to be put through a traumatic situation because of rumors of her possible connection to me, or my son. The same goes for you, Madame Bustier, and the rest of your students."

Mendeleiev feels similarly, and really, what else can she say but "Thank you." But, she realizes that it's not necessarily his fault, so she tacks on, "And I'd be wrong to blame you or your son. Neither of you made that defective neon glowstick come after Marinette, that's the fault of those media vultures."

There's a pause after her last comment, and all her years of teaching has made her adept at picking up the silent snickering on his side. She frowns, was there someone else with him listening as well? Or was that him? Nevertheless, Monsieur Wayne's response made her forget about it.

"Still, I am sorry that Miss Dupain-Cheng was injured as a result of it. And again, although it won't be enough, I'd like to help in any way I can. I'd be more than willing to pay for Miss Dupain-Cheng's hospital bill, and any other treatments she may need."

The woman passes a hand through her hair, "I — Thank you so much. You have no idea how grateful I am for this. Truly."

"It's not a problem at all," he reassures. "I know while you came to the city knowing of its dangers, it may still be very disorienting for you to deal with as tourists. Not to mention, France healthcare is quite different from America's. I'll sort everything out with the hospital. All I ask is that you update me on what the doctor says she needs. Also, can you relay my well wishes to Miss Dupain-Cheng?"

"Of course," Mendeleiev says. For once, she cannot find the words to say. "Thank you again, Mister Wayne."

"Of course. Before I go, just to confirm, what time would be good for you to discuss Friday's proceedings? I know we would've agreed at ten in the morning, but after today...would you prefer to talk in the afternoon?"

She thinks. The rest of this evening is going to be spent checking on their kids. Tonight, when their students are asleep, will probably be the only time where she, Caline and Monsieur Hapréle can truly unwind and deal with whatever emotions they're keeping locked away for the children's sake — they need to be the calm, collected teachers they are by next morning. They should be stable by Friday morning. "Morning's fine."
"No problem. I hope you have a better afternoon, Madame Mendeleiev."

"Thank you, same to you." She answers. "And...I hope your son's okay as well." She remembers the kid quite well, how he'd immediately tried to prevent the Riddler from immediately taking her and then ultimately went with them. "I know that he wasn't injured, but I can imagine that the whole time hadn't been easy for him."

"Thank you. I'll relay your message to him."

When the called ended on his end, she returns the phone to the detective, her brain droning on since — there was nothing to seriously worry about anymore. Immediate things, anyway. Detective Grayson seemed to sense her internal state of mind at the moment, since he gave her a small, calming smile.

"You're welcome to be present for the questioning if Marinette's okay with it."

"You were in a precarious situation, Miss Dupain-Cheng." Dick's blue eyes scan hers. "I'd understand if you need time to process everything. I can always come back another day."

Marinette shakes her head before he's even finished, "I'd prefer to get it over with, Monsieur Grayson." She absolutely wanted to leave the blinding, sterile white walls of the hospital and get back to her hotel room. And...she wanted to eat something. Madame Mendeleiev rubs her shoulders, comfortably, as if to prepare her for it.

He eyes her while he's preparing the victim statement document, "What did we say about formalities, kid?"

A wry grin forms on her lips as she realizes that he wasn't as serious as his voice was making him sound, "You slipped first."

He laughs, taking a device from one of his pockets. "Touché." He drags one of the two chairs in the room, the one with his trenchcoat folded over its backrest, and brings it closer to the other side of the radiology room table that Marinette sits on. It had been returned to him earlier with a 'thanks' from the teenager. Mendeleiev sits on the other. "Now, although I will be writing by hand, do you have an issue with being recorded?" He waves the device in his hand. "It's not mandatory, just an accompanying addition with the written statement."

"It's not an issue."

"Okay, thank you." He sets up the device right beside her on the table. "Now, obviously you may be a little bit nervous about recounting everything, even terrified. And, that's okay — it's nerve-wracking for everyone. All I ask is that you leave no detail out — anything you remember about Nigma, about your time inside the museum, tell me. You won't be holding me back, or taking up too much of my time, I promise. If you'd like me to pause so you can take a break, that's fine. Once again, just tell me."

She nods seriously, "I understand."

"Okay. I'll be starting the process now." When her expression of certainty hadn't wavered, he presses the button on the device to record. "Recording online. This is Detective Richard Grayson,
badge number nineteen-four-zero, Gotham City P.D. The time is currently two thirty-five PM, on April seventeenth, 2019. Can you please state your name, for the record?"

"Um. Marinette Dupain-Cheng."

"M-A-R-I-N-E-T-T-E?" He eyes her for confirmation, and she nods. "Okay. And can you please state your name for the record?" He glances to Mendeleiev. "While we would've talked before how you're in here for support, I'll still need it for documentation purposes."

"Denise Mendeleiev." At Marinette's look of surprise, she playfully scoffs. "What? What name were you expecting me to have?" She knew that none of the students knew her current first name; she also knew of the multiple name possibilities they came up with.

"....honestly, you look like a Amandine, or a Daphne. Maybe even a Marianne."

"All good names, but not my own." The woman smiles, mysteriously. "I chose Denise because it sounds nice. And yes — " She says, as she sees Marinette open her mouth once more. "It's not my birth name and none of you will ever know my birth name."

The girl pouts. Madame Mendeleiev, as nice as a teacher she is, was an enigma apart from the rest of their teachers. Granted, it wasn't the business of students to know in-depth information on their teacher, but she was interesting, and many students came up with multiple backstories to her, given the various, cryptic stories she'd tell of her past whenever it pertained to the lesson.

Dick laughs, looking downward at the sheet. "Reminds me of my dad — only a few people know in-depth personal information about him."

"Easier to narrow down who the culprit is if something happens," The ominous way her teacher says it makes Marinette frown.

"Something like what?"

Madame Mendeleiev stares at her for a moment, and the teenager shifts uneasily at how simply she says, "Wouldn't you like to know?"

Dick raises a slow eyebrow at the answer, "That's D-E-N-I-C-E?" The woman could simply be joking, saying it for her own amusement, but they'll have to do a background check on the woman, just in case.

"D-E-N-I-S-E."

"And M-E-N-D-E-L-E-I-E-V?" He checks. "Okay. Marinette, you are currently sixteen, correct?" At her nods, he makes a note. "What's your cell phone number?"

"It's with a France area code, so it's thirty-three, followed by sixty-five, thirty-two and fifty-seven."

"And your address? Not your home address back in France, where you are currently staying."

"The Kane Hotel." Mendeleiev nods in agreement.

"Okay. So," Dick leans back in his chair, an intentional tactic to give off the impression that this is just a simple conversation, and to decrease any nervousness in Marinette. "It's my understanding that you're here for a field trip? That's why you came to Gotham?"

She understands what he's doing almost immediately; he picks a neutral topic to start on, and aside
from laying a foundation for future questions, it subconsciously gets her to relax. Marinette's done it before on Akuma victims to understand what led to their akumatizations. "Yes. We came for the Wayne Enterprises' Student Conference."

"Did you have fun? Was there anything there that really interested you?"

Marinette smiles, "Oh yes, I did! There were some internships I was interested in. Monsieur Wayne's program has some internships with Tory Burch, Chloé and other fashion houses."

"Oh, you're interested in fashion?" He asks, as if he doesn't already know. At her noise of affirmation, he follows up with, "Any specific company you have your eye on?"

She shrugs, "Well...I haven't really decided yet." Truthfully, she doesn't know how long Hawkmoth will have a hold on Paris, and she can't leave for an internship abroad while he's yet to be defeated. That's part of the reason why she rejected the internship offer from Chloe's mother.

"I'm sure you'll find the right one. And what about your time in Gotham so far?"

She winces, "It's been....eventful."

"Really? How so?"

"Well, I've been mistaken for Monsieur Wayne's daughter."

"Bruce Wayne?" At her nod, he questions. "Well, are you?"

"Nope. I was born to Thomas Dupain and Sabine Cheng. My mother even threatened to bring out the video they took of my birth. I told her under no circumstances are you to bring that out because — " She shudders. "No one needs to see that."

Dick sends her a sympathetic glance, "Then, these past few days must've been invasive for you."

"It was. People somehow found my number, where I was staying....someone even snuck into the hotel to film me," She plays with the end of her skirt, while Mendeleiev rubs her shoulder. "Though, it wasn't as eventful as people thinking I'm dating his son."

"Which son? He has around four." Really five, if you want to get technical. But, he rather not name Duke lest someone attempts to come after him for ransom reasons.

"That, she did not know. How many kids does he have? His lips tilt at her surprise, and he raises an eyebrow, waiting. "Uh, Damian Wayne."

"Are you? Dating him, I mean."

Marinette shakes her head, "No, no. I didn't even know the names of his kids until all of....this. I hadn't met him before yesterday and saw him again today which....um." She glances at him, unsure. When he raises an eyebrow, she asks, "Is he okay? We separated because I needed to get checked out, and your police officers needed his statement, so I didn't get a chance to talk with him."

Dick recalls his idiot brother, and wants to reassure her that he was also worried about her, but doesn't want to say so while they're being recorded — he doesn't think that the department will edit it out. "He's fine. But, let's get into what happened today. You and your class went to the Gotham Museum of Art, correct?"
"Yes. We were supposed to go to the zoo today but um..." She eyes Mendeleiev, who nods in allowance. "The teachers changed it to the museum."

"The museum's very great to go to for tourists and natives alike," Dick smiles. "It's the largest museum in the state, and it's a great place for inspiration, or when you just want to spend time with yourself."

"It was! I saw a lot of great clothing pieces that I took note of." She remembers that lovely, elegant burgundy dress. "And then I met Damian after. I wasn't expecting that."

"Damian Wayne? Why was he at the museum?"

Marinette frowns; is she supposed to name Monsieur Richard in this detail when he was the one interviewing her? "His brother said something about a family day trip."

"Was it weird for you? Considering that the two of you were said to be dating?"

"It....was. At first. I apologized for bumping into him yesterday, and said that I didn't that the press would make that connection. He was nice about it," Marinette's lips are curled into a smile as she recounts it, and Dick softens at the sight. "He said he was more worried about me since he said, in his own words "no one from Gotham, or anywhere else, would willingly connect themselves to him or his father. They'd have to be incredibly dense." And he was right, because a while after that, The Riddler burst into the museum."

"Do you recall what time it was?"

"No, I....I can't remember what time it was. One second, everything was normal; the next second," Marinette forces out, hearing the echoes of the screams of terror from the gallery occupants. "— gunshots went off."

"Take your time. What happened after that? Did you know it was The Riddler immediately?"

Marinette explains that yes, she had instantly recognized him and how while she couldn't understand what he was saying, the man immediately went for her, and ended up taking Damian along with her without knowing his identity. She pushes past the memory of guns pointed at her teacher and her classmates, and the gun pressed against her back as she recounts the path to where he eventually filmed the ransom video, and when he placed the bomb around her neck.

"So, you've finished saying your message," Dick holds in his praise on her sticking it to the Riddler, Jason already did it on their way out of the museum. "What happened after?"

"Damian had an idea to get him to reveal the riddles, without letting the Riddler know who he was. He wanted me to follow his lead, and play an absolutely distressed hostage so he'd be the narcissist he is and divulge them to us to feed his self-satisfaction and superiority complex."

"Did it work?"

Marinette winces, "Not...really. Well, I didn't actually give it time to see whether or not it would've worked, but it didn't seem like it was. So, I provoked him."

She feels more than sees Mendeleiev tense beside her, and when she glances to the woman, her eyes are unseeing. Dick notices it as well, and can see that she's visibly come to a conclusion, and he knows what it is: For all intents and purposes, the only injury Marinette should've gotten, thank goodness she didn't, was her head exploding — not, a broken wrist. And, considering that two specific people were with her the longest, and one of them was another 'hostage' who wouldn't
have broken it, that only left....

His eyes track her, waiting for any hint of an explosive outburst, "What do you mean by "provoked"?"

"I called him an idiot and a coward and I challenged him to give me the chance to save myself since Damian couldn't reveal his identity — there was no telling what he'd do with that. And...I kind of forced Damian to translate for me." And even though she remembers just how the Riddler shoved her sorry attempt at being brave right back in her face, her voice is harsh when she says, "So, I provoked him and he broke my wrist. Damian was upset that I did, because we hadn't agreed on it and I got hurt, but it worked. He told us what we needed to do to unlock the bomb."

Mendeleiev's hand clenches the arm of the chair she sits in. She doesn't look like she'll say what she wants to, but, he still watches her. "Alright. Can you walk me through the rest of your time in the museum? We do have you and Damian walking around on camera, but I'd like to hear it from you."

Marinette freezes, "We were being filmed?"

He nods, "It was only in the rooms where the keys for the bomb were. Of course, I'm not counting the multiple of security cameras around the museum. But yes, he was filming the two of you. And, it was posted online."

She stares at her knees. While there were the initial thoughts of If that bomb exploded, it would've been seen on those cameras, people would've seen me die on camera and Was my request to Damian filmed as well?, the one that her brain truly settled on was: Thank goodness I didn't bring Tikki out, or transform into Ladybug.

Dick notices her silence, and softly asks, "Would you like to take a break?" He attributes it to the fact that, once again, she was being filmed without her knowledge and consent for everyone online to witness, and there was a high possibility that her violent death would've been broadcasted.

Madame Mendeleiev's hand touches hers in a show of comfort, and the teenager shakes her head. "No. What was your question? I'm sorry, I forget it."

"Can you walk me through the rest of your time in the museum?"

So, she explains just how she and Damian escaped the room through the fireplace passage-way and then attempted to figure out the riddles, and their locations between themselves. Even though they weren't sure about the precise location of the last key, they had possibilities. The room numbers are etched in her mind, so she rattles them off for him to note so the police can investigate the rooms. And she explains how everything up until they had two more rooms to search went great, because the bomb started beeping.

"What do you mean beeping?"

"It was loud, almost made my eyes bleed." She grimaces at the memory; the beeping was clear in her head. "For a moment, we were just frozen and looking at each other because we realized that it shouldn't have been making any sort of noise because we still had like...thirty-two minutes. And then Damian went to look at it and he just..." She remembers the panic etched in his features, and she clenches her fists. "He just grabbed me and we started running."

Dick's eyes are trained on the movement of her hands. "Why did you start running?"

She starts to feel sick again, as the dread she had felt in that moment returns swiftly, "We — lost
thirty minutes off of the bomb.” Her body starts trembling, just like as it did in the elevator, and she makes eye-contact with Monsieur Richard.

His gaze is understanding and she knows what he’s about to suggest, "Why don't we — "

"No." She says, and winces at just how forceful it is. The hand Mendeleiev moved over hers goes to join them together, and tightens, and she fights to keep the newly-produced tears at bay. "I'm sorry. I — "

Dick shakes his head before she can continue apologizing, "It's alright, Marinette. I'd be more concerned if your reaction wasn't like this." Truthfully, he's much more concerned at how she wants to push down her emotions instead of feeling them. "Take your time. I promise I won't be upset about it. You've been very brave today, even now, after experiencing what you did."

Marinette shakes her head, because if she must break down, she prefers to do so within her hotel room. "I'd like to continue, thank you."

"That's fine. Take your time."

She sends a grateful smile towards him, "Um. We lost thirty minutes off the bomb, so we starting running. We got to the elevator, and I...I just kept thinking about how we weren't going to make it."

He stills. "What do you mean?"

"We had two more rooms to actually search, and the time it would take to even get through the first one would be a full two minutes."Marinette exhales, "Damian tried to reassure me but I knew. I knew that we wouldn't make it unless some superhuman intervention appeared.” And while she had intended for that intervention to be her..."And it did, in the form of Superboy."

Dick continues making notes, even as his mind tries not to focus on how hopeless Marinette must've felt in that moment. He knew that if they kept running, he and Jason would've gotten to her in time. Damian also knew that. But, she hadn't. She genuinely must've thought that she was going to die. He exhales heavily, sending an apology to her in his head, even if it hadn't been something they intended. "How did Superboy get there?"

"He burst through the window next to us."

"Can you set it up for me? I just want to be sure: This is when you came out of the elevator? Had you left the elevator a while ago and are in the middle of running?"

"We had just come out of the elevator. The window was right outside the elevator," She gestures with her hand. "Like — here's the elevator," and then she realizes that her other hand can't be used unless she wants to feel pain. "Madame Mendeleiev, can you..." The woman extends her free hand to help Marinette with her demonstration. "To the right of me.....thank you. There's where the window was."

"So, the window was to the right of you two, and he came through it?" At her nod, he notes it. "So, Superboy appears — what happened after that?"

"He used his...heat beam," She frowns. "Or is it heat vision?"

"Heat vision."

"He used his heat vision from his eyes to melt the bomb off. He must've fried the wires inside the panel or something because it didn't explode after it fell off. And Red Hood and um...."
a hand to gesture to him. "Showed up. And they led us out of the museum after that."

Dick eyes her, "And that's everything?" When she nods, he clicks his pen to finish. "Okay, thank you for being brave enough to share this with me, Marinette. Let me say that this shouldn't have happened to you, and I'm sincerely sorry that it did. You should've been able to enjoy your field trip without the threat of your safety."

"Thank you," Marinette gives him a smile. Even if it didn't do much, as it already happened, she appreciates it nonetheless.

He passes the sheets he had been writing on towards her, "I'd like for you to read this over for me. If it lines up with what you remember, then I'd like for you to sign here — " He flips to the last page, and gestures to the bottom of the last paragraph. " — to show that everything you've said here is a correct account. If some parts do not, please tell me."

While Dick switches the recording device off, the teenager reads over the written statement. After several minutes of taking in the words, she reaches for the pen to add her signature.

"Thank you," he says when she hands it back over to him. And he stands, extending a hand towards Marinette. "And thank you for allowing yourself to speak with me."

"No problem," Marinette's grip is strong in his. "And...can you tell Damian that I said thank you?"

Dick smiles, but it's arched knowingly, "I will, I promise. But, he'll be at the meeting Friday to discuss the lawsuits. I think that any note of thanks would mean more coming from you than it would me."

Oh. She hadn't realized he would, but it makes sense as Monsieur Richard's said it. The original lawsuit would've originally concerned her, Monsieur Wayne and the paternity allegations. Now, she supposes today's situation must've added to it. Or, be a whole new lawsuit entirely — *mon dieu*, how big was this lawsuit going to be? And then, she considers his words — *why* would it mean more coming from her? "Oh."

He does the same to Mendeleiev, and leaves them with a polite farewell, an encouragement to feel better and a reminder to call Monsieur Wayne if there was anything else concerning. As soon as he steps out, her teacher drops herself back into the chair she had been sitting in prior, exhaling heavily. Marinette glances over her in concern, "Are you alright, Madame?"

There's a moment where she stays silent, before eyeing Marinette seriously, *earnestly*. The teenager straightens at her solemn expression that stays for another moment, focusing on her injured hand, only relaxing when the woman weakly questions, "You still hungry?"

She's never seen the woman so weary, and in an attempt to lighten the mood, she grins. "Very."

"You sure steak-frites will be enough for you? We still have to wait on the doctor to return."

Marinette frowns. Truthfully, no. However, she doesn't want to make them spend more money than they need to.

Mendeleiev sees visibly sees the thought-process on her face and quickly says, "None of that. I was asking you, meaning we're willing to buy it." She'd buy the kid anything she wants, after today. And, in an attempt to eliminate the girl's consideration, she adds, "We'll buy pizza and other things for the rest of the class, as well. So, if you want more food, it's fine."

"Then, can I get pizza and steak-frites?"
GOTHAM — After an almost agonizing two hours, people in Gotham Cty, across Metropolis, throughout the country and even within Marinette's home city of Paris, France breathed a collective sigh of relief when The Gotham City Police Department announced that sixteen-year-old Marinette Dupain-Cheng has been rescued and is currently admitted in an undisclosed hospital for a minor injury. The department scheduled a press conference at 3:30pm this afternoon to update the public.

Marinette Dupain-Cheng, who would have been on a field trip with the rest of her French classmates, was among the hostages trapped within the walls of the Gotham Museum of Art. The teenager was the prime target of The Riddler, who trapped her within a collar bomb and broadcasted her capture to the Gotham public. In a concise press conference led by GCPD Police Commissioner James Gordon, he describes "pure relief" at retrieving the girl alive and gives a special thanks to Gotham's vigilantes and Superboy for providing significant aid to the situation.

Watch the live video here:

[video: the thumbnail of the livestream is Police Commissioner James Gordon, captured in the midst of speaking to a crowd of journalists and reporters. The press conference specialized microphones seen in the thumbnail are from The Daily Planet, The Gotham Gazette, The Central City Citizen, News 12 (New Jersey), CNN, WCBS-TV, WNYW (FOX 5) and PIX 11 news.]

Transcript of Live Updates from the Press Conference:

- The lockdown of the museum occurred at 11:00 am and had spanned over three rooms in total. Dupain-Cheng had been with her classmates and teachers when the shots ran out.
- According to multiple witness testimonies from those in the same room as Dupain-Cheng, The Riddler immediately walked over to where she was and had said that he was there for "someone specific" who "needed a warm welcome" to Gotham City. Based on this, and other comments the criminal made, The Gotham City Police Department is certain that he had decided on targeting Dupain-Cheng due to the media attention she had been getting for the past few days, but cannot conclusively say whether he knew her class would have been at the museum today.
- Additionally, the department are still investigating on how long before the lockdown had The Riddler been within the museum.
- Witness testimonies also note that a teenage boy had initially intercepted The Riddler from immediately taking her away, commenting that she would not have understood whatever he said to her, given that her native language is French. As a result, The Riddler brought the boy along with Dupain-Cheng and led them away from the rest of the hostages by gunpoint. Gordon discloses that the teenage boy was actually Damian Wayne, who had been in the same gallery as Dupain-Cheng and was led away to act as a translator.
Gordon reinforces that the two teenagers hadn't initially known of the other's existance at the museum. Dupain-Cheng was on a last-minute field-trip change to the museum, while Wayne had been with his brother for a "family bonding-outing" in disguise due to the invasive reporting on his life the past few days. According to Wayne, he stepped in because he knew that she would not have been able to understand the Riddler on her own, and he knew that the criminal's appearance was due to the rumours connecting him and Dupain-Cheng.

After leading the teenagers away, The Riddler trapped her within a collar bomb and broadcasted a ransom message for Damian Wayne to come to the museum, and free Dupain-Cheng. The bomb was activated around 11:35 pm.

According to Gordon, Wayne revealed his identity to Dupain-Cheng and the two conspired to keep his identity a secret as they were concerned of what The Riddler might do as a result. (The teenagers believed that The Riddler may either increase the difficulty of whatever he was going to have Wayne do to free Dupain-Cheng, or half the already decreasing time on the bomb as a punishment for not revealing his identity sooner.)

The teenagers came up with an attempt to get The Riddler to reveal his scheme on how the bomb was to be unlocked; Dupain-Cheng was meant to act as a petrified hostage, which they hoped would've have appeased his "sick, twisted, narcissistic delight at seeing how his scheme affected her" (according to Wayne).

When that seemed to not be working, Dupain-Cheng took charge of the situation to intentionally agitate The Riddler to see if he would then reveal it. The second attempt had not been agreed on by Wayne, and while he tried to dissuade her from doing it in the moment, she attempted to insult him with her very limited English. Gordon notes the bravery of Dupain-Cheng, saying that her quick-thinking ended up working for them and "even with the brilliance of Damian Wayne, multiple vigilantes and officers present on that day, she is one of the noteable heroes in this case — no question about it. She ultimately jump-started the quest to save herself." Gordon also notes that she kept reiterating that "Damian Wayne would not be coming” for her and that she found it unfair that she would have to die because she'd be waiting for someone who would not be coming. Therefore, he should allow her to safe herself.

The Riddler's initial scheme was to send Wayne on a scavenger hunt for three keys to unlock the bomb. The location of the keys were under specific paintings, that needed to be deciphered based on three riddles given by The Riddler and before the time runs out. Given Dupain-Cheng's insistance and "other factors to be determined", he allowed the teenage girl to save herself like she wanted. As punishment for Dupain-Cheng insulting him and his "lack of a challenge", The Riddler fractured her wrist and ordered for the two teenagers to be held for thirty minutes before they could be able to look for the keys. The Gotham City Police Department believe that The Riddler still expected Wayne to show up to the museum, and eventually join Dupain-Cheng.

Wayne and Dupain-Cheng escaped before they were scheduled to be released, through the the fireplace in The Dining Room of the Fitzmaurice House. According to Wayne, he realized that due to the public notice that the gallery was still under construction, yet had no construction equipment, he theorized that workers must've come to the exhibit via another entry-way. He ended up being correct — the museum held passageways within the walls that ran throughout the museum. The henchmen that had been ordered to watch the teenagers were eventually found murdered, most likely done by The Riddler due to not doing their jobs.

After escaping The Dining Room of the Fitzmaurice House, Wayne and Dupain-Cheng figured out the names and composition of the paintings between themselves, and found the locations by using the museum's free WIFI to access the museum's website to search the paintings. Gordon said that upon looking at the riddles that they needed to decipher, he and his department are floored at their intelligence.

Gordon references the video clips that made their way to the internet. He says that the videos weren't from the museum's security cameras, but from The Riddler's own devices. The department believes that The Riddler set up the devices sometime between "before he set off the lockdown" and before the teenagers came to the first gallery. Gordon additionally notes that they believe that The Riddler filmed Wayne and Dupain-Cheng to "keep the public invested into this horrific situation as if it were a soap opera", as these devices were only in the galleries where the keys were in.

Wayne and Dupain-Cheng were successful in getting two keys, however thirty-twominautes before the bomb was meant to explode, the bomb sounded off and lost thirty minutes. This happened at 1:03 pm. According to Detective Charlie Fields, The Riddler was the one who decreased the time.

Before the bomb could detonate, Superboy entered the museum and removed it from Dupain-Cheng. Gordon notes that the superhero additionally fried the circuits of the bomb so it wouldn't activate after it came off. When word reached to Detective Charlie Fields that the bomb hadn't exploded and killed Dupain-Cheng, he said that his "body
started to shake”. When authorities relayed that Dupain-Cheng was alive to one of her guardians that stood outside waiting, the woman was overcome with relief and emotion.

- Dupain-Cheng was reunited with her guardian and taken to an undisclosed, local hospital for her broken wrist. Gordon urges the public to not post anything on social media concerning her current whereabouts if anyone sees her.
- Authorities are currently searching for The Riddler, and his associates. They note that they all escaped through the museum’s basement, and left through a getaway car 100 yards from the museum.
- Gordon notes that authorities will provide more updates on the case at 4:00 p.m. Friday.

Tim whistles as he makes his way towards the Batcave. He’d been dropped off earlier at Wayne Enterprises to fashion a statement concerning the reason why Damian was at the museum in the first place, and done some extra work before he’d finally come home — taking a good few hours. Barbara had messaged him while he was at the office, saying that she’d finished the job he asked her to do — accessing any information on Paris, France from 2016-2019, and noted her comments about what the hell are the Parisian government trying to hide from the rest of the world i’m this close from throwing my computers out, holy shit what the actual fuck and you and B have to see this, though i’m warning you, it’s a lot. with surprise.

His entire plan was to read through everything Barbara had sent to them, and then bring it to everyone else’s attention. It would just be him, and his coffee in the dark.

He hadn’t accounted for Damian to be in the seat he was going to sit in, the Batcomputer monitors up and running.

"Jesus Fu —" The startle Tim has is violent enough to spill a good deal of the coffee in his cup, the hot liquid splashing on the floor near his feet. He pays no mind to it, a hand over his beating chest. "Damnit, Damian — you’ve had seven years to grow out of the sneaking up on people thing. Why haven’t you?"

"You’ve had seven years to grow back the brain cells that have gone defunct over the years for every single time you’ve spared a thought, Drake," he retorts, dimissively typing away at the keyboard. "Why haven’t you?"

That last part was all too familiar, mocking in its inotation, and Tim growls at the back of his throat. "Look you little — " He stops as soon as he takes in what’s displayed on the Batcomputer. "What are you doing?"

Damian's eyes flit to him for a second, "Do you not have eyes?"

The screens were flooded with multiple open tabs, all of them seeming to be news articles. When he skims the center screen, he internally reads some of what he sees. The Debut of Paris’ Newest Superheroes: Ladybug and Chat Noir. Ladybug and Chat Noir: Who Are the People Behind the Masks? Stoneheart: The Start of Hawkmoth’s Villianous Reign. Nightime Akuma Sandboy Affects Thousands. How do Akumatizations Work? Akumatized Child causes Havoc among Parisians. Heroes Assure Citizens: "We will not stop until Hawkmoth is defeated."

Tim stares in horrified surprise. "I was wondering what the hell would cause Paris to have an internationally issued blockade. Babs even said that she had to go through hell to access any information within the last three years — now I know why she warned me."
Damian exhales, "You've been saying that Paris has a supervillian, but you never said anything about them having their own superheroes."

"I had no idea they even had any," Tim hastily places his cup down on the long computer table, touching one of the computer screens so he can bring one of the articles to the forefront to read. "Up until now, I was under the assumption that they were being plagued by a supervillian without any help whatsoever. How the hell did the Justice League not know about any of this?"

The teenager's glower says that he's wondering the same. "Apparently, three years ago, some omniscient presence called Le Papillion appeared out of nowhere and began terrrozing the citizens of Paris, demanding for some artifacts called The Miraculouses."

Tim pauses from his reading, "Le Papillion and Hawkmoth are the same person?"

"Yes — Le Papillion's his original name but Paris gave him the other one. And, he's never physically appeared like most of Gotham's villains do. There was this," Damian waves his hand in an attempt to find his words. "Guise he spoke through made up of...butterflies. That face is the only thing Parisians have to go off of concerning his identity. He must be a person, not a being."

There was a pause, where silence drones on within the Batcave. Tim stares at Damian as if he'd grown multiple heads in the past few seconds, and they were wriggling around him like Medusa's own hair of living snakes. After his mouth opens multiple times, and words fail him each time, he eventually settles on, "I'm going to need you to explain."

Damian runs a hand through his hair, "Le Papillion appears suddenly to demand for these artifacts called The Miraculouses." He eyes his brother to see if he at least understand that part, and continues when he gets an affirmative nod. "According to the reports I've read, the miraculouses are this...enhanced jewelry. The ones he's looking for are the Ladybug Miraculous and the Black Cat Miraculous. In order to try and obtain them, or to draw out the owners of them, he sends out these enhanced butterflies that have the ability to turn people into unique supervillains that act as his own minions."

"And there's where you've lost me. Give me a sec'," Tim takes a swig of his coffee. Yet, by the way he rubs his left temple, it doesn't seem as if it helped. "So let me see if I have the plotline of this magical-terror inducing kids show — Butterfly Man wants this magical jewelry. So, to get them, he sends out magical...butterflies that have the power to posses people and turn them evil?"

Damian nods, as if that isn't the most ridiculous thing he's ever said. "According to this report — " He clicks to bring it up. " — They're called Akumas."

"They're called Akumas," He chuckles to himself, edging just on the brink of hysteria. He blinks, "Wait, like the Japanese folklore creature?"

"I wondered the same, and I suppose so — just as those fire spirits bring afflictions onto humans, these Akumas do the same."

Tim frowns, "What? How?"

"Japanese Akuma bring suffering, pain, distress or agony onto a human. These corrupted magical moth creatures target people with intense negative emotions — anger, disgust or hatred. Once they come into contact with a person experiencing that negative emotion, it possess them and physically changes their appearance — in a process called akumatization. It forces the victim to follow Papillion's every order, which is always to get the Ladybug and the Black Cat Miraculouses. The possessed victim can be strong enough to cause excessive damage to the city of Paris — damage
equivalent to the astronomical property damage that Superman can cause.

The elder exhales for a moment. He remembers what Marinette said to Damian back in the museum, *It's telling me to cry especially since this is the first time in years that I can cry without fear of being akumatized.* Meaning: that the citizens of Paris live in constant fear of being possessed for a powerful supervillain's agenda, regardless of their age. No wonder Marinette's response to her hostage situation was her attempting to control her fear. No wonder why she contemplates the probability of her death. Damian's comment about everyone being entitled to their emotions must've rang false to her — because they weren't. Good fucking God, what the fuck does that do to a person?

Her teacher words ring in his ears, "You can argue what he puts us through is a form of torture...."

He assesses Damian — despite the upfront, simple way he's explaining all of this nonsense, he looks agitated. *Furious* that he hadn't found out about this sooner. There's something else in his eyes though, something he can't discern just yet, and Tim finally realizes that in order for him to be *this* caught up, he must've come to the Batcomputer immediately as he got home. He *looks* as if he's had his eyes glued to the computer screens for hours. He must've come to do his own research, when he saw all the files Barbra sent over and read over them for himself.

Tim eyes the screens once more, "So, where do the superheroes come in?"

In response, Damian brings up a video of the two superheroes being interviewed by a Parisian reporter. And at first, he's stumped. Because he can't *get* a good read on these people.

Everyone in their family were great at estimating ages, they *needed* to be. They could estimate someone's age, weight, height — all the very specific details that they can obtain of someone unknown. So, the very, *very* alien sensation of just...not being able to gather these people's ages makes him unsettled. But then, he pays close attention to what they're saying. And how they speak. And the wide-eyed way they take in the interviewer's questions. And all of a sudden, the glamour around their faces shift to show much younger faces.

Tim clenches the edge of the computer table because — they're *kids*. At first glance, they don't *seem* like it. But, the longer he watches the tentative way they both speak with reporters, it clues him that they're *incredibly* young. He eyes the video's published date: 2016.

"They're the ones who own the miraculouses he wants — Ladybug and Chat Noir. They appeared around the same time he did. There's a yin-yang dynamic with them: Chat Noir has the power of destruction while Ladybug has the power of...creation? Solving? She has the ability to conjure things to fix a situation. She also has some sort of sorcery that has the ability to reverse any damages done by both the akumas and the heroes."

Tim's eyes are wide, "How old are they?" He winces at the visibly harsh landing the two earn after being flung by one of the akumatized victims. "Are they even *equiped* for something like this? I'm barely handling hearing it."

At this, Damian looks even more infuriated. "They're untrained, unqualified *children*. They clearly have no sort of inbuilt training for this."

The elder's already using the touchpad of one of the computers, eyeing the numerous pictures captured of the duo. *If that video was taken in 2016, and they look *that* young....* He comes across a very recent picture of the two, taken around last week — they *definitely* look older than they did then. Ladybug has longer blue-ish hair, and Chat Noir's much more taller, his hair's longer. They both look like young adults now, possibly around Damian's age, and resemble the heroes they're
used to seeing — weary-eyed, seasoned, a veteran. If this is three years later.....then they would've been around twelve or thirteen years old when this first started.

Instead of saying that last thought, because vocalizing it would be some sort of confirmation, what leaves his mouth is "You were literally a fetus when you started fighting."

"I was equipped for it, Timothy." Damian nails him with a fierce look. "I was trained to be an efficient assassin from birth and taught one thousand ways to execute a man. My childhood was a special case that not everyone can handle. These two — for the first time they dealt with Papillion, they didn't even successfully handle the threat. They didn't eliminate it, the akuma multiplied and affected multiple people. We have father, and he trains us before taking us out on patrols. They don't seem to have done any of that I haven't seen anything about some older mentor-figure who provides them guidance. Look — "

The teenager brings up another video of the two during a battle, captured by a brave civilian. "Ladybug seems to be the leader, and the default strategist, while Chat Noir's usually the diversion who follows her lead. But, if they have no guidance, that means that she's coming up with this on her own. The citizens of Paris depend on children who have no idea what on earth they're doing, who would also have to keep their emotions in check so they don't become possessed."

Tim....hadn't taken that into account. The amount of stress those kids must be shouldering.....everyone in this family jokes about their depleting mental health but, good god, what about them? He has no idea why Butterfly Man wants their magical jewelry, but he'll bet one hundred bucks that it's not for anything good. They can't afford to let their emotional walls down lest they be attacked by him. If they're the only two who can fight this guy, who he's not even sure is a person....jesus christ. How the hell did they even get this type of power anyway?

"They're constantly at it," He flicks through the articles on different Akumas. "Some of these Akumas attack at all hours of the night into the early morning. "When the fuck do these kids get any sleep?"

"No wonder Marinette's formed a habit of supressing her emotions," Damian mutters, but Tim thinks that he hadn't realized that he had even spoken. "No wonder Marinette's regularly thought about her death. Sure, these heroes' inadequancy is currently twarting Papillion's every attack, but no one knows what this person's capable of. What happens when he brings out something that these heroes can't fix? What if this force escalates to murder? What if — "

Damian cuts himself off, clenching the arm of his computer chair. Tim observes him for a second, frowning.

He had refused Dick's invitation to come with him to the hospital. And yet, it was obvious that she was fueling his thought process and actions. Hearing her comments had concerned him, therefore they would've obviously concerned Damian. He inwardly groans — there was not enough coffee in his blood to emotionally dissect the kid. An emotional Damian had a tendency to be violent in his outburts, and cutting in his words, even if he'd improved over the years. This was Dick's forte, and the fucker was at the hospital getting Miss Dupain-Cheng's statement.

He takes a swig from his coffee, and gags at the lukewarm liquid. A direct representation of how he felt about attempting to comfort Damain.

"Why didn't you go with Dick to the hospital? I thought for sure you would've wanted to make sure she was okay."  

Damian's face quickly goes blank at that, but continues to tap at the keyboard as if he wasn't
bothered. "There was no reason for me to. Her wrist was the only thing injured, she'll recover in about six to eight weeks. I'm not so concerned."

"And yet here you are," Tim retorts easily. "Conducting an investigation into the social climate of Paris, France because you're concerned that it's compromising her mental health."

"The only thing I'm concerned about," Damian spits, and the elder can sense the growing agitation within him. "Is how the Justice League has lapsed so badly that this three year long crisis in Paris went unnoticed."

"Mmm-hmm," He hums, skimming more of the articles. And then, his eyes catch something that had nothing to do with the situation in Paris — two comprehensive, thorough background checks that Barbara wouldn't have done for him since he hadn't asked her to. "That's why you're taking this situation like it's an attack against you."

Damian growls, and opens his mouth to say something insulting, but falters as he catches what Tim's found. It's the background check he did earlier on Lila Rossi, and her devious green eyes stare back at him from her government indentification picture. His brother waits, a simple eyebrow raised.

The teenager scoffs, "I know that you haven't lost that many brain cells to remember that we do this sort of amount of research into someone who uses our name for nefarious reasons all the time."

"And yet, I remember very well that researching her was delegated to me. Why are you doing it?" He skims the document for a bit, and his eyes widen at some of the information connected to her name — Disorderly Conduct within Classroom. Complaints of Bullying and Targeting from Classmates. Investigation into Billion Dollar Embezzlement Scheme, Italian Diplomat brought into Questioning. Italian Diplomat to Dominica Charged with Embezzlement and Other Corruption Charges, Family disowns him.

Damian eyes him, "Well, perhaps you should have been quicker."

_Inhale. Exhale._ Tim closes his eyes to gather some sort of strength. He'll admit, it was cute seeing the usually cold Damian acting this protective, but he'd be lying if he said he didn't want to throw a stapler at him.

The raven-haired boy continues. "That pathological liar is an attack against me — using my name for her own devices. Not to mention, worming her way through a school's negligent administration, having such a hold on her classmates, turning them against each other — she must have a pattern of this sort of behaviour. And," he gestures with a hand. "I had it confirmed for me."

"And the background check into Marinette's school?" He brings up said information.

"You heard her," he argues. "That cesspool deserves a thorough investigation. There's numerous complaints concerning a Chloé Bourgeois, who we've heard is the mayor's daughter. All of them were never seriously addressed, considering she's still enrolled within Collège Françoise Dupont. There's a note of Expulsion on Marinette's record — that principal didn't even have the brains to fully remove it. If that stays on her record, it can affect her chances for employement. That man needs to be terminated from his position for his negligence."

Damian snarls, "That, with the addition of the harassment from Rossi — imagine what that accumulation could do to her mental health. If it gets too overwhelming for her, she could easily become susceptible to Le Papillon. You should've seen the way she was struggling in the museum. If Rossi escalates any further than what she's already doing....."
Tim stares at him, "But, you're not concerned about her, huh?" The teenager freezes at that, words failing him. "If you're not, then you're being way too protective and invasive about something that doesn't involve you and a girl that you have no real connection to yet. Plus, you have no idea on whether she's been akumatized before or not." He eyes a headline — *Student Akumatized for the Second Time.* "You can be akumatized more than once."

His face slackens, and it was obvious he hadn't considered *that.* Tim winces; he *really* hopes he's not fucking this up.

"Look Damian," Tim drifts backwards slightly, just out of Damian's immediate range. "I know you're bad with emotions. *I'm* bad with emotions. Everyone im this fucking family's bad with emotions. Well.....Dick and Duke are the better of us. But, it's obvious to everyone that you're avoiding her. I don't know what's going on between you two, but I thought you two had something — possible friendship, *disgustingly* awkward flirting," Damian sends him a glare. "Either way, why are you avoiding her? Remember that thing about verbalizing your feelings? Actually *do* it and stop immersing yourself into something else."

"I'm not talking about this with *you,*" he scoffs. "Besides, it wouldn't do me any good to have her be connected to me in any way. It's for the best."

Tim clicks his tongue. "Okay. Can you explain why?"

He pauses, "What?"

The elder exhales, eyeing him dead on. "I know I'm not Dick, and we don't *usually* talk about things like this, but I can listen. You're smart, and you would've thought about this long and hard. If you think that a friendship with the girl isn't good for you, then that's fine. It's your choice. But, I'm asking to understand — why is it for the best?"

Damian blinks in surprise, before eyeing Tim in suspicion. After a few seconds, with his brother not changing his serious expression, he eventually says, "Drake, you know *none* of us can have civilian attachments so easily."

"*Why?"*

He looks at his brother as if he's stupid, "Look at what having her name connected to mine resulted in. She could've *died.* If we were to become anything further than acquaintances, that wouldn't be the last time she'd be placed in danger. We're lucky it was Nigma today, imagine if it was the *Joker.* She doesn't need that, along with what she's already dealing with. She also isn't aware of *us,* or *me."

"Those are...valid points." Damian eyes him with a deadpan look. "However, let me provide some counterpoints that can help you with your decision."

The raven-haired boy considers it, and answers with a "Proceed."

Tim counts off on his fingers, "Cass has Brenda back in Blüdhaven; Stephanie has Padma, and a few acquaintances from her philosophy classes; and Dick has....god, *too* many people. Point is sure — we don't *all* have civilian attachments. But, those of us who have the few ones they have, have the ability to keep them away from our other lives. You'll just have to be careful. But then again, that's not really the *issue,* is it?" He eyes Damian knowingly, who narrows his eyes at him. "I'm not getting into that, partly because I want to be nice and not force you to talk about something I'm sure you don't even have a grasp on yet, but mostly because I would rather drink this cold cup of coffee and walk backwards off the manour's roof before I talk about love with you."
Damian grimaces, "The feeling is mutual."

"Good. Second counterpoint: She may not be aware of you, nor your history with the League, but you don't have to tell her right away, do you?" He shrugs. "Give it like....two years before you say anything. Maybe three, depending on how close you want her to be. Actually, it all depends on whether or not she gets a surprise visit from Talia." Damian seems to visualize the possibility, and his eyes are wide. "Third point, and this one's the most important — you're taking her feelings into account without actually taking her feelings into account."

At the teenager's visible confusion, he elaborates. "Remember your early days dealing with Bruce? When he'd constantly attempt to control your movements, and how you worked, and you hated it? Bruce may have had a good reason for it, but never truly talked with you about it, or even considered how you'd feel about being tailed constantly. At least, at first. Now, that's changed."

"Now, input that situation with Marinette — you're deciding that it would be best to leave whatever the hell you two had as a situational, fucked-up story that maybe you could look back at twenty years later and laugh. Which, is fine, sure. But, you've never consulted her about it. She probably wanted to talk more with you, but couldn't since she needed to get checked out. Imagine how she'd feel if you never reached out to her ever again, after the two of you spent what must've been one of the most traumatic moments of her life."

His brother opens his mouth, closes it, and thinks about Tim's words for a second. "Oh."

"And, considering that she already yelled at you for not verbalizing your feelings," he jabed Damian's forehead with his index finger. "Imagine her reaction if she found out that you made that decision. She'd think you view her feelings as something that doesn't matter, or that she needs to be protected like a liability. Anyone wouldn't want to hear that."

Instead of cursing his brother out, Damian frowns, rubbing his forehead, "You have made several counterpoints that I won't disregard further. I — thank you, Drake."

"No problem, kid. You deserve some more civilian friends."

"Now that that's handled," the two brothers startle at Dick's voice, and spin around to see him walking beyond the entrance into the cave. He places a hand on Damian's computer chair, and ruffles Tim's hair. "What's all this on the monitors?"

"How long were you listening?" Tim pouts, not appeased by the "good job" head messing. "Did you intentionally leave that for me to handle?"

"And if I did?"

"Then you're dead to me and I'm going to eat the rest of your Fruit Loops."

"No, wait — "

Damian watches them bicker for a bit before he breaks it up, "Grayson." Upon gaining his attention, he falters slightly. "How's...."

"She's fine," The teenager didn't need to explain further, he could understand what he was getting at. "Asked about you while you stayed away because you had the temporary lapse in judgement similar to that of an intentionally disruptive romantic-comedy male lead." At Damian's slight wince, he ruffles his hair. "It's okay, bud — this is all weird to you and you're trying to make sense of it. At least Tim got to you before I did. Also, background checks into other people are fine, but no more into things concerning her. If you're going to, consult her first so she doesn't get upset."
"Purple butterflies terrorizing the city of Paris and turning people into minion-esque supervillians....magic jewelry...yeah no, you've lost me," Jason looked every bit as perplexed as he mentioned. The rest of the occupants aside from Tim, Damian and Alfred shared his confusion. "I need to get through this with some type of food. Which reminds me — whoever was the fucker that took my slices of pizza from the fridge, just give yourself up, and I won't punch the shit out of you." When no one spoke up, he nodded his head in satisfaction. "Smart, you knew I'd never let that slide without penance."

"Let me start over," Tim says, taking a bite from one of the slices of pizza on the plate that had been hidden by his chair. A loud squawk escapes from Jason at the sight.

"Timothy. Tim. Timbo. Timmers. Timgelina. The ever present pain in my ass. The cause of my agony." Jason eyes him dangerously from where he sat, even as his words were calm. "You have exactly five seconds to give me that plate, or I will teleport over there to have your face meet my fist. Don't think I won't."

"You raise a pretty strong argument. However, I would like to for you to consider a counterpoint."

"Proceed."

Tim watches him dead in the eyes as he takes another bite, "Fuck you."

"You know what — "

Alfred deposits two slices of pizza in front of him before he could so much as lunge, somehow having snatched it from Tim's plate, and ignoring Tim's betrayed yell of his name. "Here you are, Master Jason."

"Thank you, Alfred. You're the only one in this house I trust aside from Dick."

"Aw, Jay-bird."

"An honour, Master Jason."

Tim clears his throat, forgoing clapping his hands since one of them is greasy, "Back to explaining. Three years ago, someone called Le Papillion appeared out of nowhere and began targeting the citizens of Paris, searching for some magic jewelry called The Miraculouses. The miraculouses he's looking for are — " He brings up enlarged pictures of Ladybug's earings, and Chat Noir's ring, having heard testimonials from victims what exactly it is Hawkmoth wanted, and what they looked like. " — the Ladybug Miraculous and the Black Cat Miraculous."
He brings up a picture of a travelling Akmua, taken from a civilian's phone. "In order to draw out the people who own them, he sends out enhanced butterflies called Akumas."

"Enhanced with what?"

"I have no idea what exactly it is," Tim answers Jason's question. "But whatever it is, it has the ability to possess a person once it touches them, and turns them into personalized supervillains that follows Le Papillion's orders — which is always to get the miraculouses. Parisians have dubbed it "Akumatization"."

Dick raises a hand, "Question: How does that work? It possesses them, but how do they follow his orders? How are they able to get possessed in the first place? Is it just free reign?"

"He targets people with intense negative emotions," Damian answers. "Any hint of vulnerability as well. Anger, disgust, hatred, sadness, fear....somehow he knows that someone somewhere in Paris is experiencing some sort of pain, and he takes advantage of it. There's no pattern concerning age or gender, he targets everyone."

The included picture of a young boy, who had become the akuma Gigantitan made them deeply disturbed. For all he had argued before, Jason couldn't stomach his pizza anymore, his lips thinning. Dick gazes upon the picture of the tiny baby August, and thinks of his own daughter being possessed by one of these things. He tightly grips his bottle of gatorade. Even Alfred looked deeply bothered by everything so far.

"Based on the interviews we read, there seems to be a mental link that comes with the Akuma." Tim picks up from where Damian left off. "They're never able to conclusively say what their time with Le Papillion was like. It's a blank for them when the akumatization wears off. But, one thing they note is that he's always in their head — any time someone attempts to fight him off, or gets distracted in anyway, Le Papillion forces them back on track."

Bruce sighs, his stoic facade cracking for the first time since they started; he hadn't known about all this. He questions, "What about geographic location? Any places in Paris being targeted more than once?"

"That we don't know," Tim frowns. "We thought it was best that everyone got caught up to date on this first."

"Where did it start?"

"Twenty-first arrondissement, Paris. The victim was called Stoneheart." The akuma, similar to the Hulk in stature but was completely made of stone, was displayed on one of the monitors, walking down the streets with someone clutched in his fist. "A teeneage boy was upset due to something concerning his crush. Kept Paris under siege for about a few hours — shooting at him or landing a hit just made him bigger and he destroyed just about anything in his path. But, you understand the side effects of having a supervillian like this, don't you? The citizens of Paris aren't entitled to have negative emotions — they constantly have to reign them in, lest their vulnerability cause them to be possessed."

There was silence after Tim's words, until Dick softly breaks it, "Her teacher said something, back at the lawsuit meeting, how experiencing what they go through Paris can be considered torture. To have all citizens force themselves to become desensitized to what happens within their city....how frequent are these possessions?"

"Almost every week in a month, it seems like. We'll need to go over the news reports to confirm."
Jason watches as Stoneheart's rampage comes to halt by a barricade of police officers, and they shoot — whatever it was, it was definitely not bullets — only for the akuma to grow bigger with a flash of golden light. It throws a police van at the retreating officers, and he exhales, "So, that's why." When multiple heads turn to him, he explains. "You know — the brat's girlfriend."

He continues talking before Damian could say anything, "We all heard their conversations — she was clearly terrified, but she still kept it together a little too well. When we were walking out of the museum, she was shaking, even as she was talking normally with everyone. Not to mention that little bout of her contemplating her own mortality," Damian and Tim's expression cloud at that, and Jason gestures to the screen, "She, and all the citizens of Paris would have practise in attempting to control their emotions."

Dick exhales, "Even at the hospital, she hadn't broken down in any way. It was there; she was close. But, she didn't want to."

"She'll shelve any sort of panic attacks until a "later, more convenient time"," Damian adds, working his mouth to speak as he recalls her words. "Like she usually does."

Tim grimaces. At the time, he had agreed with the statement because...well, it was true for him. Now, it seems so much more of a warning sign.

"She's probably in her hotel room having one right now," Dick looks even more distressed. "Now until Sunday's the only time where she can truly feel any sort of emotion. When they go back to Paris, it's back to suppressing them."

Bruce's eyes narrow as he watches Stoneheart settles on the second platform if the Eiffel Tower, his movements thunderous and mighty. "They must have called the army, or someone else to deal with this." His terse words were the only indication of his upset. "Even if it hadn't been the League, they couldn't have just left it like this."

"I'd like to say yes, but considering the huge blockade all of this was buried behind...."

And then, they all watched as the akuma started sputtering, fruitlessly attempting to gather his bearings as heavy, grating coughs clawed their way out of him. Drawing his head back, he roared and —

A surge of black butterflies violently burst from his mouth, amalgamating beyond him to form a nondescript mass, even as some butterflies kept fluttering around the edges, and it took a moment before they realize it to be a head. Any of the usual facial features were formed from the butterflies, sculpting themselves to form a nose and the curve of a mouth. It has no clear set of eyes, only deep shadows where they should have been.

"What. the fuck. is that?" Jason shot up in his seat. Everyone else's eyes were wide as they watched on, as if they couldn't have conjured up this even in their wildest nightmares.


Stoneheart slumped backwards after it all, seemingly unconscious with the screaming girl still in his fist, but they paid no attention to that as the camera focused more on the head, giving a frontwards view as it started speaking.

"People of Paris. Listen carefully — I am Le Papillion."

The voice broadcasting from the head was alarmingly dulcet as it spoke, never once raising it volume. It sounded male, and was reminiscent of the cadence of a public speaker attempting to
persuade their audience with only the conviction and power in their tone. You *had* to listen to it, lest you miss anything integral.

"Ladybug. Chat Noir. Give me the Ladybug earnings and the Cat's ring now. You've done enough damage to these innocent people, surrender the miraculouses and everything will go back to the way it wa — "

Clapping interrupted him. Slow, sarcastic clapping cut through his monologue as if it hadn't been an ultimatum, as if they found the entire charade amusing. And video feed switches to focus at ground level, and they watch as a short figure walks forward, donned a red and black spotted jumpsuit. They had blue-ish hair, and it was styled in pigtails.

"What. in the — "

"Nice try, Papillion," they, a female voice, start tersely, cutting Dick off from finishing his statement. "But we *know* who the bad guy is — let's not reverse the roles here. If it hadn't been for *you*, none of these innocent victims would be transformed into your monsters!" The girl stops, staring straight up at the fluttering mass with a powerful glare, her hands clenched tightly at her sides. "*Papillion* — no matter how long it takes, we *will* find you, and you'll be the one handing over your Miraculous!"

And then she breaks out into a run, unraveling a yo-yo —

Jason slowly drags his eyes towards Tim for confirmation that he'd *somehow* doctored the footage. Tim shakes his head.

— that whirls by her side while she travels down the long bridge to the tower, before she launches her yo-yo up high so it can wrap itself around a lampost, and she braces herself against the edge of the metal barricade before using the wire to forcefully catapult herself up to the head's level. She spins the yo-yo a few times while suspended in the air —

"*I free you from evil!*"

— and she flips to keep her height longer, every single twist punctuated by her blazing yo-yo as it strikes within the hoard of butterflies. Every single hit claimed a cluster of them, and the apparition roars in outrage. She keeps it up until the butterflies explode apparent, and the akuma that would've powered the visage attempts to scurry away. The girl begins to descend, but her fall is right behind the creature and she catches it within her yo-yo as she lands on the platform Stoneheart would've been on earlier.

She eyes the people of Paris watching on down below, another camera catching the expression on her face, full of defiance and earnestly. "Let me make a promise to all of you," her voice is strong as it rings across the area. "No matter what attempts to harm you, Ladybug and Chat Noir will do *everything* in our power to keep you safe!"

She taps the cover of her yo-yo and it flares, before she raises it upwards and a gush of white, transparent butterflies escape from it. They would've been from the thousands she'd snatched from before, and they gather overhead, just below the tip of the Eiffel Tower before they *burst* in the sky, fluttering in all directions.

Tim stops the video then. Should they want to go over the footage, and he knows they all will, they can all access it after. This was just to showcase the important, summerized information that they could fit in the span of an evening.
Bruce stares at the screen, though it's clear that he's not really seeing it. "Who was that?"

Tim brings up a picture of the crime-fighting duo, taken from their very early days. "That was one of the owners of the miraculouses that Papillion wants. Paris currently has two main superheroes that fight him — Ladybug," he points to indicate who was which. "And Chat Noir." He then starts to play the same interview of the two that he came across earlier.

"Their first noted appearance was on the same day this akuma first appeared," Damian pipes up. "So far, we haven't seen any information concerning their existence prior to that day. Assuming that the magical artifacts Papillion wants give them the powers they have, they shouldn't be metas."

Jason scowls at the screen, before delving into a surprisingly accurate mockery of Papillion's voice, "You've done enough damage to these innocent people" — god, does he hear himself talk? What page out of the campy, daytime superhero show did he tear that from? Slimy piece of shit."

"How old are they?" Of course, he's the first one to realize that glaring detail. "They...they look so young. I mean — they don't. Not at first. I couldn't get a good read on them at first but then it just...redirected. Listen to them — they're children. They can't be older than thirteen here. How in the hell did they get to possess magic jewelry? No child would just have that."

Alfred studies the children as well, noting the tentative way they answer questions at first, before they relax somewhat. "That is a good question, Master Richard. Are these children equipped for power on that scale? That young lady delivered a fantastic, confident speech, but do they seem as if they know what they're doing?"

"It was pretty convincing though," Jason pushes some hair out of his eyes. "If she hadn't said any of that, that entire city would've absolutely blamed those two kids. He has that emotional manipulation perfected, saying every single thing he's guilty of and projecting that culpability on them. He could've turned everyone on them."

"I'm eyeballing them to be around thirteen when this all started, so they'd be around Damian's age now. They don't...seem to be trained for it." Tim continues, "They've adapted after years of being on their own but...with the very first akuma, Ladybug hadn't eliminated it, and it multiplied and possessed multiple citizens. If they had a mentor of some kind that's versed in this...magic," it seemed to pain him to call it that. "That wouldn't have happened. There are multiple other times where it's obvious they have no real training. Ladybug seems to be the default leader, and Chat Noir follows her lead almost all the time. But, if there's no one providing them guidance, that means that she's coming up with this on her own. They're doing this all on their own."

Bruce takes a deep breath, looking just the tiniest bit shaken at that. "Are you suggesting that the citizens of Paris depend on children who have no proper guidance on how to be superheroes, and who would also need to be strong enough to keep their emotions in check so they do not become possessed like Parisians can?"

Jason's face darkens, clenching his fists. He knows about having his life uprooted during his childhood.
"Oh god," Dick breathes, his horror escalates further. "You said that these...what are they called, akumatizations? They happen every week? Do they happen in daylight or the nighttime? When do they sleep? They must go to school, right? — Are you telling me that they're constantly fighting this Butterfly Man, forcibly burying their emotions, doing their homework and training themselves?"

"Mostly during the day, yet some Akumas happen at night well into the early morning." Tim aims an understanding glance at his eldest brother's further horror. "So, that's what it seems like."

Alfred holds a strong arm at the back of Dick's chair, "And they are the only heroes?"

"They seem to have assembled a team," Tim brings up pictures of the other heroes over time, a mixture of amateur and professional photography. "But, they seem to be around the same age as Ladybug and Chat Noir, and only became part of it after a long while."

"There's more magic jewelry?" Dick's eyes roam the new superheroes. "Who owns that treasure chest of magic powers?"

Jason snarls, "That confirms it, doesn't it? Those kids wouldn't own it, so someone must be picking them to become superheroes. Some bastards just plucking these kids off the street, giving them magical accessories, and shoving them into the lap of a fucking supervillain without any sort of fucking training. I — why is so much responsibility on these kids?" He wildly gestures towards Damian. "At least he came out of the womb ready to kill. At least Dick helped with training us. Even Bruce did that, and I'm not giving him an award for the world's best mentor soon. But those two were signed on this for...how ever long Butterfly Man's gonna be twitching like a cockroach. They can't even be angry at the fucking asshole. I — "

He cuts himself off, clutching the armrests of his chair in an attempt to not jump up and pace. Bruce eyes the children for a long time before he asks, "Has anyone ever died from Papillon's attacks?"

Tim sighs, looking every bit as drained as they all felt. "If they have, I've never seen any permanent log of it yet. The thing is, Ladybug has this power called Miraculous Cure, which can reverse any damages done by both the akumas and the heroes." They look at him as if he's nuts, and he shrugs, knowing that he sounded insane. "I have no idea if that thing works on dead people, but any sort of property damage that occurs is immediately fixed."

"Almost as if it never happened." Jason sarcastically comments.

"You have to admit, that's...pretty useful." Dick drums his fingers on the table-top. "That must be another reason why it's never made its way outside Parisian borders. Destruction on a huge level would catch the attention of people overseas, but if it's immediately rectified..."

Alfred softly comments, "That doesn't take away the trauma that comes with destruction like this. Those who may have been possessed will forget, but everyone else who's had to witness it all...."

They stew on everything they've learned so far. For several, long seconds, they were all silent.

"Father," Immediately, Damian was awarded with everyone's attention, as he hadn't spoken for the majority of the unraveling of information. His eyes were blazing as he asks, "How did this get past the Justice League? Not one of them knew about this?"

"From those who I've asked, they didn't." Bruce pinches the bridge of his nose. "The only person who I haven't been able to get a hold of yet, is Wonder Woman."
They all pause at that. Wonder Woman, otherwise known by her civilian identity of Diana Prince, was one of the few Justice League members that knew Bruce's identity, and the existence of his children (the other was Superman). Which means, that they knew about her general civilian existence as well. The thing with that was: "Isn't she a curator for the Louvre?" Dick questions.

The expression on his father's face confirms that yes, that was her occupation and there's no reason why she wouldn't have brought this up with them if she spent a great amount of time in Paris.

Dick frowns. Then, she must have witnessed these attacks at some point. But, he knew Diana, knew of the instilled sense of justice within her — she'd never intentionally withhold information from the Justice League's attention. At least, not when she knew they could help in some way.

Damian's face reflected the same, "Wonder Woman would never hinder interference from the Justice League."

"Maybe she's been trying to gather information on her own?" Tim offers. "We're listening to it now and we still don't know everything. We still have tons of footage to observe, reports to analyse, find any patterns we can...."

Alfred thinks for a moment, "If she did know about this, perhaps she knew the League couldn't help." At everyone's surprised look, and Bruce's indignant expression, he explains. "These Akuma possess anyone based on whatever negative emotion they experience, but they are normal, everyday people. If the damage is usually at a high, catastrophic as we saw, imagine one of these things possessing Miss Diana, or Mister Kent."

Everyone collectively understood. Damian's face turns, "Those daytime heroes wouldn't stand a chance. No one in Paris would stand a chance."

"I'm not saying that she would lie to you once you ask her," Alfred concludes. "But, she would know the danger of any League members travelling to Paris. And, she would be aware of your tendency to want to solve situations like this immediately." He eyes Bruce seriously. "She could have very well removed any evidence of Paris' situation. Not for any nefarious reason to keep you out of the proverbial loop, but to protect them."

They muse on the elder man's words for a bit, until Bruce breaks it with a heavy sigh.

"Regardless, I would still would have liked to know about it. He grumbles. "We need more information. We'll need to continue searching through the files here, and I'll continue my attempts to contact her."

Jason folds his arms, "You need to get in contact with those two kids, old man. Sure, we may not be able to help, but it'll give an idea of what exactly they're working with. Because I don't think those interviews with akumatized victims go into detail about Papillion's whole reason for doing all this."

"We were going to ask Marinette on Friday about it but," Dick's face twists. "I'm not so sure that it won't cause some sort of negative reaction with her." Damian looks troubled at that. "Her teachers, maybe?"

"We can still ask Marinette, just...broach it carefully? Her teachers definitely. I would've suggested a trip to France but — " Tim gestures towards the monitors in lieu of an answer. "Jason and Damian are an absolute no for now. I'm also out. Bruce probably, but that means he'd have to take time off from Wayne Enterprises activities which could be noticeable. The only one of us capable of pushing down strong negative emotions easily would be..."
When his brother doesn't finish his sentence, Dick looks up and freezes at the looks everyone directs at him. He assesses them all; the expectant raised eyebrow from his father, the serious look from Damian, the semi-amused looks from Jason and Alfred and the pointed finger from Tim. His mouth drops open in offence.

"I can be threatening!"

"No one is saying you can't be, Richard — " Damian says. Jason lets out a snort. "You absolutely can. But, you would have a better handle on it than the rest of us. You also have the ability to transform your emotions into something much more positive, or use them to fuel your purpose. If we were to send anyone, it would be you."

"I — you — " When no one else objects to Damian's words, he huffs. "Fine. Fine! I've always wanted to spend some time in Paris, anyway. It'll be a nice little vacation for me — I could finally go to the Louvre, or the Musée d'Orsay and oh my god I just proved your point."

"Whenever we decide to put that into action," Bruce carries on, talking past the amused inotation in his voice. "You'll have to ask for time off so you can leave. If there are any issues with that, I'll help you. Patrol is still on for tonight. Damian, Jason — you two are on watch at Miss Dupain-Cheng's hotel."

Damian...hadn't been expecting to see her so soon.

Bruce says nothing, but glances at him knowingly. Jason hums, "Don't worry. I'll make sure he doesn't keep the comms on when they — "

He just barely dodges one of the staplers Damian had near him, though it still manages to scratch his skin. "I'll take that greasy plate of yours and suffocate you with it. Don't be vulgar!"

"I didn't even say anything!"

Tim scoffs, "We could all hear the unsaid 'yet' with that, Jason."

" — She has been reunited with one of her guardians for this trip, and will be reunited with her fellow students soon."

A man, apparently the Gotham Police Commissioner according to Mme. Catalina, spoke from the television. Or, at least, that's what the bodyguard translated for Caline. "She is doing as well as circumstances allow. There are a few details we can share about today —"

The teacher simply watched the man speak, not understanding most of what he was saying, her eyes this close to glazing over. The woman was restless, her hand passing through her reddish-orangish hair for the umpteenth. It was taken out after they arrived back at the hotel, since she couldn't be bothered placing it in her usual bun — it must've look like a bird's nest at this point.

While she sat on her designated bed for the stay, Mme. Catalina sits on one of the provided longue chairs, a drink in her hand. Occassionally, she would relay what the Police Commissioner was saying, even though she had to have known that the woman wasn't truly listening.

Sure, Mendeleiev had told to stay away from the televisions in the hotel. And, she had. At least, until she knew that Marinette was fine. Safe. Alive. At the moment, watching the press conference
was essentially background noise for her — she couldn't understand much anyway.

Caline's fingers wrung themselves together in anxiety. Her skin trembles, the events of earlier today leaving remnants of adrenaline still buzzing underneath it. The images of Marinette being led away by gunpoint — attempting to reassure them, standing with her head held high even with a bomb around her neck play on repeat in her head, akin to a worn film tape rolling over and over in her thoughts.

She doesn't think those images will leave her, perhaps not until she physically has the girl in front of her.

Mendeleiev had kept her promise and called to update: Marinette had a broken wrist and needed to go to the hospital for it. She had even given the phone to Marinette to say a few words before the girl inevitably grew sicker — she was concerned that she was sick in the first place, but was reassured that it was either a reaction to earlier today, a reaction of not eating anything for a long time or a combination of the two — and threw up. There were other updates as well, including the task to ask the children what they wanted to eat that they could have delivered at the hotel.

That had been over an hour ago, and the two were on their way back. Mendeleiev had said that reporters had somehow figured out where Marinette was receiving treatment, and hadn't given her, or the other teacher the luxury of a leisurely exit from the hospital. At least there had been officers stationed near her room and would be transporting them back; none of them were able to actually get inside or close to Marinette.

To make the time pass quicker in the gaps where Mendeleiev hadn't contacted her yet, and up until a few minutes ago, she had stayed with the children for a good bit. Most of it was spent holding the ones who were still out-of-sorts, or reassuring them that yes, Marinette is fine, she's okay and she'll be back soon. She knew better than to tell them everything, leaving out her wrist injury. Between her and Monsieur Haprèle they made sure that none of them were able to check their phones, or go anywhere on their own or go down to the lobby where there were televisions.

Something cold is shoved into her hands, and Caline jumps at the sensation, before she looks down at the weight now in them. It was a carbonated drink, a Sprite, and she stares at for a moment before her eyes trail the hand holding it out up the arm, to —

"Drink this." Mme. Catalina's voice brook no arguement. She hadn't seen the woman bring in another drink with her. "It may not be coffee, but it'll energize you."

She hated coffee anyway. "Thank you."

How long was the hospital to the hotel anyway? Were they in traffic right now? Had there been an accident on the roads or something? What was taking so long —

There's a noise, a whoosh of the room's door being pushed inward and Caline's head immediately turns at the noise. Her eyes grow wide as they catch them, and she swiftly stands to make her way over to the two, placing the drink in the chair. Just before she reaches them, she pauses, taking in Marinette's injured hand in the black, imbolizing shoulder sling.

As much as she hates it — a reminder of just how close she was to death — it was better than the bomb around her neck. It was better than having her....dieu merci .

"Marinette," Caline exhales, before pulling her into a hug, mindful of her hand. The amount of tension that seemed to rush out of her was immediate, accompanied by the overwhelming relief that had previously been left unsated. The girl returns the embrace, as much as she could with one
working hand.

Caline draws back from it, teal eyes roaming over her features and holding her face in one of her hands — they were so close to never seeing her like this again. They were so close to returning to France without her. Marinette visibly seems exhausted, and seems to find comfort at her touch. Her eyes are slightly wet, and when she blinks, Caline realizes that she's just as emotional.

Her voice is fond when she says, "I heard you were really hungry."

Marinette laughs, and it's a slightly wet sound.

She continues, "It'll be here soon. Until then, you can rest in your room and one of us will bring it for you."

Mendeleiev tips her head in greeting to Mme. Catalina, before she questions, "Where are the other students?"

"In their rooms. Monsieur Haprèle's still with a few of them while I had been with the rest. I just came from giving them back their phones since you two were on your way home." Her friend's eyes focus on the still playing television, and then she casts her an unimpressed glance. Caline rolls her eyes; it wasn't as if she had been paying attention. Her attention returns to Marinette, "They've been antsy about you; Alix, Kim and others." More like worried sick, but she won't elaborate. "I'll tell them you've returned, but if you wish to be on your own, I'll tell them so."

Marinette shakes her head, "Can they come in my hotel room?"

"One of them has to stay with you anyway," Mendeleiev answers. And she remembers that it'll be quite hard for the girl, getting around with a broken wrist. Alix would most likely be the one to room with her — they'll decide after the food arrives. "But, I'll send them your way. Sasha, can you...?"

Caline understands the unsaid request for what it was, and she hesitates in releasing her student, but ultimately does. Mme. Catalina steps forward, placing a strong hand on her shoulder for a beat, before leading Marinette to her hotel room. The girl gives a parting smile before the door closes, and Caline returns it, and she feels how wobbly hers is.

When the two leave, Mendeleiev walks forwards and immediately brings her into a hug. The older woman murmurs, "What did I tell you about staying away from the TVs, you dummy?"

A wet laugh escapes from her, "I said 'It wouldn't do me any good', didn't I? It didn't — it was pretty much background noise for me and I couldn't understand." She sinks into the embrace, sniffing. "What happened at the hospital? You said that something important was solved for us."

The other woman groans, "That, is a discussion to be had while we pour our emotions into our drinks."

"Not now," Caline leans backwards to fix her with a flat look. "We still have the children to look after."

"Of course I don't mean now," Mendeleiev reflects her expression, unamused that she even thought that. "We are meant to be the very model of teaching individuals, and all that. I mean when the children are sure to be in their rooms, like four in the morning or something."

Caline frowns. She catches how Mendeleiev doesn't say when they'll be sleeping — After today, she's not sure sleep will come to them so easy. "So, tipsy enough that we can't hold back our words,
but cognitive enough to get to work if we need to. Meaning Margaritas.

The other woman looks put out, and she understands — had they not had children to see after, Margaritas would not be the drink of choice after today. "Meaning Margaritas."

[group chat: "the barricades of collège françoise dupont"]
[group chat description: absolutely for educational purposes and not for when we're bored as hell]
[group chat members: marichérie, ninyo, jules, nath, rosee ❤, kimpossible, adrien, gremlinonskates, tothemax....]

16:15 pm.

GUYS
SHES BACK
(16:15 pm)

gremlinonskates
kim what the fuck could you have possibly done in the last eight minutes that you left my room to go to mme bustier?
WAIT
WH A
(16:16 pm)

ninyo
WAIT REALLY
(16: 16 pm)

jules
oh thank god
when did she get back??
(16: 16 pm)

rosee ❤
is she okay???
(16: 16 pm)

gremlinonskates
GIVE PROOF OR ILL FIND YOUR LOCATION AND KICK YOUR ASS
(16:16 pm)
@gremlinonskates SHE FOUGHT ME IN TRYING TO GET THIS PICTURE BUT HERE

@ninyo YES REALLY

@jules LITERALLY JUST NOW I WAS GOING TO MME BUSTIER'S ROOM AND SHE
WAS JUST???
WALKING UP WITH THE BODYGUARD LADY

@rosee ❤ FINE BUT HER LEFT WRIST IS BROKEN

tothemax
Oh, thank god she's okay
UM WHAT
(16:19 pm)

rosee ❤
WHAT
(16:20 pm)

gremlinonskates
WHAT THE FUCK
FUCK YOU MEAN HER WRIST IS BROKEN
(16:20 pm)

jules
how'd she even get that???
(16:20 pm)

Ivan
^ 
(16:20 pm)

ninyo
kim im really gonna need you to explain
(16:21 pm)
Lila
Oh, she's back
(16:21 pm)

Sabrina
whats going on?? why the sudden influx of messages??
oh
OH WOAH WHAT
(16:21 pm)

SHE SAID AND I QUOTE: "that absolute disgrace to colour coordination broke it"
  it's why i've been in her room helping her change
  oh yeah i'm in her room rn
(16:22 pm)

rosee ❤
oh my god
(16:22 pm)

gremlinonskates
THAT FUCKING GLOWSTICK
(16:22 pm)

ninyo
what the fuck
(16:23 pm)

Lila
.....You're helping her change?
  You're a boy
(16:23 pm)

yes and?
(16:23 pm)

ninyo
mari and kim have been friends since they were six
  nothing about the other phases them anymore
(16:24 pm)

Sabrina
but she got it checked out and everything?
  she's fine?
(16:24 pm)

YES YES
  she's just waiting on food like the rest of us
(16:24 pm)

gremlinonskates
is she up for visitors?
  like if she says no i'll leave her alone but....
  i just really need to see her
I'm sure she's had a tough time today, what with that and going to the hospital. She should probably be left alone for the night.

[group chat: “see no evil (ila), hear no evil (lila)’”]
[group chat description: and lead us not into temptation (to beat her up) but deliver us from evil (lie-la)]
[group chat members: shewhorisfrombread, niNO, jules, kimpossible, nath, skateawayfromthedevil and tothemax]

16:26 pm.

skateawayfromthedevil has sent a photo

hnnnnnnnnn
(16:26 pm)

now how do you people expect me to not rock her shit when she does things like this
(16:26 pm)

tothemax
*sighs*
(16:26 pm)

didn't i ask "is SHE" up for vistors?? why the fuck is she opening her mouth to speak for her???
(16:27 pm)

now that i have realized what's up
has she always dismissed mari like that???
jules
yes
(16:27 pm)

skateawayfromtheflotten
yep
(16:27 pm)

tothemax
Yes, she has
(16:28 pm)

niNO
ughh
(16:28 pm)

one of you better talk to her before i do because i will hurt her feelings
(16:28 pm)

[group chat: "the barricades of collège françoise dupont"]
[group chat description: absolutely for educational purposes and not for when we're bored as hell]
[group chat members: marichère, ninyo, jules, nath, rosee ❤, kimpossible, adrien, gremlinonskates, tothemax....] 16:28 pm.

Lila
I'm sure she's had a tough time today, what with that and going to the hospital
She should probably be left alone for the night.
(16:26 pm)

tothemax
There's a possibility that she may not want company
However, let's see what she says
(16:28 pm)

@everyone who wants to see her SHE GAVE THE GREEN LIGHT
IF YOU’RE COMING DON’Y FORGET TO BRING YOUR ROOM CARD
(16:29 pm)

gremlinonskates
don’y
(16:29 pm)
tothemax
Don'y
(16:29 pm)

jules
don'y
(16:29 pm)

ninyo
don'y
(16:29 pm)

Ivan
don'y
(16:29 pm)

   it hurts the most comming from you ivan
(16:30 pm)

rosee ❤
comming
(16:30 pm)

   ......i retract what i said it hurts the most coming from you rose
(16:30 pm)

ninyo
i unfortunately have a sleeping girlfriend in my lap so i can't physically be there
(16:30 pm)

   [group chat: "see no evill (ila), hear no evil (lila)"
   [group chat description: and lead us not into temptation (to beat her up) but deliver us from evil
   (lie-la)]
   [group chat members: shewhorisesfrombread, niNO, jules, kimpossible, nath,
skateawayfromthedevil and tothemax]
   16:30 pm.

niNO
but keep me updated via vns
(16:30 pm)

    noted
    if you're able to leave alya later on and wanna come over to nette's then say
(16:31 pm)

niNO
ye ye
(16:31 pm)
[group chat: "the barricades of collège françoise dupont"]
[group chat description: absolutely for educational purposes and not for when we're bored as hell]
[group chat members: marichère, ninyo, jules, nath, rosee ❤️, kimpossible, adrien, gremlinonskates, tothemax....]
10: 05 pm.

ninyo
i unfortunately have a sleeping girlfriend in my lap so i can't physically be there
(16:30 pm)

Ivan
same mylène's on me and after today.....she needs the sleep
if anything we'll come around later on or we'll leave it until tomorrow
(16:31 pm)

gotcha
(16:31 pm)

gremlinonskates
ON OUR WAY
(16:31 pm)

tothemax
^
(16:31 pm)

rosee ❤️
^^ with juleka
(16:32 pm)

Lila
I'll wait until tomorrow to see Marinette
My tinnitus is acting up anyway so I'll just go to bed
(16:32 pm)

Sabrina
i'll wait until tomorrow too since i was gonna sleep and these messages kinda woke me up
tell her that i hope she's doing okay tho
(16:32 pm)

Ivan
^
(16:32 pm)

got it!
see you guys later/tomorrow
(16:32 pm)
[group chat: “see no evill (ila), hear no evil (lila)”]
[group chat description: and lead us not into temptation (to beat her up) but deliver us from evil (lie-la)]
[group chat members: sheworisesfrombread, niNO, jules, kimpossible, nath, skateawayfromthedevel and totemax]
16:32 pm.

You have sent a photo

yeah there's no way we're letting rossi anywhere near nette tomorrow
i can tell she's not in the best headspace rn and that bitch's words sound like a threat
(16:33 pm)

niNO
everything she says sounds like a threat
(16:33 pm)

jules
^  
also am i to assume that when the food gets here we're eating in marinette's room
(16:33 pm)

she says that she's fine with that
also someone has to go get the food when it comes
my arms are full of a mari so i can't
(16:34 pm)

tothemax
We'll decide when we get there
(16:34 pm)

skateawayfromthedeve
speaking of being there
knock knock
(16:34 pm)

Now that Marinette's inside the walls of the hotel, she starts to feel way too exposed, even though Mendeleiev made sure to bring her up and away from the hotel's lobby. She's not yet fraying at the seams, but the embrace, the closeness, the contact of Kim's arms around her in a hug is a welcome comfort.
When the teenagers came to Marinette's hotel room, they all immediately embrace and fuss over her — she's never seen them so distressed. She felt at ease, even with their worrying, and reassure them that she was and would be fine — she'd just like to burrow in bed and eat something. They ensure to stick close to her after, as if they need to reassure themselves that she was safe.

They actually did up eating in Marinette's room when the food arrived. An extra-large pizza box, along with a large carbonated drink and an empty styrofoam box that previously had fries and steak, rests open on top of the hotel provided work desk. Max and Alix sat on the white-oak floor, pizza placed styrofoam plates on their laps while Juleka and Rose sat on the chaise with their slices. Kim and Marinette were on her bed, doing their best to not dirty the sheets as they ate and spoke with Marinette's parents on the phone.

She had spoken with her parents earlier that day, but due to the hectic trip to the hospital, Mendeleiev hadn't gone into specifics concerning Marinette's injury. She had kept Sabine and Tom updated, but she wanted to wait until the doctor noted no worrying damages concerning her. Then, Dick came to get her statement, so Marinette hadn't spoken to them aside from then. There were instances where Mendeleiev asked her if she wanted to, but every single time she said she'd wait until they were back at the hotel.

And it wasn't as if she hadn't wanted to, she absolutely wanted to reassure her parents that she was safe, and hear their own voices herself. But, she knew that once the fear and anxiety wore off, she'd be a witness to the utter fury that she knew they were keeping in about the entire situation. And well, she was right:

"A broken wrist? He broke the bones in your wrist!!"

"Yeah," Marinette answers her mother's voice slowly, as Kim held out her phone in one of his hands. "I miiight have challenged him a little and he gave me that for my troubles."

Alix sighs, and it's long-suffering. "You called him an 'idiot' and a 'coward'. You told him that him trapping you in a bomb to wait to be freed wasn't 'a challenge'." When she had relayed that tidbit to them, they all had various reactions: Alix and Kim had scolded her, because her injury could've been worse; Max and Juleka had commended her on her bravery, because they wouldn't have been able to bring themselves to aggrivate him, and Rose had teared up a bit, just relieved that it hadn't been worse for her.

Her mother's reaction still persisted in the angry category:

"That walking, plucked neon feather duster — 操他的祖先到第16代，我希望那個混蛋的每個後代都會受到詛咒!" Marinette winces at the decree, because she's pretty sure her mother said, verbatim: *Fuck his ancestors to the sixteenth generation, I hope every offspring of that bastard will be cursed. I'll come to Gotham to deal with him myself! Don't think I won't — "*

"Holy shit," Alix's eyes were wide as she continued yelling. "I've never heard Mrs. Cheng this angry. I mean, it's understandable, but..."

"I have," Kim's eyes reveal the war flashbacks of his childhood that had just flashed through his thoughts. "One time Mama Cheng cursed this white guy who yelled at her to stop speaking Mandarin in France. He wasn't even French, he'd spoken it, but he definately wasn't from France. Probably American. Either way, she insulted his receding hairline and cursed all his forefathers."

Marinette snorts, remembering the incident quite well. "She also called him a colonizer since, if he was going to dictate she speak French or English, he was no better, still upholding colonial language ideals."
Her father was much more calmer, his reaction similar to Alix and Kim's, with a hint of Rose's:

"One of these days," her father's voice was weary, but fond. "You will learn to not give us heart attacks. Insulting the man on live television?"

"He couldn't understand me anyway. Besides, I had every right — He deserved it."

There were some details that she hadn't told her parents, a result of deciding that they didn't need that on their minds at the moment. However, the rest of the teenagers had noticed her low-spirited demeanour and wanted her to get it out instead of holding it inside so, she told them after she finished talking with her parents.

"It's just — I just t-thought we weren't going to make it — " Something akin to a sob left her, painful despite Marinette's lack of breath. " — Superboy appeared and saved me, b-but in that moment I thought that I was going to d-die. I — I wasn't going to see Maman or — or Papa again — " Her face crumpled as she broke off, turning her head to curl up into her Kim's torso.

"I know," Kim's voice was intentionally low as he speaks in her hair. Low and calming. But, his voice is doing that thing where it's so evident that he wants to cry, but he's powering through it, talking as if it isn't obvious in his voice. "I know, em gái. You were so brave, but you also must've been so scared."

Marinette chokes on her breath as she continues to sob — like she was drowning, like she was dying, and Kim's heart twists painfully. He shuts his eyes tight, shuddering as he begins to cry with her, the emotions of today bubbling and overflowing from within him. Up until this point, he'd been the calm one — for once — for everyone within the hotel room. But, they all needed this cry. Because, they're not in Paris right now — they didn't have to fear akumatizations.

The rest of them had initially sat in silence as Marinette recounted everything, but eventually crumbled into tears as well. Alix, who usually hated crying in-front of others, was the second to burst into a snot-filled mess of tears, but had stretched to give Marinette an additional strong hand for her to hold onto. The first to cry was Rose, who had yet to bring her head up from where it was buried in her girlfriend's shoulder. Juleka scooches them over to be nearer to Marinette, placing a hand on her head. Anyone who couldn't touch Marinette placed their hands on each other, so their energies were linked and flowing.

"When that guy pressed the — the gun to Madame Bustier's head," Tears were running down Max's cheeks, eyes red-rimmed behind his glasses and Alix rubs his shoulders with her other hand. "All — all I kept thinking about is how if he shot her, Ladybug's Miraculous Cure wouldn't be able to save her. She — she wouldn't be able t-to come back — "

He succumbs to his tears, burrowing into Alix. Another sob escaped Marinette at the mention of Ladybug, and Kim holds her tighter, "I know, Mari. I — I know." Five words said from him, soft and small and achingly sad through his tears. All he could think about was that if Marinette died, she couldn't be brought back — Ladybug wouldn't be able to bring her back because today wasn't an akuma attack and it couldn't be fixed —

Kim grounds himself with Marinette, who was currently sobbing in his arms. She's safe now. She's alive. She's alive.

Juleka sniffs; she hasn't fully broken into tears yet, but her eyes are glossy, and she's more focused on the previously sobbing Rose. "We weren't able to keep our phones; Madame Bustier even — even took Max's backup phone. And we weren't allowed to watch TV or go online so we were just sitting there. All we could think about is whether or not you were — you were dead — " Her voice
wavers, but she eventually continues. "It was awful."

It had definitely taken some time before they got it all out of their systems: Late afternoon had turned into evening. Dusk made its way onto the Gotham horizon, the orange light pouring through the hotel room's sliding door. The orange gradually transformed into the chill, black darkness of night. The teenagers' sobs turned into sniffles, and from sniffles into little sporadic hiccups.

And eventually, in-between the murmurs of her friends who try to lighten the mood with comments while watching Beauty and the Beast in French, everything goes dark for Marinette.

She didn't know what exactly woke her up.

All Marinette knew was that one second her eyes were closed, and the next they blink open to her darkened hotel room, the hum of the air conditioning filling the room. Kim sleeps soundly beside her, his arm curled protectively over her stomach. Snores pipe up from behind his back, and when Marinette gingerly sits up, amidst all the pillows elevating her and her wrist, she can spot Alix's hair peaking out from just under his shoulder. When she glances around some more, she catches Juleka and Rose cuddled onto the chaise, and Max is at the foot of the bed she's currently on. The sliding door to the balcony is still closed shut. Someone was in the bathroom, but the light wasn't on in there, and after straining her ears a bit, she could tell it was Mme. Catalina.

Marinette blearily stares at the wall for a long moment, before she glances at the clock on the bedside table.

11:00 PM.

She frowns even more at that. It hadn't been that long since this evening, and she hadn't been having a nightmare — she should be dead center in Sleepytime Junction right now. What had woken her up?

An sleepy, annoyed groan left her as she drops back into bed, closing her eyes and willing herself to return to sleep.

Return to sleep....

Return to sleep...

Return to sleep..

Return to sleep.

Return to sleep.

Return to sleep.

With a groan, her blue eyes open once more. She ends up staring up at the ceiling, letting her eyes adjust to the darkness. Upon realizing that she was not going to get back to sleep, Marinette grumbles, before slipping out of bed. It was a challenge; she had to carefully move out from under Kim's grasp so as to not wake him, out from under the covers and she rests her feet on the cold oak
floor, missing the carpet right near the bed.

The cold sensation makes her whimper in discomfort, and she quickly steps back onto the carpet. There's a beat where she stares at the floor, wondering just how she was supposed to move across the cold, but then her brain goes.... *shoes*.

Ah.

Her flats are still discarded by the side of the bed, so she dips her feet into them and begins to walk.

Her sling is discarded on the beside table as well, and her doctor's words of keeping her wrist elevated for at least forty-eight hours ting in her head. Has it even been twenty-four hours? What *is* time? Her body feels sluggish despite her brain not letting her sleep, like one of those clocks in a *Salvador Dali painting*. Who decided that day was what it was? How were they able to come up with time measurements? Time was an illusion.

Wait. She blinks, and refocuses on her sling once more. Wrist. Elevation. Yes.

She's not going to wake someone up to put it on for her, besides, she watched a video earlier on how to do it on her own. It takes a long time to get it on but she eventually does. She also makes sure to grab her phone. And, she pauses.

Where was she going? Sure, she'd rather tire herself out again than just lay there, but she knows that she shouldn't *leave* her hotel room. It wasn't safe. People would take pictures of her if they saw her in the hallways roaming.

So, where should she go?

She eyes the sliding balcony door — outside there maybe? But, outside was also not safe. Technically anyway. Someone could *probably* kidnap her off a balcony, even if her new room was on the eigth floor. And it was most likely cold.

But she couldn't sleeeeeep.

Huffing, she walks over to her luggage and takes out a thick, oversized, wool-weaved poncho. She always brought with her whenever she travelled, just in case it would be dreadfully cold. It was a hassle to cover her cast, but she manages. Slowly, she unlocks the sliding door and steps out onto the balcony. It was, in fact, cold outside — the night's cold temperature bites at her ankles. It's not overwhelming, so she sits down on one of the balcony chairs and immerses herself into the night-life of Gotham City.

It's...different from Paris. There's shouting coming a few blocks away from the hotel; she couldn't discern it but she could tell that it was incredibly angry. The air here was much more frowsty and fetid — it was noticeable, but one probably had to get accustomed to the Gotham City atmosphere.

But, the longer she sat there, the longer Marinette's awareness strengths and the more she starts to feel as though she were being watched. A flash of movement comes from the her periphery and Marinette straightens, eying the roof of the building adjacent from the hotel. There was a bird that was now perched onto the radiator over there, and relaxes. The movement was most likely the bird in mid-flight. The feeling of being watched?....probably a side effect of finding out that she and Damian were being filmed back into the museum.

Marinette leans back into the chair. She wonders how Damian's doing. Given the adrenaline-fueled situation, they didn't get a chance to decompress together and....well, Marinette doesn't know. Sure,
they were entangled in a life and death situation due to the pushiness of the media, but that doesn't mean that she should expect anything else. After the trip wraps up, that would be it.

She exhales heavily. It was a shame; he was nice and sweet — he had been incredibly reassuring during the instances where fear seeped through. At least on Friday, she'd be able to thank him properly.

The feeling of being watched came over her once more, and she immediately looks up above her, leaning as far to the side as she can to see the balcony of the above room. Still, there's no one physically there, but she can absolute feel a presence, the presence of someone hiding just far enough out of her sight.

Her breathes catches, and she quickly stands up — it may truly be nothing, but she's not staying another second outside. She immediately ensures that the sliding door is open behind her, so if any attack occurs, it'd get the attention of Mme. Catalina. At the same time, she keeps her back to the sliding door as she walks to it, knowing that if anyone should attack her, she wouldn't be caught that off-guard.

Her heart drops down to her feet as someone drops in on the balcony with her and her instincts kick in:

The person had a huge advantage over her in height, and possibly raw power. But, she could take advantage of that.

She was down one wrist — an arm if she was being technical, and the area on the balcony was cramped. What she needed to do was keep moving and not get boxed in. And considering that the balcony's space wasn't too wide.....she needed them unbalanced.

Sure, she didn't want to intentionally kill anyone, and a fall off the eighth floor of a hotel would undoubtedly result in that but she didn't want to be kidnapped either. She needed to be quick, and disabling, possibly get them in a position where she could knock them out against the railing. So, in order to achieve this — she needed to fight dirty. Face strikes, wide movements — when she pushes them back, she'll need to take advantage of their surprise when they realize she'll put up a fight. They probably weren't expecting her to know how to fight, expecting her to be easy to subdue.

So, she draws in her injured wrist closer to her and away from their reach. Drawing out her right arm, she delivers with a neck strike, and when they yelp in pain, she follows it up with an oblique kick to their hip — She needed to break their current stance and equilibrium.

"Shit. Fuck. Hey no, wait — " The voice coming from them was urgent, and they immediately blocked the punch she tries to aim at his jaw, bracing themselves from falling backwards. They hadn't buckled when she struck their hip, so she tries to aim a powerful punch to their chest, which causes him to wheeze, but not falter. "Jesus Christ, freckles — I'm not here to kidnap you!"

They repeat in French for her, but she doesn't pause, just in case they simply said it to get her guard down. After several more blocks from them, and before she goes to attack with another equilibrium-altering kick, she actually manages to catch just who it was. Because she'd met them before, earlier that day, in fact.

Red Hood's still tensed as he restrains her right wrist in a gentle hold, only relaxing when it was clear that she wasn't going to attack him again. His arms go up in defense, as if to further prove that he means no harm, staring at her silently. Over on the left balcony next to them, someone else lands on the platform. From first glance, she knows he's one of the multiple Robins; her class
would've studied Gotham's superheroes when they reviewed their villains. She's further convinced when she catches the yellow 'R' on the red chestplate, and the style of the Robin suit that it's one of the last few Robins. He looks surprised at her, his arms folded.

"So," Red Hood's still gazing at her. "First off — sorry for startling you so bad that your first instinct is to kill me."

Chapter End Notes

Now: onto the after-chapter notes.

(1) As realistic as I try to keep most things in this story, I'm very limited and using google searching to base my writing on. Therefore, lemme say that I'm not in the medical field, and have absolutely no first-hand knowledge on the duties of a paramedic.

You have no idea how much research I did concerning broken wrists, types of fractures, etc. My FBI agent must be concerned.

(2) Your Vitale card contains all the information you need to reimburse your health costs (i.e. Your Vitale card is your insurance card). By presenting it to your doctor, you have the assurance of being automatically reimbursed within a week. From what I researched, children as young as twelve can own one. More information on the carte-vitale can be found here.

(3) The Switzerland and the United Kingdom (EHIC) is a personal document that grants access to healthcare services across Europe: By entering into the French state healthcare system, you will also be able to apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This entitles you to accessing medical treatment while visiting all EEA/ EU countries (plus Switzerland and the UK), for free or at a reduced cost.

The Card is completely free and more information on it can be found here.

(4) The Visa Waiver Program permits citizens of member/participating countries to travel to the United States for business or tourism for stays of up to 90 days without a visa. France is one of those countries. More information on this can be found here.

(5) Mendeleiev's cryptic background stories are like the ones of that one chef from Ratatouille.

(6) The talk between Damian and Tim is based off of that one scene between Dick and Damian, from the animated movie Teen Titans: The Judas Contract (2017).

Most of the time, Damian has been quite defensive when it comes to other people — mainly because everyone else, including Bruce keep questioning his age, capabilities and his whereabouts. When Dick realizes that Damian's going off somewhere, he questions him and Damian's immediately on the defensive. Once he realizes that Dick is simply curious ("I wasn't interrogating — just taking an interest"), he immediately changes his behaviour, opens up and is quite civil with Dick. He even comments his
approval of Dick and Starfire's relationship.

I feel as though Dick would have practise in dealing with every single person within the family and their temperaments, and have it down to a science because...that's just the type of person he is. Thus, Tim attempts to take a page from his book but does it in his own way — breaking it down and giving facts to help him reach a conclusion. He's grown to love Damian as a brother (in this universe anyway), so that's why he tries.

(7) Yeah, I hate misunderstandings in Anime, Romantic-Comedies, etc. One of the only works that dealt with a misunderstanding well was Pride & Prejudice. Either way, we ain't serving that here, baby.

(8) That comment on Ladybug's hair being blue-ish was intentional.

Look, I am making myself believe that the Miraculous have a built-in glamour in their designs, that alters their appearance significantly so as to not have anyone connect their superhero identity to their civilian one. Because otherwise, that would mean that everyone within the ML!Universe has the IQ of a sponge. How does it work?

Well, people know what Ladybug and Chat Noir look like. And they know what they sound like. They can commision paintings and sculptures of the two with accurate facial features and other details. They can recognize them in audio, pictures, on the street, etc. Yet, brains will never be able to connect them to their civillian identies unless something else clues them in. Two plus two will always equal nine.

Ladybug: Blue-ish hair (like canon makes it look) usually in pigtails | Marintte: Jet Black hair, started off with it in pigtails, now alternates in hair-styles. Chat Noir looks the same, but is voice is significantly different.

The batfam can tell that they're children, but can't connect them to a specific face. The glamour also makes it so no one can connect the superheroes to any civilian on surveillance footage, in pictures, etc. Remember that whole "hey let's cast Marinette and Adrien as LB and CN" thing and no one caught on? That's whyyy.

Thank you in advance for reading! Leave a comment if you want to and I'll see you in the next one!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!