

Pendant ce temps, à Paris, en France. . .

Mardi 10 août 2016

La ville s'était calmée depuis la visite de Hit Girl.

Tout était revenu à la normale et surtout, mon identité secrète était sûre. J'avais aidé à accomplir un sauvetage étonnant. Des dizaines d'enfants avaient eu la chance de vivre une nouvelle vie. Je ne les ai pas envie - pas un peu. J'ai manqué l'action; La lutte contre le crime à Paris n'était pas aussi excitant que de courir avec *Fusion*.

Comme je regardais au-dessus de ma ville, j'ai senti une montée de fierté dans ce que je faisais. J'étais un vigilante. J'étais la première ligne contre ce qui affligeait ma ville. J'étais La Coccinelle.

"La Coccinelle . . . La Coccinelle . . . Êtes-vous là?"

"Désolé, Contrôle, je me suis écouté un peu."

"Tu rêvais encore?"

"Oui, mon ami, j'étais."

"N'avez-vous pas une ville pour patrouiller?"

"Sur mon chemin . . . attendre . . . J'ai quelque chose. . ."

. . . okay - just setting the scene! Let's try that in English. . .

Meanwhile, in Paris, France. . .

Wednesday, August 10th, 2016

The city had calmed down since the visit of Hit Girl.

Everything had returned to normal and most importantly, my secret identity was secure. I had helped to accomplish an amazing rescue. Dozens of kids had gained a chance of a new life. I did not envy them - not one bit. Since then, I missed the action; fighting crime in Paris just was not as exciting as running with *Fusion*.

As I gazed out over my city, I felt a surge of pride in what I was doing. I was a vigilante. I was the front line against what plagued my city. I was La Coccinelle.

"La Coccinelle . . . La Coccinelle . . . Are you there?"

Huh?"

"Sorry, Control, I tuned out for a bit."

"You were daydreaming again?"

"Yes, my friend, I was."

"Haven't you got a city to patrol?"

"On my way . . . hang on . . . I think I may have something. . ."

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La Coccinelle moved along the rooftop and peered into an adjacent alleyway. Something moved down there, several storeys below. It looked like a child and they appeared to be very angry. As La Coccinelle descended the building, she could see that the child was smashing everything within reach. It was also evident, on closer inspection, that the child was a young girl of maybe nine or ten years of age. The girl was definitely angry as she poured a clear liquid onto the wood from a plastic bottle. A box of matches followed.

"Salope!" La Coccinelle exclaimed.

"I'm sure there is no need for comments like that!" Akuma said in La Coccinelle's earpiece.

"Sorry, Control - I'm currently watching a young girl smash some shit up and set it alight."

"Okay. . ."

La Coccinelle dropped down to the ground and she closed on the obviously upset youngster. As she closed, she saw the youngster brace up - for some reason, La Coccinelle never considered the girl to be a threat; pretty stupid considering the type of kid she had been fighting to free, just a few short months before.

However, La Coccinelle was at the top of her game and she caught the leg as it came up and around, deflecting it back downwards and away from her body. The girl came at the vigilante full force - and she was good . . . very good. La Coccinelle knew that she could not hurt the girl which made defending herself a challenge. Finally, after a particularly hard punch had landed on her armour, she had had enough - but before she could say anything the girl stepped back.

"Merde!" she growled.

"Who are you?" La Coccinelle asked.

"My name is my own."

"You have another name - I am La Coccinelle. . ."

"Those dégénéré crétins never gave me a name," the dejected girl responded as she stared at the ground.

La Coccinelle had a shrewd idea what the girl was talking about as she studied the smouldering flames behind her and she smiled.

"La Terreur!"

"La Terreur?"

"Yes - it suits you, somehow."

Instead of the expected smile, the girl pouted.

"I don't deserve a name like that. . ."

"Why not?"

"I am a bad person - Je suis un *Prédateur*!"

La Coccinelle stepped back at that. The poor girl was one of *them*; those kids she had helped to rescue back in May. Her heart went out to the young girl.

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"You have a place to stay?"

The way the girl hung her head gave the seasoned vigilante the answer. She had a distinct feeling that she might regret her benevolent actions but she was not about to leave a young girl alone on the streets. On the other hand, her job was to clean up the criminals, not the homeless kids - of which there were many on the streets of Paris, just as there was in any major city. However, La Coccinelle had played a major part in putting that kid on the street.

"Come with me . . . hungry?"

"Oui."

It was time to take a chance - maybe the offering of an olive leaf might help the girl, either that or it would get her and her friend killed. La Coccinelle held out a hand to the girl which after a few seconds hesitation was soon filled by the hand of the young girl.

"Control, I'm coming in - and I have a new friend. . ."

"*Ta Guele! Are you fucking nuts?*"

"Probably. . ."

There was a lot of muttering from Havre Principal as La Coccinelle led the young girl towards her transport.

"Nique ta mere!" the girl exclaimed much to La Coccinelle's displeasure - the girl had a foul mouth on her.

What had caused the young girl to swear violently? It was the red and black Kawasaki Z1000 R Edition motorcycle which was parked up down another alleyway.

"You hang on tight now," La Coccinelle cautioned as the young girl wrapped her arms around her new mentor's waist.

They sped through the night at high speed, crossing the Seine, and they did not pause until they had left the city centre behind to the east. After braking heavily, La Coccinelle turned the motorcycle off the road and down a darkened street which angled steeply downwards and appeared to be an impasse - but then an opening appeared on the

right and the motorcycle was enveloped in total darkness as the opening closed behind the rider and her passenger.

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"Somebody not paid the electric bill?" the young girl quipped.

"Funny. . ." La Coccinelle responded tartly as she snapped her fingers and lights began to snap on all around them.

Ahead of them was a large open space with no windows - very much like a large warehouse. Over to the left were four motorcycles - all powerful, and of differing makes - in identical red and black colour schemes. The central section of the facility was a large glazed in area that was fitted out for martial arts training. To the right of the training area, there was a brick structure which extended floor to ceiling. Each wall held a pair of large vertical windows which were tinted to allow one way vision out. Standing in the doorway which led inside the brick structure was a young, pale-skinned young woman with flowing light-red hair who bore a very disapproving expression on her face.

La Coccinelle parked the motorcycle beside the others and then she dismounted, pulling off her crash helmet and placing it on a rack if similar helmets of varying designs. The young girl followed suit, although she wore no crash helmet. La Coccinelle held out her hand which the girl took and they both headed towards the brick structure with the pouting young woman. Just before they reached her, La Coccinelle stopped and she turned to the young girl, dropping to one knee.

"You about to propose to me?"

"No," La Coccinelle chuckled. "I want to help you - I want you to trust me enough to tell me your name. . ."

"No . . ." Akuma tried to no avail.

La Coccinelle reached up and she pulled off her mask to reveal a young woman. Her hair was black, with pale blue highlights and was tied back in a tight ponytail. Her bluebell eyes were sparkling as she smiled at the youngster.

"My name is Marinette and the pouting girl in the doorway is Alya."

Alya rolled her eyes but she smiled warmly at the girl.

"Hi - what is your name?" Alya asked.

The young girl's shoulders slumped as she came to a decision.

"Je suis Yvette."

Marinette looked up at Alya.

"I promised Yvette some food - what have we got?"

"Not much," Alya replied. "We have some bread and some meat. . ."

Alya laughed as Yvette's eyes went wide.

"Come on - let's feed you while Marinette gets herself changed and sorted out."

Alya led Yvette past the brick structure and towards what was obviously an open-plan kitchen with a large wooden table and six chairs.

"Bread is there - meat is in the fridge. . ."

Yvette was ripping off a chunk of bread almost before Alya had finished the word 'bread'.

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"What the fuck are you doing, Marinette?" Alya demanded as she rounded on her friend in the armoury.

"She's a *Prédateur* and she has nowhere to live. I couldn't just leave her out on the streets, now, could I?"

"I guess not . . . but I think you might have misunderstood the idea of a 'secret identity'," Alya pointed out resignedly.

"I thought about that, long and hard - maybe not long enough, but I had to come to a decision. I saw the way that those poor kids were forced to learn. I saw that dunking tank in Toulouse. I saw where they were punished. I saw the way that little kids were forced to fight instead of enjoying a normal childhood. Yvette is one of them and I want to help her. If it makes you feel happier, I'll speak to Mindy about her."

"She's a nice enough girl - polite, but after what you told me about them, I assume she could rip my head off and hand it to me."

"And then some," Marinette confirmed. "Let's go check on our trained assassin and see if she's left any food for us."

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Yvette was still eating when Marinette and Alya returned to the kitchen. Her cheeks were bulging and the three-foot loaf had been reduced to mere crumbs on the kitchen side - the meat was all but gone too. Alya was about to comment on the vanished food but then she saw the immense look of pleasure and contentedness on the young girl's face and she relented.

"You doing okay?" Marinette asked.

The response was more of a mumble but it appeared to be in the affirmative. In between bites, Yvette was now yawning enormously.

"You tired?" Alya asked gently.

"Very - I've not slept much in the past few weeks.

"Come on - let's get going; I have a nice bed waiting for you," Marinette commented.

The young girl smiled.

Thirty minutes later. . .

Central Paris

Marinette was grabbed the moment she closed her front door.

One hand took her by the cheek, another seized her left buttock – and squeezed. Then out of the darkness came a pair of lips which touched her own and she felt her legs go weak beneath her.

“Mon chérie amour,” a deep voice purred into her ear.

“Adrien. . .”

“Oui, mon ladybug. . .”

Adrien’s left hand moved down Marinette’s chest and stomach before settling on her crotch. Marinette moaned as she felt herself swept off her feet and then moments later, she was laid down very gently onto their bed.

“We need to talk. . . mon dieu!”

Adrien’s hands had slid beneath her trousers and his fingers were very gently caressing her. . .

“Marinette?”

Adrien’s hand froze.

“You brought Alya home with you?”

“Not just Alya. . .”

Ten minutes later. . .

Adrien looked down at the young girl who just grinned back at him.

“So, we’re taking in lodgers now?” Adrien asked of his fiancé.

“Something like that – you said you wanted to help those poor kids I helped in Toulouse. . .”

“This was not quite what I had in mind, mon amour – but I trust you. . . Yvette?”

“Oui monsieur.”

“Call me Adrien – follow me and I will show you to your bedroom.”

“He’s so good with kids,” Alya commented as the two young women watched Adrien lead Yvette down the corridor and into a room on the right.

"Bathroom is across the corridor - I'll find you some towels . . . blue, maybe?"

"Oui s'il vous plaît."

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Ten minutes later, after Alya had left, Marinette went to check on the young *Prédateur*, only to find that Yvette was fast asleep. Her long black hair was just barely visible, protruding from beneath the duvet. Adrien wrapped his arms around Marinette and she absorbed his warmth as she allowed herself to be manoeuvred back to their bedroom.

"Now - where were we. . ." Adrien breathed into Marinette's ear.

"Your fingers were somewhere around my . . . but we can't."

Adrien sat down on the bed, pulling Marinette with him.

"Shame - anyway, what are you going to do with her?"

"Not sure - but I know somebody who does. What time is it?"

"A little after 2 am."

"So, that would make it a little after 7 pm, in Chicago. Let me make a quick call."

The following morning
Thursday, August 11th

"Bonjour, Yvette!"

"Bonjour, Marinette."

"Tired?"

"A little - I've been sleeping rough for a long time."

"Ready for breakfast?"

That perked up the young girl as Marinette placed a pile of fresh croissants from the boulangerie on the table along with copious amounts of café au lait. Yvette dug in with barely concealed gusto.

"Has our lodger left anything for me?" Adrien asked as he sat down beside the diminutive Yvette.

"Some," Marinette commented. "But, I'd dig in fast before she cleans us out completely."

Thirty minutes, later, Yvette sat back and groaned.

"That was really good. Thanks, Marinette. May I go for a shower, please?"

"Go - you have towels?"

"Oui mademoiselle."

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"You're all still alive, I see," Alya commented as she looked at her friends. "Where is the little assassin?"

"In the shower," Adrien laughed. "You got the items?"

"Of course," Alya replied and she sounded a little offended.

"You never fail, Alya."

Alya gave Adrien a withering look as she handed several bags to Marinette before heading back out the door.

"While you care for your wayward assassin, I'm off to keep Paris safe," Alya said tartly.

"She doesn't approve of Yvette, does she?" Adrien muttered rhetorically.

Marinette headed off to find the young girl in question.

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Yvette stepped out of the shower feeling a lot more human than she had twelve hours before. She felt like a different girl. She returned to her bedroom to find Marinette emptying out half a dozen bags of clothing.

"You look a lot better - smell better, too," Marinette commented. "I have some new clothes for you - I hope Alya picked out the right sizes. Underwear, trousers, socks, blouses, T-shirts - take your pick. Some trainers and some pixie boots."

Yvette beamed at the selection as it was laid out before her. The dirty clothing had been dumped in a pile beside the bed.

"I'll bin those old things," Marinette suggested as she saw Yvette cast a glance at them.

"Good - a part of me, I don't mind losing," Yvette commented.

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Once Yvette was dressed, Marinette sat down opposite her on a couch, with Adrien beside her.

"You have a nom de famille?"

"Dubois, Yvette Dubois. Ma famille est morte - J'ai tiré sur ma mère. J'ai tiré sur mon père. J'ai tiré sur ma petite soeur."

Yvette and Adrien just looked at one another. They were both very aware of the processes used to brain wash the *Prédateurs*, but for Yvette to just come straight out with it. . .

"I thought that they didn't remember that event?" Adrien commented.

"So did I," Marinette replied.

"I am ten-years-old - just last week, in fact. I was taken as a *Prédateur* when I was seven-years-old. Just last month, I started to remember things - bad things. Things that left me angry and upset. Things that made me wish I was dead. I've done bad things - very bad things."

Yvette began to cry as she pulled her feet up onto the couch and hugged her knees close to her chest.

"You're going to throw me out onto the streets know you know what I am and what I have done."

"Never going to happen, ma chérie. We know what a *Prédateur* is and we do not blame you for what you became. I had the honour of being part of the team which destroyed that heinous organisation in Toulouse a few months back," Marinette explained. "There will always be a place for you here, for as long as you want, Yvette."

Adrien nodded.

Yvette began to cry again, but for a very different reason.

That afternoon

Marinette answered the knock on the door and found herself face to face with a tall blonde woman.

"Bonne après-midi! Je suis Brooke. Mindy m'a envoyé pour voir s'il y avait quelque chose dont vous aviez besoin."

"Qui?" Marinette replied.

"Mindy sent me - do I really have to say the code phrase; so humiliating!"

Marinette just stood there.

"Okay - 'it's biology bitch' - happy?"

Marinette laughed as she waved the young woman inside.

"Mindy said you might come by - I understand you have a house in Paris?"

"My parents have an apartment on Avenue Marceau," Brooke replied. "We spend the summer here, in Paris."

"Cool - why that phrase?"

"A long story that I'd rather not go into, thank you very much - Mindy's attempt at humour. Okay. Mindy sent me to see if there was anything you needed for your new - what *is* a Predator?"

"Je suis un *Prédateur*!" Yvette commented as she came up behind Brooke.

"She looks so sweet," Brooke sighed. "But I hear she's a chip off the old Hit Girl block."