

Sabrina the Teenage Therapist, Volume 2

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Sabrina the Teenage Therapist, Volume 2

by [tptplayer5701](#)

Summary

A "Mind Games"-verse anthology:

Since returning from Angola, Sabrina's life has changed a thousand different ways. Therapist, student, hero, mother-to-be... How will she navigate her wild and crazy life?

A Dinner Engagement

Sabrina smiled warmly, looking around the table in her parents' apartment. Even though she had finally moved out – officially – she and Max still came here for dinner at least twice a week – sometimes more often, especially on the nights when she worked late at the Agreste Rehab Center and Max spent half the day consulting with one of the other hero groups. Today, he had been in Athens, helping the Olympiad to set up their new conference table and holographic projectors; tomorrow, he was scheduled for a trip to New Atlantis, to discuss the new space-plane designs. Her stomach churned uncomfortably, despite the consistent sensation of happiness and contentment exuding from the baby. She swallowed, forcing back her anxiety at the thought of Max leaving. Looking around the table, she took in the nervous-but-excited faces around her, allowing herself to tap into what they were feeling. Her parents' happiness permeated her own emotions, and the anxiety ebbed the slightest bit. Coming here was always such a trip down memory lane. She had moved out, almost two months ago, but still this felt so much like home: comfortable, familiar, welcoming.

But this was the first time she and Max had come over for dinner since Claudie's return from the cosmonaut training facility in Moscow. Warring with the happiness and excitement, Sabrina could also sense a level of palpable anxiety and nervousness around the table, especially coming from her parents and from Claudie. A hint of guilt coming off of Claudie. Trepidation from Max. Nervousness from her parents. Sabrina breathed slowly and deeply, releasing her own fluttering nervousness into the air.

This was her family. All of these people cared about her – and about Max. Whatever they were feeling, they wanted what was best for them.

"So you have been in space?" Sabrina's father asked curiously, passing Claudie the chicken.

Claudie nodded, her guilt starting to increase. "I didn't want to be away for so long of a stretch – if I had realized that I would be leaving Max entirely without supervision for two years, I might have put off my application to ESA for another year or two, until he was in university."

"No," Max insisted, his eyes widening. "As I told you then, I was capable of looking after myself while you were in training. Mme Lê kept an eye on me when I needed it, and my friends made sure I was never lonely."

Claudie raised an eyebrow at him. "And I am glad of that fact," she agreed. "But it is different having a parent home. Especially with as long as I was away."

"We have been happy to have Max over for meals and look after him over the last year since the kids started dating," Sabrina's mother assured Claudie, giving Max a fond smile. "You raised a wonderful son."

Claudie smiled. "Oh, I know," she agreed. "I wouldn't have been willing to apply to ESA when I did if I didn't trust him to look after himself."

“So how did you come to be an astronaut?” Sabrina’s father asked.

Claudie shrugged. “It had always been my dream to become an astronaut. When Max was born, I had to put those plans aside to raise him, but once Max was in collège, I thought that maybe the time was right. So, I applied, and I was a little surprised when they admitted me into the training program.” She sighed. “Later than I expected, but still, I was able to follow my dream eventually.”

Sabrina’s mother hummed. “I suppose having children *can* cause one to put one’s plans on hold,” she mused, her eyes darting in Sabrina’s direction. “Though we hope that will not be the case.”

“And it certainly doesn’t *have* to be the case,” Claudie agreed, studiously avoiding looking away from Sabrina’s mother, though her eyes darted toward Max. “But it does take a lot of work to raise a child. Especially if you end up raising them alone.”

Sabrina’s stomach clenched at the thought; under the table she found Max’s hand. His breathing hitched, but he gripped Sabrina’s hand tightly, giving it a reassuring squeeze. Her mouth set in a thin line, Sabrina forced herself to breathe: in slowly, hold, out even slower. It was okay. Max was okay. He wasn’t going to get hurt. Finally, she exhaled, releasing her fear and anxiety into the atmosphere.

“Of course, having a partner to share the burden certainly relieves some of the stress,” her mother pointed out, patting her father’s arm. “I don’t know *how* I would have managed without Roger, you know.”

“Most of the time while Max was growing up, I didn’t have that kind of support, unfortunately,” Claudie told her sadly. “Max’s father left us when Max was a baby, so I had to raise him by myself. Sometimes, I really wished I’d had someone to help me, especially when Max was little.” Finally, she glanced over at Sabrina with a nervous smile. “But I’m absolutely going to make sure the next generation has someone to help them out.”

Max frowned. “I have absolutely no intention of abandoning my family,” he informed Claudie, pursing his lips. Guilt, shame, and indignation warred for dominance in his emotions.

“I wouldn’t dream of suggesting that,” his mother told him in return, though her own sense of guilt shifted into embarrassment and then to relief.

Sabrina raised an eyebrow, looking back and forth between them. “It really is okay,” she assured Claudie. “Max and I are on board with what we’re doing, with how we’re going to handle being parents – or at least as much as we *can* be, when the baby’s still...” She gestured vaguely to her abdomen.

Claudie let out a breath. “I know,” she replied, giving Sabrina a sympathetic smile. “But...” She let out a breath. “I hope I never have to see someone go through the challenges I faced. Not when I can do something about it.”

Sabrina smiled. “I’m glad our baby will have her grandparents in her life.”

“Do you know what you’re having?” asked Claudie, cocking her head to one side.

Sabrina shook her head. “Not yet – we decided to let it be a surprise,” she explained. Max hummed, and Sabrina stifled a laugh. “Of course, there really is a lot we already *do* know about the baby,” she added.

“Oh?”

Sabrina nodded. “I know that when I eat sweets, the baby gets happier. When I’m getting overtired, the baby starts getting cranky. But most of the time, her overwhelming feeling is contentment.” Claudie’s eyes widened. Sabrina rubbed her belly and smiled softly. “My miraculous. I can feel the baby’s emotions – all the time. It’s... it’s a really amazing, special feeling.”

Claudie’s eyes widened. “I bet.”

“No one ever needs a pregnancy test, when Sabrina is around,” Max joked, squeezing Sabrina’s hand.

“I... *try* not to pry,” Sabrina protested. “But sometimes I can’t help sensing it.” She stifled a laugh. “Sometimes, my friends will actually ask me to check!”

“Is that... a *concern* for girls your age?”

Sabrina smiled. “Let’s just say that I’m not the *only* one expecting a baby.”

Her father grimaced. “Andre’s office did a study,” he interjected. “They just released it within city hall this week – I’m surprised it hasn’t leaked yet. But in the four months since the Tarasque’s defeat, neonatal care has gone up by almost four times the figure from this time last year.”

Max’s eyes widened. “I had noticed a trend... but I calculated it to be a fluke, an outlier, a factor of small sample size after I had not measured the previous data.”

“No fluke.” Sabrina’s father shook his head. “Though it *could* be an outlier year. But around the year that your child is old enough for school, Paris could have a serious problem on its hands.”

Sabrina’s stomach clenched.

“Whatever happens will happen,” her mother interjected, patting her father’s arm. “It’s best not to speculate on what that future might be like. I’d much rather live in the here and now, with the grandbaby we’re going to have in just a few months!”

“Absolutely!” Claudie agreed, grinning eagerly. “With luck, I will be fairly close to home, at least for the next couple years.”

Sabrina’s father hummed. “On that note, now that you’re back from space,” he began, giving Claudie a curious look, “what *are* your plans now?”

“Truthfully, I haven’t given it too much thought,” she admitted. “At least not the specific details. Startrain has already offered me my old job back, though after *actually* piloting to the stars, I’d as soon not return to driving a train. I have been asked to speak at four different collèges and lycées in Paris alone this autumn, and I have an invitation to guest-lecture at the University of Paris in the spring term. I am *also* still employed by ESA – I will be serving as their liaison to the French government, at least for the next year, since I am the most recent French astronaut to serve a mission aboard the ISS. After that, I would *like* to take another trip to the ISS, though perhaps not such an extended stay.” She shook her head ruefully. “I had no idea my time would be in such great demand after getting back to *terra firma*!”

Max grinned. “If you are going to be serving as liaison to the French government, perhaps we can arrange a more permanent liaison position for you...” Sabrina’s father furrowed his brows, and Claudie cocked her head to one side. “My colleagues and I have been designing a permanent Moon base for the last year,” he explained. “One that would be shared and manned both by the heroes *and* by the various space agencies. We will need someone knowledgeable and experienced in the field of aerospace to serve as a liaison between the two groups – ideally someone who has experience on both the civilian and hero sides. And I can think of no better option than you.”

Claudie’s eyes widened in surprise, and she sat back in her chair. “You want *me* to work alongside you on something of this scale? To design an entire habitable base? I’m honored, of course, but I can’t be the best option available. I piloted the capsule; my understanding of its functionality is limited at best, at least in comparison to our flight engineer. Wouldn’t you be better served by one of NASA’s or ESA’s astrophysicists?”

Max nodded. “We will include others in the process, of course,” he assured her. “But they cannot learn how the portal system works or where the heroes’ portals go. Certain of our other technologies likewise cannot be shared with the larger scientific community. And the heroes will not work with the civilian space agencies in the same way that we do with each other – secret identities and hidden locations will prevent it. But I trust you to keep those secrets and make the proper connections with the civilian agencies on our behalf.”

Claudie started but nodded. “Of course; I would be happy to help however I can.”

Sabrina grinned. “Think of it this way: if you’re working with Max, then you’ll always be able to come home for dinner!”

Her mother arched an eyebrow. “Then why is it that we only see you for dinner a couple times a week?” she teased.

Sabrina flushed.

It was near the end of the meal that Max cleared his throat. The anxiety and nervousness that had been hiding below the surface for the last two days suddenly spiked. “There is something that I had always intended to do at some point, though recent events have brought it far more into our minds than we had imagined,” he announced, squeezing Sabrina’s hand. Glancing back and forth between Sabrina’s parents and Claudie, he grimaced. “I know you wish we had done this sooner, before Sabrina became pregnant, but we cannot go back in time and

change that. All we can do is move forward with the circumstances in which we find ourselves.”

Sabrina’s father grinned, giving Max an encouraging nod.

Turning to face Max as he slipped out of his chair in front of her, Sabrina’s eyes widened in anticipation. Was this really what she thought it was? A couple weeks ago, they had sat down to talk about it after dinner, but this... She swallowed back the butterflies fluttering in her stomach, feeling moisture welling up in her eyes.

Max took both of her hands in his own, swallowing hard. “Sabrina,” he whispered, “you are my best friend – I could not imagine living my life without you. When we were separated, that was the hardest six weeks of my life – the only thing on my mind was how to get back to you. Now that we are together again, I never want us to be apart again. And now you are going to be the mother of my child. So will you be my wife?”

Sabrina sniffled, tears falling from her eyes. “Yes.”

Shopping

Chapter Summary

Sabrina goes shopping with "her baby's godmothers."

"This one looks so much better!"

"*That* one?? Ew! There is no way that my goddaughter is sleeping in a crib covered in unicorns and rainbows! It's garish and ugly and... *saccharine*! Those little monsters look like rats with giant heads! All those colors are giving *me* a headache; how's my goddaughter going to be able to sleep? She's going to have nightmares!"

"Excuse me? What do you mean, *your* goddaughter??"

"Um, just *that*! Unless you think *you're* going to be her godmother, Dupain-Cheng..."

"It's 'Agreste' now, *Bourgeois*. And why *shouldn't* I be her godmother?"

A scoff. "Utterly ridiculous. Let's see... Where to start... maybe with the fact that you're *not* Sabrina's best friend?"

"What!?"

"Enough!" Sabrina rubbed her forehead, groaning, and plopped down in one of the furniture store's chairs, ignoring the warning sign next to it and glaring back and forth between Chloe and Marinette in annoyance. Even though the baby wasn't due for almost half a year still, Chloe and Marinette had still insisted on dragging her to the store to look at baby furniture – changing tables and playpens and cribs and – a hundred things she knew they needed to get but didn't need *yet*. Not that she and Max had anywhere to *store* new baby furniture in their apartment, even if they *did* buy it all. Now that Claudie had decided to rent her own apartment, they would have a separate room for the baby... but Claudie was still living there for now, while she looked for an apartment close by. But still, Marinette and Chloe had picked her up from the rehab center after her last session of the morning and taken her to get lunch before stopping at half the furniture stores in the city. Yet for as much as Sabrina wanted to enjoy the time together... She sighed. "If the two of you don't stop bickering, we won't choose *either* of you to be the baby's godparents."

Marinette yelped, leaning over to examine Sabrina closely. "Are you okay? Not hot or anything are you? Or maybe you need a drink of water – Mama says she needs at least eight glasses of water a day, so how much have you had already." She swallowed. "We're, um, we're not bothering you, are--"

“What do *you* think, Dupain-Cheng?” retorted Chloe, pushing Marinette roughly aside to kneel next to Sabrina, taking her hand and glaring at Marinette. Catching herself on the display next to them, Marinette frowned. Chloe scoffed. “Of *course* it bothers her when you’re arguing. You don’t have to say and take this,” she added to Sabrina. “We can just look on our own.”

Sabrina gave Chloe a deadpan look. “I asked *both* of you to come with me today,” she pointed out. “So I want *both* of your opinions. And you were arguing, too.”

“Only because *someone* was going to stick our baby in *the* ugliest crib in the store,” Chloe protested, giving Marinette an incredulous look. “She’s being absolutely *ridiculous!*”

“*Our* baby?” Sabrina interjected, raising an eyebrow at her.

“Oh, but it’s so *cute!*” Marinette insisted, cutting Sabrina off. “Don’t you think our baby will look so adorable in here? Especially with the stuffed alicorn that Adrien and I are getting for it—”

Chloe made a face. “Does Adrien know you’re planning to spent his money on that vomit-inducing nightmare fuel?”

Marinette’s eyes narrowed. “I’m spending *our* money on an adorable flying unicorn with a sparkly horn, which happens to match the unicorns on the adorable crib that we picked out. Besides,” she added, holding out the packaging to Chloe and pointing to one of the images on the side. “Don’t these unicorns remind you of Kaalki?”

“I mean, not particularly,” Chloe replied, giving it a dubious look. “*Maybe* with the colors, but even *that’s* pushing it. When’s the last time you actually *saw* Kaalki?”

Marinette scoffed. “What are you talking about? Look right here, at this pony. The head, the eyes, the muzzle... maybe it’s not *perfect*, but it’s close.”

Chloe rolled her eyes. “Even if it *does* look like Kaalki, what’s the point? Why does our baby need to sleep in a crib decorated with these horrifying abominations that barely even *look* like Kaalki, when she could just as easily sleep with the real thing?” she pointed out, arching an eyebrow. Making a face, she pushed the box away. “Get that thing away from me.”

Carefully, Marinette placed the package on the floor and folded her arms. “It still looks better than that garish green thing *you* were looking at,” she grumbled. “It looks like a giant lime. If you’re going to go for something in a solid color, the least you can do is suggest something in a nicer color. That pink one looked so *cute* – especially with those onesies we picked out.”

“Actually, I think I might prefer the green one. At least green is a little more unisex,” Sabrina asserted. “On the baby registry, we even asked for unisex clothing, to make sure it would be okay for either a boy or a girl.” She paused, raising an eyebrow at them. You realize we don’t actually know what we’re having yet, right? Other than a baby, I mean. I’d rather not get a whole bunch of clothing that won’t work for a boy when we have a girl, or won’t look right on a girl if we have a boy.”

Marinette sighed, her shoulders slumping. “Yeah, I know. But I’m not going to call your baby an ‘it’.”

Sabrina smiled impishly. “Just as long as we’re clear on both of those points.”

“Both?” Chloe furrowed her brows.

“Yeah.” Sabrina nodded. “First, that the baby could be either a boy or a girl. Second, that it is *my* baby – mine and Max’s. When either of *you* is the one having the baby, then *you* can be the one making all the decisions!”

Marinette’s eyes widened, and her cheeks started to turn rosy. “You’re not saying—” Her voice trailed off, and she mouthed the word, “pregnant,” her hand drifting down to rub her belly.

Sabrina furrowed her brows in concentration, focusing in on Marinette’s abdomen. Marinette sat, frozen in place, staring at Sabrina and unable to move for several long moments while Sabrina concentrated on Marinette. She could feel Marinette’s emotions plainly – nervousness, trepidation, happiness – along with a hint of excitement... Sabrina furrowed her brows, digging in deeper. But finally, she shook her head. “Not that I can sense. Why, are you worried?”

“Not really?” Marinette let out a breath. “It’s... it’s something we’ve talked about,” she admitted. “I’ve been thinking about us having children together for...” Her cheeks turned a brighter shade of red “... for *years* now. And we do want to *have* kids some time. But we haven’t talked about it too *seriously* yet. It’s more of a ‘What if it happened someday?’ kind of question. At least for right now.”

Sabrina gave her an amused smile. “Well, as far as I can tell, it’s still just a hypothetical. At least for you. For me and Max, on the other hand...”

Chloe arched an eyebrow at her. “And whose fault is that?” she pointed out.

“Ours,” Sabrina replied calmly. “It’s *our* responsibility, and something that Max and I are working through *together*. Although we *do* appreciate having our friends to support us,” she added. Subconsciously, she ran her thumb across the back of her new ring, glancing down at it and smiling.

Marinette sighed affectionately. “Okay, show it.”

Quirking an eyebrow at Marinette, Sabrina nevertheless held her hand up to her. As one, both Marinette and Chloe leaned forward, staring at the engagement ring more closely. Sabrina smiled. The ring wasn’t large or showy – compared to Marinette’s engagement ring, it was extremely modest, with a single small diamond in a simple setting. Thanks to his Super Akuma Battle games, Max could have afforded more than this, but Sabrina wouldn’t have wanted to spend all that money on a ring, not when they had so much else to worry about right now. She didn’t need something flashy; all she needed or wanted was something to show their love, to show their commitment to each other – as if the baby they were having together *didn’t* show their commitment.

Marinette cooed, taking Sabrina's hand and holding it up so the diamond caught the light. "Ooo... So pretty! I like it!"

Chloe's smile warmed, glancing between the ring and Sabrina. "You're happy with it, right?"

Sabrina nodded. "I'm happy," she assured her. "Max and I are in this together. We were already; this just confirms it."

"Still," Marinette interjected, "no matter what happens, you're never going to be alone, having to raise your baby. You'll always have us, too!"

"I know." Sabrina quirked an eyebrow at Marinette and Chloe. "Just don't make a habit of arguing about *my* baby!"

"I won't argue," Marinette assured her, giving Chloe a meaningful look.

Chloe rolled her eyes, sighing heavily. "Yeah, yeah, we promise. But still," she added, smirking, "we all know that you need us."

Sabrina smiled, warmth filling her chest, and nodded, pulling both of them into a quick hug. "I know. And I really do appreciate all of your help. I do feel a lot better about all of this, knowing that you're going to be here to help and support me, and Max, and the baby."

Job Interview

Chapter Summary

Sabrina interviews a potential new officer for the Superhero Liaison Department

“Excuse me? I was told to come and see someone in this apartment?”

Standing in the entryway of her counseling office, her hand on the doorframe to block the entrance, Sabrina furrowed her brows, studying the man in front of her for a long moment. About the same age as her father, though maybe a year or two younger, with the frame of a strong and fit man who had lost a little of his muscle tone. His hair was short-cropped, almost military in its appearance. Looking at his face, Sabrina started, blinking. She had never met this man before, had she? But there was something so... *familiar* about the face.

The man gave her a nervous look and took a hesitant step backward, doubt, anxiety, and confusion creeping into his emotions. “Sorry; I must have the wrong apartment. I’ll just... go and try the other one?”

Suddenly, Sabrina’s eyes widened and she nodded in realization. “Oh! Of course! Sorry; I completely forgot. My father mentioned this morning that he would be sending you over... you’re Marcel, right?”

Marcel nodded slowly, looking past Sabrina into the counseling office waiting room with a confused look on his face. “Yes, that’s correct. Although I was never told *why* I had to come here. I, um, I was *told* it might have something to do with a job?”

Sabrina gave him a reassuring smile and stepped back from the door, gesturing for him to enter. “Don’t worry; it’s nothing bad,” she explained. “You were recommended for a very specific position, and this is the last stage of the vetting process.”

Hesitantly entering the waiting room and glancing sidelong at the decorations on the walls, Marcel cocked his head in confusion, still standing by the front door. “But... I didn’t apply for any jobs lately...”

“This isn’t something you apply for,” she told him, gesturing for him to follow her down the hallway and into the counseling room. “Unfortunately, I can’t tell you any more than what I’ve already said until after we finish our conversation. But I promise, all of your questions will be answered in due time.”

Marcel furrowed his brows dubiously but shrugged, finally taking a seat on the opposite side of the coffee table from Sabrina. “Okay, so...” He waved his hands expectantly. “What are we doing here?” He chuckled, shaking his head. “I have to admit, I never imagined I’d be interviewed for a job by a girl the same age as my daughter!”

Sabrina stifled a giggle. “And I wasn’t expecting to be vetting a man the same age as my father!”

He gave her a wry half-smile, though his emotions were lacking in humor. “Touché.”

Sabrina inhaled and exhaled, releasing her own emotions into the atmosphere and focusing her attention on Marcel, ignoring the happiness welling up from inside of her. Anxiety, confusion, a hint of worry... but a hint of excitement and anticipation all the same. No red flags so far. “Why don’t you start by telling me a little about yourself?” Sabrina suggested, making a couple of notes on her clipboard.

Marcel shrugged. “Okay... Well, I’m married. One daughter – about your age, I think. Born and raised in Paris. I served in the army for almost 20 years – Marine Infantry. I just took my retirement, right before all this madness started.”

“In that case, thank you for your service,” Sabrina told him, checking the note on her clipboard and nodding to herself. “Tell me a little more about your military record. Where did you serve?”

He hummed. “Let’s see... Africa – a dozen or so missions, all around the continent. Most of my deployments were in North Africa, though not all. I can talk about some, but there are still a few I can’t actually talk about – top secret assignments, you understand. “

Sabrina raised an eyebrow, suppressing a laugh. “I understand completely,” she assured him. “I won’t ask you to breach any confidences if you don’t ask me to do the same! Then which missions *can* you discuss?”

He frowned, furrowing his brows pensively. “Let’s see... We were sent into the Middle East on a peacekeeping mission a few years back... not much happened on that one. I did end up pulling a protection mission for a VIP at a conference in Lebanon, fifteen years ago, I think? That deployment got real hairy, real fast. It wasn’t while *we* were there, but after we had left, a terrorist group bombed the peace conference and killed several innocent civilians. Afterward, our squad was sent to flush the group responsible into the open. We captured a lieutenant and disrupted a couple cells, but it was only of... mixed success.” He frowned. “That seems to be too much of a recurring theme: mixed success. But that’s about it for important or ‘eventful’ deployments. I’ve mostly been stuck behind a desk the last couple years, marking time until retirement. But now...” He shrugged. “I retired and got out, but it’s starting to look as though the world is passing us by.”

“Oh? What do you mean?”

He scoffed. “I used to think our military was among the best in the world – *at least* on a level with Britain and Canada, even America or Russia or China in some respects. But then that... *monster* showed up, and it was like we could do *nothing* to it.”

Sabrina swallowed, putting down her pen. “Were you there?”

He shook his head, his shoulders slumping. Sabrina could feel guilt welling up in him. “If it had been just a couple months sooner... But I’d already retired by that point,” Marcel

explained. “So I was in town when the shutdown started. I was sitting in the living room, watching the news, when the Tarasque formed.” He shuddered. “That was an unreal experience: I watched that monster form, watched all the chaos and confusion, all of it in real time on the television. They didn’t even have a chance against it.” He swallowed, his jaw clenching, and looked away. Guilt and shame roared to life in him. “It was like it didn’t even notice them. I’ve seen a single Leclerc obliterate an enemy column in less than a minute. Two could bring down a bridge from three-plus kilometers away with a pair of well-placed shots each. But this thing... it just kept coming. Shells that could rip through concrete just bounced off of its shell. And the fire coming from its eyes – it destroyed two lines of tanks in a matter of moments. When you watch something like that...”

Sabrina hummed ruefully, pushing aside the anxiety that roared to life every time the subject of the Tarasque came up. “You’re not wrong,” she told him curtly. Slowly she forced herself to breathe. She was okay. Her friends were okay. The Tarasque was gone. They had defeated it in Tarascon, and he had found Max again after seemingly losing him – they had a baby on the way, they were going to get married, they had a life together. Drawing in a deep breath, she released it slowly, recentering herself. “What did you do while the Tarasque was rampaging through the city?”

He groaned. “Not much I *could* do,” he retorted, his features falling. Wringing his hands, he looked down at the floor. “My wife, Noémie, was at work when it appeared. I couldn’t find her, so I just grabbed my daughter and tried to get out of the city. We weren’t really making much progress, but then King Monkey showed up out of the blue and half-dragged us down to where the portal had been opened. I begged to know where my wife was, but all he could say was that he would try to look. Then he shoved us through. I didn’t see him *or* my wife again.”

Sabrina nodded, remembering the story. She could sense the mix of guilt and anger coming off of him, both emotions warring for dominance. “I imagine that was terrifying, running away from that monster and finding yourself in a completely different country.”

“Good guess,” he muttered, frowning. He grimaced. “Thinking back on those days, I wasn’t really *thinking*; I was only feeling. I felt pissed off and frustrated. I had no idea where Noémie was. I thought the Heroes of Paris had failed, that they had gotten my wife killed, like so many other civilians who were killed between the fight and the evacuation. I spent the first few days just sulking in the tent. That’s when Ondine got angry with me and left, because I was in such a bad headspace. I didn’t see her again until we were leaving to return, after the Heroes had defeated the Tarasque and started to repair Paris.” His shoulders slumped. “And then, when we came through the portal back to Paris, what did I do? I was short with her, blaming the Heroes of Paris for all the *crap* that had happened. And that’s when she ran off *again*. And what did I get for all of that? I got home, and Noémie was just sitting at the kitchen table, waiting for me. She’d survived, and she had been in Paris the whole time.” He looked away. “I’m not proud of what I did, or how I handled it. Ondine is at least talking to me again, but it’s still not the same as before all of this happened. I always liked that boyfriend of hers before this, but he’s been... *distant* with me. Never said anything before asking her to marry him.”

“That was a *very* difficult time,” Sabrina pointed out. “The Tarasque brought out the worst in some people; it brought out the best in others. I’m not in the business of judging people solely based on their responses to the Tarasque. Have you thought about this since then?” Sabrina concentrated on her miraculous, pushing in deeper, focusing on Marcel’s emotions as he considered her question. Anger, frustration, guilt... She hummed. “Are you still so angry at the Heroes of Paris for their failure against the Tarasque?”

He shrugged, his brows furrowed in thought. His emotions shifted through a wide range before settling back on guilt. Finally, he shook his head. “Not at the Heroes of Paris, no,” he admitted. “I’m not angry at them; they did what they could to rescue the people who were in danger.” He frowned. “No; If anything, I’m angry at myself. I just – I felt so *useless* when the Tarasque appeared, and then when we were in Angola. There was nothing I could do, and my family was in danger. Young men and women had lost their lives, and for very little gain. I thought I had lost everything – everything but my daughter... and then I lost her, too. Not because of something the Heroes of Paris had done. But because of *my* actions.”

Sabrina nodded. “But now? If you had the ability *to* do something in a similar situation? What would you do? Is that something you would even *want*?”

“I would leap at the opportunity,” he answered immediately, his mouth set in a thin line. “If there was something I could do, something to help the situation, I would absolutely want to do it.” Confusion colored his emotions. “Why?”

Sabrina let out a breath, furrowing her brows in thought. Finally, she nodded. “The fact is that you were recommended for a very specific job in the Paris Police,” she explained.

He cocked his head to one side, his brows furrowed. “They want me to be an *investigator*?”

Sabrina gave him a reassuring look. “You don’t *have* to be an investigator, though it can help. One of your former squad mates suggested you, in fact. But until you had been vetted, we could not share any details – security, you see.”

He cocked his head to one side. “This is all a test? A security thing?”

She nodded. “Yes. The first step was a background check, which was already completed, but we also needed to give you an in-person interview to judge your fitness for the Department. And my evaluation is that you passed. So I am authorized to offer you a position in the Paris Police Prefecture’s Superhero Liaison Department.”

Doctor's Appointment

Chapter Summary

Sabrina and Max have an appointment with their family doctor - who's basically part of the family

“How have you been feeling lately?”

Sabrina groaned, leaning her head back and rolling her neck, her hands braced behind her on the examination table. Looking around the office, she sighed, taking in the comfortable atmosphere: the walls were still painted in the same sterile white she had come to expect from doctors' offices, but even with that, the office retained enough hominess to calm her and help her relax. Several paintings and posters lined the walls – she could see Nath's signature on at least one, which showed a doctor caring for a young child with a cast on her arm. In one corner, small portraits of Ladybug and Cat Noir stared out at the patient, wearing expressions somewhere between encouraging and confident. On the opposite side of the room, an embossed book cover with what appeared to be Arabic writing on it had been framed and hung in the middle of an assortment of diplomas and certifications. A simple rug in bright colors had been placed in front of the examination table, right where a patient would stand to climb up. Sabrina had to admit: Chloe had done a good job when she decorated the clinic, giving it a fusion of North African, Arabic, and European aesthetics. Refocusing on the question, she drew in and released a slow breath. “Aside from feeling at least three times bigger than I was four months ago, I feel pretty good,” she began, giving a calm smile. She kicked her legs a bit and frowned. “But my feet have been sore for a few days.”

Dr. Ouazani hummed, making a quick notation on his clipboard. Warming his stethoscope with his hands, he pressed it against Sabrina's chest in a couple of places, then pulled her blouse up to check the baby. He nodded to himself judiciously, adding to his notes. Finally, he picked up her foot and examining the sole more closely, pressing the arch several times in different spots. Sabrina winced, flinching as he pressed a particularly painful spot, and Dr. Ouazani immediately released her and leaned out of the way. Sabrina flushed in embarrassment, though Max squeezed her hand comfortingly. Finally, Dr. Ouazani nodded judiciously and reached for a small hammer. After checking her reflexes, he frowned, his brows knit together. “You seem to be in good health,” he finally announced. “Everything appears to be normal.”

“I think her sore feet may be a consequence of the dancing at Adrien and Marinette's wedding,” Max pointed out in amusement.

Sabrina grimaced. “Well, *you* insisted that we should dance...” she argued, smiling. “I was just... going along with it.” *As usual*, she didn't add, heat rising in her cheeks.

Max raised an eyebrow. “As I recall, *you* asked to dance.”

“If the *kids* were going to be dancing, we couldn’t well sit at the table the *whole* time,” she reminded him. Stifling a laugh, she added, “After all, *someone* had to keep an eye on Turing.”

“And that is *exactly* what we were doing,” Max deadpanned.

Dr. Ouazani chuckled. “My Leïla has been talking about nothing but that wedding celebration since it happened!” he observed. “And especially about how much fun it was to see so many people there.” He hummed. “I *do* recall her mentioning the young couple that was with you there – the boy and girl sitting at your table.”

Max smirked. “In his normal guise, Turing could not have remained incognito,” he pointed out. “And with his friend planning to attend, he did not wish her to go alone.”

“I see.” Dr. Ouazani raised an eyebrow. “And because of this ‘friend’, you had to dance for hours?” he asked.

Sabrina nodded innocently.

Dr. Ouazani sighed. “Well, either way, I doubt the soreness in your feet is cause for concern,” he told them. “It is not uncommon for pregnant women – even if they did *not* ‘dance the night away at a wedding’!” He gave Max a meaningful look. “My recommendation is a foot rub – that can help to ease the pain, though you should not continue if it causes *more* pain. Other than that, if you are still concerned about it at the end of the week, I’ll be happy to run some additional tests, but for now my prescription is *rest*. Rest and fluids. Water is especially important during pregnancy.”

Sabrina made a face. “You and Dr. Brasseur keep saying that – I’m going to turn into a *river* if I drink anymore!”

“You need a lot for the baby,” he told her. “And for yourself. You do not want to become dehydrated – that would be even worse for the baby.”

“I have been ensuring that she drinks enough water,” Max informed him.

“That is good.” Dr. Ouazani made another notation on his clipboard before refocusing his attention on Sabrina. “You are taking your vitamin supplements, of course?”

Sabrina nodded. “Every morning – Nooroo doesn’t let me forget.”

Sitting on the cabinet in the corner, Nooroo folded his arms. “If I did not remind you, you would *forget* more often than you *remembered*,” he squeaked.

“I wouldn’t,” Sabrina insisted, though Max gave her an amused look. She flushed. “I would remember something this important,” she muttered, folding her arms.

“Well, regardless of how it happens, it is good for you to take them,” Dr. Ouazani told them, nodding. “The baby *could* be born healthy, even without neonatal vitamins and prenatal care

– I have seen it more often than I care to admit – but the care really does help with the delivery process and help with the baby’s health and development.” He frowned, looking back and forth between them for a moment before consulting his clipboard again. “Now let’s see... at check-in, you told Leila that your next checkup with Dr. Brasseur is in... three weeks?”

“That is correct,” Max agreed, glancing up at Markov, hovering beside him, for confirmation. The robot bobbed its head up and down, the appointment date flashing across his display. “That will be approximately 20 weeks.”

“And how did the first trimester go for you?” Dr. Ouazani asked Sabrina, stroking his chin pensively.

She shrugged, glancing over at Nooroo. “Overall, it was about what I thought it would be, I think. Morning sickness was worse some days than others, but once I figured out what was happening and how to handle it, I managed just fine.”

Max frowned, glancing over at Markov, who beeped as binary digits scrolled across his screen. Max gave Sabrina a concerned look. “There were no less than eight days that you could not eat before eleven without getting sick afterward,” he pointed out. “And an additional seventeen when you refused to eat at all prior to lunch.”

Sabrina folded her arms, pursing her lips. “I managed,” she repeated.

“Well, with any luck, the morning sickness will not continue,” Dr. Ouazani told them. “But if it does – and especially if it worsens and you struggle to keep food down – you need to tell me or Dr. Brasseur about it. We need to make sure that *you* are getting the nutrients you need – the baby will take whatever he or she requires, even if that means leaving your body to go without. And if that happens, it will be bad for both you *and* the baby. Bundle of joy, a baby undoubtably is... but it is *also* something of a parasite. We need to keep *you* healthy, if we are to keep the *baby* healthy.”

Sabrina sighed. “I understand.”

“But what about everything else? Everything is well with the baby?” asked Dr. Ouazani, placing his stethoscope on Sabrina’s abdomen once more and closing his eyes to listen intently. She sucked in a breath as the cool metal touched her skin.

“The baby is... happy,” Sabrina responded, focusing on the wellspring of emotions coming from within her. “Content.”

Dr. Ouazani shook his head ruefully. “I still do not understand what you can do, how you can sense what the baby is feeling. But I wish I could understand it better – it would be useful if I knew how to *use* that information for treatment.”

Sabrina nodded in understanding. “All I know is that my baby is happy and content; beyond that...” She shrugged, rubbing her belly. “That’s all that matters to me.”

He hummed. “Would you be willing to sit in as a consultant on occasion?” he asked. “If you let me know what the fetal emotional state is, I may be able to start making connections in terms of health, treatment...”

Sabrina frowned, furrowing her brows in thought. Max squeezed her hand gently. Finally, Sabrina gave a half-nod. “I’m really busy, so I don’t know if I’ll *always* be able to do it, but I’m willing to give it a try, at least. If you think you might be able to use that information to help other mothers and babies.” She glanced over at Max. “But I *will* need to make sure my identity is still protected.”

“Of course – absolutely,” he assured her quickly. “I would never wish to put a hero’s identity at risk.”

“We know that,” Max replied. “We would not trust you with our identities – to say nothing of our lives – if we did not trust you implicitly.”

“I will give that some thought,” Dr. Ouazani mused. “I will need to protect my patients’ information, as well...” He let out a breath, a hint of anxiety in his emotions. “But perhaps we can start small, by having you both over for dinner?” he suggested. Sabrina cocked her head in confusion. Dr. Ouazani grinned in excitement. “Yamina is expecting!”

Sabrina gasped. “Oh! That’s so amazing! Congratulations to you both; we’re so happy for you! Yes; of course we’d like to come over for dinner some night.”

Max gave them a pensive look. “I am fascinated to see the results once you have sufficient data,” he told Dr. Ouazani.

“What night should we come over?” Sabrina asked Dr. Ouazani.

He raised an eyebrow. “Perhaps I should let *you* suggest a night – preferably one when Nabatala would not be scheduled for patrol...”

Max stifled a laugh. “I will arrange it.”

Nadine, Take 2

Chapter Summary

Nadine and Philippe arrive in Sabrina's office in need of counseling

Sabrina folded her arms, staring at the now-empty corner of her counseling room. Sighing, she rolled her stiff shoulders – the furniture that Adrien and Marinette had picked out for her was nice, but it was *very* heavy. “Are you *sure* I should be doing this?” she asked Nooroo, quirking an eyebrow at the Kwami floating beside her. “It could cause problems, don’t you think?”

“It is up to you,” Nooroo squeaked. “But you may find that you need *something* here to watch the baby, even with all the options you have available.”

Sabrina nodded in acknowledgment, looking back down at the small playpen crib that now took up one corner of the room. The warm color scheme matched that of the office, at least, but it did leave her chair and desk a little more cramped than they had been before. The other side of the room might have given a little more space... but that was where the window was, and where the counselees would sit. According to all the books she had read, this was the best setup to help her clients feel comfortable and at home, without feeling squeezed into a corner. She frowned. “Maybe I need it,” she allowed, pursing her lips. “But at the same time, I would feel nervous having my baby in the room while I’m trying to counsel someone. What if the baby starts to cry or needs to be fed? What if the person isn’t comfortable with the baby in the room?” She stifled a humorless laugh. “None of the books said what to do in *this particular* situation...”

Nooroo hummed, inclining his head toward her. “You still have time to decide what to do,” he reminded her. “And this is only a backup plan.”

Sabrina let out a breath. “I know. Between Mom, Emilie, Claudie, Chloe, Marinette, Alya, Mylène...” She shook her head in amusement, thinking back on the lunch with Ivan and Mylène over the weekend, after the wedding. Nooroo had been almost vibrating when he confirmed Sabrina’s suspicions. “Even Amelie and Bri and Anne. I know we won’t be lacking for babysitters. I hope.”

Nooroo raised an eyebrow at her.

“Are you volunteering?” Sabrina asked him, suppressing a smile. “I’m sure you and Kaalki could keep an eye on her!”

Nooroo huffed and folded his arms. “*I* would watch him... but *Kaalki* refuses to help.”

“I would have thought that she could just phase her tail out of the baby’s grasp,” Sabrina pointed out.

Nooroo sighed. “I will watch her while you are busy, of course, Mistress,” he promised. “And the baby,” he added.

Sabrina giggled, one hand on her stomach, and opened her mouth to respond. Before she could say anything, however, she felt two familiar sets of emotions suddenly appear in the hallway outside her counseling room, as if from nowhere. With a faint whoosh, the portal closed behind them, though Sabrina could still hear soft conversation in the background. Sighing, she glanced up at the clock and turned toward the door. “I suppose we ought to see how they are doing,” she called over her shoulder. Flitting quickly after her, Nooroo alit on Sabrina’s shoulder and nodded.

The door to the hall closet shut with a soft click, as the lock activated. “So where do we go from here?” Philippe was asking, just as Sabrina stepped out into the hallway.

“Right down here!” she called, smiling brightly and beckoning them. “Although if you would like a drink, you can help yourself to water, tea, coffee, or even some sodas, all in the kitchen at the other end of the hall, opposite the waiting room.” Freezing in place, Philippe’s emotions shifted through surprise into worry and finally to embarrassment. Beside him, Nadine half-jumped as she turned in Sabrina’s direction, but her lips parted in a smile the moment she saw her. Sabrina held out a hand, giving Nadine a quick hug. “How are you both doing today?”

Nadine grinned, though Sabrina could still sense the tension and anxiety buried just below the surface of her emotions. “I’m doing *fantastic*!” Nadine assured her, nodding a little too eagerly. “Super. Perfect.”

Philippe folded his arms, a troubled look in his eyes, and gave Nadine a worried look.

Sabrina sighed. “You know I can tell that’s not entirely the case,” she told her gently. “I can feel how anxious you are.” She raised an eyebrow at Nadine meaningfully. “Is this anxiety what brought you here today?”

Philippe let out a breath and nodded, rubbing circles on Nadine’s shoulder blade with his thumb. “There’s... a lot of stress coming up,” he explained, looking down at the floor. His shoulders slumped. “I’m...” He turned his gaze on Nadine for a moment and pulled her into a closer hug. “I’m worried it might be too much for Nadine to deal with on her own. Especially so soon after... well...”

“Lila?” Sabrina supplied.

Nadine flinched.

Sabrina drew in a slow, deep breath, focusing on the anxiety pouring off of Nadine – so much stronger than the last time she had seen her, at the wedding. Inhaling, Sabrina pulled the emotions away from Nadine; exhaling, she released them into the atmosphere around her. Nadine’s breathing hitched, her eyes widening. Sabrina sighed. “It’s okay,” she assured

Nadine, keeping her voice low and soothing. “Lila is not going to hurt you again. You are safe now.” She furrowed her brows, observing Nadine carefully. “You know,” she began slowly, “I saw you at the wedding.” Nadine cocked her head to one side. Sabrina smiled. “I wanted to go and say hi, but there was just so much else happening. Your dress looked really pretty, though.”

Nadine perked up, smiling. “Thanks! And I loved your dress, too – especially the way that it moved when you and Max were dancing.”

Sabrina waved a hand dismissively. “What I did hardly qualified as ‘dancing,’” she told her. “I was just swaying a little in time with the music; *you* were far more graceful than I was.”

Nadine shrugged. “If I were, well, like you...”

“Pregnant?” Sabrina arched an eyebrow at her.

Nadine nodded. “If I were in your situation, I don’t know if I would have been able to dance any better than you did.”

“Oh, I’m sure you would be,” Sabrina told her. “*I* haven’t been doing gymnastics for a decade!” Nadine’s smile froze, her anxiety spiking. Sabrina’s eyes widened, and her stomach clenched with guilt. “Nadine?” she asked hesitantly. Nadine looked up at her, rousing herself slowly. “Does talking about gymnastics bring up bad memories?” Sabrina asked gently.

Nadine sighed. “Not as bad as it was,” she admitted. “But it does some.” Her shoulders relaxed the slightest bit. “Being able to *be* la Gymnaste again, as a hero this time, has really helped with it, though.”

Sabrina put a hand on her shoulder. “You absolutely *are* a hero,” she assured her. “Lila did not define you.”

Nadine smiled. “I know!”

Taking in Nadine’s infectious enthusiasm, Sabrina smiled in response. “So, tell me about what brought you here today,” she instructed her.

Nadine’s emotions shifted to guilt and embarrassment.

Sensing the change in her emotions, Sabrina gave her a reassuring smile. “It’s okay to be afraid when changes happen,” she assured her. “Especially unexpected changes coming so quickly on the heels of *more* change. Things have been happening quickly this summer, haven’t they?” Nadine nodded, sniffing. “And they’ve all been *good* changes, I think,” Sabrina continued. “At least since you got away from Lila. But it’s still change, and it will take some getting used to. But that’s why I’m here. Why don’t you both come in here and we can discuss it together?”

Nervously, Nadine followed Sabrina into the office, with Philippe close behind them. Sitting in her accustomed chair and adjusting her posture slightly to be more comfortable, Sabrina focused her gaze on Nadine, taking in the way that she and Philippe sat together on the

couch, Nadine leaning into him as he wrapped his arms around her comfortingly and gently squeezed her hands. Philippe's emotions betrayed worry, fear, anxiety; Nadine's were filled with the same, along with a hint of guilt.

Sabrina nodded to herself and leaned forward, bracing her elbows on her knees. "Let's start with what's going on," she instructed them. "I sense a lot of worry; you said that there's a lot of stress coming up. Can you tell me that that's about?"

Nadine tensed. Rubbing her back, Philippe grimaced. "Ivan and Mylène said that we would have to move out and find our own apartment after Christmas," he explained. Sabrina nodded in understanding. "I think that's the biggest thing. Nadine had been doing so well while we were staying with them, but now it's *another* change, coming so quickly after we rescued her and got her into this safe place to begin with."

"I don't *want* to go," Nadine murmured, looking down at the floor. "I – I thought that Mylène wanted us there, that we could stay as long as we wanted." She blinked several times. "Did– did I do something wrong?"

Sabrina cocked her head to one side in surprise. "Why do you think you might have done something wrong?"

Nadine shrugged. "I–I *thought* Mylène liked me, that she was my friend. But now she's saying I have to leave."

"And because you are friends, you had hoped that you would be able to stay there as long as you needed?" Sabrina finished, humming. Nadine nodded. Sabrina tapped her chin. "Do you have to be living with someone for them to be your friend?"

Nadine shook her head. "No."

"That means you don't have to be living with Ivan and Mylène for them to be your friends," Sabrina pointed out.

"I know..." Nadine's shoulders slumped. "It's just – it's a change. And I don't think I'm ready for *more* change."

Sabrina sighed. "Sometimes, change is necessary for us to grow. You could stay with Ivan and Mylène while you were recovering from what had happened. But now you can move out with Philippe, find your own apartment, and try to have some more independence." Sabrina smiled. "You are going to change. You are going to grow. You are going to get even better. This is just one step of that process."

The Future Mother-in-Law

Chapter Summary

Sabrina is helping her future mother-in-law move into her apartment. While pregnant.

“Where do you want this box to go? It’s labeled ‘Books’.”

“What? No – Sabrina, you shouldn’t be carrying *that*! It’s *far* too heavy!”

Sabrina rolled her eyes. “I’m not an *invalid*,” she retorted, placing the box on the floor next to the bookcase and planting her hands on her hips, trying not to let the exertion show on her face. “I’m just *pregnant*...”

Claudie sighed, leaning against the wall and putting down the duster with which she had been cleaning the top of the entertainment center. She nearly stumbled over the carton next to her feet, and braced herself against the wall. Rolling her neck, she wiped her brow with the back of her hand, letting the duster slump to her side. Almost two weeks Claudie had been back in Paris, dividing her time between consultations with the European Space Agency and the Air and Space Force, and working with Max’s Hero Techies. Until today, she had still been living in the apartment with Max and Sabrina, though she had spent some of her time at home packing the few items that she hadn’t brought with her to Russia when she started her training. Sabrina let out a breath. While it had been nice to have Claudie living with them, the tension between Max and Claudie at bedtime had been almost unbearable, even if neither of them had said a word.

Fortunately, they had managed to find an apartment for Claudie, and very close to the one that Max and Sabrina were still sharing. In a way, it had been fortuitous that their neighbors had decided to move out last week. Before their landlord had had a chance to rent it back out to someone else, Max had put a deposit down for Claudie. This way, she would be close enough for them to spend as much time together as they wanted to, but they would have their own apartments and their own space. Sabrina’s stomach twinged. She only hoped that living right next door wouldn’t turn out to be *too* close. Marinette and *her* mother-in-law shared an enormous mansion without trouble, but Claudie was not Emilie. And Sabrina was not Marinette.

A crash came from the back room, where the closet of one apartment abutted against the closet of the other. The sound of a muffled curse carried through the walls, and Sabrina suppressed a flinch, glancing toward the apartment’s front door. The landlord hadn’t *rejected* what they were doing up here with their adjoining units... but they also hadn’t *told* him their plan first. The front door was shut, however; extending her senses, she couldn’t feel M. Peletier’s emotions anywhere close to them. They were still in the clear. Looking around,

Sabrina dropped onto the new couch that they had just had delivered that morning, stretching her arms and shoulders and fixing Claudie with a steady gaze.

Claudie's shoulders slumped. "Believe me, I know you're pregnant," she told Sabrina, her emotions shifting between excitement and guilt. "And I am well-aware of exactly how much a pregnant woman can and cannot do – I did do this once myself, you know. And that's why I know you shouldn't be lifting these *really* heavy boxes on your own. It isn't good for the baby to put so much strain on your core. Please. Stick to the lighter ones."

Sabrina frowned. "You remember I'm also a superhero, don't you?" she pointed out. "If I transformed, I could move all of this without any problems. Even *without* transforming, I'm still in pretty good shape – at least to lug boxes around. Besides," she added, raising an eyebrow pointedly and looking down at the carton Claudie had been steadily pushing across the room, "*you* still haven't recovered from space yet. So it's not like *you* can move all these boxes around, either."

Claudie scoffed, finally pushing away from the wall, leaving the carton where it lay, and moving across the room to sit down on the couch beside Sabrina. She shook her head ruefully, the duster dropping from her hand. "Aren't we a pair?"

Sabrina shrugged. "Max said he would talk to Kim and Ivan about coming to help move furniture this weekend," she told her. "And once he finishes installing the door, it will be even easier to get your things in here. Plus, Marinette and Chloe offered to come and help with decorating and setting things up."

"True..." Claudie frowned, looking down at her hands. Her emotions shifted to shame and embarrassment.

Sabrina's stomach clenched. "I'm... sorry," she apologized, a worried look on her face. "For taking away your apartment while you were gone. And I *know* you feel like I stole your son away from you, too. And, I'm sorry for that, too. I wasn't *trying* to do that – to do *any* of it."

Claudie cocked her head to one side in surprise, staring at Sabrina with wide eyes. "*You*'re sorry?" she repeated, blinking. "But why should *you* be sorry? *I*'m the one who should be sorry. I was gone for so long; I should have realized Max would have grown up and moved on by the time I came back from my mission to the space station. Although coming home to find myself a *grandmother* is a little more than I expected," she allowed, shaking her head in bemusement. "As was my son proposing to the girlfriend he hadn't been dating when I left!"

Sabrina flushed, looking away. "It wasn't planned," she admitted. "None of it was planned."

"I hoped as much," Claudie observed, raising an eyebrow, a hint of amusement entering her emotions.

Sabrina let out a breath. "Believe me, we weren't *trying* to have a baby in our first year of university. It just... *happened*." She sniffed, blinking a tear away. "I—I thought Max was dead." Claudie's breathing hitched. "When the Tarasque stormed through Paris. We were trying to get everyone to safety. I'd used my Akuma already, trying to rescue the civilians trapped around where the Tarasque was. Max was trying to hold the portal open as long as he

could so as many people as possible could get out – I gave him as much of a boost as I could, but I was getting tapped out. So many were dead. So many were lost. And suddenly, the Tarasque was right there in front of us. There was nothing else we could do. In the end, Max and I were the only ones left on the Paris side of the portal, with the Tarasque bearing down, right toward us.” Sabrina could feel the anxiety and fear rising in Claudie, but she couldn’t stop. She gulped. “His foot got caught. In the rubble. I tried to pull him free, but I just, I couldn’t. Then he just... he pushed me through the portal and handed me the miraculous. I could feel him... and then he was gone. The portal closed, and I was alone.” Her shoulders shook. “I was *so* alone...”

Claudie covered her mouth, her eyes wide in horror. “He—he– and you–” She swallowed, placing a hand on Sabrina’s knee. “Oh, I’m so sorry... I—I didn’t know...”

Sabrina let out a breath. “I was so lost and sad in Angola...” Her voice trailed off. “Then, when we got back to France, we were fighting the Tarasque again, and everything was going *wrong*. Our plan fell apart *completely*, thanks to that *bitch*. I stopped her, but I thought it was too late. I was staring up at the Tarasque, just waiting for the end, when... I heard it. Something I’d never thought I would hear ever again. Max’s voice. Max was *alive*! He had brought reinforcements from Paris! *That’s* what saved me. And at that point – I don’t know, I just... I lost it. I couldn’t bear to be apart from him ever again. And that was it. No more separation – in *any* sense of the word.”

“And nine months later, you’re going to be a mother.” Claudie shook her head wryly, her emotions shifting from guilt to amusement.

Sabrina looked up at her in surprise.

Claudie let out a breath, her sadness and loss returning. “I can’t exactly say that I blame you; that’s not too far off from what happened to me with Max’s father – though certainly not to that level.” She sighed. “We were in our last year of university, and he had gone abroad to study for a semester. We’d been together for two years at that point, and oh, how I missed him while he was gone. We tried to talk, but it was *never* the same. I just, I couldn’t *wait* to see him again, to be *with* him again. So when he came back at graduation, I begged to know where our relationship was going. At that point I would have done anything for him. I couldn’t imagine being parted from him ever again. So when he suggested that we could move in together, I jumped at the possibility. I wouldn’t be alone, ever again. And then Max came along, and I thought my life was perfect.” She swallowed, shame and grief and guilt shifting back into dominance. “But he said he wasn’t ready to be a father. That he didn’t want anything to do with our baby. That it was *my* fault that our child had been born. And he left me. I haven’t seen him since. His parents wanted nothing to do with us, either. Even though I had Max – and don’t think for a *minute* that I regret that, of course – but even though I had my baby and I was never alone again, I was still *so* lonely. There were days I didn’t know how we were going to survive – until I got the railway job, and that gave us some security.”

Sabrina gasped. “That must have been so devastating! To have someone you loved so much just... *abandon you* like that. I can’t imagine how much grief and pain you must have felt then – if what you’re feeling *now* is only a *fraction* of what it was like while it was happening.”

“It was,” Claudie responded, her mouth turning down in a frown. “I blamed myself for the longest time: I was too eager, I was too ‘easy.’ I was too... *needy*.” She scoffed humorlessly. “It wasn’t until Max was in école élémentaire that I was finally able to recognize that *he* was the one who had abandoned *us*. I may have wanted everything that happened between us, but he wanted it just as much. And when it came right down to it, he refused his responsibility.”

Sabrina pursed her lips. “Max wouldn’t do that,” she insisted. “I know he wouldn’t.”

“I certainly *hope* not,” Claudie agreed, clenching her jaw. “I absolutely did *not* raise my son to abandon his responsibilities and his family. But, then I thought the same about his father.” Sabrina started to open her mouth but kept silent as Claudie turned toward her, blinking away tears as her emotions turned from grief and pain to resolve. “But regardless of what happens, I want you to know that *I* will not abandon you or your child. No matter what.” She took Sabrina’s hand, squeezing it firmly. “I know Max loves you. I know he’s committed. Believe me, I am *proud* to see him stepping up for his fiancée and child. But even *if* that ever were to change. Or if something happened – and we both know it’s a possibility, given your... ‘covert nocturnal activities.’ I promise you: I will always be here. For you *and* for your baby.”

Swallowing, Sabrina sniffed back tears and leaned forward, giving Claudie a big hug. “Thank you.”

Marriage Counseling

Chapter Summary

Sabrina has a session with the newlyweds

Pouring herself a cup of tea, Sabrina let out a calming breath and looked around her counseling office, taking in the homy atmosphere. When she had first agreed to work for the Agreste Charity as a counselor, she had assumed that most of her clients would be coming to her *from* the Charity's rehab centers, and that she would be seeing them on the first floor at the rehab center. She had expected a few heroes to come to her, of course – how many other counselors could Alya really talk to about the stress of having to essentially live a double life as both the Ladyblogger and Rena Rouge, one of Ladybug's closest allies? Who else could understand Kim's anxiety over how much he worried Ondine when he stayed out too late on patrol? What counselors could Hoda even *visit*, being an alien living on a strange planet? And Sabrina was all too happy to give back to the others, to thank them for accepting her back, even after what had happened in Angola.

Still, she hadn't expected to spend the majority of her time counseling heroes. With the disruptions to the Lynchpin's drug-running operation, the number of people entering the various rehab centers for help had skyrocketed in the weeks immediately following their last sting operation, though the rehab centers' populations had stabilized recently. Lately, it seemed as though Sabrina spent more of her time in *this* office, visiting with the Heroes of Paris and others, than she did in the rehab center downstairs. Not that she would ever complain about the opportunity to work in the more comfortable surroundings of her office, instead of the relatively-sterile rehab center.

Even before the knock came at the door, Sabrina had already gotten up from the small kitchen table and walked into the waiting room, stopping in front of the door. "It's open!" she called cheerfully, as Nooroo flitted down from his accustomed perch on the shelf above the window to land on her shoulder.

Slowly, the door opened, and Adrien and Marinette walked through, looking around the waiting area expectantly. Sabrina smiled warmly, greeting Marinette with a hug before offering the same to Adrien. "It's good to see you!" Sabrina told them fondly. "I know it's been a while since the wedding – and I've seen you both since then – but I haven't seen you both *together*. Would you like some tea? I just made a fresh pot."

Marinette nodded eagerly, moving around Sabrina in the direction of the kitchen. "Of course!" Grabbing a couple cups out of the cabinet, she poured some for herself and Adrien. "How is the remodeling going?" she asked, handing Adrien his tea.

“A lot better, after you and Chloe and Zoe helped out,” Sabrina assured her, smiling. “We’ve got all the furniture in the right places – Max and I even started getting the nursery set up, though we’re still missing a few things.”

“I’m sure you’ll have everything you need after the baby shower!” Marinette answered, smirking impishly.

Sabrina gave her a suspicious look. “You and Chloe had better not...”

Marinette’s eyes widened. “Who, us?” she asked, a little too innocently. She grinned. “But by the time we’re done, you will *absolutely* have whatever you need for this baby.”

“We *already* have just about everything we need for this baby.”

“Which is not the same as *everything*.”

Looking back and forth between them, Adrien frowned, though his emotions betrayed amusement. “Why is it that the two of you have gotten to meet Chloe’s surprise-sister, but *I* still haven’t?” he demanded.

Marinette quirked an eyebrow at him. “Maybe because *someone* put off the company’s quarterly reports to the last minute...” she teased.

He made a face. “It’s not *my* fault they didn’t get done while we were on our honeymoon,” he grumbled. “I told them to have the financial report finished by the time we got back, but the accounting department dragged their feet.”

Sabrina raised an eyebrow at him. “Oh?”

“They *were* missing a couple of figures from the American distributor,” he allowed. “But they could have had everything *else* ready to go.”

Marinette shrugged. “It got finished in time, one way or the other. Maybe next week we should invite Chloe and Zoe over to the Mansion for dinner,” she suggested.

“We can do that. I think Mom would enjoy meeting Chloe’s sister, too!”

Sabrina raised an eyebrow at them in amusement. “Well, now that that’s taken care of, I guess we’re finished for now! So, are you going to pay with cash or check?”

Marinette stifled a giggle. “I’m still not sure *why* you asked us to come, though,” she admitted, furrowing her brows and failing to hide her confusion. “Are you afraid we’re in *trouble*, or something?”

“Nothing of the sort,” Sabrina assured her smoothly, giving her a reassuring smile. “I just wanted to see how things are going. You had your wedding almost a month ago; you’ve been married close to five months. By now, some of the ‘newness’ of it should be starting to wear off. So, you should start finding more of those little points of friction in your relationship – the things that were cute and endearing when you first moved in together and first were married, but now they are starting to annoy you.”

Adrien glanced at Marinette, raising an eyebrow dubiously. “I mean, I *think* we’re doing pretty well. Right, Bug?”

Marinette nodded, leaning into his side. “I don’t really think there’s *anything* Adrien does that annoys me. Although I *do* occasionally need at least a *little* space...” she added under her breath, giving him an affectionate nudge in the ribs.

Adrien pursed his lips, his brows furrowed.

Sabrina quirked an eyebrow at them and smiled, as Nooroo glanced pointedly at Tikki and Plagg, and the three Kwamis disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. “Why don’t we go into the office and talk a bit?” Sabrina suggested.

Adrien sighed. “Fine.”

Once they were situated, Sabrina placed a new sheet on her clipboard and leaned forward, glancing back and forth between them. “So, where should we start? Marinette, you mentioned that you sometimes would appreciate a little more space?”

Marinette shrugged. “It’s nothing major. Adrien’s two main love languages are gifts and physical touch,” she explained. “And that’s a good thing! I love gifts – giving *and* receiving. And I love the physical intimacy, too, don’t get me wrong. I enjoy spending quality time together, just cuddling on the couch. Some nights, the only reason I can sleep is because Adrien is right there next to me.”

“But...” Sabrina prompted, raising an expectant eyebrow.

Marinette sighed heavily. “But sometimes Adrien asks for *more* of me than I can really give,” she admitted. Adrien furrowed his brows, looking at her nervously. “Not in bed,” she added quickly, her ears turning red. “*Definitely* not that. But the rest of the time. Sometimes – not all the time. Like last week, when I was working on a commission – Mylène’s wedding dress–”

“You might want to take new measurements...” Sabrina interjected, stifling a laugh.

Marinette furrowed her brows and eyed Sabrina confusedly. “Er, right...” She cleared her throat. “But, anyways, I was working on the dress when Adrien came in. Normally that’s fine – it’s nice when he comes in to watch. But this time, I was trying to sew, and Adrien wrapped his arms around me from behind. I could still work, but it was so much harder to concentrate while he was trying to hug me.”

“You’ve never said anything before,” Adrien protested, his eyes wide.

Marinette frowned. “I guess... I never really saw it as so much of a problem before,” she confessed. “It was always so cute: you *wanted* to be there with me and watch me sew, and I wanted you there. But now, with so many commissions to work on in my spare time, to say nothing of the designs I still need to finish up from the honeymoon...” She let out a breath. “I don’t *want* to push you away... but I also need to be able to focus. And it’s a lot harder to do that when you’re hanging off my shoulders.”

“So, you are worried that Adrien is distracting you from your work, which is so important to you.” Sabrina nodded in understanding. “And Adrien?” she asked, turning to him. “What do you think of what Marinette shared?”

Adrien pursed his lips, guilt and frustration in his emotions. “I understand,” he admitted, looking down at his hands. “And I feel bad for distracting her – that’s the last thing I want to do. But at the same time, *I*’m worried that Marinette is stretching herself too thin! She’s been working herself to the bone to get her designs done in time, for the last season *and* for this one, after we lost almost three months of production time before the Tarasque appeared and then while we were in Angola. Add in all these commissions – I’m glad our friends are all getting married, but I wish they would *slow down* so my wife can keep up with it! And then there’s everything with the Heroes of Paris – and France – and Europe...” He threw his arms up helplessly. “Sometimes, it feels like everyone has a claim on Marinette’s time *except* me.”

“Kitty...” Marinette murmured, putting a hand on his forearm. “I’m sorry if I’ve been distracted lately,” she apologized. “I don’t *want* to put you off or just... take you for granted, or *anything* like that. But I’ve been so *busy* lately. And I don’t want to let anyone down!”

“Would it be fair to say that Marinette is close to letting *you* down?” Sabrina asked Adrien.

He furrowed his brows in thought. “I wouldn’t put it that way,” he began.

Sabrina raised an eyebrow, glancing over at Marinette. “It sounds like this is starting to cause friction in your marriage. Are you afraid you might have taken on too much, with all these commissions?”

Marinette shrugged. “I mean, I don’t want to turn anyone down...”

“But if you *do* ‘spread yourself too thin,’ as Adrien said, what would that do to your commissions?”

Marinette looked away. “I might not finish *any* of them,” she admitted, her emotions shifting into guilt. “But, then, what am I supposed to do? I don’t want to turn anyone down! They come to *me* because they like my designs! And designing and sewing is something that I’ve always loved.”

Sabrina sighed. “All of that is absolutely a good thing! You’re not wrong to want and even need time for yourself, or to do the thing you love so much,” she told Marinette. “After all, you don’t want to get so wrapped up in your relationship that you lose your own identity, right?”

“Right...” Marinette frowned. “But I *am* Adrien’s wife.”

“Last I checked,” Adrien interjected, quirking his lip up in amusement.

Sabrina nodded. “You are. And you are also Ladybug. And you are also a friend. *And* you are also Marinette. You need to let yourself *be* all of those things. And that means that *sometimes*, you need to just be ‘Marinette, fashion designer’. But not all the time.”

Adrien frowned. “So, what does that mean?”

“Honestly, it means that you’re not wrong to want to spend time with your wife, any more than *she*’s wrong to want to spend time by herself. And you’re not wrong to worry that she could be getting overwhelmed with responsibility.” Sabrina’s lips twitched up in amusement. “The challenge for you is to figure out how to keep all of those things in balance.”

“So, what should we do?” asked Marinette.

Sabrina smiled. “Well, for starters, I would suggest that you start setting aside distinct blocks of time for your designing and commissions, and do the same for spending time with Adrien – and not just ‘five minutes before bed’, or however long you take.”

Marinette flushed. “It’s a little longer than that...”

Adrien’s ears turned bright red.

Sabrina stifled a laugh, coughing away the emotions firing back and forth between them. “Regardless, you do absolutely need to set aside time for each other.”

“But I have so many commissions to finish!” Marinette protested, her eyes wide. “What if I don’t get them finished in time!?”

“Don’t you have an entire fashion house of resources at your disposal?” Sabrina pointed out, raising an eyebrow at her. “Could you come up with the design and then let one of our seamstresses put it together?”

Marinette frowned. “I *could*...” she allowed. “But then it wouldn’t be *me* doing it – I couldn’t do that to Mylène. And I would still want to add the embroidery myself.”

Adrien hummed. “But Giselle is really good,” he reminded her. “If you told her what you wanted, she probably could sew the dress together while you work on the next design. Then you put the finishing touches on the dress once it’s ready.”

Marinette furrowed her brows. “Maybe...” She sighed heavily. “I’ll give it some thought.”

Sabrina smiled. “Maybe you don’t do that with *every* dress. But it’s okay for you to get help from others to get all of these commissions finished on time.” She cocked her head to one side. “Isn’t Mylène and Ivan’s ‘wedding’ not until the summer, though?” Marinette nodded. Sabrina blinked. “So you *could* hold off on that one and work on one of the dresses that will be needed sooner, right?”

Marinette blinked. “Right.”

“Then maybe you do that: finish them in the order they’re needed, and use your fashion house to do some of the work for you!”

A Dinner Party

Chapter Summary

Sabrina and Max have dinner with the Ouazani family

“Sabrina! Max! Come in, come in!” Dr. Ouazani grinned from ear to ear as he stepped back from the door to usher them inside. “Thank you so much for coming over tonight! Yamina has been working away busily in the kitchen ever since she got home from work – I tried to help, but with... *mixed* results. But the lamb has been cooking most of the day, and the other dishes are just about finished.”

Sabrina smiled. “I’m sure it will all taste fantastic,” she assured him, following him down the short hallway to the kitchen and placing her dish on the counter. “Hopefully this cake turned out okay; Max can attest that I am not nearly as talented of a baker as my mother is!”

Max placed a hand on her arm. “You are every bit as talented as anyone else,” he told her.

She raised an eyebrow at him. “You’re sweet, but we both know some *much* better bakers than *me*.”

“Perhaps,” Max allowed, nodding his head in concession, “but if so, then there is no shame in that.”

“Yes,” Dr. Ouazani agreed, smiling in amusement. “Very few could compete with Marinette Agreste and her father! At least in that regard.”

Looking around the living room, Max’s eyes widened in surprise. “Where are your boys? From everything I had heard, I fully expected to find your apartment a warzone, whenever your twins happen to be home.”

Sabrina giggled. “The way you talk about them, they almost sound like the Césaire twins – two girls who live in my parents’ building,” she added for Dr. Ouazani. “I used to babysit them more, but they’re just about old enough to look out for themselves now. And I’m much busier now than I was in collège and lycée.”

“Aren’t we all?” Dr. Ouazani replied rhetorically, chuckling. “Leïla brought the twins down to the park for a couple hours, just to make sure that Yamina and I would have the time to clean and cook before you arrived. They should be returning shortly – assuming Salim and Samir didn’t find one of their friends and run off!”

Sabrina’s eyes widened, and she shook her head ruefully. “That poor girl...”

Dr. Ouazani smiled. “Don’t worry *too* much about her; Leïla is very good with young children – the boys *normally* obey her...”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Sabrina mused. “How much does she charge for babysitting?” she asked, quirked an eyebrow at him.

“Well, *we* pay her with room and board...”

At that moment, Mme Ouazani stepped out of the kitchen, carrying an enormous roaster loaded down with most of a lamb. “That’s not what she was asking, and you know it,” she teased him, smiling in amusement. Setting the roaster on the table, she turned to Sabrina and Max. “I think Leïla would be thrilled to babysit for you if you asked her,” she assured them. “Although with how busy that girl is these days...”

Max chuckled. “I can imagine – starting a new lycée, and especially Pasteur, is an enormous commitment.”

Mme Ouazani nodded ruefully. “Part of our hope in coming to Paris was that Leïla would have these opportunities, that she would be able to study and receive the best education possible. But I do sometimes worry that we might be pushing her too much.”

“Mme Ouazani,” Sabrina began, focusing her senses on the woman for a moment before diving deeper, searching for the mote of emotions buried within here that would indicate her baby’s presence. After a moment, she finally located that spark and studied it carefully. *Huh*. Before she could continue, Mme Ouazani gave a dismissive wave.

“You can just call me Yamina – our *children* are going to grow up together; it hardly feels appropriate for you to call me ‘Mme Ouazani.’ Unless *I* should call *you* ‘Mme Kanté!’” Yamina raised an eyebrow at Sabrina with an amused smile.

Sabrina felt warmth in her cheeks. “Not *yet*,” she began, taking Max’s hand. “But soon.”

“Oh?” Dr. Ouazani – *Tarik* – cocked his head to one side in surprise. “Have you set a date for it then?”

Max nodded. “The baby’s due date is in January; we are planning a small ceremony next month with our families as preparation for it.”

“But we *will* have a larger celebration next summer,” Sabrina added, squeezing Max’s hand. “And you will *absolutely* be invited for that!”

“Even with a newborn?” asked Yamina, resting one hand on her stomach.

Nodding reassuringly, Sabrina stifled a laugh. “Yours will not be the only ones there,” she assured her.

“‘Ones’.” Dr. Ouazani blinked. “I’m sorry?”

Sabrina’s eyes widened, and she flushed. “Um...”

“Tarik...” Yamina began, giving him a surprised look. “There was something Dr. Brasseur told me at my appointment today, and I wasn’t sure how to tell you.” Dr. Ouazani’s eyes went wide. Yamina smiled warmly, placing one hand on her stomach and looking down. “Apparently, they found a discrepancy on the genetic test, and when they rechecked the result, there was something they had missed. We’re having twins. Again.”

Dr. Ouazani’s jaw dropped. “How is that *possible*?”

“Statistically, multiple births seem to be correlated,” Max pointed out. “A family with a history of twins is more likely to have them in the future.”

“I know.” Dr. Ouazani pursed his lips, his emotions betraying his anxiety. “But how did it happen to *us*? How are we to provide for *two* more mouths?”

“They are both happy, at least,” Sabrina offered, giving him a sympathetic smile.

“I’m glad to hear that, at least.” Dr. Ouazani let out his breath, his emotions shifting to relief and happiness.

Yamina stared at Sabrina with wide eyes. “How can you possibly know any of that?”

Sabrina flushed, glancing over at Max for help. Fortunately, Dr. Ouazani jumped to her rescue.

He cleared his throat. “Sabrina... seems to have a gift for these kinds of things,” he explained, just as the door burst open and low chatter in a mix of Arabic and French filled the small apartment.

Two boys no older than four barreled through the apartment, chased by Leïla. “Wash your hands!” she shouted after them, rubbing her forehead as the boys disappeared in the direction of the bathroom. With a groan, she collapsed into her seat at the table. “Those two are *almost* more trouble than they’re worth,” she grumbled under her breath before glancing up and seeing Max and Sabrina. Her eyes widened, and she coughed. “Oh! Um... hi! It’s – I’m glad to see you tonight!”

Sabrina smiled. “And it’s good to see you, also!” she greeted Leïla. “We don’t see each other *nearly* often enough! The last time was the wedding, wasn’t it? You’re always welcome to stop by my office – even if just for a cup of tea.”

“I know,” Leïla agreed, nodded. “Maybe I’ll do that one of these days – though with school starting soon, I don’t know how often I’ll be free.”

“‘Office’?” asked Yamina curiously, cocking her head to one side and studying Sabrina.

“I’m a counselor,” Sabrina explained. “Mostly at the Agreste Charity Rehab Center in the 4th Arrondissement, though I’ve been to all of their locations.”

“At *your* age?” Yamina’s eyes widened.

“I’m in university now to study counseling,” Sabrina told her. “But I’ve been working part-time as a counselor for the last year in connection with my schooling.”

Yamina hummed. “I imagine that’s a fascinating experience, working with all of those different people in their distress!”

Sabrina nodded. “I suppose what I do isn’t too much different from Dr. Ouazani – or Leïla,” she added. “I see people in trouble, and I try to help them resolve whatever is troubling them. I don’t use medicines or surgeries or anything like that, of course – if someone needs medication, they have to see someone else for that – but through my counseling people normally leave the clinic in a better position than they were in when they arrived. Sometimes, I can’t do much for someone, but most of the time I can help them, even if just a little bit.”

“What kinds of things do you find yourself talking about with people?” Yamina asked, as the twins returned and they sat down around the table to begin eating.

“I can’t share *much*,” Sabrina warned, taking her seat.

Yamina nodded. “Of course. Tarik shares almost nothing about his practice.”

Sabrina let out a breath, helping herself to a large serving of couscous, followed by some of the lamb. “Let’s see... a lot of the patients who come to me through the rehab center are struggling with addiction, of course,” she began. “But for many of them, the drugs are only a small part of what is troubling them. You see, many turn to the drugs to self-medicate for more serious problems – mental illness, guilt, grief, family trouble... The rehab center can help wean them off the drugs, but without addressing those deeper issues, the drug use might be replaced by a different negative habit, leaving the person in the same states as they had arrived. So sometimes I will meet with the person for an hour-plus, only to then have to pass them off to our on-call psychiatrist to diagnose and treat an underlying mental disorder.”

“That sounds like quite fascinating work,” Yamina observed, passing Sabrina the next dish to help herself. “A different way of helping people – though not dissimilar from Tarik!”

“We do bump into each other at the rehab center on occasion,” Sabrina agreed, raising an eyebrow at him. “And, occasionally, with Leïla!”

As they ate, Sabrina continued to focus her empathy on Yamina, and especially on the two babies growing in her. She furrowed her brows, trying to tune out the external noise, all the other emotions around them, to focus on the babies. Inhaling and exhaling slowly, she released all her own emotions into the atmosphere, emptying herself. She could feel the contentment from the babies, the affection for their situation, though one of the two’s emotions shifted to discomfort for a moment before returning. At the same moment, Yamina reached down to rub her belly, frowning to herself. Sabrina smiled to herself, nodding pensively. Reaching into herself with her emotions, she tapped into the now-familiar well of happiness and contentment that was her own baby, comparing that to what she sensed out of Yamina. The feeling was similar... but yet very different. She frowned. She could feel the babies’ emotions, but what did they mean? She knew that her baby was happy, but what would it mean if the baby was ever *unhappy*? How could she identify the differences between their emotions, let alone connect them to some cause?

And yet, she had learned to discern the differences between different people's emotions, and she had even started to make connections between their emotions and the circumstances around them. But that was not a perfect science. She could sense different emotions from the people around her perfectly; she couldn't always understand *why* they felt what they felt, however, without a conversation. Perhaps it would be the same way in this case: she might be able to tell that an unborn baby is upset, but she wouldn't be able to determine the cause until someone had actually examined the baby.

If she and Dr. Ouazani were going to get anything useful from this experiment, it could take a lot of extra work to determine those causations.

Beside her, Max and Dr. Ouazani were in the process of talking with Leïla about the different medical schools in and around Paris – Sabrina hadn't realized just how many options were available for becoming a doctor. She smiled, taking in the curiosity and eagerness in Leïla's emotions, the way that she leaned forward into the conversation. On the other side of the table, the twins bickered with each other, squabbling over their dinner while Yamina chided them and urged them to eat properly, though with mixed success. Sabrina smiled, taking in the comfortable attitude of the family dynamic, sensing the love and affection of the unborn twins for their mother and family.

Finally, after dinner, after cake, as Max and Sabrina were preparing to leave for home, Dr. Ouazani rose and walked them back to the door. Pausing just before leaving, Dr. Ouazani asked Sabrina, "Well?"

She frowned, thinking back on what she had felt over the evening. "I didn't feel anything *bad*," she began slowly. "I could sense the range of their emotions – I think they were fighting a bit. But I can't quite tell what the emotions *mean*, only what they are. If you still want to continue this, I can let you know what I sense, and if there's anything negative, *maybe* that will give you cause to look more closely. But beyond that..." She shrugged. "I wish I knew how to help. But unfortunately, even though I can sense the emotion, I can't always understand why the person feels what I sense." Letting out a breath, she sighed apologetically. "I wish I could say more."

"You already have helped," he assured her quickly. "And I would be happy to continue working with you on this project – if, that is, you are willing."

"Of course," Sabrina agreed, smiling.

Dr. Ouazani smiled back, though with some strain around his mouth.

Max paused, furrowing his brows. "Dr. Ouazani?" he began. The doctor raised an eyebrow expectantly. "Have you considered consulting on a more permanent and formal basis for us?"

"What do you mean?"

"We may have regular need for a doctor on call – especially with our nascent aerospace program. It would be beneficial to have a doctor whom we trust, who can assist whenever there is a medical emergency – more than just in Paris."

Dr. Ouazani frowned, his brows furrowed pensively. “What would this entail *exactly*? Remember, I do have a clinic of my own to worry about.”

“Nothing that would interfere with your clinic, I hope,” Max assured him quickly. “We would retain you to be on call for us. If there were ever an emergency that required your skills, I would bring you to the site and return you home.”

Dr. Ouazani shrugged. “I don’t see why not. But if I am seeing a patient, I may need some advance warning.”

“Of course,” Max promised. “I would give you forewarning to finish whatever you are doing before collecting you.”

“Then, I am at your disposal.”

Max smiled. “I will draft a contract for you to sign, and consult Adrien regarding compensation – a flat rate for being on call for us, along with an additional fee when we call on your services.”

His eyes widened. “Oh, you don’t have to—”

“We insist.”

Tea with Mom

Chapter Summary

Sabrina stops by her parents' apartment to visit with her mother

“Sabrina!”

No sooner had the apartment door opened, even before Sabrina could get a quick glimpse of the apartment's interior, than her mother was throwing her arms around Sabrina's neck in a bone-crushing hug. Letting out a breath and relaxing into the hug, Sabrina smiled, returning her mother's embrace and allowing her to guide her into the apartment, drifting back in time to when she had been so much young, when her mother had almost always greeted her after school with a hug at the door. Shifting her head to one side to look past her mother's shoulder, Sabrina felt a twinge of nostalgia, taking in the couch and chair set in the living room, just before her mother directed them over to sit down on it. Years ago, when Sabrina had been in collège, her parents had saved for two months to replace the ratty old sofa they'd owned for almost two decades; the first time Sabrina had eaten cookies while sitting on the new couch, her father had scolded her roundly before making her vacuum the couch, inside and out. Now, four years later, some of the newness had worn off. Looking closely, Sabrina could pick out a dozen small stains, some of them from the time Chloe had come over and insisted that they be allowed to eat snack in the living room and refused to accept any other response from Sabrina's parents. At the time, Sabrina had all-but idolized Chloe for standing up to her parents; now that she and Max were looking at buying their *own* furniture, and with a child of their own on the way... she could admit to herself that she related more to the twitch in her father's face when he had seen the two of them eating chips on his new couch.

Sinking into the couch, Sabrina let out a breath as her mother finally released her and sat back, examining Sabrina's face fondly before wiping a tear from the corner of her eye. “Hi, Mom,” Sabrina told her, smiling.

Her mother sniffled, giving Sabrina a watery smile. “Oh, I'm sorry – but it feels like it's been *ages* since you were here!”

“But Max and I came for dinner two nights ago!” Sabrina protested, her eyes widening.

“I know,” her mother agreed. “And I am *so* happy for you both – it's so wonderful that my little girl is growing up and starting a family of her own! I can't wait to meet my first grandchild! And you found a wonderful young man to start your family and raise your child with!” Reaching for a tissue, she dabbed her eyes. “But that's just... it's not the same, sweetheart.” She sighed, giving Sabrina a regretful smile. “Don't misunderstand: I *love* the incredible young woman you have become. But sometimes, I still wish I could have had a little more time with the little girl you were.”

Sabrina's stomach clenched, tapping into the mix of joy, happiness, and sadness in her mother's emotions. "I'm sorry for--"

Her mother shook her head firmly, placing a finger over Sabrina's mouth to cut her off. "You have nothing to be *sorry* for, dear," her mother assured her quickly. She laughed wryly. "It's a mother's prerogative to be sad when her child grows up – you'll understand when *you* get there." Raising an eyebrow and glancing down at Sabrina's stomach, she added, "Because for as adorable as your baby will be when he or she is born, they won't stay that way forever..." Sighing, she studied Sabrina fondly for a long minute until finally, with a sigh, she released her hold on Sabrina's shoulders and stood up. "Let me make us some tea."

Sabrina's eyes widened, and she shifted her focus from her mother to the baby, seemingly asleep, having settled down after fussing through half of her last counseling appointment of the day. So young – though she could pretend she already knew everything about her baby, just from the emotions she picked up on throughout the day, she hadn't formally met him or her yet. To think: in only a few short months, she would be holding their little bundle of joy – this baby that she and Max had created. What an experience it would be! Watching the baby grow up. Experiencing the joy and excitement of life again as the baby experienced everything for the first time. How long would it be, then, before her baby was *here*: grown up, getting married, starting a family of his or her own? She sighed. "I hope he stays young at least for a *little* while..." she murmured softly.

Her mother's emotions shifted, surprisingly close behind Sabrina. Suppressing the urge to jump, Sabrina glanced back at her. "Did you find out what you're having, then?" her mother asked, handing Sabrina a steaming cup and sitting down next to her again, sipping her own tea. Though her voice retained a casual tone, Sabrina could still feel the curiosity and excitement building in her emotions.

Sabrina smiled. "Not yet," she admitted. "We want it to be a surprise."

"We actually did the same with you – waiting to be surprised. Although your father suspected that you would be a girl." Her mother hummed. "But have you thought about names yet?"

"We have..." Sabrina frowned. "We haven't picked any, though. *I* suggested that if we have a boy, we could name him 'Max' – Max doesn't know if he wants a 'Junior', though."

Her mother nodded. "We talked about naming you for your father before you were born," she observed. "I thought it would be sweet; your father absolutely hated the idea."

"I also suggested 'Roger' – after his grandfather," Sabrina confided. "Max is a little more amenable to *that* idea, though Roger is a bit of an 'old name'."

"Don't let your father hear you say that!" her mother teased, stifling a laugh.

Sabrina smiled, giggling in amusement, and batted her stomach. "'Mathieu Roger Kanté'. I *think* that's in the lead for now, at least if we have a boy. Mathieu for Claudie's father – Max's grandfather; Roger for mine. When Max was growing up, his grandfather was the only father figure he had... until his Grandpa Kanté died when he was ten." She sniffled, warmth

in her chest. “But he’s said that he started to see Dad in that way, after we started dating. Dad was so welcoming of him – especially after he found out that we were superheroes.”

Her mother covered Sabrina’s hand with her own. “I think that’s a wonderful name. And I *know* your father would be honored.”

Nodding, Sabrina took another sip of her tea. “That’s for a boy. If we have a girl...” She frowned. “That’s a little harder to decide. I like ‘Louise’ – for grandma. But I also just like the name ‘Josette’.” She shrugged. “At least we still have a few months to decide.”

“That’s true,” her mother agreed, nodding. “Although I’d already named you in my mind, *years* before you were born! I just needed to convince your father to go along with it!” She smiled mischievously. “Fortunately, he wasn’t too difficult to persuade...” Looking off into the distance, she sighed affectionately before refocusing her gaze on Sabrina. “Whatever you decide, it will be beautiful.”

“I hope so.” Sabrina let out a breath. “I would hate to saddle our child with a name they would grow up to hate.”

“You’ll make the right decision,” her mother assured her. “But when you do, be sure to let me know – I’ve been experimenting with calligraphy, and I would absolutely love to write something for the baby!”

Sabrina grinned. “Absolutely – I’ll add you to the list! Marinette already started on a baby blanket, though she’s not going to finish it until she has a name to add. And I think Chloe would cover the nursery with decorations if I let her!”

Her mother hummed. “You have such wonderful friends – this baby will be *so* loved.”

“I know.”

“But how has the morning sickness been?” her mother asked, examining Sabrina carefully. “I remember it was much worse last month.”

Sabrina shrugged. “It’s gotten a lot better lately. There have been one or two days, but nothing like a couple months ago. I haven’t really been having the same trouble keeping food down in the morning, at least. Dr. Ouazani isn’t too worried.”

“That’s good.” Her mother cocked her head. “You never told me how you came to see this new doctor,” she mused. “I thought you were happy with Dr. Barreau; he’s been seeing you since you were a baby!”

“I *was*,” Sabrina replied slowly. “But we’ve gotten to know Dr. Ouazani and his family very well – Chloe and Adrien helped him to start his clinic.” She raised an eyebrow at her mother. “And he knows that I’m Impératrice Pourpre; he works with the Heroes of Paris.”

Her mother’s eyes widened in understanding. “And that way, you don’t need to worry about keeping your identity secret with your doctor.”

“That’s why so many of the heroes come to *me* for counseling,” Sabrina agreed, nodding.

“*And* because you are so good at what you do.”

Sabrina blushed.

After a moment of silence, her mother sighed, looking her up and down. “I’m glad you are doing well, dear. You don’t want to *lose* weight while your pregnant...”

Sabrina chuckled ruefully. “Not much risk of that!”

“All the same...”

“I know.” Sabrina let out a breath. “I’m being careful.” She raised an eyebrow. “You really don’t *have* to worry about me, you know.”

Her mother smiled regretfully. “A mother never stops worrying about her child.” She cleared her throat. “But how are things going with Claudie?” she asked, a tint of anxiety entering her emotions. “I can only imagine how much of an adjustment this has been for you – I *know* how much it must be for *her*!”

Sabrina smiled. “Actually, it’s been going very well! Claudie and Max have been hard at work on their plans with the other heroes. We have Claudie’s apartment almost completely set up now – all of her furniture and such is in the apartment; now she can get down to unpacking and setting up.”

“I can’t imagine it’s *easy*, having your soon-to-be mother-in-law living right next door!” her mother observed wryly. “I would not have wanted your Grandma Raincomprix living that close, especially not when we were first married...”

Sabrina shrugged. “We’re figuring things out: how often to have meals together, how much time Max and I need for ourselves, what kinds of things we do together or separately... It’s an adjustment, but I think it’s going to be okay. Definitely when the baby arrives we’ll appreciate having her right there!”

Sabrina’s mother hummed. “Still, just because your father and I don’t live right next door to you, don’t count *us* out of the picture. If you need someone to watch the baby for you, I would be *happy* to take him or her for the day – or the night – anytime you need it. After all, we’re only a portal away!”

Sabrina smiled, leaning into her mother. “I know – and I’m so grateful to you and Dad for being here for us through this. I... I’m not sure if I would be able to do this, if it weren’t for you, and Dad, and Claudie... and everyone else who has been supporting us this whole time.”

Her mother wrapped her in a warm hug. “And *I*’m grateful that my little girl has found such a sweet young man to start a family with, one who cares about you so much. That you both care about each other so much.” She blinked several times.

Sabrina’s breathing hitched at the sensation of love and affection coming from her mother. “Mom? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” her mother assured her. “Just... thinking about how much you’ve grown up.” Wiping her eyes, she sniffled. “You really do need to come over here more often, sweetheart – I promise I won’t cry so much the next time.”

Sabrina raised an eyebrow at her affectionately. “I doubt that.”

The Family Back Together

Chapter Summary

The oldest child returns home... with a friend

As the portal in the hall closet whooshed open, Sabrina didn't look up from the pot she was stirring on the stove. "You're back early!" she called cheerfully. "Dinner will be ready in fifteen minutes!"

"Thank you, Mother," came the reply, as two sets of steps proceeded down the hallway.

Her eyes widening in surprise, Sabrina spun around to face them, just as Turing and Uncanny Valley emerged from the hallway, looking around the living room and kitchen area in surprise. Leaving the pot bubbling on the stove behind her, Sabrina smiled brightly, meeting them halfway and giving Turing a big hug. "Turing!" she greeted him. "It's been so long since you were here; it's so good to see you again! You can join us for dinner – even if you don't *eat*, you can still sit and visit."

"I have received updates from Markov," answered Turing, returning Sabrina's hug. "But there is an experiential element missing from reading reports."

Sabrina smiled. "We'll tell you all about it."

Uncanny Valley stood beside him, looking around the living room. "Your apartment looks different," Uncanny Valley observed, studying the living room walls. "I knew that you were moving things around – Turing said you had made some changes in your living arrangements, now that his grandmother is back – but I didn't expect the changes to be so... noticeable."

Sabrina shrugged, releasing Turing and moving on to hug Uncanny Valley next. "It's not *that* much change," she protested. "We kept most of the furniture; Claudie took the couch since it was pretty new, and we found a brand-new dining room set for her. Most of the differences are cosmetic: pictures and posters on the walls, new decorations in the kitchen..."

"Either way, your apartment looks very nice – more personalized to you and Max," Uncanny Valley told her firmly.

"Thanks." Sabrina smiled. "But how have the two of you been getting along? Turing has been keeping us up to date on your travels around the Americas – I understand you just finished a trip to Brazil to take samples around where the Lion originated?"

Turing nodded. "That is correct," he confirmed. "Doorman conveyed us to Rio de Janeiro first, and we took control readings in the city before continuing on to Parque Nacional da

Serra dos Órgãos, to the coordinates indicated by Hato Gozen and the others. We took readings and planted sensors in the area to monitor conditions. From there, we tracked the Lion's course from the park to Natal, using the drones to place sensors as we went. Finally, Doorman opened a doorway for us to return to New York."

"Not *immediately*, though..." Uncanny Valley interjected, elbowing Turing.

"Correct – not immediately."

"Oh?" Sabrina returned to stirring the soup as she listened to their story. "Did you find something fun to do in Brazil?"

"There was a parade in Natal," Uncanny Valley explained, an eager inflection in her voice. "Complete with music and dancing – we decided to stay there for two extra days, just to experience it. Turing learned to dance samba."

"That sounds like fun!" Sabrina observed, smiling to herself.

"I would not have attempted it, had Valley not insisted," Turing replied.

Sabrina cocked her head, hearing something different in his voice. "Oh?" She glanced back at them over her shoulder, to find the two androids staring intently at one another. Sabrina's eyes widened. "Is this... There seems to be something different between you."

Glancing over at Sabrina, Turing nodded. "Correct. Valley and I have decided to conduct an experiment regarding the nuances of human relationships."

Uncanny Valley smacked his arm. "That's a very confusing way of telling your mother that we have started a relationship."

Sabrina blinked. "Er... what?"

"But we have not *started* a relationship," Turing pointed out. "We started a relationship four months and sixteen days ago, when we first met formally. Friendship is a form of relationship. That existing relationship merely *changed* one week ago."

Uncanny Valley arched an eyebrow at him. "*I* know that *you* know the difference in connotation between 'friendship' and 'relationship' – at least at it is commonly used in this context."

Sabrina gasped. "You–you—" Suddenly, she grabbed both of them in a tight hug. "I can't believe it! Oh, I'm so excited for you! I know how much you enjoy each other's company; I'm glad you decided to spend more time together!"

Turing cocked his head to one side. "You are not upset that I have a... feminine companion?"

"You *can* say 'girlfriend,'" Sabrina pointed out, raising an eyebrow at him. "And no. Of course not. Why would we be upset? You know how much Max and I like Uncanny Valley. And how happy we are to see you with a friend. Of course, we'd be happy for you!"

“I had observed many parents to react negatively to their child’s first... girlfriend or boyfriend,” he pointed out.

“Well, you *are* less than two years old,” Sabrina allowed, her lips quirking up in amusement. “And you’ve only had a humanoid body for about six months of that, so...” She stifled a laugh. “No – Max will not react negatively to you bringing home your first girlfriend.” Pausing, she cocked her head as the portal in the hall whooshed open for the second time and two distinct sets of emotions stepped through. “But speaking of whom...”

“Don’t worry about what he said,” Claudie told Max, as the portal shut behind them. “This doesn’t have to be a setback.”

“He refused to even consider our proposal,” Max grumbled, annoyance and frustration coloring his emotions. “How else am I to take it *except* as a rejection of our idea?”

“Our plan is solid,” Claudie argued. “Anyone who reads it *has* to recognize that.”

“I *know* that. But, then, why did he choose *not* to read it?”

“Tell you what,” replied Claudie. “I’ll see what I can do with the *Deputy* Administrator – *she’s* the *real* power at NASA; this Administrator is just a political appointee. *He* might say ‘no’ for political reasons, but *she* could still change his mind for ‘political reasons’. I have a friend: one of my trainers was a NASA engineer who was transferred to their Space Operations Directorate. I’ll call and see if I can meet with him and the Deputy Administrator to see what they can do. Maybe the Administrator had to reject it publicly for political reasons: NASA only *just* started operating their own shuttle orbiters last year; he may fear that too much international cooperation too soon would undermine NASA’s credibility in their public view.”

“Given that their President is one of the leaders of the United Heroez, who have very publicly assisted the Heroes of Paris in the past with international crises like the Tarasque, that excuse hardly holds water.”

“Oh, I don’t disagree,” Claudie assured him, as they stepped out of the hallway and into the living room area. “And I’m sure they will be willing to cooperate if we approach them the right way. If nothing else, we may be able to convince them to give us their design in exchange for a small share of the collected resources.”

Max groaned. “Fine.”

Looking around the room, Claudie froze in place, her eyes wide, and stared at Turing and Uncanny Valley in surprise. “Um... hello?” she began hesitantly, looking back and forth between the two androids and Sabrina.

Sabrina smiled. “Welcome back!” she greeted Max and Claudie. “I was just catching up with Turing and Uncanny Valley – dinner will be ready soon.” Beside Sabrina, Uncanny Valley also froze in place, looking at Claudie intently. Sabrina gave her a reassuring pat on the shoulder. “In the meantime, you can wash up and sit down at the table if you’d like.”

“Dinner smells good!” Max agreed, nodding, before holding out a hand to Turing and pulling him into a quick embrace. “It is good to see you again, Turing! You have been away... a long time. Ever since the wedding, correct?”

“It has been an enjoyable time,” Turing assured him. “We have been 73% successful in our information gathering.”

“Excellent!” Max grinned. “I want to hear everything you have found, but not until after dinner.”

“Very well.”

Uncanny Valley cleared her throat to draw their attention. “If you wish to work with NASA, you could go straight to the source and speak to President Hombee,” she suggested. “I’m certain she would wish for NASA to work with you.”

“That is true,” Max agreed slowly. “But I am unsure if that is the wisest course of action, after President Hombee’s appointed Administrator denied us.”

“I’m sorry,” Claudie apologized slowly, still looking back and forth between the two androids, “but I don’t think I recognize either of you. Who are you?”

Sabrina stifled a laugh.

“I am Uncanny Valley, of the United Heroez,” she responded. “I came here to... consult with Max?” she tried, a question implicit in her tone.

“They are our friends,” Sabrina explained to Claudie quickly, placing one hand on each of their shoulders. “In many ways, *more* than simply ‘friends’!”

Claudie hummed pensively and nodded to them. “Well, then, it is nice to meet you both.”

“Likewise, Grandmother,” Turing responded, nodding in return.

Claudie blinked several times before looking back and forth between Turing and Max and Sabrina. “Wait... what.”

Max sighed in amusement. “This is Turing,” he explained. “He is one of the two artificial intelligences that I built and coded, the other being Markov. Turing’s primary function was originally to serve the Heroes of Paris, while Markov assisted me in civilian life. Initially, Turing had a chassis similar to that which I had created for Markov, but when the illness began spreading, I gave Turing an anthropomorphic body so he could assist in providing treatment. And with him is his friend, Uncanny Valley.”

Claudie nodded slowly in understanding, holding her hand out first to Turing and then to Uncanny Valley. “It is nice to meet you both.” Suddenly, her head cocked to one side, and she stared intently at Turing. “Hang on... you help Max with his superhero work?” Turing nodded. Claudie shook her head ruefully. “I can’t believe I didn’t put it together sooner. Then that means that I need to thank you: it was because of you and Max that I made it safely to the International Space Station.”

Turing nodded to her in response. “You are welcome,” he told her, his mouth turning up into a smile.

A Client Returns

Chapter Summary

Sabrina has a follow up with Noëlle

Sabrina's eyes widened as the door to her office opened and the woman poked her head through, looking around nervously. "Noëlle?" Sabrina stood up, smiling, and waved for her to come in. "Léa mentioned that she'd added a last-minute appointment to my schedule; she didn't tell me it would be you! Welcome; come in! Would you like some tea? It just started steeping, so it should be ready in just a couple minutes."

Noëlle gave her a nervous look, her emotions a jumbled mess that Sabrina could barely identify. Still the shame she'd carried last time. Guilt. Disappointment. Anxiety. But also relief. And even... joy? She glanced around the small counseling office quickly before her eyes returned to Sabrina's face, though she remained in the doorway.

Sabrina gave her a warm smile. "Whatever's going on, I'm sure we can work through it together."

Finally, Noëlle stepped fully inside, moving gingerly, and closed the door behind her. Sighing heavily, she nodded. "Tea sounds nice."

Sabrina glanced over the woman – just out of university, if she remembered correctly from their previous encounter. Last time she had come for counseling, Noëlle had been confused and unsure of what to do, having become pregnant while in the Angola refugee camp. The father had abandoned her outright; she had been afraid and ashamed to seek help from her employer or her family. It had taken a lot of encouragement from Sabrina for her to consider asking others for support. Sabrina let out a breath. Noëlle was still clearly pregnant – the baby's emotions stood out to her like a beacon, happy and contented. But Noëlle's emotions...

"Did you see that they just redid the Trocadéro?" Sabrina asked, pouring Noëlle a cup of tea and taking out the sugar. "My fiancé and I went for a walk through there yesterday evening, and it was absolutely gorgeous!"

Noëlle hummed thoughtfully, holding her cup with both hands, and nodded. "Maybe I'll stop by there later."

"I heard that Miss Pinky was planning to plant another community garden, only a few blocks from here," Sabrina observed, leaning forward and observing Noëlle carefully. "That looks like it will be fun to see!"

"I guess."

Sabrina frowned, letting out a heavy sigh, and pulled up her notes from their last visit on her tablet. “We *can* continue making small talk. But I suppose we should get to the reason for this visit. So, what can I do for you today?”

Noëlle sighed heavily, her emotions shifting back and forth between sadness, guilt, and anxiety. “I guess... I’m not really sure what I should do *now*,” she admitted. “I decided to keep the baby.”

Sabrina nodded, smiling. “I’m happy to hear that!”

“But that’s the thing – I’m *not*.” Noëlle frowned, a worried look on her face. “I hadn’t planned on this – like, at all. It really just happened on accident. I haven’t seen Jean since getting back from Angola; I don’t expect to see him again. That means it’s all on *me* now. What kind of life will I be able to give this baby?”

“Have you told your parents about it?” asked Sabrina, glancing down at her notes. “You had mentioned them as a possible resource.” Noëlle nodded, looking away. Her sadness increased. Sabrina’s breathing hitched. “They were angry,” Sabrina guessed, giving her a sympathetic look.

Noëlle’s eyes widened in surprise. “Yes. I—I thought they would accept it, that they would help me, that they would support me! And they did say that they still loved me, that they would help with the baby. But they were angry and frustrated about it, too. My father – he was just about ready to go and find Jean and punch him – whether because of the pregnancy or because he had left, I was too afraid to ask.” She folded her arms over her belly protectively.

Sabrina sighed heavily. “I’m so sorry to hear that. It must have been a shock, to have your parents react that way when you went to them in this time of need.”

Noëlle scoffed. “Do you want to know the strangest part? They were both worried that I would never get married with a baby – as if that was the first thing on my mind at the moment.”

“Is it a consideration?”

Noëlle shrugged noncommittally, a hint of guilt in her emotions. “I hadn’t really thought about it before. I hadn’t had any *plans*, but I also hadn’t been *opposed* to it, either. But then they brought it up, and now it’s like it’s all I can think about. How am I supposed to raise this baby on my own? How am I supposed to get married or even *date* as a single mother? Am I going to be all alone for the rest of my life?”

Sabrina hummed. “You can’t really know that for sure,” she pointed out. “Unless there’s something you haven’t told me, you can’t predict the future. But what I *do* know is that you will not be *alone*, alone. You aren’t alone right *now*!”

Noëlle raised an eyebrow at Sabrina dubiously. “You?”

Sabrina shrugged. “Well, yes, I supposed. But no; I mean your baby. You have your baby right now with you, and he or she will be a part of your life, no matter what. Now, that’s not the same thing – of course, it’s not. But it gives you a reason to keep going. For myself, that was the first thing I thought about: no matter what, I have this baby, who will be a part of my life and will need me.”

Noëlle cocked her head to one side, her brows furrowed. Looking Sabrina up and down, her eyes widened. “Wait... are you–?”

Sabrina nodded, smiling slightly. “About a month behind you, I think,” she answered. “I knew when you were first here, but it was still very early.”

Noëlle nodded in understanding. “What was it like for you?” she asked, a pleading tone in her voice, curiosity coloring her emotions.

“It was... not the same as you,” Sabrina admitted. “Although it easily could have been. My boyfriend – he wasn’t in Angola; I... thought he had been killed. It wasn’t until it was all over that I found out he was still alive. And when I found him again, I don’t know – I just... I couldn’t stop myself. I *had* to be with him, to feel that he was there, that he was real. And then...” She shrugged. “I was so scared at first. I didn’t know what to do. But Max was so happy – he wants us to be a family. My parents were worried and upset that it happened the way it did, but they are happy for us. Max’s mother promised to be there and help me, no matter what happens; actually, she was in a similar situation as you, when Max’s father abandoned her and her parents refused to help her.”

Noëlle’s eyes widened. “What did she do?”

“It wasn’t easy for her,” Sabrina told her. “She had to work really hard to make ends meet and raise her son. She put her hopes and dreams on hold for fifteen years, until Max was in lycée. But she was able to find a decent job, one that would allow her to take care of herself and her son. And eventually, she was even able to go back and achieve her dream.”

“So there *is* hope.”

Sabrina leaned forward. “There is *always* hope,” she assured Noëlle. “We can’t know what the future will look like. You may be able to pursue your dream while raising your child. You may need to put it on hold temporarily. You may meet someone else to start a life with, and they will love your baby just as much as you do. Or you might not. But either way, you don’t have to go through this alone.”

“I know.” Noëlle quirked an eyebrow humorlessly. “A couple of my friends from university, they’re also expecting now. But *they*’re in relationships – they’re not facing it by themselves.”

Sabrina hummed. “Have you considered ways that you and your friends might be able to work together? For babysitting and the like, I mean.”

Noëlle cocked her head to one side. “Huh. I... actually hadn’t even thought about that,” she admitted. “But I’ll ask.”

Sabrina smiled. “Whatever happens, know that you aren’t facing this alone. I’m here to counsel you any time you need it. And the charity has actually talked about ways to help people in situations like yours: providing clothes, diapers, toys... whatever you need. If you can’t afford it, we’re here to help.”

Zoe

Chapter Summary

Sabrina has her first session with Zoe.

Rushing out of the clinic and into the stairwell after her last rehab center counseling session of the day, Sabrina nearly ran headlong into someone, skidding to a halt and almost losing her balance in the process. Her arm flailed as she tried to keep her balance, and a surprised yelp escaped her throat. A strong hand grabbed her arm, holding her upright, and her breathing hitched.

“Sabrina!? What on earth are you trying to do to my goddaughter!?”

Sabrina blinked, staring up at Chloe in shock, breathing heavily as she tried to regain her composure. “Oh!” Sabrina clutched her chest, trying to bring her breathing and heartrate under control, and leaned back on the door, pushing it closed behind her. Finally, she slumped her shoulders, her breathing returning to normal. “Sorry; I... well, actually, I thought I was late to meet the two of *you*!” she admitted, glancing back and forth between Chloe and Zoe sheepishly. “But I guess I’ll just have to arrive at the same time as you.”

Chloe quirked an eyebrow at her in amusement, giving her a quick one-armed hug. “Not the worst thing in the world,” she observed. “It’ll give us a chance to catch up!”

“We really haven’t gotten to do too much of that lately.” Sabrina hummed, giving Chloe an evaluating look as the three of them started up the stairs. “So, what have you been up to for the last week?”

Chloe shrugged. “Not all that much.”

“We went to the park with your *friend*...” Zoe teased in a singsong tone, grinning at Chloe.

Sabrina raised an eyebrow. “Oh? Is this the same ‘friend’ that she brought to the wedding?”

Chloe coughed. “Same one.” The corner of her lips quirked upward, and happiness infected her emotions.

Sighing, Sabrina smiled. “I’m glad he makes you happy,” she told her. “Although one of these days, you *are* going to tell me all about him...”

Chloe rolled her eyes. “Fine. I will. I just... I’m trying to... take it slow. At least until after the election is over.” She shook her head in annoyance. “Just another couple days...”

Zoe’s emotions turned anxious. “Will that mean no more ‘fieldtrips’?” she asked.

“No...” Chloe cocked her head to one side. “Of course not. It’ll just mean no more needing to schedule them for exactly when Daddy had a press conference scheduled!”

“Fieldtrips?” Sabrina looked back and forth between them curiously.

“I’ve been bringing Zoe with me to visit our allies, right?” Chloe responded. Sabrina nodded. “This week, I took Zoe to visit the African temples, and then Hoda gave her a tour of New Atlantis.”

Sabrina’s eyes lit up. “That must have been so much fun!” she commented, glancing over at Zoe. “Did you get to visit the Sorcerers’ Academy?”

Zoe grinned. “It was so cool! They were training at the time, so I got to watch some of the sparring. I had no idea that people could *do* things like that – there was one girl who had created wings for herself and was flying over the boy’s head, pushing him around with wind gusts. Then he transformed a dust cloud into a swarm of gnats that seemed to practically engulf her, and she nearly fell out of the sky.”

“It was a good thing they had spotters,” Chloe interjected, as they reached the second floor and entered Sabrina’s counseling office.

“I imagine they have a lot of injuries there...” Sabrina mused, raising an eyebrow.

Chloe shrugged. “According to Miranda, every year there are a few who get hurt – one or two serious injuries – but they have a couple of healers on the island who can take care of most of the injuries without much trouble.”

Sabrina nodded, moving toward the kitchen. “Just give me a few minutes and I’ll have tea ready,” she called, leaning against the counter. While the water boiled, she listened to the two sisters talk, taking in the positive emotions they felt toward each other.

It was good to work with the heroes.

Her work at the rehab center was always stressful – even when the counselee did *not* turn into a terrifying monster and attack her! Today, her last appointment had been with a new client, a woman who had gotten so addicted to alcohol that it had cost her a job, a family, and even a place to live. When she had come to them, she had been living on the streets since the Tarasque; the last time she’d had a regular place to live had been in Angola, when she’d had a tent at the refugee camp, though she had spent most of her time trying to get drunk. After arriving at the rehab center and detoxing from the alcohol, she had started counseling, trying to determine the root cause of her alcoholism. Today, they had finally started to talk about her depression, beginning the process of healing from it. And Sabrina loved being able to help people in those situations. But it could be so stressful.

Finally, Sabrina blinked, hearing her name in the conversation, and poured the tea. “If you are ready to start,” she told Zoe, “we can go down to my counseling room.”

Zoe shrugged. “Okay...” she agreed hesitantly, looking around nervously as she stood up. Chloe started to follow her, but Sabrina cleared her throat.

“I need to talk with her *alone*,” Sabrina reminded Chloe, raising an eyebrow at her pointedly. “Don’t worry; things will go just fine.”

Flushing, Chloe sighed. “Fine. But I’m going to be right here the whole time, just in case you need me,” she told Zoe, who nodded.

Finally, Sabrina led Zoe down the hallway to her counseling room, where Zoe looked around curiously, taking in the simple furnishings. Her eyes paused on the playpen set against one corner of the room, and she glanced up at Sabrina in surprise. Sabrina smiled kindly. “You would be amazed just how often that playpen comes in handy,” she began. “I got it for my *own* baby, but I’ve had a dozen patrons come in here already who needed this to provide child care.” Zoe hummed, nodding in understanding. Sabrina sighed. “So, Zoe, how have you been doing the last few weeks – it’s been quite a ride, hasn’t it?”

Zoe nodded, a twinge of anxiety in her emotions. “Sometimes, I don’t know what’s even *happening* around me,” she admitted, frowning. “Everything’s just – it’s been happening so fast. One minute I was just by myself, trying to find somewhere to stay; the next, I have a whole family, a place to stay, a sister...”

“Everything you wanted?” Sabrina finished, raising an eyebrow.

Zoe shrugged. “Yes? But... not *quite* what I expected it to be like.”

Sabrina hummed. “You shouldn’t hold your new stepmother against the rest of your new family,” she advised her. “Chloe spent *years* trying to be just like her mother, trying to win her approval, trying to even just get her attention. But she has never managed it. Her father, on the other hand, has always loved his family, even if he isn’t the best at showing it.”

Zoe shrugged noncommittally.

Frowning, Sabrina examined her closely. The girl seemed reserved, quiet. And yet, behind that, Sabrina could sense hints of guilt, grief... happiness? “Has Chloe explained to you what my miraculous allows me to do?” Sabrina asked Zoe.

“A bit.” Zoe frowned. “You can sense emotions?”

Sabrina nodded. “It’s not a perfect system – I’m still learning and adapting and practicing. But I can sense what someone is feeling. Sometimes, we use that to figure out if someone is trying to hide something. Sometimes, it’s a way to find people who are in trouble. In counseling, I use it to sense the person’s emotions and help them process. In your case, I can feel some guilt, and some grief, but also... I think, more than anything, that you’re happy. With your new family, your new life. Would that be accurate?”

Zoe furrowed her brows in thought but nodded slowly. “I’m – I *am* happy. At least with Chloe, and with Father. I have the family I had always wanted, though not quite the way I had hoped. Chloe has been so nice, so welcoming – you *all* have. I’d always wanted to have a sister – or, after Mom told me about my father, to *know* my sister. And now I do!”

Sabrina smiled in amusement. “I’m glad that things are working out so well for you. Especially after recent history...”

Zoe’s shoulders slumped. “Do you mean the election? The scandal I caused?”

“I mean whatever you want to talk about,” Sabrina told her. “If you want to talk about that, then we can talk about the election and the scandal.”

“I...” Zoe swallowed. “I didn’t mean to cause so much trouble! Really, I didn’t! I think Jean-Claude blames it all on me. But I wasn’t *trying* to do it. I just... I wanted to get to know my family. But the way I introduced myself, it made everyone angry and upset. All the rumors, all the—”

“‘Scandal’?” Sabrina supplied, raising an eyebrow.

Zoe nodded, sighing heavily. “I messed everything up.”

“Considering that you had been living on the street and going back and forth between your friends’ houses for months without anywhere to live, I think you can forgive yourself for causing a stir with the way you introduced yourself,” Sabrina pointed out. “For that matter, I don’t know that the scandal would have been any less if you had waited. It may have been delayed, but it still would have come out eventually, along with everything that entails.”

Zoe frowned.

Sabrina smiled sympathetically. “The most important thing for you to remember is that it’s not *your* fault. The circumstances of your birth – the circumstances of your mother’s death – the situation you were in before approaching your father and stepmother – none of that is *your* fault. You were put into a horrible situation, and you had to find a way to survive. And now, all you can do is adapt. But, fortunately, you have friends who can help with that.”

Pre-ish Marriage Counseling

Chapter Summary

Francisco and Marina come to Sabrina for counseling

Sabrina tapped her chin and hummed, examining the array that she had put out for her next clients. A bag of pastries from the bakery – helpfully dropped off by my Marinette a few minutes ago. Tea and coffee. And she had set out the changing blanket on the table between them. “I think that should just about cover it!” she mused, glancing over at Nooroo.

“I would think so!” the Kwami squeaked cheerfully. “Although, I do not recall you going to these lengths for any of your other clients,” he pointed out, raising an eyebrow at her knowingly.

Sabrina shrugged in embarrassment and looked away. “I just... I want to be thorough. And I am hoping that they will come back again – perhaps for more than just counseling, in a few months.”

Nooroo hummed in understanding, just as the portal in the hall whooshed open, punctuated by a baby’s cry. “It appears that you will find out soon!”

“Can you go and get them?” she asked him, rummaging around in her desk to find a sheet of paper and her clipboard. The Kwami flitted away, phasing through the wall, and returned only a few minutes later with Francisco and Marina following after him. Sabrina glanced up at them and smiled as Nooroo returned to land on her shoulder. Glancing down at the baby in Marina’s arms, Perry’s wing tightly clutched in one fist, Sabrina sighed fondly. In response, the Kwami looked up at her with a heavy sigh, shifting his wing in the baby’s grip. The baby stirred, moving his arms, and let out a plaintive cry. “Good afternoon!” Sabrina greeted them. “I’m sorry if we’re interrupting his naptime.”

Marina shook her head and smiled tiredly. “No; it’s not that,” she explained. “I think he’s hungry. Do you mind...?”

Sabrina waved a hand dismissively. “It would be a bit hypocritical of me to get upset with you for breastfeeding your baby, if I expect to be doing the same in a few months,” she pointed out, raising an eyebrow in amusement.

Marina let out a relieved breath, flopping down on the couch and carefully adjusting herself to start nursing. “Thanks – you have no idea how much of a relief that is to hear. The other day I took Jose Maria to the park, and he got hungry. I sat down at a table by myself, covered up, all of it – and this woman came up to me and started yelling that I shouldn’t be doing something like that in public, where her child might be able to see it!”

Sabrina scoffed, shaking her head in annoyance. “Seriously? People can be so *rude* sometimes!”

Francisco’s eyes narrowed, and he cocked his head to one side, staring at Marina. “When did *this* happen? Where was I?”

Marina sighed. “You were working – the trip to Madrid, maybe?” She shrugged dismissively. “It was... just me...”

Francisco’s emotions very suddenly turned to guilt.

Sabrina’s eyes widened. “I can sense that that statement had a profound impact on you,” she told Francisco. “What is it about Marina facing something like this by herself that causes so much guilt?”

Francisco’s emotions fluctuated between guilt and shame. At the same time, Marina’s flooded with surprise. Francisco let out a breath. “I... well, I abandoned Marina,” he admitted. “When I found out she was pregnant. I didn’t want to be a father – I didn’t want to be ‘tied down’ with responsibility, I don’t think.” He swallowed, looking down at the floor. “So I ran off to get away from my responsibilities.”

Sabrina nodded in understanding. “And now you feel guilty because leaving was your response to the pregnancy, and Marina facing something like *this* alone is a reminder of that?”

He nodded. “After I found my miraculous and became el Peregrino, I finally came to understand what responsibility was. I didn’t need to go off and find a purpose; I had a responsibility to Marina – to her and to Jose Maria. I needed to help Marina and be a father to our son... though I was afraid that my stupidity could have cost me that opportunity.” He looked over at Marina. “I guess... every time you mention having to deal with things on your own... it reminds me of what I did to you. Or of what I *almost* did to you.”

Sabrina hummed, jotting a couple quick notes on her paper. “Marina?” she asked next. “How did you feel about everything that happened between you and Francisco regarding the pregnancy?”

Marina’s face fell, and she leaned back, adjusting her hold on Jose Maria and moving him from one side to the other. She remained quiet for several minutes, before she finally answered, “I was absolutely crushed. I had given myself wholly to Francisco – I had been in love with him and thought we would be together forever. And then, to have him *reject* me like that. To have him just... disappear for months and leave me to deal with the consequences of our actions, all on my own. It was – when he came back, I actually didn’t know if I *wanted* to have him back in my life. I didn’t know if I wanted our baby to know his father at all, if Francisco was going to abandon us at the drop of a hat like that. I didn’t know if I could trust him.”

Francisco’s shoulders slumped, and he nodded in acceptance, letting out a breath.

Her focus still on Marina, Sabrina raised an eyebrow in understanding. “You said you *were* crushed. That you *didn’t* know if you could trust him. Past tense. I take it that that’s changed?”

Marina’s eyes widened, and she nodded firmly. “Well, I mean, of course!” Francisco’s emotions shifted slightly, and he adjusted his posture. Glancing over at the movement, Marina gave him a small, reassuring smile. “When you came back, I know I was hesitant. I know I kept you at arm’s length.”

“Understandably so,” Sabrina interjected, raising an eyebrow.

“Por supuesto,” Marina agreed with a nod, not taking her eyes off of Francisco. “But that was only at first. Before I knew how much you cared, how much you had changed. Before I knew that you were being serious, that you really were going to be here for us – for me and for the baby.” She smiled wryly, covering his hand with hers. “At *that* point, I knew that we were going to be okay; I was only worried that you wouldn’t want to actually *marry* me!”

His eyes widened. “Of course, I wanted to marry you,” he assured her. “I was afraid – when I first returned, I mean – that *you* would not want that. Then I was afraid that if I ever brought it up, it would not be the right time. Not before Jose was born, I mean. But I absolutely had planned to ask you to marry me. And I had very much hoped that you would say yes.”

She looked down at the rings on her fingers. “I know – that you had already picked out a ring was a good indicator of that!”

He smiled, squeezing her hand before lifting it to his lips. “I was only waiting for the right moment to ask.”

Sabrina hummed, drawing their attention back to her. “I’m glad that you are doing so much better now than you were then,” she told them. “And I hope that we’ll be able to help you improve even more – and not just for *your* sakes, but for Jose Maria’s, as well!”

Marina smiled at Francisco, taking his hand in hers and placing it on Jose Maria’s head as the baby finished nursing. “That’s what I want, too.” While Marina readjusted herself, Francisco took the baby and held him up to his shoulder to burp him.

“You can place him in the playpen behind you,” Sabrina instructed Marina, once the baby had been sufficiently burped. “I got it for when *my* baby is born, but...” She waved a hand at her own belly. “It will be a few months before he or she will actually be able to use it!”

Marina giggled, gently placing the baby into the playpen as he fell asleep. “I suppose this is why you invited me to go shopping with you after the wedding?” she asked Sabrina, raising an eyebrow knowingly.

Sabrina nodded. “In part,” she agreed. “I knew why you were still here because of this – but really, I enjoyed meeting you at the wedding and I wanted to get to know you better!”

Marina smiled. “I would like that, too.”

“Perhaps in a few months we’ll be arranging playdates for our babies – in fact, mine isn’t the only Heroes of Paris baby on the way...” Sabrina mused.

Marina cocked her head in surprise. “Really? But the other Heroes of Paris are all, well–”

“Our age?” Sabrina finished, stifling a giggle.

Marina’s mouth opened, and she nodded in realization. “True. But still, I wasn’t exactly *planning* on this... I don’t know *how* I’m going to balance Jose Maria and university; if it weren’t for Francisco’s job with the Agreste Fashion House, I would have to get a job on *top* of that, and there’s no *way* I’d be able to manage it all!”

Sabrina hummed. “I know. I was already worried about how much I was taking on between the Heroes of Paris, counseling, university... and now to have a baby to take care of in addition to all that?”

“I’m not sure how I’m going to handle it all,” Marina admitted. Francisco placed a hand on her shoulder, and she leaned into his side, letting out a heavy sigh.

Sabrina smiled, glancing back and forth between them. “Fortunately, you *aren’t* having to worry about it all on your own. You have a partner here with you!”

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