In Heat

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/10858809.

Rating: Explicit
Archive Warning: No Archive Warnings Apply
Category: F/M
Fandom: Miraculous Ladybug
Relationship: Chat Noir/Ladybug, Adrien Agreste/Marinette Dupain-Cheng, Chat Noir/Marinette Dupain-Cheng
Character: Marinette Dupain-Cheng, Adrien Agreste, Ladybug (Miraculous Ladybug), Chat Noir (Miraculous Ladybug), Alya Césaire, Nino Lahiffe, Papillon | Hawk Moth, Gabriel Agreste, Tikki (Miraculous Ladybug), Plagg (Miraculous Ladybug), Nooroo (Miraculous Ladybug), Chloé Bourgeois
Additional Tags: Mating Cycles/In Heat, Pheromones, Identity Reveal, Reveal, Slow Burn, Romance, sin - Freeform, Smut, NSFW, Sexual Tension, Sexual Frustration, Sexual exploration, Sexual Fantasy, Masturbation, Mutual Masturbation, Wet Dream, Lust, Intimacy, Hawk Moth Redemption, Chloe Bourgeois Redemption, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Feline tendencies, soul mates
Stats: Published: 2017-05-08 Updated: 2019-04-05 Chapters: 16/? Words: 111131

In Heat

by EikaTsukiyomi

Summary

It’s the one-year anniversary of when Ladybug and Chat Noir received their powers, and Marinette learns from Tikki that it marks the beginning of the mating cycle: for the next 30 days, Ladybug and Chat Noir will be drawn to each other by powerful pheromones generated by their miraculouses. The more time they spend in each other’s presence, the stronger the effects will become, until they risk being completely overcome with lust.

And so, Ladybug and Chat Noir have little choice but to brace themselves for what is bound to be a month of intense sexual tension and frustration...but what they don’t know is that they unknowingly cross paths almost every day, and so not even their kwamis can prepare them for how profoundly their heats will affect them. Will their partnership survive if they give in to temptation?

And what will happen when Hawk Moth figures out what’s going on?

Notes
The legal age of consent in France is 15 years old. I've aged Marinette and Adrien up a year from their canon ages (13-14), and this story is set almost exactly one year after "Origins" in addition, which puts Marinette/Ladybug and Adrien/Chat Noir around 15-16 years old.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Last Day Of Summer

Chapter Summary

It's the last the day of summer break, and Hawk Moth's latest supervillain, Summer Fae, is out to make sure that school never starts again! Just another mission for Ladybug and Chat Noir...except this time, Chat Noir puts his knowledge of popular anime to good use to help Ladybug capture the akuma, and puts in a little extra effort to make sure one anxious middle-schooler's first back to school is a little easier. Curious how Chat Noir pulled off his little scheme, Ladybug takes some extra time to hang out and chat and finds herself troubled by nagging feelings for her partner that have only started creeping up on her over the summer. For Chat Noir, it's just a bonus dose of Ladybug after this latest mission, and it seems a fitting prologue to the anniversary of the day they first met.

Chapter 1: Last Day Of Summer

Thursday, August 31st

Marinette had never looked forward to the first day of a school year, and she was pretty sure she was in the majority; did anyone look forward to the end of summer break? Even so, dreading the coming of September 1st so much that it caught Hawk Moth’s attention and got you akumatized? This seemed a bit much…

“Now that I’m here,” proclaimed the supervillain calling herself “Summer Fae,” “Nobody ever has to go to school again! I’m going to make today—the last day of summer break—last forever!”

She looked to be a girl in middle-school, with her long auburn hair tied back in a wild ponytail and decorated with a crown of flowers. She was dressed in an orange sundress decorated with fresh green leaves and miniature sunflowers, and she had wings like that of a fairy and was armed with a scepter wrapped in vines. She didn’t seem to be carrying a grudge against anyone, nor did she seem resentful of society in general, and so she wasn’t particularly aggressive, but she was under Hawk Moth’s control, and so, sooner or later, she would be coming after Ladybug’s and Chat Noir’s miraculouses.

Ladybug’s Lucky Charm had turned out to be a red-and-black-spotted replica of Chat Noir’s ring, and she hadn’t known what to do with it except put it on, but Chat Noir had taken a long, thoughtful look at it, and then taken off, seemingly inspired, and leaving Ladybug completely baffled. He was now across the street, perched on the edge of the school roof on all fours, like the cat he loved to be.

“Okay, but can you be more specific?” Chat Noir called, addressing Summer Fae. “Is today gonna last forever ‘cause the sun will never go down? Or will today keep repeating without the date changing?”

“Why, do you have a preference?” Summer Fae asked.

“Does it matter?!” Ladybug yelled, glaring at Chat Noir from her position. Why hadn’t he let her in on his plan?
“Absolutely!” he yelled back. He turned his head to address Summer Fae again. “If you never let night come, you’ll never have another sleepover! Or see the fireworks at midnight on Bastille Day! Or go on moonlit walks with your true love!”

Ladybug couldn’t decide whether to be surprised or not that Chat Noir was the type to like moonlit walks with his significant other. She filed that intriguing detail away to think about later.

“Oh, well, don’t worry about that!” Summer Fae said cheerfully, waving a hand. “Summer nights are nice, even if they aren’t as fun as summer days, in my opinion. We’ll all get an infinite number of days of summer to do whatever we want with!”

“But is it gonna be like Groundhog Day?” Chat Noir wanted to know. “Is the same day gonna repeat over and over and over, with everyone doing exactly the same things every time?”

“No, of course not!” Summer Fae cried, pressing a hand to her heart in horror. “What would be the point of that?! No, it’s just gonna be a beautiful summer day every day, with no more school!”

“Ah, okay, glad we straightened that out,” Chat Noir said, nodding in satisfaction. “It sounds like, out of all the ways you could have planned this, you’re doing it the way I would, too!”

“Aw, thank you!” Summer Fae said, beaming. “You know, Chat Noir, you seem like a really nice guy…if you and Ladybug give me your miraculouses instead of starting a fight with me, I’d love to go on a...a...moonlit walk with...with y-y-y-you...!”

Is this for real? Ladybug marveled, slapping a palm to her forehead.

“...a moonlit walk with...with y-y-y-you...!”

Is this for real? Ladybug marveled, slapping a palm to her forehead.

Chat Noir straightened in surprise. Then he raised a hand to rub the back of his head.

“Uh, gee, that’s...very, very flattering, mademoiselle! I must say, you’re the first supervillain to pay me such a glowing compliment!”

“So, what do you say?” Summer Fae asked excitedly.

Ladybug resisted the urge to demand of Chat Noir where the hell he was going with this. He definitely seemed to have a strategy in mind, and she just hadn’t caught on, yet. He wasn’t usually the one to direct the action, but not because he wasn’t smart. She decided to just keep her eyes open and see where this went.

“Alas, a cat has much more pride than to let himself be wooed by sweet words,” Chat Noir answered dramatically. “But I’ll tell you a secret…”

He gestured for Summer Fae to approach. Ladybug gaped at him.

Is THAT how he expects to get the object with the akuma in it?! Seduce the supervillain?! He’s gonna make a fool of himself...although I will admit, I would be VERY impressed if it worked...also a little weirded out, though. IF, just IF there’s a chance he could pull this off, I’d blow the whole thing if I interfered...but maybe I can position myself to be backup if his plan doesn’t work...

Summer Fae appeared to be approaching Chat Noir, albeit hesitantly. Ladybug quietly jumped down from her perch and started making her way sneakily towards the school. She took the long way around the side of the building, and began climbing as quickly but quietly as she could.
Easy does it…

As she approached the edge of the roof, she could hear Summer Fae’s voice...sounding strained and panicky?

“No, wait! Wait, please! If I can free him, he’ll give me his miraculous! And he’ll get us Ladybug’s! We won’t even have to fight them! We’ll all get what we want!”

“Free him”? He’ll give you his miraculous? And mine? What is happening?

She hoisted herself up to peek up over the edge.

Summer Fae was on her knees, eyes screwed shut, gripping the sides of her head like she was suffering a migraine. Chat Noir was--strangely--sprawled out on his side right next to her, propped up on an elbow and supporting his head on a fist. He could have been lounging on the beach, except he was eyeing Summer Fae with a look of mingled confusion and concern.

She must talking to Hawk Moth...Is this our chance? Why is Chat Noir just lying there?!

Just then, Chat Noir caught sight of Ladybug; his eyes gleamed with confidence and he flashed his trademark smirk at her. In the same second, she returned the look; she knew that look: it said, Victory’s ours, my Lady.

With that, Chat Noir snatched the flower crown off Summer Fae’s head and tossed it to Ladybug. She tossed it easily with one hand and used her teeth to tear it in two.

“No more making mischief for you, little akuma!”

The akuma emerged, and Ladybug dropped to ground and whipped out her yo-yo, capturing the black butterfly with practiced ease and purifying it.

“Bye-bye, little butterfly!”

With a cry of, “Miraculous Ladybug!”, she threw her Lucky Charm into the air, and a burst of magical ladybugs erupted into the sky, reversing the invisible spell of Summer Fae’s that would have prevented September 1st from ever coming.

She leapt back up onto the school roof where Chat Noir was talking to the girl who had been Summer Fae up until just a moment ago.

“Well...I’m glad I didn’t do anything,” she was murmuring, “But it’s already mid-afternoon, and tomorrow, I’m going back to school! I don’t want to…” She sounded close to tears.

Ladybug wanted to sit with them and hear the girl’s story--maybe it would help make sure she didn’t get akumatized again--but she needed to go. Her earrings beeped, reminding her that she had four minutes before she turned back into Marinette Dupain-Cheng.

But...I’d REALLY love to know how Chat Noir’s plan worked...and how did he know it was her flower crown that had the akuma in it? I thought for sure it would be her scepter…

“Hey, Chat Noir, I gotta bug out; I’m about to detransform. But if you hang around, I’d...actually like to hear how you pulled this thing off! Make sure she gets down safely, and I’ll see you soon?”

Chat Noir’s eyes lit up with excitement at her proposal. He gave her a two-finger salute and a jaunty
“Leave it to me, my Lady! I shall eagerly await your return!”

She nodded, leaping off the school rooftop and swinging her way over the Parisian cityscape.

Chat Noir watched her go, then turned back to the young girl.

“What’s your name?” he asked kindly.

“Um, Aimee…” she timidly replied.

“Aimee...it suits you, since you seem to be quite the romantic type!” He flashed her his encouraging Adrien Agreste smile.

“Uh, thanks! I guess so,” she murmured. She blushed and smiled shyly.

“So, what is it about going back to school that’s upsetting you?” he asked. “It must be pretty bad if it caught Hawk Moth’s attention.”

Aimee took a deep breath and sighed sadly.

“Last year, these two girls in my class started picking on me. They point all the ways I’m not pretty enough to ever get a boyfriend, and they leave nasty messages in my locker and on my desk. They make every day miserable for me...so I’ve been dreading the first day back to school all month long…”

“That...sounds really rough. I’m sorry…” Chat Noir smiled sympathetically and patted Aimee’s shoulder. “I admit I’ve never been bullied at school myself, so I don’t really know what it’s like, but I’ll say this: if no boys were interested in you because you weren’t pretty enough for them, then they don’t sound worth dating anyway. A real gentleman will love you because he thinks you’re amazing inside and out, so don’t feel like you have to settle for anything less, okay?”

Aimee’s cheeks glowed, and she smiled tremulously.

“You really think so?” she asked shyly. “I hope you’re right…”

“One more thing!” Chat Noir added brightly. “Do you have a smartphone?”

“Uh, yeah…?” Aimee fidgeted until she had dug out her phone from her pants pocket. “Why?”

“Take a selfie with me!” he chirped, scooting up next to her. “The next time those girls give you a hard time, tell them Chat Noir’s got your back, and show ‘em our selfie to prove it!”

“R-really?! A-Are you serious?!” Aimee fumbled clumsily with her phone in her excitement.

“Yeah!” Chat Noir leaned in as Aimee readied her phone. “Now smile like you just got a kitten for your birthday!”

Aimee laughed giddily, and snapped the picture.

“There we go!” Chat Noir grinned as Aimee beamed at the picture, then glanced back at him.

“I love it! Thank you, Chat Noir!” She hugged her phone tight to her chest. “I’ll treasure it always!”
“You’re welcome!” Chat Noir stood up and helped Aimee to her feet. “Let’s get you back to solid ground, shall we?”

After dropping down into a narrow alleyway to feed Tikki a cookie, Marinette transformed into Ladybug again and headed back to where she had left Chat Noir. Neither he nor the young girl were there any more, of course, but she knew, wherever Chat Noir was, he would see her up here...or she would see him nearby. Sure enough, she caught sight of him on top of a building to her left out of the corner of her eye. She turned and headed straight for him as soon as she caught his eye.

As soon as she reached him, she gestured to him to sit next to her against a chimney so as to be less visible from the street below. She didn’t want to risk attracting an admiring crowd when she just wanted a nice, quiet talk with her partner. They rarely had opportunities like this.

“I’m back!” she announced, sitting down. “So, how is she? The girl?”

“She’s fine!” Chat Noir replied proudly. “Apparently she’s been being bullied a lot at school, so she was really dreading going back. I let her take a selfie with me so she could tell her bullies I’ve got her back!”

“That’s nice of you,” Ladybug said, smiling. “I just hope people don’t start picking on her next because they’re jealous she got a picture with you.”

“Well, then, you and me will just have to pay her school a visit and tell those girls we’re very disappointed in them!” he responded, crossing his arms and giving a self-satisfied nod.

“We don’t have much time to spare for personally checking up on Hawk Moth’s victims,” Ladybug pointed out, “But you did good, chaton!” She stroked his head as if she were petting a cat.

“Mmm, thanks!” he purred, letting himself nuzzle his head into her hand just a little bit.

“So, tell me what you were thinking with that seductive scheme of yours,” she said. “I’ll admit I’m impressed that it worked, but it was awfully risky. And how did you know it was her flower crown and not her scepter that had the akuma in it?”

“Well, I couldn’t think what the scepter could’ve been if that was the object,” Chat Noir said, “But I just so happened to recognize what the flower crown was: See, there’s this anime that really popular right now, about a magical girl with, like, the power to make plants grow really fast and strong, and she has to defeat this evil wizard who’s plunged the world into an eternal winter--”

“Ahem, Chat Noir? The flower crown?”

“Heh-heh, sorry! Anyway, she wears a flower crown exactly like the one Summer Fae did, and you can buy replicas of it online and at conventions, but of course, the flowers are fake and not as pretty and realistic as real flowers would be. So, coupled with the theme of Summer Fae’s costume, I figured she was a big fan of the show, and had a replica flower crown that turned into the real thing when she was akumatized!”

Ladybug blinked at him for a moment, impressed with his impromptu detective work, and a little surprised but amused that he know a lot about anime.

“Wow…” she muttered. “But, what about that whole, ‘Come here and I’ll tell you a secret’
scheme?"

“Ah, that...well...” He suddenly looked sheepish and scratched the back of his head. “I figured she might be just young enough and into the show enough that, with the mindset of a supervillain with magical powers rather than, you know, a normal girl, I could convince her that I had a spell on me and that, if she broke it, she could have our miraculouses because she...had earned my loyalty and affections...?”

Ladybug narrowed her eyes at him.

‘Loyalty and affections’? ‘Affections’?! That...makes me feel...off, for some reason...

“Okay, you’re gonna have to explain what you mean by that,” she said, raising an eyebrow and smirking wryly at him.

Chat Noir eyed her warily with the expression of a shamefaced dog that had been caught with his face in the garbage bin.

“Erm...okay, so...keep in mind, I was totally just trying to play the part and lure her in--”

“Now you just sound even shifter,” she cut in. “Should I be worried?”

“What? Worried? Naw, not at all! I just...! Okay, so, what I told her was, ‘A cat’s affections can be won only if he’s pampered the right way,’” and that if she, uh, basically won over the cat in me, she could break the spell on my miraculous that prevented me from taking it off or disobeying you...and then I’d basically be ‘her kitty’ and I’d fight on her side.”

Ladybug had no idea how to feel about this...heartstring-pulling scheme of his. She supposed it had been a simple matter of trying to trick the supervillain to get the object without even having to start a fight. But to sweet-talk the supervillain and... What had she tried to do to earn his “affections”?

“Uh...okay...” she said slowly. “So...sounds like she fell for it...?”

“Well, yeah...” he answered hesitantly. “She, uh...scratched behind my ears...?”

Ladybug felt her jaw clench and her brow furrow before she could even label the emotional response behind it. She took a breath and tried to instantly relax her face, but he had already been watching her for her reaction, and he saw it.

“Hey, Bugnette...” he murmured in a comforting voice. “You don’t have to feel jealous...”

“Wh-who said I was jealous?” she yelped, trying for force her amused-face back on. “D-do I look jealous?”

“I meant, if you feel jealous, you don’t have to! I assure you, I only pretended to enjoy it! Now, if it had been you, Bugnette...” He trailed off suggestively, but he was blushing and grinning bashfully.

And, goddammit, was she blushing, now, too?!

He really needs to stop accidently being...cute...

Sometime during the last month or so (Just because school was out didn’t mean Hawk Moth had been vacation), Ladybug had started to notice two things: First, Chat Noir seemed to have matured somewhat, in that he wasn’t showing off as often in his attempts to impress her; and second, that she had started to catch herself reacting differently than usual to little things he did. She couldn’t always
brush off his jaunty banter and lame puns with smooth comebacks and banter of her own anymore. Sometimes she found herself stunned momentarily by a blinding grin, or a casual touch, or an off-hand compliment, or a warm smile of raw adoration that, once, she caught him shooting when he thought her back was turned.

It wasn’t as if he hadn’t known before that he could be as sincere as he could be playful; she just never thought she would see so much of it all at once. It made her think that, maybe, there was a lot more of that warmth under the surface. These days, she often found herself wanting to look for that warmth…to get to know that side of him even more.

Also, it didn’t help that he seemed to have gone through a growth spurt over the past couple of months.

“Uh…Ladybug?”

Ladybug jerked back to the present.

“Ah! S-sorry! Kinda spaced out there…” she said, grinning sheepishly.

“Uh, okay…” he said, still looking a little concerned. “So, anyway…that’s how that all happened!” He crossed his arms and smiled. “My favorite part was when you read my mind the way you do and finished the deal.”

Ladybug smiled. He was totally buttering her up, but it was nice to hear, anyway.

“Well, saving the day is what we do! We’re a team, we know exactly how to work together flawlessly! *Almost* all the time, anyway!”

“That we do, my Lady!” he said warmly.

*There he goes again…* she thought. *He could have said that with way too much enthusiasm like he usually does…but he had to say it like…that.*

“Yeah…” she murmured.

He just kept looking up at her, smiling, and she did her best to keep her own smile smooth, but she had no idea how he could hold her gaze like that without feeling as nervous and strange as she currently was. Was it normal to look someone in the eyes for seconds on end?

“Oh! Hey, I just realized--!” Chat Noir suddenly seemed excited about something. He pushed himself to spin and face her. “Since tomorrow is September 1st, and it’s the first day of school, it’ll be the anniversary of the day we first teamed up! It’ll be exactly one year since we fought Stoneheart!”

“Oh! Yeah, I guess you’re right,” she said. “It’s kind of amazing to think that we’ve been fighting Hawk Moth for an entire year, huh? I wonder how much longer it’ll be before we find him.”

“Yeah, who knows?” Chat Noir said, cocking his head thoughtfully. “Actually, I’m surprised he hasn’t run out of ideas for supervillain identities!”

“I know, right?” Ladybug laughed. “I guess whatever it is the person is upset about helps give him ideas.”

“Makes sense,” Chat Noir remarked, nodding.
“You know, speaking of school starting tomorrow…” Ladybug stood up. “It’s getting late. Since I assume we’ll both be going to school tomorrow morning, we could use at least eight hours of sleep.”

“Yeah, you’re right…” Chat Noir stood up beside her. “Well, I hope your first day back at school goes smoothly for you, my Lady.” He turned and took out his baton, getting ready to head off to wherever he lived when he wasn’t helping her fight evil.

“You, too,” Ladybug replied. She waved, and then turned and took out her yo-yo. A second later, she was soaring over the rooftops on her way home.

I wonder what the odds are that we might go to the same school? she found herself thinking briefly. I wonder if I’ll ever find out…
Tikki tells Marinette all about Ladybug and Chat Noir's mating cycle, and does her best to be supportive, while Marinette tries (and fails) to not freak out, or think about Chat Noir too much.
Plagg describes to Adrien the many symptoms he gets to look forward to over the next month, including sexual frustration and...feline courtship tendencies?! It's almost too much to take in...! But Adrien's also worried for Ladybug's feelings, and how this mating cycle will affect their partnership.

Wednesday

As soon as Ladybug dropped down through the trapdoor from the balcony to her room, she released her transformation and descended down the stairs from her bed. She was just beginning to consider what she wanted to do before dinnertime when Tikki--who had apparently downed another cookie in record time--zoomed up to Marinette’s eye-level to get her attention.

“Marinette! I know this is sudden, but I need to explain something really important to you!”

“Something important?” Marinette echoed questioningly. She sat down in her chair and swiveled to face Tikki. “Why, does it have something to do with my miraculous? I thought you already told me everything I needed to know to be Ladybug.”

“I told you everything you needed to know up until today, but tomorrow marks exactly one year since you transformed into Ladybug for the first time, and on that day, there’s a spell on your miraculous that activates and remains active for exactly 30 days. After that, it’ll happen again at the same time as before, each year, until you don’t need to become Ladybug anymore and you stop transforming…Do you understand so far?”

“Uh...yes, I think so, but what even is this spell? Why does it have to happen? Is there a way to break the spell?”

“No, there’s no way to break it,” Tikki answered seriously. “There is a reason for it, but it made a lot more sense long ago when it was a lot harder to live to an old age. Now that people like to think they’ve become...much more civilized...it has the potential to attract a lot of negative attention from people around you.”

“O...kay…” Marinette said slowly. “Should I be worried? I’m really starting to worry...”

“It’s a good idea to worry a little bit, just to be cautious, but try not to freak out; it won’t do you any good to lose your head over it. The spell isn’t dangerous to you, or to anyone else...well, there are possible complications that could end up hurting you and Chat Noir, but only if you two are careless. I’ll support you in every way I can, and I’ll help you minimize the symptoms.”

“Um, ‘symptoms’?!” Marinette echoed, voice full of dread. “Tikki, what is going to happen to me?!”
Tikki sighed.

“I’m sorry; there’s no way of putting this that won’t really embarrass you and...horrify you a little bit...”

“Oh god...” Marinette curled up like a frightened koala in her chair and stared at Tikki in horror.

“The next time you and Chat Noir transform, your miraculouses will start emitting magic that will act like pheromones that will attract you two to each other. It starts off very subtly, so you might not even notice it at first, but the more time you two spend in each other’s company, the more quickly the symptoms will develop. As long as you two keep your heads and resist the temptation to spend more time together, it won’t be too hard on you, just a little frustrating and uncomfortable. Still with me so far?”

“Uh, can you repeat the part about pheromones and something about us being attracted to each other?! Please tell me that doesn’t mean what it sounds like it means!”

“I’m sorry, Marinette, but it’s exactly what it sounds like. It’s...basically a magically-induced mating cycle, meant to ensure that, if you and Chat Noir were to die defending humankind against whatever is threatening it, that there will be successors to finish whatever you started.”

There was a long silence in which Marinette gaped at Tikki in horror. Her face was the same color pink as her capri jeans.

“...so it’s going to make us really really really HORNY?!” she squeaked shrilly. “It’s gonna make we wanna BANG CHAT NOIR??!!”

Tikki gazed at Marinette sympathetically, her eyes even bigger and shinier than usual. Finally, she answered grimly...

“...later in the cycle, if and when the symptoms develop that far...yes.”

Marinette’s response, in the tiniest voice to come out of a human being...

“...fuck.” Then, in a strangled croak, “Fuck!”

“I’m sorry, Marinette...” Tikki said sadly. “I wish I could stop it from happening.”

“Tikki, help me!!” she whimpered. “Please, tell me how to not want to sleep with Chat Noir, I will DIE of shame if I jump his bones because I’m...I’m...!”

“In heat,” Tikki supplied sympathetically.

“AAAAAAAAGGGGGHHHHH!!!”

“Marinette, what happened?” her mother’s voice called from downstairs. “Are you alright up there, sweetheart?”

“Yes, Mom!” Marinette chirped, her voice cracking. “I just...stabbed myself with my sewing needle!”

“Okay, well, as soon as you’re bandaged up, come down for dinner, okay?”

“Okaaayyy!” Marinette heaved an enormous sigh and stared into space. There was a slightly demented look frozen on her face, and her head was full of the screams of the damned.
Marinette sat in silence for a while. Tikki watched her quietly, waiting patiently in case Marinette wanted her to repeat anything. She wouldn’t blame Marinette in the slightest if she spent the entire night agonizing over this new development.

“Well…” Marinette muttered. “I might as well go down for dinner. I’ll be back soon…”

“Okay, Marinette. I’ll be right here!”

Marinette stood up and shuffled dejectedly over to her trapdoor, which she opened and descended through to the kitchen where her parents were waiting.

In spite of the cacophony going on in her brain, she was able to enjoy her food and make enough small talk with her parents to maintain a semblance of sanity. If she seemed distracted, her parents didn’t call her out on it. But then again, living a double life as Ladybug made her prone to odd behavior at least twice a day. Maybe they were desensitized to her weirdness by now.

“So, Marinette, how are you feeling about tomorrow?” her mother asked kindly. “There’s a good chance you’ll see a lot of your friends from middle school, so that must be comforting, right?”

“Oh, it is,” Marinette said, nodding. “But it also means there’s a chance Chloé might be in my class! I mean, don’t get me wrong: as long as I get Alya in my class, and maybe a few more other old friends from middle school, it’ll be worth it, but still...I know Chloé couldn’t have changed much over the summer.”

“Well, it sounds like you know what to focus on more,” her mother remarked, smiling.

“Even if Chloé never tries to be a better person,” her father piped up, “As you both grow up, rivalries like this will start to seem more and more insignificant. You’ll both have more important things to pay attention to, like university and your future careers.”

“I don’t know how much Chloé will care about all that with how rich and spoiled she is, but it’s something, I guess.”

After dinner, Marinette helped clean up and wash the dishes, though she was in a bit of rush to escape back upstairs. Even if her parents had no way of knowing what was going on in his head right now, she still felt uncomfortable being in the same room while thinking about everything Tikki had told her. Once she got back up to her room that she decided to just go straight to bed. All of this freaking out she was doing was going to make it difficult to fall asleep, she knew, so she figured she might as well get an early start.

After changing into her pajamas and getting into bed, Tikki flew up from below and landed on her stomach.

“How are you doing, Marinette?” she asked.

“I...I don’t know…” Marinette muttered vaguely, staring into space through Tikki’s head. “I keep trying not to imagine wanting to have sex with Chat Noir, but then I just end up imagining it twice as much...I am terrified at the thought of seeing him again.”

“You’re not going to feel any different at first, and the symptoms develop gradually. You won’t be caught by surprise.”

“Oh...well, I guess that’s one good thing…” She fell silent for a moment, then: “Will Chat Noir’s kwami have told all about this by now, too?”
“He should have,” Tikki said. “But the next time you see each other, you should talk and make sure you both understand the situation. You need to be on the same page.”

“You want me to talk to him about all this?! Tikki, why would you make me do that?! I’m already going to die of shame as it is! You want us to embarrass each other to death?!”

“I know it’s embarrassing for you, Marinette, but the fact that you’re both going through this should at least help you two sympathize with each other. You can’t let your communication suffer because of embarrassment, it’s too important. I realize how stressful this, but it’ll be a lot easier once you teach yourself to not worry more than you need to.”

Marinette groaned.

“I know you’re probably right, Tikki, but...I just don’t know how I’m gonna deal with this…” Her eyes suddenly bugged out as another horrifying thought struck her. “What if Chat Noir and I can’t handle it? What if we lose to temptation and end up…?!?” She couldn’t even finish the sentence. “It could ruin our entire relationship! I mean, partnership! I mean, team dynamic!! You know what I mean!!!”

Tikki came closer and smiled at Marinette comfortingly.

“I firmly believe that if that did happen, it would be because you both gave into temptation. And yes, that could easily lead to a lot of awkwardness between you two, but I believe your friendship is strong enough to not be ruined by it.”

“So, Chat Noir wouldn’t...wouldn’t try to...force himself on me?” Marinette asked softly.

“Do you think he would?”

“No!” she cried instantly. “No, but...but if the spell got strong enough...maybe he couldn’t...stop himself...?”

“The cycle doesn’t change your personalities,” Tikki said. “And it doesn’t put you into a passive trance like the spell of a supervillain might. Do you think Chat Noir would put his own sexual desire over you and your feelings?”

Marinette managed a strained smile.

“No, he would never.”

“And as long as you only see each other when you need to protect Paris and keep your heads about you, your symptoms shouldn’t get to a point where you can’t control yourselves.”

Marinette took a deep breath.

“Okay...okay, I’ll try to remember that. We can do this....”

“That’s the spirit!” Tikki praised, raising her tiny arms in celebration. “I know you can do it!”

“Thanks, Tikki.” Marinette gently scooped up Tikki and brought her up close to her face and placed a tiny kiss on her head.

“Sleep well, Marinette,” said Tikki.

Marinette placed Tikki beside her pillow and scooted herself under the covers.
“Goodnight, Tikki.”

Marinette closed her eyes and tried to relax. Thanks to Tikki, she wasn’t panicking anymore, but she couldn’t banish her thoughts about Chat Noir and the cycle altogether. She tried to imagine how Chat Noir might have reacted upon hearing about the cycle from his kwami. She couldn’t imagine him not freaking out to some degree like the way she had. Was he worried about feeling awkward around her? Almost definitely. Was he horrified by the thought of wanting her, like, ten times more than normal?

...oh, god...I don’t have an answer for that one...

Because for almost as long as they had known each other, she had suspected that he might have a crush on her. She was pretty sure he had never said so to her face, but it was so obvious from the way he acted around her, there was no way he wasn’t doing it on purpose. He probably thought he being smooth and subtle, but he was definitely no pickup artist. But the point was, he didn’t see as just his superhero partner, the way she saw him (she greatly appreciated his companionship, she really did, but could she also think of him as a close friend if they didn’t know each other’s identities?). If he had some form of romantic feelings for her (it felt surprisingly...strange...to think of it in those words), then would it not bother him so much, since it was just a lot more of what he already felt?

Whoa, wait-wait-wait-wait-wait-wait-wait-wait! Does he really feel that way about me? I mean, yeah, he has a “crush” on me, but what does that even mean, exactly? Does he...does he fantasize about kissing me, for instance?

Yes, she realized, he almost certainly did, because she recalled him making kissy-lips at her while hanging upside-down from a lamppost by her yo-yo.

Does he wish he could take me out on a date?

Yes, she realized, if offering to be her date to the mime show counted as asking her out.

Does he...does he already fantasize about doing MORE than kissing with me?!

This one was a lot harder to say...she certainly fantasized about doing a lot more than kissing with Adrien, but how similar were her feelings for Adrien comparable to Chat Noir’s feelings for her?

If he does feel that way about me, and he’s anywhere close to my age--which I’m sure he is--then he’d only be a healthy, straight teenage boy for having sexual fantasies, I guess…

...Still doesn’t make me feel much better about it, though.

~

Adrien got back home in time to make it look like he was working on homework before he was called down for dinner. As he often did, he ate his food on autopilot, but in this case, it was because he was lost in thought.

Being gifted the opportunity to just sit down and chat with Ladybug was such a rare and wonderful thing...their conversation might have been mostly about Summer Fae, but still, it had felt so nice to sit right next to her, hidden away from the admiring public and press, and just talk like two good friends. If he could only take her out on dates, they could have so much more time together to have pleasant conversations…

When Adrien went back upstairs to brush his teeth, he found Plagg sitting on the edge of his bed
looking at him in a strangely expectant way.

“What?” he asked.

“Go ahead and brush your teeth, then come sit down somewhere,” Plagg said, sounding bizarrely business-like. “I have a supplementary to add to your miraculous training.”

Adrien’s eyebrows disappeared under his bangs.

“...should I be afraid?” he asked. “Because I do not like your tone…It sounds ominous.”

“Well, you’re not wrong,” Plagg said, shrugging his tiny shoulders. “Go brush your teeth,” he repeated. “This is gonna take a while.”

Adrien slunk toward the bathroom eyeing Plagg like he was afraid of being backstabbed with a shiv. He closed the bathroom door (Plagg was creeping him out, okay?), brushed his teeth, and flossed before coming back out. Plagg was right where he had left him.

“Sit down,” Plagg said, finally floating back up into the air.

Hesitating, Adrien slowly made his way to his bed and sat on the edge, eyeing Plagg warily.

“So,” Plagg began. “Tomorrow marks one year since you first transformed into Chat Noir. Am I right?”

“Yyyyyeeaahhh…” Adrien said slowly. “Why? Are my powers going to change somehow?”

“No,” Plagg replied. “You’re going to go into heat.”

Adrien’s brain froze for a second, before…

“Um, WHAT?!?” he yelped. “I’m going to WHAT?!”

“Go into heat,” Plagg repeated tonelessly. “It’s the start of your mating cycle. It will last exactly 30 days, and then you’ll be back to normal until the same time next year.”

“Mating...cycle...” Adrien echoed. “Waitaminutewaitaminutewaitaminute, so when you say, ‘go into heat,’ you mean like...like a cat?!” His voice cracked on the last word. “What does that even mean?!” he croaked.

“Yup, like a cat,” Plagg replied. “Or, rather, like a normal human with a cat added. It starts off super-subtle,” he continued, “so you’ll barely even notice it at first, but the more time you spend near Ladybug, the faster it gets worse. If you two keep lingering after defeating a supervillain like you did today...by the fourth week, you’ll want to have sex with Ladybug so badly, you’ll be in agony.”

Adrien’s brain was now playing Plagg’s last sentence on loop, struggling to fully comprehend it. With each loop, his face turned one shade of pink brighter, and by the fourth or fifth loop, his jaw had gone slack. He decided to pause and focus on the details for more information.

“...and by ‘agony,’ you mean...?”

Plagg thought for a moment, then rolled his eyes.

“Recall the bittersweet torment you apparently indulge in by masturbating with your head filled with fantasies involving Ladybug...”
The sound that escaped Adrien sounded like a rat getting stepped on.

“...and multiply that by about ten or twenty. That’s how badly you’ll want her.”

Adrien’s wish to spontaneously combust from embarrassment was abruptly replaced by dread again.

Ten or twenty times that…?!

He couldn’t even imagine it.

“Those are the basics,” Plagg said, correctly interpreting Adrien’s change of expression to mean that he was still listening...sort of. “Ladybug’s going to be going through pretty much the same thing, except, during the last week, she’s going to start to smell really sweet to you-- even sweeter than usual--while you will start exhibiting feline courting behaviors like caterwauling and love-biting.”

“WHAAAAAT?!” Adrien gripped his own head between his hands in horror. “‘Caterwauling and love-biting’?!”

“And a bunch of other behaviors, but you don’t have to worry about all of that until later.”

“WELL, I’M WORRYING NOW!” he wailed. “Ladybug’s going to run screaming for the hills if I do that! Being Chat Noir is awesome and amazing and cool, but being a black cat in heat is not!”

“You’d probably be right,” Plagg said with a nod, “Except she’s going to be in heat, too. So, whether she’s in love with you or not, your miraculouses are going to make her want you, too.”

“That…” Adrien tried to visualize this, but unlike with his own fantasies in which she wanted him because she loved him the same way he loved her, it made him feel slightly...nauseous, almost.

“That...that just sounds cruel and unfair,” he said sadly. “I want her to love me...and want me because she loves me. It sounds like we’re getting spells put on us that’ll make us not act like ourselves.” The longer he thought about it, the more horrified he was starting to feel about the whole thing. “If...! If she just...threw herself at me because she’s in heat, and I couldn’t help her think rationally because I’m in heat, then she’d just end up feeling torn and confused once it all wore off. She could end up depressed and ashamed and full of regret! And I couldn’t help support her because I would have been half the reason it happened to her…”

Adrien wrapped his arms around himself and cringed.

Plagg finally relaxed and sagged a little in the air, looking at Adrien pityingly.

“I can’t promise you two won’t end up in an awkward spot,” Plagg said grimly, “But if it makes you feel any better, the mating cycle never changes your personalities, no matter how bad it gets. You’re head-over-heels in love with Ladybug, and you’ll still be in love with her during your cycle. You’ll still care about her, and respect her, and want her to love you for you, not just because you think a good catch. I’d bet all the camembert I could eat in your lifetime that, even while in heat, you’d never force yourself on her or anything like that; you’ll probably end up groveling at her feet and begging to ravish her if anything.”

Adrien let go of the breath he had been holding with a whoosh and sagged with relief.

“Thank god for that…” he choked with a sniff. “I don’t think I could live with myself if anything happened that way…” He looked back up at Plagg imploringly. “But what about Ladybug? If she doesn’t feel like she loves me, how is she going to handle feeling like she wants me anyway?”
“Well, that’s up to her, obviously,” Plagg replied. “If she’s convinced she sees you as just her partner, then she’ll probably be doing her best to ignore her libido and concentrating on her more rational thoughts and feelings. It’s not much different than resisting the urge to have a one-night stand even when you know it’s asking for trouble because you’re not in love romantically with the other person. It’s just...you know, ten or twenty times harder.”

Adrien groaned.

“I’m going to have to make sure she knows she can kick my ass if I cross a line,” he said, “Because I’m guessing already being in love with her is just gonna make my situation worse…”

“It won’t be necessarily worse, per se,” Plagg cut in. “It just won’t feel at-odds with the rest of your feelings for her. With her, it might feel like her brain’s stuck in a paradox.”

“Still, I’m going to tell her she can beat me senseless if she needs to. She probably already knows this, but I might as well say it.”

“Fine with me,” Plagg said, shrugging. “You should talk as soon as possible so that you both know everything that’s going on. After that...” Plagg flew closer to Adrien’s face for emphasis. “You both need to meet only when you need to save Paris, and then go your separate ways as quickly as possible. No lingering, work-related conversation only, and no unnecessary calls--voice or video--on your communicators; the “pheromones” come from your miraculouses, so even long-distance communication will add to your symptoms. As long as you do this, and just keep your heads about you in general, you should get through your cycles without too much trouble. Oh, and feel free to blow off the steam by yourself as much as you need to; it’ll help take the edge off.”

“Blow off steam...? Oh...” Adrien scowled, turning red again. “All right, I got it.”

“Good. If you think I might have missed something, ask away.” Plagg put his paws on his hips. “Otherwise, that’s it. You’re dismissed.”

“M’kay...” Adrien sighed. “Thanks, Plagg...” He heaved himself onto his feet. He felt emotionally exhausted and decided he might as well change for bed now.

“Sure,” Plagg grunted, settling down to find a spot next to Adrien’s pillow to sleep on. He flopped himself down on his belly and yawned loudly, and then caught Adrien’s eye as he climbed into bed.

“Things’ll work out,” Plagg said bracingly. “You two make too good a team to let this break you up.”

Adrien smiled at Plagg gratefully.

“That’s what I’m hoping,” he murmured.

“And tomorrow, you’re going back to school, so maybe you’ll see some of your friends from last year.”

Adrien looked up at the ceiling and managed a grin.

“Yeah...that would be great...” He turned his head to look at Plagg again. The black Kwami had closed his eyes.

“Goodnight, Plagg,” he whispered.

Plagg immediately began to snore. Adrien took the hint and rolled over, closing his eyes and giving
silent thanks to whatever force of destiny brought Plagg--and Ladybug--into his life.
Chapter Summary

Marinette, Alya, Nino, and Adrien are in the same class this year! (Well, so is Chloe, but Rose and Juleka are, too!) Alya and Nino team up to orchestrate a dramatic reunion for their favorite couple, only for Adrien to exceed all expectations and thrill Marinette to pieces!
Adrien gives himself a stern talking-to for greeting Marinette way too excitedly, only to find himself unable to shake an uncanny awareness of her closeness. Later, Adrien finds himself worrying about his next encounter with Ladybug: could he end up blurting out his feelings for her if and when his heat gets bad enough? Maybe it's better if he tells her sooner, on his own terms...

Did you just whisper in her ear? / Words she only dreamed to hear
Pretty lady, look at how he's smiling / I think he likes you!
But it's too late / You believe in fate
You're absolutely smitten / You'll never let her go
-- dodie, "Absolutely Smitten"

Thursday, September 1st

Marinette had resigned herself to the fact that she would probably be going to school the next morning with exactly zero hours of sleep, but if it had happened that way, she wouldn’t be currently groaning like a zombie with her eyes glued shut with sleep. Luckily she had remembered to set her alarm on her phone, so she wouldn’t end up sleeping through the day, but she couldn’t think of any reason to drag herself out of bed...

“Marinette, your alarm’s been going off for ten minutes!” her mother called. “You don’t want to be late your first day!”

Well, I don’t wanna miss catching up on my beauty sleep, how ‘bout that?

“Marinette, wake up!” chirped Tikki, who was currently patting Marinette’s cheek with a tiny paw. “You wouldn’t want to miss class with Alya and Adrien, would you?”

...Okay, MAYBE my beauty sleep can wait...

Eating breakfast and getting out the door into the fresh air helped wake her up somewhat. She grumbled over the walk to school being three times as long as the walk across the street to her middle school had been; not because her athletic endurance was bad, but because she was starting to miss her bed already.

It turned out to be worth it, however; upon finding her assigned classroom and letting herself in, she was greeted by a familiar scream of excitement.
“Marinette! Get over here, girl!”

Before she could move, Alya had her in a bear hug.

“We’re in the same class, hell yeah!” she crowed.

“I am so psyched!” Marinette agreed, hugging her back. “Now I know this year will be a good year even if Chloé’s in our class, too!”

The girls separated and grinned at each other. Alya leaned in and stage-whispered, “Yeah, unfortunately, she is in our class; she came in earlier, but she left again to go wait outside the school for Adrien. She’ll probably have her dad threaten the principle if he isn’t in the same class.”

“Would it be awful if I was secretly grateful for that?” Marinette asked sheepishly. “If I couldn’t ask him out last year with him in our class, I don’t have a chance this year if he’s not in our class!”

Alya suddenly smirked evilly.

“Oh, don’t worry about that...” she drawled mysteriously. “Besides, it’s not just me: Nino, Rose, and Juleka are in our class, too, and Sabrina isn’t, so Chloé won’t have her minion with her this year!”

“Oh, that’s awesome!” Marinette cheered. “And I don’t know that not having Sabrina around will make much of a difference, but I don’t mind either way!”

“Same here!” Alya agreed. Her phone dinged at her, letting her know she had gotten a text. She immediately whipped it out and unlocked her screen. She seemed very excited about something.

“Who’re you texting?” Marinette asked, craning her neck to try to see.

“Nino,” Alya replied, sounding way too innocent. “I have him on a secret mission. He’s letting me know that he’s successfully intercepted and captured the target.” She scrolled through something on her phone and hit a key. Marinette could hear it calling someone.

“Uh...what?!” Marinette asked nervously. “What kind of ‘secret mission’?”

“You’re about to find out!” cackled Alya. She brought the phone up to her ear. “Agent DJ, this is Agent Ladyblogger! Are you in position?”

Marinette gaped at Alya, completely baffled and a little nervous at the way Alya was leering maniacally at her.

“Roger that!” Alya continued after a pause. “Everything’s in position on my end. Operation: Lovebirds Unite is a go! Proceed!”

She hung up. Marinette briefly considered running for her life.

Alya spun her around by the shoulders and covered her eyes.

“Hey! Alya, what are doing?! What are you and Nino plotting?!”

“A surprise,” Alya stated simply, steering Marinette back out into the hallway.

“Wha? But--where are you taking me?!! I just got here!”

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh...you’re not the only one who just got here!”
“WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?!”

“Just relax, don’t resist, and trust me!” She stopped, forcing Marinette to a halt.

“Oh, Marinette!” Marinette recognized Rose’s voice. “Hi! Juleka and I are in your class, with Alya and Nino, too! Isn’t this great?”

“Why do you have her blindfolded?” Juleka’s voice, sounding curious.

“To prevent her from resisting capture,” Alya responded.

“Is anybody going to tell me why I’m being captured?” Marinette asked.

Before she could receive an answer, however, she heard Nino’s voice approaching from down the hallway.

“...trust me, dude. All will become clear in due time!”

“If you would stop talking like that, I wouldn’t be so suspicious!”

At the sound of this familiar voice, Marinette’s heart suddenly decided it wasn’t happy sitting still and started fluttering against the inside of her ribcage.

Oh-god-oh-god-oh-god I’m not ready for this! This isn’t fair, I need warning and preparation for this! I’m going to pass out!!

“And...stop!” Nino stopped walking, his prisoner doing the same.

“Excellent work, Agent DJ!” Alya praised. “We’ve succeeded in capturing them alive! And now, for the final step!”

“Alya...!” Marinette croaked.

“Wha--? Is that...?” Adrien suddenly spoke, his voice trailing off. Marinette could almost believe he sounded as dizzy as she felt.

Please let me survive this! she prayed.

“Is that you, Marinette?” Adrien asked, still sounding a little breathless.

Marinette was extremely glad he couldn’t see her swaying in place.

“Uh! Y-y-y-y-yes!” she squeaked. “It’s m-me!”

As if on some silent signal, Alya took her hands away from Marinette’s eyes, and Marinette prayed she wasn’t blushing as obviously as she felt like she was. Because there he was! Her one, her only, her sweet, sweet Adrien! And the expression currently on his face--eyes wide and jaw slack in surprise--looked so much like what her face felt like (minus the glowing blush, of course) that her knees almost buckled.

Rose and Juleka? He didn’t even notice them.

The next thing she knew, Adrien had broken into the biggest, most blinding grin she had ever seen on him, picked her up around the middle, and spun her around with a laugh she hadn’t heard from him since exactly one year ago.
“I can’t believe it, we’re in the same class?!” Adrien laughed. “What are the odds?!” He set her back down and pulled back enough to look at her again, while Marinette remained hyper-conscious of his hands on her shoulders. “You have no idea how much I hoped you three, at least, would be in my class, this is amazing!”

He paused to catch his breath, while Marinette desperately tried to restart her heart.

_I never realized before just how oblivious he is to what he does to me, _Marinette thought vacantly. _I guess that’s a good thing until I get my act together…_  

Adrien blinked several times, still gazing at Marinette like she held the secret to everlasting happiness. Then, he seemed to suddenly remember his manners and back-peddled too quickly in a panic, releasing her shoulders and dropping his gaze. His hands actually flailed in midair for a second before dropping to his sides, and, while it wasn’t the easiest to spot against his warm and sunny complexion, there was a blush blooming across the bridge of his nose.

“Uh! Sorry, I--! I guess I...got a little too excited there!” He raised a hand to scratch the back of his head. “Excuse me!”

“Ah! No, nonono, it’s fine! I mean, _I’m_ fine! I mean...uh, don’t worry about it! I...I-I-I-I didn’t...mind...I...” She was about to correct herself again, worried that saying ‘I didn’t mind’ was a little too much, but she shut her mouth before she could and tried to smile, deciding she would leave it out there. She _really hadn’t_ minded…

“Uh...okay, I’m...glad…?” Adrien hesitantly smiled back, and Marinette internally gave herself a hearty pat on the back.

“Well, Nino and I couldn’t be happier to see you liked our surprise!” Alya said with a satisfied nod. “Rose and Juleka are in our class, too, Adrien, as you can see!”

Adrien started and suddenly noticed Rose and Juleka. He immediately greeted them sincerely and enthusiastically, but all Marinette really noticed was that he didn’t pick either of them up and spin them around…

_Maybe this month won’t be such a disaster after all…_ she thought.

After joining the rest of her class, Marinette sat down next to Alya behind Nino and Adrien.

_Would it have been pushing it if I had wrapped my arms around his neck while he spun me?_ she wondered, staring dreamily down at the back of Adrien’s head. _I wish I had at least smiled at him or laughed instead of just gaping in shock...hopefully, he doesn’t regret doing any of that because I told him I didn’t mind...when he and I are finally a couple, we’ll do stuff like that all the time...it’ll be amazing!_  

Alya reached across the desk and nudged Marinette to catch her attention.

“Wha--?”

“GURL!” Alya hissed. “TELL ME that what I saw this morning between you and Adrien _actually_ happened, because I _totally_ forgot to record your reunion! Did he, or did he not, _pick you up by the waist and spin you around?!”_

“_He did!_” Marinette squeaked back. “I can hardly believe it myself, but he did! Oh my god, Alya, I thought I was gonna pass out! And he sounded so happy!”
“I’ll say he did!” Alya whispered excitedly. “I’ve never seen him that excited! I haven’t heard him laugh like that, ever!” Alya was gesturing excitedly and her eyes were flashing, the way they did when she got a big scoop. “I mentioned it to Nino, and even he was surprised! Girl! Do you know what this means??”

“No! What does it mean?!” Marinette breathed, squeezing her fists and leaning forward eagerly. “What does it mean, Alya?!!”

“It means this is the year!” Alya hissed. “If not the semester! I’m calling it now: you, my dear, are going to be Adrien Agreste’s girlfriend before final exams, and you will be banging him before graduation!”

“Alya!!” she gasped. “Geez, could you announce that a little louder, I don’t think Adrien’s FATHER HEARD YOU!”

Alya just started shaking with suppressed laughter.

“Don’t tell me you wouldn’t love it if it came true, though!” she choked, shooting Marinette with a finger gun. “Oh my god, I am so getting you a ‘Congrats on the Sex!’ cake!”

“Um, no you are not!” Marinette hissed, making an “X” with her arms. “I will bury your head in the cake if you even try!!”

“It is my right as your best friend and wingwoman to give you a ‘Congrats on the Sex!’ cake, and you cannot stop me!” Alya crooned, smirking. “You may as well just resign yourself to this fact!”

“I really do appreciate you rooting for me, but I don’t think school is the best place to talk about me banging Adrien,” Marinette replied flatly. “And even if no-one hears, and all I end up doing is just silently fantasizing about banging Adrien, I don’t want to risk anyone catching me doing so and seeing my expression.”

“You realize you just said the phrase ‘banging Adrien’ out loud yourself twice, right?” Alya pointed out.

Marinette scowled and turned bright pink.

“Besides, I think I’ve known you long enough that I’ve probably seen your fantasizing-about-banging-Adrien face at least once, and you’ll be glad to know that it doesn’t look much different from the rest of your fantasizing-about-Adrien faces: dreamy smile, blushing cheeks, and the occasional sigh. No big deal!”

“Well, you already planted the image, so I guess it’s too late, anyway…” Marinette grumbled.

“‘Atta girl!” Alya chuckled.

Great… Marinette thought, pouting. Just great…Well, now I know what I’m thinking about for the rest of today! Thanks, Alya!!

In truth, she couldn’t stay mad for long; she probably would have spent most of the remaining periods thinking about Adrien without Alya’s help. He was sitting one row below her and one seat to the side, which meant she could almost see the right side of his face as he looked forward, and see his entire right profile when he looked in Nino’s direction! It was serendipitous!

I would like to thank all the gods and goddesses and miscellaneous guardian spirits of love and happiness and future boyfriends…! Thank you ever so much for Adrien Agreste…!
When the lunch bell rang, Chloé lunged at Adrien and tried to convince him to eat lunch with her in the cafeteria instead of going home, but he delicately pulled his arm out of her grasp and told her his father wouldn’t approve.

“I need to at least get his permission beforehand, and then maybe I’ll be able to eat lunch here at school sometimes,” he said patiently.

“It’s not like you’d be having lunch with somebody he doesn’t know!” Chloé said, scowling. “He knows I’m not going to kidnap you, or something!”

“If I don’t go home for lunch today, all he’ll know is that I didn’t come home when I was supposed to, and while I’m probably at school, I could have been kidnapped or something,” he pointed out. “He’ll get mad at both of us if I stay for lunch, Chloé, and yes, your father may be the mayor, but I don’t think my father’s been intimidated by anyone in his life.”

“That has nothing to do with this conversation, but, whatever,” she said carelessly. “I’ll see you when you get back.”

“Oh...yeah, sure...”

Since she was also going home for lunch, Marinette trailed a ways behind Adrien as he left the school and got into the Agreste family car to be chauffeured home by his bodyguard. Once he was out of sight, she walked herself home, a dreamy smile on her face.

When the final bell rang, there was the expected shuffle and scramble of people gathering their things and filing out into the hallway. Marinette didn’t immediately move to do the same, but just sat and watched Adrien with her chin in her hand as he tucked his tablet into his messenger bag. He was taking his time gathering his things as he listened to whatever Nino was saying to him. He stood up slowly...

And then he turned and looked up at her.

She instantly sat up a little straighter, her expression turning starstruck.

For a brief moment, he stared back, his wide-eyed expression difficult to read...curious? Intrigued? Mystified, even?

Then the spell broke; he smiled and waved at her. It was his normal, polite and friendly smile...except, if Marinette had been paying just a little more attention, she would have noticed how his shoulders weren’t fully relaxed, that his chin was tucked slightly down instead of tilting slightly up. It meant he had to roll his eyes up higher than usual to meet her gaze, and the result made his expression ever-so-slightly bashful...

But Marinette was too busy internally screaming to notice.

EEEEEEE HE WAVED AT MEEEEEE!!!

And off he went...

Marinette was still grinning awkwardly and waving long after he and Nino left the classroom.
“...Well! Somebody seems very glad to be in the same class as you!” Alya remarked.

“He waved at me…” Marinette whispered, only half-listening. “He looked at me and smiled at me and waved at me…”

“That he did!” said Alya. “And by next semester, you two will be kissing hello every morning! Secretly in some quiet corner or empty classroom or cleaning closet, of course.”

Mmm…! Wait, no! Marinette, control your thirst!

“I dunno if Adrien is into PDA or not, though, Alya...he would probably have to be extra careful not to engage in PDA because he’s a model and his father’s company is world-famous!”

“You would think so…” Alya mused, “Except he totally picked you up and spun you around like you two were in a musical in front of me, Nino, Rose, and Juleka.”

Marinette had no comeback for this. She could only stand there frozen in shock, her eyeballs bulging.

“But you’re right,” Alya continued. “You two will have to scope out some secret meeting places for your midnight trysts!”

“Alya, no…”

“Or maybe you’ll just sneak into each other’s rooms…”

“Alya, oh my god…!”

“I bet his bed is huuuuge...Kid’s loaded, after all.”

“STOOOOOP!!!”

Blonde boys were going to be the death of her, it seemed.

~

As he sat down next to Nino in the classroom, Adrien felt like he needed to give himself a lecture on proper social behavior.

Just because you haven’t seen Marinette in a while doesn’t give you an excuse to pick her up in a hug around the waist and spin her in a circle! She might be your friend, but she’s not your GIRLFRIEND! And even if she was, you can’t get carried away like that in public! You are the son of Gabriel Agreste, and your father would not approve!

It was probably because of how over-enthusiastic he had been in his greeting of Marinette, but even after entering the classroom and sitting down next to Nino to wait for lecture to start, he couldn’t shake this kind of subtle but ever-present awareness of Marinette sitting behind him. It was difficult to describe, even to himself; he wondered if being able to feel someone’s eyes on you was similar to this. On the now-rare occasions when he ate dinner with his father, for example, he could almost feel his father exerting a subtle but almost tangible pressure on his own personal space, even from on the other side of the long, cavernous dining room. He could keep his eyes down on his plate the whole time, and still feel his father’s intimidating presence.

This was like that, except he had been sitting in a classroom along with about twenty other students, each contributing to the subtle buzzing of the room’s atmosphere. When he was sitting next to his
best friend in a classroom full of people, why would Marinette’s presence stick out to him so much? He couldn’t hear anything she was doing behind him, nor had she done or said anything out in the hallway that was notable enough to stick with him, except maybe the fact that she hadn’t minded his over-enthusiastic greeting.

At least I didn’t freak her out too much...at least I don’t think so. She said she didn’t mind, so, no harm done, I guess...

Remembering how warm and affectionate her family and home felt, he thought that maybe Marinette was used to receiving more hugs in general than he was. The thought made him smile. It was easy to see where Marinette inherited her kindness.

Having finished scolding himself, he tried to concentrate on lecture, but the whole time, he could still feel her sitting behind him. It was subtle, and only slightly distracting, but it was...new. A new awareness, a new sensation.

When the bell rang for lunch, Chloé had predictably tried to get him to stay to eat lunch with her, and he had to explain to her why he couldn’t, even though, of course, he was positive she already knew. She hadn’t changed at all, it seemed.

And, as far as he could tell, Marinette hadn’t changed much either. She was still the same sweet and klutzy girl who sometimes stumbled over her words that he remembered from middle school (also, remembering also how creatively-talented she had been in middle school, he could only imagine the things she could do now). So then, what was it about her now that was nagging at him?

Again, it was probably all on him. His subconscious just wasn’t ready to forgive him just yet for his social faux-pas. And since Marinette was the one who suffered it, the fact that she was sitting right behind him was nagging at him. That was all...

Returning home for lunch was a free opportunity to clear his head with a change of scenery. Familiar scenery, but different from school, where Marinette had been sitting right behind him. Once he had finished lunch, he realized that perhaps he should have concentrated on enjoying his food as deliberately as possible to help himself not keep thinking back to Marinette. It wasn’t that he couldn’t stop thinking about her; she just kept popping up in the back of his head, gently requesting his attention like a purring kitten touching him with a single paw. It wasn’t anything worth worrying about, just...intriguing.

So, when the final bell rang, he had found himself turning to look up at her as he stood from his seat. He couldn’t have told you what he expected to see, but she just drew his gaze, like a ladybug landing on an important note he hadn’t noticed.

She was still sitting at her desk, her cheek resting on her hand when he caught sight of her. Her head jerked up out of her hand and her eyes widened as soon as realized he was looking at her. Caught, Adrien had immediately smiled and waved at her, hoping that was enough to make him not look like he had been staring at her like a weirdo. She seemed to buy it.

But he had been struck by the sudden realization that she was...actually quite pretty…

Not at all a strange thought to have; people had their “types”, but the standards by which conventional beauty was measured weren’t all that varied; if they were, fashion models would be as motley a group as the rest of the human race. He felt that, as a model himself, he could attest to this. Adrien was a sensitive, humble boy, and you would never catch him boasting about the fact that pictures of him could be seen all over Paris, but, honestly, he would have to be really down on himself to think he wasn’t handsome, plain-and-simple.
Thus, he felt that it was indisputable that Marinette Dupain-Cheng was likewise a very attractive human being.

...Ugh, do you even hear yourself, Adrien? You are REALLY overthinking all of this! Just stop worrying about it! It’s just Marinette!

Needless to say, by now he was starting to worry a little bit for his mental health...just a little bit.

~

Even after he got home from school, he was still preoccupied, but at least he was alone with Plagg in his room where no one could witness his awkwardness. Taking advantage of the free time he had before dinner, he got on his computer and brought up the Ladyblog to see the latest on his and Ladybug’s feats of heroism (as far as the public knew, anyway). Even though he had seen and participated in it all in person, it was fun to see it all from a third-person point of view...especially when he got to watch Ladybug save Paris from multiple angles.

Alya’s latest video, of the two of them confronting Summer Fae, was one the more underwhelming posts: Alya had recorded the footage from very far away, and so the viewer couldn’t see what was happening at all. He and Ladybug hadn’t even engaged Summer Fae in any form of combat, so there wasn’t much to see. He was actually glad Alya hadn’t been able to catch anything he had said to Summer Fae on camera. He would prefer that nobody hear him sweet-talk anybody other than his Lady.

Speaking of his Lady...

It may have only been one day since he had seen her last, but it had also been one day since he learned that the two of them would be entering their “mating cycle”, and even though he dreaded the inevitable embarrassment, he wanted to talk to Ladybug about it so he could hear her thoughts. Maybe her kwami had told her something that Plagg forgot to tell him, or maybe she an idea or two of her own for them to deal with it. Either way, he also wanted to know if she was as worried as he was about how the mating cycle might affect their ability to work together effectively as a team, or how it might trouble their relationship in general. He wanted to reassure her that, no matter what, his loyalty to her would not be shaken, and that he believed in her loyalty to him in turn.

He also really just wanted to see her...and maybe give her a hug if she was okay with it.

The problem was, they had no way to contact each other when weren’t both superheroes, and so if Hawk Moth decided, for some reason, to not akumatize anyone for a while, he and Ladybug wouldn’t be able to meet to talk about their situation. What if Hawk Moth went a whole week without akumatizing anyone? That would be one-quarter of their mating cycle past. How far along would their symptoms have developed by then? Would even be safe to talk to Ladybug at that point?

“Hey, Plagg?” he called, spinning his chair around to look around his room for his kwami. “What should we do if Hawk Moth doesn’t akumatize anyone soon? I mean, don’t get me wrong, it would be nice for Paris to get a break, but eventually, won’t it be too risky to try to meet Ladybug?”

Plagg emerged from inside Adrien’s pillowcase.

“Even if Hawk Moth didn’t give you two anything to do for a week, you should still be okay to talk for a bit. Since you won’t have seen each other until then, your symptoms wouldn’t have developed much.”
“That’s a relief, I guess,” Adrien said. “How bad would we be by then, exactly?”

“That would lead to twice as many bothersome erections for you, probably…” Adrien yelled, covering his ears. “TMI!!”

“…Hating Ladybug and trying to take her down. Somehow or other, Ladybug had saved the day as usual, of course, but by the time the spell on him had broken, they had both already used their superpowers and had to go their separate ways before they changed back. He hadn’t had the nerve to try to get her to stay long enough to hear his confession. At least she hadn’t held against him whatever horrible things he had said to her during the fight.

Would Ladybug feel any differently about him if she knew exactly how he felt about her? The last thing he wanted to do was make things awkward between them with a confession of love that wouldn’t be well-received…but what if that was all that was holding them back? What if all he needed to do was take a leap of faith?

No, stop that! he scolded himself. This month is the worst time for you to be getting your hopes up for no good reason. Any other time, maybe, but not during the mating cycle! It wouldn’t be right...

But could he keep his true feelings to himself until it was over? If it got to the point where he started throwing himself at her feet and begging for her permission to ravish her, as Plagg said he might, then what would stop him from declaring his all-consuming love to her in the process? Not telling her he loved her more than life itself would seem like a lie of omission by then! Would it be better to tell her the truth before he was no longer of sound mind?

“Plagg…” he called again, staring down at his knees. “What do you think the odds are that I’ll blurt...
out that I love her because the mating cycle is messing with my head?”

“Ooh...that would be something, wouldn’t it?” Plagg remarked, not sounding nearly worried enough, in Adrien’s opinion. “Something like 80% if you two are lucky and your symptoms don’t get too bad...more like 90% if you two are fighting supervillains every other day.”

“Oh, god…” Adrien buried his face in his hands.

“And she’d eat it up, too,” Plagg added. “Probably say the same.”

“Wait, what?” Adrien looked up and stared at Plagg in confusion. “But how could she trust my state of mind at that point? Wouldn’t she try not to take me too seriously because the mating cycle was messing with my brain?”

“No, because it would be messing with her brain, too,” Plagg pointed out, gesturing with a paw. “Hearing you say you love her with every fiber of her being would be music to her ears, and she’d probably beg you to take her right then and there.”

“Oh, fuck...” he croaked, trying and failing miserably to not visualize Ladybug pinning him against a wall, kissing him senseless, and commanding him to make her his.

“So you’re thinking it might be a better idea to tell her before you start yowling for her love?” Plagg asked.

“Um, excuse me, ‘yowling’?!” Adrien asked, running his fingers through his hair in a nervous tic.

“You know, meowing plaintively at her like the tomcat you are to try to get her aroused.”

“Oh my god, what is going to happen to me?!” Adrien howled, standing up and gripping his hair like he was about to rip it out. “Plagg, she’s going to be terrified of me!”

“No, she won’t,” Plagg deadpanned. “And you don’t have to worry about that part for a while. I’ll tell you about every feline tendency you’ll develop when your symptoms get bad enough. Until then, just concentrate on managing your urges.”

Adrien took several deep breaths, trying to calm himself down. This month was going to shed years off his life.

“So…” he finally asked hesitantly, “Do you think I should tell her how I feel?”

“Your feelings are going to influence how you react to your symptoms, so it’s only fair she knows how they might affect you,” Plagg replied. “Unless you think it would just upset her, I’d say do it.”

Adrien released his grip on his hair and heaved a deep sigh.

“Okay...” he said lowly. “I just hope she’s in an okay mood when I see her.”
It Was The Heat Of The Moment

Chapter Summary

Ladybug and Chat Noir's opportunity to talk finally comes when the supervillain Doctor Quack appears, but first, he needs to be stopped before he captures and operates on any innocent and perfectly-healthy citizens! Puns are thrown left and right, and both Ladybug and Chat Noir get a good laugh at each other's expense. Afterwards, Ladybug and Chat Noir have their talk: Ladybug sees a side of Chat Noir that he’s never shown before, and then hears a confession that he’s wanted to make for a long time… …And then, Ladybug discovers just how powerful a single kiss can be.

Saturday, September 3rd

Marinette couldn’t remember looking forward to school this much before. It added spring to her step the next morning knowing that Adrien would be there, sitting one row down and one seat over from her, just like in their middle-school days. Adrien smiled at her and said good morning with a cheery wave as they filed into the classroom, and she felt like a cup of liquid sunshine was poured into her belly. By the time she remembered to wave back and smile (she didn’t trust herself to speak) he was sitting down next to Nino and taking out his tablet. Untroubled, Marinette sat down next to Alya in the row right behind him and just watched him with a dreamy smile on her face.

She might have been able to spend the whole morning free from worrying about “the talk” she had to have with Chat Noir the next time they met…but it seemed the universe had other plans. Halfway through Math, Alya’s alert went off on her phone, signaling that the press was reporting live at the scene of something big, usually a supervillain on the rampage. Ignoring the scowl of disapproval the teacher sent her way, Alya stood up in her seat, leaped over Marinette’s legs, and tore out of the classroom yelling, “OFF TO RECORD LADYBUG! SEE YOU ALL WHENEVER!”

The classroom erupted in excitement, and the teacher struggled to get everyone to settle down so he could resume lecture. In the commotion, Marinette slipped out and headed straight for the girls’ bathroom to transform.

~

After taking to the rooftops, Ladybug flipped open her yo-yo to view Alya’s livestream on the Ladyblog. Alya was sure to be heading straight for wherever the press was reporting from, and Ladybug hoped she could track her to the supervillain’s location and keep her best friend out of trouble.

“I’m pedaling as fast as I can, but I’m gonna lose this guy any minute!” Alya voiced growled in frustration as the view through her phone showed what looked like a surgeon dressed in hazmat-yellow operating room garb, riding on a gurney that pushed itself and sported multiple straps for restraining hysterical patients. Whoever the supervillain was, he or she was leaving Alya behind at what must have been at least 30 kilometers per hour.

Good thing you can’t follow them, too, or I might have to rescue you again, Ladybug thought dryly.

She flipped her yo-yo closed and used it to lasso a nearby smokestack, taking off over the Parisian
rooftops. Continually glancing down as she swung and leaped, she kept her eyes peeled for the sight of a surgeon riding on a speeding gurney. When she suddenly heard screaming, she followed the sound to the park, where she was greeted with the sight of people running for their lives in all directions. Sure enough, she spotted the supervillain, armed with an oversized hypodermic needle in one hand and a scalpel in the other. He was pacing around the park, trailing after the fleeing people and calling after them, maybe trying to convince them to let him operate on them? Ladybug had a feeling that anyone he caught would be strapped down on the gurney, and she was relieved that it was currently unoccupied. She would just have to make sure it stayed that way.

Just as she was about to leap into action, a familiar voice rang out from the direction of the nearby apartment complex.

“Hey!! Is your malpractice insurance paid up?”

She easily picked out the black figure perched on the edge of the roof, and shakily drew a deep breath when her heart started pounding nervously.

*You’re fine, Ladybug,* she told herself bracingly. *Just finish the job the way you always do, then you can feel all awkward and have the embarrassing talk!*

Ladybug then realized that her hearing must be better than the supervillain’s, because he didn’t react to Chat Noir’s taunt at all. Maybe one of them could sneak up on him? But where was the akuma hiding? In the syringe? In the scalpel? In the gurney? In the face mask?! The gloves?! The lab coat?!

*We don’t have time to strip a supervillain and break everything on him! How are we supposed to know which object to grab?!!*

Chat Noir dashed along the edge of the roof on all fours and leaped onto the roof of Collège Françoise-Dupont to get closer to the scene. Ladybug hoped he wouldn’t do anything impulsive just yet. They needed a plan...

Then, her eyes landed on the gurney again…the gurney with restraining straps.

*Ooh, how convenient…*

Now knowing what they needed to do to beat him, Ladybug dropped gracefully down from her perch and whistled to catch the supervillain’s attention.

“I don’t think it’s proper practice to operate on patients outdoors!” she called, standing with her hands on her hips.

As soon as he caught sight of her, the supervillain spread his arms out in surprise. The sunlight reflecting off his headgear made it difficult to make out his facial features.

“Oh, my poor, dear, girl!” he cried dramatically. “You have the most serious case of Ladypox I’ve ever seen!”

Before she could say a word in her defense, she was startled by the sound of Chat Noir bursting into uncontrollable laughter. She almost didn’t recognize his voice, having never heard him laugh so hard before, but sure enough, she tracked the sound to the sight of Chat Noir hugging himself around the middle and swaying in place as his knees threatened to buckle under him.
“WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?!?” she hollered at him, hoping he could see her outraged glare from where he was.

From the breaks in his cackling, it sounded like he now hiccuping from the force of his own laughter. She watched in disbelief as he lurched sideways and actually toppled off the roof from laughing so hard. Crossing her arms, she enjoyed as much as possible the ensuing screech and thud of him hitting the ground. She knew a fall from that height wouldn’t hurt him, so she felt he deserved it.

“SERVES YOU RIGHT!!” she yelled for good measure.

She heard him wailing something hoarsely from wherever he had landed, but she couldn’t make out the words. She decided she didn’t care.

“My dear, we simply must operate as soon as possible!” the supervillain exclaimed, approaching Ladybug with what looked like an expression of concern on his face. “Just leave everything to me, Doctor Quack, and I’ll have you back to normal in no time!”

“Um, eXcUse YoU, siR!” Chat Noir called, his voice cracking from the earlier abuse. He came trudging around the corner of the school building, hugging his own stomach and gasping for breath. “But iF yOu can miSteAk my LaDy’s ethereal beauty...for a SKIN CONDITION, I’d say YOU would be the one who needs operating on! May I recommend laser eye surgery? Because you are BLIND!”

“You’re still not funny, Chat Noir;” Ladybug deadpanned without looking at him.

Doctor Quack whipped around to face Chat Noir.

“Oh, goodness, Chat Noir!” he exclaimed. “I confess I didn’t go to veterinary school, but I think your anatomy is human enough for me to take care of you, too. What seems to be the problem?”

“Hey! You’re the one who just admitted you’re a quack!” Chat Noir shouted back, pointing an accusing finger at the approaching supervillain. “I’d bet 2,000 euros you got akumatized ‘cause you lost your medical license!”

He started backing up as Doctor Quack got closer, and Ladybug took the opportunity to look for the perfect moment to lasso him with her yo-yo and possibly force him down on his own gurney.

Doctor Quack put his tools away in his pocket and snapped his fingers. The gurney suddenly zoomed to his side and Doctor Quack mounted it like a horse.

“You know, cats live longer and happier lives if they’re spayed or neutered--”

She couldn’t help it: Ladybug burst out laughing. Chat Noir’s gaping look of mingled outrage and horror was just too hilarious.

“YOU STAY THE HELL AWAY FROM ME!” he shrieked at Doctor Quack, grabbing his own tail and holding it protectively to his chest as his turned around and tore off down the street yelping in terror. Doctor Quack raced after him on his gurney, swerving dangerously around cars and pedestrians.

Wiping tears of laughter out of her eyes, Ladybug took to the rooftops again and went after them.
Chat Noir used his staff to propel himself up onto another line of buildings, obviously counting on the fact that gurneys couldn’t go up walls.

“Listen, I am all for improving the quality of life of cats everywhere,” Chat Noir yelled down at the Doctor. “But if you deprive me of the ability to have kids someday, you will be committing a crime against the HUMAN RACE! I OWE IT TO THE NEXT GENERATION TO PASS ON MY GENES!”

*Is this guy for real right now?* she wondered. If he didn’t sound so hysterical, she would be hardcore shaming him right now, but maybe being threatened with castration gave him the right to rant a little bit. Besides, she supposed it would be a shame if the next generation was short by two or three young people as attractive as Chat Noir because he couldn’t help make them...

*DON’T continue that train of thought, Ladybug.*

With Doctor Quack still distracted by a very offended cat-boy, she figured it was now or never. Maybe her yo-yo would be enough to get the Doctor restrained enough to force him down, but she decided to play it safe.

“Lucky Charm!”

A red and black-spotted hospital gown fell into her arms.

“Okay, very thematically appropriate, but…” She scanned her surroundings, assuming that throwing it over Doctor Quack’s head would be too straightforward. She spotted a mannequin in the window of a nearby boutique, and an abandoned shopping cart around the corner in an alleyway, and it all clicked into place.

Dashing into the boutique and stripping the mannequin of the trenchcoat and hat it was modeling, she dressed it in the hospital gown and carried it outside. She stood it up in the shopping cart and tied it into place with her yo-yo. Bringing the other end of her yo-yo with her, she ran past Doctor Quack, drawing his attention.

“Doctor Quack, help!” she cried. “There’s a sick crazy woman chasing me!”

Two seconds later, the mannequin rattled by, pulled along in the shopping cart by her yo-yo.

“Just keep running, Ladybug! I’ll have her restrained!” Doctor Quack came racing after her on his gurney.

Ladybug skidded to a halt and backflipped over him. Doctor Quack crashed into the shopping cart, tackling the mannequin to the ground. Ladybug bound him to the mannequin, which immobilized him completely, including his arms and hands. She then shoved the both of them onto the gurney, and strapped them into place, with the Doctor on top.

She stood waiting patiently as Chat Noir caught up with them.

“Well, well, well!” Chat Noir drawled, grinning maliciously. “How the tables have turned!”

“You were more than a little ridiculous, but he *did* traumatize you a little bit,” Ladybug said sweetly. “So, I figured I’d let you do the honors.”

“I’m *touched*, my Lady!” he said, beaming at her. He turned and leered down at Doctor Quack, grinning evilly. “Hold still now! This won’t...hurt...a bit!”
Somebody’s NURSING a bit of grudge… she thought, smirking.

“Cataclysm!”

Chat Noir reached out very carefully and pinched the tail of Doctor Quack’s lab coat. It turned black and dissolved away, along with all of the tools inside it except for the scalpel, which remained intact, though still pitch black until Ladybug flicked it with her finger. It dissolved into dust, giving up the akuma that had been hiding within.

“No more evildoing for you!”

Opening her yo-yo and throwing it with practiced ease, Ladybug captured the akuma and tapped the top of her yo-yo after catching it to release the purified butterfly. To her surprise, however, it emerged from her yo-yo pastel pink instead of white and sparkling like it was covered in glitter. Before taking to the sky, it fluttered around Ladybug curiously like a moth drawn to a porch light. Then, after a moment, it took off, flying away to wherever free butterflies went.

“Whoa!” Chat Noir followed the butterfly with his eyes. “That’s different! What did you do?”

“I don’t know,” she said, also watching the butterfly disappear from sight. “It was acting like…it was attracted to me?”

“Well, I mean, I wouldn’t blame it if that was it, but why, exactly?”

“I captured it and purified it the same way as always!” she said, choosing to not acknowledge his first comment. “And I don’t think there was anything unusual about the supervillain, either.”

“Do you think it has something to do with the way I used Cataclysm?”

“No, I don’t…oh!” she exclaimed suddenly. “Oh, no…” she groaned.

“What? What’s wrong?” Chat Noir asked, sounding worried.

“I think it’s because…” she hesitated, glancing nervously at him. “It’s because of the…mating cycle.”

There was a moment of silence. Ladybug’s miraculous beeps its three-minute morning in her ears, and Chat Noir’s beeps its four-minute warning.

“Well, I guess that answers the question I was gonna use to start the conversation,” Chat Noir remarked. “I was going to ask if you got the same lecture from your kwami that I did from mine.”

“I did, and I know, we should talk about it, but first, I need to feed my kwami. You’ve got an extra minute on me, so can you look after our doctor?”

“Will do,” he said, nodding. “I’ll wait for you up there somewhere after I’ve fed my kwami, too,” he said, gesturing to the rooftops above them.

“Great, see you soon!”

And off she went.
Marinette sat outside her family’s bakery against the wall as she waited for Tikki to finish eating her cookie. She was hugging herself around the knees, trying to figure out how this conversation with Chat Noir was going to go.

“I’m really nervous, Tikki!” she whined. “I don’t know how I’m gonna do this! It’s so embarrassing!”

Tikki spoke with her mouth full.

“Chat Nwah ish just as embarrassed as you ah, he won’ make fwun of you!” She swallowed. “It’s not as if you’re explaining everything about the mating cycle to him; his kwami will have already done that. You’re just making sure you both know how you’re going to handle it.”

Marinette nodded, trying to take Tikki’s words to heart.

“Yeah...yeah, okay...okay, I can do this…”

“Yes, you can do this!” Tikki swallowed and floated up to Marinette’s eye level. “Okay, I’m ready!”

Marinette gulped and stood up.

“Okay, Tikki...um, Transform Me!”

Ladybug found Chat Noir waiting for her where he had been avoiding Doctor Quack earlier. He was sitting with his arms around his knees, looking lost in thought, until he looked up the moment she appeared next to him.

“Oh, hey, Bug,” he greeted, smiling warmly at her.

“He really needs to cut back on the pet names...” she thought, pressing her lips together as her heart did a little bounce.

“Oh, hey...” She laced her fingers together and shifted from side-to-side uncertainly. “So…”

“So...you...want to take a seat?” Chat Noir asked timidly.

Ladybug bit her lip, hesitating, and then sat down next to him with about an arm’s reach distance between them.

For a while, neither of them said anything or looked at each other.

“So...” Ladybug finally spoke, glancing at Chat Noir out of the corner of her eye. “How are you...feeling?”

Chat Noir grimaced. He knew what she was getting at.

“Just about the same as always...pretty much normal,” he answered, shrugging. He glanced at her. “You?”

“Uh...same?” she hedged, clenching her jaw. “Well...” She winced. “Hearing from my kwami what the...the cycle is going to do to me was...let’s just say it was a shock…”

“Yeah, same here,” Chat Noir admitted, nodding.
“I try not to think about it, but that just makes me think about it more, and I just…” She shook her head hopelessly. “I’m horrified at the idea that this spell could get so powerful that I suddenly…start feeling like that and…wanting things and not being able to control myself!” She was blushing furiously now, but she felt like finding the words to explain her feelings aloud to Chat Noir might help her feel better. And, who knew, maybe he could help reassure her.

“All of my thoughts and feelings…” She paused, trying to find the words. “They’re all supposed to come from somewhere, you know? They’re supposed to make some kind of sense because…usually you know why you feel something, so you worry about what’s bothering you instead of the feeling itself, but this…” She threw her hands up in frustration. “I’m afraid it’s going to feel like my miraculous is...trying to take over my mind.”

Chat Noir nodded silently in understanding.

“Yeah...I think I know what you mean.”

There was another long silence. She felt grateful that Chat Noir seemed to understand how she felt but wondered what was on his mind.

“...what are you most worried about?” she asked timidly. “If you don’t mind telling me, of course.”

He smiled ruefully at her and then appeared to consider his words.

“I…” He trailed off, and shakily took a breath. He looked so distressed she had the urge to give him a hug. She settled for putting a hand on his shoulder. He looked up in surprise, his brows still furrowed.

“Hey, it’s okay,” she said soothingly. “You don’t have to tell me. Just...remember we’re a team, and we’ll get through this together. Our partnership is too strong and too important to be ruined by something that isn’t our fault. I wouldn’t...let you do anything to me that I didn’t want you to, and I trust you to do the same with me, all right?”

He chuckled and smiled gratefully at her, patting her hand with his own.

“I know. I was going to give you my explicit permission to kick my ass if I do anything out of line, anyway, just to be sure.” His gaze fell to his feet. “I was scared to death of the idea I might...force myself on you,” he whispered, his voice cracking at his last few words. She squeezed his shoulder, moved by how emotional he clearly felt about this.

“I swear, I would rather die than consider the thought!” he croaked. “But the way my kwami was describing how bad my symptoms could get if we saw each other every other day…” He shook his head, cutting himself off. “I couldn’t live with myself if anything like that happened...” He took a deep breath and seemed to relax somewhat. “Luckily though, my kwami said he was almost absolutely positive I wouldn’t, when I asked him about it.”

“Even if you felt like you were going crazy with...you know…?” she asked.

“He said that, no matter how bad the symptoms might get, that they can’t change our personalities. I’d never take advantage of you, and that won’t change even if I feel like...like I’m dying from blue balls or whatever.”

“I see...yeah, I think my kwami mentioned that, too. But then, are you just going to end up just…suffering in silence, then?” she asked.

“Uh…” He looked sheepish and suddenly had a hard time meeting her gaze. His head shrunk down
to hide in between his hunched shoulders.

“Okay, you’re not going to try to avoid that one, are you?” she said, raising an eyebrow. “If you’re not going to do nothing, then what do I need to brace myself for?”

“I’m not trying to avoid the question, it’s just…” He threw his head back and threw an expression of, Oh god, why me? to the heavens. “It’s just REALLY embarrassing!”

“I know,” she said sympathetically. “But it can’t be worse than anything I might have to endure.”

“Actually, it can,” he deadpanned. He forced himself to look at her. “My kwami said that, during the last week of the cycle or so, you’re going to start smelling really ’sweet’ to me. Well, ’sweeter than usual,’ he said. Me, though…” He winced.

“Are you going to smell...I don’t know, musky?” she guessed. “Like…whatever sex is supposed to smell like?”

Chat Noir snorted.

“HA! I wish!” he said. “No, I’m gonna…” He screwed his eyes shut and pressed his lips tightly together into a thin line. Ladybug couldn’t help but lean toward him in curiosity.

“I’m gonna start acting like a cat,” he forced out, his jaw stiff, opening his eyes again. “Like a cat in heat, my kwami says.”

Ladybug’s eyes bugged out, but she waited for him to elaborate.

“I’m going to...develop a bunch of ‘feline tendencies,’ as my kwami put it,” he said, making quotation marks in the air with his fingers. “I don’t know if I can even remember all the quirks he listed…meowing, ‘caterwauling,’ ‘yowling,’ uh… Oh…” He squeezed his eyes shut again. “...‘love-biting’...!” he squeaked.

Ladybug’s soul emitted a tiny choking sound as it left her body for a moment.

“...‘love-biting’?!” she echoed in the world’s softest whimper. “You’re...! You’re gonna...?! You’re gonna try to bite me?! Why?!”

“Not to hurt you, I’m sure!” he rushed to assure her, waving his hands. “I don’t even know if I could, because of your suit. Hurt you, I mean.”

Ladybug could feel her face heating up. She wasn’t quite sure what ‘love-biting’ meant as it pertained to cats, but if it was anything like what ‘love-biting’ usually meant for humans…”

Oh, god...

The image of Chat Noir gently but feverishly scraping his teeth against her neck, as he panted against her skin and nuzzled his nose under her jaw...

“Uh...Ladybug?”

She gasped, snapping out of it.

“Uh, sorry!” she squeaked, scratching the back of her. “Kinda...spaced out for a second, there…”

“Yeah, uh...no problem!” he said, looking like he didn’t quite believe her.
Another stretch of awkward silence…

Chat Noir took a deep breath and let it out with a whoosh, as though bracing himself for something. Ladybug eyed him nervously.

“So…my kwami told me about…another difference between…how we’re going to be experiencing the mating cycle…” he began haltingly, carefully considering his words.

“I don’t like your tone…” she said slowly, leaning back away from him slightly. “Is this even worse than you…love-biting my neck?”

Chat Noir turned bright red and tried to withdraw his head between his shoulders like a turtle. Then he suddenly straightened up again and eyed her curiously, though his face was still red.

“Did I…say that I would be biting your neck specifically…?”

She froze. Her eyeballs tried desperately to pop out of her sockets to escape the heat of her sudden blush.

“Uh…maybe?”

“O…kay…?” Once again, it looked like he wasn’t sure if he believed her or not.

“So…what were you saying?” she asked.

“Oh, uh…so, my kwami said that…this whole situation might seem…I guess, either not so bad or worse to each of us depending on…how we…how we saw each other normally, without the mating cycle messing with us. I mean, I don’t think the mating cycle is going to change how we feel about each other, necessarily…it’s just…going to make us feel lust for each other. Am I making any sense?” he asked, looking at her nervously.

“I…I think so…” she answered hesitantly. “You’re…you basically saying that…the mating cycle won’t make us…fall in love with each other by itself, it can only make us feel…sexually-attracted to each other, which isn’t the same thing. And if…hypothetically…one of us…was already in love with the other, we’d still feel that way, and that might make the mating cycle not seem so bad…or worse, depending how you look at it. And if we weren’t in love with each other…we’d just feel horny for each other, without the love. And that might make it seem worse because it would be totally at odds with how we--or they, or whatever--normally felt about the other. Did…did I get all that right?”

“Yeah, that…makes a nice summary, actually,” he said, managing an approving smile. “So, here’s the thing about that…” He seemed to become really nervous again, and let his gaze fall again.

“Even though we know that love and lust aren’t the same thing, we might forget that in the haze of the mating cycle if it gets bad enough. My kwami didn’t say this,” he added, “But…I thought about it, and now I’m worried about it, because…” He looked off into space and gestured with his hands hopelessly. “What if it basically makes me act like I’m slightly drunk? It’s not just about what I might do, what if I said something that I…that I would ordinarily keep to myself? I don’t think that I would ever lie to you, even during the mating cycle,” he added, glancing at her. “I would still mean it, and believe it, but…my timing might be all wrong, or the way I say it might be all wrong…or it might be hard for you to believe me because I would be under the influence of the mating cycle. You follow?”

Ladybug took a moment to mull over everything he had just said.

“I think so…” she said slowly. “You’re worried you might say something or do something to make me uncomfortable? You wouldn’t mean to, but you’re worried how I might take it?”
“Kinda...” he said, dropping his gaze again and rubbing the back of his neck. “It’s just…” He looked at her again and turned himself to face her. Ladybug blinked in surprise.

“I’m almost positive that, if I don’t...tell you now, I’ll end up telling you at a bad time or in a bad way later when I’m not thinking straight. This isn’t really the best time either, and I’ve been meaning to tell you for...for a while, but I just...never did.” He kept breaking eye-contact; he was really nervous about this!

Ladybug was feeling really nervous, too, but she wanted to be a good listener, and she really appreciated how honest he was with her, so she tried to look patient and receptive.

“Okay…” she said, nodding. “Um, I’m listening.”

His eyes were darting around even more, now; his eyes were bugging out a bit more, and his ears even drooped.

“Hey, it’s okay…” She reached out and patting his hand. “Whatever it is, I...I’m happy you’re telling me all this.” She smiled reassuringly. “I know this has been...a really awkward conversation.”

“Yeah, you can say that again…” he said, grimacing. “Whew! Okay…” He met her eyes again. He looked...almost like he was nervous enough to cry.

“Oh, minou…” she whispered. “Come here…”

She lunged forward and dragged him into a hug. He gasped softly in surprise, and then his arms wrapped themselves her and squeezed her tightly, as if by reflex.

“Are you afraid I’ll be mad?” she asked. “Or upset? Is it bad news?”

“No…” he mumbled. “Not bad news...and I don’t think you’d be mad, but…” He drew in a shaky breath. “I’m worried it’ll...make things awkward between us...and I really don’t want that…”

“We’ve already gotten through with talking some pretty awkward stuff,” she pointed out. “And this mating cycle is going to put us through a lot more awkward stuff whether we want it or not, but we’ll get through it. You’re worried it’ll be even more awkward if I hear it later, right?”

“Yeah…” He nodded, and his hair tickled the side of her neck. Then the hollow behind the corner of her jaw tingled as he sniffed her.

“You smell nice…” he mumbled. “You always smell nice.”

“Uh...th-thanks…” she mumbled back, blushing. She had a sudden urge, and she resisted for a few seconds, but she gave in a few seconds later and nuzzled his neck with her cheek, while she took a sniff of her own.

He smelled like the outdoors, and there was another smell that she didn’t know how to describe; she could only label it as Chat-Noir-boy-smell. She theorized it was part hair-and-hair-products, part body-wash-and-skin, part natural-musk-of-teenage-boy. She was pretty sure she had never deliberately smelled him before, but his scent was still familiar, even pleasant if she was being honest.

She felt a tiny shiver go up Chat Noir’s spine at the sensation, and instead of making her feel self-conscious, she felt...pleased with herself, for some reason. The tiniest of movements, the tiniest of touches from her, and his physical response had been instantaneous, and not stifled in the least.
It deeply intrigued her in a way nothing ever had before.

“...Ladybug…?”

Chat Noir slowly and gently pulled back, his hands coming to rest on her shoulders. With his face less than thirty centimeters away, she could see his gaze flicking between her eyes and, once, downwards briefly to her lips.

“Ladybug…” he murmured again, “I...I love you.”

This declaration seemed to take all the breath out of him; he squeezed his eyes shut and took another deep breath.

“You are...the bravest, smartest, most amazing girl I know...and...from the day I met you, I...I’ve only fallen further and further in love with you with...every day I’ve fought by your side.”

He paused to catch his breath again. Ladybug felt like her head was spinning.

“Saving Paris with you is...always the highlight of my day, honestly, and so...whatever else I end up saying about how I feel about you during the mating cycle, no matter how sappy or...cheesy it sounds…” He glanced sideways, unable to hold her gaze for too long. He was blushing harder than she had ever seen him do before, and that it was so obvious to her was saying something, as his mask covered half of his cheeks.

“...there really isn't any way I can think of that I could over-exaggerate how…madly in love I am with you. So, if you...end up…” His voice was slowly sounding more and more awkwardly stiff and forced. “Hearing a lot more than you ever wanted to know about what I think about you... I apologize in advance.”

Smiling ruefully at her, he leaned back and finally took his hands off her shoulders.

“Uh, that's it,” he said. “You don't have to say anything,” he added, holding out a hand. “I know I just dumped a lot on you...probably a lot more than you needed to hear…” He grimaced apologetically, his eyes still darting around shyly. “I wanted to wait for the right moment, but it never seemed to come, so...yeah…”

They sat there in silence for a long moment. Ladybug was still stunned.

How could she have thought it obvious that he had a crush on her but still be caught by surprise by just how in-love he had been all this time? How could she not consider that what he felt for her was more than just a boy trying to impress a pretty girl? He was willing to die for her, and she knew this! How could she think so little of his feelings? His good heart was what made him a worthy superhero...a superhero who could be trusted to responsibly wield the power to destroy anything he touched.

This boy in a black cat suit was as golden inside as his hair...and, deep down, she had always known this, too.

Chat Noir heaved himself to his feet, jerking her out her daze.

“Well, I guess we’d better...go our separate ways until next time…” he said hesitantly. He pivoted maybe fifteen degrees left away from her but lingered, his nervous gaze returning to her face over and over again.

Ladybug had stood up after him, and had now grabbed his wrist without thinking.
“Chat Noir, wait!”

He froze, staring at her curiously.

“What?”

“I…” Ladybug blinked, feeling lost in her own emotions. She wanted to say something, after hearing Chat Noir’s heartfelt confession which had churned up a whirlwind of emotions in her. She really, really didn't want him to go...it felt like letting a great chance slip away...

She searched his face for some clue to what she wanted...he seemed to be doing the exact same thing...once again, his eyes flickered down to her lips, and her attention was instantly captured. She knew--she felt--what he was drawn to...

“You want...to kiss me…?” she whispered.

It was barely audible, but she heard him gasp as his eyes snapped to her face. He pressed his lips together self-consciously into a tight line. He glanced down at her lips again, and...just barely...nodded.

There was a spark...and something inside her caught fire. She stepped closer, almost toe-to-toe with him, and thought she heard another intake of breath.

He was spellbound, she realized; open and vulnerable and wanting...

Her hand traveled up his arm to rest at his bicep, her eyes holding him prisoner.

“...kiss me,” she whispered.

His breath left him--she heard it--and she actually saw his cat’s eye pupils dilate for a second. Slowly...so slowly she almost didn't notice it...his hand came up to hesitantly, tenderly cup her cheek. He tilted his head slightly as he gazed down at her, as if wondering briefly if this was really happening. She felt his other hand touch the side of her waist hesitantly...and then slowly, and gently, he wrapped his arm around her waist to scoop her closer by a centimeter.

Then, she almost sensed rather than saw his face coming down to meet hers, and she craned her neck up to catch him, letting her eyes flutter closed at the last moment...

Their lips met for three, maybe four seconds, but time was a meaningless concept in that moment. It was gentle, and almost shy, with both pairs of lips relaxed but closed, no moving of heads, no urgent pressure...but Chat Noir’s lips were warm and soft against hers, and his nose rested just next to hers, and his hand cupped her cheek so tenderly, and he held her so gently...her heart fluttered excitedly and a shiver traveled up her spine, and it was...miraculous.

And so when they naturally began to separate, she knew she wasn't done with him.

She reached up from his arm to cup his jaw and beckon him back down, bringing her other hand up to press against the back of the hand he held against her cheek. Caught off-guard, he accidentally ended up bumping his nose into Ladybug’s. Neither of them were deterred; just a slight adjustment of angles, and he was kissing her again. She could feel more of his lips locked with hers, more open and even warmer and softer than they had felt before. Both of his arms were now wrapped around her waist to pull her closer, and her own arms had flung themselves around his neck.

And then, Ladybug heard him (felt him, even) moan ever-so-softly into her mouth--moan!--and she felt like her whole body was glowing, her heart racing and burning like the flame of a torch. He was
drowning in her, drowning with her in the heat of the moment, and it was complete and utter bliss.

She had no idea how long that kiss lasted, or how they knew when to finally separate, but it might have been only to catch their breath; she inhaled deeply exactly as she heard him do the same, and they lingered there, gazing blearily at each other, coming slowly out of their trance.

Chat Noir’s hand came back up and stroked her cheek softly, his thumb brushing against her ear. She was reminded of the earring that was there, one of two miraculous that had brought them together...and then, finally, she remembered why he had been about to leave in the first place.

“I forgot our kwamis told us not to dawdle…” she murmured, glancing down bashfully.

“Me, too…” Chat Noir mumbled, blinking slowly at her. “I’m...probably gonna be forgetting that a lot…”

...me, too, she thought to herself.

She smiled shyly up at him, then suddenly frowned in confusion: she could hear a strange noise, a kind of quiet rumbling or whirring. It was soft and muffled, but it wasn't coming from far away; it sounded very close by...but they were alone up here.

“Wha’s wr--”. Chat Noir cut himself off and coughed to clear his throat. His voice had come out curiously distorted, like he had been speaking into the whirring blades of a desktop fan (though without the echo effect). Frowning, he beat a fist against his sternum, as if to dislodge something in his throat, but only looked confused and slightly worried.

Ladybug pressed a hand against the center of his collarbone, just below the pit of his throat, and felt something vibrating. Leaning in very close, she tracked down the sound to somewhere above his Adam's apple in the back of his throat, and it hit her.

“Oh my god, Chat Noir, you're purring!”

“What?!” he croaked. “But I don’t have...whatever it is that cats purr with. I have a human mouth and throat!”

“Well, somehow, you're still purring!” she said gleefully. “Remember what you said about you developing ‘feline tendencies’? This must be one of them!”

Chat Noir continued to look embarrassed for a moment, but then he seemed to cast his worry aside and relax. He smiled at her, still blushing from their kiss earlier.

“Ah, well…” he sighed. “I don't mind if it's just you who can make me purr, my Lady.”

Ladybug blushed (or was she still blushing from their kiss?).

“I don’t either,” she admitted. She looked up at him. “Listen, I should probably let you go, but, Chat Noir?”

She took a deep breath and gazed into his eyes, trying to untangle her thoughts.

“I’m...I’m happy to hear that you…that you love me, Chat Noir…” she stammered. “I...I wish I knew...how to tell you how I feel…” she continued slowly, her gaze dropping shyly, “Because, honestly….I don’t really know. I don’t know what to label them.” She forced herself to look up at him again. “I just know that I have them, and that some of them are new, and they’re complicated and confusing, and--!”
Chat Noir put a finger to her lips. He beamed at her, his smile stretched to its greatest width and his eyes shining with so much raw adoration that it took her breath away.

“You don’t have to know,” he murmured. “Just this, what you’ve given me today...that’s enough to make me the happiest cat in Paris.” He removed his finger and scratched his temple. “The mating cycle probably isn’t the best time for figuring out feelings, anyway. But Ladybug…”

He cupped her face in both of his hands. Her heart throbbed at this display of tenderness.

“I’m happy to wait as long as you want me to...So, no pressure, my Lady. I’m already yours.”

“Chat Noir…” She was at a complete loss for words.

“But…” He took a shaky breath, and she thought she saw him consider leaning forward. “If you keep looking at me like that…” he whispered, his purring making his voice raspy, “I won’t be able to resist kissing you again.”

Ow...I feel like my heart has the hiccups...

“Telling me that doesn’t exactly help me resist temptation,” she finally said, “But don't worry, I'm used to being the responsible one,” she teased.

“Maybe I’ll end up ruining that for you,” he mused suggestively, letting her step back out of his embrace.

“We’ll see,” she said vaguely. She reluctantly took out her yo-yo and turned to head home. “See you around, chaton.”

He waved as she leaped into the air and swung out of sight.

“See you next time, Love-bug,” he whispered.
Chapter Summary

The plot thickens...
A little butterfly finds its way back home, its instincts rewritten by a ladybug's spell...

Saturday

Something was...different. Something had gone wrong, somehow.

Whenever Ladybug purified one of his akumas, his empathic connection to it—and his control over it—would be broken, and it wouldn't hunt down any more victims at his command, nor would it return to him of its own volition.

That wasn't what had happened to this last one. Sure enough, when it finally came back through the window, his suspicions were confirmed. It wasn't pure white, but a pastel pink, glowing and trailing sparkling lights behind it.

Holding out his hand, open palm up, Hawk Moth silently called it to him. It settled in his hand obediently, and he cupped his other hand over it, focusing on charging it with the dark magic he had given it earlier. He saw it gather beneath his palm, but when he uncovered the akuma, it remained exactly as before. The dark magic dissolved uselessly into nothing, and Hawk Moth stared down at it in disgust.

“What in the world have you done, Ladybug?” he demanded, his voice echoing around the cavernous chamber. His akumas, of course, could offer him no insight, and without emotions of its own, the one in his hand felt no different than the rest; it just clearly wasn't pure, like the rest of them.

Reluctantly, Hawk Moth released his transformation and caught his kwami in his hands.

“Something strange has happened, Nooroo,” he said without preamble. He nodded towards the pink butterfly, which stuck out like a sore thumb among its white fellows. “This akuma came back...changed, not purified.”

Nooroo flew over to get a closer look at it, then turned to face his master.

“It isn't charged with your magic, either,” he said. “If it isn't pure, either, it must be charged with Ladybug’s power, somehow.”

“Oddly enough, I had gathered as much myself,” Gabriel replied icily. “But how? Why this time?”

“Master, what is the date?” Nooroo asked.

“Saturday, September 3rd,” answered Gabriel automatically. “But what does that have to do my akumas, or Ladybug’s powers?”

“I’ll explain if I’m right,” Nooroo said. “What was the date the last time you sent an akuma?”

“...August 31st,” he answered after a moment’s thought. “A Wednesday. Why?”
“Ah,” Nooroo nodded, looking thoughtful. “That makes sense...” He came floating back towards his master. “Master, today was the first time you sent out an akuma since September 1st, this year. September 1st was the day Ladybug and Chat Noir appeared, and so it’s been a year now since they first received their powers.”

“And this is all significant because ...?” Gabriel pressed, staring the kwami down impatiently with his eyebrows raised.

“Their mating cycle has just begun, Master,” Nooroo answered. “In order to help protect Ladybug during this time, her miraculous must have enhanced her powers and charged the purified akuma with her magic instead of yours, to prevent the threat to her from returning. Until the mating cycle is over, this will probably happen to every akuma she purifies.”

“Seeing as you somehow neglected to mention this mating cycle until now,” Gabriel said, his voice hinting at his slowly rising temper. “Maybe you’ll take this opportunity to explain it!”

“Only Ladybug’s and Chat Noir’s kwamis know all about how it works, Master,” Nooroo replied apologetically. “But for thirty days, Ladybug and Chat Noir will be powerfully attracted to each other, and find it almost impossible to resist the urge to copulate with one another. Any children they bear would be more likely to be worthy of bearing their parents’ miraculouses, if Ladybug and Chat Noir fall protecting their people.”

Gabriel snorted in disbelief. As if the typical teenager needed more encouragement to fall prey to their human instincts, emotional and reckless as they tended to be…

“As long as their so-called mating cycle doesn’t affect my ability to make supervillains, I see no reason to change my approach,” he remarked. “I have hundreds of akumas at my disposal; Ladybug could spoil two of them a day, and I’d still have dozens to spare after only thirty days. If anyone is going to be inconvenienced, it’s going to be Ladybug and Chat Noir themselves.”

“If that was the only way you’d be affected, then you’d be right, Master,” Nooroo admitted. “But as the akumas keep coming back to you carrying Ladybug’s magic, they might start to have adverse effects on you. We have no way of knowing what could happen!”

“I’m not going to put my entire mission on hold for a month because some ‘adverse effects’ might happen!” Gabriel snapped, the room amplifying his voice to a roar. “Especially when this could be when Ladybug and Chat Noir are at their most vulnerable!”

“But Master, they won’t be more vulnerable; they’ll be incredibly protective of each other, and possibly more aggressive towards the supervillains you send after them, even more in tune with each other’s movements! They may be harder to defeat than they ever have before.”

“I’ll let the results of my future battles with them speak for themselves,” Gabriel said firmly. “I don’t care to hear about your theories if you have no evidence for them.”

And with that, he turned and strode out of the room, shutting the window hatch and plunging Nooroo and the butterflies into total darkness.
When I Think About You

Chapter Summary

Marinette returns home for the afternoon, and loses herself in the strange new memory of sweet, sweet kisses...what does this special moment say about her feelings? And what should she do if she can't resist the urge to kiss him again? Tikki lends a wise and compassionate ear, but warns Marinette about a particularly mortifying symptom yet to come with her heat.

Adrien drowns in the memory of Ladybug's kiss and lets his fantasies of her sweep his love-addled brain into the gutter. Plagg decides Adrien could use a reminder of what he risks getting himself into, but maybe not until after Adrien takes care of some much needed business...

Saturday

Ladybug dropped down through her trapdoor into her bedroom and released her transformation. She sprawled out on top of her bed, staring up at the hatch, and brought the back of her hand up to her mouth. Her lips tingled again at the memory of kissing Chat Noir, and her heart throbbed inside her chest.

Marinette tried to think back to the moment leading up to the first kiss, to remember what her train of thought had been. She remembered seeing his eyes flickering to her lips, and feeling a rush of...boldness? Excitement? Desire? She was drawn in by Chat Noir’s longing, spellbound expression and his unspoken (but obvious) wish to kiss her, tempted to grant him his desire to see how it would affect him, and what it would feel like. The fact that she was love with Adrien and longed to kiss him someday hadn’t mattered at all in that moment...all that had mattered was her and Chat Noir, and the promise of something strange and new and delightful if she gave into temptation.

And, oh, had it indeed been incredible. She couldn’t even muster up the will to deny it. She wasn’t sure exactly what she had expected kissing Chat Noir to be like, but it wasn’t what she received: he hadn’t tried to blow her mind with kissing proficiency that he probably didn’t have, nor had it taken several awkward and clumsy attempts to line up their mouths properly, as she might have expected from a boy with no previous kissing experience. He had gone in slowly and carefully...to make sure their first kiss was a good one, maybe? And the tenderness with which he had cupped her cheek...how could she not be touched by such a gesture? And the way he looked at her, she swore he was drowning in her eyes.

There was no feeling of desperation, no sense of urgency, no greed for more...his kiss was soft, and gentle, and tender, and sweet...even reverent...it was everything a first kiss should be, and it flooded her with a feverish heat she had never felt before. And so, when they found themselves separating, she had felt herself craving more. She had pulled him in again, resulting in the clumsy bump that almost caused her to giggle out loud (Because this was them and they were actually doing this!), but she had simply adjusted the tilt of her head and found his lips again, allowing her new-found feelings of passion to drive her kiss, let him feel her desire as she parted her lips just slightly against his. Her blood had been simmering with heat and her heart had felt like it was swelling with delight, and then, when he moaned, she had felt a heady rush of satisfaction. He craved what she did to him; he let her drown him without shame. She had never felt so desirable before, so powerful even while she let
herself fall.

*Could Chat Noir actually be a romantic at heart?* she wondered.

“Hey, Tikki?” she called softly. “It’s true that the mating cycle doesn’t change our personalities, no matter how bad the symptoms get, right?”

“Yes,” Tikki responded, flying up from below to talk to Marinette from where she could be seen. “It just adds to your reproductive instincts and amplifies your sexual responsiveness. Well, that and a few side effects. Did Chat Noir tell you about those, from his kwami?”

“Yeah,” Marinette said, nodding. “His side effects are the feline tendencies, right?”

“Right!” Tikki confirmed, smiling.

“So...what about *my* side effects?” Marinette asked nervously. “He said that his *kwami* said that I’m going to start to smell really...’sweet’?”

“Ah...” Tikki’s smile became nervous, and possibly embarrassed. “Yes, that’s true...”

Marinette squinted suspiciously at Tikki; her tone of voice sounded evasive.

“There’s more to it, isn’t there?” she said. “Tell me, Tikki...”

“I will, I will!” Tikki said quickly, waving her little paws at Marinette. “I won’t hide anything from you, Marinette, I just...know that this is going to embarrass you a lot...”

“Oh.” Marinette gulped. “Well...I’m gonna find out either way, so you might as well tell me now so at least I know what’s coming.”

“I know.” Tikki sighed. “Later in the cycle, Chat Noir’s sense of smell is going to get a lot more sensitive, especially to you. In conjunction to that, you’re going to...um, become much more ‘wet’ than usual for you, as you would say...much more easily, too.”

Marinette’s eyes bugged out so far that they went crossed for a moment.

“Um...!” Her voice was barely more than a strangled croak. “You’re saying, like... *aroused* w-w-wet?! *WHY*?!”

“To attract Chat Noir,” Tikki said, frowning apologetically. “Because his sense of smell will be enhanced, he’ll be able to smell it on you.”

Marinette’s jaw dropped open in horror and started to tremble.

“...Why?” she croaked. “Why? What have I done to deserve this? Tikki, I’m going to die of embarrassment!”

“It’s not possible to die of embarrassment...even if it starts to feel that way sometimes,” Tikki said sympathetically. “If it helps, just remember that Chat Noir is going to feel just as embarrassed as you, even if he isn’t suffering the same side effects. Just imagine what it would be like if you could *smell* exactly how aroused Chat Noir was just by being close to you.”

“YES, I’M SURE IT’S EMBARRASSING!” Marinette squeaked hysterically. “I’M *ALREADY EMBARRASSED AS HELL*! CHAT NOIR IS GOING TO BE ABLE TO SMELL MY PANTIES FROM HOWEVER-MANY-YARDS AWAY!!”
“I’m sorry, Marinette…” Tikki said sadly. “I wish there was something I could do to keep the cycle from happening…but all I can do is tell you how to minimize your symptoms. And I’m sorry to say that kissing him today is going to speed up the process a bit. Not by much, but it adds up quickly, and the further along you get, the harder it’ll get to resist.”

“I know…” Marinette sighed. “And I didn’t exactly try my hardest to not kiss Chat Noir…I just really wanted to…see what it felt like. And I guess his confession really got to me…it was just…incredible to hear how strong his feelings were, and to see him…want to kiss me so badly.”

“I know. I understand,” Tikki said, smiling kindly. “You care for him very, very much…you love him, even if it isn’t the same way he loves you.”

Marinette blushed, thinking back to the rush of emotions that seemed to flood every vein and nerve in her body as she kissed Chat Noir. Could all of that really be the result of normal human instinct amplified by the mating cycle? They were only halfway through the first week…and if the cycle truly couldn’t change her personality, than why had she been so willing to kiss him if she only saw him as her partner and dear friend? She had started feeling strange around him even before the mating cycle had supposedly started…so, did that mean she had already been attracted to him?

Her natural reaction was to adamantly deny it; she loved Adrien! Adrien was her one true love! He just didn’t know it yet because she hadn’t told him she loved him…right?

“Tikki, if the mating cycle doesn’t change my personality, then how can I be attracted to Chat Noir if I’m already in love with Adrien?”

“Marinette, it’s absolutely possible to be in love with more than one person at the same time!” Tikki said cheerfully. “And you’re not in an exclusive relationship with either of them, so it isn’t as if you’re being unfair to either of them! Why, Chat Noir doesn’t even know about Adrien, and you haven’t told Adrien how you feel, either, so you aren’t doing anyone any harm.”

Marinette frowned, pondering Tikki’s words. She supposed she should be comforted by what Tikki said, but her feelings felt way too complicated to be sorted out overnight. Besides, how could she sort out her feelings if the mating cycle was messing with her head? Maybe there was no point in worrying too much or trying too hard until the cycle was over.

Besides, there was a more immediate problem that had just occurred to her.

“Actually, Tikki…” she began hesitantly. “I know giving into temptation is a bad idea and will only make the cycle worse, but…” She bit her lip and looked up at Tikki guiltily. “To be honest…when I see him again…” Her voice grew smaller and softer with every word. “I think…I’m gonna want to…k-kiss him again.” She could feel herself blushing. “Whatever my feelings for him might be, I…r-really, um…”

Tikki smiled in understanding.

“You really liked kissing him,” she finished for her gently. “It felt good, right? That’s normal, even without the mating cycle affecting you.” She floated closer to Marinette, who held out her hands to let Tikki sit in them. “I know you understand the risks, and you have a good head on your shoulders, Marinette. There’s nothing wrong with craving intimacy; I just don’t want you to suffer more symptoms than you have to, or end up doing anything you’d regret later. In the end, I know you’ll do whatever feels right to you. As long as you two come out of this okay, I’ll be happy.”

Marinette smiled at Tikki gratefully.
“Thanks, Tikki,” she said. “I’m really glad I have you with me to support me and help keep me grounded. I know we’ll make it through this thing one way or another; I just wish I could understand my own feelings.”

“I believe in you, Marinette!” Tikki said, gesturing encouragingly with a paw. “And it’s all right if you can’t figure out your feelings; thinking about Chat Noir won’t affect the mating cycle, so don’t worry about fantasizing about him or dreaming about him. Besides, the harder you try to not think about him, the more intrusive thoughts you’ll have about him, anyway.”

Marinette pouted, but knew from experience that Tikki was right.

“And, who knows?” Tikki added. “Maybe you’ll learn something new about yourself…” she said mysteriously.

“‘Learn something’?” Marinette echoed, raising an eyebrow in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“If you are attracted to Chat Noir, and you just don’t know it yet, then the mating cycle might help you realize it.”

“What?!” Marinette asked incredulously. “How can the mating cycle help me understand my feelings? It infects me with abnormal amounts of lust! How will I know if the attraction is caused by the cycle or not? Won’t it just confuse me?”

“Love and lust aren’t the same thing,” Tikki reminded her. “Maybe the intensity of your attraction won’t be accurate, but the way you interpret it can only come from you. Think with you head as well as your heart, and you’ll figure it out. I know you can!”

Marinette smiled and brought Tikki up to her face to place a tiny kiss on the kwami’s tiny head.

“Thank you, Tikki. I’m not sure I understand, but...I’ll try to remember that.”

Tikki nodded and beamed at her.

“I guess I’ll try to get some homework done before dinner,” Marinette mused aloud.

“Good idea.” Tikki said, taking to the air again. “Oh, but one more reminder, Marinette…”

“What?”

“Any time you start to feel overwhelmed by your symptoms, masturbating can help take the edge off for a while, so keep that in mind, too, okay?”

Marinette sat down in her computer chair robotically, her face going stony.

“Sure, Tikki,” she said tonelessly. “Thanks, Tikki. I’m gonna get so much homework done, because your advice will help my concentration so much!”

Tikki giggled nervously.

“Sorry!” she chirped. “Just trying to help! You do know it’s completely natural to--”

“I KNOW, TIKKI!!” ~
Once Adrien had made it back to his room, all he could say was, “...she kissed meeeeee...!” before his legs seemed to turn into jelly and he had flung himself onto his bed. Now he was lying spread-eagled across his bed, his arms wrapped tightly around his pillow. He wore a dazed, dreamy expression, his giddy smile blooming into a goofy grin every five minutes or so as he stared at the ceiling. Twice, now, he had suddenly rolled over onto his side and buried his face into his pillow to muffle the sounds of his giggling and what Plagg could only describe as *keening* (it had the same tone as the “Awww!” one might emit at the sight of a tiny kitten, but sounded like, “Hnnng!” through the mass of the pillow).

It wasn't like Plagg expected a reaction any *less* intense than this from Adrien after being granted a kiss from his lady-love--he could just relish his Camembert and leave the boy to his lovesick thoughts--but it had been over an hour, now, and he felt that Adrien could benefit from a reminder of why kissing Ladybug *wasn't* the best idea right now.

“You do realize,” Plagg spoke up, “That if you two start making a habit of staying after a mission to kiss, you’ll end up wanting to scent-mark every inch of her body before the second week is even out?”

Adrien whipped his pillow away from his face and sat up to locate Plagg, who was sitting on the headrest of his computer chair.

“Oh, excuse me, but what do you mean by ‘scent-mark’?!” he asked nervously.

“Oh, you know, anything that will make her smell like you,” Plagg replied offhandedly. “Nuzzling her, rubbing against her, petting her all over, licking her, love-biting her neck…”

“Oh god…!” Adrien hid his face in the depths of his pillow again. His imagination was pulling up vivid fantasies for every intimate act Plagg listed, and he could already tell he would be jacking off tonight to many more fantasies of everything he dreamed of doing with Ladybug.

He lowered his pillow and looked imploringly at Plagg. “I couldn't resist her, Plagg, the way she was looking at me…! The way she whispered...she wanted me to kiss her! She asked!” He let out a moan, squeezing his pillow in a death-grip. He stared into space, recalling the blush on her face, the desire in her eyes, the way her lips parted ever-so-slightly as she looked at him…

*Oh god, her lips…*

If there was anything in this world more warm and soft and supple than her lips, it could only be some other part of Ladybug that he had yet to touch with his bare skin. Just the thought of holding her bare hand in his, with their fingers intertwined, made his heart feel like it was being gently squeezed by a warm hand, because he had never known the touch of her bare skin at all; he never would, until they were somehow able to meet without a pair of masks to separate them.

Until that day, if and when it came, he could only dream…and it was tortuously easy; Ladybug’s supersuit covered almost everything, but at the same time showed off her every curve. In the year since they had met, Ladybug had grown a good few centimeters, and her curves had filled out subtly, granting the world a peek of the woman she would become. Oh, she was still slender in shape, and somewhat petite in size, but the sway of her hips as she walked didn't use to hypnotize him nearly as much as it did now.

And now, at last, he knew what it was like to kiss her…!

*“Kiss me…”*
His heart had throbbed so hard, it was like it had been pressed up against his ribs for a second. She had never looked at him like that before...it was like seeing his own longing reflected back at him.

When their lips met, he could swear he felt his heart shiver behind his sternum, and he felt a tiny whimper almost escape his throat. Their heads and lips were still, and yet his lips tingled where they pressed gently against hers. It was magical…

And then--! And then, just when it seemed the moment was reaching its natural conclusion, another miracle happened: she caught hold of him and drew him back in! And (after a clumsy smooch of noses) then her lips found his again, and pressed against his with a desire he could feel... it felt like his passion for her being mirrored back to him! It sent shockwaves through him, made his blood simmer with heat. Her lips were SO SOFT and he could almost TASTE HER and it just felt so incredible, he had moaned into her mouth before he even knew it was coming.

In conclusion, no dream or fantasy of kissing Ladybug that he had dreamed in the past could compete with the real thing, let alone what it did to him.

And, oh, if this would prove true for every other intimate touch between them that he could imagine…!

What would it feel like to kiss her in other places? To nuzzle his way under her chin and bury his nose behind her jaw and nibble at the warm skin under her ears and behind the corners of her jaw. She would smell so good, and taste so sweet...but he wouldn’t linger there for too long; he would slowly trace a meandering trail of small, moist kisses down her neck and then press his lips into the pit of her throat (in his fantasies, her suit never got in the way), all while holding her close so that he could feel her every physical reaction against him, and hear every sound that escaped her in his ear...oh, god, what would she sound like? Would she try to keep herself quiet, uttering only breathy gasps and the softest murmurs? Would she eventually relax and let him hear her squeaks and moans? Would she wrap her arms around him? Weave her fingers into his hair? Bury her face in his neck or shoulder as she clung to him?

Ladybug’s forwardness when she had told him to kiss her earlier proved to Adrien a theory that he had had for a while about what kind of a lover she was: While he was sure that she was just as susceptible to nerves and bashfulness as he was due to lack of experience (she was definitely about his age, so he assumed they were both new to this game called love), he also felt that she was a girl who, when she felt sure of herself and knew what she wanted, she wouldn’t be afraid to tell him what she wanted, and by god, he’d do anything for her if it pleased her!

He recalled instances when she had scratched him under the chin, rung his bell, pet him on the head, and scratched behind his black cat ears for a job well done...yes, she may have already picked up on the fact that he had a thing for praise from his Lady. She was certainly clever and observant enough. In fact...she could probably map out every sensitive spot on his body—even ones he didn’t even know he had—and reduce him to a puddle of goo in minutes.

Adrien squealed into his pillow again and let himself flop backwards on his bed.

“Oh, just get it over with!” Plagg grumbled. “I’ll just stay over here and watch TV while you do your thing, and then maybe you’ll be able to do something productive after you eat dinner...like homework...or a shower...or sleeping, anything besides just writhing over there!”

Adrien took his pillow off his face to glare at Plagg.

“I’ll fantasize about Ladybug and writh all I want, thank you!” he grumbled. “And if you want to watch TV, help yourself!” he added. “Nobody’s stopping you!”
“Suit yourself,” said Plagg apathetically. “Just remember, it’s the only way to take the edge off without involving Ladybug and making your symptoms develop faster.”

“I know…” Adrien sighed grudgingly. “And I’m not trying to be stubborn or anything, it’s just…” He winced. “Jerking off twice or more in the span of two or three hours seems a little excessive, don’t you think?”

Plagg’s response was accompanied by a bored, almost disgusted stare.

“For you, while you’re in heat? Not really, no.” he answered dryly. “Even if it was, you’re gonna have to get over it: by the last week, you could be getting off six or seven times a day and still feel like you’ll shrivel up on the inside if you don’t rut Ladybug like the cat in heat you are.”

Adrien gaped at Plagg and turned bright red in horrified mortification. He uttered a choked squawking sound like a chicken being grabbed by the neck.

“Just giving it to you straight, kid,” Plagg said, devoid of pity. “And by the time your symptoms get that bad, Ladybug will be in just as much agony.”

Adrien groaned.

I’m screwed! he thought. We’re BOTH screwed! If Ladybug actually ends up wanting me as much as I want her all the way through the cycle, and things keep escalating between us, how are we supposed to help each other resist temptation?! If she wants to kiss me again the next time we see each other, I will NOT be able to stop myself from giving in! I’d give her ANYTHING and EVERYTHING she wanted of me...

These thoughts only served to reactivate the fantasizing part of his brain again, and Adrien didn’t have enough willpower left to redirect his attention again.

Had Ladybug picked up on how weak he was for her, from their kiss? Probably…but would she put this knowledge to use the next time they saw each other? If she had their best interests in mind, the smart answer would be no, but hell if he didn’t really want to see what she could do to him! Did this make him a masochist? Eh, if it was for Ladybug, that was fine: she could inflict as much sweet torture on him as she wanted. And if she decided to show him no mercy next time… oh , how would she destroy him…?

She wouldn’t stop at just kissing him breathless, oh no …she would press her hands against his chest so she could steer him towards the nearest wall and pin him against it before she kissed him senseless. All he could do was concentrate on not passing out from lack of oxygen intake as she kissed him hungrily, greedily, with reckless abandon and no restraint, as he did his damndest to match her pace and level of passion. She would let her hands wander freely, pressing and sliding up and down his torso and clutching at his biceps and shoulders. Or maybe her hands would make their way all the way up to cup his face, or weave her fingers into his hair. His fingers would be buried in her gorgeous black hair, claws gently scratching against her scalp…or desperately clutching at her hips as she pressed and squirmed against him.

Oh, the sounds she would get out of him…and the sounds he might coax out of her …soft grunts and murmurs, delicious moans and whimpers of pleasure, whines of longing…! Once she had them both gasping for breath, she wouldn’t be content to linger; she would let her lips trail lower, sprinkling kisses down his throat, until she found her path impeded by the neck of his suit…

Adrien happened to know that the bell at his throat could be pulled down to unzip his suit, but only because he had gotten curious one day and tried it. Ladybug probably hadn’t had reason to wonder
whether his zipper worked before, but now (in his fantasy) that it was the only thing between her and more of his bare skin, she would take hold of his bell in one hand and tug it slowly down, trailing her other hand’s fingertips down his chest and a trail of kisses in their wake. He would watch her, hypnotized, as her face sank slowly down, his hands resting in her hair or at her waist, his breath coming rapidly in shallow pants. As her lips reached the end of their track and she got down on her knees, she would look up at him, her eyes smouldering and her smile warm but mischievous… because she knew exactly what she was doing to him.

Adrien stifled a groan and winced slightly; a semi in skinny jeans was uncomfortable even in its earliest stages of arousal. He turned to look at Plagg, who was eyeing him expectantly with raised eyebrows. Adrien tried to look nonchalant in spite of his obvious embarrassment.

“Hey, Plagg…think you can, uh…disappear for a bit?” he asked sheepishly.

Plagg looked like he wanted to tease him, but he only said, “No problem,” and headed for the loft.

Adrien gave silent thanks for his kwami’s unusual show of consideration as he made quick work of undoing his belt.

If I’m really going to end up as wound-up as Plagg said, at least he won’t make fun of me for it.

Shoving his pants and boxer briefs down below his hips, Adrien took himself in hand and carefully reconstructed his fantasy with Ladybug to pick up where he had left off.

He took a deep breath and managed to stammer, “W-what have I done lately for you to spoil me, my Lady?”

Ladybug looked up at him coyly, rubbing circles into his hip bones.

“Maybe you didn’t have to do anything,” she said. “Maybe I just felt like spoiling my kitty.”

Slowly, she rose up, leaving a tingling trail up his torso with her lips. His breath shuddered in his chest as she stood, cupping his cheek with one hand and running a finger along the V of his hip…

“Ladybug…”

“L-ladybug…!”

...She leaned into him, pressing a scorching kiss under his jaw and cupping him in her right hand, stealing his breath away in an instant. He reached towards her with trembling hands to pull her in for a kiss, but she put a finger to his lips.

“Shhh…” she whispered, sending sparks shooting through his veins with every movement of her hand. “Just relax…and let me ravish you. Okay, kitty?”

“I’m…y-yours to ravish, m-m-my Lady…” he gasped. He settled his hands on her hips and trembled under her touch. “As long as…I can do the same for you…?”

“Of course,” she murmured, gazing deeply into his eyes. “I want you, too, Chat Noir, later. You’ll let me feel your love, too, won’t you?”

Adrien let out a strangled moan as he stoked himself closer and closer towards his release. He closed his eyes and imagined it was Ladybug’s hand that was sending sparks shooting through him. He tried to picture her expression as she watched him unravel: her eyes would be dark and intense with desire, making him feel naked and exposed by her heated gaze alone. She would be wearing a soft
but mischievous smile, her lips parted just slightly and her chest heaving just enough to show her slightly-breathless excitement.

He briefly wondered—as he often did—how accurately his fantasies reflected the ways she might really express her passion. Did he know her well enough to guess how she might look at him, how she might touch him, what she might say? He wanted so, so badly to know! He knew he shouldn’t assume, or even hope, that the mating cycle might be the time she finally came to him and embraced his love for her…but she had kissed him! She said she had feelings for him! She said his love made her happy! How could he not hope that maybe she was finally beginning to fall for him? She had kissed him! He had no way of knowing for sure, but somehow it just didn’t seem like Ladybug at all to kiss someone she didn’t feel something something like love for…not like that.

Holding onto the memory of her lips moving against his, he pumped himself frantically as he groped around blindly with his other hand for the tissue box on the corner of his desk. Yanking five or six tissues free, he held them at the ready in a wad by his side as he panted over the finish line.

A thin moan escaped him as he came, muscle spasms sending a great shudder up his spine and causing his toes to curl briefly. Once he had spent himself into the tissues, he lay there for a moment to catch his breath, blinking blearily at the ceiling. Eventually, he pulled his underwear and pants back on, and, after standing to throw the tissues away, he buckled his belt again.

He didn’t feel any different than he normally did after taking care of himself, so Adrien assumed he wasn’t on his way to needing to masturbate more often than usual as a result of his symptoms worsening, the way Plagg had described. But if the only way to keep his symptoms from worsening was to minimize his contact with Ladybug, and he couldn’t bring himself to do so…

“Hey, um...Plagg?” Adrien called. “If we assume a supervillain appears every other day at most, like you said, but Ladybug and I minimize contact with each other as much as possible, how bad will our symptoms be by the end of the mating cycle?”

Plagg came flying down from the loft, satisfied that Adrien was done “taking care of business”.

“Hmm, good question…” he mused. “Every Chat Noir and Ladybug are different, so the mating cycle won’t affect them all exactly the same way.”

“Well, I’m just asking about us two,” Adrien said. “Knowing me the way you do, and knowing what you know about how the mating cycle works, what do you think my symptoms will be like if I do everything I can to keep them from getting worse?”

Plagg held a paw to his mouth thoughtfully. Adrien waited with his jaw clenched nervously.

“Well, you’ll have to deal with all of the feline tendencies no matter what, but the urges won’t be as strong as they will if you and Ladybug keep smooching …”

Adrien pouted, but kept his mouth shut.

“And you’ll probably end up masturbating more often than usual because you’ll be fantasizing about Ladybug more than usual…”

Again, is it even POSSIBLE to fantasize about her even more than I already do? Adrien wondered.

“And, in general, you’ll just be even more attracted to her than usual,” Plagg concluded. “Actually,” he added, “I should specify…”

“Call me ignorant or naive or whatever,” Adrien interjected before he could stop himself, “But I just
can’t imagine being attracted to her any more than I already am...I already love her with every fiber of my being!"

“As I was about to say,” Plagg said, powering on, “I should specify that you’ll be more sexually attracted to her than usual. The mating cycle can’t make you fall in love any more than you already have; it can only amplify your sexual instincts and responses to each other.”

“That’s exactly what Ladybug and I thought!” Adrien exclaimed. “Love and lust aren’t the same thing, and the mating cycle can only amplify lust! Am I right, Plagg?”

“Yeah, pretty much,” Plagg replied. “So, if you follow my advice to the letter, you’ll want Ladybug more than usual, and you’ll act like a cat in heat, but it won’t overwhelm you.”

“But if I don’t resist the mating cycle…”

“You’ll want Ladybug so badly you won’t be able to think straight about anything else,” Plagg finished for him. “Any time you’re with her, you’ll intoxicate all five of each other’s senses and find it almost impossible not to give in and start having crazy amounts of sex until the cycle wears off. And any time you’re not with her,” he continued, talking over Adrien’s squeak of horrified embarrassment, “You’ll literally ache with longing and sexual frustration, and you won’t be able to rest until you find Ladybug again.”

Adrien’s shoulders hunched up around his head as his face fell. There was nothing appealing about what Plagg was describing; it was almost frightening. At the same time, however, he couldn’t forget how irresistibly drawn to each other they had been...and he still couldn’t deny that he was helpless to resist Ladybug’s desire.

“Plagg...I don’t want to let the mating cycle drive us crazy, but I’m afraid I won’t be able to stop it…” Adrien said, staring at Plagg hopelessly. “Honestly...if Ladybug can’t resist the mating cycle any better than I can, we’re probably just going to end up slowly giving in...and I’m not saying that to shrug off responsibility onto her! I just…!” He sighed. “I already love her, and want her so much...that if she wants me, too...if she loves me, too...I’ll just end up giving in to her.”

Plagg heaved a deep sigh.

“I was afraid you were gonna say that…” he grumbled. “Well...if it can’t be helped, it can’t be helped. Look, Adrien…”

Plagg came closer to look Adrien more directly in the face. Adrien held out his cupped hands and Plagg settled down to seat himself in them.

“I’m not telling you to resist the mating cycle because it’s bad,” Plagg said. “I’m telling you so you can keep your symptoms mild so that you don’t have to be miserable. If you and Ladybug don’t feel ready to do the whole do, then you shouldn’t have to feel forced into it. On the other hand...if you two really want each other in that way, and the mating cycle is just what urges you to come together...it wouldn’t be a bad thing, even if it caught you two by surprise, right?”

Adrien blushed at the mention and thought of he and Ladybug “doing the whole do,” but smiled at Plagg. Because the small-but-wise kwami was right: his partnership with Ladybug was unshakeable, and nothing that might happen as a result of the mating cycle could ever change that.

“So then...what should I do?” Adrien asked, his brow furrowing again. “I don’t want us to have to fight against our feelings, but...I don’t want Ladybug to end up doing anything she might regret because we both get carried away.”
“So you’re mostly worried about Ladybug?” Plagg asked.

“Yeah, pretty much,” Adrien said, smiling wryly. “I mean…” He scratched his cheek nervously. “I…already feel like I belong to her, but she doesn’t know exactly how she feels about me, so this whole thing with the mating cycle is probably going to make her feel really confused.”

“So, how do you want to play this?” Plagg asked, tilting his head.

Plagg made it sound like such a simple decision, but how was it simple? Adrien tried to focus on what was most important: how could he best support Ladybug? How would she prefer they approach this?

“I want to hear how she wants us to deal with this,” Adrien said finally. “Next time I see her, I’ll ask her how I can help her stay true to her feelings. She can take the lead, but I’ll keep an eye out for her.”

“Okay, that works,” Plagg said nonchalantly. “Just try to get your serious talk over with before you get distracted with smooching.”

“I know, I know…” Adrien said with a laugh. “If I don’t see her for a while, our symptoms won’t be much worse by the next time we see each other, right?”

“Yup,” Plagg said, floating up into the air again. “But if Hawk Moth keeps churning out a supervillain every other day, you two won’t be able to stay away from each other enough to keep the mating cycle from getting rough.”

“So Hawk Moth gets to be an even bigger problem than usual!” Adrien groaned, rolling his eyes. “That’s just great!”
Fallin' For You

Chapter Summary

Adrien finds himself both irresistibly drawn to Marinette's scent and dismayed at his apparently-weakening inhibitions regarding social conventions and personal space around her. Neither Nino nor Alya fail to take notice, and Chloe ends up causing a scene. If only he knew what a thrill his increased closeness brings Marinette! But what do Nino and Alya know that he doesn't? And how can he perform so well at basketball tryouts when he's been a useless mess during class? During lunch period, Marinette takes some time to give herself a hand as she fantasizes about Adrien...only for Chat Noir to invade her fantasies. When she finds herself wanting to share more with her partner, she realizes she might just be falling for him.

Sunday, September 4

Marinette slept in Sunday morning until 11 AM, and then worked on homework until 2 PM, when Alya came over to hang out for the afternoon.

Adrien became the first topic of conversation.

“He may not realize it yet, but Adrien is beginning to fall for you, I know it!” Alya said excitedly. “Your big reunion on our first day back was just the beginning! What you need to do is find subtle ways to show him that you enjoy his attention so he’ll keep upping his game, and when it looks like he ready to start making a move to win your heart, you can start making a move on him! After that, it’s only a matter of time before one of you confesses to the other! It’s a win-win!”

“That...all makes sense, I guess…” Marinette said slowly. “But it sounds like I still need to stay cool around Adrien, and that’s a skill I still need to improve. And if anything goes wrong, he could end up freaking out and hating me!”

“Girl, he’s not gonna hate you! You couldn’t make him hate you even if you wanted to! If Adrien started acting all awkward because he was trying to put the moves on you, you wouldn’t hate him for it, right?”

“Of course not!” Marinette exclaimed. “Adrien’s so good with people, there’s no way he could freak me out!”

“So you gotta believe there’s no way you can mess it up, either!” Alya said with a firm nod. “If Adrien’s got a crush on you--which, if he doesn’t already, he will--then you can’t fail! Now, wanna hear how to get this thing started?”

“Oh…sure!” Marinette was nervous, since Alya’s ideas tended to be much more daring than hers ever were, but if it would help her win over Adrien, she had to at least consider it.

“So, tomorrow morning, you are going to wait for Adrien outside so that you can be the first person to say good morning to him, and maybe have a conversation on your way to class! Ask him how his summer was, maybe! He’ll be thinking about you all day!”
“...That’s your plan?” Marinette asked. “I thought there would be...more.”

“That’s the beginning!” Alya corrected. “One thing at a time, dear child! Baby steps!”

“Well, then…” Marinette sighed. “It sounds like something I should be able to pull off, but knowing me, I’ll find a way to trip over my own feet and forget how to speak French the minute I see him.”

“But you’ll give it your best shot, right?” Alya asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I’ve got nothing to lose by trying!” Marinette tried to sound as determined as possible, in the hope of boosting her confidence. “At the very least, I’ll be one of the first people he sees!”

~ ~ ~

On the very same day, Adrien sat down with Nathalie to go over his class schedule so she could start organizing his other regular activities and see when the best times to schedule photoshoots would be for the rest of the semester. The rest of the afternoon he spent finishing the rest of his homework, including some Chinese review worksheets.

It made Adrien feel a little paranoid, because he had begun to expect Hawk Moth to akumatize someone every day for no other reason other than that it would be the worst case scenario. He knew he should feel relieved, because the less often he and Ladybug had to meet, the more slowly their symptoms would develop, but he didn’t want to lured into a false sense of security. Plus, he really wanted to talk to Ladybug about the mating cycle and how they were going to handle it. Plagg pointed out more than once that there was no rush: their symptoms wouldn’t get much worse over a few days if they didn’t see each other during that time. Adrien tried to let Plagg reassure him, but he couldn’t shake this near-constant feeling of restlessness, almost impatience. He and Ladybug obviously hadn’t done the best job following their kwamis’ advice, but Hawk Moth hadn’t forced them to meet every day the way Plagg had feared he would, either. Hopefully this meant they were somewhat on track to keeping the rest of the cycle mild, right?

Monday, September 5th

Monday began the same way as any other: The car pulled up to the curb in front of the school, and Adrien stepped out to join the half-a-dozen-or-so other students heading for the main entrance. Before he had reached the stairs, however, he caught sight of Marinette sitting on the bottom-most steps. She was probably waiting for someone….but it looked like she was fidgeting, whether out of nerves or excitement, he couldn’t tell. He found himself approaching the stairs slowly and carefully, as if she was a woodland animal he didn’t want to startle. She caught sight of him a few seconds later, and instantly sat up straight-as-a-board, her eyes wide and her hands tucked between her knees. He was forcibly reminded of a wild rabbit.

Suddenly feeling self-conscious, Adrien stopped and waved at her, putting on his warmest smile.

“Hi, Marinette!” he greeted her. “Are you waiting for Ayla?”

“Oh hi! Adrien! Hi!” she answered shyly, scratching her cheek. “Uh, no, not...not Alya, um...I was, uh…!” She bit her bottom lip slightly and started fidgeting again, her eyes darting around nervously and her brows furrowing. He frowned at her slightly in concern. She seemed really nervous about something.

“Oh, I didn’t mean to put you on the spot or anything!” he assured her, holding up a placating hand. “I was just, you know, curious...”
“Oh, no no no no no!” Marinette rushed to add, standing up suddenly. “You didn’t do anything! I’m just--! I was just--! Ugh…!” She buried her face in her hands and groaned. Adrien was starting to worry a little bit at this point. She seemed so distressed!

“Hey…Are you okay?” Hoping he wouldn’t scare her, Adrien leaned forward and touched a hand to her shoulder. She looked up at him, her expression anxious, but at least not scared, as far as he could tell. “You seem really…anxious. Is something wrong?”

She blinked at him, glancing briefly at his hand on her shoulder. He noticed her eyes seemed shinier than usual, and her face was slightly flushed.

While Marinette sometimes had trouble putting together a coherent sentence (at least around him), she was also one of the sweetest people he knew, incredibly talented, and fiercely loyal when it came to supporting her friends. Sometimes he felt like he still hadn’t figured her out, like there was still a lot more to her that he hadn’t gotten to know yet. And yet…somehow he felt he could tell that she wasn’t feeling herself right now. It hurt to see her looking so down.

She stared back at him for a moment, her brow relaxing a little. Very slowly, her hand came up hesitantly, and uncertainty, and then—unexpectedly—came to rest on top of his own on her shoulder. His heart fluttered excitedly at the innocent touch, and he beamed at her when she managed a grateful smile.

“Thanks for…worrying about me,” she murmured. “I…I don’t know what’s up with me today…I guess I just feel…jumpier than usual…or maybe anxious, like you said. But I’m okay…I think.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Adrien said, relaxing now that she seemed calmer. Her smile still looked a little tremulous, but it was warm, and sweet, and it made him a little giddy. Really, she was a warm and sweet person! In fact…

She…smelled sweet…?

He leaned just a tiny bit more and tried to surreptitiously catch her scent. It was sweet…he couldn’t figure out what it reminded him of. It wasn’t perfume: he would recognize the smell of ethanol. It was probably a combination of her natural scent and the scent of whatever hair products she used. It was subtle, and unassuming, but for some reason, it just drew him in…

“…A-Adrien…?”

He gasped, his head jerking back, and he realized he must have been in a daze, with his nose way too close to her face to be ignored.

What the hell are you doing?!

“Ah-ah! Sorry! Sorry, I--!” He took his hand back and scratched the back of his neck, blushing furiously (he could feel it). “I don’t know what came over me, I just--!”

“I-It’s okay!” she squeaked, holding out her hands in an attempt to reassure him somehow. “I-I’m not…mad, or freaked out, or anything!”

Adrien stared at her dubiously.

“Marinette…you really don’t have to say that,” he said. “I...might not know what's wrong with me today, but…that's no excuse for acting like a creep.” He cringed.

“You’re not a creep!” Marinette exclaimed, actually frowning at him now. “Really, I’m not mad! I
just…” She pressed her lips together but actually leaned in and tilted her head questioningly. “Were you...sniffing me?”

Adrien felt his face burn with shame and found it very difficult to meet her eyes. She only sounded curious, but he winced at the thought of admitting to his offense.

“Uhhh...I...guess so…” he forced out. “You, uh…” His voice was rising in pitch with every word he spoke. “You...smell really nice, and I...guess I was curious…”

Her eyes widened, and her lips parted just slightly into a tiny “O” of surprise. She was blushing, but his eyes were drawn to her mouth, which was looking very kissable right now…

**ADRIEN, WHAT THE HELL?!**

And then she actually smiled (bashfully) and murmured, “Uh, thank you…Adrien!” Was she seriously flattered?! He was not worthy…

_Marinette, please, stop being so cute, it’s messing with my head!_ he groaned internally.

They both jumped when the school bell rang, signalling the start of classes.

“Oh, no, we’re gonna be late!” Marinette cried. “Come on!”

They raced up the stairs and tore through the hall to their classroom, gasping for breath a little as Marinette flung the door open, only to trip and fall on her face. Adrien tripped over her ankles and hit the floor right after her, landing with an arm over her back and a leg tangled up with hers. Adrien heard several people (mostly girls) giggle at the sight of them on the ground, while the teacher peered over his desk at them with his eyebrows raised.

“Glad you two could join us,” he remarked lightly. “Take care on your way to your seats, won’t you?”

Adrien couldn’t remember the last time he had embarrassed himself in public, and his stomach was already punishing him for it. He’d be lucky if he had an appetite for lunch today.

~ ~ ~

Alya nailed Marinette with a sly leer that said, _You will tell me EVERYTHING later!_ as she sat down in a daze. Deciding whether to be more embarrassed or thrilled at the fact that Adrien had fallen on top of her in front of the whole class would normally have taking all of her brain power at the moment, but her head was already spinning with the even more mind-blowing fact that Adrien had **sniffed her** because he thought she smelled nice! And that was in addition to the fact that he had cared enough to notice how nervous she was and ask if she was okay! He had actually **worried** about her!

*He’s so sweet!! she thought giddily. He has a heart of gold and the most beautiful soul in the world! Oh my god, I love him SO MUCH!*  

Maybe the conversation hadn’t gone the way she intended, but somehow, the interaction still felt like a victory. She managed to convince him it was okay to like how she smelled, right?

*Now if only I could work up the courage to smell him, she thought. I bet he smells like sunshine...whatever that smells like.*

~ ~ ~
Adrien, meanwhile, felt like he was on the verge of a psychotic break.

Why?! Why would you do that?! Why?! WHY?! You are a CIVILIZED HUMAN BEING!! You can’t just get in girls’ faces and sniff them, even if they smell nice! You KNOW better than this!! You are NOT A CAT!!

Wait...a cat...?

It hit him. But...it couldn’t be...

The mating cycle...but, it only attracts Ladybug and I to each other! Nobody else, right? Unless...maybe it’s another cat thing? But...why Marinette? I haven’t done anything weird around anyone else...did Plagg forget to tell me something? Or are my symptoms suddenly getting worse more quickly than he thought they would? Ugh, I hope he has an explanation for this!

It didn’t take Adrien very long to realize he would need to ask Nino for his notes later; no matter how hard he tried, he just couldn’t focus on lecture. Marinette—his classmate, his friend, the GIRL HE HAD JUST TRIED TO SNIFF EARLIER—was sitting RIGHT BEHIND HIM!! How was he supposed to concentrate?! It seemed like his ears were hyper-focused on her, like his brain had decided she was the only thing worth listening to. He couldn’t actually hear her against the atmospheric noise of the classroom and the droning of the teacher’s voice, and yet his ears kept straining to catch every sound she made that they could!

~ ~ ~

When the final bell rang at the end of the day, Adrien scrambled to gather his things as quickly as possible so that he could escape the classroom before Marinette could pass his row. He completely forgot to worry about how his behavior might look to others.

“Dude,” Nino said, watching Adrien with one eyebrow raised. “What’s the rush?”

“Huh?” Adrien froze, glancing at Nino. “Uh...nothing, no rush! I just...uh…”

Nino blinked, then crossed his arms, clearly dubious.

“Well, you look like you expect a bomb to go off any minute,” he remarked. He glanced towards Chloé’s seat, where she was absorbed in something on her phone. “Or for Chloé to jump you and kidnap you!” he added, chuckling.

Adrien blinked, then laughed nervously. Chloé was rarely on his mind for any significant stretch of time, and today he could have forgotten about everyone in the classroom except Marinette.

“She should know better than to try anything like that,” he chuckled, shouldering his bag. Nino scooted sideways and stood up to let Adrien get out of his seat.

Adrien heard Marinette whispering something to Alya in a squeaky voice as both girls got out of their seats. He clamped down on the impulse to stop and look at them.

Don’t stop and stare...Nino is watching you...your ride is waiting for you...just start walking...

“Whaa--!”

He reacted entirely by reflex, so fast he couldn’t have had any time to think...he dropped his bag, letting the shoulder strap slip off his shoulder, spun around, and caught Marinette in his arms. He was forced to step back with one foot to brace himself against her momentum; she had clearly tripped
while walking down the steps behind him. Her chin had clipped his left shoulder on the way down, and her left arm was pinned against his chest. He was lucky she hadn’t knocked the wind out of him, or brought him tumbling down the steps with her.

“Whoa! You okay?” he asked, pushing her back onto her feet with his hands at her waist.

“Yeah, you’re fine! You’re amazing…” Marinette murmured in a dazed tone of voice as she focused her eyes on his face. “I mean, whoa, that was you! I MEAN, YEAH, I’M...okay!” she babbled, turning bright pink. Her left hand was still touching him, and there was that sweet scent of her again…

Adrien pulled her into a hug and nuzzled his nose and right cheek against the side of her neck.

“Good, I’m glad!” he said, gently breathing in the smell of her skin. “That could have been a nasty fall.”

“Uh…! Well…” Marinette murmured somewhere next to his head. “As long as you’re around, I don’t have to worry too much...right?” Her voice still sounded dazed.

Adrien felt his face flush, but the wonderful bubble he and Marinette were in was popped by the sound of Chloé’s voice from across the classroom.

“Um, excuse you!” she yelled. “But nobody said you could fling yourself at Adrien just because he’s strong and has amazing reflexes!”

Adrien’s head snapped back, away from Marinette. He was now blushing bright red with the humiliation of Chloé looking at them, but the way she had just shouted at Marinette really irritated him. So much so, that he stubbornly left his hands at Marinette’s waist as he turned his head to look Chloé in the face as he scowled in disapproval.

“Chloé, she obviously tripped!” Adrien said incredulously. “Excuse me if I didn’t let her break her nose on the steps!”

“Yeah, you tell her,” Nino murmured in agreement.

Chloé looked like she had been slapped in the face. Several people laughed at her, and Adrien felt no sympathy, though he was vaguely aware of his conscience nagging at him in a panic for drawing attention to himself.

“Now that you mention it, though, Chloé…” Ayla piped up, “I’m sure we’d all be happy to let you fall on your face if you throw yourself at any of us! Your daddy could afford all the hospital bills and plastic surgery, right?”

More laughter. Chloé stood up, her face contorted with rage.

“Oh, well, aren’t you all just SOOOO witty and hilarious!” she snarled, glaring at Nino, then at Alya, then at Marinette. “Don’t think you’re special, Marinette Dupain-Cheng! You’re just lucky Adrien’s nice to everyone!” Seemingly satisfied with having the last word, Chloé turned and stormed out of the classroom.

Adrien’s mouth fell open in shock. What had Marinette ever done for Chloé to hate her so much?! He looked at Marinette: she was watching Chloé go with an angry scowl on her face, but she didn’t seem hurt, like she had taken Chloé’s insults personally. In the background, he could hear the rest of the class gathering ready to leave, but he made no move to leave Marinette’s side. He felt like he had to stay...he just wasn’t sure why.
Marinette heaved a deep sigh, and then looked up at Adrien.

“Thanks for…standing up for me, Adrien,” she said, smiling sweetly. “And thanks again for catching me!” She tucked a loose lock of hair behind her ear. Adrien’s eyes followed the movement of her hand, then lingered for a moment on her still-pink cheeks…and then finally came to rest on her lips: pink, glossy, so soft-looking, and still stretched in a soft smile…

Suddenly, she started in surprise and glanced down to where—

--His hand was still there?! Now at the small of her back...as if to pull her closer…?!

Oh my god, get a FUCKING GRIP, ADRIEN!!

He jerked it away as if electrocuted.

“Sorry, I--! I must’ve spaced out for a second!” he blurted.

You can’t even keep your paws to yourself, now?! FOR SHAME!!

Marinette stared at him curiously.

“Uh...no, you’re fine! It’s fine! I’m...fine…” she said vaguely. “Um…” She glanced around the classroom self-consciously; many people had left by now, and most of those that remained were (remarkably) not staring, which Adrien was very relieved to see. Guessing Marinette had simply trailed off, he bent down and picked up his messenger bag. When he straightened up, however, he found Marinette hadn’t moved, and was now leaning forward just slightly, as if she were about to ask him something…

He froze, his hand still on the shoulder strap of his bag after slinging it over his shoulder, and stared back at her.

“...what?” he asked faintly. It felt like her eyes were sucking him in...And he swore he was almost close enough to smell her again…

She straightened up looked away, but smiled shyly.

“Sorry!” she squeaked softly. Slowly and hesitantly, she started descending the stairs past him, and Adrien thought for sure she would keep going...but then she paused, just past him and slightly behind his left shoulder...

“...you smell nice, too.” She whispered timidly.

...and then kept walking.

Adrien whipped around, but Marinette had already scuttled out of the classroom. His heart gave a strange wiggle, and he could feel himself blushing.

...What just happened?

“Dude, did she break you?” Adrien vaguely registered the sound of Nino’s voice right behind him, and the sensation of him gently shaking his left shoulder.

“What?” Adrien asked stupidly.

“Yeah, sounds like she kinda broke you.” Nino slipped past him and turned to face him, shouldering his bag. “But...what actually happened? What’d she say?”
“Uh…” Adrien tried to jumpstart his brain, but he couldn’t even remember why he had been leaving the classroom in the first place. Was school over? The bell had rung, right? But what for?!

“Maybe we should save the interrogation until later, when our boy can talk properly.” That was Alya’s voice, also coming up behind him. Before he could turn to look at her, she threw an arm around his shoulders and leaned in conspiratorially.

“I may not know exactly what’s going on yet,” she murmured right next to his face. “But it looks like you’re doing a good job! Keep it up!”

“Wha--?!” Before Adrien could turn his head to look at Alya properly, her arm was gone, and she was strutting past Nino on her way out of the classroom. Adrien rounded on Nino.

“What was that all about?!” he demanded. “She just said, ‘It looks like I’m doing a good job’? What is she talking about?!”

Nino looked completely baffled for a moment, then thoughtful...then his eyes started darting from side-to-side, and he looked suspiciously panicky.

“Nino…” Adrien said warningly, “What do you know that I don’t?”

Nino sighed and gave him an apologetic grimace.

“Nino…!”

“Bro, I don’t know for sure,” Nino said uncomfortably. “But…I’ve kinda been sworn to secrecy…”

“Um, if it has something to do with me, then I think I oughta know!” Adrien said indignantly.

“I know, I know…” Nino was clearly feeling really conflicted. “It’s just, it’s also about...somebody else, and I swore to Alya I would keep it a secret…”

Adrien sighed.

“Okay, just...unless I have basketball or fencing after this, my ride’s probably been waiting for me for a while, now, so I should get going, but...I might call you later?!”

“Yeah, sure,” Nino said, smiling. “Later, dude!”

“See ya!” Adrien exchanged a fist-bump with Nino, and then hurriedly dug out his phone as his best friend left the classroom.

He was late for basketball tryouts. Great.

~ ~ ~

Adrien actually felt like he had done extremely well, and he was almost positive he would make the team. Now that he was thinking about his mating cycle again, though, he suddenly wondered: was it strange that thoughts of Ladybug hadn’t distracted him during tryouts? He felt like he had really been in the zone the whole time, but during class it seemed like he couldn’t concentrate on anything...why? Was he overthinking it?

_Guess that’s one more thing I’ll have to ask Plagg about_, he thought. He shouldered his duffel bag, shut the door to his locker, and headed out to meet Nathalie and the Gorilla for his ride home.

~ ~ ~
Marinette had barely made it past the school entrance when her phone rang. Digging it out of her purse, she realized she should have known the scene she caused in the classroom would have Alya hot on her tail.

*I guess I should be grateful she didn’t run me down in the hallway,* she thought, tapping “Answer” on her phone and bringing up to her ear as she walked. “Hello?”

“Girl, where did you disappear to?! What happened with Adrien?! YOU HAVE TO TELL ME EVERYTHING!”

“Sorry!” Marinette said, wincing from the volume of Alya’s voice. “I wasn’t trying to escape you, I swear, I just had to get out of the classroom! I couldn’t take everyone starting at us anymore, and I didn’t want to embarrass Adrien any more than I already had.”

“No offense taken…” Alya assured her, “As long as you tell me EVERYTHING that happened between you two…outside before school, AND in the classroom! It’s thanks to my plan you ended up on the floor with him this morning somehow, right?”

Marinette felt her face turn red faster than a traffic light. *Choice of words matters, Alya!*

“Agh, don’t remind me!” Marinette groaned. “That was so embarrassing! For Adrien, too, I’m sure!”

“Maybe, but it was also hilarious!” Alya said with a laugh. “Like something straight out of a Disney movie! But tell me what happened before that, when you met him outside!”

“Well…” Marinette thought back to her morning encounter with Adrien and took a moment to get her thoughts straight in her head, wanting to give Alya as many details as possible.

“As soon as he saw me, he said hi and waved at me!” she began hopefully. “He asked if I was waiting for you, and I said no, but I didn’t know what to say after that, so, of course, I started babbling like a fool again…” she continued, now sounding bummed. “In fact, it was so bad, he actually tried to apologize for putting me on the spot with his innocent question!” she whined.

“Geez, you must have been really freaking out,” Alya said sympathetically. “I guess starting a conversation with him all by yourself is still a really big step.”

“That’s the problem, Alya; it shouldn’t be this hard! I’ve been crushing on him for over a year, now, and I haven’t gotten any better at talking to him!”

“Hey, don’t beat yourself up! There’s always next time!” Alya said bracingly. “But what happened next?”

“I told him he didn’t do anything wrong, but I was just so frustrated with myself that I felt like I was about to cry, and I reeeeeeally didn’t want to cry in front of Adrien! It would have made him feel even worse!”

“Maybe…but did you hold it together?”

“Yeah, mostly,” Marinette replied. “But I’m pretty sure he noticed I was feeling upset; he touched my shoulder and asked me if I was okay. And…somehow that calmed me down a little. I…” Marinette’s voice softened, and she blushed a little at the memory. “I touched his hand, and I thanked him for worrying about me.” *How did I work up the courage to do that?* She wondered. *I just suddenly felt calmer, out of nowhere.*
“What, really? Wow!” Alya exclaimed. “Good for you! Did he take it well?”

“Yeah, he...smiled really big at me,” she sighed. “But then…”

She paused, recalling the way Adrien’s face had slackened and his eyes had gone out of focus…

“And then, he...seemed to get really distracted by something...I couldn’t tell what part of my face he was looking at anymore…and then he leaned in really, really slowly towards me…”

She remembered his eyes fluttering closed, and hearing the soft sound of him slowly breathe in her scent...

“And then he...this is gonna sound really weird, but...he...sniffed me!”

“...uh, what?” Alya asked. “‘Sniffed’ you? Seriously? That’s...kinda weird.”

“I know, it was...strange…” Marinette said thoughtfully. “But it was kind of...interesting, somehow. He seemed like he was almost...in a trance? He seemed to completely forgot I was watching him. And when I said his name, he got totally startled! And then he got really really apologetic for ‘spacing out,’ as he put it, and made it sound like he didn’t even realize what he was doing! But when I asked him, he admitted that I smelled nice!” Marinette’s voice grew excited. “He thinks I smell nice!! That’s good, right?!"

“I mean, yeah, totally!” Alya said. “It’s just...kinda weird for him to try to smell you out of the blue like that. It seems like the kinda thing you’d do when you’re alone and in the mood to cuddle, and you two haven’t even started dating yet...”

“Yeah, that makes sense…” Marinette mused. “Honestly, though...I can’t say that I minded...it was...flattering. I told him I wasn’t mad or freaked out, but he said I didn’t have to say that to try to make him feel better, because he thought he was acting like a creep! Even though he didn’t even know what was going on with him!”

Alya didn’t answer right away. Marinette frowned, even though Alya couldn’t see her expression of suspicious disappointment.

“You don’t actually think he was acting like a creep, do you?!” she demanded indignantly.

“I know he’s not a creep,” Alya said quickly, “But it could have looked creepy to someone who didn’t know him. Like I said, you just don’t sniff people you’re not dating out in public like that...and for him to act like he didn’t even realize he was doing it? Very strange…”

“I know it’s strange…” Marinette said. “But what could it mean?”


“I told him very firmly that he wasn’t a creep,” Marinette said proudly. “But I asked him…” She trailed off. Had she really been brave enough to ask him if he had sniffed her? How?

“...I asked him if he really did just sniff me—”

“You asked him to his face?!” Alya gasped.

“I know! I don’t why I suddenly got so brave! But I did, and he admitted he did! He was super-
embarrassed about it...but that’s when he said I smelled nice!” Marinette grinned dreamily at the memory. “So, I thanked him for the compliment!” She added happily.

“Well!” Alya exclaimed. “It sounds like you managed to get plenty out of the encounter even though you had a rough start! Congrats!”

Marinette giggled. “Thanks!” she said.

“But tell me about what happened after class!” Alya urged. “I saw him catch you when you fell, and then he frickin’ HUGGED you!”

“I KNOW!!” Marinette squealed. “He said he was glad I was okay, because it could have been a nasty fall, he said, but…” Marinette paused to draw a shaky breath as she felt herself blush even more at the memory of his his arms around her and his breath at her neck…

“But he caught me against him, with his arms around me, and I felt him smell me again on my neck...!” she gushed in a hushed voice. “And I could smell him, too, and he smelled so niiiiice! Actually…” she added thoughtfully, “I swear he kinda smelled a little like...some kind of cheese. I don’t which kind, exactly, but…”

“Cheese?” Alya echoed. “That...doesn’t sound it would smell nice at all, but, hey, if you don’t mind, I guess that’s all that matters! And if you can figure out what kind of cheese it is, you could bring him some for lunch! They say the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach!”

“Hmm...maybe I will!” Marinette mused.

“Also, I plan to call Nino later and see what I can find out from him about what Adrien’s thinking!” Alya added smugly.

“But Alya, I don’t want him to know I have a crush on Adrien!” Marinette whined.

There was silence for a few seconds from Alya’s end.

“Girl, Nino figured out you like his best friend last year,” she said. “You really don’t hide it very well, and after we started dating, he became my partner-in-crime. How do think we pulled off ‘Operation: Love-Birds Reunion’ with you two at the beginning of this year?”

Marinette took a moment to digest this.

“You’re not mad at me, are you?” Alya asked.

“N-No, I’m not mad, just...embarrassed…” Marinette mumbled. “He won’t tell Adrien, will he?”

“No, I made him swear not to,” Alya assured her. “He’s just keeping an eye out for future signs that Adrien is falling for you, and help steer your boy in the right direction. We’ve both got your back now, girl!”

“Uh, okay...I guess that’s good.” Marinette said, approaching the corner of her street. “I’ll leave Nino to you, then! Let me know if he has anything interesting to tell us about Adrien, okay?”

“Will do!” Alya chirped. “I gotta call Nino before I get started on homework. Talk to ya later!”

“Okay!” Marinette replied cheerfully. “Bye!”

~ ~ ~
Marinette knew she should probably get started on her homework before dinner, but her head was still filled with thoughts of Adrien...his gorgeous face, the smell of his skin, and the warmth of his arms around her...

Tikki flew up to settle on the bookshelf that made up the headboard of Marinette’s bed, as Marinette climbed up to sprawl herself on her bed. She sighed dreamily, and thought back to that moment in the classroom...

Even if Adrien had just been trying to catch her, and it was just the way she had ended up falling, being held in his arms like that...his arms wrapped around her waist, her arms pinned (awkwardly) against his chest, her cheek brushing the side of his neck (and her chin throbbing from clipping his shoulder)...it now placed second on her list of Best Moments with Adrien Agreste, right below the hug he had given her afterwards as he nuzzled her cheek! She still wasn’t sure where exactly all of this impulsive affection was coming from, but it had to mean something really good, right? And maybe Alya was right and it meant he was falling for her! Maybe this year would be the year!

Now I know for a FACT that Adrien gives the most AMAZING hugs! she thought. Oh, to be scooped up into his loving embrace...! And he could nuzzle me, like he did today, and give me NECK KISSES! Oh yes, neck kisses are heaven...! Well, at least that’s what I’ve read... I wonder how much Adrien likes neck kisses...

Marinette had exactly zero knowledge of what kind of lover Adrien was; she could only imagine based on what she knew about his personality. He was so wonderfully kind and caring, and respectful...oh, he would so loving, she was sure of it! Marinette let out a barely-audible sigh and blushed as she imagined him hovering over her as she lie beneath him, gazing at her in awe and in love (an expression she had some difficulty picturing clearly, as she had never seen what it looked like on his face in real life).

He would be spellbound by the sight of her naked body spread invitingly before him, and he would touch her reverently as he whispered to her how beautiful she was. He would be carefully attentive, watching her and listening to learn what made her feel good...he would be careful not to hurt her, of course, but he would relish the act of touching her, of filling her with such pleasure that she couldn’t stay silent, nor stop her body from shuddering and writhing from the sensations that threatened to overwhelm her...

Marinette could feel her heart hammering wildly and her face glowing red. Between her thighs, she could feel her sex growing hot and damp with arousal. The muscles of her core kept shuddering involuntarily, raw nerve-endings tingling and burning for attention.

“Tikki...?” Marinette murmured shyly. “Um, can I...have some privacy?”

“Of course,” Tikki said kindly from behind her head. She zipped past her face, over the side of her bed, and out of sight below. “I’ll be under the pillow on the chaise.”

Marinette undid the button and zipper of her shorts and pushed them along with her panties as far down her legs as she could reach and then kicked them off. She spread her legs wide and shivered as her exposed sex met the open air. After a moment, she decided to shed her shirt and bra as well. She cupped her breasts in both hands and massaged them, slowly rolling her nipples with her thumbs, taking her time building up her arousal as she pictured Adrien shirtless above her (Bless you, Gabriel swimwear ads! she thought). She imagined it was his hands caressing her instead of her own, continuing to massage her left with one and trailing down her body with the other and stroking the inside of her thigh...

She brought her hand to her aching sex, massaging her folds with her fingers. She was squirming...
slightly now, her hips rocking minutely forward and backward in a desperate, reflexive search for relief. Finished with teasing herself, she finally placed two fingers just above her clit on either side of it, and began rubbing in fast, tight circles. Deep inside her core, her muscles were already fluttering, spastically squeezing on nothing over and over as she stroked herself closer and closer towards her release. Her breath was coming in soft pants, sometimes catching and shuddering every time her heart gave a throb or flutter...

Marinette tried to imagine as clearly as possible what Adrien’s face would look like as he watched her pant and writhe beneath him in ecstasy...she pictured him smiling down at her, with more love and warmth than she had ever seen before on his face in real life, and her already-foggy brain almost blew a fuse; his normal, everyday smiles were already so warm and sweet and gentle...but a smile from Adrien that only showed itself to a lover…! Trying to focus this blessed image in her mind sent a flash of heat throbbing through her whole body, and she failed to fully stifle the giddy coo that escaped her just then. Oh, to see him look at her like a goddess to be worshipped, she could barely imagine what a flood of emotion the sight would bring her...perhaps just as incredible as the flood of emotion he might feel to see her, Marinette, coming undone by his touch…

She was close, now, so close…! She kept holding her breath to stifle the little whimpers and moans that threatened to escape her in the throes of her pleasure. Swirling her fingertips as vigorously as she could against her clit, she imagined Adrien, his gaze heated with desire and anticipation, lower himself down over her...supporting himself on one forearm, he rocked forward to capture her lips in a heated kiss, and moaned happily against her mouth…

This time, she didn’t have to imagine what it felt like to kiss him, or what his moan sounded like; she knew, she remembered, because she had done that with Chat Noir, and the memory was so much better than a fantasy…

Wait, WHAT?! Marinette froze, her hand still, and her body rioted at the sudden loss of stimulation so close to the finish line. She groaned in frustration, squeezing her eyes shut.

Noooo, I'm so CLOSE...!! Whyyyy?! That stupid cat with his stupid-warm hugs and stupid-cute purring and stupid-sweet kisses and stupid--!! Argh, let me fantasize about Adrien in peace!! YOU WEREN'T INVITED!!!

But she just couldn’t bring herself to let the orgasm she craved so much slip out of her reach, and barely two seconds later, her fingers were back to rubbing frantic circles again. Imagining Chat Noir on top instead of Adrien didn’t dampen her arousal in the slightest, not when she could imagine him kissing her so vividly...in fact, because it was him she remembered kissing so well, not Adrien...it pulled her in even deeper, sent a fresh wave of delicious heat flooding through her body. Her breathing deepened into uneven gasps and her hips rocked frantically against her hand as she felt that invisible, special something wind tighter and tighter, like a coiled spring. Then, her breath caught in her chest as the muscles in her core spastically seized up, and her orgasm crashed over her like a great wave. She covered her mouth and nose with her other hand to muffle her strangled groan as she rode it out. She struggled to catch her breath as fingers gradually slowed.

Marinette vaguely wondered if she should be more bothered by the fact that she had just finished touching herself while fantasizing about Chat Noir. He sure hadn’t been the boy she had intended to imagine kissing her torridly as he brought her to climax. On the other hand, fantasizing about Chat Noir didn’t do him, or her, any harm, just as Tikki had said. It wasn’t like Chat Noir could read her mind and know she had been thinking about the two of them doing those kinds of things together...sexual fantasies were perfectly normal; she was just using her imagination to enhance the mood of her solo session…
In fact, she realized, she had been more frustrated about the fact that her thoughts of Chat Noir had interrupted her thoughts of Adrien more than the fact that she had thought of Chat Noir in the first place. Sure, she was surprised that it hadn’t felt more awkward to think of Chat Noir that way, but the fantasy itself...it had worked. And that got her thinking...

_I can make educated guesses about what kind of a lover Adrien would be, just from what I know about his personality, she thought. But Chat Noir’s actually shown me a little bit of his romantic side...I know now how he kisses the girl he loves for the first time...I know what it feels like to have him embrace me, and cup my face in his hands, and caress my cheek, and look at me with love in his eyes...it’s only a glimpse, but it shows how he expresses affection..._

She felt her heart throb at the thought, and she shivered, her breath shuddering.

_I love Adrien, and I want to be with him, but...he hasn’t shown me how he feels about me...if he loves me, or could love me if he knew how I felt about him, I don’t know. But I do know how Chat Noir feels; he showed me, and...I felt happy. Really happy...and I felt so happy seeing how happy I made him feel...And when I see him again, I want to make him even happier. I want to share more with him: more hugs, more kisses, more touches, but also..._

Marinette’s brow furrowed as she stared up at her skylight. She felt like her heart was swelling up with too many emotions for it to contain.

_I want to know him better...we’ve been through so much together, and I’ve always cared about him a lot...and yet, we only ever see each other when we have to fight Hawk Moth’s latest supervillain...we fight together, we save the day, then we go...I’d like to say I consider him my friend, but we don’t do anything together that normal friends do, or know things about each other that normal friends know, like birthdays, or hobbies, or our dreams for the future..._

Marinette sat up suddenly, staring wide-eyed at nothing.

_Could we actually end up defeating Hawk Moth someday without ever getting to know each other beyond our superhero identities? I...I don’t want that. That wouldn’t be fair!_

Marinette scrambled to put her clothes back on, and then called for the one person she could talk to about her new feelings and revelations.

“Tikki...?” she called softly.

Tikki came zooming up from down below, where she had no doubt been patiently hiding under the decorative pillow on the chaise.

“Yes? What’s the matter, Marinette?” she asked, noticing Marinette’s look of distress.

“I...” Marinette hesitated, not sure how to express her feelings out loud. “I was thinking about Chat Noir, and...well...”

“You really want to see him again?” Tikki guessed, smiling kindly.

“Well, yes, I do, but...” Marinette searched for the right words. They finally came to her seemingly out of nowhere, and they took her so much by surprise that she gasped just loud enough for Tikki to hear.

“Marinette?”

“I...I don’t think I’m scared of the mating cycle anymore,” she finally said. “I was...really happy to
hear that Chat Noir loved me…” she continued hesitently. “And...I liked kissing him...like, a lot...and I feel like I want more. I mean, I want to see more sides of him...I want to…” She paused to consider her words; these new feelings were hard to translate! “…share more with him, if that makes sense…? I’m...curious...no, intrigued...about him...and…” She trailed off, glancing up nervously at Tikki. “Tikki...will I never know who he is, even after we defeat Hawk Moth? I...I don’t want to lose him as a friend...or, whatever we are…”

Marinette wasn’t sure what kind of reaction she expected from Tikki, but it certainly wasn’t a beaming smile.

“Maybe as more than a friend?” she asked gently, tilting her head. Marinette opened her mouth to respond, but Tikki added, “It’s fine to love more than one person at a time that way, Marinette.”

“I...I…” Marinette felt conflicted. Is Tikki right? she wondered. Could I be...falling in love with Chat Noir? But, the mating cycle…!

“Maybe as more than a friend?” she asked gently, tilting her head. Marinette opened her mouth to respond, but Tikki added, “It’s fine to love more than one person at a time that way, Marinette.”

“I...I…” Marinette felt conflicted. Is Tikki right? she wondered. Could I be...falling in love with Chat Noir? But, the mating cycle…!

“Maybe as more than a friend?” she asked gently, tilting her head. Marinette opened her mouth to respond, but Tikki added, “It’s fine to love more than one person at a time that way, Marinette.”

“I...I…” Marinette felt conflicted. Is Tikki right? she wondered. Could I be...falling in love with Chat Noir? But, the mating cycle…!

“Maybe as more than a friend?” she asked gently, tilting her head. Marinette opened her mouth to respond, but Tikki added, “It’s fine to love more than one person at a time that way, Marinette.”
“But...could I really do that? Date Adrien as Marinette, and...see what Chat Noir and I could be as Ladybug?”

Tikki looked more serious, but still encouraging.

“I’m not saying it’ll be easy, or that it won’t put your identity at risk, but...the thing is, Marinette…” Tikki gave her cheek a comforting pat. “The mating cycle is already going to make it harder to keep your true identity secret from Chat Noir, because, well…” Tikki gave an apologetic smile, and Marinette instantly heard alarm bells go off inside her head. “Your costumes aren’t designed to let you two take them off without changing back to normal, so you won’t be able to have sex with your masks still on.”

Marinette groaned loudly and keeled over backward, hitting her head on the bookshelf at the head of her bed and yelping in pain.

“Are you okay?!” Tikki squeaked in alarm.

Marinette sat up, rubbing the back of her head.

“Yeah...nothing new for Marinette the super-klutz...” she grumbled. She looked up at Tikki again. “Do you think we will end up having sex, then?!” she whined, slightly horrified.

“It’s too early to make assumptions like that,” Tikki assured her. “But, you two did kiss--twice--after your first mission together after you two went into heat,” she added teasingly. “And this was only two days after I told you spending more time together would worsen your symptoms!”

“So...you’re saying...we’re weak for each other?!” Marinette croaked.

“Well, with you two being in heat, that kind of goes without saying, a little bit.” Tikki answered. “I would say that in addition to that, you two in particular have a lot of chemistry together! You know what I mean?”

“Kind of...?” Marinette hedged. “I...always thought it felt like I’d known him forever even though we’ve barely known each other for a year, now. And we just seemed to figure out the teamwork thing automatically, almost like it was instinct...or, like we think on the same wavelength...? Is that actually a thing?”

“Yes, it is!” Tikki said happily. “Your personalities complement each other! So working together comes naturally to both of you!”

Marinette smiled.

“Yeah...I guess that’s true!”

“So, do you know what you’ll do next time you see Chat Noir?” Tikki asked.

Marinette thought for a moment.

“I’ll...” Marinette looked up at Tikki, took a deep breath, and smiled bravely. “I’ll tell him...I want to see where this goes. I want to share more with him.”

Tikki beamed at her.

“That’s the spirit!” she praised. “Just be careful not to lose your head around him! Follow your
heart, but don’t forget to think carefully with your head, too, okay?”

“Thanks, Tikki,” Marinette said, scooping Tikki out of the air and touching a kiss to the kwami’s tiny head. “I promise!”
Nino puts his matchmaking skills to the test during a call to Adrien, and asks him a very important question. Adrien tells Plagg all about his crazy day, and asks why basketball, of all things, would give him his powers of concentration back. Plagg gives our poor boy MUCH, MUCH more information than he asked for, topped off with a lecture about love, and the girl(s) that stole his heart. Plagg is also secretly #done with our poor, oblivious sunshine cat son, who is simultaneously #thirstyAF and hopelessly confused. After dinner, he takes a shower and fantasizes about Ladybug some more, just because I can! >:3c

**Monday**

Adrien spend the car ride home trying to organize his thoughts. *So much had happened over the last six hours, and it all seemed to come back to his strange...moments...with Marinette. Why did interacting with her have such a powerful, strange effect on him? His heat was the only explanation he could think off, but it was supposed to be attracting him to *Ladybug*, because he was Chat Noir, and his miraculous were currently resonating with hers and emitting magical “pheromones”! Why would Marinette--or anyone else--attract his attention like that?*

*And if I'm supposed to be lusting after Ladybug, he thought, *Why wouldn't she be on my mind during school?*

And then there was the weird way Nino and Alya had reacted to the scene in the classroom between him and Marinette. Nino had pretty much admitted that he knew something Adrien didn’t, and that Alya was in on it, too, whatever it was. Did it have something to do with Marinette? Could *possibly* have anything to do with what was going on with him?

He had so many questions. He hoped Plagg had the answers...or that Nino could at least give him a clue.

As soon as Adrien had reached the sanctuary of his room, he opened his duffel bag to let Plagg out. The kwami came flying out, and Adrien was pleased to see he wasn’t feeling lethargic from inhaling the entire wheel of Camembert that he had stashed inside.

“Plagg, I need to talk to you!” Adrien began without preamble. “I don’t how much you picked up from inside my bag, but today has been *crazy*, and I have *no* idea what’s wrong with me, but I *hope* you can explain it all!”

“Probably,” Plagg said with a shrug. He crossed his tiny arms and looked expectant. “Well, let’s hear it.”

“Okay, so…” Adrien flopped down on the edge of his bed and tried to gather his thoughts. Before he could continue, however, his cell phone rang. Adrien dug it out of his bag and saw that it was Nino calling him, so he answered it, immediately reminded that he still wanted to know what Alya and his best friend knew that he didn’t about what happened at the end of class.
“Hi, Nino! Couldn’t wait for me to call you, huh?” he joked.

“Yeah, pretty much!” Nino laughed. “I just got off the phone with Alya; I told her you were catching on to us, and that I wanted to come clean with you, and she said that was cool, except I still can’t tell you the secret we promised to keep for that someone who shall remain anonymous. Just know that it’s not anything bad, okay?”

“Okay, that’s good,” Adrien said, feeling a little more relaxed now, just from talking to his best friend. “Yeah, I get it. Honestly, I just want to know what Alya was hinting at that I didn’t get when she said, ‘It looks like you’re doing a good job; keep it up’.”

“Yes, no, she didn’t expect you to get it,” Nino said. “It’s...okay, lemme back up: Do you remember the first day of classes? When I covered your eyes and brought you to where Alya had brought Marinette the same way?”

“Yeah, but...what does that have to do with today?”

“I...have to keep quiet about a key detail,” Nino said sheepishly, “It goes back to that secret...but Alya basically recruited me to do that so that we could stage your reunion with Marinette and surprise you guys. And, man! It went better than she thought it would!” Nino laughed. “I don’t I’ve ever seen you that excited before, dude!”

Adrien blushed and fidgeted were he sat. “I...I was just so stoked to see you all after not getting to hang out at all summer!”

“You were happy to see Alya, Rose, and Juleka...and, yeah, you were definitely stoked to see me!” Nino said, a playful smirk evident in his voice. “But with Marinette? Dude, you were over the freaking moon!”

“I...” Thinking back to that moment, and remembering his excitement, Adrien realized that his strange behavior around Marinette might have started as far back as the first day of the mating cycle...but how? Why?

“I...don’t really know what came over me, honestly...” Adrien admitted. “I felt like such a...spastic weirdo right afterward. I mean, you know me, I try to not to be dramatic like that!” Not as normal Adrien Agreste, anyway, he thought.

“I do know you...I also know you’re not a weirdo! Not in a bad way, anyway!” Nino said brightly. “And I’m sure Marinette doesn’t think you’re a weirdo-in-a-bad-way, either. She didn’t seem too weirded-out after the big reunion, did she?”

“Uh...no, I don’t think so,” Adrien said, doing his best to think back. “She was her usual nervous, stammery self, but she told me she didn’t mind...I think.”

“Yeah, I’m sure she wasn’t freaked out,” Nino assured him. “I mean...” Nino paused, and it seemed to Adrien that Nino was either carefully considering his next words or remembering something important or interesting. Adrien frowned in confusion; he was starting to feel like he was missing something big again.

“Alya said Marinette was psyched, actually,” Nino finally said. “That you picked her up and spun her around and stuff, I mean.”

“Really?” Adrien asked, pleasantly surprised. “Marinette...told Alya that? And you heard that from Alya?” He couldn’t keep his tone neutral; he realized it probably betrayed the soft giddiness he could feel bubbling up from somewhere behind his navel.
“Ha ha, yeah!” Nino said, chuckling. “Seriously, dude, you could get a lot closer to her if you want to...you just gotta loosen up a bit! Keep it real, you know?”

“Get...closer to her?” Adrien echoed, feeling his heart give a nervous but excited flutter. “What do mean? We’re...friends. At least, I think of her as a friend…”

“I mean, yeah, you’re friends! Totally!” Nino said. “But...I mean…” Nino trailed off, sounding unsure of how to finish his thought. “Okay...lemme ask you a question, and try not to get weirded-out if I sound crazy, alright?”

“Uhhhhh....okay…? You’re making me really nervous now, but, let’s hear it, I guess…”

Adrien heard Nino take a deep breath on the other end, and he briefly considered chickening out and hanging up right then and there.

“Do you...do you think you might... like her? Marinette? As in, like -like?”

Adrien’s mouth fell open, and he stared sideways at his phone out of the corner of his eye like it had just whispered something creepy in his ear.

“Uh…what?” Adrien felt like his brain was lagging. “L-like her…? W-where is this coming from?!”

“Uh, maybe from the whole thing about you scooping up Marinette and twirling her around like she just accepted your hand in marriage?”

A squeaky wheeze escaped Adrien as he turned pink in the face. He hoped Nino hadn’t heard.

“That’s…! I didn’t mean it like that! I just…!”

“I know!” Nino said, obviously grinning now. “You just don’t know what came over you! ”

Adrien had no comeback for this. It had just happened on pure impulse! And it really wasn’t like him to act impulsively in public...but he remembered it had felt so natural and right in the moment...he had only felt weird about it afterwards. So...had it just been a freak moment of impulsiveness? He really didn’t want to overthink it...but it also seemed foolish to try to bury it under the rug and label it as nothing. But then, what should he do about it?

“I...okay, I can totally picture what it must have looked like,” Adrien said carefully. “But...I really...I don’t…”

Adrien fully intended to finish the sentence: ‘ I don’t feel that way about her; she’s just my classmate and my friend,’ but it was like his mouth refused to cooperate. He couldn’t force the words out...they didn’t sound right in his head. But it was the truth...wasn’t it?

“...E-even if I did ,” he said instead, “What about Marinette? She hasn’t shown any special interest in me that I’ve noticed.”

Somewhere outside his field of vision, Adrien heard Plagg grumble, “Oh, for the love of Gouda…”

Bewildered, Adrien twisted around to glare inedulously at Plagg.

What’s your problem?! he thought, hoping his expression spoke his mind for him.

Plagg just stared back him with the most thoroughly-bored expression Adrien had ever seen. Adrien resisted the urge to throw his pillow at Plagg and forced himself to turn back around and ignore him. He’d just demand answers after this important conversation was over and done with.
“Really?” Why did Nino sound...surprised? “Not even after you caught her when she tripped, and gave her the snuggliest hug I’ve ever seen you perform on somebody?”

Adrien’s lingering expression of bewilderment instantly fell off his face; his eyes popped as he remembered...

The press of her hand and arm against his chest as she leaned into him...

The warmth of her wrapped up in his arms...

The softness of her cheek as he nuzzled her...

The sweet scent of her skin...

And the sound of her voice...

“As long as you’re around, I don’t have to worry too much...right?”

Her whisper...

“...you smell nice, too.”

Adrien gulped and held his breath just in time to keep a tiny whimper from escaping. He could feel his face glowing pink.

“Um, w-well...she was grateful, of course!” Adrien stammered. “That I caught her, and that I stood up to Chloe for her…”

“Dude…” Nino’s tone of voice indicated an immunity to Adrien’s poor attempt at bullshitting him. “Alya and I BOTH saw Marinette whisper in your ear, and we saw what it did to you. THAT’S what Alya was talking about when she said it looked like you were doing a good job and to keep it up: you’ve both got your eyes on each other, and you can win over Marinette if you just keep doing whatever you’re doing!”

Adrien sat in stunned silence for several seconds. Memories of the day’s moments with Marinette rushed through his mind...

“You’re not a creep! Really, I’m not mad! I just...Were you...sniffing me?

“Oh, thank you...Adrien!

“As long as you’re around, I don’t have to worry too much...right?

“...you smell nice, too.”

His heart gave a hot throb, and he pressed the hand that wasn’t holding his phone to his chest, as if to keep it from jumping out of its proper place. How many times had he had the urge to kiss those lips of hers since he went into heat? How many times had he almost gotten lost in her eyes? How many times had his hands lingered on her, subconsciously longing to pull her closer, to wrap her up in his arms so that he could soak up her warmth...

Oh, if he could nuzzle his way under her chin and just drink in her scent as he pressed tender kisses all over neck and stole a taste of her skin with tiny swipes of his tongue--

Oh, god! What is HAPPENING to me?!
“Well, uh…! Thanks for…letting me in on…this… thing ?” Adrien said, struggling to get his brain working again. “I’ll, uh…keep it all in mind for…uh…”

“For when you see Marinette again?” Nino chuckled. “I get it! You got a lot to think about, right? Go for it, bro! I’ll be rootin’ for ya! Talk to ya later!”

“Wha--?” Click.

Nino hung up.

Adrien lowered his phone and stared at it for a second in confusion, then pressed “End.”

Ugh, it still sounds like Nino’s getting the wrong idea about me and Marinette, he thought. But, then again, I guess I didn’t know how to correct him, either. I don’t even understand what I’m feeling. What am I gonna do?!

He turned to face Plagg, who was watching him expectantly with his little arms still crossed.

“So…how much of that did you catch?” Adrien asked resignedly.

“Enough to make for quite the teaser to the story of your day,” Plagg remarked. “I’m guessing you want to tell me all about it, now?”

“Yeah…” Adrien sighed and rubbed his eyes. “Oh man, I was already so confused…and then Nino had to make it even more complicated…!” He groaned into his hands, and then took a deep breath and shifted where he sat to get more comfortable.

“So…this morning, I ran into Marinette outside the school doors, and we started talking…well, sort of…and I…” He paused, remembering the way she had smiled gratefully at him and touched his reassuring hand on her shoulder. His heart had given a little flutter and he had felt slightly giddy, but he didn’t know how to put the feeling into words.

Then he remembered her scent …again.

“I…caught a little bit of her scent , and…without even thinking, I--I didn’t even realize I was doing it!--I leaned in to smell her, and I wasn’t even subtle about because she totally caught me , and…!”

Plagg was watching him with one eyebrow raised, listing closely, but his overall expression was unreadable...not that Adrien was watching for his reaction at the moment; he was too flustered by the fact that he was blushing again, and his heart was starting to go pitter-patter as struggled not to get distracted by intrusive thoughts of Marinette...

“And then, I…just…” Adrien looked to be on the verge of a mental breakdown. “I just randomly noticed her lips, and it just randomly occurred to me that they would probably be really nice to kiss , and I have no idea why, because I’ve never thought of anything like that about her, and she’s never caught my attention so much before!”

He paused to catch his breath. He rubbed the back of his neck with both hands.

“And then, after class…it was weird; Marinette tripped behind me, and I just instantly whipped around and caught her before I even realized what happened. It was like reflex ...and then…! Oh my god, Plagg, I caught her scent again, and I just pulled her into a hug like it was nothing and Nuzzled THE SIDE OF HER NECK! SHAMELESSLY!” He groaned. “I just couldn’t resist smelling her again… ” he whimpered.
He buried his face in his hands for a few seconds, then looked up imploringly at Plagg.

“Plagg, something is wrong with me, and I can only assume it’s because of the mating cycle, but from everything you’ve told me, it doesn’t make sense! I’m only supposed to be attracted to Ladybug, right?! So what is going on?!”

Plagg didn’t react right away. After five very slow seconds, he put a paw to his chin and looked up at the ceiling in an exaggerated display of pondering.

“Hmmmm…” he hummed for good measure. Adrien’s eyes bugged out. Did Plagg not even know?!

“Wellllll…” Plagg finally said in an almost bored voice. “You could just be, oh, I don’t know, falling in love with her? Plain and simple?" 

Adrien’s mouth fell open in disbelief.

“Plagg, I’m in heat! Am I not supposed to be bewitched, mind, body, and soul, by Ladybug and everything she is?! Wha–I barely thought about her at all today; I just kept freaking out over Marinette and how weird I was being, and…! And I just couldn’t freaking concentrate because Marinette was sitting in the row behind me and I just couldn’t ignore it!”

“Sounds like typical behavior of a boy in love,” Plagg remarked dryly. “You daydream about Ladybug constantly, and that doesn’t bother you at all.”

“Because I’m in love with Ladybug!!” Adrien said, sounding incredulous and frustrated.

“So then, you’re in love with Marinette, too, because you can’t stop thinking about her, either.”

“I’m not!!” Adrien exclaimed. “And even if I was, how the hell would I even notice if I’m in the middle of my mating cycle?!”

“More like about a third of the way through your mating cycle,” Plagg corrected.

“Ugh!” Adrien threw his hands up in frustration. “Plagg, you’re not taking this seriously!” He rubbed the back of his neck with both hands in a nervous tic.

“I’m taking this dead seriously!” Plagg shot back. “And I’m now struggling with the possibility that you’re suddenly doubting the power of love! You think just because your miraculous is amplifying your lust for Ladybug that you can’t feel love for anyone else? Is Ladybug just so beautiful and incredible and perfect that no other girl could possibly catch your attention?”

Now Plagg sounded almost...disgusted. And not in the way he usually acted when Adrien raved about Ladybug. He sounded like he was disappointed in Adrien, and Adrien could only wonder where this was coming from.

“Plagg, I know Ladybug isn’t perfect,” he said, a little hurt by the accusation. “And yes, she’s beautiful, and amazing, but I know she’s not the only girl in the world like that...she’s just the one I fell in love with, and so she’s ‘the one’, you know? She’s... her beauty and her bravery and her wit and her everything else make me feel things that no-one else’s does. It’s not that Marinette isn’t amazing in her own ways...she is , and I notice! But I’m in love with Ladybug. I’m not shallow...I thought you knew me better than that…”

Plagg sighed and his entire posture sagged.
“I do know you better than that, Adrien,” he said seriously. “You can’t blame your mating cycle for making you feel weird around Marinette, and then say you shouldn’t be feeling weird around her because of your mating cycle, too. It’s not wrong to fall in love with more than one person! You’re not doing any harm! It’s how you handle it and what you do with it that will affect other people...and the way you’re thinking about it right now, you’re setting yourself up for unnecessary angst, and being disrespectful to Marinette because you claim you can’t possibly fall in love with her! You don’t mean to, I know, but that’s what this all sounds like.”

Adrien was speechless, and he was almost worried that he couldn’t fully comprehend everything Plagg had just told him. Plagg seemed pretty convinced that his mating cycle wasn’t to blame for this...but the way he had felt and acted around Marinette today just didn’t seem normal, and Adrien couldn’t get over it. How did Plagg expect him to deal with it?

“You’re...saying I’m in denial?” he finally asked faintly. “You seriously think I’m...in love with Marinette, too, and it has nothing to do with the mating cycle?”

“Honestly, I don’t think it matters whether it has anything to do with your heat or not,” Plagg said flatly. “Either way, there’s nothing we can do about it. Clearly, if you could make yourself not feel this way about Marinette, you would, if only to ease your silly conscience over Ladybug, but you obviously can’t. So you’re just going to have to deal with it. Just do yourself--and me--a favor and stop agonizing over it! It’ll all work out, trust me.”

Adrien just stared at Plagg, anxious and confused. He wished he could understand how to be as calm and confident as his kwami was about all of this...but he just felt so lost.

“How can you be so sure?” he asked desperately. “Tell me, Plagg, how do I make all this work?”

Plagg didn’t answer right away; he blinked once slowly at Adrien, then came forward to float closer to Adrien’s face.

“I can’t just give you all the answers, Adrien. You’ve got to figure them out for yourself...and I know you can...you will.”

Adrien’s eyebrows rose slightly, as he tried to absorb comfort from Plagg’s words.

“Seriously, you’ve come so far without ever doubting you and Ladybug were meant to be together, even though you two are supposed to keep your true identities secret from each other! For Gruyer’s sake, you’ve never even had previous experience with girls before!

“And yet, all this time, you’ve been holding out for Ladybug for an entire year, never doubting that ‘true love would find a way’, or whatever...exactly the romantic, naive thinking of a young boy hopelessly in love... The odds have always been kind of against you, kid; most people would say you stood a much better chance with Marinette! But, who woulda thought, you were right to believe! It seems like Ladybug’s finally fallen for you! I’d say your heat has only done you favors so far!

“But now that your heart’s telling you it’s drawn to Marinette, too, you’re suddenly gonna second-guess your feelings, and agonize over everything that could go wrong, and why you shouldn’t be feeling this way?”

Adrien blinked several times in bewilderment. He was struggling to absorb and comprehend everything Plagg was now throwing at him.

“When did you suddenly become the expert on love?” he teased lightly.
“I’m thousands of years old,” Plagg stated seriously. “I’ve watched over every Chat Noir in history, from the dawn of humanity. Times have changed a lot, and every one of them have been different, but you’re certainly not the first one to fall in love…you’re not even the first to fall in love with Ladybug, with or without the mating cycle having anything to do with it.”

Adrien’s eyes widened and his head reeled. It was so easy to forget that he was merely the most recent in a long line of superheroes dressed as black cats…and, of course…how could he be the first to fall in love with his partner in ladybug spots? Especially with the mating cycle involved…but, next to every boy and man who had worn the ring on his finger, Plagg had been there, and would have seen or heard about it all…every facet of human attraction. Gluttonous, slothful, and mischievous as he was, Plagg was wise, and he knew Adrien possibly better than anyone else did…and he cared for Adrien, a lot.

So, if Plagg assured him it was okay to follow his heart…he might only miss out if he held himself back.

Adrien smiled at Plagg gratefully and rubbed a fingertip behind one of Plagg’s ears.

“Thanks, Plagg. I’ll…try to pick and choose my battles with myself, if that’s what this all comes down to.”

Plagg smugly tucked his paws behind his head, as if flexing tiny arm muscles, as he leaned contentedly into Adrien’s finger-rubs.

“Yeah, don’t sweat the small stuff,” he said smoothly. “Take it one day at a time.”

“Yeah…I’ll try.” Adrien sat up straighter and stretched.

“So, is that everything that’s been bothering you today?” Plagg asked, looking pleased with himself for giving Adrien so much helpful advice.

Adrien ran through the day’s events in his head, trying to see if he had forgotten anything.

“Oh!” Adrien snapped his fingers and pointed at Plagg. “There was one more thing: I had basketball tryouts today, and…” His brow furrowed and he scratched his head thoughtfully. “I thought it was odd how well I did, considering how distracted I was all through class. I mean, Marinette wasn’t there to distract me, so that might be part of it, but…” He tilted his head side-to-side indecisively. “Maybe I’m just overthinking things, but I don’t get how I played as well as I did when I’m in the second week of my mating cycle. Shouldn’t I have been daydreaming about Ladybug, or something?”

“Do you usually daydream about Ladybug during basketball?” Plagg asked dryly.

“Well…no, not usually,” Adrien admitted. “But I’m in heat right now, so…”

“Lemme ask you this,” Plagg interrupted. “How well do you think you’d do fighting a supervillain if you couldn’t stop thinking about Ladybug and how much you want to rub yourself all over her?”

“No, but especially if you mess with my head beforehand like that!” Adrien retorted, scowling. “Whose side are you on?!” Don’t think about it, don’t think about it…!

“Right,” Plagg answered, showing no remorse whatsoever for sending Adrien’s mind to gutter. “Going through a mating cycle to help ensure you two bare progeny who can inherit your miraculouses would be pretty pointless if it made it easier for your enemies to defeat you. So, any time either of you start performing enough physical activity for your bodies to start sweating and
producing adrenaline, your heats compensate by easing up on the ‘pheromones,’ and instead, your senses and reflexes are sharpened... you’ll be more alert instead of less, and that way, you can better protect each other.”

His interest seized, Adrien was just barely able to avoid losing himself in any lustful fantasies of “rubbing himself all over” Ladybug.

“More alert?” he echoed. “So, during basketball practice…”

“Your miraculous stopped emitting the ‘lust-for-Ladybug’ pheromones, and instead started emitting the ‘protect-Ladybug’ pheromones, so instead of fantasizing about Ladybug and craving all the lovey-dovey stuff with her, all of your senses and reflexes were basically fine-tuned so that you would perform at 110%. Obviously, you weren’t actually fighting against a supervillain to protect Ladybug, but it was strenuous physical activity, and it made your body produce adrenaline, so your miraculous responded.”

“Wow…” Adrien rubbed the back of his neck thoughtfully. “So that means, next time Ladybug and I have a mission, we’ll be able to fight even better than usual? Ten percent better than normal?”

Plagg nodded. “Exactly… and ten percent is just a typical average; the more compatible you two are as partners already, the more your performance will be enhanced. If you two normally worked well enough together just because you were used to it, for example, than you might not notice much of a difference… except you wouldn’t have the urge to make out in the middle of a fight, of course. On the other hand, if you two make a good team naturally, than you might feel more like 125%… and at that level, you might find that you can sense when your partner is in danger, and be able to anticipate each other’s actions almost perfectly.”

Adrien’s eyes bugged out, and he leaned forward eagerly, unable to keep an excited grin off his face. “Are you serious, Plagg? Is it like… reading each other’s minds? Or, seeing glimpses of the near future?”

“No, it’s more like… as if you two were identical twins.” Plagg tilted his head and crossed his little arms thoughtfully. “You’ve read stories about how some identical twins can feel when the other is hurt, or upset? Or that they can often tell what the other is thinking or feeling a lot better than other people? It’s really subtle… like, you’ll notice almost invisible signals from each other that you normally wouldn’t catch, and your reaction time for being where your partner needs to be, exactly when they need it, will seem practically perfect, like you two were programmed to always be in-sync.”

“That sounds amazing…” Adrien said, his voice hushed in awe and a giddy smile still stuck on his face. “We’ll be able to save Paris even more easily than usual!”

“Yeah, probably, but don’t get cocky,” Plagg warned, pointing at Adrien with a tiny black paw. “Every supervillain is different, after all.”

“But then…” Adrien pressed his lips together nervously. “As soon as we win…”

“You’ll go right back to wanting to kiss each other senseless,” Plagg supplied with a smirk.

Adrien sighed. “Of course…”

“And while we’re on the subject,” Plagg added, “I should probably give you a heads-up on what to expect over the next week, as far as feline tendencies and such.”

“Oh, man…” Adrien rubbed his eyes. “Go on, then…”
“The purring will continue for the rest of the cycle. Ladybug’s scent will start to become more and more attractive to you, and you’ll want to nuzzle her a lot…”

“That doesn’t sound so bad,” Adrien mused hopefully.

“...And eventually, you’ll want to lick her, too...on her neck, mostly. To taste her skin, and scent-mark her.”

Adrien choked on his own spit and turned yet again into a blond strawberry. He covered his glowing-red face with his hands.

_God, what I already wouldn’t give to taste her…! And see where she might have sweet spots on her neck…!_

He imagined the soft, breathy gasps he might hear from her as he sprinkled kisses under her jaw and behind her ears...the mildly sweet-salty taste of her warm skin......the squeeze of her arms around him, the gentle scratch of her hands against his back, and the sensation of her body squirming beneath him…!!

“_And later_,” Plagg continued, raising his voice to be heard over Adrien’s fantasizing, “You’ll graduate to love-nips, and start kneading...you know, that thing cats do that some people call ‘making biscuits’?”

Adrien groaned and rubbed his face with his hands, struggling to keep his head on straight. “And this will all hit me over the next week?!”

“At the rate you two are going, most likely,” Plagg said with a casual shrug. “Might come on even faster if Hawk Moth keeps himself busy and you two insist on making out after every mission. Not that I’m judging,” he added, “Just saying, it all depends on you. Just keep me updated on anything that happens while you’re wearing the suit, m’kay?”

“‘Kay…” Adrien mumbled.

~

After dinner, Adrien took a shower. He pumped out his pent-up desire for Ladybug in his hand, imagining her there with him, _gloriously_ nude and almost _sparkling_ with the water streaming down over the soft curves of her body. And he knew her almost every curve by sight (her suit hugged every one), except for those most intimate features of her that only a lover would see: the color of her bare skin and whatever marks decorated it; her nipples that he knew existed but could only imagine; and the warm, plush folds of her sex hidden between her thighs. The image was vivid enough to sent hot tingles racing over his skin, but it filled him with a wistful longing to behold her in all her glory in real life, to touch her with all the reverence and affection he felt for her. He’d wrap his arms around her and press their wet bodies together, and they’d explore each other other with their hands, the slickness of water on skin making the sensation new and exotic.

On a different train of thought, though, he also really liked the image of Ladybug covered in bubbles...and the idea of washing each other’s hair, too. It made for such a cute picture, and he giggled aloud imagining Ladybug playfully smacking him with a sudsy shower pouf.

“Stop trying to drown yourself and get out of there! I’m hungry!”

Adrien chuckled at the muffled sound of Plagg yelling to be heard over the running water. He double-checked to make sure he had rinsed all the suds away before turning the water off. He could think about Ladybug as much as he wanted without wasting water.
As he grabbed a towel and started drying off, he caught sight of his jacuzzi-style bathtub and wondered if Ladybug was the type to prefer baths or showers as part of her default bathroom routine. Soaking in a hot bath was great for soothing stiff or sore muscles, but Adrien’s day-to-day life often felt too busy to allow for taking that much time to relax; between modeling, fending, basketball, martial arts, and fighting supervillains as Chat Noir, it was not uncommon for Adrien to shower twice a day. He very much doubted Ladybug had as demanding a daily routine as he did, however, and so he liked to think she took the time once in awhile to indulge herself in a nice long soak in the bath, perhaps with a foamy layer of pleasantly-scented bubbles, or even a bath bomb and candles for special occasions...for some reason, he pictured floating tea-lights and a bath bomb fizzing a sparkly pink color and giving off a scent of...vanilla? No, not with a pink bath bomb...strawberries? Or roses? Some kind of mildly-sweet flower…

Hey, a history of modeling for perfume ads gave him plenty for his imagination to work with, okay? He wondered if Ladybug would tell him her favorite fragrance if he asked her...or if she liked fragrance on guys or not…

“...you smell nice, too…”

Clearly, a morning shower was all he needed for Marinette to find his scent attractive...so maybe cologne would be overdoing it...he’d certainly be very curious to know what Marinette used on herself to make her smell so good! It couldn’t possibly be perfume or body spray, because he would’ve picked up on the artificially-strong smell immediately. No, whatever it was, it was mostly natural...for some reason, it made him think of something delicate, warm, and sweet...he was so sure that if he tasted her just once, he wouldn’t want to pull away...what would have happened if he had let himself press his open lips against her neck so he could steal a quick lick off of her skin? Logical knowledge of the norms of human interaction would obviously discourage such a scandalously-bold move...but for some reason... the only resulting scenario he could picture was Marinette gasping softly in surprised pleasure and wrapping her arms around him to hold him close against her, letting her fingers weave themselves into his hair...a near-silent but unmistakable signal to continue ravishing her…

Adrien’s blood simmered with heat and his nerves tingled with electricity; jacking off in the shower apparently hadn’t helped him much, if his very (ahem) prominent physical reaction was any sign.

Oh my god, GET A FUCKING GRIP, ADRIEN! He buried his face in his wadded-up towel and bellowed into it. You DO NOT think about that stuff with MARINETTE!! WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?! ...and how many times have I asked myself that? Uggghhhhh…!

He finished drying himself off vigorously and then wrapped the towel around his waist before coming out of the bathroom. When he spotted Plagg leering at him from across the room, he scowled, daring the kwami to say something.

“Don’t look at me, ” Plagg drawled. “I just want my Camembert. Just bring it to me in the next five minutes, and I won’t doom you to a sleepless night of sexually-frustrated fantasizing.”

Adrien forced himself not to glare at Plagg suspiciously, and instead started putting on pajamas like Plagg’s threat didn’t make him nervous. “You say that like I won’t have that problem without you messing with me,” he said grumpily over his shoulder.

Plagg flew across the room and landed on Adrien’s bare shoulder, startling him.

“I could make it worse,” Plagg whispered into Adrien’s ear. “I could feed you food for thought...tell you exactly what Marinette could do to you that would turn you into a puddle of purring, kneading, mewing, writhing tomcat in less than a minute...”
“Um, what?!” Adrien squeaked hoarsely, freezing in the act of putting his arms through the sleeves of a white t-shirt. “Did you say Marinette could do things to me?! I thought only Ladybug had special effect on me?!”

Plagg’s mouth stretched into an evil, knowing grin.

“You and Ladybug are the only ones in heat, of course…” he said smoothly, “But you being in heat makes you very sensitive to specific touches ...in the most cat-like way possible.”

Adrien felt a chill go up his spine. Then, he gave himself a mental shake and hurriedly pulled the shirt over his head, Plagg leaving his shoulder to avoid getting enveloped in soft cotton.

“Okay, now that I’m dressed, I will get you your Camembert!” Adrien assured him, hurrying over toward his desk.

“Good boy,” Plagg praised, nodding at Adrien pompously.

Adrien scowled, but picked up the phone and called the chef on the intercom, asking for a platter of Camembert to be brought up. Then he sprawled himself out on his bed as Plagg flew over to Adrien’s couch, where he seated himself to wait for his precious cheese.

“Since I’m probably going to have trouble falling asleep tonight anyway…” Adrien said hesitantly, trying not to sound embarrassed, “Maybe you could tell me a little about what to expect with this so-called ‘sensitivity to certain touches’...?”

Plagg snickered. “I should’ve known you’d be curious!” he gloated. “But I guess it might do you some good to warn you…”

Adrien gulped.

“It’s part of the feline tendencies,” Plagg explained. “The simplest way to put it is, if somebody--particularly Ladybug, of course--pets you like a cat in some way, then you’ll enjoy it like a cat. She strokes her head? Bliss. Massages your neck? Bliss. Scratches down your back? Bliss, and cat-like stretching and writhe in pleasure. This will all trigger plenty of purring, of course, and later on, kneading and all that other mushy cat stuff.”

Adrien rolled over and buried his face in his pillow to hide his flustered and blushing face. Every action Plagg listed instantly generated a little fantasy clip in his brain of Ladybug doing those exact things to him, and even without knowing what it would be like to have those feline tendencies surfacing, it was far too easy--though not surprising--to imagine the sensations, and how he might react to them. He could probably embarrass himself plenty without also reacting like a cat in heat, so he could only imagine what Ladybug could get out of him...

And, once again, curiosity killed the cat, he thought. And in this case, satisfaction will bring me back only for me to get myself killed again. Why am I like this? Oh, my lady, what has my love for you done to me…?

Well, at the moment, it was giving him another troublesome boner. Again. Great...

“He’s something interesting about that, though,” Plagg suddenly piped up, jerking Adrien back to the present (barely). “Getting stroking by Ladybug can also be very soothing, so it can actually help you calm down if you’re feeling too wound up to function. You’ll still want to rub yourself all over her, of course,” he added, triggering another fantasy for Adrien of him doing just that to Ladybug, which sent more ripples of heat down his body to pool between his legs. “But you won’t feel nearly as restless and impatient. Keep that in mind for emergencies, if you like.”
Adrien was too distracted by the imagined sensation of feeling Ladybug’s bare skin rubbing against his to worry about what Plagg might mean by, “emergencies”. His whole body felt flushed, and his breathing and heartbeat were both fluttering. Imagining the sounds of her soft, breathy gasps made it twice as bad (or twice as good, depending how you looked at it). Then he made the mistake of imagining her gasping and moaning his name …

*Mm-nngh… Ah! C-Chat Noir…! Kitty…!*

Fuck it, he was a goner.

“…Plagg…” he groaned loudly, muffled by his pillow, “You gotta go up to the loft again…”

He heard Plagg gulp down the last of his cheese and smack his lips.

“Sure thing,” he answered easily. He floated lazily up towards towards the loft, his little hands behind his head. “Sweet *dreams!*” he called, snickering.

Adrien got under the covers, and then slipped his hand under the waistband of his pajama pants.

“Thanks…” he grumbled. "Goodnight, Plagg..."
Alya meets Marinette at school before class to give her the biggest scoop of her life: Adrien Agreste is slowly but most certainly falling for Marinette, and Alya’s got all the evidence she needs from her boyfriend and partner-in-matchmaking, Nino. All Marinette’s gotta do now is make her move! When Adrien shows up moments later, the two twitterpated teenagers share a charged moment, and Marinette is over-the-moon! Too giddy to concentrate on lecture, Marinette spends class time admiring pictures of Adrien on her phone, but then finds herself daydreaming about Chat Noir…remembering and missing his kiss, and wondering how much he already wants her…

Straight through my heat
She aimed and she shot me
I can't stop the bleeding
(Whoa-oh)
— The Backstreet Boys, "Straight Through My Heart"

Tuesday, September 6th

The first Alya did after getting out of bed Tuesday morning was shoot Marinette a text telling her to get to school a little early, if possible, so that she could pass on what Nino had told her about his conversation with Adrien. Although Nino still had a lot to learn about interviewing, it sounded from what her boyfriend told her like he was shaping up to be an excellent partner in matchmaking; Alya felt like now she could say with near-absolute certainty that Adrien Agreste was slowly-but-surely falling for Marinette Dupain-Cheng.

After getting dressed, she texted Marinette again as she ate breakfast, knowing that her BFF had a habit of oversleeping. After she had put her dishes away and brushed her teeth, she sent a third text, just in case. Then, she grabbed her bag and ran out the door.

This is gonna be great! Marinette’s gonna FLIP!

Marinette had already hit “snooze” on her phone’s alarm when Alya’s first text arrived. She gave no sign that she heard the tell-tale tone, and so Tikki took it upon herself to check Marinette’s messages.

Alya: rise n shine! got a HUGE scoop for u! meet me b4 class!

Alya’s “huge scoops” are almost always about either Ladybug or Adrien, Tikki thought. I wonder which one it is this time? Maybe she got some good video footage of our fight against Doctor Quack…? Or maybe she caught some candid photos of Adrien! Tikki smiled to herself in amusement at the image of Marinette squealing with delight over Adrien’s image.
When Marinette’s alarm went off again, Tikki patted the covers hiding the sleepy girl’s head from view in an attempt to help rouse her from the not-really-sleeping, not-yet-alert state of snoozing.

“Marinette! Alya sent you a text! She says she has a “huge scoop” for you!”

Marinette groaned her teenager’s leave-me-alone-and-let-me-sleep groan, but emerged from under the covers enough to look at her phone, squinting groggily at the bright screen.

“What could she have to tell me that’s so important that I have to meet her at school early?” she grumbled. “There’s no way it’s worth it…”

“Even if it’s about Adrien?” Tikki asked, smiling knowingly.

Marinette pondered this for a few seconds, and then rolled over and slowly sat up with a reluctant groan.

“Okay, maybe…but this better be good!” she grumbled, stretching.

Tikki giggled, and then flew into the air out of the way as Marinette threw the covers off.

~

Alya’s second text gave Marinette a bit more motivation:

**Alya:** srsly M, this is BIGGEST SCOOP OF UR LIFE! ITS ABOUT UR FUTURE LOVER!!! DONT BE LATE!

Marinette raised an eyebrow at Alya’s message.

She must mean Adrien, but…“future lover”? That’s a new one. And...the biggest scoop of my life? Geez, what in the world does she think she’s found out? I already buy every magazine issue Adrien appears in, and I follow everything about him online…and she still remembers I have a copy of the two-page spread of young men’s SWIMWEAR he did for La Mode, right?! Does she think she’s got something better than THAT?! She’d have to fly a drone up to his bedroom windows and catch footage of him NAKED to top that! And there’s no way she’d get away with that…right?

For a moment, Marinette allowed herself the guilty pleasure of visualizing what a drone’s-eye view of Adrien Agreste in the nude might look like, and positively squirmed in her seat, feeling the beginnings of a lady-boner coming on as her face turned a shade of pink to put her backpack to shame.

...Well, I guess I’ll find out sooner or later, either way, she thought, giving herself a mental shake.

Once she had finished eating breakfast and cleaning up after herself, Marinette brushed her teeth and then ran back up to her room to get dressed and grab her purse. On her way out the door, she paused to kiss both of her parents goodbye.

“Bye, Mom! Bye, Dad! Oh, wait…” She glanced between them. “Is it okay if I take a couple of cookies with me?”

“Sure, sweetie!” her mother replied, straightening a window display of macarons.

Thanks! I’ll see you later!” Marinette grabbed two chocolate chip cookies on her way out and slipped them into her purse for Tikki. The door had barely shut behind her when received another text. Frowning in confusion, she dug out her phone and saw that, sure enough, it was from
Alya...again.

**Alya:  LAST CALL!  im on my way now, and we got 40 mins till class starts!  be there or square!**

Marinette sighed, but smiled as she sent a reply.

**Marinette:  ill be there in 20!  this had better be good!**

When she arrived in front of the school building, she saw Alya already waiting for her outside, holding her phone in both hands as she started down at the screen, practically bouncing with excitement. Marinette ran up to her, daring to let herself get a little excited.

“Hey! I made it!” she announced cheerfully. “So, what’s this HUUUUGE scoop all about?”

The expression on Alya’s face was one of barely-contained euphoria; her eyes were wide and gleaming behind her glasses, and her mouth was stretched out in a gleeful grin.

“Girl, I am about to rock your world!” she proclaimed. “Oh my god, where do I even begin! Okay, so, I talked to Nino yesterday and told him he could come clean to Adrien about us playing matchmaker on him, as long as he didn’t reveal that he knows that you already have a crush on Adrien, right? But I told Nino, I said, ‘This is our chance to try to figure out how **Adrien** feels about **Marinette**,’ so I gave Nino some advice for how to interrogate Adrien about you without sounding suspicious, and so, once he was done talking to me, he called Adrien to talk to him. Are you getting all this?”

“Uh, yes, I think so, but now I’m worried!” Marinette whined, fidgeting nervously. “I’m sure your coaching was great, but Nino...is Nino sneaky enough to pull that off without letting something slip? And is he sharp enough to pick up on any little clues Adrien gives off? And not even face-to-face, but **over the phone**? You’re the reporter, Alya, you might be able to do it, but Nino...?”

“No, believe me, I had my doubts, too,” Alya said, nodding smugly. “So I didn’t try give him more information than I knew he could handle. I didn’t expect him to try anything too sneaky. But not only did Nino get Adrien to talk, he took **notes** while he was listening, and he called me back right after their conversation to give me his report!” she gushed. “Oh, I was so proud of him! And, oh my god... Marinette...” Alya leaned in dramatically. “I got ALL the sweet and dirty deets for you!”

Marinette’s eyes were now bugging out, as she tried and failed to not start freaking out over the implications of Alya’s statement. She could feel her heart hammering against her rib cage.

“What? Nino asked Adrien about me and Adrien actually **talked about me**?!” she squealed, leaning in excitedly with her hands squeezed into fists under her chin. “Oh my god, Alya, what did he say?! What did he tell Nino?! TellmetellmetellmetellmetellmetellmetellmeTELLME!!”

Alya raised her phone.

“Allow me to refer to my notes! Let’s see... About your big reunion on the first day of school? Adrien literally said he **didn’t even know what came over him** ... And then, Nino decided to be gutsy, and asked him if he thought he might like you ...”

“**What**?!” Marinette squeaked. She started hopping from foot to foot in a panic. “Oh no...that’s bad...what did he say?! **WHAT DID HE SAY, ALYA**?!”

Alya held up a placating hand, still smirking. “He **very nervously and shyly** asked Nino where this question was coming from, and Nino reminded him about the pick-up-and-hug-and-spin thing, and
Adrien got super flustered and defensive, and said, and Nino quotes, ‘I...okay, I can totally picture what it must have looked like, but...I really...I don’t...’ but then just trailed off! Nino said there was, like, five whole seconds of silence!

“And then, he goes, ‘Even if I did, what about Marinette? She hasn’t shown any special interest in me that I’ve noticed.’ Marinette, he started to try to deny it, but he didn’t finish! He didn’t say he didn’t like you! And then he asked about YOU! He wanted to know how YOU felt! He’s obviously oblivious as FUCK if he hasn’t noticed you showing him any ‘special interest,’ but this is exactly what I thought was going on! He’s starting to fall for you, but he’s afraid to admit to himself and to you because he doesn’t know how YOU feel! You get it?! He’s vul-ner-a-ble!”

Marinette gaped mutely at Alya as she struggled to comprehend everything she was hearing, with her brain working at about half-speed.

She eventually whispered, “So...you think...he’s falling in love with me, but he doesn’t realize it? And he still has no idea that I love him?”

“Exactly,” Alya replied, crossing her arms with an emphatic nod. “Or, even better, he might be starting to realize now that he is falling for you, since Nino’s planted the seed in his mind! In fact, my guess is he’s already noticed that he feels something special for you, because if he really had no idea, he would have automatically told Nino that he didn’t like you that way! He tried --he started to --but he couldn’t!” Alya raised her arms and pumped her fists. “Ha ha! Girl, we’ve got him right where we want him!”

Marinette lunged forward and grabbed Alya by both arms in her eagerness. “Oh my god, Alya, what do I do? How do I win over Adrien? Alya, tell me, I need to know!!”

“Easy there, girl!” Alya chuckled, patting Marinette on the head. “He’s already as good as yours, so you don’t have to do much; you just gotta send the right signals and drop the right hints to encourage him to make a move on you! And while you’re at it, you keep working on getting over your shyness around him, ’cause he’s gotta start picking up on the fact that you’ve got your eyes on him!”

Marinette let go of Alya’s arms and groaned, her entire upper body sagging dramatically. “Alya, I’ve been trying to get over my shyness since last year! And he didn’t notice! How am I going to do better this year?”

“‘Well, this time, you don’t have to pressure yourself to tell him that you like him! Not right away, anyway,’ Alya explained, holding out a finger. “You’re gonna lure him in! We’ll start out subtle, and then keep turning up the heat until there’s no doubt left in his mind that you want him! As soon as catches on, he’ll make his move, and then it’s just a matter of who confesses first!”

“That still sounds like something I’m bound to screw up,” Marinette remarked. “But I guess this time, I don’t have to worry as much about him not feeling the same way…”

“You got that right!” Alya crowed. “So, starting today, here’s your assignment: whenever your eyes meet, see if you can hold eye-contact with him for at least one second, instead of glancing away all shyly and nervously like you usually do. And tomorrow, wear an off-the-shoulder or peekaboo-shoulder top.”

“What?!” Marinette squawked in alarm. “How is showing off my bare shoulders subtle and modest?!”

“Er, relatively subtle and modest!” Alya said sheepishly, grinning as Marinette turned pink in the face. “For all he knows, It’s just you feeling like wearing something a little cheekier than usual!”
You’re not gonna ask him what he thinks about your outfit, or anything, you’re just drawing his eyes to you a little more deliberately! Other than the eye-contact thing, you don’t have to act any differently!

Marinette pursed her lips thoughtfully as her brow furrowed. It sounded like it might be doable…

“Okay, I’ll give it a try,” she finally said. She tried to put on a brave face.

“Yeah! Go for it!!” Alya cheered. She glanced to the side, towards the street, and her face slowly morphed into a smile that was downright diabolical.

Oh no...don’t tell me...!

“Just in time...okay, girl, go get ‘im! I’ll see you in class!”

She walked past Marinette, giving her a hearty pat on the shoulder, and disappeared through the school doors...leaving Marinette slowly turning on the spot to see Adrien getting out of the family car at the curb.

Oh, god…! I’m so nervous, I’m gonna pass out…!

~

Adrien caught sight of her as he shut the car door behind him. He stood there and blinked, staring at her from across the sidewalk...she stared back, frozen in place and stiff as a board, and Adrien suddenly realized he couldn’t remember whether this was normal for her or not...did she usually look like a startled rabbit, like she had yesterday? It seemed enough like the Marinette he knew...he wasn’t struck by the sense that she was suddenly acting out-of-character...but at the same time, something was nagging at him...if this was normal for her, how come he never noticed how odd it was before?

After one, maybe two seconds, he blinked again and started, realizing he had been staring at her like a weirdo... again! He smiled and waved at her, hoping he didn’t look as self-conscious as he felt.

“Uh hey, Marinette! H-how are you this morning?”

“Uh hi!” she squeaked back, managing an awkward grin and a stiff wave back. “Adrien! Hi! Um! Good morning! I mean, I’m good! This morning, I mean! How are you?! Wait, did I ask that already…?”

“No, I’m good!” he replied, hesitantly walking over. “Shall we head to class?” he asked. “The bell’s probably gonna ring any minute.”

“What? Oh, uh...yeah, sure!” Marinette trailed after him as he approached the school doors. Adrien swore he could feel her eyes on him...but at least with her behind him, he couldn’t be distracted by the sight of her pale, slender neck…

...but leaving her to follow him seemed rude, somehow, when he could let her walk with him. And besides…

“Seriously, dude, you could get a lot closer to her if you want to...you just gotta loosen up a bit! Keep it real, you know?”

...he wasn’t going to figure out his own feelings by trying to avoid them, right?

He slowed to a stop to allow Marinette to catch up with him. He heard her footsteps slow down as
she approached, as though she wasn’t sure if it was okay to get close to him. He turned to look at her over his shoulder.

“Coming?” he asked, smiling.

“Huh?” She froze, clearly caught off-guard. “Uh, yeah!” She grinned at him; it was a grin he was very familiar with—it was probably the expression he saw Marinette wearing most often when he interacted with her—only, this time, it struck him how nervous and awkward she looked.

Had she always acted this way around him? Why? He could understand if she had started feeling uneasy around him after he started acting like an attention-starved cat, but she hadn’t really treated him differently since then…

“Were you…sniffing me?”

“…You smell nice, too.”

...well, unless her saying things like that to him counted!

“Adrien…?”

Marinette’s voice jerked him out of his thoughts, and he blinked several times to clear his head. She had stopped right beside him, and was now looking up at him curiously, her hands bunched together under her chin like a hamster.

Adrien sighed and rubbed a hand over his face in frustration. “Sorry, I...must’ve spaced out for a second…”

“You...were staring at me…” she remarked hesitantly, her brows furrowed in concern. “Do I...have something on my face…?” She raised a hand uncertainly to her cheek and started biting her lip...

No, don’t do that… “No, no! You’re fine!” Without thinking, he reached out toward her cheek and gently touched the tip of his thumb to her lips. “Your lips are going to get chapped if you keep doing that, though.”

Marinette’s eyes popped in surprise as her lip popped free from her teeth. The movement of her lip relaxing under his thumb felt like a tiny kiss, and Adrien felt like his heart had slammed itself against the inside of his rib cage. It was a miracle he managed to keep himself from squeaking out loud. He had just enough presence of mind to take his hand away, but he was already blushing hot enough to feel it in his neck. Unable to hold her gaze, he rubbed the back of his head self-consciously.

“Uh…!” His instinct was to apologize for his boldness ( again ), but at this point, he felt like he had committed too many transgression against her for it to mean much anymore. But, also...glancing at her, he didn’t see any sign that she was offended...she was just staring at him with wide eyes...in amazement…? And…

...she was blushing …?

The bell rang right at that moment, and they both jumped and yelped in surprise.

“Come on!” Marinette grabbed his hand as she dashed past him, and he struggled to keep up as she dragged him along at an awkward run. It shouldn’t have been a big deal...but the soft, warm squeeze of her hand on his made his heart swell with excitement…

...and that’s when he started to get the feeling that he was really screwed...because it used to be only
Ladybug’s touch that could do that to him.

Oh god...what am I gonna dooooo?!

~

Marinette wasn’t sure where she suddenly gained the confidence to take Adrien’s hand, let alone drag him with her all the way to the classroom....but that wasn’t even what she was freaking out over.

Alya was right.

Adrien had wanted to walk to class together with her! And then, she caught him staring at her again! Oh, she wished she could tell what he was thinking when he did that! Could he have been thinking about her? If he was staring at her, then he must have been thinking about her, right?!

But even that hadn’t been all of it...no, not even the best part! The part that just about made her heart pop like a balloon was when Adrien had reached out and touched his thumb to her lips ...she had barely realized she had been biting her lip until that moment, but even after that, she had fixated on the fact that Adrien had mentioned her lips, because how would it have occurred to him to worry about her lips getting chapped if he hadn’t already been thinking about them, right?! Because he had been staring at them, too!! Right?!

And then…!

He blushed…! she thought, feeling like she might pass out face-down into the desk any second. There’s no way I could’ve imagined it, right?! Oh my god, Adrien is SO FREAKING CUTE WHEN HE’S BLUSHING, I CAN’T EVEN HANDLE IT!! EEEEEE!!! Wait, so...he blushed when he touched my lips...and he was staring at me so much...I can’t think of any other explanation: he’s starting to fall for me! Just like Alya said! OH MY GOD, I’M SO HAPPY!!! THIS IS GONNA BE THE YEAR!!

And so began another day of classes that Marinette took zero notes for. Hardly a thought passed through her mind that wasn’t about Adrien. Marinette would have pointed to the fact that, again (as always), Adrien was right there in front of her where she could stare at him all day. Couple that with everything that had been happening between the two of them in the past week or two, and she was a goner. And she was right...to a point. But if she had spared just a moment to remember how much she had been thinking about Chat Noir lately--how she had gotten off to fantasies of him just last night!--she might have realized how strange it was that Adrien now completely dominated her imagination…

But, because he was right there, she didn’t. She replayed the morning’s miraculous interaction with Adrien until it was time for the next class. Then, she replayed all of the rest of her favorite interactions from the past two weeks; every gaze, every word, every touch.

During literature, the third class of the day, Marinette propped her text book up against a short stack of three others on her half of the desk, so that she could sneak a peek at the pictures in her secret “Adrien <3” photo folder on her phone. Her current favorite was a collage she had made of all the swimwear looks Adrien had modeled back in early summer.

Adrien had unfortunately been unable to accept Alya’s invitation to go to the beach with her, Nino, and Marinette over summer vacation, but the pictures of Adrien modeling various styles of men’s swimwear had almost made up for it. Both then, and now, she found it impossible to decide which looks were her favorites. It was ridiculous how Adrien could make any pair of swimming trunks or
board shorts look as designer-brand as they were (admittedly, they *were* all brightly colored and patterned). And the *speedos* ...well, if he had shown up at the beach wearing those in person, she probably would have had a heart attack right then and there. On the other hand, the wetsuits and drysuits looked amazing on him, too, even though they showed very little bare skin. It was probably something about how gloriously form-fitting they were.

Actually, *Chat Noir* looked pretty amazing in his very form-fitting suit, too...that wasn’t too weird to say, was it? She’d have to be *blind* not to notice his lean but athletic musculature. And hadn’t he said something to her once about him looking really good in a swimsuit...? Well, with a body like that …

*Ahem!* Anyway, one thing was for sure: both Adrien and Chat Noir were very attractive boys...boys with very nice pectorals, which would probably be *so nice* to caress...actually, they probably had very nice *everythings* that would be really nice to touch…

Chat Noir, though...being as in-love with her as he was...he probably thought she had very nice...features...right?

*And MY suit is just as form-fitting as his is...so does he ever, like...ogle me?* she wondered. Actually, *maybe it would be weirder if he didn’t...he’s a teenage boy who I now know has been in love with me for over a year, and NOW we’re under the influence of a mating cycle! Oh wow...does he think I’m...* She blushed. *Does he think I’m...beautiful? Does he think I’m... sexy??* I think Adrien *is* gorgeous, and hot, and sexy, and *all that*, so then...Chat Noir probably *thinks about me that way, right?!* *Wow...that’s...an interesting train of thought…*

Marinette had been raised to have pride and confidence in herself. She was never one to brag, or rub her capabilities into other people’s faces—that was just mean-spirited—and she took compliments politely, but she also *knew* that she had a lot of creative skills, was a pretty-darn-good gamer, and also very lucky to have inherited some very good genes from her family. She was cute, she was pretty, and she knew this!

But, no matter how proud you were of your own appearance, knowing that other people sincerely thought you were attractive was a whole other thing. Yes, she was beautiful in her own unique way, but to think about *Chat Noir* thinking she was beautiful…! She couldn’t recall any occasion when he had said so to her face, but…

“*Um, excuse you, sir! But if you can mistake my Lady’s ethereal beauty...for a SKIN CONDITION, I’d say YOU would be the one who needs operating on! May I recommend laser eye surgery? Because you are BLIND!*”

“Ethereal beauty,” huh? It was part of one of Chat Noir’s wisecracking comebacks, so it wasn’t nearly as flattering as a straight-up compliment given directly to her would have been, but still…

*Wait...when he confessed to me, what was it he said he liked about me, again? He said a lot... I think I wrote down everything I could remember in my diary after I got back that afternoon... I should read that entry, maybe while I'm having lunch...*

Even though she couldn't remember exactly what Chat Noir's words had been, she could remember with striking clarity his earnest expression as he gazed into her eyes and told her that he loved her...his smile had been so warm, and so had his eyes...and, *oh*, when he had kissed her…!

Marinette felt herself blush, and buried her face in her arm on the desk.

She would *never* forget that look on his face as he brought his hand so tenderly to her cheek, and she
would never, ever forget how incredible it had felt to kiss him. And it wasn't because the moment had been so memorable that it would never fade from her mind (human brains tended to be disappointing that way, which was the whole point of keeping a diary), and it wasn't because she had described it in excruciating detail in her diary, either. It was because…

It will happen again, Marinette thought determinately. I will kiss him again...I want too! And again and again and again...and I want to see how else he wants to show me all that affection he's kept bottled up for me! I want to hear what else he thinks about me...how I make him feel...and when I can find the words for how I feel about him...I'll tell him. He deserves to know, and it would make him so happy! He might act like he has a huge ego, but he's the opposite of self-centered, and he's sensitive, in the good way: he responds so much to whatever I make him feel, and that makes me feel so...powerful? No, that's not the right word...Desirable? Yeah...it feels like he lets himself be open and vulnerable to me...or like whatever I made him feel was too strong to...stifle! Oh my gosh, he...! It's like he...

...wants me...!

This thought almost seemed presumptuous, but she remembered the way he had moaned softly into their second kiss, and the way he had looked at her, and it was just obvious! He was in love with her! Why wouldn't he want her that way?

Either way she looked at it, this realization felt mind-blowing to her, and it provoked a whole new series of mind-blowing thoughts: Chat Noir probably longed to do so much more than kiss her, because he had been in love with her as long as she had been in love with Adrien, and she sure fantasized about doing a lot more than kissing him! Hell, she had gotten off to thoughts of both Adrien and Chat Noir just last night!

Oh, crap... This only made her recall some of those very same fantasies, along with the realization that Chat Noir--her goofball of a cat-boy partner--almost surely fantasized about her as much as she had ever fantasized about Adrien...and those fantasies would include…

Kissing me...seeing me naked... touching me, all over... kissing me all over...HAVING SEX WITH ME...!

Fortunately for Marinette's emotional stability, her brain hadn't had enough practice fantasizing about Chat Noir to automatically generate visualizations of him doing all of these things to her, but she could imagine all too easily being wrapped up in a torrid embrace by him while he kissed her passionately and gently but feverishly drag his tongue and teeth all over her neck and restlessly scratch at her waist and ribs with his claws…

Marinette squirmed slightly in her seat and squeezed her thighs together in a useless attempt to stave off the arousal she felt collecting there. Lunchtime couldn't come soon enough.

~

Adrien's heart was still pounding by the time lecture started, at least two minutes after he sat down next to Nino (who was almost surely staring at him, now...great...). Honestly, he was prepared to suffer heart palpitations all through class, considering that Marinette was--AS ALWAYS--was sitting right behind him. But that was the problem: she always sat there behind him, and for the rest of the term, she would probably continue to sit there...which meant that as long as Adrien continued to harbor these...feelings for Marinette, whatever they were, his concentration would continue to suffer all through class.

Adrien had always been a very diligent student, and while he was just as prone to letting his mind
wander during lecture as the average teenager, he never let it affect his grades (Adrien Agreste, the son of Gabriel Agreste, was not allowed to carry anything less than an 80% average). Nino, he knew, would happily continue to share his notes with him, but sooner or later, he was bound to ask questions if he continued to ask for them almost every day.

That he was in heat along with Ladybug had been more than enough to turn his life topsy-turvy! Why was he so irresistibly drawn to Marinette? Was it really as simple as Plagg suggested? Was he...really falling in love with her? His heart throbbed nervously at the thought, and he just barely resisted the urge to look at her over his shoulder.

If that was really all there was to it, why would it happen during his mating cycle of all times, the four months during which he was least likely to be interested in anyone other than Ladybug? The timing was just too uncanny for him to get over it...and there was also the romantic in him that shied away from the idea that he could want to kiss any girl other than Ladybug, heat or not.

Well, kiss in addition to... other things ...

Wait, no, don’t continue that thought…!

Too late.

...Marinette’s lips had been so soft against the tip of his thumb...granted, it wasn’t even remotely the same as actually kissing her, but still...oh, kissing her would probably feel so nice...! Would she wrap her arms around his neck or bury her fingers in his hair or tenderly cup his face in her hands? He imagined nuzzling her cheeks and under her chin against her neck...she’d probably make really cute sounds...! Would she sigh softly in contentment? Mew like a tiny kitten? Coo like a dove? Would she tilt her head back to expose more of her neck to him, so that he could sprinkle it with kisses and taste her soft, warm skin...?

Oh no oh no oh no oh nooooo...

And now he had a boner creeping up on him.

Why is this happening to meeeeee?

Adrien suffered in silence until the lunch bell rang. By then he was fairly confident he could walk out of there, but he positioned his messenger bag very deliberately and strategically just in case. If Nino was the only one who noticed and recognized his behavior, he’d consider himself fortunate.

But of course, Nino had to throw an arm around his shoulders and pull him aside as soon as they left the classroom.

“Dude…” he muttered conspiratorially into Adrien’s ear. “Unless you’ve got your eye on another girl I don’t know about...or Marinette just suddenly falls for some other guy--”

Adrien instantly felt his stomach clench briefly at the mere idea, and he subsequently felt the urge the bang his head against the wall. Repeatedly. What was this crazy world coming to, for him to suddenly feel in any way possessive of Marinette?! He had no right! She wasn’t his! Not yet, anyway.

Oh, for...someone please shoot me...

“--which will never happen...for reasons...you two have got it made . Or you would, if one of you would make a move. If I were you…” He gave Adrien a friendly pat on the shoulder. “...I would
accept and cherish your destiny.”

And then, clearly pleased with himself, Nino walked off, replacing his baseball cap on his head. Adrien just stood gaping after him for a moment...and then decided he didn’t have the energy to freak out about it any more. He needed to get out of the school for an hour and eat...if he could muster the appetite.
Hawk Moth’s newest supervillain appears; business as usual, except for two things: First, this supervillain is a familiar face, which makes things a little more personal; and second, Ladybug and Chat Noir both anticipate having a very important TALK afterward… ;)

It’s only when Ladybug finds herself alone with Chat Noir that she finally realizes just how deeply she’s fallen for him, and so she finally tells him what’s he’s dreamed of hearing for so long. The two lose themselves in a torrid embrace and many heated kisses, which brings out a little more of the lust-hungry tomcat in Chat Noir than the two have seen so far until now!

When Marinette finally returns home, she’s able to treat herself to the orgasm she’s been looking forward to all day, and even figures out her way around her g-spot after some patient sexual exploration and experimentation. When she finds herself craving cuddles from Chat Noir to the point of mild distress, however, she learns from Tikki that her symptoms are progressing very quickly, now: her body will start to crave Chat Noir’s touch more and more, and she’s due to start getting super wet very soon, as well. What’s a Ladybug in heat to do?!

Tuesday

If Tikki hadn’t been with Marinette to make sure she didn’t wander off in the wrong direction, Marinette could easily have gotten lost and run over by a car, with how lost in thought she was on her way home for lunch.

“Wait, Marinette!” she chirped, sticking her head out of Marinette’s purse. “Home is that way! Go back and go left! Across the street!”

“What…? Oh!” Marinette stopped and retraced her steps, following Tikki’s pointing arm. “Thanks, Tikki…sorry, I was…distracted.”

“I figured!” Tikki said, smiling up at her. “Just stay aware of your surroundings!”

Before Marinette could respond, she hear a noise in the distance that sounded like a cross between the cracking of a tree falling and the rumbling of an earthquake.

“Do you hear that?” Tikki exclaimed. “It sounds like an earthquake!”

“Yeah, but…I don’t feel the ground shaking…” Marinette remarked, looking around for the source of the sound. “And I don’t see any dust rising…if it was an earthquake, buildings and stuff would be falling, right?”

“Only if it was strong enough…and if you can’t feel the tremors…”

“Well, whether it’s an earthquake or something else, it could be the doing of a supervillain either way!” Marinette said, turning around and running towards the sound. “We’ll just have to check it
Marinette squeezed herself into the first alleyway she found (which might not have qualified as an alleyway at all, since the space between the building was barely wide enough for a bicycle). She regretted not looking for a wider alleyway when she scraped her nose on the brick and felt her hair getting messed up, but she was hidden from view, which was what mattered.

“Tikki, transform me!”

Suited up and spotted, she made to take out her yo-yo, only to find that she didn’t have enough room to move her arms to reach it.

“Ugh, I guess this’ll teach me to pick my changing spots more carefully….” She shimmied back the way she had come, trying to ignore the stinging in the tip of her nose, and then took to the rooftops. She kept her eyes peeled for any signs of chaos going down: sounds of people panicking, people running, police sirens, helicopters, buildings collapsing…

However, the first unusual thing she caught sight of was what looked like climbing roses growing up the sides of Collège Françoise-Dupont and across the lawn and streets in all directions. The roses were oversized and pitch black, and the stems and leaves were covered in thorns. They didn’t seem to be causing any damage to the building, but anyone trapped inside risked getting hurt if they tried to get out, especially if the roses had any magical powers, which was highly likely. Traffic accidents were quite likely to happen at the rate the roses were growing, and any pedestrians out walking about would be helpless. The sooner she could find the supervillain and capture the akuma, the better. Hopefully, Chat Noir had heard the sound of the roses growing, too, and would be joining her soon to help take this supervillain down…

I hope our team dynamic won’t get thrown off by our heats… she thought. I don’t think my symptoms have gotten bad enough for me to suddenly have the urge to jump him as soon as I see him, so he can’t be any worse off, right? Still, I don’t know how I’m going to act normal around him… I’ve been thinking about him--fantasizing about him!--a lot today! I’ve kinda made up my mind to kiss him silly when I see him, and I was hoping to read what I wrote about his confession in my diary and rub one out before I go back to class!! Ugh, just thinking about is getting me all bothered again…

Wait… will he be able to smell how aroused I am at this point in the cycle?! Oh crap, I forgot about that until now! If he notices, he’d BETTER not say anything rude!!

Ladybug perched on the roof of the Agreste estate and cast her eyes around trying to locate the supervillain among the thousands of huge black roses. If they were the same color as the plants they had summoned, and were content to wait for her and Chat Noir to come to them, this might be difficult…

Her bug-phone rang right then, and she quickly snatched it up from behind her hip and hit the answer button.

“Chat Noir! Are you following the… wait, the wall behind you is covered with roses! Are they harmless, then?”

“That’s the weird thing,” Chat Noir replied, glancing sideways at a rose sticking out next to his shoulder. He was keeping his voice low, so she guessed he was trying to stay hidden. “The fragrance they give off is so strong it’s giving me a headache, but they don’t seem to do anything… Seriously though, imagine every single one of these roses was a scented-oil plug-in, and then multiply your own sense of smell by 1.5, and you’ll get an idea of what I’m enduring right now. But
then, what’s the point of making them grow all over Paris? It can’t just be for decoration, or I would hope there would be a lot more colors!” He tossed his head to make his hair swoosh and smirked. “I mean, I know I make the color black look good, but I have charisma and feline charm! And cunning wit and star power AND animal magnetism!”

“A little modesty would go a long way,” she deadpanned, trying to look exasperated instead of amused. “Anyway, the point is, we need to track down the supervillain who’s the roses grow and capture the akuma, or all of Paris will smell like plug-ins and be covered in thorns. Have you got any leads?”

He quickly got serious. “I’m pretty sure the baddie in question is in the gym. I actually caught sight of her earlier, and I’m trying to see if I can sneak up on her. I think…” He grimaced. “I think it’s Aimee, the girl from before who got akumatized into Summer Fae; I recognized her.”

“What?!” Ladybug gasped. “Hawk Moth akumatized her a second time?! That’s horrible...I wonder what happened that upset her this time, and if it’s anything like what got her akumatized the first time…”

“If it happened here, while she was still at school, then it probably was. I guess the selfie I took with her didn’t stop those girls from bullying her again…” His cat ears drooped slightly.

“There wasn’t anything else you could have done, and we can’t keep watch over everyone to make sure they never experience negative emotions,” she said gently. “We’ll make this right, turn Aimee back to normal, and then see what we can do to help her, okay?”

“Yes, okay,” he said, smiling gratefully back at her. Her heart gave a strange wiggle in her chest. Too bad we’re not talking face-to-face...I kinda want to kiss him right now, she mused, before mentally smacking herself. Oh my god, get it together, Ladybug! You’ve got a job to do!

She took a deep breath to steady her nerves.

“So...if she’s just waiting in the gym, and not out looking for anyone or anything, she must expect us to come to her. Hawk Moth wouldn’t let her just hang around without a plan to beat us and take our Miraculouses, and she must have something she wants, too…”

“Yes, I figured this was probably a trap,” Chat Noir replied with a nod. “That’s why I figured sneaking up on her might give us an advantage...but maybe going in guns blazing would catch her off-guard just as much?” He tilted his head back and forth indecisively. “If I used Cataclysm on the right spot, I could probably clear a way in…”

“Only if there’s no other way to get in...we might need your superpower to get us out of a tight spot later. Here, let me come to you; I’ll track your location on my bug-phone.”

“Sure thing!” He cracked a cheeky grin. “Don’t get lost in the garden tracking down this black beauty, now!” He said this with a hearty wink and jabbed a thumb at himself. Ladybug smiled and rolled her eyes at his antics.

“You’re the only black thing that’s talking and moving, so I don’t think it’ll be hard,” she said. “Actually, I could probably sneak up on you, since you won’t be able to smell me coming with all that rose perfume around.”

“You think I’ve always had a cat’s sense of smell? I’m flattered!” He chuckled. “Honestly, I’m happy to just wait until after we prune the garden…” He leaned in close to the screen, putting on another flirtatious smile. “…then I can smell you free from interference...if you’re partial to the idea,
of course...” Another cheeky wink.

Ladybug’s eyes popped, and it felt like her heart jumped and hit its head. She could imagine—as easily—the sensation of Chat Noir’s breath on her neck, and her imagination wanted to run away with it and add the feeling of his hands tenderly holding her face...moving one hand up the back of her neck to weave his fingers into her hair as he traced her collarbone with the claws of the other...

For fuck’s sake, get a grip, Ladybug!! You have an akuma to catch and a city full of citizens to save!! For shame...

She could feel herself blushing, and hoped Chat Noir hadn’t noticed anything off about her expression...ugh, how embarrassing…!

“Um…! Let’s not...get distracted while we’re supposed to be protecting Paris. Also, after we’ve taken care of this latest supervillain...I actually...have some stuff I wanna talk about with you, so...let’s get this over with, huh?”

Chat Noir’s eyebrows shot up and he blinked at her in surprise. Then, his expression turned sly (this darn cat…!)

“Right...gotcha! Let’s get straight down to business, save Paris, and then I’ll be happy to hang back and ‘talk’ alllllllllll you want~!” He shot her his trademark eyebrow-wiggle-and-cheeky-grin combo, and Ladybug had to clench her jaw to keep it from dropping open.

Is he for real right now?! Am I the only one who’s all nervous and bashful?! No way, that’s not fair...

Chat Noir broke the tension by bursting into laughter. The sound made her heart throb and a tiny shiver went up the back of her neck; it was such a pure and happy sound...it made her feel warm and sunny inside. It had been such a long time since she had heard him laugh like that...

...wait. Had she heard him laugh like that before? She couldn’t remember when...

“Sorry, sorry! I’ll behave, I promise!” he chuckled. “Aw man, you shouldn’t seen your face...!”

He really does have a bright smile... she thought, smiling.

“Silly kitty,” she said. “We’ve been chatting too long; I’m gonna hang up and swing on over.”

“Okie dokie! See you soon!”

She hung up and located the blinking green paw print on the map on her bug-phone, showing where Chat Noir was relative to her location. She still couldn’t get into her fight-ready mood for the fight with a supervillain that was surely to come.

How am I going to keep myself from scooping him up into a big hug when I see him? Or just smacking him a big ol’ kiss?? I can’t deny it anymore...He’s just too dorky and adorable...He’s adorkable! Ah, I’m a mess...

~

As soon as Ladybug dropped down beside the school building, the smell of the roses hit her like a tidal wave.

“Urgh!” She pinched her nose shut as she slipped around the corner. Even without Chat Noir’s
enhanced sense of smell, the stench was almost strong enough to make her start coughing. Sure enough, it was like the entire building was covered in scented plug-ins. The roses smelled just like real roses, but just WAY too strong to be pleasant.

Just around the corner, she found Chat Noir waiting for her, sitting like a cat for no reason that she could think of except for the heck of it. He looked up excitedly as she approached and beamed at her, blinking once very slowly at her. The gesture struck her as very endearing, even though it was odd to see someone blink so slowly…

“Hi…” he greeted her, all traces of his earlier bravado replaced with warm sincerity.

“Hi, kitty,” she greeted, squatting down next to him. She reached out without thinking and started affectionately scratching his scalp through his thick blonde hair. His eyes widened at her forwardness, and she swore she could almost see sparkles in his eyes. Then, his eyelids drooped and a lazy smile spread across his face as seemed to sag slightly in place. Then, she heard it…

Awwww, he’s purring! I’m making him purr!! Oh my god, he’s so cute, I can’t handle it!! Hnnnng, wanna kiss hiiiiiiiimm…!!!

SHUT THE FUCK UP, LADYBUG!!!

She affectionately brushed his bangs out of his face before reluctantly (v-e-r-y reluctantly) pulling back. She made a mental note to play with his hair more later.

“Come on, chaton ,” she said, standing up. “Let’s find a way into the school and take care of Aimee, okay?”

Chat Noir blinked several times and then gave his head a vigorous shake, like a cat with something stuck to its face.

“Y-yeah, uh, right!” He stood up next her, and then gagged and pinched his nose shut.

“Ugh, these roses are horrible! ” he grumbled. “My head is killing me...URGH!” He abruptly let go of his nose and coughed. “Oh, god-- ACK! --don’t breathe through your mouth, that makes it even worse!”

Ladybug glanced at him in confusion. She had just pinched her own nose shut and had found breathing through her mouth to be a vast improvement, though it left an unpleasant aftertaste in her mouth.

“If you say so…” she said. She turned toward the rose-covered wall and backed up several paces to get a better view of the side of the building. Looking up at the edge of the roof, she knew she could easily use her yo-yo to get up there, but was it safe? Having Chat Noir use Cataclysm on the thorny wall of roses was another option, of course, but as she had told him earlier, doing this seemed wasteful and risky. There was no telling what would happen once they confronted the supervillain-turned-Aimee inside, and they might need his Cataclysm later. Chat Noir could also get to the roof using his staff, but again, they had no idea what might happen. Trying to shove their way through the roses by force was obviously a bad idea, even if their supersuits protected them from getting pricked by the thorns. Just because all the roses had done so far was stink up the place didn’t mean they were harmless. Who knew what would happen if they were touched?

She remembered that the gym of the school was in the very center of the building under an opening in the roof. She didn’t think she could jump down into it from any nearby buildings--they were all just a bit too far away. Chat Noir might be able to propel himself over the opening with his staff and
drop down into it without touching the school building, but she couldn’t do the same thing with her yo-yo without something to lasso. She supposed she could lasso his staff if he extended it up through the roof, but once he was inside, the supervillain would probably spring into action, and then their plan might be fucked. They should drop down into the gym together, so that neither of them risked being captured without the other’s support, or left behind if the way in got blocked by more roses. After all, there was a good chance that this was a trap.

“Did I ever tell you how I love watching a plan form behind that face of yours, my Lady?” Chat Noir murmured warmly near her left ear. She felt him tuck a lock of loose hair behind her ear tenderly with the tip of a claw. A delightful little shiver shot straight up the back of her neck and made her scalp tingle, and she was seized with the sudden urge to turn to face him, seize him, and kiss him absolutely senseless. By the skin of her teeth, she resisted, but she couldn’t stop a shivery sigh from escaping, and she very much doubted Chat Noir missed the shiver up her neck, or the flush bloom across her cheeks. She took a deep breath and swallowed before responding:

“Well, the plan I was forming is gone, now; you’re distracting me,” she scolded, refusing to look at him as she stared at the edge of the school roof.

Chat Noir gasped very softly in delighted surprise. “I’m distracting!? Ah, how long has it been my dream to be able to distract my Lady!”

“There’s a time and a place for being distracting, and this isn’t it, Cat ssanova,” she quipped back, as she retrieved her train of thought. “Okay, I think I’ve got a plan.” She finally turned to face him and leaned sideways to point at his staff, which was secured at the small off his back. “You’re gonna take out your staff, extend it, and prop it up at a 45-degree angle pointing toward the school roof. I’m going to balance on it and hold on while you extend it until I’m directly over the opening in the roof, and you need to make sure it doesn’t touch the roses. When I’m in place, I’ll drop down through the roof and bring the end of the staff down with me. You’re going to hold onto the other end of the staff, and so my acting as a counter-weight should turn your staff into a teeter-totter, and bring you up over the roof where you can drop in right after me. You’ll probably be best off clinging to your staff with your arms and legs wrapped around it for when I bring you up. You got all that?”

“Yup! Brilliant!” he chirped. “I’m not too thrilled about being yanked into the air, but I’ll just hang on for dear life just like you said!”

“Good boy!” she replied. “Okay, let’s do this!”

Chat Noir took out his staff and extended it to about two meters long. He grasped it firmly at the center and propped it on his shoulder, pointing it at the school building behind him. Ladybug grabbed on with both hands and carefully climbed up the length of it, hunched over and balancing on her toes with her knees bent. She felt rather like a mutant chameleon.

Chat Noir craned his neck to watch her climb his staff, beaming at her in a deceptively-innocent manner.

_Careful where you ogle, tomcat!_ she couldn’t help but think.

Once she had climbed past his shoulder, she carefully straddled the staff and locked her legs around it, and then flattened herself against it.

“You can hang onto it like this, okay?” she said, glancing at him.

“Yeah, got it,” he confirmed, nodding. “Just say when!”
“Okay, I’m ready.”

Chat Noir pressed the paw-print-shaped button on the staff, and Ladybug saw the edge of the school roof start to draw closer and closer as she was pushed towards it by the staff as it extended. She looked down as she passed just over the surface of the roof and watched the opening in the roof draw near. She felt the staff bend slightly under her weight, but trusted in its indestructibility and Chat Noir’s strength.

“Okay, stop!” she called over her shoulder. The staff stopped extending with her right above the open roof. “Get ready! I’m dropping down!” She loosened her grip and flipped sideways, letting her legs dangle down. She dangled there for a second, and then the staff tipped over and slid, dropping her towards the gym floor as Chat Noir no doubt jumped onto his end of the staff and was launched upward by her counterweight.

“Whoa-oo-ooa!” Chat Noir slid down the staff like a fire fighter on a firepole. He touched down right next to her and then took the staff from her, returning it to its normal length and then holding it at the ready. Ladybug scanned the gym and took in the sight of even more black roses growing all around them right out of the concrete. She pinched her nose shut again; the smell was overwhelming. Chat Noir started coughing, and she saw his eyes were starting to water.

“GACK! UGH, I can’t breathe!” he croaked.

Suddenly, Ladybug heard the sound of accelerating plant growth right above them. Looking up, she saw the black roses growing to cover up the opening in the roof, blocking their exit.

“So it was a trap,” she remarked. “Good thing we made sure to come in together.”

“All thanks to your plan!” Chat Noir said hoarsely, beaming at her in spite of his obvious physical discomfort. “I’d say you really rose to the occasion!”

Ladybug groaned. “I should’ve known...you got any more puns saved up that I should brace myself for?”

“Oh, I’m gonna have as much fun as possible with this one!” he responded with a wink. “I wonder if Aimee will appreciate my wit and sense of humor?”

Before Ladybug could think of a comeback, she heard a vaguely-familiar voice call out to them.

“Finally! Ladybug and Chat Noir! You two sure took your time!”

The overgrown thicket of roses parted to reveal the akumatized Aimee: Her long, wild auburn ponytail was unmistakable, and she was once again sporting fairy wings at her back. Instead of a sunny dress, however, she was outfitted in a pitch-black leotard--form-fitted like her own supersuit--with a long tutu sparkling with deep blood-red glitter. A single black rose adorned her ponytail like a barrette, and Ladybug was willing to bet that was where the akumatized was.

“Were you afraid to come and face me?” she asked, staring imperiously at them. “Or…” She paused, appearing distracted as though a thought had occurred to her. She smiled slyly. “Maybe you two got distracted …”

Ladybug glanced at Chat Noir in mild bewilderment, and saw he looked as confused as she was.

“There’s…certainly a lot to do in Paris,” Ladybug remarked, “But we take our jobs as superheroes very seriously. Somebody’s got to keep Hawk Moth and his supervillains from endangering innocent people...say, from being smothered by giant thorny roses?”
“I’d say turning Paris into a noxious jungle makes your roses the most distracting thing in Paris,” Chat Noir tagged on, coughing again. “Though not in a good way; why are they all black? Where are all the red, white, yellow, or pink roses? And you, Aimee, or whatever-you-call-yourself-now, what’s with the gothic getup? Shouldn’t your cheeks be rosy and your lips red as a rose? I gotta say, I’m disappointed.”

“Talk trash all you want, but the fact is, you’ve fallen into my trap, and you’re never getting out until you surrender your miraculouses! As for my name, it’s Black Rose Fairy!” She fluttered into the air, and the roses sprang to life, growing at an alarming speed towards Ladybug and Chat Noir. “And what I meant was that you two might have gotten distracted by each other’s company. I hear things between you have really started to heat up! Have you been bitten by the love-bug, Ladybug? Have you been feeling frisky, black kitty?”

Ladybug felt her face turn red faster than a traffic light, and she swore steam would start coming out of her ears and nose out of embarrassment and anger.

“How do you--?! When did you--?! Wha--?! You--! YOU JUST MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS!” she shrieked, bobbing and weaving under and around the attacking roses. Thank GOD she won’t remember any of this after we turn her back to normal, she thought, But...HOW DOES SHE KNOW IN THE FIRST PLACE?

“Oh, have you and Hawk Moth been gossiping about us, now?!” Chat Noir demanded incredulously. He used his staff to beat back a trio of attacking roses and then extended it to propel himself over them. “Are you envious of our love, purr -haps? Or is Hawk Moth feeling a case of sour grapes because he hasn’t been able to get any action lately because he’s been hiding out in his evil lair?”

Both Ladybug and Black Rose Fairy yelled, “EEEWWW!!”

Ladybug added, “Just because you’re probably right doesn’t mean you should say it!” She stumbled slightly as she ran and dodged: the concrete under her feet kept cracking and quaking from the rapid growth of the roses’ roots under the surface. While she could use her yo-yo to tie up the growing plants, it wouldn’t be of much use if the roses could just keep growing, and Black Rose Fairy could just summon more, as many as she wanted. There wasn’t a safe way to try to lasso Black Rose out of the air, either; she could fly out of the way easily, and that was without all the roses blocking Ladybug’s way. How could they stop them from growing…?

Chat Noir called out, “Hey, B.R.F.! I got a joke for ya! What happened to the rose when another rose was added to it?”

“Don’t call me that!” Black Rose yelled back.

“The rose rose!” Chat Noir snickered at his own joke, only to let out a startled yelp as a bunch of roses attacked him from above, where they were growing downward from the roof. He leapt out of the way, separating his staff into two segments and throwing them at Black Rose like boomerangs. She only narrowly avoided them, and Ladybug wished she could think of a way to put his distraction to good use…

“IIIIIIII’VE BEEEEEEEEN KISSED BY A ROOOOOOSE…!”

Oh, great, now he’s breaking into song?!

“Stop running around!!” Black Rose yelled, gesturing wildly as she tried to capture them. “Why aren’t you falling under my spell?!”
“SHE LEFT ME ROSES BY THE STAAAIIIIIRRRRS!! A SURPRISE TO LET ME KNOW SHE CAAAARRES!!”

What? Her spell? What spell?

Confused, Ladybug glanced in Chat Noir’s direction; she failed to catch his eye, as he was too busy dodging flowers. Well, that and…

“I WANNA LAAAAAAYYYY YOOOOOUUUU DOOOOWWWWN IN A BED OF ROOOOOOOSES!!” he was now singing. Ladybug might have groaned again, except 1) This time, they were lyrics from one of Jagged Stone’s newest singles, and 2) It made Black Rose scream in frustration to have Chat Noir continue to taunt her.

“Are you saying your roses aren’t just for making Paris reek?” Ladybug asked. “I’m sure they’re giving a lot of people breathing problems by now, but…”

“Why would I just want Paris to smell like roses?” Black Rose retorted, flushing angrily. “I’m making everyone in Paris my servants, so that they can ridicule and humiliate and intimidate everyone who’s been tormenting me!”

Is that why Chat Noir and I have these horrible headaches? Ladybug wondered. Because the scent of the roses is supposed to brainwash us? But then, why isn’t it working? Is it just because we’re superheroes…? That never seemed to protect us from spells before…poor Chat Noir knows that from experience…

“And who would be better to lead the march than you and Chat Noir?” Black Rose continued. “Especially you, Chat Noir…I told them you had my back, but they didn’t believe me…but we’ll show them, won’t we?”

The roses pursuing Ladybug suddenly seemed to change course. To her horror, they were all now growing towards Chat Noir, even faster than before!

“CHAT NOIR!” Ladybug flung her yo-yo in a desperate attempt to capture even some of the roses before they reached him, but there were just too many! In a flash, Chat Noir was completely cocooned in thorny roses. They wiggled and squirmed as he obviously struggled to get free, but then the smell of the roses intensified even more, making her feel slightly lightheaded. Seconds later, the roses grew still.

“Oh no…”

Resigned to the fact that she might have to defend against a hostile Chat Noir now, too, Ladybug decided it was now or never.

“Lucky Charm!!”

A red and black-spotted lawn rake appeared. Ladybug mused that it might make a slightly better weapon against aggressive giant plants, but there were just so many of them … How was she supposed to get close enough to Black Rose to snatch away her hair clip?

Before she could come up with a plan, she caught sight of Black Rose landing at the top of the stairs to the second floor of the school, where the net of roses was pulling itself apart to release Chat Noir. He squatted cat-like beside her like a loyal pet, and Black Rose stroked the top of his head fondly, smiling victoriously.

“Now you’re my kitty,” she said in a sickeningly-sweet tone. “Now, take down Ladybug so we can
take her Miraculous. Once Hawk Moth gets what he wants, he’ll spare you for me, and then you can stay my kitty forever!”

“THAT’S MY KITTY, YOU WITCH!!”

Ladybug’s sudden ejaculation seemed to shock Black Rose into silence, and both her and Chat Noir’s eyes bulged in shock. Ladybug had taken herself by surprise most of all; she was almost never one to lose her cool in a fight against a supervillain, even when Chat Noir was turned against her. But the way Black Rose had been talking to him… petting him…!

It made her blood boil with rage.

Chat Noir was the first to move again: he leapt down to face Ladybug and brandished his staff.

“Well, shall we get this over with…my Lady?” he asked smoothly.

Ladybug blinked and squinted imperceptibly at him… She saw Black Rose flutter down to stand behind him to watch the action unfold. She glanced down at the rake in her hands again, then looked up again at Chat Noir. They stared each other down for a moment, and then…

It clicked. Her eyes widened in comprehension.

_It’s because we’re in heat! We can’t be brainwashed! He’s pretending!! He’s holding his staff at the ready to--!!_

She smiled triumphantly.

“Bring it on!” she cried.

She charged at him, raising the rake above her head to strike. Chat Noir backflipped away from her, his staff coming down on a line of roses and breaking their stems as they were pinned to the concrete. At the exact moment his feet hit the ground at the end of his backflip, Ladybug used his back as a springboard and thrust the rake forward and below her, crushing the second line of roses blocking her way to Black Rose and allowing her to push off even higher into the air. As she landed right behind Black Rose, ready to snatch the barrette from her ponytail, a third wave of roses burst from the concrete, surrounding her, but Ladybug didn’t even get the chance to worry…

“Cataclysm!”

Chat Noir slapped his open palm against the already-destroyed floor of the gym. The fractured concrete crumbled, destabilizing and destroying the roses’ root system. They crumpled to the ground, unable to support themselves.

“NO!!” Black Rose cried.

Ladybug neatly snatched the black rose from her ponytail and crushed the petals in her fist. A black butterfly fluttered out of the ruined flower, instinctively trying to flee.

“No more evil-doing for you, you nasty bug! Time to de-evilize!”

With a flick of her finger, Ladybug flipped open her yo-yo and gracefully flung it skyward, snatching the akuma out of the air almost effortlessly.

“Gotcha!”

Her earrings beeped their four-minute warning as she paused before opening her yo-yo again.
Would the butterfly be sparkling pink again, like last time? Sure enough, when it emerged, it fluttered around her head trailing sparkling lights behind it, glowing ever-so-softly pink.

As it took off, heading wherever magic butterflies go, she picked up her rake and flung it into the air.

“Miraculous Ladybug!”

The swarm of magical ladybugs spread out to cover all of Paris that the roses had overgrown, no doubt freeing all of the people they had brainwashed from their spell and from being trapped indoors. The roses in the gym dissolved into nothing, and the concrete was made intact again. Black Rose Fairy’s costume dissipated, leaving a dazed and confused Aimee in her place.

Ladybug turned to Chat Noir, and they exchanged their traditional fist-bump, beaming identical grins.

“Pound it!”

“Ladybug? Chat Noir?” Aimee was staring at them anxiously. “What happened? Where is everyone? I...oh no...” Her face fell, and she wrung her hands. “I was akumatized again, wasn’t I?”

“Hey, don’t beat yourself up, it wasn’t your fault,” Chat Noir said, gently walking over to her and squatting down next to her (ignoring the beeping of his ring). “You didn’t ask Hawk Moth to turn you into a supervillain! He targeted you and took advantage of your feelings...he’s the only bad guy here!”

Ladybug squatted down on Aimee’s other side and put a comforting hand on her shoulder.

“Chat Noir’s right,” she said. “Those girls are still bullying you, aren’t they? You have every right to be upset for how cruel they’ve been to you! It’s not wrong to feel negative emotions, Aimee. We’re just sorry you had go through this again.”

“Well...I don’t remember anything that happened…” Aimee admitted. “But I must have tried to do something bad, just like last time…”

“Hey, don’t worry! Everything’s gone back to normal!” Ladybug said bracingly. “Nobody got hurt, and Paris is safe!”

“I’m sorry the selfie you took of us didn’t make those girls leave you alone...” Chat Noir said, grimacing. “I hope it didn’t make things worse somehow…”

Aimee squinted with the effort of thinking back to before she was akumatized. “My memory’s kinda fuzzy, even of back then...I think when I told them about you, they laughed and didn’t believe me, and when I tried to show them the picture to prove it…” She squeezed her lips together in a tight, trembling line, appearing to remember something upsetting. “They said it didn’t mean anything...that you just felt sorry for me, and that you would never be interested in a boring girl like me…”

Chat Noir scowled in outrage; Ladybug was positive her face looked exactly the same.

“I just can’t understand how some people can be so nasty…” he said with a frustrated sigh.

“I wonder at that a lot, too,” Ladybug said with a grim nod. “My best guess is, some people just have to put other people down to feel good about themselves...because they’re jealous, or they don’t like themselves deep down, I dunno…”
“Well, do you think I did it just because I felt sorry for you?” Chat Noir asked Aimee.

Aimee looked up at him and shook her head meekly.

“And, I say there’s no such thing as a boring person!” he added brightly. “You certainly aren’t boring! I don’t know you very well, of course, but I know you really like Summer Fae, and I happen to enjoy that series, too!” He gave her a friendly wink, and a bright grin.

“Really?” Aimee smiled shyly but brightly at him. “You’re not just saying that?”

“Now, does this look like the face of a liar?” Chat asked, gesturing to his still-grinning face with a finger.

Aimee laughed. “No, it doesn’t!”

Ladybug smiled at the heart-warming scene; here was proof again that Chat Noir really did have quite the sweet side...actually, it reminded her of Adrien: so warm and kind, and happily helpful and supportive...she remembered when her great-uncle had come to Paris all the way from China last year to compete for the title of World’s Greatest Chef on a cooking show. Not only had Adrien been happy to act as translator and have his bodyguard chauffeur them all to Le Grand Paris, but he had been quick to reassure Marinette when she expressed doubts that her great-uncle even liked her, or appreciated the bouquet she had given him. And when Chloe had sabotaged her great-uncle’s soup just because Marinette had antagonized her (for being rude and nasty as usual), Adrien had been on her side 100%. Ah, he had even put a comforting on her shoulder...so sweet!...

Her earrings beeped again, ending her train of thought and sending her into a very slight panic. She wanted to help Aimee just as much as Chat Noir did, but they needed to make this quick...she still needed to have that talk with Chat Noir…

Her stomach gave a nervous wiggle at the thought.

She cupped her chin thoughtfully, trying to think of how they might stop those girls from bullying Aimee anymore...or help Aimee better handle their bullying emotionally. If these girls were anything like Chloe, a warning from Chat Noir and herself was unlikely to change the way they treated other people. What Aimee needed was a boost in confidence, so that she could ignore the girls’ insults. The problem was, there was no quick, simple way to increase someone’s confidence; she knew this from her own personal experiences with Chloe.

This gave her an idea...but she was a little hesitant to put it to use: it required her to share a tiny detail about her personal life. It wasn’t something that could be used to find her secret identity, though...right…?

Chat Noir’s ring beeped again. They had less than three minutes. She couldn’t think of anything else they could do without getting themselves way too invested in Aimee’s life, so she decided to go with it.

“Listen, Aimee…Chat Noir and I need to be going, but let me give you some advice,” she said. “There really isn’t any fool-proof way to make bullies stop bullying other people; the best thing to do is to work on raising your own confidence and just ignoring them. It’s a lot easier said than done, I know, but you’re the only person you have control over. And I’ll tell you something…”

She glanced nervously in Chat Noir’s direction. He wouldn’t get upset hearing her share a personal detail with someone else before him, would he?

“...there’s...a girl who’s been going to the same schools as I have for years, and for the longest time,
she’s been trying to make my life miserable. It took me...a long time to build up the confidence to stand up to her, and you know what? She still says nasty things to me and everybody else, but it doesn’t matter so much anymore because I’ve taught myself to not care about anything she says. Those girls say all those nasty things to you just to try to upset you; none of it is true, and how could it be if they don’t even know you?”

Both Aimee and Chat Noir listened to her inspirational lecture with rapt attention. In fact, they were wearing almost identical expressions of awe. It made her blush a little.

“So...think you’ll be okay?” Ladybug stood up and held out a hand to Aimee. “It’s okay to be upset, or mad, or disgusted...and it’s okay to cry if you need to. Just don’t let them make you feel down on yourself.”

Aimee smiled tremulously at her and took her hand, letting her pull her to her feet. Chat Noir stood up as well. Ladybug noticed that he was glancing between her and Aimee with an uncharacteristically distant expression, like he was lost in thought.

“Thank you, Ladybug...Chat Noir...” Aimee said. “I’m gonna try really hard to not let them get to me so much anymore...I think it’ll be easier, now, because you’ve been so supportive of me.”

“I’m glad! Now let’s get you back to solid ground!”

By the time Aimee had been sent on her way home (she assured them it wasn’t a long walk), both Ladybug and Chat Noir had less than two minutes left.

“We gotta split and feed our kwamis!” Ladybug exclaimed, starting to panic. “I’ll meet you...on the Arc de Triomphe, okay?!”

“Okay-see-you-soon!” Chat Noir replied hurriedly in one breath. He scampered away in the opposite direction as she headed straight for the old familiar sanctuary of the girls’ bathroom.

Her transformation dissolved just as she flung herself through the door. No one else was in there, thank god, but still...she couldn’t just count on being lucky when it came to protecting her identity.

Tikki was quick to remind of this, of course.

“That was way too close!” she squeaked softly, sitting up in Marinette's cupped hands and looking tired and frazzled. “Marinette, if anyone had been in here...!”

“I know, I’m sorry!” Marinette whined, wincing. “Oh, I hope Chat Noir got to a safe hiding place in time!”

“You can make sure he’s okay as soon as I’ve gotten my strength back,” Tikki said, trying to sound reassuring as Marinette deposited the little kwami into her purse. “I’ll try to eat this cookie quickly!”

~

Adrien sat hunched up and curled into a ball with his arms around his knees as Plagg savored his cheese with what seemed to Adrien to be as much noise as possible. He silently vowed to never hide behind a dumpster again except as a last resort: Even with the lid down, the odor of rotten food and various other disgusting substances still managed to waft its way to Adrien’s nose, and the stench of Camembert right next to next to him made it three times worse. Had he always had such a sensitive nose, or was his heat giving him an enhanced sense of smell as Adrien as well as Chat Noir?
“Do I have the feline sense of smell as Adrien as well as Chat Noir?” Adrien asked aloud, addressing Plagg. “Or is this just a really smelly dumpster?”

“You’ve kinda always had a better-than-average sense of smell,” Plagg replied with his mouth full. “Nobody else seems to notice you smelling like Camembert.”

“That’s because most people are too polite to tell me I stink to my face, probably,” Adrien grumbled.

“Well, even with just your human sense of smell, certain scents will stick out to you more,” Plagg continued, ignoring Adrien’s complaining. “As Chat Noir, you smell everything better than you used to, but a certain few smells a lot better than usual. As Adrien, you’ll smell everything the same as you always have, but if you smell those certain smells, your heat-and hormone-addled brain will still go, ‘Woot! Ladybug Alert!’”

Adrien instantly honed in on Plagg’s emphasis on the phrase “certain smells,” which set off the alarm bells in his head.

“And, by ‘certain smells,’ you’re referring to…?” he asked tensely.

Plagg swallowed the last of his cheese before replying, which filled Adrien with a now-very-familiar sense of dread.

“Basically any and all scents that Ladybug gives off,” Plagg finally said offhandedly. “But particularly skin, sweat, and arousal.”

“Uh…arousal has a smell?” Adrien asked curiously but nervously, his eyes bugging out.

Plagg leered at him sideways and smiled…it was an expression that filled Adrien with terror.

“Well, of course…” he crooned slyly. “As a female, she gets wet when she’s aroused, and that has a smell, doesn’t it?”

Adrien instantly turned cherry-red and emitted a low whine, hiding his face in his arms. Plagg snickered.

“Why do you do this to me?” Adrien groaned. “That doesn’t make this any easier for me to endure, and I thought you trying to help me…so that I don’t have to suffer so much!”

“Sexual fantasies are completely harmless,” Plagg replied carelessly. “And it’s not like you won’t have plenty of them without me giving you food for thought.”

“Exactly!” Adrien explained indignantly. “I don’t need you pushing me down the gutter when I can slide down all by myself!”

“Hey, you asked about your sense of smell, I just answered your questions,” Plagg replied with a pompous sniff. “This way, when the smell of Ladybug’s arousal hits your nose like a stormwind, you won’t be caught totally off-guard.”

Adrien had no comeback to this, and in any case, he was preoccupied with kink-shaming himself for trying to imagine this scent that, with no previous sexual experience, he had never been acquainted with. After giving himself a mental slap on both cheeks, he looked up at Plagg again.

“Well…you’re finished eating, right? It’s time to transform again, so I can meet Ladybug.”

“Okay, have fun!” Plagg replied, smirking.
“Ugh! Plagg, Transform Me!”

He squeezed himself out from behind the dumpster and used his staff to propel himself towards the roof. He set off at a brisk pace, leaping gracefully from roof to roof, occasionally running on all fours where there were longer stretches of flat rooftop. He hoped Ladybug hadn’t run into any trouble while looking for a place to transform; they had both cut it pretty close.

The Arc de Triomphe, situated as it was in the intersection of five big streets, seemed to him like not the best place to meet away from prying eyes. He suspected it was simply the first landmark that popped into her head, and he chuckled at the thought of the always-cool-and-collected Ladybug mentally floundering. It never failed to thrill him just a little bit every time he saw a new side of her personality, no matter how insignificant.

Like the fact Ladybug had a bully in her life, and had for many years…it was difficult to imagine Ladybug having a hard time dealing with a bully ever, since she always seemed so confident and self-assured to him…until he remembered the day he had met her, when she had blamed herself for allowing Stoneheart and his army of stone men to run amok because she had failed to capture his akuma the first time. She had been so discouraged…until he had reassured her, reminding her that she had saved Chloé’s life, and that they were the only ones who could save Paris. Then, Hawk Moth had announced himself, and demanded the surrender of their Miraculouses…and Ladybug and strode right up to him and thrown his threats in his face. In that moment, she had been nothing short of glorious, and she had stolen his heart without even trying.

Does she have any idea of how beautiful and incredible she is to me? he wondered, smiling to himself wistfully. Are there even words good enough to express that to her? Ah, I doubt it!

As he approached the Arc de Triomphe, he could see Ladybug was waiting for him from the tiny red figure standing on top of it. As he started scaling the side of it, his heart started pounding in anticipation. When he reached the top, he was met with the sight of her face closer than he expected as she bent over at the waist to catch his gaze.

“Hey, Chat Noir,” she greeted, sounding unusually shy. “Um, I realized as I was heading over here that this actually isn’t a very good place to have a private conversation, so…”

“I was thinking the same thing!” he said good-humoredly. “You wanna lead the way to a better spot?”

“Sure!” She stood and threw her yo-yo, and then swung down and over the streets and cars converging around the great monument. Chat Noir took out his staff again, and followed.

One of the most convenient things about the architecture of Paris was that all the traditional-styled roofs had multiple levels and a lot of features sticking up that provided plenty of places to hide from people like Alya who might try to follow and spy on them. The spot Ladybug lead them to was one of many Chat Noir was also familiar with, and the feeling of increased privacy was comforting, but it also make his heart go pitter-patter, knowing that they could do almost anything they wanted to here without anyone knowing…as long as they weren’t too loud …

Baaaaaaad train of thought. Don’t go there! he thought.

Luckily, Ladybug distracted him as she leaned her back against a jutting section of roof. He immediately took notice of her fidgeting posture, downturned gaze, and stiff shoulders. He stood across from her and adopted a similar pose in an attempt to look relaxed. When she finally looked up at him, they opened their mouths at the same time.
“SO…!”

They both cut themselves off and glanced away with nervous chuckles.

“Uh, sorry! Go ahead!” Ladybug urged him.

“No, no, you first!” he urged back.

“No, it’s fine! What’s up?” she said, grinning.

Chat Noir laughed. They both sounded ridiculous…!

“No, I insist,” he said, gesturing her way. “Hearing what you have to say first will help me figure out how I want to say my part,” he added.

“Oh. Well, in that case…”

She smiled bashfully and fidgeted. She was acting so nervous, he wondered briefly if he should be worried...but, somehow, he was getting the feeling from her demeanor that whatever she had to tell him wasn’t bad news...just something she was feeling awkward about, for whatever reason.

Oh wait, I know! he thought. It’s because of that thing Plagg told me about, where we would get really good at reading each other! I bet that’s also why the fight with Black Rose Fairy went so well! I wonder if Ladybug’s kwami has told her about that yet…

Ladybug finally spoke, which broke his train of thought and caught his attention.

“So…” she began, shifting her weight from foot to foot and tracing the ground with her toe. “I, uh...I’ve been thinking…”

He could see she was trying to smile, and this further reassured him that whatever she was trying to tell him wasn’t going to anything he needed to worry about, when her ambiguous phrasing and hesitation might suggest otherwise. He smiled back at her reassuringly and gave her a patient nod of encouragement.

“About...uh…” She seemed to pause to search for the right words, then sighed and... blushed?

Now he was really curious...

“I’ve been thinking about you a lot lately!” she finally half-yelled at him. “And...! And...! Because I...really liked kissing you, and...I realized I didn’t want things to just end there. I knew...I was going to want to kiss you again, and...maybe more...and yes, I considered the possibility that this was mostly just the mating cycle drawing me to you, but…”

She paused, glancing nervously and bashfully all over the place as she considered what to say next. The break didn’t do much for Chat Noir: he felt like his head was spinning from the sudden onslaught of information...information that was also making his heart bounce off the walls of his chest like a cat on catnip at three in the morning. Oh, and he was blushing, too.

“But...the truth is...I think I...started feeling new things for you a little while before we both went into heat, and...if it really was just the mating cycle making me...you know, think about you and things and whatever…”

No, please, feel free to list what those “things” were that you thought about me… he thought distantly, still staring starstruck at her.
“...then I would just be...um, you know...thinking with my head in the gutter all the time, and *wanting* things…”

*Oh, really? What “things” might those be, my Lady? Perhaps I can be of service…?*

“But that *isn’t* all I think about.” She finally managed to look at him and hold his gaze. “I think about you, and I...wonder about things about you, like…” She lost her nerve and dropped her gaze again shyly. “Like, what you’re like in school: are you the class clown who just tries to get everybody to laugh? Do you spend class time passing notes between your buddies, or goofing off on your phone or doodling on paper? Or do you actually pay attention and take notes and study? I wonder if you’re in any extracurricular activities, and what you do for fun in your spare time...I wonder what you like to wear day-to-day, what your favorite color is, what you--”

She cut herself off as she no-doubt noticed his current expression. He realized belatedly that he was starting to feel a lump forming in his throat and quite possibly tears starting to form in his eyes.

*She actually wants to know me better...* he thought, his heart now swelling with affection for her. *She’s always made it so hard to tell whether she wanted to keep our partnership strictly professional, or if she just felt like we had to in order to protect our identities...does this mean she actually wishes we could tell each other who we are?*

“...Chat Noir?”

*Ladybug stepped closer to him, staring up at him with some concern, but mostly wonder. She was close enough for him to catch a hint of her scent on the air...delicate, warm, sweet, and many other things that he didn’t have words for.*

*I love this girl so much...*

He glanced down and hesitantly took her hands in his. She didn’t take them away, and he gave them a gentle squeeze.

“I...never knew whether or not you ever thought of me as *anything* other than your partner,” he said softly. “Now I’m hearing my Lady might actually want to get to know me more, as a friend...or something more?”

He hoped he didn’t sound presumptuous with that afterthought. Ladybug didn’t react as if he did, at least...

Instead, she lurched forward and wrapped her arms around him in a hug. *Chat Noir froze in surprise. What was even happening?*

“Yes...” she said softly, squeezing him. “Something more! Don’t ask me what to call it, because I don’t know, I just...! I just know that, last week, I was terrified of how the mating cycle might affect me, but now...I’m not afraid of it anymore. I want...I want to see where this goes.”

*Chat Noir felt like he had been struck by lightning. He blinked, then looked down at the top of Ladybug’s head. Her scent wafted all around him, and he impulsively buried his nose in her hair and just breathed her in, wrapping his arms around her to complete their embrace.*

“You’re saying...” he murmured into her hair, “You...feel something...more than friendship...for me?”

There was a pause, as she seemed to take her time absorbing his question and trying to figure out her feelings. Then, he felt a shiver go up her spine and heard her let out a breath of air. *She smooshed*
her face into his sternum and squeezed him even tighter. Then, he thought he heard her sneeze, and he almost panicked.

“Yes…” she whispered. “I…” She did sound close to tears! What was happening?! “I...I think I’m falling in love with you, you silly cat.”

All of the air in his lungs was knocked right out of him by her words, and—again—he felt the tears coming on again. He squeezed his eyes shut against them as his face was split into a watery smile, and he nuzzled his nose and lips into her hair.

Am I dreaming? he wondered. Or is this really happening right now? Oh, god, if this is a dream, PLEASE don’t wake up yet! And if this is real…!

He felt his purr start up.

“Y-y-you do? I-I mean, y-you are?” he croaked.

She giggled, and the sound made his heart do a happy wiggle. Then, she looked up at him, dislodging his face from her hair. He could see her eyes shimmering with emotion, and her smile was blinding. She reached up and affectionately scratched him behind the ears (his real ears, not the cat ears). This sent delightful little shivers all across his scalp and down his spine, and before he knew it, he found himself trying to nuzzle against her hand. She kept her fingers buried in his hair, and so he took her hand in his and pressed a kiss against her palm. He heard a tiny, soft gasp; opening his eyes, he saw her gazing up at him in wonder. He smiled at her.

“You make this cat the happiest in Paris, my Lady,” he said warmly, his voice slightly distorted by purring. She smiled back.

“You...you make me happy, too, mon minou,” she said, blushing. She dropped her gaze bashfully for a moment, then seemed to suddenly remember something, and looked up at him again.

“Oh! I forgot! You had something you wanted to talk about, too, right?”

“Oh, yeah…” he rubbed the back of his head sheepishly and cleared his throat against the purr-induced tickle there. He let her take her hand back. “So...I was actually going to ask you...what kind of approach you wanted to take with the mating cycle, but you’ve kind of answered the question already...at least, part of it.”

Ladybug thought for a moment, then pouted.

“Well...obviously spending more time together than we need to still isn’t the best idea, since that’ll make us get worse more quickly, but...well, we’ve seen how good at that we’ve been so far! I don’t think I can...suddenly whip myself back into good behavior, and I...don’t really want you to feel like you have to either…”

“Why, Buginette!…” he said, grinning at her and raising his eyebrows. “Are you saying you want to be able to mess around a little bit?”

Ladybug’s face turned the same color as her suit.

“Wha-! You--!” She looked away and puffed out her cheeks in the most adorable pout he had ever seen.

“...that’s not the phrasing I would use, but...you’re not wrong, I guess…”
“Whoo!” he crowed. He leaned forward and grinned at her and gave her the wiggle-waggle eyebrow dance. “I must say, I’m veeeeeeery much looking forward to getting acquainted with this side of you, Buginette."

Her shoulders rose up on either side of her head, but she held his gaze.

“Well, I’m...interested to see how you handle it~!” She smiled innocently.

*Oh my god, I’m still falling...this, right here, is the woman of my dreams, without a doubt.*

“But for now…” she turned slightly more serious. “Let’s just play it by ear, since we’ll only see each other when a supervillain appears, anyway. We still won’t go on any patrols, to make sure we don’t run into each other, and no unnecessary calls on our gadgets. Otherwise…” She trailed off suggestively.

“How about I just follow your lead, and you take things wherever you want, okay?” he suggested, reaching out to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. “And if at any point you want me to be the more responsible of the two of us, I’ll make sure you don’t get us carried away where you don’t us to.”

“Can you do that, though?” she wondered aloud, shifting side-to-side uncertainly. “It’s not that I don’t trust you, I just...well, if it got bad enough, maybe no amount of self-control will be enough...I hope that’s not the case, but…”

“If it’s for you, for us, I can do anything,” he said, putting a hand over his heart. “And hey, it won’t just be me: we’ll support each other, and play it by ear like you said.”

After a moment, she smiled and nodded.

“Okay...” she said softly. “One day at a time...”

She glanced down at the ground and started fidgeting again...was there something else she wanted to say?

“We should...probably go our separate ways right about now...” she hedged. “But…”

“But...?” he echoed hopefully before he could stop himself.

She pressed her lips together for a moment and looked up at him again. Then, she took a half-step closer to him and very delicately took hold of his arms just above the elbows. His heart instantly starting beating triple-time, and a soft gasp escaped him.

“Before I go...may I...kiss you again?”

He shivered at the sound of her murmur, and his heart seemed to slam itself against the front wall of his rib cage. So many variations of “hell yes” popped up for consideration in his mind that he failed to settle on any of them. Instead, he put his arms around her and gently pulled her close without a word, leaning forward just enough to bring his face down to her level.

He was not prepared for the enthusiasm of Ladybug’s response, which was to stand on tiptoe and fling her arms around his neck as she pressed her lips hungrily against his. He wrapped his arms around her waist and scooped her up against him so he could feel the soft warmth of her body pressed flush against his. She hummed in pleasure, and then as their lips softly detached from each other, twin gasps of air escaped them, and he felt her warm breath against his open lips before Ladybug was kissing him again...and again! He kissed her back insistently, desperately...he just couldn’t get enough of her! And from the way she tilted her head up to meet him so eagerly...
time, hugging herself tightly against him and panting in-between kisses, he knew she couldn’t get enough of him. He was floating on clouds and sinking into the ocean at the same time, his brain gone foggy and his heart fluttering like a bird. Kissing came so effortlessly now, no longer shy and awkward but certain and passionate, like a dance between them. Determined to not be the first one to pull back for air, he struggled to keep breathing through his nose; the sweet fragrance of her skin flooded his nose, and he longed to bury his face into every dip, nook, and valley of her body to fill his lungs with her, and then rub and nuzzle every hill and curve of her, lapping at her skin with his tongue, until she smelled like him, like his …!

The volume of his purr had just about doubled, and he could feel the vibration of it in his lips and tongue (which meant that Ladybug could almost certainly feel it as they kissed). He suddenly nosed his way under her chin and started nuzzling her neck, tracing his nose in aimless little swirls under her jawline and sprinkling teeny-tiny kisses all over. He felt her bury her fingers in his hair, and her breathing came in shallow, uneven little gasps. She made a little sound that was like a cross between a hum of pleasure and a giggle of delight...it made his heart sing to hear her relish his feline displays of affection, and he sighed dreamily before stealing a taste of her skin where it was exposed just above the neck of her suit...oh, god, if desire had a taste, it was this! He let out a low whine...Ugh, he WANTED!! He opened his mouth wider and dragged his teeth against her skin, almost panting against her neck at this point. When she gasped in surprise, however, it was loud and sudden enough to snap him out of his trance, and he jerked his head back like he had been stung on the nose by a bee.

She stared wide-eyed at him as he blinked rapidly and struggled to catch his breath. He gave his head a little shake in an attempt to clear it, but his nose was still filled with the smell of her …

“S-sorry, I--! I--uh--!” He swallowed heavily. “I...guess, uh...the tomcat in me got carried away…”

Ladybug blinked and seemed to come out of a daze of her own.

“Oh! Uh, don’t worry, it’s okay!” She smiled bashfully, blushing pinker than a watermelon. “You didn’t hurt me or...make me feel uncomfortable, or anything.” She inclined her head to stare him in the eyes mischievously. “I’m guessing that was the love-biting you were talking about that one time…?”

Somehow , he felt his face heat up even more , and his eyes bugged out. Then he slapped a palm to his face.

“Oh my god…!” he groaned. “I didn’t even…! Ugh, I’m a devolving mess…”

Ladybug giggled, and he took his hand away from his face to look at her in surprise.

“Really, I don’t mind!” she said, grinning. “I mean…” She glanced around shyly. “It would defeat the purpose if your feline tendencies scared me off, right? They’re part of the mating cycle because they’re supposed to help you...win me over, right?”

“I...guess you’ve got a point…” he said, mulling it over. “Wait…” He fixed her with what he hoped was a seductively mischievous gaze and grinned. “Are you saying it’s working?”

“Uhhhhhh…!” Her hot-pink blush and deer-in-the-headlights expression said it all, and so, of course, all he could do was beam at her with unrestrained glee.

“Awww, you do have a soft spot for kitty-cats!” he gushed, squishing her cheeks between his hands. “All this time, I just had to give in to my instincts!”
“Oh noooo, you’ve discovered my secret fetish for cat-boys,” she drawled. “Whatever shall I doooo?”

“I mean, if I got what’chu want, and you want what I got…”

“Ooh, careful with your choice of words, chaton!” she teased, booping his nose with a finger. He let go of her face and chuckled.

“If I’m being honestly serious, though,” she added, “I should...probably get going…” She took a step back away from him with obvious reluctance. “Before we lose track of time again…”

“Afraid you won’t be able to keep your hands off me?” he teased.

“Afraid we won’t be able to keep our hands off each other …” she corrected softly, fixing him in what he swore was the closest thing to bedroom eyes he had ever seen on any human in person.

Yeah, THAT ’LL help me keep my hands off you, definitely!! he thought sarcastically, hoping that his still-lingering arousal wasn’t… ahem , PROMINENTLY visible.

“Uh, yeah! You’re right, of course!” he managed to say, smiling sheepishly. “I guess I’ll...see you around?”

Ladybug chuckled, turning to leave. “Yeah...s-see you around!” she said softly.

“Oh, wait! Before you go, one more thing…”

Ladybug paused, looking at him curiously and turning to face him again.

“Just to...satisfy your earlier curiosity a little bit…” He scratched the back of his head awkwardly and then folded his hands behind his head in an attempt to look at-ease, but when he spoke, the soft warmth in his voice was somewhat at odds with his casual posture.

“My...favorite color is blue. I really like playing video games and watching anime online, and I’m...actually a very diligent student, though I have been known to pass notes and have whispered exchanges with my...friend who sits next to me. I apologize if I’ve ruined any bad-boy fantasies you may have had of me!” he added jokingly.

Ladybug giggled.

“You’ve done a lot of punning and posing and showing off over the year that I’ve known you, but I never got the impression that you were a bad-boy! And it’s a good thing you never tried that particular approach, because bad boys are not my type!”

“I didn’t think they were, but it’s great to hear!” he replied with laugh.

She gazed at him in silent wonder for a moment, taking in the little jewels of information he had just gifted her and smiling, every bit as happy as he hoped she would be to learn just a little bit more about him.

“Thanks, Chat Noir…” she said. She took a deep breath…

“...My favorite color is pink,” she said. “I always try to do my best in school, so I’m a pretty good student, but I shine best when I get to use my creativity...I’m really into arts and crafts, I guess you could say...and I really like video games, too.”
She turned around and took out her yo-yo.

“S-see you soon!”

And off she went.

Chat Noir held a hand to his chest.

*This girl’s gonna be the death of me…* he thought dreamily, a gooey smile spreading across his face.

*Either by kissing the breath out of me, or because she’s drop-dead gorgeous! Heh, I crack myself up…”*

He took out his stick and turned and set off for home.

*Oh, man, I hope nobody at home missed me!* he thought, finally realizing he really had no idea how long he had been out here with Ladybug. He stopped to check the time on his stick. *Okay, I should make it back in time for dinner with plenty of time to spare.*

~

After climbing through his bedroom window (well, the one of many windows in a row that he preferred to use to come in and out of) and shedding his magical catsuit, he quickly checked his room phone and cell phone for any messages. He saw Nathalie had tried calling him three times and left him a text, demanding that he let her know where he was so that she knew he was safe and where to pick him up. He felt bad for her; he couldn’t tell her that he kept running off to turn into a superhero, and so it almost definitely worried her sick every time. And then, even when he turned up fine afterward every time, she and the Gorilla would suffer his father’s wrath at least as much as he did, when it wasn’t their fault at all.

Nino had blown up his phone with two voice mails and several texts asking if he was okay after the black rose overgrowth. He shot Nino a reply saying he was fine, and that he was late replying because Nathalie and his father had gotten all over his case for going missing in all of the chaos. It was close enough to the truth if the chronology of events was ignored, because he was willing to bet that Nathalie would be lecturing him big time the next time he saw her. Actually, how long had it been since he had gone AWOL? It had been maybe a quarter after noon when the black roses had ensnared the car during his ride home, and it was about half-past-two now, so...two hours and fifteen minutes? Yikes, he was gonna be in trouble.

Well, at least his troublesome boner was finally gone.

~

Marinette was hyper-conscious of the lingering wetness of her arousal all the way home. She hoped she wouldn’t leave a damp spot in her suit, because then, would it stick to Tikki?! Tikki probably wouldn’t hold it against her, but that didn’t make it any less embarrassing.

When she finally released her transformation, however, Tikki made no comment about it, and so Marinette inwardly breathed a sigh of relief. Tikki *did*, however, get right up in Marinette’s to take a good look at her still-blushing face.

“Oh, my…” she tittered. “You and Chat Noir went at it again, didn’t you? Did you tell him what you wanted to say?”

Marinette smiled shyly and scratched her cheek with a finger.
“Uh, yeah! I did.” She flopped backward onto her back and yanked her pillow from overhead to hug over her chest. “And… it made him really happy… so happy, it was so sweet. He wanted to ask me about how I wanted to handle the mating cycle, too, so he decided he was going to take cues from me, but that I could ask him to help me resist temptation if I wanted to anytime…and, yeah, we… obviously got caught up in… making out for a while.” She crossed her legs and squeezed her thighs together against the throbbing of arousal, her memory flashing back to passionate embrace… she squirmed restlessly, and briefly wondered how long it had been since she hadn’t been blushing; it was starting to feel like a chronic condition.

She hadn’t intended to confess to Chat Noir that she was in love with him; she hadn’t known that! Until he had wrapped his arms around her and nuzzled his nose and lips into her hair and…!

“You… feel something… more than friendship… for me?”

His soft murmur had been filled with wonder and hope… and somehow, hearing just how much he longed for her heart in exchange for his suddenly made her own feelings crystal-clear.

Yes! I love you!!

It had sprung to her mind instantly, unbidden, and the truth of it had left her breathless, brought tears to her eyes! She took a leap of faith and let him hear those words that he had been longing to hear for so long…

“Y-y-you do? I-I mean, y-you are?”

The tremble in his voice told her she had given him the greatest gift he had ever wished for, and the emotion in his eyes warmed her heart like nothing ever had before. When she had scratched him behind the ears, he had instantly nuzzled against her hand with the enthusiasm of a cat for his beloved mistress, and then he had taken her hand and kissed it like a knight swearing fealty to his lady, taking her breath away.

It made her wonder again why it had taken her so long to realize how loving he was.

I can’t believe I used to try so hard not to humor him too much… she thought. I wanted to make sure I didn’t overinflate his ego… but he just melts under the smallest doses of affection! It’s so adorable and makes me feel almost giddy! It’s kind of addicting to spoil Chat Noir, as if he were a real cat… I wonder if he feels something similar when he can tell I like how he kisses me…?

She hadn’t forgotten her earlier desire to read the entry in her diary about Chat Noir’s confession, but now she had much more potent fodder for her sexual fantasies… and she couldn’t stand to wait any longer for sweet release.

“I… I gotta rub one out, Tikki…” she whined. “Gimme twenty minutes?”

“Oh, take as much time as you need, Marinette,” Tikki said sweetly before zooming out of sight. “I can’t help keep your parents from accidentally interrupting you, though.”

“Oh, crap, my parents!” she groaned. “They don’t know why I never came home for lunch!” She dug her phone out of her purse and called her home phone number.

“Hi, Mom!” she squeaked nervously when her mother picked up. “Sorry I didn’t call you sooner, it was just so crazy out here with the roses everywhere, but I’m fine, I just went back inside the school building and waited with everyone else until they all disappeared! Classes are dismissed for the rest of the day, so I’ll be home soon, okay? Bye!”
Marinette hung up before her mother could get in a word edgewise, and put her phone aside.

She quickly unbuttoned and unzipped her jeans and shoved them along with her panties as far down her legs as she could before impatiently kicking them off. She let out a shaky breath as she spread her legs, exposing her damp sex to the open air. Forgoing any sort of preliminary teasing, she dipped two fingers into her folds and swirled them lazily around to lubricate her fingertips. Then she brought them straight to her clit, using two fingers on her other hand to lift her clitoral hood as she started tracing gentle circles.

Forcing herself to keep the volume of her voice confined to breathing and gasping only (while she could, at least), she retrieved the deliciously vivid memories of being intertwined with Chat Noir and pouring every ounce of her desire into kissing him, as he pulled her flush against him and kissed her back like...like...

Well, like her loved her...truly, deeply, madly loved her.

It had felt like her body was glowing with heat and humming with electricity at the same time, as her heart pounded frantically in her chest and her core throbbed with arousal. She had tried as hard as her love-drunk brain allowed her to keep quiet, but it had been so hard not to moan with pleasure and whine with need, especially when he had started love-biting her almost exactly like she had fantasized about him doing! His claws had sent delicious shivers up her spine as he restlessly clawed at her, purring like a motor boat the whole time. Ah, it was addicting, the thrilling rush she felt to have him so willingly vulnerable to her and so eager to shower her in his affection. Who didn’t dream about having a lover so sincere and so devoted to his partner?

A lover...

Oh, god, he would worship me, wouldn’t he? she thought. She was panting rapidly, swirling her fingers as fast as she could over her clit as her hips subtly rocked back and forth as she neared climax. Even though he’s probably no more sexually experienced than I am...if we actually had sex...!

It was so easy to imagine Chat Noir’s body pressed against hers, because it had just happened! And it was so easy to imagine him panting next to her ear, because he already had! She just had to add the imagined sensation of his skin sliding against hers, his hips thrusting against hers, his...!

She stifled a whine as she came, her inner muscles spasming as she continued to rub feverish circles against her clit. She refused to let up, forcing her body to continue flooding her with aftershocks. She squirmed and whimpered as she milked herself for every ounce of ecstasy she could, not caring that she tended to squirt slightly whenever she did this. She didn’t stop even when she felt the tiny squirt of warm juice hit her hand, not until her legs were shaking and she wasn’t willing to risk getting any louder.

She struggled to catch her breath, feeling much better physically, but emotionally, she was feeling a little greedy: she wanted to keep exploring this daring new fantasy, and she wanted to keep masturbating while she did...this seemed like the perfect occasion for a g-spot orgasm to her, but she had to able to give herself one successfully.

She knew, of course, that every woman was different, and not all g-spot orgasms were created equal, but...it just didn’t seem fair that she might not be able to experience them, period! Everything she had read about them made them sound so amazing! But on the occasions she had tried, it had just felt...strange, like she needed to pee, and it was too uncomfortable to insert more than just one finger
in there. But if that was all that she could manage, how the hell was she supposed to enjoy sex?!

Maybe now that she had already come, and quite hard, too, she would be relaxed and wet enough to manage one? It certainly didn’t hurt to try…

She carefully pushed her middle finger inside herself, and felt around for that rough spot on the upper wall of her core. When she was pretty sure she had found it, she started crooking her finger and rubbing it in the come-hither motion that every source she had consulted had recommended. She did her best to ignore the feeling of her bladder being stimulated…maybe it would go away if she just kept going? Or she would get used to it?

Whether it’s with Adrien OR Chat Noir, I wanna be able to make this WORK before my first time, dammit! Is that really too much to ask?!

It did start to feel less weird after several seconds, but it wasn’t exactly setting off fireworks inside her, either. She tried to imagine it was Chat Noir’s finger instead of her own, and the image sent a rush of heat through her, but it didn’t seem to change how the sensation felt.

How is a thrusting cock supposed to feel amazing when I can’t make myself feel amazing with my own finger?! she lamented dramatically. Does it really all just come down to clitoral stimulation? She remembered learning from Sex Ed. that very few women were able to orgasm during intercourse without it, but…! But that was just because it took practice, right?! If it wasn’t possible to have a g-spot orgasm that way, then what was all the fuss with dildos about?!

Marinette wasn’t comfortable using a household object as a substitute-dildo, even if it was hers, so she carefully added her other finger and started slowly and gently pumping her fingers in and out as she stroked. Using two fingers felt odd, but not uncomfortable, so she kept at it, rubbing a little more firmly…

Ooh, THAT’S better…

It felt...different, but good. While stroking her clit sent what felt like sparks emanating from where her fingers touched, this felt more like throbs of heat and pressure. She could keenly feel her face and neck flushing, and it was like her blood was getting warmer, and thicker as it pumped through her veins…

It felt really good, now...she found herself unable to completely stifle her soft grunts and moans as she started rocking her hips back and forth again with need and anticipation. Her inner walls were spasming slightly around her finger, now, and she could feel the muscles in her legs twitching just a tiny bit. She didn’t know what to expect out of the orgasm she hoped to get from this, but she was excited. She held her left hand over her nose and mouth to help muffle herself as she rose higher and higher, and wound tighter and tighter...her heart was throbbing so hard, it felt like it might pop…!

It was a little difficult to pinpoint the exact moment she came, because her core had already been spasmodically and erratically squeezing her finger, but it was a surge of much more of it all: her inner walls squeezed and kept squeezing, her thighs quivered, and her toes curled as a wave of hot ecstasy rushed through her. She emitted a kind of muffled squeal into the hand she held over her mouth as she felt warm liquid leak out over the fingers of her right hind that she still held inside herself.

When she was sure she wasn’t going to make any more noise, she took her hand away from her face and started trying to catch her breath. As she slipped her fingers out of herself, the sensation of feeling her inner walls relaxing back together made her shiver and squeeze her thighs together. She rolled over and snatched her pillow into a bear hug, moaning softly into it is satisfaction. She imagined familiar, loving hands rubbing her back and strong but gentle arms embracing her from
behind. She found herself really wanting to wrap her arms around Chat Noir and kiss him again...to feel his warm body pressed against her again and the sound of his purr surrounding them both.

*I guess I’m feeling cuddly,* she thought.  *I wanna cuddle with him...I bet he would LOVE cuddles!*

*I wonder if Adrien loves cuddles, too...*  

*Oh, shit...Adrien!*  

It occurred to her that, when she was wrapped up in her fantasies of Chat Noir, her brain never tried to yank her back to thinking about Adrien, even though Chat Noir had proven capable of distracting her from fantasies of Adrien. And when she was with Chat Noir in person, wrapped up in his embrace and kissing him...it was like she forgot Adrien even existed. Oh, the moment she thought of anything school related, Adrien would pop right back into her mind, of course, and while she was at school, he was the center of her solar system (most of the time). But if Chat Noir could make her feel so incandescently happy, and their feelings for each other were mutual…

...did it even make sense to keep pursuing Adrien? She still didn’t even know if he liked her. She didn’t *like* the idea of giving up on Adrien; her heart balked at the very thought of it. But that didn’t change the fact that she was hanging onto what could still be a very one-sided crush when she now had something very mutual with Chat Noir that could easily turn into something beautiful and everlasting…

...well, if it weren’t for the whole secret identities thing. How far could a relationship between two people progress when they knew almost nothing about each other?

*Well, that could just be called a friendship with benefits, I guess,* Marinette thought dryly. *Except...it’s not just friendship. We both already have feeling for each other, and we want there to be! So, it's more than that...I want to know who he is...I want him to know who I am…*  

*If it weren’t for Adrien...*  

She tried to imagine, as clearly as possible, feeling Chat Noir’s arms wrapped around her as he spooned her from behind, nuzzling his nose into her hair and pressing tender kisses to the crown of her head. It was *so easy*...because it it was *so like him!*  

“I...I want to be with him...” she whimpered aloud into her pillow.  “Tikki...I don’t know how to let go of Adrien, and I don’t think I want to, but...I want Chat Noir to be mine…!”  

She heard the tiny *swish* of Tikki zooming up to her from wherever she had been hiding.  

“Aw, Marinette...” Tikki stroked Marinette’s cheek with a tiny red paw as Marinette gave a sniffle.  “It’ll all work out, don’t worry!”  

“But how?” Marinette asked, looking up at Tikki.  “I know being in heat has helped me discover my feelings for Chat Noir, just like you said, but there’s no weaseling out of the fact that I’m in love with two different boys, and when has that ever turned out okay?”  

“It always does...We just don’t know *how* it will, yet,” Tikki said gently.  “Things with Chat Noir are going so fast because you two are both in heat, but that doesn’t mean Adrien definitely *isn’t* the one for you. You just need to explore your relationship with him more, and figure out if you want to try taking it further. Remember, you’re not really dating either of them; just keep exploring your
feelings for each of them, until you figure out which one your true love is!”

Hearing Tikki put her situation into more concrete, real-life terms made her feel a little better, but Marinette was struck with a new thought, and asked, “Tikki...do you feel one might be better for me than the other?”

“It’s hardly fair to compare them that way!” Tikki argued. “One is your superhero partner who you’re in heat for, and one is your long-time crush who’s also your friend and classmate! They’re a part of very different sides of your life, and I only hear about Chat Noir secondhand from you!”

“Well, it’s not like you get to observe Adrien very much, either,” Marinette pointed out. “Just...what do you think of them?”

“Hmm,” Tikki took a moment to collect her thoughts. “Well, from everything I’ve heard about Chat Noir, and how you feel about your relationship with him, it sounds to me that you two are very compatible with each other! Remember when we talked about how you two seem to have amazing chemistry together? Plus, It’s obvious how happy he makes you feel, and you obviously make him very happy, too! And, you know, I also think it’s sweet that he’s remained in love with you for this long while also being your friend and partner. It means it’s so much more than just a crush, just like how you still have feelings for Adrien after all this time because you didn’t just develop a crush on him because of his reputation and good looks!

“Now, Adrien...because he’s important to you, he matters to me, too, because I care about you!” Tikki continued, as Marinette listened with rapt attention. “Chat Noir might be your partner, but that doesn’t automatically mean he’s also your true love, you know? You may be Ladybug, but you’re no less Marinette now then you were before, so there’s no reason you can’t be with Adrien if you two are compatible with each other! You’re allowed to fall in love with a normal boy as a normal girl!”

“Gee, I should hope so!” Marinette said jokingly with a self-satisfied nod.

“And also, there’s something else...hmm, how do I explain this...?” Tikki mused, bringing a paw to her mouth thoughtfully.

Marinette tilted her head curiously.

“I don’t know how to describe it, but when you’re with Adrien...I get a really good feeling about him, somehow, like he’s very compatible with you, too!”

“Really?” Marinette asked softly, smiling hopefully at Tikki. “It is like...a kind of sixth sense only kwamis have?”

“Humans can develop it, too, with the right training, like the Grand Guardian,” Tikki replied. “But, yes, you could think of it that way!”

“That kind of leaves me back in square one, though: either Adrien or Chat Noir could turn out to be the one, but I can’t figure out which one,” Marinette sighed. “At least, not yet...but I guess it’s really nice to know that there really is something special about Adrien just like I always felt there was...”

“You’ll figure it out,” Tikki said confidently, waving a paw at Marinette. “Now, why don’t you make sure your parents aren’t worried about you?”

Marinette groaned.

If only parents had pause buttons for when their daughters needed to be superheroes...
Marinette staged her return home by turning into Ladybug to jump down to street-level from her balcony, and then she went back inside through the side door as Marinette again. After apologizing to both her mother and father for worrying them, assuring them she wasn’t hurt, and that it only took her so long to get back because she had been stuck inside the school building by the roses, she managed to get off with just a gentle lecture. Working on homework was a welcome change of pace after what a hectic day she had, and eating dinner with her family left her feeling pleasantly drowsy. She decided to indulge herself with a hot bath before getting ready for bed.

As she was filling up the tub, she got a text from Alya:

Alya: Step 1 of Operation: Seduce Adrien Agreste is a go tomorrow morning! Describe your 3 cutest/cheekiest/sexiest tops and bottoms

Marinette sighed and rolled her eyes with an exasperated smile.

Marinette: Most of what I make/own is cute! And I dont own anything sexy… :/

Alya: Well then what do u have thats cheeky? Like, cute but not cutesy-cute more like cheeky/flirty cute

Marinette: ???

Alya: DO YOU HAVE A PEEKABOO SHOULDER TOP? OR AN OFF-THE-SHOULDER TOP?

Marinette: Yes I think so

Alya: COOL ok wear that with something equally cheeky-cute bottom that looks good with it! Maybe change up your hairstyle and lipgloss color! Or if ur feeling bold go braless! >:D

Marinette: WHAT?! NOOOOOOO!!! I will wear my raspberry red lip gloss and my midi shorts that's all!! DX

Alya: That's not gonna look like much of a hidden message but it's something I guess!

Marinette: ...I could put a little body glitter on my collarbone…?

Alya: HELL YEAH POWER MOVE DO IT GURL!

Marinette: Ok will do! See u 2morrow! :)

Alya: Good luck! ;)

Marinette put her phone aside and sank into the water with a sigh.

"It’s a little weird to try to imagine Adrien getting all flustered over me in a new outfit… she mused. It’s such a simple, common thing…will it really work on Adrien? I mean, he’s a special, wonderful boy, but he’s still a BOY and I feel like it’s rude to assume too much that he’s not like other boys…I guess if he didn’t think AT ALL like other boys did, I wouldn’t be able to ask Alya and Nino for advice on how to get him to notice me…And I’d like to still be able to relate to him as a HUMAN, even if he sometimes looks too beautiful to be mortal…but he IS mortal! Otherwise, he’d be way out of my league!"
Climbing into bed rarely felt as nice as it did after a bath or shower and a change of fresh, clean pajamas. Still, something felt just not quite as comfy as it could be somehow...an extra blanket seemed like it would feel nice, but she wasn’t feeling cold...still, she wanted extra warmth and weight spread over her...like the warmth of another body snuggled up to her...

*Oh, man...I think I’m still craving cuddles...* she thought. She didn’t want to get out of bed just to hunt down an extra blanket, and it any case, it just wouldn’t be the same.

*I guess I can just fantasize about Chat Noir until I feel sleepier,* she thought. *I can just imagine he’s here, cuddling with me...*

She snaked a hand under the hem of her shirt and stroked her ribs and belly before moving higher to slowly grope first one breast, then the other, taking extra time to roll her nipples one at a time with her thumb. Her breathing slowly deepened, and she could feel a fresh wave of arousal gathering between her legs. She let out a little whine of frustration at the lack of an actual human form pressed against her back. She wrapped both arms around herself as if to give herself a hug, but it wasn’t a good enough substitute for someone else embracing her from behind... *that* was what she wanted...for Chat Noir to surround her in him, to cocoon her in his touch...!

She yanked her camisole top over her head and then shoved her jersey cotton shorts and panties down and off her legs. Feeling the sheets surround her naked body was really nice, and for a moment, she thought this would help her feel a little better, but more than anything, it just added to her arousal. This wouldn’t be the first time she felt horny enough to want to masturbate more than once in a single evening, but somehow...this craving felt more frustrating and harder to shake than usual...she hoped another orgasm would help...

“Tikki...?” she murmured, a sudden thought occurring to her. “Is there any way being in heat might make me feel...starved for attention? Like, really crave cuddles with Chat Noir?”

“There’s nothing wrong with that!” Tikki said, zooming into view. “Don’t you have little phases like that sometimes normally?”

“Yeah, kind of, but...” Under the covers, she groped between her legs for her aching clit, too impatient to be embarrassed. “I’ve never felt this way about Chat Noir, and...I dunno, I want more warmth, more weight over me even though I don’t feel cold...I want Chat Noir to just...!” She paused, blushing, and panting a little as she began stroking herself between her damp folds. “I want to just feel him touch me all over...hold me tight against him...I feel like a full-body massage from him would be the best thing ever right now...”

Tikki’s eyes suddenly went wide.

“Oh...!”

“What?” Marinette stared at Tikki nervously, stilling her hand.

“Yes, that sounds exactly like one of your symptoms...” Tikki informed her grimly. “‘The Ache’....usually around the middle of the third week, you start to literally become touch-starved for Chat Noir...like ordinary skin-hunger in humans, but magically-induced, and focused towards Chat Noir only. It develops gradually, but you’ll start to feel like your body is aching deep inside for Chat Noir to touch you, and it won’t let up until he does. The quickest way to soothe it is for him to massage little circles into your joints and press slow kisses against the spots on your torso where your spots appear as Ladybug. The complication is, all this physical contact will still help speed up the
progression of the mating cycle like everything else does...and the fact that you’re starting to feel it now, already...you’re almost an entire week ahead of schedule!”

“Oh nooooo!” Marinette whined. “And it’s only going to get worse, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“And...! Wait...this means Chat Noir’s going to start feeling some version of this, too, doesn’t it?” Marinette wrapped her arms around herself in an attempt to self-soothe, but her arousal had all but fled at the thought of Chat Noir in physical distress.

“Yes.” Tikki nodded seriously. “He’ll experience it like a kind of dull, burning itch under his skin...and only your touch will make him feel better.”

“That sounds awful...” Marinette’s worried frown deepened. “It just doesn’t seem fair for the mating cycle to torture us so much just because we won’t give in to...our ‘instincts’ or whatever. We’d basically be...touching each other and...stuff...just to avoid being punished by our heats! That just doesn’t seem right!”

Tikki sighed sympathetically.

“I know, Marinette, and I agree with you.” Tikki settled herself down next to Marinette’s pillow. “I wish I could turn it off for you...or at least reduce the intensity of your symptoms, but all I can do is support you.” Tikki stared into space for a moment as if lost in thought, and then quickly turned to Marinette again: she seemed to have just thought of something else.

“If the Ache is starting to come on already, then you’re almost certainly going to be...getting wetter than usual very, very soon, too! Maybe as soon as tomorrow, I’m afraid.”

Marinette groaned dramatically and rolled onto her back.

“Great! Just great!” She threw her arms in the air in frustration. “As if Chat Noir and I weren’t already having a hard-enough time! Nope!! Now we get to suffer withdrawal symptoms!! And I get to torture Chat Noir whether I want to or not by getting my panties soaked!! GODDAMMIT!”

But Marinette was too tired to fume for long...tomorrow would come regardless of how much or how little she was looking forward to it, or how much sleep she got, and so she tried to clear her mind by imagining the sound of Chat Noir’s purr in her ear. After about twenty minutes, she finally drifted off to sleep...

And that night, she dreamed sweet dreams of blonde hair, green eyes, and a sleek black form tangled up with hers.
Whispers In The Dark

Chapter Summary

Hawk Moth is dumbfounded when Ladybug Chat Noir prove themselves to be immune to Black Rose’s powers and take her down with ease, but he’s more concerned with the strange effects the pink butterfly seems to having on his powers...and then, when the second pink butterfly returns to his lair, he’s forced to reevaluate his strategy when it appears that Ladybug’s miraculous may be attempting to sabotage his mission.

Chapter Notes

At last! I can hardly believe how long it’s been since I lasted updated...believe me, it’s been frustrating to put this fic on hold while I recover! I’m on the mend, however, so I can start coming back to this beloved story of mine, as long as I pace myself carefully until I’m back to 100%. Thanks to everyone for being patient and encouraging; your comments, as always, continue to bring me many happy smiles! Being centered around Hawk Moth, this chapter will be a shorter one, but my excitement for the chapters to come continues to grow!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tuesday

Watching Ladybug and Chat Noir defeat his supervillains never got any less frustrating, no matter how many times he saw it happen...but this latest failure was nothing short of infuriating, humiliating! If the Black Rose Fairy could have turned Ladybug and Chat Noir against each other, then whatever mysterious abilities their mating cycle might give them would have been useless! But instead, they had both been impervious! And the way Chat Noir had both him and Black Rose fooled, it was like putting a gun to the brat’s head and pulling the trigger, only for a bouquet of flowers to pop out: Completely and utterly humiliating.

He would still be in a towering rage over the whole thing, except...something was very wrong. And he was pretty sure he knew what was causing it...

He waited, staring up at the enormous window expectantly, and, sure enough, another glowing pink butterfly came flying in, trailing sparkling lights behind it. He eyed it warily, but extended a hand to it. It obediently fluttered forward and landed in the palm of his hand. He focused on it, but just like the first pink butterfly, and the rest of its white brethren, it carried no emotional vibrations...not even from Ladybug or Chat Noir, which he had thought might be the case...but there was no way he had only imagined it, was there...

But then, it hit him again without warning, and he flinched, jerking his hand back and sending the butterfly fluttering away again.

It was a rush of emotions that he could tell had come from the butterfly, second-hand from...someone, since the butterflies themselves felt no emotions themselves...but from who?
Ladybug? He couldn’t be sure...but they were so familiar to him, they could have been his own, from another not-so-distant time...

It was the same stone-dropping-into-the-pit-of-your-stomach feeling of panic he felt whenever Adrien went missing; he felt it when he had entered Adrien’s room last Christmas to find that his son had somehow climbed out through his window; he felt it when Adrien snuck out of the house last September to go to school; he felt it whenever Nathalie and Adrien’s bodyguard failed to get his son home safely before a supervillain’s rampage swept the city; and ever since Adrien was born to around age five, he had felt it pretty much every time he heard a loud noise anywhere in the house (until Adrien had grown mature enough to know how not to hurt himself on the home furnishings).

And the moment Chat Noir had been enveloped in Black Rose’s plants...he had felt it then, too...for the briefest moment. And then his thoughts were his own again the very next second. For the next few seconds, he was stunned, disbelieving...and then, both he and Black Rose were dumbfounded by the revelation that the roses’ perfume had been worthless against their two enemies, and that Chat Noir had completely fooled them!

Now that he was thinking this whole thing through logically, it made the most sense to assume that it had, indeed, been Ladybug’s emotions he had felt in that moment: her partner had just been snatched up by their enemy’s enchanted roses, turning the odds against her. Naturally, she would worry; about her partner, and about the fight. The how and what, then, was clear...but why? How did transmitting echoes of Ladybug’s emotions to him help protect her and Chat Noir from him?

Did Ladybug actually control what she did to his akuma? He doubted she had meant to have the first pink butterfly do what it did in that moment; why he would have sensed her deliberate intention if she had. So, then...was it just a spell her miraculous passed on by itself? That still didn’t explain why…

Unless…

*Does her miraculous intend to paralyze me with empathy?* he thought incredulously. Still watching the pink butterflies, he sneered at them contemptuously.

“Just who do you think I am?” he demanded aloud. “You are foolish and naive, if you think I’ll show you mercy just because you’re a child…”

He raised his gaze to the dome-shaped walls that surrounded and towered over him, as if he could imagine seeing Ladybug through them, hiding in plain sight somewhere in Paris…

“The echoes of your distress is music to my ears!” he roared, spreading his arms wide with a wicked grin. “Taint my akuma with your mating-cycle voodoo all you will, but I will take you down, sooner or later, and when I do, I will revel in your despair!”

His tirade was met with silence, of course, save for the fluttering of countless tiny wings. Nevertheless, it had the same cathartic effect as it always did to vent his frustration after suffering second-hand defeat by Ladybug and Chat Noir. He now stood still, both hands on his cane, frowning pensively.

Reluctant though he was to admit it, Nooroo might be able to offer insight on this...latest development. He was also fairly certain that Nooroo knew better than to say, “I told you so,” at least. If he was to be any more successful next time, he needed to know more.

He shed his transformation and held out a hand to keep the tired kwami from falling out of the air. Nooroo plopped into his open palm, then sat himself up to glance about the dark, cavernous room;
he seemed to expect to find something amiss.

“Ah...another akuma came back enchanted,” he noted, catching sight of the two pink butterflies. He looked up at Gabriel curiously. “Did...anything strange happen? That didn’t happen last time, I mean?”

Gabriel blinked, then glanced at the butterflies again pensively, trying to decide how best to describe his experience...

“The moment my supervillain caught Chat Noir in her trap…” he began slowly, “I suddenly sensed...a brief flash of panic, and fear for him, as clearly as if I had honed in on it myself...but I hadn’t, and it wasn’t from my supervillain, either. I’m guessing it was from Ladybug; the timing matches, and it is her magic in these two akuma.”

Nooroo’s eyes widened slightly in surprise and interest.

“That...certainly makes the most sense…” he mused. “But...if I may ask, Master...you said you’re guessing it was from Ladybug...but if you sensed what you did so clearly, as you said...how could you not tell it was from Ladybug? That ability is part of your powers as Hawk Moth.”

Already frowning, Gabriel’s jaw clenched slightly. Nooroo was honestly just confused and curious, he knew, but the question still felt pointed, an arrow right into his dignity.

Gabriel Agreste was the kind of man who preferred not to go around displaying his emotions for all to know unless there was a reason for it; if letting his feelings show would reveal a loss of composure on his part, then he would keep them locked up inside rather than let anyone know he was feeling scared or hurt. Family life had allowed him and his wife and son to balance one another, emotionally, but after Mme. Agreste had disappeared, he had withdrawn, unable and unwilling to accept that she might never return to fill the gaping hole she had left in his home...

...which brought him to where he was now: using the powers of the Butterfly Brooch to acquire the Ladybug’s Earrings and the Black Cat’s Ring...

...and deeply reluctant to tell his kwami that Ladybug’s emotions had--for the briefest instant--shaken him, and he was afraid to find out why.

But if he didn’t figure out his enemies’ new tricks, he would just be wasting his time here until their mating cycle was over...And why should he wait, when there was still a possibility he could find a way to gain the upper hand? His pride should be a small price to pay.

“Master?”

He glanced back at Nooroo, who was now eyeing him with something akin to intrigue. Gabriel did his best to shake off his irritation and pull his thoughts back together.

“...When I felt her fear for Chat Noir…” he finally said carefully, “It was so suddenly, I was caught off-guard...and thought it was my own. I know that feeling well...from when I worry for my son.”

He had glanced away again, unable to hold the kwami’s gaze. Nooroo wasn’t sure how to react.

While it broke Nooroo’s little heart to know that the Butterfly’s Brooch was being used for evil, he didn’t hate his master, nor did he see Gabriel Agreste as being an irredeemably evil man. Perhaps, being a kwami, he couldn’t, even though he had plenty of reason to resent the man for what he did with his ill-gotten power. He corrupted the innocent and manipulated them, terrorized the people of Paris and sewed the seeds of chaos, all in the pursuit of absolute power...but his wish was to use it to
bring back someone he had lost to extraordinary circumstances that he felt he could never live without.

He was incredibly self-centered and arrogant, and grief had filled him with bitterness and hardened his heart. His ambition had given him tunnel-vision and made him ruthless, to the point where he thought nothing of the thousands of lives he endangered every time he sent out an akuma...

...but he still loved his son, Adrien, in his own way, however little he showed it.

“Answer me this if you can, Nooroo,” Gabriel said, wrenching his gaze away from the pink butterflies. “Does Ladybug control the magic she’s cast on my akuma, or is it just her mating cycle acting through her miraculous on its own?”

Nooroo blinked, snapping out of his reverie. He brought a paw to his chin thoughtfully.

“I can only make an intuitive guess, based on my overall understanding of the miraculous in general,” he said after a moment’s thought. “Only Ladybug’s kwami knows exactly how her powers work, and how her mating cycle affects them. I don’t think she can, but I really don’t know.”

“Yes...if that’s the case, she doesn’t know what she’s done to my akumas, correct?” Gabriel asked, much calmer now that they were talking logistics.

“Most likely,” Nooroo replied with a hesitant nod. “But then, if Ladybug’s kwami knows what’s been done, she’ll tell Ladybug, of course.”

Gabriel grunted in acknowledgement, deep in thought. Then, a very unsettling thought occurred to him.

“Is it possible that Ladybug and her kwami could track the akumas they’ve enchanted and find this place?” he asked, his tone steely and his eyes wide with barely-concealed panic.

Nooroo’s eyes bugged out, and his little body was almost vibrating in midair from alarm. Then, he seemed to relax after a moment’s thought.

“Well, if that were possible at this point, they would have already done that,” he said nervously.

Gabriel relaxed only slightly, his jaw still clenched.

“And if more enchanted akumas come back here?” he asked tensely.

Nooroo’s expression only crumpled further.

“I really couldn’t say, Master,” he said apologetically. “Perhaps the more enchanted akumas come back here, the more ways they’ll start to affect both you and Ladybug and Chat Noir...this is only the second akuma to return, and you’re already experiencing strange effects...and what’s more, you’ve now seen for yourself that Ladybug and Chat Noir will only be more difficult to defeat while they’re in heat.” He paused and took a deep breath as if steeling himself. “If I may speak freely, Master, you have nothing to gain by continuing to pursue their miraculouses while they’re still in heat; you’re only taking additional risks!”

Gabriel’s eyes flashed and Nooroo pressed his paws together anxiously under his Master’s glare. Gabriel didn’t say anything, however; more than anything, Nooroo was simply voicing concerns that—if he was honest with himself—had already begun to occur to him. Hearing them explicitly pointed out to his face was just irritating; he didn’t want to hear any of it, but he would be a fool to ignore it.
Backing off until their mating cycle was over would mean putting his mission on hold for three more weeks, but there could be a possible benefit to luring them into a false sense of security...but there had never been any pattern to where and when and how frequently he sent out an akuma anyway, and so Ladybug and Chat Noir had no reason to change how they approached each of his supervillains...especially since every supervillain he made was different.

But that was the thing: the identity and abilities of every supervillain was shaped by their identities and woes as civilians. He couldn’t *design* the perfect supervillain with the perfect set of abilities to take down Ladybug and Chat Noir, because his victims were desperate for the abilities to change their circumstances, and if he couldn’t offer that to them, they had nothing to gain by agreeing to steal the miraculouses for him, even when the strength of their negative emotions made them weak against his akuma’s influence. All of this meant that every chance to akumatize someone he passed up was a missed opportunity that he might never get again, and he had no way of knowing when the next supervillain he created would be the *one*.

None of this, however, completely justified risking giving Ladybug a way to track down the location of his secret lair...unless it was to lure her into a trap. And being in heat made an already-perfect hostage into something even *more* personal...

Nooroo’s eyes widened anxiously as he saw his Master’s expression clear and the shadow of a smirk appear as the wheels turned in Gabriel’s head.

“Well, then...this just turns my situation into a risk-versus-reward scenario,” he said half to himself as he turned away from his kwami. “You may consider your warnings duly noted, Nooroo...if Ladybug and Chat Noir ever find their way here, it will be on my own terms, to make their final stand.”

Nooroo watched his master leave not knowing how worried to feel, only that he dare not feel optimistic at this point: Gabriel was showing no signs of giving up, and if he could indeed find a way to take advantage of the mating cycle...

*It looks like the stakes are higher for both sides, now,* Nooroo thought sadly.  *I hope their miraculouses will keep them safe...good fortune be with them. And maybe...just maybe...they’ll keep surprising us, and bring an end to all of this that no one has to suffer for...*

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: The Adrienette intensifies! >:D
Chapter Summary

Both Marinette and Adrien each wake up from a wet dream about their partner-turned-lover, and they both worry with good reason that their heats are progressing to the next level. For Adrien, the line between Ladybug and Marinette is mysteriously blurred when he sees his Lady without her mask in his dream. Marinette puts on a new look and executes Operation: Seduce Adrien Agreste, which leads to some very sexually-charged moments and sends Adrien’s sanity into a tailspin when the ‘itch’ strikes him without warning. After the class is divided into groups for a science project and Adrien pushes through fencing class, he spends lunch period talking to Plagg about his mating cycle, desperate for some explanation to his predicament.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Feel this / Can you feel this
My heart beating out of my chest?
Feel this / Can you feel this
Salvation under my breath?
- Bethany Joe Galeotti, “Feel This (feat. Enation)”

Wednesday, September 7th

Marinette couldn’t have explained how she ended up like this...but that was how dreams worked: they always seemed to start in the middle of the action, and only made sense as they happened. Thus, it never once occurred to her to wonder how she had ended up lying naked with Chat Noir on her bed, wrapped tightly in his arms and craving his touch more than she had craved anything before in her life...all that mattered was that she was finally getting what she so desperately needed: tender touches from gentle hands, deep pressure from loving arms, and sweet, sweet kisses from reverent lips.

She clung to Chat Noir desperately, wanting-- needing --to keep her body pressed flush against his as he rutted against her, sending delicious throbs of pleasure rippling through her body. She was so wet...it was like her body was weeping with need for him. In the throes of her intense arousal, she couldn’t stop squirming; squeezing Chat Noir’s hips between her thighs and rubbing her calves against his legs as he ravaged her neck with kisses, licks, and love-bites. Even with the husky rumble of his purr right under her ear, she could hear the sounds of her own pants and whimpers piercing the silence of her room.

“Please…” she moaned, struggling to maintain the rhythm of her rolling hips against his as her pleasure reached a fevered pitch. “Please...More...I need more… ! Chat Noir, I need you!”

“I want…” he panted, “To give you...everything you want...my Lady…” He latched onto the side of
her neck in another love-bite and stole a taste of her skin with a greedy swipe of his tongue. “But I have to find you...or you have to find me ...” He raised his head so that he could look into her eyes. His expression was yearning, his pupils blown wide...though he was having just as much trouble keeping his eyes open as she was. “I’ll share every part of me with you...if you’ll share yourself with me...? Marinette...?”

She couldn’t properly form words to answer him with; she could only try to nod fervently, and hope her expression told him what he wanted to hear. Every other breathless pant to escape her was a soft cry of pleasure, her climax mere seconds away...he brought his hands to her face and pulled her in for a kiss--

Only for her to wake with a startled gasp.

Panting slightly, she blinked several times, dazed. She was a bit sweaty, and her skin felt ever-so-slightly...tingly? No...it was the same slight ache she had felt last night; that craving for cuddles from Chat Noir. Shifting slightly, she registered that her bed sheets were in disarray, tangled up and twisted around her legs...not all that unusual for her, but…

*Whoa, hang on, why are my panties so wet--?! Oh...*

Spreading her legs apart slightly, she touched a fingertip to the crotch of her panties and found that, sure enough, she was wet enough to have soaked right through them.

*Did I just...have a wet dream about Chat Noir?! Oh man...I bet Tikki’s gonna tell me my heat is getting worse...*

Marinette sat up and shivered in response to a throb of lingering arousal between her thighs.

“Tikki...?” she called softly.

Tikki flew into Marinette’s field of view from below, looking fully awake and chipper as always.

“Good morning!” Tikki greeted. “I’m guessing you had a very erotic dream about Chat Noir that you want to talk about?”

Marinette gaped at Tikki.

“Whaa--?! Was it *that* obvious?! Did I...say his name in my *sleep* or something?!”

“Well...yes, you did, but even if you hadn’t, it’s an easy guess for me. Almost every single Ladybug in heat has at least one dream about Chat Noir, and you were...moving around a lot and...stuff.” She smiled apologetically at Marinette, who was blushing magenta with embarrassment.

“I...yeah, I did...” she admitted. “And...my panties are soaked through...” she whispered bashfully. She forced herself to look back up at Tikki. “Is that...another one of my symptoms?”

“Ah...” Tikki looked more serious. “Yes, that’s the...extra wetness starting up. Considering you’ve started feeling the ache already, I’d be more surprised if you weren’t experiencing this by now.”

Marinette’s eyes bugged out; she had just remembered something.

“So that means...Chat Noir’s gonna be able to smell it, too?” she croaked. “And it’s going to make him... *want* me even *more*?!”

Tikki nodded gravely. “Sorry, Marinette...I’d recommend wearing pantyliners from here on out until
your cycle is over...it won’t mask the scent from Chat Noir, but at least you don’t have to worry about getting your shorts and pants and skirts wet.”

Marinette yanked her pillow towards her, buried her face in it, and screamed.

“Oh, Marinette...try not to worry about it so much,” Tikki said bracingly. “Oh, I know!” She perked up again and smiled at Marinette encouragingly, clapping her paws together. “Weren’t you going to dress up for Adrien today? Why don’t you pick out your outfit?”

“Oh!!” Marinette sat up ramrod-straight and shoved her pillow back behind her where it belonged. Grabbing her phone, she scrambled down the stepladder and opened up her messages app to look back at her text conversation with Alya from last night.

“An off-the-shoulder or peekaboo-shoulder top…” she muttered to herself, scrolling slowly through the conversation. “My midi shorts...my raspberry lipgloss...and body glitter for my collarbone...should I wear my hair different today, too?”

She tried to picture herself as Adrien might see her, approaching from a distance. Where would his eyes be drawn? Or rather, where did she want his eyes to be drawn?

I wonder what he thinks my most attractive features are... she thought. Certainly I’d like him to be drawn to my lips~ She grinned giddily at the thought. Ah, and wouldn’t it be nice if he could get lost in my eyes! Ooh! Or if he got the urge to run his fingers through my hair because he’s never seen it down before and thought it looked pretty fluttering in the breeze! Eeeeeee!...

But wait...what I definitely know he’s noticed is my scent! He’s sniffed me...what, twice now? At least? Maybe that’s what I should emphasize...in which case I think I should actually go without the body glitter...I don’t want it interfering with my natural scent! Because, whatever my scent is like, he seems to really like it!

Now having a good idea of what she wanted her look to be, Marinette headed straight for the bathroom to wash her face and brush her hair, feeling bold and excited.

~

She was everywhere...all around him...his entire world had shrunk down to the size of a single room, everything else disappearing until nothing existed beyond the two of them, entwined in one another on the bed. He held her as close as humanly possible, and she clung to him desperately, pressing her body against him and letting her legs tangle with his. She was letting him grind out his pent-up hunger for her against her slick folds, and the wet sounds mingled with her ragged pants, whimpers, and soft moans, further fueling the fire in his blood and pulling sounds of pleasure from him that rivaled her own in volume...some of them he wasn’t sure had ever come out of him before. He kissed her like their lives depended on it, breaking away only to lap greedily at her bare skin and gently but ravenously gnaw at her neck.

“Please…” she moaned. “I need more...! Chat Noir, I need you!”

“I want…” he panted, “To give you...everything you want...my Lady…” He dragged his teeth over her skin and tasted lust on his tongue.

“Please…” she whispered. “I want...to find you...find me, Chat Noir…!”

He raised his head so that he could look into her eyes, struggling to keep his eyes open and make his mind focus...
Find you? Find me?

Her expression was yearning, and even in the dark, he could see the blush in her cheeks…

Her mask wasn’t there.

“…Marinette…?”

He had never seen her like this in real life: her dark hair tousled on the bed beneath her cheek, her face flushed and lips parted as she panted and whimpered her pleasure, her eyelids fluttering as she clung to him. And yet, there was no doubt in his mind: those sky-blue eyes, petite nose, and soft pink lips…they could only be hers…

His Lady…

Mesmerized by the sight of her, the sounds of her, he cupped her face in his hands and coaxed her lips towards him…

Only for it all to disappear when he woke with a gasp.

The first thing he registered was that his underwear was sticky with jizz. Adrien grumbled in annoyance.

Come on, we didn’t even get to finish in the dream! he thought, pouting. It always has to end in the middle of the action…

Adrien shivered: he seemed to have sweated a lot over the course of the night, and his bedcovers were a lot more tousled around him than usual.

Given what kind of a dream he had just had, he wasn’t really surprised, and dreams like this about Ladybug were fairly common for him, now especially since the glorious day she had returned his feelings and kissed him straight to cloud nine. And yes, he had dreamed about being intimate with her, as intimate as two humans could be with each other…

No, the only strange part was that he had taken the preventative measure of taking care of himself right before he went to sleep and had still managed to come in his sleep. He couldn’t remember the last time it hadn’t worked…maybe he was foolish to assume it was a foolproof strategy, but he just couldn’t help but wonder…

…Is this another sign my heat is getting worse?

Rolling over, he reached for his phone on his desk beside the bed to check the time; his alarm was due to go off in less than ten minutes. With a sigh, he sat up, heaved himself to his feet, and headed for the bathroom to freshen up.

After his morning shower, Adrien found Plagg awake and waiting for him, looking strangely expectant sitting on his pillow.

“Uh…good morning?” Adrien greeted Plagg warily, keeping one eye on the kwami as he cautiously approached his dresser.

“The morning isn’t good until I’ve had my cheese,” Plagg responded pompously, crossing his tiny arms and puffing out his chest. “Sleep well?” he asked smoothly. “Sounded like you and Ladybug were having quite the dreamland frolic in the sheets…or was it Marinette this time?”
Adrien turned bright red and gaped at Plagg in humiliated outrage, but then remembered something strange from his dream.

“It was...it was Ladybug, but...” He frowned thoughtfully. “But she was...she wasn’t wearing her mask...and I called her Marinette...even though I was calling her ‘my Lady’ before...” He brought a hand to his head, straining to think back, but finding his memory fuzzy. “I can’t remember if her face changed...I just know I recognized her...I don’t know if she was Ladybug the whole time, or if was Marinette the whole time, and I just switched names for dream-logic reasons, or if she changed at some point and I didn’t notice or care for dream-logic reasons...”

“I think you’re overthinking the whole thing,” Plagg remarked carelessly. “It was a dream; it doesn’t have to make any sense. We already know you’ve got the lovey-dovey eyes for Marinette as well as Ladybug, now--well, I know, anyway--so your subconscious dreamed up a fantasy where you got to have them both.”

“I do not have the same feelings for Ladybug and Marinette,” Adrien said flatly. “I won’t pretend I know what I feel for Marinette, but whatever it is, it’s...different.”

“Whatever you say, Lover-boy,” Plagg drawled.

“Anyway,” Adrien pushed on, starting to pull out his clothes for the day. “That wasn’t the only weird thing...she told me...she wanted to find me...or that I had to find her. I was already there with her, but she...she made it sound like she couldn’t...like we couldn’t be together until...until something important happened...”

Plagg heaved a sigh, apparently exasperated with Adrien’s density.

“Obviously, that’s your subconscious expressing your desire to know Ladybug’s true identity and for her to know yours before you two go all the way to rolling in the hay,” he explained.

Adrien scowled, and blushed again as he always did at any mention of sleeping with the love of his life.

“Well, whatever, maybe you’re right, and it’s nothing” he admitted, shoving his feet into a pair of dark-grey jeans. “But what about the fact that I took preventative measures and yet still managed to come in my sleep?” he asked, forcing the sentence out before he could trip over his words in embarrassment.

“What about it?” Plagg retorted, shrugging. “You’re a teenage boy lusting after a girl--or two--and you’re in heat on top of that. Hardly shocking.”

“That’s my point!” Adrien exclaimed, pulling on a long-sleeved apple-green shirt. “What if it’s a sign that my heat is about to get worse?”

“Of course it’s getting worse,” Plagg drawled. “You two can’t lock eyes without locking lips for two hours.”

“Arrgh!” Adrien groaned in frustration. “Plagg, just tell me if I’m being paranoid or not!”

“It could be related, but it might not be,” Plagg responded offhandedly with a shrug. “It’s not a symptom by itself...although, speaking of symptoms...”

Adrien spun around, a dark-green sweater in his hands, and stared at Plagg in alarm.

“I figure I might as well warn you about what comes next,” Plagg said, settling himself more
comfortably on Adrien’s pillow. “We call it, the ‘itch.’ It feels like a barely-there itch, but *under* your skin, mostly in your scalp, neck, shoulders, back, and chest. You’ll start to crave Ladybug’s touch—well, even more that usual—because the only way to soothe it is for Ladybug to stroke you, or by rubbing against Ladybug, like a cat, basically. I’m not trying to add to your worries,” he added. “Just warning you, so you recognize it when it hits you.”

Adrien had to take a moment to digest this new, alarming information.

“And it’s just one of the symptoms?” he finally asked. “It’s not actually harmful?”

“No, but it’ll get steadily worse over time as the rest of your symptoms develop and drive you crazy. Keep me updated on how it changes; it’ll help warn us that your feline tendencies are going to add up.”

“Okay…” Adrien sighed, pulling the sweater over his head. “Ugh, there’s so much to worry about…”

“Keeping track of it all can be *my* job,” Plagg said. “You just keep talking to me, okay?”

“Okay...thanks, Plagg. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“You wouldn’t be Chat Noir, and your life would be dreary.” Plagg responded instantly, puffing himself up. “Now, where’s my Camembert?”

When Marinette came out of Tom & Sabine’s Boulangerie, she found Alya waiting for her.

“Alya! Are you going to walk to school with me?” she asked, stroking a lock of her own hair absentmindedly.

“Duh! Girl, this morning is going to be a turning point in the story of your love-life!” Alya exclaimed, gesturing grandly. “I’ve gotta make sure your outfit is on-point and give you the inspirational pep-talk!” She looked Marinette up and down.

“What do you think?” Marinette asked, smiling as she gave a slow twirl. “I wasn’t sure if wearing a necklace or bracelet would dressing up a bit too much or not, but I followed your recommendations: peekaboo-shoulder top, kinda-short-but-not-mini-shorts, and something different for my hair and lipgloss. Oh, and I decided to go with my macaron-pink sandals and a matching headband.” She brought a hand up to the headband in question, which was decorated with pink blossoms. “I kept my makeup face the same, though.”

“What did you do to your nose?” Alya asked, leaning in curiously.

“Oh, I, uh…” Marinette had forgotten all about the scrape on the tip of her nose until she had started doing her morning makeup, but it looked like it hadn’t quite scabbed over completely, so she had dabbed some antibiotic cream on it instead of trying to cover it up with concealer. “I...scrapped it on the wall when I was rushing downstairs.”

“Well, I still give the outfit ten-outta-ten!” Alya said with a wink and a finger-gun. “I love the ruffles along the neckline! It’s still totally you, but it also whispers, ‘There’s something about her today…’. If you don’t catch Adrien ogling at you, at least for a second, then he’s an oblivious banana tree.”

“Great! So…” Marinette and Alya started walking down the sidewalk. “Should I *act* any differently when I’m around him? I mean, do I have to do something special? You *know* I’m not
very good at being subtle…”

“No, you have a hard enough time acting normal around him already!” Alya laughed. “Just be yourself, same as always, but watch him. Pay attention to where his eyes go, and we’ll get an idea of how well an outfit can catch his attention!”

“O-okay...I think I can do that,” Marinette said slowly, nodding. Privately to herself, she added, *Let's see if he tries to sniff me again, too!* Her heart was fluttering with nerves, but also with excitement.

~

Now that Adrien had an idea of how his heat was going to further torture him next, he felt restless and on-edge, almost paranoid. He couldn’t stop worrying that this “itch” was going to come on suddenly out of nowhere and make it impossible for him to function. From the way Plagg had spoken about it, it sounded like it was going to develop gradually and worsen over time, more quickly the more often he and Ladybug saw each other…

*Wait a minute…* he thought. *Ladybug! If I’m going to start feeling all weird and awful and craving Ladybug’s touch, then…won’t she start feeling like that, too?! So far, it seems like each of Ladybug’s symptoms are either counterparts to each of my symptoms, or the same has mine. So that means…*

He felt his face turn red.

*SHE’S going to be craving MY touch because SHE’S going to be feeling miserable and my touch is the only thing that can make her feel better?! Oh god…HOW am I supposed to suddenly stop touching her if that’s what keeps her from feeling miserable?! That goes against every fiber of my being!! AUGH!!!*

He made a mental note to talk to Plagg ASAP so he could hopefully figure out how he and Ladybug were going to handle this.

*Oh man…* Adrien rubbed his hands over his face tiredly. *These next two and a half weeks are going be so stressful…and what about that?! Stress is NOT conducive to romance!! Geez, it’s like our miraculouses are torturing us until we stop fighting their influence and just give in...wow, that really sucks…*

“Adrien, we’re here.”

Adrien returned to the present at the sound of Nathalie’s voice. The car must have pulled up to the school and he hadn’t reacted.

“Sorry!” he said, grabbing his bag. “I’m moving, now!”

Right on cue, the Gorilla opened the curbside passenger door for him from outside. Adrien got out of the car and started making his way to the school doors. He casually glanced around at the other students also arriving, just in case he knew any of them. On the days Nino got to school earlier, he liked to take the spare time to chat with his best friend.

He found Nino waiting for him in the hallway. He gave a cheery wave, feeling more relaxed now that he was in familiar good company.

“Hey, man!” The two boys exchanged a fist bump. “You’ve got fencing today later, right?”
Adrien dug out his phone to check.

“Uh...yeah, looks like I do!” he responded, his voice a pitch higher than usual. He had been so frazzled this morning from his talk with Plagg that he had apparently not taken in anything from the schedule Nathalie had shown him at breakfast.

“Lucky…” Nino groaned. “All of us who don’t have sports today have to go to the library and get assigned into small groups for our first research project.”

“What, so, everyone with sports on Wednesday gets a free pass?” Adrien asked, confused. “That doesn’t seem fair.”

“No, you’re getting assigned into a group, same as the rest of us, you just don’t have to meet with your group in the library to do whatever practice assignments the teacher gives us for picking out our topics and stuff,” Nino explained. “It means instead of having to review how to research our topic materials and plan and pre-write and essay for the umptieth time, you get to go to a fencing lesson and then start collaborating on whatever topic the rest of your group has settled on and skip the awkward-as-hell study session with the teacher hovering around talking to us like we’re grade-schoolers the whole time!”

“I would have preferred to help pick a topic and help with planning, even if our science teacher is a bit...grating sometimes,” Adrien said sympathetically. “Hopefully we’ll both get assigned to groups with people we can work well with.”

“Yeah, like each other!” Nino said. “That would be nice...or maybe with Alya or with Marinette. Just as long as none of us are stuck with Chloe.”

Adrien smiled awkwardly and forced a chuckle. “I don’t think Chloe would do anything to disrupt the project...she’d probably find an excuse to not do her share of the work at all.”

“That was when she had Sabrina to do her homework for her,” Nino grumbled. “Maybe she’ll try to recruit a new crony…”

“Honestly, I think she’s still handing off a lot of her schoolwork to Sabrina,” Adrien said with another wry smile. “Sabrina’s been doing Chloe’s homework since grade school.”

“Heh, wow…” Nino chuckled, shaking his head. “Makes sense, though.”

Just then, something behind Adrien seemed to catch Nino’s attention: he leaned slightly to the side to look over Adrien’s shoulder and waved, smiling.

“Hey, girls!”

Adrien turned around as Alya returned Nino’s greeting and waved back. He didn’t recognize Marinette at first without her hair in their signature pigtails, but when she spoke a second later, the familiar sound of her voice made it click.

“Uh, hi! Adrien!” she greeted shyly with a little wave.

His heart did a giddy little flutter and his focus of attention zoomed in completely on Marinette; he felt almost spoiled to be the first, sole recipient of Marinette’s attention, like a little kid on his birthday. He zeroed in on the somewhat shy but happy gaze she was fixing him with, and vaguely registered his own mouth stretching into a smile.

“Hi!” he responded. “I...almost didn’t recognize you, Marinette!” Inwardly, he was surprised to
hear his voice coming out much softer and half an octave higher than usual. His hand came up involuntarily to rub at the back of his neck as he felt his cheeks warm, but then he noticed the pinkish-red scrape on the tip of her nose, and he frowned in concern.

“What happened to your nose?” he asked, leaning in slightly. His hand hovered uncertainly just in front of him as he stopped himself from reaching out to touch her cheek.

“What? Oh…” Marinette giggled a little—breathlessly, Adrien thought—and brought up a hand to tuck a lock of hair behind her ear. “I, uh…scrapped it on the wall when I…was running downstairs.” She grinned sheepishly. “It looks worse than it is, it’s…no big deal.”

Adrien opened his mouth to respond, but then noticed something that, to him, was like discovering a great treasure of the earth, and he simply couldn’t hold himself back. He reached out and gently brought his fingertips to Marinette’s cheek. She went still and watched Adrien’s face, transfixed. (Unnoticed by their mutual friends, meanwhile, Alya and Nino had shuffled off to give the two “lovebirds” their space.)

“I never noticed you had freckles…” he murmured, his gaze warming. “How did I never notice them…?”

Marinette blushed, but rather than stiffening out of nervousness, she seemed to relax in response to his voice, her lips slackening, and her eyes softening.

Something about her expression filled him with the temptation to bring his other hand to her face and coax her to him so that he could wrap his arms around her and pull her close and kiss her over and over again as they let their hands stroke loving warm into each other’s skin…!

Nope! Nope, don’t even think about it! Adrien scolded himself. Of course, telling yourself to not think about something is an almost sure-fire way to make yourself think about it more, and so Adrien only found himself further imagining what it would feel like to have their bare bodies pressed against each other, arms wrapped around each other, exploring and worshipping...

…Oh my god, what is WRONG with me?! No, don’t freak out, just…! Just don’t do anything creepy…!

Marinette’s voice brought him back to reality, and in hindsight, Adrien was proud he didn’t startle and retreat away from her in a rush to give her back her space. He was certainly freaking out over his own behavior on the inside, but Marinette didn’t seem weirded-out at all...

“Well, they are pretty tiny…” she said with a smile, her gaze dropping modestly.

Wait, what are talking about, again? Adrien thought. Oh, right: her freckles. They really are adorable...

“...almost invisible in the winter, and they’re not all over my face, just, you know…across the bridge of my nose, mostly…” Marinette scratched an itch at the corner of her jaw with a finger. “I don’t really expect anybody to notice them…” Am I babbling? she thought, Yeah, I’m definitely babbling.

Adrien’s eyes followed the motion of her hand and fixed on the side of her neck, and he vividly recalled the lovely scent of her at the sight. At that point, it was impossible to not notice Marinette’s exposed collarbone and shoulder, which Adrien was sure would smell heavenly if he only gave in to his urges, but he was starting to freak out again about where his train of thought was going: his tomcat instincts were urging him with an unnerving persistence to move in close to her and lean in to
drink in her scent...and to nuzzle her, kiss her throat, lick her soft skin and nibble on her with his teeth ...

Argh, no!! Oh my god... Adrien gave himself a shake and a mental slap to the face, taking a step back to give Marinette more space and bringing his hands back. What the hell is wrong with me?!

“Uh--! Uh--!” He glanced rapidly from side to side, scrambling for some sort of recovery or escape. Marinette just kept staring at him with wide eyes and her mouth slack; a fitting expression for watching a socially-awkward weirdo freak out, he thought. “I, um--! I’m--! I dunno what I--! I’m--! Sorry?!” he babbled. “I--! You know what?! I gotta use the restroom! Uh, see you in class...?!”

Marinette just blinked at him, struck dumb by his alien antics.

...If he gently took hold of her waist and pulled her in close, would she tilt her head back and expose her throat to him when she felt his breath on her neck? What soft, lovely sounds could he draw from her, sprinkling cat-kisses all over her neck and exploring the soft, soft skin of her body with reverent hands...

Aaaaaaaaand now he could feel a boner coming on...faaaaaaantastic.

So Adrien just made a break for it.

Whyyyy?! Chat Noir, why are you like this?! he berated himself. Maybe you can’t see Ladybug as often as you want, and maybe Marinette is adorable and beautiful, but that doesn’t mean you can start trying to claim Marinette, too!!

~

The bell for homeroom rang ten, maybe twenty seconds after Adrien disappeared around the corner. Marinette had been startled out of her stupor, but her brain continued to play only a endless stream of question marks in a single tone reminiscent of a dial tone. She walked to her classroom and sat down in her usual seat without even realizing that Alya and Nino were already there. Nino twisted around in his seat to watch as Alya rounded on her.

“Well?!” she stage-whispered excitedly. “How’d it go after we left?! Tell me all about it!”

Marinette blinked, staring blankly at the desktop.

“I...I think I’m still trying to figure out what happened, honestly…” she said distantly.

Alya exchanged baffled looks with Nino, but didn’t have time to start the interrogation as the teacher walked in. Adrien came in right after him, walking stiffly as if he were in a marching band, with a phony smile stuck on his face, and clearly trying to look normal when he was feeling anything but.

Marinette had no idea what to make of it.

Her heart was still racing as she mentally replayed her interaction with Adrien again and again. She didn’t know what she had expected to happen in the hallway--for Adrien to react the way Alya said he would had just seemed too good to be likely--but she definitely hadn’t expected him to notice her freckles for the first time and stare at them like he had never seen freckles before in his life. And then, when he had actually caught sight of her bare collar and shoulders...

The way he was staring at me, it’s like he was...hypnotised! she thought. And...was I imagining it, or did I actually see...longing in his eyes?
She had no idea when she had developed this knack for reading Adrien’s body language, but she couldn’t be completely crazy, because whatever she had sensed from him was having very real effects on her.

*He was so close...I wanted to kiss him so bad...! I swear, I could practically feel sparks flying between us...! Well, at least in me!*

Of course, she hadn’t gone for it, because they were in the middle of the school’s main hallway, and she hadn’t completely forgotten that, but...that want remained, and the way he had looked at her almost made her believe that the same urge had crossed his mind, too.

But even if she couldn’t label whatever it was he was thinking or feeling when he looked at her like that, she wanted very much to know what it was, to see it unleashed instead of hidden behind his eyes… She had caught herself wondering if she could coax it out of him with her touch… If she ran her hands up his chest or wrapped her arms around him, would he reciprocate, and take her into his arms and touch her...other ways?

The more she thought about it now, staring at the back of his head, the more she found herself squeezing her thighs together and crossing and recrossing her legs against the throbs of lust she was still feeling. She could feel wetness gathering between her thighs, and wondered how much of it was due to her heat.

Not only that, but her wistful imaginings of having Adrien’s arms wrapped around her wouldn’t leave her alone, no matter how hard she tried to concentrate on lecture, and she swore she was starting to feel that ache for intimate touch settling deep into her skin. It didn’t occur to her to question how strange it this to come on now, of all times, because, in her mind, when had she ever *not* wanted to share a loving embrace with the boy she loved?

The big difference was, now she couldn’t stop wishing they were locked in a closet together at that very moment...preferably in an alternate dimension where they wouldn’t they get caught.

*Of course, Adrien doesn’t seem like the type to risk his good image to make out with a girl in a closet at school, Marinette admitted to herself good-humoredly, but someday, we’ll be the type of couple who enjoys a good make-out session whenever the mood strikes us--in appropriate settings, of course!*

Marinette grinned and giggled under her breath, gazing dreamily into space. Alya glanced sideways at her twitterpated best friend for the twentieth time that day and tried not to burst out laughing at Marinette’s expression.

*This girl has no idea how obvious she is… she thought, hiding a snicker behind her textbook.  If Adrien could catch her looking at him with THAT face just once, he’d totally catch on to how hot for him she is! But now we’ve got a boy both in love AND in denial to make things interesting!*

~

At the end of Biology class, Mme. Gaucher brought up the research project that Nino had brought up and that had somehow completely slipped Adrien’s mind.

“Allright, everyone, listen up!” she called cheerily, smiling warmly at the class.  “Today you’re all going to get put into your groups for your first research project, and those of you who don’t have sports after lunch get to go meet with your partners in the library to pick your topics and start gathering source material!”
“I wish she wouldn’t make it sound like a trip to Disneyland,” Nino whispered to Adrien out of the corner of his mouth.

Adrien made a mumbling, almost whimpering noise in response, struggling to pay attention. Nino turned to look at Adrien and frowned in concern, but he couldn’t catch Adrien’s eye.

Adrien had been battling Marinette-centered fantasies and an on-and-off hard-on since the bell had rung for first period. He felt like his body was malfunctioning on him, and he couldn’t even know if it was his heat or not that was to blame for it all, because Ladybug wasn’t any part of this scenario.

*I’m a mess…* he thought, feeling like his sanity was starting to slip away bit by tiny bit. *I’m a mess, and my kwami can’t even tell me why…*

“So, without further ado!” Mme. Goucher whipped out a sheet a paper which no doubt held the students names in their groups.

*I have to hope I don’t end up in a group with Marinette,* Adrien thought glumly. *I don’t know what could happen if we have to spend even more time around each other.*

“Group number one will be: Alya, Claire, and Elise!”

Somewhere behind him, Adrien heard the sound of a high-five and two girls making sounds of pleasant suprise. He guessed they were close friends who were excited to be in a group together.

“Group number two will be: Chloe, Felicienne, and Marinette!”

Adrien stared at the teacher as his mouth fell open in dismay. Twisting in his seat to look at Chloe on the other side of the classroom, he saw her stand up and raise her hand, the sneer on on her face foretelling some prissy protesting to come.

“Madame Gaucher!” she said loudly, “Marinette and I have been in the same class many times before, and she is impossible for me to work with! I urge you not to put us in the same group!”

Adrien frowned, then craned his neck to look behind him at Marinette.

Big mistake.

When Marinette--who was glaring at Chloe and possibly about to speak up--happened to glance at Adrien, her expression cleared and their eyes locked. It was as if time skidded right to a halt.

A strange sensation ran slowly up his back, like a shiver, but lingering there, under his skin, instead of dissipating like a shiver he might get from feeling cold. In the moment, he barely noticed it, because at the same time, that desire to steal close to Marinette and scoop her up into his arms crept over him again...much more than just a stubborn urge, but a deep, pervasive longing. He actually felt himself shift his weight as if he was about to get out of his seat, and only managed to rein himself in just in time. The way she was looking at him, he felt like she was looking into him, seeing the Black Cat hiding in plain sight and just waiting for him to come to her...and somehow, he just felt so sure that if he slipped into her arms, he would find what he had been longing to find all this time...only he had no idea what that something was.

“Adrien, is there something you’d like to Marinette to hear?”

Mme. Goucher’s voice shattered Adrien’s trance like a whip to the face, and he yelped aloud and jumped in his seat.
“UH! Uh, no, Madame, sorry, I was just-- I was--!” Rattled at he was, Adrien was drawing a blank. How was he going to get out of this?!

“Mme. Gaucher, you could switch Marinette with Adrien!” Chloe cut in brightly. “Adrien and I are best friends and we’d work really well together!”

“We all have to work with people we don’t get along with sometimes, Chloe,” Mme. Gaucher said in her overly-maternal, no-nonsense voice. “You won’t be able to avoid it in university, and you’ll do it all the time in your working life, too! The sooner you start practicing, the better!”

Chloe scowled, and flumped back down in her seat, crossing both her legs and her arms, as if to display the maximum amount of displeasure possible.

*Again, why does she hate Marinette so much?* Adrien wondered glumly. *Marinette gets along with everyone else I’ve ever seen her interact with! Everyone likes her!*

Adrien twisted back around in his seat to look up at Marinette again.

Marinette had to resist the urge to swoon.

Those were *kitten eyes* Adrien was giving her, and Marinette considered it a miracle she hadn’t dissolved into a puddle of goo in their wake. But *why* was he looking at her like that?

*What is going through this boy’s head?* she wondered.

“Alright, now let’s all pay attention, okay?” Mme. Gaucher said loudly, causing Marinette to jump and Adrien to whip back around in his seat. “You’ll all be out of here soon!”

Adrien ran his fingers through his hair restlessly. Even after rubbing at the itch, however, the strange sensation remained. He scratched his head again, but it didn’t help. And then he noticed that his whole back was starting to crawl. Adrien hunched his shoulders and held his head in his hands in dismay.

“Dude, are you feeling okay?” Nino asked, leaning in again to whisper to Adrien.

Adrien had no idea how to respond. He couldn’t exactly bring up the fact that he was going through his mating cycle with *Ladybug*, and besides, he didn’t even know whether his heat had anything to do with whatever was wrong with him! Even if he left all of that out, How was he supposed to explain what was going on with him? *He* didn’t even know because even his *kwami* didn’t seem to know!

*WHY can’t Plagg tell me what’s wrong with me?* he wondered again, bewildered. *Is it my heat, or isn’t it?! Why can’t I keep it together around Marinette?! If I was... really in love with her...* His mind reeled at the thought. *That’s no reason for me to completely lose it like this!! But there’s no reason my heat should be acting up around anybody but Ladybug, either!! And if Plagg really can’t figure it out... what am I gonna do?! What’s going to HAPPEN to me?!*

“I...don’t know what’s going on with me,” he finally said. Nino wasn’t expecting that, and seemed to not know how to respond..

“Group three will be Adrien, Fleur, and Lysandre!”

Adrien barely registered the sound of his name; he rubbed the back of his neck, and then ran his fingers through his hair again. Still, he found no relief from the tingling, crawling sensation he was now feeling from the top of his head to the base of his spine. It took almost all his self-control to not
start writhing in his seat and scratching at his back; he clenched his jaw and tucked his hands under his knees. It was getting difficult to keep his breathing slow and even. And then it hit him, and he started to panic a little:

*Oh no...this is the “itch” coming on, isn’t it?!* His eyes widened in horror as he stared blankly at the desktop. *I can’t do anything about it; only Ladybug can make it go away...oh, man, how long am I gonna have to endure this? How much worse is it going to get?! It’s subtle enough now that MAYBE I could get used to it JUST enough to ignore it, so that nobody else notices me acting weird, but...later? I don’t even know if I’ll be able to sleep at night!

(“Group four will be Henri, Philippe, and Rose!”)

Then he thought of Ladybug.

*I wonder if Ladybug’s feeling miserable right now, too...I wish I could talk to her, to see how she’s doing, but we can’t go on patrols or call each other at all...Are we really going to just have to wait this out? What’s going to happen the next time someone’s akumatized?*

(“Group five will be Armin, Juleka, and Nino!”)

*I really hate to admit it, but...I feel like we’re already doomed at this point, Adrien thought. This “itch” is already starting to drive me crazy, and I haven’t even been dealing with it for a day! And Ladybug’s almost definitely started to experience whatever her counterpart to my itching is, and I bet she’s about as miserable as I am right now...unless hers works differently from mine. Still...I just can’t imagine us being able to keep ourselves from giving in and trying to comfort each other. By the time we see each other again...even if it’s as soon as later today, our symptoms are just getting to be too much to ignore.*

“And...that’s it!” Mme. Goucher finally announced. “You’re all free to go!”

*Thank goodness...* Adrien thought. *Maybe fencing will take my mind off this itching, and then I can ask Plagg about what to do about all this during lunch. I hope he can be more helpful this time!*

He busied himself with putting his textbook and tablet away as quickly as he could so that he could leave the classroom before Marinette passed by him on her way out. He could not afford to let himself get distracted by her again, because who knew what he might do then!

“How Madame Gaucher made you late for fencing class?” Nino asked with a laugh.

“Uh, yeah, a little!” Adrien replied without looking up. “Well, actually, she might not have taken so long if Chloe hadn’t interrupted…”

“Heh, good point!” Nino chuckled, putting his own things away. “Well, I’m off to meet my group in the library! See you after lunch.”

“Yeah! See ya!” Nino stood up and clapped Adrien on the shoulder as he turned and headed out. Adrien shouldered his own bag and took a deep breath as he got to his feet.

*Okay, keep your eyes on the door, and just walk straight out!* he thought to himself. *Whatever you do, do NOT look behind you at Marinette!*

Somehow, amidst the clamor of twenty students all shoving school supplies into bags and filing out, he distinctly recognized the sounds of Marinette packing up her things and Marinette getting up from her seat, and if Adrien hadn’t already started walking, he wouldn’t have been able to resist the impulse to stay where he was…
Adrien forced himself to keep walking, exiting the classroom and heading for the gym, even as his imagination played out possible scenarios for what might have happened if he had let Marinette come to him...

He gathered her up in his arms and held her close, nuzzling the side of her face with his cheek and breathing in her sweet scent. She wrapped her arms around him and hugged him back, and she sighed happily as they soaked up each other’s warmth...

She raised her head from where she had been resting it against his chest and gazed up at him, craning her neck...instinctively, he leaned down until his lips met hers halfway in warm, lingering kiss...

Adrien clenched his jaw against another shiver that ran down his spine.

*Where is my heat-addled brain coming up with daydreams like this?* he thought, shaking his head in dismay. *There are exactly zero reasons that Marinette would come up to me and just hug me out of nowhere! Although I feel like a hug would feel really nice right now...but, anyway! Kissing Marinette is also OUT OF THE QUESTION! I am in LOVE with Ladybug, I am LOYAL to Ladybug, and Marinette is JUST a really good friend!! Even if she IS super-sweet, and...really pretty...oh my god, pull yourself together, Adrien!*

But it wasn’t until he reached the boys’ locker room that Adrien’s environment became stimulating enough to distract him from his thoughts. Changing into his fencing uniform did nothing to affect the itching sensation; it felt like the irritation was under his skin instead of on the surface. It continued to nag at him until he started to work up a sweat, finally dulling slightly so that it was barely noticeable as he concentrated on sparring. It was incredibly relieving to know that physical exertion granted him a temporary respite from this, too, in addition to his intrusive thoughts.

*I wonder if this means that this thing for Marinette really does have something to do with my mating cycle...* he mused as he rode home for lunch an hour and half later. *Then again, concentrating on my performance in a sport properly would theoretically help take my mind off anything. Otherwise, I just wouldn’t do very well. I guess Plagg is still my only reliable source of information.*

~

Adrien brought his lunch upstairs to his room so that he could talk to his kwami as soon as possible, and he made sure Plagg was given his own lunch of Camembert.

“Plagg, I’m pretty sure the ‘itch’ just dropped on me while I was in class this morning,” Adrien began as Plagg swallowed his cheese. “Is there anything I need to know about it that you haven’t already told me?”

“Not really,” Plagg said unconcernedly. “Your body’s literally craving Ladybug’s touch, and you instinctively want her to pet you like the cat you half are. It’ll gradually get worse the longer you go without pets from Ladybug, which will help you feel better, but of course, the more time you spend with Ladybug, the faster your symptoms progress, so you kind of just have to choose whether you’d rather grin and bear it to minimize the intensity of your future symptoms or beg for relief and hope you two don’t lose your minds later.”

“Right…” Adrien took a bite of his sandwich and chewed thoughtfully. “I noticed that I seemed to feel better while I was in fencing class, though,” he said, swallowing. “It’s back now,” he added, rolling his shoulders with a wince, “But does the physical activity help, like it does with the...thoughts?”
“Not really,” Plagg said, settling down on Adrien’s desktop. “Not in the same way Ladybug’s touch would, anyway. It’s just while your body is in battle-mode, your symptoms get overridden by the adrenaline so that they don’t distract you and make you vulnerable, remember?”

“Oh, right...yeah, that makes sense...” Another bite. “So...the next time I have a mission with Ladybug, she’ll be suffering from whatever her version of this is, right? What’s...it like?”

“Yup. Supposedly, it’s like body aches, but more subtle. It makes her crave your touch, just like you crave hers, but just like being pet like a cat will have the greatest effect on you, there’ll be a ‘special touch’ or two that’ll work best on Ladybug. You can ask her to tell you about it if you want, since her kwami will probably have told her about it.”

“Body aches...like from a fever? That sounds awful!”

“No better or worse than your itching,” Plagg said neutrally, shrugging.

Another bite. Adrien frowned sadly at the thought of Ladybug in discomfort, and again, he wondered: if he found Ladybug suffering from being apart from him, and his touch was the only thing that could make her feel better, what could he possibly do but do everything in his power to comfort her? The way he saw it, his reason for existing was to fight by her side and love her unconditionally with every fiber of his being, and so not tending to his Lady’s needs went against every one of his basic instincts! But if giving in would end up making things worse for both of them in the long run...

“If Hawk Moth keeps up his current activity rate, and I end up meeting Ladybug about every three days, exactly how much worse will our symptoms get over time if we...uh...” Adrien rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. “If we were to...you know...hang around?” He started scratching at his scalp almost absentmindedly against the still-lingering itch as he stared at Plagg nervously.

“You mean if you two were to keep making out after every mission, like you’ve been doing this whole time?” Plagg asked dully.

Adrien hunched his shoulders defensively as he blushed, and he suddenly lost the ability to look Plagg in the eye; more than enough of an answer for Plagg.

“Well...the thing is, it’s hard for me to say. Spending, say, an hour with Ladybug every three days wouldn’t be bad at all...we would expect the ‘itch’ to start coming on sometime during the third week, and, with a decent amount of self-control, you’d be able to behave normally out in public up until about...right after the fourth and final week begins. Now, what problem do you notice with this scenario?”

Adrien stared blankly at Plagg for a moment, pondering the details and coming up with nothing. Then, it finally hit him, and his eyes widened.

“...that scenario is exactly what’s been happening this whole time.” he said. “...but I’m less than two weeks in, and I already have the ‘itch’...Plagg, I’m...my heat is progressing about twice as fast as you said it would!”

Plagg nodded grimly.

“But...! Plagg, what does this mean?!” Adrien asked anxiously, his half-eaten sandwich lying forgotten on his desk.

“It suggests that you two are spending a lot more time together than three or four hours a week, but I know you haven’t transformed into Chat Noir more often than that, and we can assume Ladybug’s
not sneaking into your room to watch you sleep or something, since she she doesn’t know where you live…”

“Well, she knows where Adrien Agreste lives, but she doesn’t have any reason to stalk Adrien, right? Eh heh heh…!” Adrien chuckled nervously, and Plagg frowned at him in disgust.

“Oh, but wouldn’t you love it if she did!” Plagg grumped. “Anyway,” he continued, “If it’s not you two, then...maybe it has something to do with your super-high compatibility? Maybe you two are just super-sensitive to each other?”

“That’s gotta be it,” Adrien said instantly, staring into space with a gooey smile on his face. “There’s so much natural chemistry between us, we can barely take the heat!” He snickered at his own pun.

“Hang on, lover-boy, we’re not done talking!” Plagg rose up into the air to level himself with Adrien’s line of sight. “I find it puzzling that you noticed the ‘itch’ come on while you were at school. You’re sure you weren’t feeling it at all this morning before you left?”

“No, I was fine until…” Adrien paused, brow furrowed, thinking back. “It hit me after biology, while the teacher was assigning us into project groups. I had just turned to look at Marinette, and then I felt the first ‘itch’ sort of crawl down my back...The rest of it just started piling up right after that.” He looked up at Plagg again. “Why, are you thinking something triggered it? I don’t remember you telling me it worked like that.”

Plagg shook his head. “It doesn’t, really,” he said, bringing a paw to his chin thoughtfully. “But depending on the timing, it can either hit you all at once—usually while you’re with Ladybug—but most of the time, it builds up slowly and gradually the longer you’re away from Ladybug...but it hit you just as you were looking at Marinette, which I find very interesting…” He looked up at Adrien with a sly smile now on his face. “And you’re still pining after her, right?”

Adrien groaned in frustration. “I am not pining!” he protested, scratching at his scalp with both hands (in vain). “If I’m pining after anyone, it’s Ladybug! Marinette I see almost everyday!” He stopped scratching and scowled at Plagg. “And anyway, I thought you said I couldn’t blame my heat for what I feel when I’m around Marinette! Do you…” His shoulders slumped hopelessly and he stared at Plagg imploringly. “Do you know what’s going on with me, or not?”

Plagg blinked, then heaved a sigh before bringing himself closer to Adrien’s face. “I’m not going to lie; your mating cycle has been probably the fastest-advancing I’ve ever seen—”

“Are you serious?” Adrien asked softly, his mouth hanging slightly open.

“Yup, but you know, I’ve got this feeling that this isn’t a bad thing. I didn’t tell you not to blame your heat for your girl-troubles because I knew there wasn’t any connection; there’s no way I can know that for sure, because this has never happened before! I think you’re forgetting something…” Plagg floated backwards and crossed his arms. “The mating cycle doesn’t change how you really feel.”

Adrien just stared back for a moment, stunned speechless.

“You’re saying...my heat could be affecting how I feel physically when I’m around her, but...it has nothing to do with how I feel about her? That maybe it is making me into a hormonal disaster
around her, but that my feelings for her are all my own?"

Plagg nodded sagely.

“There’s something else I thought of: if falling in love with Marinette would hurt your chances of mating with Ladybug, then why would your heat flare up when you’re with Marinette at all? Who knows...maybe this is an auspicious sign.”

“You...you think so?” Adrien asked, hesitant but hopeful. “You think I should just...trust my instincts? All my instincts?”

“Sure beats fighting with yourself, doesn’t it?” Plagg remarked with a shrug, smirking.

Adrien smiled gratefully.

“Thanks, Plagg. I hope you’re right.”

“Of course I am,” Plagg scoffed. “I am clever and wise and awe-inspiring!”

Adrien chuckled as he checked the time on his phone.

“Whoops! I gotta head back to class!”

Plagg watched Adrien scramble to clean up the remains of his sandwich and gather the textbooks he would need for the rest of the day’s classes. He also took off his sweater to change his shirt, since he hadn’t left himself enough time to shower after fencing.

*I don’t know whether to be relieved or not that he still hasn’t figured it out, Plagg thought. He wouldn’t have to worry about loving two girls at once anymore, but...maybe he needs more time to figure out what loving them really means.*

Chapter End Notes

I know many readers--myself included--are naturally wary and suspicious of original characters because they too many of them end up stealing the spotlight form the canon characters, but don't worry: all the new classmates named in this chapter exist pretty much only to put bodies in seats in the classroom, because it didn't seem realistic for Marinette and Adrien's high school classes to have the exact same people as their middle school classes did. The characters Claire, Elise, Felicienne, Fleur, and Lysandre--who will be in Marinette's, Adrien's and Alya's groups--will be introduced in the next chapter, but rest assured, they're only here in this story to contribute to some fun future interactions, and will hold next-to-no influence on the plot! I just thought it would be fun to have some new girls for Marinette, Adrien, and Alya to talk to about love, dating, and Ladybug and Chat Noir (and how good a catch Chat Noir obviously is)!
Marinette meets up with her project group: Chloé, who, of course, hopes to not do any work; and Felicienne, a cat-lover with zero patience for bad attitudes. Marinette realizes that this project could be a very convenient way to study feline tendencies, and so she and Felicienne decide to save arguing with Chloé for another day. During her lunch break, Marinette re-reads the entry in her diary telling the story of her first (and second) kiss with Chat Noir, and does her best to release the pent-up sexual frustration she's been carrying around all morning. To her dismay, it seems that orgasms won't be quite enough to fully relieve her any more when it's Chat Noir's touch her body craves. After school, Marinette and Alya hang out to discuss Part 2 of Operation: Seduce Adrien Agreste...a double-date to the aquatic center! Alya claims it's the perfect novel experience to help Adrien loosen up around Marinette, if she can let go of her nerves and have fun without passing out at the sight of Adrien in a swimsuit!

Wednesday

On their way to the library with about a dozen fellow classmates, Marinette and Alya hung back to bring up the rear of the group so that they could talk more-or-less privately. Most of the other kids were holding their own conversations with each other, and Chloé appeared to be too preoccupied with her dissatisfaction with her current situation to care what Marinette might be discussing with her best friend in confidence, and so Marinette took the opportunity to give Alya the abridged version of what had happened between her and Adrien in the hallway.

"...he just stared at my face, like he had never seen freckles before!" Marinette whispered, blushing at the memory of his face coming so close to hers. "He seemed so relaxed, like it was totally normal, but at the same time...his eyes were so..." She trailed off, remembering the powerful urge to kiss him she had felt when their eyes met. ".Ugh, this is gonna sound crazy--it sounds crazy even to me! --but, I swear I saw...something like longing in his eyes...like, you know how they talk about 'heated' gazes in romance novels, or whatever? That's exactly what it felt like!"

"Have you ever seen a ‘heated gaze’ in real life before, though?" Alya whispered, sounding intrigued.

"No, but we’ve both seen it in movies lots of times, right? You know what I’m talking about? How their expressions go all...soft but hyper-focused right before they move in for the kiss?"

"Adrien was looking at you like that? " Alya hissed, sounding about as mind-blown as Marinette was.

"I... yeah, he was! Oh my god, he really was! And I wanted to kiss him so bad, but we were in the middle of the hallway…!"

"No, yeah, I get it, but go on, what happened then?!" Alya whispered excitedly all in one breath.

"He...he seemed to suddenly snap out of...something, and he back-pedalled, just like he’s done before, and then he just...bolted for the restroom! Do you think he was doing what you said he’s
"Yeah, I bet you that’s exactly what happened! I mean, he might not have been consciously trying to hit on you, but he noticed something about you that he hadn’t before, and because he likes you, it felt like a special discovery to him. Like...how would you feel if you discovered something new about Adrien like that? Like a freckle or beauty mark on him somewhere?"

Marinette pressed her lips together against the giddy smile that instantly stretched across her face. She failed to completely muffle her giddy squeal, which was more than enough answer for Alya.

"Exactly! And so that’s probably how Adrien felt!" Alya grinned as Marinette gasped in her excitement.

"Oh my gosh…! Do you think…?! Do you think he wanted to kiss me, too?!" she whispered breathlessly.

"You were probably looking at him the same way he was looking at you if you wanted to kiss him, so, yeah, maybe he did!"

"Oh god, I feel like I’m gonna faint…!" Marinette clutched at her own heart.

"Can’t faint yet, girl: I have to meet with my group, and you have to meet with yours--with Chloé--so you’re going to need your wits about you!" Alya clapped Marinette on the shoulder sympathetically.

"Lucky me…" Marinette grumbled, slouching dramatically.

Ms. Goucher was waiting in the library for the class to arrive. She gave each of them an index card with a number on to help them find and meet up with the other members of their groups.

"Okay! I'm off to meet up with my fellow ones!" Alya said, gesturing with her card. "Good luck with Chloé!"

Marinette sent Alya off with a gloomy wave back, and then took her card from Mme. Goucher: it had a number two on it.

As much as I’m DREADING having to do a group project dealing with Chloé the whole time, Marinette thought, Hopefully I can keep her from sabotaging our grade, even if I can’t get her to do her fair share of the work. At least I’ve learned how to not let her get to me (well, most of the time); most of the other kids in our class probably haven’t had to deal with her before, and I’d hate for her to end up in a group with somebody who’s easy to bully, like Rose.

Marinette heaved a sigh and started wandering the library, holding up her card facing outward so that her other group member (she hadn’t remembered their name) could find her.

I REALLY don’t want to, but I’d better find Chloé first, if I can. If she’s left alone for too long, she might try to bully someone else into trading group number cards with her...good thing Adrien isn’t here for her to bother, at least.

Marinette searched the library until she spotted Chloé by her blonde ponytail and designer handbag. She was standing in the middle of an aisle texting on her phone with an annoyed scowl on her face. Marinette would have been willing to bet that she was trying to shove her share of the workload onto Sabrina, even though the two of them were now in different classes.

Ugh, she’ll never change...
Marinette approached Chloé and cleared her throat loudly. Chloé looked up and sneered in that familiar snooty way she always did.

“Oh, what do you want? Don’t tell me you’re actually going to try to make me help you with this project?” She tossed her ponytail haughtily. “It’s ridiculous! It’s juvenile! We’re in lycée now! Why am I being forced to prove I know how to do research for a science project?! This class is a complete waste of my time!”

Any other time, Marinette would have rolled her eyes at Chloé’s poor attitude and sense of entitlement, but this time, she winced slightly, because Chloé was far from the only one who not-so-secretly thought Mme. Goucher’s teaching methods felt like an insult to their intelligence.

Nevertheless, Marinette felt confident in assuming that Chloé’s reasons for not wanting to pull her weight on this group project were the same ones as for every other homework assignment she’d ever been given. She knew for a fact that Sabrina had been doing all of Chloé’s homework for her since grade school.

“Honestly…” Marinette said, “I can’t answer for the rest of us, but if Sabrina’s really been doing all of your homework for you since you could read and write, maybe you should prove you can do research and collaborate on a project, since you’ve probably never done it by yourself before!”

“I won’t be doing research as part of my career! That’s what secretaries are for!” Chloé snapped, gesturing dismissively. “I will be making bigger, more important decisions…like what other have to do, and where all the money goes!” She patted her ponytail haughtily and smirked.

“Oookay…” Marinette drawled, rolling her eyes. She crossed her arms. “Well, until then, we’re still in school, and we’re stuck with this project, so let’s just get this over with, okay?”

“Don’t expect me to be at your beck and call!” Chloé snapped, bending forward and pointing a warning finger at Marinette. “You can do what you want with this project, but I’m not gonna be your little study-buddy, got it?”

“First of all, this a group project, not a study session, so you’ll do your fair share of the work with us if you care about your grade,” Marinette said, struggling a little bit to contain her mounting frustration. “Second of all, this isn’t just about you and me being stuck together; we have a third group member, and we’re supposed to be meeting up with her right now so we can pick our topic and start planning our research…and if Madame Gaucher sees us not working on our worksheets, she’s going to be all over us, and we reeeeeeeally don’t want that, right?”

“Ugh, no!” Chloé sneered. “If that woman so much as breathes on me, I will have her fired!”

Marinette took a brief moment to gaze heavenward and wonder what she had done in her past life to be cursed with Chloé Bourgeois.

“Let’s just go find…! I forgot her name…” Marinette turned around and held her card aloft again. “Our third group member.”

“Great, you go look for her that way, and I’ll go this way!” Chloé made to go around the corner of the bookcase in the opposite direction, but Marinette moved quickly to cut her off.

“Nope! We’re going together!” Grimacing, Marinette reluctantly grabbed Chloé by the arm and started dragging her along. “I don’t trust you not to sneak off and ditch us!”

“Hey! What are you--?! Don’t touch me!!” Chloé tried to haul herself in the opposite direction, throwing her weight forward and tugging against Marinette’s grip on her arm, but she didn’t seem
willing to put up more of a fight than that. She wasn’t the kind of person to start an all-out catfight, Marinette knew, because god forbid she got a hair out of place or wrinkle her designer clothes. As Chloé continued to put on her display of indignant reluctance, Marinette continued to pull her along as she held her card in the air with her other hand and kept her eyes peeled for anyone holding the same number. Before too long, a girl with her hair in a black ponytail and a jacket with cats printed on it hurried over, holding her own card with a number two on it.

“There you are!” she said with a friendly smile. “I’m glad I found you! You’re both in group two, with me, right?” She glanced between Marinette and Chloé expectantly.

“Yeah!” Marinette nodded, immediately smiling politely and letting go of Chloé’s arm. She raised her hand in a friendly greeting. “I’m Marinette! I forgot your name, sorry…” she added apologetically.

“That’s okay,” the girl replied, smiling back. “I’m Felicienne. And you’re...Chloé, right?” she added, turning to Chloé, who sniffed and patted her hair haughtily.

“Chloé Bourgeois!” she corrected, looking mildly insulted. “I’m the mayor’s daughter, I thought everyone knew that!”

Marinette rolled her eyes as Felicienne looked slightly confused and taken aback by Chloé’s attitude. “O...kay…?” she replied warily, raising one eyebrow. “But...I got your first name right, right?”

“But you didn’t recognize me,” Chloé said, like her reaction was only to be expected. “So I can only assume you haven’t lived in Paris very long, if you don’t recognize me and my name!”

Ugh, I don’t want to have to DEAL with her! Marinette inwardly groaned. If we have to put up with THIS the WHOLE TIME…!

Felicienne frowned, clearly starting to see the kind of annoyance Chloé was going to be as well.

“Um...first of all, Madame Goucher called us all by our first names only, so I had no idea what your last name was,” Felicienne pointed out. “And second of all, I don’t pay much attention to politics, so I didn’t even know anything about our mayor’s family.” She squinted at Chloé critically, clearly trying to figure out what her problem was, but Marinette knew from experience that trying to apply logic to Chloé’s behavior was a hopeless waste of energy.

“Uh, Chloé’s used to having classes with a lot of the same people through collège, so she’s used to thinking we all know her!” Marinette piped up with an exaggerated false cheeriness. She turned to Chloé and beamed at her. “Don’t worry Chloé, the whole class will...get to know you soon enough!” Like what an insufferable PEST you are... she added in her head.

“Right…” Felicienne glanced between Chloé and Marinette, appearing to size up the dynamic between them, and from her dubious expression, Marinette guessed she came to a fairly correct conclusion or two. “Well, let’s go sit down and get started on those assignment sheets; it’s already been, like, fifteen minutes since we all came in, and we’ve only got until the end of period.”

“Yes! Great idea! Let’s!” Marinette chirped. She followed Felicienne as she lead them to an empty reading table, Chloé trailing behind Marinette looking like she would rather be anywhere but here.

“Your socks are so cute!” Marinette remarked on Felicienne’s knee-highs, which were beige with a pattern of white paw prints on them and a tiny, plush cat face sewn at the top of each one. She noticed also that Felicienne’s high-top sneakers were patterned with leopard spots. Combined with her feline-covered jacket, it was easy to guess what her favorite animal was. “I like your jacket, too.
I’m...guessing you really love cats?”

“Oh, thanks!” Felicienne replied, sitting down and tucking her school bag under the desk. “Yeah, I do. I’ve grown up having cats in the family my whole life, so now I can’t live without them!” She giggled. “I volunteer at the animal shelter on weekends, and we have three cats at home, too.”

“Aww!” Marinette cooed. “I would love to adopt a pet or two or three someday, but I sew and work with arts and crafts all the time, and my parents run a bakery, so it never seemed like a good idea…”

As an animal lover herself, Marinette could easily imagine how nice it would be to have a cat or two around all the time, but she knew very well from personal experience that cats had a tendency to get into mischief; not only had she rescued a fair few pet cats from high places, she had a superhero partner who sometimes bit off more than he could chew, just like his namesake.

And now that he’s in heat, he’s going to be acting even more like a cat than usual, she remembered. He’s already gained the ability to purr, and...the urge to lick me and love-bite me…!

Marinette felt her face heat up and her heart flutter as she recalled the sensation of Chat Noir’s teeth scraping against her skin. She squeezed her thighs together briefly against the throb of arousal between her legs, but this only seemed to heighten her sensitivity to it. She gave herself a little shake, reminding herself that she was not a good time to fantasize about Chat Noir: she was sitting at a table with her arch nemesis and needed all her wits about her if she wanted to get through this assignment. Still, she couldn’t help but smile as she allowed herself to think back to the sound of Chat Noir’s purr rumbling in his chest.

Maybe it’s partly because I’m in heat, too, she thought, but so far, none of his new kitty-quirks have bothered me...they’ve either been really cute, or... arousing, actually, if I’m being honest with myself! Of course, once he’s able to smell my... ugh, my wetness!!... things will probably get really awkward for both of us... Other than that, though...I wonder what other cat-like tendencies Chat Noir will pick up? I can’t help but be curious!

“Ugh, cats are too much trouble!” Chloé was saying (as always, she felt the need make every conversation about her). “They leave their loose fur everywhere, and they scratch the furniture! Everything in my room is too expensive and fancy to let an animal sit on!”

Jolted out of her musings, Marinette scowled at Chloé, and Felicienne’s lips were pressed together into a thin line as she eyed Chloé with poorly-concealed distaste.

Is Chloé just...determined to make everyone hate her, or something? Marinette wondered, not for the first time by a long shot.

“Well...if you brush your cat every day, it’ll leave a lot less loose fur around, and that’s also what lint-rollers and vacuum cleaners are for,” Felicienne said dryly. “And cats have to scratch, it’s instinct. It keeps their claws sharp and stretches their muscles, and they do it to mark their territory, too. You just have to give them a scratching post or two and a scratching block or pad on the floor or two, and train them to use those instead.”

“There you go: Too much trouble!” Chloé shot back haughtily. Leaning over, she dug her phone out of her bag again and promptly buried her nose in it.

“What are doing?!” Felicienne demanded. “We have work to do! Look, it’s fine if you don’t like cats, but don’t just ditch us! We have to brainstorm for topics, and— and—!”

“Don’t even bother, she’s always been like this,” Marinette interjected, rolling her eyes. Lifting up
her chair by the seat underneath her, Marinette scooted around the corner of the table to sit closer to Felicienne. Lowering her voice, she leaned closer and added, “We’ll just brainstorm without her, and if she doesn’t like our topic, tough, she’ll just have to deal with it.”

Felicienne pursed her lips, her brow still furrowed. No doubt she was just as averse as Marinette was to letting Chloé get off easy, but to try any harder to get Chloé to do what they wanted would be a waste of effort at best, and kicking a hornet’s nest at worst.

“Brainstorming is one thing…” Felicienne finally muttered, leaning over to talk to Marinette, “But once it’s time to actually start researching, and planning, and prewriting…that’s just gonna mean more work for us!”

“I know, but if Chloé actually participated, we’d have to consider her input on everything,” Marinette muttered back, “And trust me, we don’t really want her input, it’ll just slow us down.”

Felicienne frowed, glancing at Chloé briefly and scowling. It was nice to have a partner that Chloé couldn’t easily bully, but at this point, Marinette was happy to just not have to deal with Chloé at all.

“Actually…” Marinette continued, an idea starting to form in her head, “What if we make cats our topic for the project? I’ve…actually taken a special interest in cats recently, so…if we have to do this ourselves without Chloé, why don’t we have fun with it?” She smiled hopefully at Felicienne.

Felicienne’s expression cleared somewhat as she looked back at Marinette.

“Really?” she asked. “You…you want to? I don’t mind brainstorming other topics…”

“No!” Marinette chirped brightly, clapping her hands together. “I’d love to research cats with you!”

Felicienne grinned.

“Okay!” she said. “Awesome! In that case…” She reached into her bag and pulled out a white ballpoint pen with a cat-shaped topper on it. “Let’s start filling these out!”

Marinette rummaged in her own bag and pulled out the first writing utensil her fingers found—a pink and red mechanical pencil with most of the eraser still intact. She pulled her answer sheet towards her and filled in her name, group number, and class across the top.

I wonder what Chat Noir would think, knowing I’m using a school project to learn more about him… Marinette thought, unable to keep a silly smile off her face. Hopefully, this isn’t considered cheating~!

In the last ten minutes of their session, Marinette and Felicienne listed several possible subtopics about cats to consider for their project. Although Marinette wanted to focus on feline behavior, she agreed with Felicienne that they needed to focus more on the material Mme. Goucher had covered in class, which hadn’t been very behavior-focused.

“If we put an emphasis on anatomy, we can talk about how cats can do all the amazing things they do,” Felicienne mused aloud, clicking her pen absentmindedly. “We can use the textbook to kind of give us hints as to what Mme. Goucher will probably be expecting from us.”

“So, we could talk about what makes them such good hunters, maybe?” Marinette suggested, digging out her biology textbook. She started searching the table of contents for the chapters she thought would be most useful and marking them down on her tablet.

“That sounds good!” Felicienne replied. She brought out her phone to check the time. “The bell’s
about to ring. Do you want to meet up later outside of school? We can start looking for research material and making a plan for the project.”

“That’s probably a good idea…” Marinette said, starting to put her things away. “Can I have your number? I’ll text you as soon as I know when I’m free next.” And then pray Hawkmoth doesn’t strike again between now and then… she thought.

“Sure! Here…” Felicienne wrote her number on the corner of a page of her notebook and then tore it off and handed it to Marinette. As Marinette entered the number into her contacts, the bell rang to signal the start of lunch period.

“Just in time!” Felicienne laughed. She put her notebook and pen back inside her bag and stood up. “Well, it was nice meeting you, Marinette! Thanks for…” She shot a pointed scowl in Chloé’s direction. “…working with me! See you later!”

“You’re welcome! Thank you!” Marinette exchanged a friendly wave with Felicienne as she left, leaving Marinette alone with Chloé, who likewise was standing up to leave now that she was free to go.

“Finally!” Chloé sniffed. “I’m getting out of this stuffy library! And away from your lowly company!” she added, sneering at Marinette. Without even waiting for a response, she turned and strode off, throwing a careless wave over her shoulder. “Enjoy your journey back through collège-level biology!”

“Yeah, thanks for nothing, Miss Prissy!” Marinette shot after her. “Enjoy your free lazy-time while you can!”

Several voices shushed Marinette from all around for raising her voice in the library; Marinette was quick to leave after that, sheepishly scuttling away like she was fleeing the scene of a crime.

She still had cats on the brain as she walked home for lunch. She sent Alya a quick text letting her know she would love to meet up after school to share their experiences with their respective groups in the library. In the meantime, however, Marinette really wanted to spend some time researching feline behavior on the internet...and not necessarily for the science project.

I wonder if I can predict what other changes Chat Noir will experience by researching the behaviors of cats trying to attract mates… Marinette thought. Maybe it can help me come up with ideas for how I can help him feel better somehow...or at least give me a better idea of what to expect. I guess I could just as easily ask Tikki for more information, but...a new perspective could help me figure out what I want to know more about! At least I’ll be doing something to feel more prepared! Otherwise, I’m just stuck waiting to see how bad our symptoms will get...

Now that she was no longer distracted by school work and social interactions, Marinette was starting to feel the subtle but permeating ache for affection spreading through her again. She found herself tempted to just crawl into bed first thing and tend to her body’s cravings…

I guess there’s no harm in taking some time to rub one out before I go back to class... she thought, blushing slightly. Maybe if I have time left over, I can still do some research...or--Oh!--I can read my journal entry from when Chat Noir confessed to me! I forgot I wanted to do that!

Marinette couldn’t help but eat her lunch somewhat in a rush; she had a lot of things she wanted to
do! After brushing her teeth, she hurried upstairs to her room and grabbed her journal out of her lock box. Tikki came out of her purse to see what she was up to.

“Oh, your diary!” Tikki smiled. “Of course: Today has been quite the eventful day so far, hasn’t it? I wish I could have watched everything that was happening between you and Adrien; it sounded interesting from your tones of voice!” She giggled.

Marinette blushed, but she smiled back at Tikki.

“‘Interesting…’ That doesn’t even begin to describe it!” Marinette sighed, staring at the ceiling for a moment. “I definitely want to record it all before bed later tonight, but…” She glanced bashfully at Tikki, who now hovered over her. “I…actually wanted to just reread my entry from the day Chat Noir…confessed to me.” Sitting up straighter, she started searching for the right page. “I could also…really use some private me-time to blow off some steam,” she admitted.

“Aw! Has Chat Noir been on your mind since this morning, too?” Tikki asked, pressing her paws together happily.

“Not while I was with Adrien, he wasn’t!” Marinette laughed, blushing. “But I did figure out that our science project is going to be a good opportunity to research cats and their biology, which means I might be able to get a better idea of what will be happening to Chat Noir!”

“So you have been thinking about him a lot!” Tikki teased.

Marinette pouted, a little embarrassed of how easily Tikki could read her these days.

“Well…!” She buried her face in her book and continued flipping through it. “It’s hard not too, when so much has happened between us…”

“Obviously!” Tikki said cheerfully. “Well, I’ll leave you to it, then! Try not to lose track of time, though!”

Tikki whizzed up towards Marinette’s bed up above to give her more privacy.

After a couple more page-turns, she found the entry she was looking for: Wednesday, September 3rd.

Huh! That’s exactly one week ago… Marinette thought. In some ways, it feels like it’s been so much longer than that...I hope I took the time to go into as much detail as possible when I wrote this!

Marinette could remember taking a very long time to write the entry because coming up with the right words to describe what had happened and how she had felt at that time had been quite the struggle: she had never had a boy tell her he loved her before, let alone a boy she had lots of deep feelings for...

...he said I was the smartest, bravest, most amazing girl he knew (at least, I’m pretty sure that’s what he said…?), and that he’s been in love with me since the day we met! He said that getting to save Paris with me is always the best part of his day! It made me feel so warm and gloowy and fluffy inside to hear him say all that...if you had told me a year ago or even a month ago that Chat Noir would confess to me like that, so sincerely...I would have assumed you meant that he was just going to turn the flirting up to 11 and sing me a cheesy love song or something! I had never stopped to think until that moment that Chat Noir’s feelings for me might go so much deeper than just a little
crush...that he might not just flirt and brag and show off because he wanted my attention, but because he was actually in love with me!

It warmed her heart all over again reading her thoughts of Chat Noir, and she smiled to herself, remembering the warmth in his voice, the way he had looked at her, and how nervous he had been to tell her just how deeply his feelings ran for her...

She read on excitedly, knowing what happened next...

...he brought his hand up to my cheek, so slowly and so gently, it was like he was afraid I might disappear if he moved too fast, or like he’d break the spell we were in if he startled me...and he wrapped his arm around me, just as slowly and gently, to pull me just a little closer...and then...it was so slow but somehow it felt like the most natural thing in the world, to just lean in and let our eyes close and press our let our just...trust instinct...

Here, Marinette could see several segments of crossed-out and scribbled-out words as she had agonized over how to finish the sentence. She had ended up letting the sentence trail off and started a fresh paragraph to make it easier on herself.

I think the kiss lasted maybe three or four seconds? I have no idea if I’m remembering it right...it sounds so over-romantic when you read it in stories, but it really did feel like time stopped! You read about how kissing makes you feel like you’re floating on a cloud, but it kind of did! I don’t know how else to describe it...! But his lips were really warm, and really soft, and he was so gentle, I don’t think our heads moved at all, not like the way they kiss in movies...but it felt so sweet that way...Does that even make sense? I don’t know how else to describe it, and a part of me still almost can’t believe it happened, and I can hardly believe I’m writing this, but it was really really really nice!!

At this point, Marinette noticed her handwriting becoming messier and her sentences becoming run-ons as she had starting writing faster in a rush to pour all her thoughts out onto the page.

Actually, I’m pretty sure we actually kissed twice. At some point I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him in and our noses got squished together for a second (why is that so cute?!) but we kissed again and I could feel more of his lips against mine and it felt more intense ‘cause we were pressing our lips together harder and I felt a shiver go up my spine and it felt like my whole body was blushing and he wrapped both of his arms around my waist and pulled me closer and THEN! (a few more scribbled-out words) He moaned a little against my lips and oh my god it was like my body temperature suddenly shot up ten degrees and my heart did this huge throb but in a really really good way!! He was seriously just letting himself drown in the moment and it was all so amazing incredible unbelievable unreal glorious

(Several scribbled-out words here were no doubt the result of Marinette trying to find the right adjectives with which to describe the experience.)
Marinette sighed aloud, letting her diary rest on her chest as she stared dreamily up at the ceiling. She brought up a hand to press the back of it to her lips as she replayed yet again the now-precious memory of her kiss with Chat Noir…

To think… it used to just be Adrien that I daydreamed about kissing… she mused. And now, look at me, daydreaming about kissing Chat Noir… and I’ve only just starting falling in love with him…

But, then, that means he’s probably been daydreaming about me for about a year now, ever since he fell in love with me! Because everybody daydreams about the person they’re in love with, right? I’ve been daydreaming about Adrien ever since I fell in love with him, and I’ve been fantasizing about him for almost just as long, because I find him absolutely gorgeous, obviously, and now, Chat Noir…! Well, I’d have to be blind not to notice how gorgeous he is, too, so…! Okay, yeah, I confess: Chat Noir is sexy, too! I mean, that catsuit of his… definitely does not leave much to the imagination… and my costume is just as skin-tight as his, so… if Chat Noir can’t help but ogle me a little bit and fantasize about me, I guess I can’t blame him. And if I know anything about what a girl’s most popular eye-candy features are…

Struck with curiosity, Marinette sat up and closed her diary, bringing it to her desk to lock it up again before she turned to face her full-length mirror. She pulled her shirt up over her head and tossed it gently over the back of her swivel chair, and then undid her shorts and let them drop to the floor, where she stepped out of them and pushed them aside with one foot.

Then… Chat Noir would definitely catch himself admiring my… let’s say, “assets”, once in a while, at least, and he would… fantasize about me, right?! Imagine… doing things to me, me doing things to him…! And seeing me naked, too…!

If any of these thoughts had occurred to Marinette even a week ago, she would have felt endlessly more embarrassed, but now… well, it was still a little strange, and embarrassing, but it was also intriguing, somehow… a whole new light to see Chat Noir in, and not a bad light either… quite the contrary, Marinette found it quite flattering. How could she not? Chat Noir thought she was sexy!

Still curious and intrigued with this new train of thought, Marinette removed her undergarments as well, dropping them carelessly aside. She turned a little to one side, then the other, looking herself up and down at different angles and trying to imagine admiring her figure from a certain boy’s point-of-view…

Marinette’s last growth spurt had largely run its course by the time she turned fourteen last year, and so her figure remained virtually unchanged since then: somewhere between hourglass- and pear-shaped; slender but athletic; and fairly petite overall. Her curves were modest, but her breasts were pert and round, and her butt just toned enough to balance them out. All in all, she thought puberty had been very kind to her (extreme clumsiness aside), and if anybody took notice of this, it was probably Chat Noir.

If Chat Noir was only attracted to me for my looks, then I probably would have caught him ogling me a lot… But Chat Noir’s not shallow like that; he appreciates me for my intelligence and personality, too, and that’s probably why he doesn’t constantly stare all rudely at my boobs or my butt or whatever. Now that we both feel (I think?) the same way about each other, though… I can’t help but feel really excited to see more evidence of those feelings of his in person… to see him look at me with raw adoration and love in his eyes, or desire and longing…! Or to feel him touch me more, like the way he held me while we kissed, and other ways I haven’t experienced before…

Marinette shivered a little as she imagined Chat Noir wrapping his arms around her from behind,
gathering her into a warm and loving embrace. She imagine just barely feeling his breath against the side of her neck and felt a familiar throb low in her belly and between her thighs. She could feel the wetness just starting to gather between the folds of her sex, and the muscles of her core fluttered and squeezed around nothing and she squeezed her eyes shut and wished again that Chat Noir were there to feed warmth and affection to her starving flesh.

*I guess all I can do for now is warm myself up...* she thought wistfully. She glanced up at her bed and immediately felt drawn to the promised warmth and softness it offered; the next best thing to the sanctuary of Chat Noir's loving arms. It felt like being away from him for too long was making her feel cold and lethargic, like a dormouse ready to hibernate.

Still naked, she climbed up to her bed and burrowed under the covers, tucking herself in before burying one hand between her thighs and cupping a breast in the other. As she massaged her left breast and stroked the nipple there in tiny circles with her thumb, she opened her legs wide under the covers and massaged the folds of her sex, spreading them and exposing her wet pussy to the open air. She whimpered as the muscles of her core throbbed with want, bringing her left hand away from her breast to reach down and gently pull her clitoral hood back with her fingers. She swiped the middle finger of her right hand through the wetness gathering around her opening, and began tracing tiny circles over her clit as fast as she could, racing for the orgasm she desperately craved. Her shallow, uneven pants were soon punctuated with thin, broken moans and whimpers, and she found herself instinctively rocking and rolling her hips.

Even as she wound up tighter and tighter inside, even as the dam burst and sent waves of pleasure rushing through her every nerve, squeezing a thin whine out of her, her body still craved something more...she groaned in frustration. The only other thing she could think to try was to slide a finger into herself and feel for her g-spot. She let out a moan of satisfaction when she found it.

*Mmmm... Oh, that feels so good...!* I guess this is how having sex is supposed to feel good...? It probably still takes practice...but I wonder if...doing it with Chat Noir could feel like this...? Or even better, maybe? Oh my god, I can’t believe I’m thinking about him like this...! But I wonder if...no, he probably does! Chat Noir probably fantasizes about having sex with me, too...!

Knowing full-well how long Chat Noir had been in love with her, Marinette recognized the common-sense logic in this conclusion, and yet, at the same time (as seemed to be the case with all of her Chat-Noir-centered realizations lately), the thought felt emotionally like an incredible revelation, and a rather wonderful one at that.

Marinette whimpered again as she slid a second finger inside and thrust them in and out of herself faster and faster, and she could feel a strange, new feeling of heat and pressure building up deep inside her. The throbs of pleasure spreading through her were wonderful, and she squirmed in anticipation of what could lead to an amazing climax. She brought a hand back up to cover her mouth as she failed to completely stifle the soft cries now escaping her.

When she came, she came hard: she let out a drawn-out groan of nearly-overwhelming pleasure as she felt warm juices trickle out as she slid her fingers out of herself. She whimpered and fought to catch her breath as she came down from her high, squeezing her thighs together and gasping for breath. Finally, she rolled over onto her side and wrapped her arms around her pillow. To her surprise...and slight concern...she felt a lump forming in her throat and her eyes pricking with tears not-yet-formed. That orgasm had been amazing...why was she feeling emotional all of a sudden?

*Emotional and sleepy, she amended. My heat again, maybe...?*

“Tikki...what time is it?” she called softly.
She heard the soft *swish* of Tikki taking to the air.

“Let me check your phone...” Tikki responded. A pause, then: “You’ve only got about five minutes before you’ll need to start heading back to campus.”

Marinette grumbled as she forced herself to sit up. She wanted *so badly* to stay in bed.

“Feel better?” Tikki asked, flying up to talk to Marinette face-to-face.

“I guess so...but I think I’m still craving cuddles...and I feel...moody? Almost like I might start to cry or something...I don’t know why... Is there some reason my heat’s the cause of it?”

“Not really, that’s just the rush of feel-good hormones from a good orgasm.” Tikki said, floating closer to give Marinette’s cheek a reassuring pat. “Masturbating can’t quite replace the comfort Chat Noir’s touch would bring, I’m afraid. You’ll just have to make do.”

“At least until I see him again...” Marinette murmured, half to herself. She climbed down from her bed, silently marveling a little at how her leg muscles felt a little shaky.

“Well...” Tikki sounded wary. “Yes, but try to moderate your contact with each other. We still don’t understand why your symptoms are progressing so rapidly, but whatever the reason, it would be best to be cautious.”

“Okay, Tikki, I’ll try...” Even to herself, she didn’t sound particularly confident. If she was being brutally honest with herself, she was actually reluctant to try to resist her feelings of attraction towards Chat Noir. As sexually frustrating as it was to be constantly craving orgasms and cuddles, it just didn’t seem worth the struggle to try to minimize their already-infrequent contact in an attempt to slow the progression of their symptoms, because how much of a difference would it really make?

The way Tikki had expressed confusion and concern about how quickly her symptoms were progressing, it certainly didn’t seem to be working as well as expected.

*As long as we continue to linger only in moderation, maybe it’ll be okay if we...kiss and stuff...* she thought, pulling on a fresh pair of underwear (with a pantyliner in them, per Tikki’s suggestion). *Ugh, listen to me rationalizing...* She frowned, gathering up the rest of her clothes. *There’s no reason to be in such a hurry to get all hot n’ heavy with Chat Noir...there’s more to a loving romantic relationship than just the sexy stuff! But my heat just has to make me all HORNY all the time...maybe we should try to take things slowly...it’s the mature thing to do, and it would help us stay sane longer, theoretically...but, but...!* *UGH, what is wrong with me?!

Marinette finished getting dressed and slowly picked up her bag and purse. Tikki dove into her purse as Marinette stood there, struggling to explain her own feelings to herself.

*Is this normal?* she wondered. *Is this what everybody feels like when they just start to get...intimate with their boyfriends or girlfriends?* Uh, not that Chat Noir’s technically my boyfriend, but anyway...! It’s weird...it doesn’t feel like I’m just excited and impatient to see him again because I want to make out with him and visit with him...it feels like I miss him, like I haven’t seen him in a while and I’m lonely without his company and his touch...but it hasn’t been that long, and I’ve never felt like this before. It must be partly because of my heat...not entirely, but part of it. At least I’m probably not the only one feeling this, right? Chat Noir’s probably feeling a lot like this, too...

Marinette finally smiled to herself...it was heartwarming to visualize Chat Noir missing her and waiting eagerly to see her. Whatever ended up happening (or not happening) when they next saw each other, she would appreciate his company for its own sake. She always did, even when it always took a supervillain to give them an excuse to meet.
“Okay...let’s head out, Tikki...” She stifled a yawn and wondered if daydreaming would help her avoid falling asleep in class or not.

*Whether I end up dozing off or spacing out hardly matters if I can’t pay attention to lecture either way,* she thought, pouting. *So why can’t I just skip the rest of the school day and stay home in bed if I want to?!!*

~ ~ ~

Marinette was feeling too lazy to walk briskly on her way back to school, and so she was one of the last people back to enter the classroom. She tried and failed to properly cover her fifth yawn as she walked right past Adrien, who was already seated, and didn’t even realize he was there until he spoke.

“H-hi Marinette!” He greeted her with a shy wave, and she froze mid-stride on her way past his row. She failed to register that his tone of voice was softer and slightly higher-pitched than usual because her brain was currently banging pots and pans because she had just YAWNED IN ADRIEN’S FACE!!!

*Oh god, WHY DIDN’T I JUST STAY HOME IN BED?!?!*

“Uh! Hi!” she squeaked, going stiff and straight as a board and returning the wave with an awkwardly-raised hand. “Hi! Adrien! Hi! How’re you?! I’m great! Nice to meet you! Wait, that doesn’t make any sense! Uh...! Um...!”

Adrien blinked, not sure how to reply.

“Uh...glad to hear it?” He grinned nervously.

“Take your seat, Mademoiselle Dupain-Cheng,” the teacher said tonelessly, turning away from the blackboard to face the class. “We have a lot to cover in today’s lecture, and I don’t want--”

He raised his voice to address everyone in the room.

“--leaving their seats until I dismiss you, even when the bell rings. Understand?”

Everyone murmured “Yes, Monsieur” as Marinette sat down next to Alya, blushing with embarrassment.

“Marinette, we have to get together after school!” Alya hissed in Marinette’s ear. “It’s time to begin Phase Two of Operation: Seduce Adrien Agreste and I know just how we’re gonna turn up the heat!”

“Sure...” Marinette croaked. “Just remind me again after the last bell rings.”

*Between Adrien and Chat Noir, my ovaries are going to explode before the month is out... she thought dully. And then it won’t even matter that I’m in heat now because I won’t be able to have any babies ever! Maybe Chat Noir would be happy just adopting a kitten or two... Actually... Marinette mused, that’s an interesting question...how would Chat Noir feel about kids? Or Adrien, for that matter? Well, either way, there’s NO WAY I’m asking EITHER of them about family-planning, because I would DIE OF EMBARRASSMENT, and I do NOT want to sound like a creep to Adrien! And Chat Noir, well...whatever his reaction would be, it would probably be WAY too intense and dramatic! No need to give even more food for thought about me when I’m sure he’s got more than enough already!*
The rest of the day’s classes were not fun at all, for a multitude of odd reasons: Marinette continued to feel drowsy, which made concentrating on lecture nearly impossible when combined the difficulty she had thinking about anything other than Adrien or Chat Noir. The classroom felt chillier than usual, and for some reason, this seemed to make her drowsiness worse, though it might have had something to do with how badly she wanted to crawl into bed where it was nice and warm and comfy...and if she could have her way, she would have Chat Noir be there, curled up with her under the covers, purring contentedly as he held her close and just touched her...all over...warming her aching and tired body and soothing her hungry skin...

Because she was aching: she was aching for him, for the relief that only his touch could provide. She could give herself all the orgasms she wanted, pull the plug on the sexual tension that was now constantly rising in her, but just as Tikki had said, her own touch would never be quite enough. It wasn’t just sexual pleasure and resolution her body craved; it was the loving touch of her partner, her other half.

She was so caught up in her thoughts and feelings that staying present in the real world took a good amount of effort. It wasn’t often that Marinette wanted to hole herself up in her room alone rather than hang out with Alya, but she did her best not to let her mood show, and luckily for her, Alya was too excited to notice.

“Okay, so! You wanna hang out at your place or mine?” Alya asked as they left campus together.

“Uh...your place?” Marinette suggested. Maybe I won’t space out so much if I’m in someone else’s room, she thought.

“Actually, now that I think about it, we should go to your place if your parents are cool with it,” Alya said. “If we’re gonna plan a date with Adrien for you, we need to have access to your wardrobe!”

Okay, scratch that plan...

Once they arrived at Tom and Sabine’s Boulangerie, they went up to Marinette’s room armed with a plate of chocolate chip cookies and a pitcher of iced tea, courtesy of Marinette’s parents. Marinette told Alya all about her meeting with Chloé and Felicienne. Between the snacks and refreshments and Alya’s company, she was already starting to feel better.

“Chloé pretty much made sure Felicienne wouldn’t like her from the get-go, but at least Felicienne doesn’t seem like the kind of person Chloé can bully easily. She and I will get along just fine, I think; the only problem is going to be getting Chloé to pull her own weight for the project. We chose the topic for our project without her, because we couldn’t get her to participate at all.” Marinette rolled her eyes as she grabbed a cookie for herself.

“I wish I could say I was surprised!” Alya sighed, shaking her head. “What’s your topic?”

“Cats,” Marinette said after swallowing her mouthful of cookie crumbles. “We’re thinking of showcasing their anatomy and how they can do all the cool things they do, like jumping and balancing and hunting and stuff.”

“Cool!”

“What about you?” Marinette asked, pouring herself a glass of iced tea. “How was your group meeting?”
“It was great!” Alya said excitedly. “One of the girls in my group, Elise, actually recognized me from my Ladyblog and said she was a huge fan!”

“That’s awesome!” Marinette said, ever the supportive and empathetic friend.

“I know, right?!” Alya gushed. “And the other girl, Claire--Get this!--Her mom is a sex ed teacher, and her dad is a professor of evolutionary psychology! We had such a blast talking about ‘human courtship behaviors’ that we decided to make that our topic!” Alya giggled and took a swig of iced tea. “She cited Adrien as an example and pointed out all the ways he made for a highly-desirable mate, and it was hilarious listening to her explain how he was scientifically a 10/10-rated specimen! I didn’t say anything about your crush on him, of course, but girl, if you wanted to recruit her, I bet she’d make a great wingwoman to join your support team!”

“While I would love to meet them--both Claire and Elise--Claire needs to prove herself a good secret-keeper before I even consider telling her about my love for Adrien!” Marinette proclaimed, crossing her arms and putting on an exaggerated frown of seriousness.

“I know, I know!” Alya said, laughing.

“Your topic does sound interesting, though!” Marinette added, giggling. “Potentially hilarious, too! You’ll have to share the juiciest details of your research results!”

“Oh, you betcha!” Alya gave Marinette a hearty wink and finger-gun. “Oh, speaking of winging and human courtship…” Alya leaned forward with a crafty gleam in her eye and clapped her hands together gleefully. “I think it’s time we moved on to Phase Two of Operation: Seduce Adrien Agreste!”

Marinette gulped. She felt her heart flutter with nervous excitement.

“O-okay…” She nodded, trying to look determined. “W-what’re we gonna do?”

“We are going to plan a date for you two!” Alya declared, jabbing a finger at Marinette’s face. “At the aquatic center! It’s time you hit him full-force with the glory that Marinette Dupain-Cheng in a swimsuit!”

“Swimsuit?!” Marinette squeaked, her eyes bulging.

“Yes, Marinette, a swimsuit! There’s already a ridiculous amount of sexual tension between you two; that boy is as good as yours if you just give that him that last nudge he needs to make up his mind and decide that you’re the girl of his dreams!”

A giddy smile spread across Marinette’s face as she practically started vibrating with excitement where she sat.

“You really think that’ll work? You think Adrien will finally fall head-over-heels in love with me when he sees me in a swimsuit?!” It still sounded a little ridiculous, saying it out loud, but if it worked, who was she to complain?

Alya laughed and patted her on the head fondly. “You silly goof, Adrien’s been falling in love with you ever since school started! I still stand by my theory! And no, it won’t be just because of the swimsuit that he finally gives in to his attraction to you; it’s because I think the aquatic center is just the place that will help you both finally loosen up around each other!” Alya leaned in conspiratorially and adjusted her glasses with a sly smile, looking like an evil scientist hatching her newest diabolical scheme for world domination. “Go ahead and ask me why!”
“Why?” Marinette breathed, genuinely fascinated and curious. “What makes the aquatic center so special?”

Alya allowed herself an evil chuckle before answering, milking the moment.

“Heh heh…I have insider’s information from Nino that Adrien…” She looked Marinette dead in the eye and hissed, “... has never been to an aquatic center or water park ever!”

Marinette’s mouth fell open.

“Seriously?” she whispered. “That’s… Wow, that does make this date kind of special… but how is it supposed to help him ‘loosen up’? How is it supposed to help me loosen up? I know you and I had a great time when we went to the aquatic center during summer break, but…”

“Think about it from Adrien’s point of view,” Alya urged, sitting back and snatching another cookie. “He’s going to look to you to show him around, and so I’m thinking that your natural leadership abilities will kick in and your nervousness will melt away and you’ll find yourself having the time of your life, because he’ll be having the time of of his life enjoying this newfound paradise of wet and wild fun with you! Just try to imagine it!” Alya gestured grandly towards the heavens, still clutching the cookie in one hand. “Adrien will be thinking, ‘Wow, so many fun things I’ve never had the chance to do before, I don’t even know where to start!’ and so he’ll look to you, and then…” She leaned in close and booped Marinette on the nose. “Then he’ll finally have the epiphany he needs to realize just how amazing you are and why he’s been falling for you all this time!”

“What epiphany? How?” Marinette asked breathlessly. She was bouncing in place now with barely-restrained anticipation. “What do mean by, ‘amazing’? What will he see?! Alya, tell me!”

Alya pressed her lips together, looking pensive and determined. Then she sighed and crammed the cookie into her mouth and chewed thoughtfully.

“Ah, I wish I knew how to put it into words…!” she growled. She swallowed, appeared to think for a moment, then looked back up at Marinette.

“You know, Marinette, that being klutzy and having trouble stringing a sentence together in front of the boy you like doesn’t make you any less likeable, right?”

“What?” Marinette blinked, taken aback at the change in topic. “Y-yeah, of course! It’s no big deal most of the time! I just wish it didn’t seem to always happen around Adrien! Not that I’m afraid he’d dislike me for it, he’s not that shallow! It’s just, you know, embarrassing, and it gets in the way of actually holding a conversation with him or asking him out or telling him I love him!”

“Right! It’s not that you don’t want him to see those parts of your personality, you just wish you could show him more than that, right?”

Marinette nodded emphatically.

“So let me ask you this…” Alya continued. “What parts of your personality would you most want him to get to know? What is it about you that you think makes you amazing? Don’t be modest, just ask yourself: say you’re starring as yourself in a movie inspired by your life story… what would it be about you that makes Adrien Agreste fall in love with you?”

Satisfied with her monologue, Alya crossed her arms and waited, watching Marinette with a fond smile.
Marinette had a lot of qualities that she was proud of, and listing some of them wasn’t a difficult task, but she had never thought to ask herself this question in relation to Adrien before, and that made the fairly-ordinary question into one of momentous significance...so much so that she suddenly found it a little hard to breathe.

*What is it about me that has Adrien falling in love with me...?*

“Well...” she began slowly, thinking. “Is it fair to say I’m talented? I’ve worked really hard for a long time to get good at designing and sewing and arts and crafts in general...I make sure to always be ready to help people in need...I’m a good leader, and I’m a good listener...I always stand up for the people I care about, and for what’s right, and I don’t let people like Chloé keep me down...”

*What about how Chat Noir sees you? He fell in love with you the day he met you.*

The thought came to her suddenly and out of nowhere. She almost chastised herself for thinking of another boy when she was supposed to planning a date with Adrien, but she cared a lot about what Chat Noir thought of her, and so she felt like it was worth thinking about: How did Chat Noir fall for her so easily, so swiftly, and so wholeheartedly, that he only fell deeper with time?

*Somehow, in the span of that single battle--well, two-part battle--against Stoneheart, I let some part of me show that just...stole his heart. What was it...?*

“Bravery...?” she murmured aloud. “I’m...brave. And...”

*I figured out how to use my Lucky Charm pretty quickly...* she thought. *Tikki says I’m a fast learner...And not everybody could have done that. I mean, it’s a good thing I could, or that would’ve been the end of a very short run as a superhero...but I did.*

“I’m...smart? Am I clever?” She glanced up at Alya, who nodded proudly.

*And when Hawk Moth’s frickin’ face appeared out of all those akumas and threatened me and Chat Noir and the whole city of Paris...I pretty much just threw it in his face, didn’t I? I slingshot myself all the way up there and caught every single butterfly before I even landed on my feet again...and when I promised for both Chat Noir and myself that we would protect Paris from that day forward, everybody cheered...I don’t want to toot my own horn and say it was like something out of a superhero movie, but...we are superheroes, and from where he was standing...Chat Noir must’ve had quite the view of all that...*

*What would be the word for that feeling, though? What adjective would he have used to describe how I looked then?*

“I’m...kinda stuck on finding the right words...” she said, smiling modestly at Alya. “Have any ideas?”

“Hmm...” Alya tapped her chin thoughtfully. “I’d say...you’re a really warm and sweet person; you care about other people, you’re fun to hang out with, you’re generous, and loyal, and everything you said, too! All of our friends from collège would agree with me, and I know Adrien has noticed, too!

“So...what does all of this mean?” Marinette whispered. “You’re saying all that’ll show more if I let myself just have fun with Adrien at the aquatic center?”

“Ex-act-ly!” Alya said smugly. “Think you’re up for it?”

“I’d have to be crazy to turn down any excuse to go out with Adrien!” Marinette giggled. “But what about you? And Nino? You won’t be coming?”
“We could, if you’d like us to!” Alya replied cheerfully. “I’d hate for us to distract you to from the mission objective, but maybe it would help you both feel more relaxed?”

“I think it’ll feel weird, at least at first, if I’m the only there besides Adrien, even if it is a date…” Marinette hedged. “Let’s make it a double-date, and let Adrien and me ease into it?”

“Sounds good to me!” Alya cheered, jumping to her feet. “Okay, let’s see that swimsuit of yours!”

Marinette got to her feet and rifled through her closet until she found what she was looking for; she pulled it out and held it up for Alya’s approval, grinning.

It was a one-piece swimsuit colored white with a simple pattern of pink blossoms and edged with a double-row of pink ruffles trimmed with dark grey along the neckline and low around the hips to form a micro-mini skirt. The dark grey spaghetti straps tied into a halter behind the neck and the wide neckline dipped down just low enough in the center to be flirty without being too on-the-nose. More importantly, it was cute and frilly without being too childish, and 100% Marinette-style.

“It sounds dreamy, but I think throwing up chlorinated water on him would probably ruin the mood,” Marinette said glumly, her entire posture sagging.

“One, Adrien is a model, so I’m sure he’s used to being stared at,” Alya stated, holding up a finger. “Two…” She held up a second finger. “If he’s oblivious enough to not already realize how hot for him you are, there’s no way he’d notice you ogling him, unless you started staring at his crotch and drooling or something, and three…” She held up a third finger as Marinette groaned, “There’s no way the three of us would let you drown, though I bet I could convince Adrien to give you mouth-to-mouth if you needed it!”

“Ah-hah!” Alya climbed up, carefully took it off the wall, and brought it back down. “The last thing you see before you fall asleep, and the first thing you see waking up! Probably makes for some juicy fantasy fodder, too, I bet!” She held up the two-page spread for Marinette to see, grinning. “Have you searched the web to see if anyone’s made nude edits?”
“NO!” Marinette looked horrified and disgusted. “No amount of skill in Photoshop could do his naked form justice!”

“Riiiiiiiiight...because you’ve obviously seen Adrien Agreste’s dick in person already,” Alya deadpanned, still wearing a shit-eating grin that would make Chat Noir very proud.

“NO!!” Marinette went scarlet, but stuck her nose in the air. “I mean that no matter how good someone is in Photoshop, they couldn’t possibly make Adrien look even sexier just by editing some pornstar’s magnum dong onto him! Gross!!”

“I know, I’m just messing with you!” Alya cackled. “Best to leave a little bit to the imagination anyway, right?”

“Right! Exactly!” Marinette nodded smugly.

“Anyway, here’s what I think we need to do,” Alya said, holding the ad up to Marinette’s eye-level again. “We gotta desensitize you! Just keep looking at these until you feel like the real thing won’t make you ogle! And also, remember you won’t be the only one admiring: when Adrien sees you in that swimsuit, he’s gonna go weak at the knees! And he doesn’t even have the benefit of having seen pictures of you showing off that much skin before!” Alya leaned in and gave Marinette a cheeky wink. “If anyone’s gonna get caught ogling, it’s gonna be Adrien!”

Marinette clutched at her heart and heaved a dreamy sigh at the thought.

“Wow~! If that happened...I don’t even know what I’d do~!” she gushed breathlessly.

“And if Adrien caught you ogling him that way, he’ll be flattered, too!” Marinette took the proffered spread. “Trust me, there’s gonna be so much sexual tension, one of you will have to make a move before you both lose your freaking minds!”

Alya’s first move was to video-call Nino to fill him in on the plan.

“Hey, Agent DJ!” she greeted as soon as his face appeared on her phone. “Listen! It’s time for Phase 2 of Operation: Seduce Adrien Agreste!” She squeezed a fist enthusiastically. “The four of us--Me, you, Marinette, and Adrien--are going on a double-date to the aquatic center! Marinette here’s gonna show off her swimsuit and show our golden boy how to have a good time! You and me are going to be emotional support while we keep an eye out for opportunities to enhance the mood so they can finally make their move! You up for it?”

Watching him from over Alya’s shoulder, Marinette grinned sheepishly and waved as Nino appeared to reel slightly from the onslaught of information.

“Uh...a double-date at the aquatic center?” he echoed. “Sounds awesome, if Adrien can make it! Is it really the best place for romance, though?” he asked, raising an eyebrow. “The whole place is wet concrete and tile, and there’s no place for having secret make-out sessions or whatever; plus, having fun in the water is the whole point of the place! Adrien’s not gonna make a move on Marinette in the middle of a place like that, all loud and full of people and chlorinated water--”

“Wow, way to be a party-pooper, Nino!” Alya complained. “I’m not expecting them to confess and start making out at the aquatic center! I want them both to loosen up and have a great time so that they’ll both want to get together more!”

“That’s not what it sounded like, but I’m with you on the loosening-up part,” Nino said, cracking a smile. “I’m still not sure I get how the aquatic center is supposed be the magic setting, but...” He nodded towards Marinette. “I gotta level with you, Marinette...Alya’s got me convinced you’re
exactly the girl my bud Adrien needs.”

Marinette beamed, very pleasantly surprised to hear Nino say this.

“Aww, Nino, really?” she gushed. “That’s so sweet! How do you figure? What’d Alya say to convince you?”

“Actually!” Alya responded instead. “It’s more like I was just being your wingwoman only knowing what you and I knew about him, but when Nino figured out Adrien was the guy you were crushing on, he volunteered to be my partner in matchmaking you two, and, being Adrien’s best friend, he had a lot of insight to offer on Adrien! The more we talked, the more it sounded like you two were actually a great match for each other!”

“Probably a breach in the Bro Code, but it’s all for a good cause!” Nino sighed melodramatically.

“Seriously?” Marinette glanced between Alya and Nino, her eyes wide. “What... kind of insight? Tell me, Nino!”

“I don’t know how to explain it, exactly…” Nino said. “It’s like...Adrien’s kind of...repressed? Like he never lets more than 90% of his personality show, or more than 90% of his emotions show. Remember last week, Marinette, when you tripped and Adrien caught you and Chloe got all bitchy as usual at you for it?”

“Yeah…” Marinette said slowly, “And Adrien was a perfect gentleman about it, as usual,” she added with a smile, remembering the blissful sensation of his arms around her and the scent of his skin in her nose. She gave her head a shake to snap herself out of her reverie when she heard Alya stifle a chuckle.

“Yeah, I’m sure it was amazing for you, girl,” Alya said, smirking. “But he actually went a little beyond his ‘usual’.”


“Um, the way he hugged you and nuzzled you like you two were young lovers?” Nino pointed out, grinning.

“Ah!” Marinette squeaked in embarrassment and covered her face with her hands.

“What, don’t tell me you forgot that part!” Alya jeered, nudging Marinette in the shoulder playfully.

“No, of course not…” Marinette mumbled. “I just wasn’t thinking about the social implications behind his behavior or whatever…”

“Well, there was that,” Nino continued, “And then there was the way he defended you from Chloe. He’s given her the disapproving frowny-face before, but I don’t think any of us have seen him give her the what-the-hell-Chloe, what-is-your-problem treatment before. I mean, he wasn’t rude or super-nasty about it, but he totally called her out!”

“Now that you mention it, I guess that was a stronger-than-usual reaction for him,” Marinette said thoughtfully. “Every other time...it seems like he tries not to ever fight with her, ever.”

“Exactly, and as far as I’ve heard, he chooses his battles with his dad, too,” said Nino. “Adrien is practically allergic to offending people...and of course, he does just about everything his dad wants him to do, even though that man is practically a robot and doesn’t understand that kids need to have fun sometimes and go out with friends sometimes because that’s what kids do! You can’t live in
such a soul-sucking home and not have it do things to you, you know? He’s missing some things, he’s missing out on things!”

Marinette blinked several times, trying to wrap her head around everything Nino had said and figure out what it all meant. She felt bad for Adrien, of course...he was a wonderful person who deserved the warm, unconditional love of a happy family, like her own, not the cold and distant-but-controlling father he silently suffered. He deserved all the friends he could ever wish for, and he deserved to fall in love and live happily ever after with his perfect soulmate, and hopefully, that soulmate was her! Which brought her back to this date...

“So...what exactly are you getting at?” Marinette asked. “I mean, obviously I’ve got to make the most of this date with him, but…”

“It’s like what I said before--he’s repressed. His max-level Adrien hasn’t been unlocked yet!”

“Because Adrien’s a model, everything he does is a reflection on his dad’s company,” Alya offered. “So he has to project this perfect image of himself everywhere he goes...right, Nino?”

“Yeah, exactly!” Nino nodded emphatically. “He makes it sound like it’s no big deal most of the time, and maybe it does come easily to him, but...”

“Some people are just naturally really mild-mannered, Nino,” Alya pointed out bracingly. “Adrien could just be a little shy by nature.”

“No, I know, I’m not saying he’s pretending to be somebody he’s not!” Nino assured them. “It’s like...okay, you remember when Adrien picked up Marinette and spun her around? It’s like I told you, Alya: I’ve never seen him that excited before! He’s never laughed like that around me! But with you, Marinette, it’s like...I dunno, he just seems to light up around you, and he doesn’t even know why!”

Marinette’s mouth had fallen open slightly by now, her eyes wide.

“So you think…?” she said slowly, “I can help Adrien be more...himself?”

“Like I’ve been saying,” Alya cut in, “Yes, if you can lead by example and be yourself around him!”

Marinette smiled; she felt like she was glowing with anticipation.

“Thanks, you guys!” she gushed. “You’re both the best!”

“Anything for you, my girl!” Alya said cheerfully.

“And for Adrien!” Nino added. “Real friends...don’t leave friends as third wheels! They...make ‘em a second pair of wheels and make a carriage…?” Nino trailed off sheepishly. “It sounded cooler in my head.”

Alya and Marinette both laughed.

“Well, I can’t wait for Adrien and I to make the perfect quartet with you two!” Marinette said, giggling.

“Yeah! So, do you want to call Adrien and invite him or do you want Nino to call him?” Alya asked.
“Me?!” Marinette squeaked. “You’re kidding, right?! Have you forgotten what happened the last time I tried to ask him out over the phone? I left a voicemail that was first-part-awkward-as-hell and second-part- creepy-as-hell because I called him ‘hot stuff’!! I had to steal his phone--!”

“I know, I know!” Alya laughed. “I just figured we should offer!”

“You stole his phone?!” Nino said incredulously, also laughing.

“I couldn’t let him hear that voicemail!!” Marinette said defensively.

“Ha-ha, I get it, I get it! I’ll make the call!” Nino assured her.

“Thanks, Nino!” Alya gave him a salute. “We shall eagerly await your call back!”

“Will do! Fingers crossed!” Nino gave a two-finger wave and ended the call.

“Ooh, I hope he can come!” Marinette gushed. “I really really really want this to work!”

“We all do! But while we’re waiting for the verdict…” Alya leaned forward and tapped on the two-page spread of Adrien in swimwear sitting in Marinette’s lap. “We can start planning our attack!”

Marinette took a deep breath and nodded, her jaw set in determination.

* I hope I’m ready for this! she thought. *No...I’m gonna be ready for this!*
Chapter Summary

Nino passes on the aquatic center double-date invitation to Adrien, who wants very much to accept but worries that he might somehow make Marinette uncomfortable. A pep-talk from Plagg gives Adrien the courage to call Marinette, who hopes she can reassure him without passing out from nerves! An attempt to practice her talking-to-Adrien skills with Alya yields little improvement, but the girls remain optimistic. Adrien, meanwhile, struggles to come to terms with his growing feelings of lust for Marinette, and so Plagg gives him a much-needed talking-to. Will Adrien be able to approach the upcoming date with the right mindset?

Chapter Notes

Please see the announcement in the latest chapter (if you haven't already) to make sure you don't miss any of the new content!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 14: I Can’t Wait To See You Again

Wednesday

Adrien groaned in frustration, rolling onto his side and rubbing and scratching at his back yet again. When the itching had become too distracting for him to keep working on homework, he decided to take his evening shower early. Jacking off had helped only slightly, in addition to the hot water itself. Once he had dried off, he had pulled on a fresh pair of underwear and a tee shirt and flung himself onto his bed, giving up on the idea of being productive for the rest of the evening.

Fortunately, distraction arrived in the form of a video call from Nino. Heaving himself upright with a grunt, Adrien grabbed his phone and answered eagerly, despite his lack of energy.

“Hey, Nino, what’s up?” Adrien tried to sound more energetic and alert than he felt.

“Hey, dude!” Nino seemed excited about something. “Do you know if you’re free sometime in the next couple of days? Alya and Marinette want to go on a double-date with us at the aquatic center!”

“The aquatic center?” Adrien actually felt himself perk up with interest. He had never been to any kind of water park or public pool before, and he had wanted very much to go with Nino to experience it during summer break, but had never been granted the opportunity.

“Yeah!” Nino nodded emphatically. “Marinette agrees with Alya and me that it’s an unacceptable travesty that you were denied the chance to experience the aquatic center with us last summer!”

“Uh, why do you keep emphasizing Marinette’s name?” Adrien asked warily. “Or do I even want to
“Well…” Nino looked slightly sheepish. “Isn’t it obvious? This is your big chance to really hit it off with Marinette, dude!”

“So this is you and Alya trying to set me and Marinette up again?” Adrien asked slyly. He was torn between amusement and exasperation; it was heartwarming how much his friends cared about his happiness, but if this matchmaking mission they had taken on became the primary objective of every outing they all went on together, he was worried things between him and Marinette would only get even more awkward.

“No! Well…” Nino pouted, looking stubbornly determined despite his embarrassment. “Alright, it kinda is, but even Alya and me weren’t winging for you guys, we’d all still want to hang out!”

“I know, I know!” Adrien said, laughing a little at how defensive Nino sounded. “No, I’d love to go with you all! Only…” He heaved a sigh. “I’d have to make sure my father will let me. Do you all have a specific day and time in mind?”

“Why don’t you give us a couple of days and times when you’re most likely to have free time?” Nino suggested. “You’re busier than almost all three of us combined, so whenever you can make it, we’ll make it work!”

Adrien beamed, finally daring to be hopeful that he might finally get to spend time having fun with friends after a long and busy summer of nothing but obligations.

“I’ll take a look at my schedule and text you with my best guesses,” he said.

“Cool! Talk to you later, man!”

“Later!” Adrien hung up, smiling hopefully.

“*There’s* another thing I’ll never understand about humans,” Plagg piped up from Adrien’s coffee table, where he was relishing a wheel of Camembert on a cheese board. “How is it considered *fun* to go to a deliberately-flooded building and swim around in the water with hundreds of other humans?”

“Because it’s…refreshing?” Adrien suggested, checking his calendar app on his phone. “I don’t know, it just is…especially with friends!”

“Oh no, wait, I know why…” Cramming the last chunk of cheese into his mouth, Plagg came flying over to sit on Adrien’s shoulder. “It’s because you’ll get to see your new lady-love showing off lots of skin, isn’t it?” he asked smugly.

Adrien dropped his phone, his mouth falling open in horror.

“Oh my god, I forgot!” he croaked. “*Marinette!*” He clapped his hands to his face. “She’s going to be there…in a *swimsuit!* I can’t even act normal around her when we’re at school! When she’s fully clothed!! *What am I gonna do?!!*”

“Then don’t go! What’s the problem?” Plagg said, gulping down a hunk of cheese. “Chances are your father will find a reason to not let you go out again, anyway.”

“…I’ve been dying to go out with friends all summer, though…” Adrien said sadly. “It really *would* be fun to go to the aquatic center with Nino and the girls…but I would hate to ruin everything because I made Marinette uncomfortable…she’s put up with me so well so far, but I *really* don’t want to push my luck!”
“Ah, what’s the worst that could happen?” Plagg asked. “You’ll be surrounded by noisy people, your friends will be watching you, and everything will be reeking of chlorine!”

“I don’t know…” Adrien sighed and rubbed his eyes. “It just seems like every time I run into Marinette, I end up spacing out and just…”

He trailed off, picturing Marinette and remembering how her scent and the sight of her skin had seemed to hypnotize him...He still didn’t understand why exactly he felt so irresistibly drawn to her, or how it was connected to his heat (or not), but somehow, he had been lucky enough so far that his behavior hadn’t gotten her to despise him forever. The last thing he wanted to do was to push his luck.

What IS the worst that could happen, though? Plagg might have a point: a public pool seems like a lousy place to try to steal romantic moments with a girl...there’s no way I’d lose my head THAT easily, right? And Marinette wouldn’t be alone with me; Alya and Nino would be there whole time, and there’s no WAY I’d end up...doing anything creepy knowing they were RIGHT THERE , right? Ugh, I can’t believe I even have to THINK about this…!

Adrien groaned in frustration and scratched his head with both hands in mindless agitation.

“Agh, I hate this!” he said through gritted teeth. “This is so messed up! I’m a good person, Plagg, I’m not some disgusting, testosterone-poisoned dick-head who sees girls as just walking, talking sex dolls! This isn’t me, Plagg! What the hell is happening to me?!”

“Whoa, whoa, take it easy!” Plagg yelped, completely caught off-guard by Adrien’s tirade. “You’re blowing this whole thing waaaaaaaay out of proportion!” He flew over to hover in front of Adrien’s face. “The most you’ve done to this girl is smell her and maybe touch her a little more often than you used to, right? And she’s never been upset or scared, has she?”

“I guess…” Adrien mumbled, frowning miserably.

“And she still enjoys your company, right?”

“I mean...I hope so…”

“If she was afraid of you, she wouldn’t want to go on this date with you, would she?” Plagg crossed his arms and smiled smugly.

“Well...it’s not like she’s going anywhere with me where there won’t be a ton of other people around and Alya and Nino with us the whole time…” Adrien said, grimacing.

“But you’re all going to a swimming place where you all will be wearing form-fitting water-suits that show off lots of skin!” Plagg exclaimed, gesturing dramatically.

“Aquatic center,” Adrien corrected automatically, his tone flat. “And they’re called ‘bathing suits’, or ‘swimsuits’.”

“Whatever!” Plagg just grinned again, flashing tiny fangs, and leaned in close as if to impart some piece of feline wisdom. “Here’s the way I see it, though: if Marinette didn’t like the idea of being nice and close to you , she wouldn’t go on a date with you that involved swimming in deep water and showing off lots of skin for you!”

Adrien instantly went strawberry-red and gaped at Plagg like a surprised goldfish.

“W-w-whadduyu--?! Y-you don’t get it, Plagg!” he spluttered, “Th-that’s not--!”
“I know what I’m talking about!” Plagg interrupted, slapping a paw to his chest proudly. “Take my word for it: she’ll be glad you’re there! Assuming your old man lets you go, of course. And if he doesn’t, well, then you’ll have gotten yourself all worked up for no reason! Anyway, you want to go, don’t you?”

“I... do, but that’s not the problem!” Adrien said. “I don’t know if I should go! I’m...not all together in the head right now…”

“Oh, for the love of all things curdled from milk!” Plagg threw his little arms up in the air and rolled his eyes heavenward. “If you’re so worried about it, then call her yourself and ask if you two are still friends, or whatever! Stop feeling sorry for yourself just because you’re not used to having horny thoughts about anyone but Ladybug! You’re hormonal, not cursed!”

Adrien blinked, processing what Plagg had said with some difficulty. His dynamic with Plagg had become a little more complicated and unpredictable since he had gone into heat (not necessarily in a bad way, of course), and it was a little strange to have Plagg show enough interest in his love-life to offer as much advice as he had lately. He couldn’t put his finger on why, exactly, but he felt like he might be missing something…

“And besides,” Plagg added, interrupting Adrien’s musings, “If it turns out your father will let you go out, won’t it just feel even worse if you turn them down, anyway, just because you’re not sure what’s going on between you and Marinette?”

Adrien took a moment to think this over.

Well, when he says it that way, it makes me feel like skipping out on them would be the cowardly thing to do...and if Marinette really doesn’t mind being around me, and really does just want to have fun as a group, then...well, who knows when we’ll all get to hang out again? And if I just keep trying to give Marinette as much space as possible...I’ll be stuck in this awkward position of not knowing what’s going on between us. Because what if Nino, Alya, and Plagg are all on to something, and Marinette and I could be...

Adrien shut that train of thought down and gave his head a little shake.

No, I’m already in love with Ladybug! he thought for the umpteenth time. And I know I probably shouldn’t get my hopes up, but...I REALLY feel like there’s something serious growing between us, mutual feelings for each other! Even though we’re both in heat right now...

Adrien felt his face heat up at the memory...

“I think I’m falling in love with you, you silly cat…”

...I can’t not believe her when she says something like THAT to me!!

“Remind me again why I should be exploring my relationship with Marinette when I’m already in love with Ladybug, and she may actually be falling in love with me, too?” Adrien asked, raising his eyebrows at Plagg.

“Because whether you want to admit it or not, something’s going on between you two, and you should trust me because I’m your kwami and I’m wiser than you,” Plagg said, crossing his little arms and legs and giving Adrien an arrogant smile.

Adrien sighed.

“...fine...I’ll see if I can get my father’s permission to go, and then I guess I’ll figure out how to
approach this whole thing from there.” He rubbed his eyes, feeling emotionally exhausted.

“Good. Now, speaking of curdled milk products…” Plagg blinked at him pointedly.

“I’ll make sure you get some cheese after dinner.” Adrien replied with a chuckle.

And just like that, he somehow felt a lot better; some things never changed.

~ ~ ~

Adrien sought out Nathalie at her desk on his way back upstairs after dinner (some pieces of cheese carefully stowed away for Plagg).

“Nathalie? When you have the opportunity, can you ask my father if I can go out with some friends to the aquatic center sometime this week? I’ll make sure it doesn’t conflict with my studies or prior commitments!”

“Yes, I can do that,” Nathalie said, picking up her tablet to check schedules. “Is this the new one that opened up last spring?”

“Yes, that’s the one,” Adrien said, nodding. “Do you…do you think father will have any…particular concerns about it?” He smiled, trying not to look as nervous as he felt.

Nathalie appeared to think this over before responding.

“Well, we don’t know if the chlorine will react badly with your hair or not, so I would suggest washing it immediately afterwards; I can only imagine your father’s reaction if you came back with it tinged green–”

Adrien cringed; he hadn’t even thought of that.

“And I know you can swim just fine, so I would hope he wouldn’t be worried about you drowning as long as there were lifeguards on duty, but I imagine accidents still happen wherever there are people running on wet floors around swimming pools–”

“Surely my father trusts me not to run by the pool!” Adrien groaned, resisting the impulse to roll his eyes.

“Other people could be running and accidently knock you over,” Nathalie said patiently. “And then we’d have your father prepared to sue the family of whoever it was that got you injured.”

Adrien sighed and scratched at the back of neck mindlessly against another itch crawling up his spine.

“I can wear non-slip water shoes, and that’ll also help make sure I don’t get athlete’s foot, and I’ll bring shampoo and body wash if he wants me to,” he said dully, “And you can tell him they’ll have a first-aid station as well.”

“I will do that,” Nathalie said, nodding. “If he says yes, he’ll probably insist that your bodyguard go with you, and he might want to know exactly who you’re going with,” she added.

“If that’s what it takes, then, yes, I’ll agree to that,” Adrien said instantly. Beggars couldn’t be choosers, after all. “I’m going with Nino Lahiffe, Alya Césaire, and Marinette Dupain-Cheng.”

“All right, I’ll tell him,” Nathalie said. She smiled in understanding. “Why don’t you find out what days and times your friends will be available.”
“They said any time I’m available, they’ll make it work,” he admitted, grinning a little.

“I’ll say their schedules are relatively open, then.”

“Thank you, Nathalie!” Adrien smiled gratefully. “I-I’ll be doing homework up my room, but please let me know as soon as you know his answer, okay?”

He hurried off, up the central grand staircase, daring to hope things might finally go his way for once.

~ ~ ~

Nathalie approached the door Gabriel’s office with her tablet under her arm. Privately, he hoped Adrien’s father would be lenient this time; after spending the entire summer on extra Chinese lessons through June, preparing for the piano performance in July, and a series of photoshoots for Gabriel’s fall line, she knew Adrien had to be dying for a day off with friends.

She knocked.

“Come in,” Gabriel’s voice answered curtly from inside.

Nathalie stepped inside. Gabriel was at his desk examining whatever he had displayed on the monitor.

“Adrien wants to go out with some friends to the new aquatic center that opened last spring,” Nathalie said. “I understand there’s been a great deal of anticipation for the facility’s opening ever since last February, and many of Adrien’s friends have gone there over the summer. You probably remember Adrien asking about it before.”

“Yes, I remember,” Gabriel said briskly, as the memory annoyed him. “I don’t particularly care how popular it may have been with the rest of his friends.” He sighed, sounding exasperated. “I just don’t understand why Adrien wants so badly to do more of what everyone else does at his age...does he assume he needs it just because it’s common, typical, or ‘normal’, whatever that might mean? It’s always been my understanding that you can’t miss what you’ve never had.”

Nathalie took Gabriel’s voicing of his thoughts to be an invitation to offer her own. If he had no intention of pursuing the subject, he would have given her a final answer and dismissed her.

“I agree he probably couldn’t miss going somewhere with friends he’s never been to,” she said, “But I imagine he misses going somewhere with friends, especially somewhere new. I think he’s extraverted enough that he can’t keep himself content without that kind of stimulation every now and then.”

“I would think that now that he’s going to public school would be enough contact with the outside world when he also has his other responsibilities to mind.”

“If he spent too much of that time socializing with his friends and not enough time learning, you wouldn’t want him getting his education there, Monsieur, when I could keep tutoring him the same way I had been.” she pointed out.

Gabriel let out a very soft noise that could have been one of either disdain or exasperated amusement.

“You know as well as I do that I let him go to public school because he would have kept sneaking out of the house otherwise,” he said, just loud enough for her to hear.
Nathalie just managed not to smile. Gabriel seemed to be in a better mood than he had been in a while, if he was willing to acknowledge that little truth aloud. She chose her next words carefully.

“He still knew to try not to get his hopes up this time, but it sounded like he was happy to address your most-likely concerns,” she said offhandedly.

Gabriel looked up with his eyebrows raised ever-so-slightly.

“He’s already prepared to take the proper precautions against athlete’s foot and the chlorine, and if you insist he take his bodyguard with him, he said he would do so.”

“I certainly would hope so,” Gabriel remarked lightly, looking down at his monitor again and swiping two fingers across it. “I assume there are lifeguards on duty?”

“Yes, Monsieur, and a first-aid station, if Adrien is correct. Shall I double-check for you?”

Gabriel looked up at her again—taking note of Adrien’s initiative, Nathalie hoped—and then seemed to shrug off any further interest in the conversation.

“Provided this outing does not conflict with any of his previous commitments, I will allow him to go if his bodyguard accompanies him and he takes all appropriate precautions against these ‘most-likely concerns’ of mine. Let me know the date and times from him as soon as possible.”

“Yes, Monsieur.” Nathalie inclined her head respectfully and left the room, finally allowing herself a smile. That interaction could not have gone any better, as far as she was concerned.

~ ~ ~

“Whatcha doing?” Plagg asked, appearing behind Adrien’s shoulder to leer at his three computer monitors. “Research?”

“AGH!” Adrien jumped and closed the browser window in a panic. He glared at Plagg over his shoulder, his face bright red. “You were supposed to watch TV while you ate your cheese!”

“I finished my cheese and the stream started buffering, so I got bored,” Plagg said. “And now I can guess where all the bandwidth went.”

“Don’t you play detective on me! My watching videos—any videos!—on the internet would not use up enough bandwidth to slow down streaming on the TV! You’re just nosey!”

“Hey, I’m not judging,” Plagg said, shrugging his tiny shoulders. “I find cooking shows to be entertaining because I love cheese, and you find porn entertaining because you love a girl and this is the next best thing to personal experience, I guess…”

Adrien spluttered furiously and flexed his fingers in midair as if fighting the urge to squeeze Plagg’s insides out through his ears.

“…I just have the advantage of being able to actually consume the cheese I love whenever I want to as long as it’s provided to me. You gotta find whatever outlets you can, I get it.”

“You know, I’m suddenly feeling extremely curious about how much easier it would be to just provide you packets of cheese powder for your rations!” Adrien growled. “Or maybe nacho cheese sauce!”

“Sounds interesting; I’ll happily try it sometime,” said Plagg, not at all intimidated. “Well, don’t let
me keep you from your ‘studies,’ I’ll go check on my cheese-porn…”

Adrien held his breath and counted to ten before pulling his homework sheets towards him.

In spite of how tightly-controlled his upbringing had been, being a teenaged boy and having unlimited internet access meant that Adrien was just as prone to switching his browser to incognito-mode on random occasions. Getting through the 30+ required hours of sex education in school last year meant that he knew better than to look at pornography as any kind of reference for real-life, and in any case, he was rather picky; being the pure-hearted (if not pure-minded) guy that he was, he wasn’t interested in watching a woman being sexually degraded or treated roughly in any way, even as part of play; he was a hopeless romantic through-and-through, and if sex didn’t involve him worshipping his Lady in every way she deserved, than what was even the point?

He slumped forward in his chair, his elbows coming down on the desktop, and rubbed his face. Now wasn’t a good time to fantasize about Ladybug, he knew, when he was supposed to be working on his homework. That’s what he had been doing, before he spaced out and somehow gotten distracted enough to mindlessly open his internet browser.

A knock sounded at his door, and he instantly sat up straight and hoped his face wasn’t still visibly flushed.

“Yes?”

Nathalie appeared.

“Your father says you go, as long as your bodyguard goes with you, you wear your water shoes, and shampoo afterwards,” she said. Adrien’s heart leapt.

“Really? Thank you, Nathalie! And thank my father for me, will you?”

Nathalie smiled and nodded.

“I will. Let me know when you need to be dropped off.”

As soon as she had closed the door behind her, Adrien flung himself onto his bed and scrambled for his phone.

“I can’t believe he’s letting me go--he’d better not change his mind on me!” Practically vibrating with excitement, Adrien brought up Nino’s contact, only for Plagg to come flying out of nowhere and block his view.

“Don’t you want to call Marinette first?” he asked pointedly. “Just to make sure she’ll be happy to see you?”

“I--I don’t know if that’s necessary…” Adrien hedged nervously. “I mean--”

“Nino just as well admitted he’s trying to play matchmaker with you two,” Plagg pointed out casually. “But what about Marinette?”

Adrien frowned, slightly confused as to what Plagg was trying to get at, and then realized that Alya and Nino could possibly be setting up this double-date without telling Marinette to surprise her, but if the worst-case scenario he was worried about turned out to be true, then showing up on Nino’s invitation alone could ruin Marinette’s entire day.

“You’re right…I should at least make sure she knows what’s going on. If she doesn’t know Nino
and Alya are trying to set me up with her, then...well, I guess we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

He didn’t have Marinette’s number, so he texted Alya, hoping she wouldn’t make the exchange awkward.

**Adrien:** Hey, Alya, can you send me Marinette’s number?

As soon as he sent the text off, he immediately started second-guessing the way he had phrased his request...if Alya asked him *why* he wanted Marinette’s number, what could he say that wouldn’t sound like a pathetic lie?!

**Alya:** oh sure! it’s 33 63 67 68 ;) what’s the occasion?

**Adrien:** Thanks! No particular occasion, I just wanted to confirm our double-date at the aquatic center with everyone. I’m free tomorrow after school, if you all are.

Adrien hoped that sounded casual enough, and that it carried no suggestion of romance whatsoever.

**Alya:** riiight, gotcha ;) ;) see you then!

Adrien squinted suspiciously at the two winking emojis. Did she not believe him?

*If I try to defend myself, I’ll just sound even more suspect,* he thought. *It’s probably best to just let her think what she wants…*

He created a new contact for Marinette and copied down her number...

*There, that was easy enough...no big deal! Now I just have to call her...*

He stared down at his phone, and his proud smile slowly melted off his face.

*Or...maybe I should just text her? Or I could just call Nino and leave it at that…*

“Oh, what’s the matter, cool cat?” Plagg’s voice jeered from behind his shoulder. “Too shy to call a girl who isn’t Chloé? Or Alya? If you can’t even handle this much, how are you ever gonna up your game and put the moves on your Ladybug-love?”

Adrien scowled and immediately hit “Call” without thinking, and then started to panic as soon as the ringing started.

“Oh no! Oh no, oh no, on no...I haven’t figured out what I’m gonna say to her! Plagg, what do I do?!”

~ ~ ~

When her phone rang, Marinette tossed her bathing suit onto her chaise lounge and picked it up, but froze when she saw who was calling.

“*Adrien’?!”* Marinette cried. “*Adrien is calling me?!”* She glanced around frantically, bouncing on the spot, and eventually located Alya, who was climbing down from her bed with her magazine spread of Adrien in one hand.

“What?! Well, hurry and answer it, what are you waiting for?!” Alya said, sounding excited.

“B-b-b-b-b-b-but I dunno what to say! I mean, I dunno how to talk to him! Agh, I mean--!”
“ANSWER IT!” Alya practically snarled, her eyes bugging out. Marinette fumbled with her phone and dropped it, and let out an anguished whine as if she had accidentally dropped a baby, but she also seemed too paralyzed with terror to pick it up. Alya swooped down, grabbed the phone, hit “answer”, and thrust it into Marinette’s hands before lunging over the chaise lounge and ducking down as if to disappear from the room. Marinette stared, mouth agape, at the phone in her hands cluelessly, until she heard the voice of the person on the other end of the line…

“Hello? Uh...hello?”

Slowly, with her heart pounding and her hands trembling with nerves, Marinette brought the phone up to her ear and tried to figure out how her voice worked.

“H-hello…?”

“Marinette! Is that you?”

“Uh...! Uh, yeah, yeah, of course!” She giggled nervously and fidgeted. “Uh, who else would it be?”

“Uh, nobody I can think of!” Adrien said, his voice sounding slightly higher-pitched than usual. “I just...thought I’d make sure…? I mean, at first I didn’t hear--Uh, nevermind, it doesn’t matter! Listen, um...so, I just got a call from Nino, and he said...he and Alya and...you were interested in inviting me to...Ugh, that doesn’t sound right at all…” His voice trailed off. “Uh, basically, he proposed a...double-date…?” He seemed to sound the words out hesitantly, as if he wasn’t sure the phrase was appropriate to use in this situation. “To the aquatic center! Me, and...well, you, Alya, Nino, and me! And...I guess I wanted to make sure...that you were okay...with...that…?” Adrien’s voice trailed off again. “Ugh, what am I even saying…”

Marinette blinked several times, feeling like her brain was working too slowly to keep up with...whatever Adrien was trying to say. He didn’t sound like his usual self at all, and it was really throwing her off! Why did he sound so...nervous?

“Uh…” She struggled to recall what he had just said and make sense of it, as Alya watched her from across the room like a tiger. “You, Alya, Nino, me...the aquatic center...Oh, right! Yeah, the aquatic center! Yeah, that’s---! Wait, what about it?”

Alya sighed and slapped a palm to her face.

“Uh…”

Adrien seemed to completely space out as well, and Marinette had to remind herself that, yes, that was definitely Adrien’s voice on the other end, he just wasn’t acting like he usually did...but why? What was this all about?

“I just...I really would love to go with you all, but...I guess…” She thought she heard him heave a sigh. “I guess with the way I’ve been...acting weird around you lately, I didn’t want to go along with anything you didn’t feel comfortable with. The way Nino told me about it, I...wasn’t sure if you really knew about it, or...if he and Alya were were trying to set up some kind of surprise or something.”

Marinette didn’t know what to say in answer to this. Yes, she knew, but she couldn’t let him know that she knew what Alya and Nino were really planning! It sounded as though maybe Adrien thought that she might the one in the dark, and that he was being recruited as an accomplice...which was probably okay to let him think, but...was it just misleading enough, or too close to the truth?
Aside from that, what was this about her being uncomfortable with something?

“Why do you think I wouldn’t be okay with it…?” she tried hesitantly. “Because you…you’ve been… ‘acting weird’? What do you mean?”

Adrien didn’t answer immediately, and Marinette tried to picture what his face looked like right now... Could he actually be feeling shy? Anxious, even? It wasn’t that she had never seen Adrien feeling uncomfortable in some way or other: he had at least one hug and one kiss forced on him every school day by Chloe, and he had had more than his fair share of unwanted attention from both the adoring public and dangerous supervillains! But this situation felt different somehow... maybe because it was just between the two of them, instead of just her watching Adrien from outside as a third person. The thought of sharing a private moment with him—even an awkward one—made her smile, and she almost forgot what they were talking about. Fortunately, Adrien broke the silence after some hesitation.

“You know...that time when I...um...” His voice sounded constricted from the effort it took to force himself to speak, and Marinette frowned, suddenly worried about him. “When I sniffed you... and...touched your face and...generally imposed on your personal space...”

Marinette glanced at Alya, who was watching her with a confused expression on her face. It suddenly occurred to Marinette that Adrien might be embarrassed for anyone else—even Alya—to know exactly what had happened between them (Marinette hadn’t minded his attention a bit, of course, but it was unusual behavior for him...). She remembered what Nino and Alya had said about him needing to maintain his image, and the shame on his face and in his voice when he tried to apologize, and suddenly his discomfort took on new meaning.

If I wasn’t in love with him, maybe I would have been weirded-out by how friendly he’s been with me... but he has no idea that I like him, so he’s worried I might think he’s been acting like a creep!

One moment, Marinette’s mind had been 75% occupied with keeping her cool while talking to her crush... and the next, she became wholeheartedly focused on reassuring her friend.

Glancing at Alya, she held up a finger, turned around, and climbed up to her bed with her phone still pressed to her ear. Settling down, she wracked her brain for the right words to put Adrien at ease.

“Adrien...you don’t have to keep apologizing,” she said gently, keeping her voice down. “I...I really didn’t mind... and maybe...! Maybe most people-- some people--maybe some people might’ve been a little... taken aback, I dunno, but...!”

“Most people would’ve been really creeped out…” Adrien mumbled, just loud enough for her to hear. He sounded so ashamed of himself, she wondered whether she was meant to hear at all.

“Adrien, listen,” she urged gently. “It’s okay, really! I...we’re friends, aren’t we?”

“Yes...” he said, starting to sound a bit more hopeful.

“Right? So I know you well enough to know that you’re not a creep, okay? You really didn’t make me feel uncomfortable... but if you ever do, I promise I’ll let you know, if that helps you feel better. Just... please don’t feel bad, okay? I don’t want you to feel uncomfortable around me, either!”

“I don’t either,” he said, sounding very relieved. Marinette could swear she could hear the grateful smile on his face, and her heart did a happy little jig. “I... thank you, Marinette. I’m... really, really glad to have you as a friend.”

“I’m... really glad, too,” she said back, a huge warm smile still on her face. “So... are we all good for
the...double-date to the aquatic center?”

“Yes! I got my father’s okay, so I should be free...tomorrow after school!” he said, the usual energy back in his voice. “I can meet you all there. Is four-thirty a good time?”

“Yeah, that’ll be fine!” Marinette chirped.

“Okay, great! I’ll...talk to you later?”

“Yeah...later!” Marinette agreed, a little breathlessly.

They hung up at about the same time, after which Marinette stared at it in wonder, her mouth hanging slightly open.

*Did I really just have an entire conversation with Adrien on the phone?! About a DATE?!*

“What was *that* all about?” Alya’s head appeared over the edge of her bed, looking curious. “You got all...secretive all of a sudden.” She frowned, looking slightly worried. “Is Adrien alright?”

“Yeah, yeah, he’s fine, there’s nothing to worry about!” Marinette assured her. “He’s...he just called to make sure I was okay with going on the double-date. He wasn’t sure whether I was in on it or not, and he didn’t want to surprise me if being there would make me uncomfortable. It turns out he’s still really worried about accidentally creeping me out…”

Alya looked baffled.

“Accidently creep you out?” she echoed. “Wha...where did he get *that* idea? I mean, yeah, he *has* been paying a lot more attention to you because he’s *majorly* twitterpated with you,” she mused, frowning thoughtfully, “And I’ve said before that he keeps backpedaling because he doesn’t want to overdo it, but...Jeez, it sounds like he’s afraid of *sexually harassing* you! I mean, it looked like you came up here to let him confess his darkest secrets, or something!”

Marinette winced slightly. “Well...he was feeling especially bad about the morning I met him in front of the school when he...sniffed me. And today, when he leaned in close and touched my cheek…”

“Well...yeah, that *is* kinda weird.” Alya admitted. “But you told him it was fine, that you weren’t creeped out...although…” She raised her eyebrows and inclined her head significantly at Marinette. “It’s kind of also a little weird that you were totally cool with it, even if it is totally in-character for you for how crazy you are for that boy.”

“I know!” Marinette with a grin. “I’d like to think that if anyone else tried that on me, I’d knock them over trying to get away, if you didn’t punch them in the face first!”

“You bet I would!” Alya laughed, and then looked serious again. “Still, it’s just...it sounds he’s not just *concerned* about accidently making you uncomfortable, it sounds like he’s *paranoid*, like he doesn’t even know what he’s doing half the time, and that just...doesn’t seem normal. It’s not like he’s shown any signs of having problems managing his urges or impulses before, right? In fact, he’s always been the *opposite*!” Alya seemed to be growing more and more confounded the more she thought aloud, and Marinette was starting to to feel the same way.

“He’s always seemed...perfect,” Marinette said softly. “So...calm and collected. Now it’s like...it’s like me when I spaz out and start overthinking everything and worry everything going to go wrong, but even *worse*, because I always get through it sooner or later, while Adrien’s still afraid of messing up even after I told him it was okay! I managed to make him feel better this time, but…” She looked
“Well, this date will be a good start, I think! It all comes back to showing him a good time and help him loosen up so that it’s easy for him to be himself with us—or, at least, around you, his girlfriend-to-be!” Alya hit Marinette with a cheeky wink and a finger-gun. “Beyond that, though…” She looked serious again, but smiled encouragingly at Marinette. “All we can do is just keep an eye on him and be there for him.”

Marinette nodded. “Okay…” she said. “I just hope he at least opens up to Nino if…if it turns out something is going on with him.”

“Let’s try to put it out of our minds and focus on helping you make the most out your date with Adrien!” Alya said bracingly. She spun around and descended the steps from Marinette’s loft to the floor. Marinette followed only to have the Gabriel swimwear ad brandished in her face.

“Gah!” Four Adrien’s in four different swimsuits beamed at her from the magazine spread, and the familiar hiccup in her heartbeat reminded her how unprepared she was for the sight of Adrien in a swimsuit in person.

“So! Back to practicing!” Alya announced. “Go ahead and drink in the sight of your boy until your little heart calms down…”

“It never calms down, Alya!” Marinette groaned. “I’ve been looking at these several times a day for the past five months and it still does things to me!

“You just need to be able to look at Adrien without making any pervy faces,” Alya reminded her. “It’s okay if the sight of him ‘does things to you’, as long as you don’t let it show on your face! Okay, now, pretend I’m Adrien, and just greet me like you would at school! Try to keep your eyes on my face and not on the pictures!”

“Okay…” Marinette closed her eyes and took a deep breath while Alya took a step back and positioned the magazine spread right under her chin. Marinette opened her eyes and locked onto Alya’s face and stared at her forehead like it was the most fascinating thing she had ever seen.

“Uh, hello Adrien!” She grinned and waved awkwardly. “Um…Hi?! How are you? I’m...uh…!”

It turns out, trying as hard as possible to not look at such mouth-watering images of Adrien only tempted Marinette’s thirsty brain to recall them on its own, and that made it next to impossible to focus on conducting a fake conversation.

“Uggghhh! Forget it, I’m a hopeless case!” Marinette groaned, throwing her hands up in defeat. “Alya, I have a hard enough time with Adrien when he’s fully dressed! What chance do I have of acting normal when his naked torso is staring me in the face?! And his bare shoulders and his biceps and his triceps and his... whatever-ceps! All of it!”

“Well, technically, it won’t be ‘all of it’; we’re going to the aquatic center, not a nude beach!” Alya pointed out with a grin.

“Well, that still leaves plenty of bare skin to mess with my mind!” Marinette whined.

Alya sighed and shook her head good-humoredly.

“Well, maybe Adrien won’t be able to keep his eyes on your face, either, so you two can at least be even! If you can at least not be too obvious about it, he might stay oblivious. And if he
doesn’t...well, then you can both be perverts together!”

There was a soft smile stuck on Adrien’s face as he lowered his phone. He stared into space, pondering the curious effect Marinette’s voice had on him when it was so close to his ear...his cheeks felt all warm and tingly...

“See? That wasn’t so hard, was it?” Plagg puffed out his chest and looked smug. “I’d say the cheese is just about ripe for the taking, but I also say this aquatic center is a terrible place for savoring your prize.”

“What?” Adrien shook his head to try to clear it and frowned at Plagg, confused. “Cheese? What are you talking about?”

Plagg heaved a dramatic sigh as though he couldn’t believe how simple-minded Adrien was.

“The one time I try using romantic metaphors that your love-addled brain will appreciate, and you’re too love-addled to understand any of it!” he complained. “Marinette is the prize cheese, and you’re the cheese connoisseur!” he translated impatiently.

Adrien cringed.

“There’s nothing romantic about comparing girls to cheese!” he exclaimed. “Ugh, this is why I don’t take love advice from you!”

“As long you admit this is about love, I’ll consider this a win!” Plagg gloated. He grinned, showing tiny fangs, and Adrien’s mouth fell open as he fully realized what Plagg was insinuating.

“Plagg!! This was never about seducing Marinette!!” Adrien whined. “This is just me wanting this double-date to be fun for everyone without me making it weird!”

“Oh, we’re back to pretending this is just a day out with friends, hmm?” Plagg nailed down Adrien with a leer so keen that Adrien leaned back in surprise. “Gonna go back to pretending you don’t feel things when you’re close enough to smell her? That the thought of her bare skin touching yours doesn’t do things to you?”

Adrien gaped at Plagg’s nerve and blushed bright red, only to have a gasp shaken out of him as he felt a shiver race up his back. He wrapped his arms around himself and curled up on his side as glimpses of Marinette’s bare collarbone and shoulders flashed in his mind--of her sky-blue eyes and blossom-pink lips that looked oh-so-soft to kiss…

“Now I dare you to tell me you didn’t feel that all the way to your nethers!” Plagg hissed victoriously. He was staring Adrien down like a cat at a cornered mouse, and Adrien could only stare back in horror, because Plagg was right...though he refused to acknowledge it, at least until after this conversation was over and he could take care of the problem in relative privacy. More importantly...

“I’m...not trying to be stubborn, Plagg,” Adrien said slowly, trying to figure out what was going on in Plagg’s head while simultaneously trying to ignore the itching under his skin and the stubbornly-lingering semi in his boxer briefs. “I just...well, can you really blame me for not wanting to fall in love with someone else when I already love Ladybug? Sure, the whole superhero-secret-identities thing keeps us from being able to date properly, but...that doesn’t mean our feelings are any less valid, right? If it were just the mating cycle making us...feel like this, that would be one thing, but I’ve always loved her...and her feelings for me aren’t just because she’s in heat, so...wouldn’t the
Plagg listened patiently as Adrien spoke and appeared ready to finally cut him some slack.

“I never said this was a good time to try dating Marinette, or anyone else,” Plagg said, coming down to sit on the bedcovers level with Adrien’s head. “It’s not going to be any easier to figure out how you feel about any girl while you’re in heat, but you’re falling in love with her now, so you need to figure it out now, because you’re already taking your relationship with Ladybug to the next level instead of waiting! If you wait until after, it’s only going to make things messier and more complicated! What are you gonna do if, fifteen days from now, it turns out you’re definitely in love with Marinette but you and Ladybug are now going at it like rabbits?”

Adrien made a pathetic noise of protest as his fading erection stirred to life again. Plagg ignored him and plowed on.

“That situation is going to feel a lot messier than if you’ve already made the effort to figure out what you want to do with Marinette. Otherwise, you’ll still be feeling torn between your two ladies while trying to deal with two or three times the lust!”

Two or three times the lust I feel now? Adrien thought. I still can’t even imagine that…

“Now, my sage advise on how to approach all this might have been different if there was a good chance you and Ladybug were going to take things as slowly and carefully as possible…” He raised his eyebrows pointedly at Adrien, who gulped. “...but at the rate your symptoms are developing...well…” He shrugged. “Best not make any self-fulfilling prophecies. Let me just say, on a scale from 1 to 10, you’re already at a 6 when you could have still been at a 3.”

The knowledge that he was apparently speeding in the slow lane (so to speak) was disturbing, but not as disturbing as knowing his symptoms could still get up to 4 units worse that what he was already experiencing.

“...So, you don’t think it’s safer for Marinette and I to just stay friends?” Adrien hedged--once more, just to make sure.

“Trust me on this: you’re too far gone for that, both of you,” Plagg replied simply. “And I know, I know…” he added, waving a paw loftily. “Normally, I wouldn’t claim to be any sort of romantic expert...but where Ladybug and Chat Noir and the mating cycle are concerned, I know what I’m talking about, so trust me when I say this what’s best for you both!” He darted forward and prodded Adrien’s nose for emphasis.

Adrien still wasn’t sure this gave Plagg enough authority to give him advice on his relationship with Marinette, but after worrying about his situation for so long (it felt like a lot longer than one week), he felt reassured knowing that at least Plagg felt like he had a handle on the situation, and it was a relief to simply give in and trust Plagg to look out for him.

“Alright, Plagg…” He sighed, managing a smile. “We’ll do it your way, then.”

“Good.” Plagg said with a satisfied nod. “Now, if you’re all done worrying…” He zoomed across the room toward the TV. “I’m going to find the most distracting program currently showing, turn up the volume, and become temporarily oblivious to anything you may or may not feel the need to do right now.”
Torn between feeling glad he didn’t have to ask Plagg to give him privacy and feeling annoyed that Plagg could tell so easily that he needed it, Adrien settled with crawling under his bed covers and acknowledging Plagg in as casual a manner as possible.

“Mm-’kay...have fun.”

As he shoved his boxer briefs down and took himself in hand, he recalled the sound of Marinette’s reassuring voice in his ear, and the sight of her baring a little more skin than usual in the outfit she had worn to school today. He allowed himself to visualize again her shy smile and blushing cheeks, and the tiny freckles across her nose…he could still hardly believe he hadn’t noticed them properly before after having classes with her all last year. He remembered also fixating on her lips (and not for the first time)...and wanting very much--however briefly—to kiss them slowly and tenderly to see if they were as soft as they looked…

Adrien did his best to shake off the familiar feelings of guilt and shame for allowing himself to fantasize about Marinette.

There’s no harm in just fantasizing about her, as long as I don’t do anything to make her uncomfortable in real life, he reassured himself. And Plagg has a point...it’s kind of pointless to keep trying to deny I have feelings for her, whatever the right labels are for them. If, after all this is over, it turns out it’s just...a temporary crush...? If it’s not meant to last, then some harmless private fantasies and embarrassing interactions will be all I have to worry about, and if it really is something...special...then my own private fantasies still won’t be worth worrying about compared to everything else that comes with dating, like what we might actually end up doing in real life...

He allowed himself to visualise her bare shoulders, which somehow seemed so perfectly sized for his hands and fingers to fit around...he visualized the expanse of bare skin across her collar, and the skin of her throat...there was something about that whole part of her that made it so tempting to press gentle kisses all over...he remembered wanting (however briefly before he shoved the forbidden urges away) to pull her close so that he could touch her, explore her, feel her shiver as his hand ghosted tenderly over every curve of her slender, petite form…

His breaths came shakily as his mind reeled in the unfolding of his now-uncensored thoughts. He stroked himself faster at the thought of burying his nose in her neck and breathing in her sweet scent as she pressed herself against him, soft sounds of need escaping her from barely-parted lips. He wondered...would her touches be nervous and shy like way she often acted with him? Or was there another side of her that would come through in the heat of the moment? Somehow, Adrien felt that the passion with which Marinette stood up for her friends was proof of an equally-passionate way of expressing her feelings and desires and needs to a lover…

Time seemed to pause for second as he realized that Ladybug, too, seemed to love honestly and passionately in spite of her (likely) lack of experience. She was a concentration of awesome strength, breathtaking beauty, and perfect imperfection (An oxymoron, yes, but it makes sense to him!)...

It was hard to say whether Marinette or Ladybug was on the forefront of Adrien’s mind in the last several seconds before he came into his loosely-closed hand, but as he came down from his high with his mind’s eye fixed on eyes as blue as the sky, it occurred to him…

Holy shit, do I have a type?!
Comments along the lines of, "When's the next chapter coming?" will be met with sass and/or sarcasm, because a) I'm not being paid to produce this story, so I am not required to meet any deadlines; b) I have a life, with responsibilities and other hobbies, and my priorities are MY priorities; and c) I don't want carpal tunnel syndrome or tennis wrist/elbow symptoms to slow me down again. Instead, tell about things you liked about a chapter/the story, and why you like it, etc. Nice comments are encouraging and occasionally inspiring!
We're Already Wet And We're Gonna Go Swimming

Chapter Summary

Neither Marinette nor Adrien know what to expect from this big double-date at the aquatic center, but they're both definitely determined to have a good time! Adrien's concerned he might end up misbehaving around Marinette again, while Marinette just hopes she won't scare Adrien by ogling him like the horny girl in love that she is. It turns out they weren't wrong to worry, but they've also reached something of a new understanding, and it'll take a lot more than some awkward interactions to shake up their friendship! If only figuring out their own feelings for each other was just as easy...will this date help everything fall into place?

Chapter Notes

Yes, it's finally here!! Hopefully, this newest update will make the long wait worth it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thursday, September 8th

As the alarm on Marinette’s phone continued to ring, Tikki hovered over Marinette and watched her squirm slightly in her sleep. Her breathing came faster and deeper than usual from her slightly-parted lips as she clung to her pillow with both arms wrapped around it and her hips undulating against nothing under the covers.

Tikki wasn’t surprised that Marinette was having another erotic dream, almost definitely about Chat Noir. Marinette rarely slept through her alarm unless she was sleep-deprived (her problem was usually that she hit the snooze button too many times), but Tikki knew that her dreams of Chat Noir would be more vivid and immersive than normal during her heat, and so it wasn’t surprising that all the ringing went ignored. Tikki wondered idly if Plagg’s owner was dreaming about Ladybug right now…

Tikki had an ongoing theory that, if a Ladybug-and-Black-Cat pair were compatible enough, they might have an increased tendency to dream about each other simultaneously, and maybe--just maybe!--they could even learn to communicate through lucid dreams. Tikki wished she and Plagg could meet with Master Fu to talk and exchange ideas about this mating cycle...did Master Fu know how quickly Ladybug’s and Chat Noir’s symptoms would develop, and why? Neither of the two possible explanations Tikki had considered seemed satisfactory…

Could the speed at which Ladybug’s heat was advancing really be attributed to how compatible she and Chat Noir were with each other? Tikki couldn’t see for herself exactly how compatible they were, of course--only deduce what she could about their relationship from what Marinette said and from those rare interactions Marinette had with Chat Noir when she wasn’t Ladybug…

...Well, there was also every interaction Marinette had with Adrien, but Tikki wasn’t sure yet how much significance to place on their evolving relationship; Marinette hadn’t mentioned feeling any
differently around Adrien lately, and Adrien could very well be falling for Marinette without their mating cycles having anything to do with it...but if the mating cycle was part of the reason they were being drawn to each other in their ordinary lives, then it could also explain why their symptoms were developing so quickly. Either way, there was no precedent, and therefore no way to be sure...at least not yet.

*I guess all I can do is keep my eyes and ears open when I can and help Marinette figure this whole situation out,* Tikki mused. *She smiled to herself. For now, I’d better make sure she gets to school on time!*

“Marinette!” she called, flying down to give Marinette’s cheek a gentle shove. “It’s time to wake up!”

Marinette squeaked and startled awake, blinking blearily at the far wall of her room and frowning miserably in sleepy confusion.

“I’m sorry to interrupt your dream,” Tikki apologized, touching down on the pillow and giving Marinette’s nose a soothing pat.

“S’okay, Tikki…” Marinette mumbled, smiling sleepily at her kwami as she slowly sat up and stretched. “Although…” She looked suddenly thoughtful. “Now that I try to think back...I can’t remember if I was dreaming about Chat Noir...or Adrien...or both, maybe?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised either way, or both; maybe you kept switching between them without realizing it?” Tikki took to the air again to subtly remind Marinette to get moving. Marinette slowly untangled herself from her bedcovers and took her time coming down the stairs to the main floor of her room.

“I dunno…” Marinette started getting dressed almost on autopilot. “I can’t remember for sure if I saw either of their faces clearly...I just remember us holding each other and feeling…” She blushed. “It felt familiar, somehow, like it must have been Chat Noir because...well, Chat Noir and I are kind of used to touching each other a lot, so I might be able to recognize him by his touch alone—” Tikki giggled and Marinette stuck out her bottom lip in a bashful pout but continued, “—B—but I’m almost positive we were both...! Um...!”

“Naked?” Tikki guessed.

Marinette whined and covered her face with her hands for a moment in mortification.

“That’s the weird part, though! I’ve never felt anybody’s bare skin against mine, and certainly not Chat Noir’s! I mean, I’ve *imagined* Adrien without any clothes on, but...”

“If you could only dream about things you had experienced in real life, it would just be like relieving memories in your sleep,” Tikki pointed out, shrugging. “But sometimes dreams are even stranger than anything you can imagine! I don’t think it’s weird at all...unless...” Tikki tilted her head at Marinette curiously. “...*You* feel like the dream means something?”

Marinette looked taken aback.

“What? But I thought—! What *could* it even mean? I’m...” Marinette laughed awkwardly. “We already know I’m in heat, and I was already a teenage girl in love before that, *so of course* I’m gonna have horny dreams, right?!

Tikki hesitated, realizing she couldn’t say anything helpful without saying too much. She smiled apologetically and shrugged.
“I just thought I’d ask! I don’t always have all the answers, even if I am your kwami!” Tikki said, waving a placating paw. “I may have helped every Ladybug through their mating cycle (when they had one), but every Ladybug is different, and no two mating cycles are going to develop the same way. Yours has definitely thrown us an unexpected twist, but don’t worry...we’ll figure it out together!”

“I know...it just reminds me that I’m…” Marinette brought her hands up to her cheeks bashfully. “...That I have feelings for two boys now and I have no idea how I’m going to choose between them…”

“Wow! Has Chat Noir caught all the way up to Adrien already?” Tikki asked excitedly.

“Wha--! Um, well…!” Marinette looked even more flustered. “I’ve...loved Adrien for so long--At least, it feels like a really long time!--and I’ve only just started feeling like this for Chat Noir...On the other hand, I’ve known Chat Noir just as long as I’ve known Adrien, and we’ve been through so much together...I mean, I feel bad thinking that anybody else could have something that Adrien doesn’t, but Chat and I have this unique bond that’s come from us being partners in protecting Paris together…” Marinette wrapped her arms around herself as if to hug something invisible and stared wide-eyed at Tikki. “I...I really am in love with Chat Noir, aren’t I?”

Tikki just beamed at her.

~ ~ ~

Having the double-date to look forward to was exactly what Adrien needed to face the day; not even the subtle itching under his skin could get his spirits down. The only thing that worried him slightly was the fact that he’d have to somehow get through school without losing his head around Marinette before they even got to the aquatic center. He’d accepted that he was bound to embarrass himself one way or another eventually, because he was going to be faced with the sight of Marinette in a swimsuit, and no way was he going to survive that unscathed! If he could just keep it together until then, he’d call it a small victory…

_Just be yourself, act normal...no big deal!_

~

_Oh, Adrien, how are you so perfect...? Ack! He’s looking at me!_ Marinette froze light a deer in headlights.

Ignoring the butterflies in his stomach, Adrien smiled at her as he approached his seat, only for Chloe to suddenly throw her arms around him from out of nowhere.

“Adri-chou! You should come sit next to me! Also, why haven’t you come over already, it’s been so loooooong...!”

“Hey, Chloe! Uh...” Adrien struggled to compose a response to the overload of information Chloe had just dumped on him. “Yeah, I know it’s been a while...I’ve been really busy lately, you know how my father kept my schedule full even over the summer...I’ve only just managed to get an afternoon free, and I’ve already made plans, so...”

“But Adri-chou, I never even got to enjoy the pool with you, and the brand-new hot tub!” Chloe whined, clinging to his arm. “Daddy had new tile put down in the pool, and color-changing lights so it looks so amazing at night, and you can adjust the jets in the hot tub however you want, and--and--!”
“That sounds really nice, Chlo,” Adrien said politely (as Marinette gnashed her teeth in silent petulance), “But I’m actually going to the new aquatic center with some friends, and since I was the one invited, it wouldn’t be polite of me to have you tag along--”

“THE AQUATIC CENTER?!” Chloe squealed in horror, recoiling and appearing to gag at the thought. “UGH! Adrien, why would you go to any kind of public pool?! They’re disgusting, absolutely crawling in germs! And the water is way too chlorinated, it could turn your hair green!”

“I’m pretty sure the chlorine is to kill all the germs, and my hair will be fine as long as I wash it afterwards,” Adrien assured her. “As for sitting next to you...uh, it was nice of you save me a seat, but...I’m happy sitting next to Nino where I always have.” With that, Adrien sat down next to Nino, hoping Chloe would take the hint and let the conversation go. She pouted, but didn’t have the opportunity to respond, as their homeroom teacher walked in at that moment.

~ ~ ~

Later today, I’m going to see that boy in nothing but a swimsuit, Marinette thought for the hundredth time, staring down at the back of Adrien’s head. I am SO thoroughly screwed.

She fidgeted in her seat, trying and failing to not picture Adrien’s gloriously-naked torso (for the hundredth time) and trying (and failing, again) to ignore the tickle of moisture gathering between her lips-down-below.

Adrien, meanwhile, was assuring himself for the hundredth time that he could not feel Marinette’s eyes on him.

You’re imagining it...you’re imagining it...it’s all in your head...it’s all in your head--well, the part of your head where your libido sits, anyway... he thought. No matter what you’ve read, you cannot actually feel when someone’s staring at you...or can you? Maybe if it was Ladybug burning eye-holes into the back of my skull, I could feel it, because we have a special connection... He smiled dreamily. Maybe someday, I’ll be able to call us soulmates...!

The bell rang, and of course, Marinette and Adrien were among those most startled by the noise.

~ ~ ~

“I’ve been feeling nervous about this date all day,” Adrien admitted aloud as he searched his wardrobe for his swim briefs. “And I can’t even figure out why. I mean, sure, Marinette will be there, and I still can’t figure out how I feel about her, but I’m not sure what I’m afraid might go wrong, either...I mean, it’s technically still a platonic date with friends, right?”

“From what I’ve heard, it sounds like this is a date to figure out if your future dates could be romantic; am I right?” Plagg remarked. “I still don’t see how you could make a date involving so much water seem romantic, anyway.”

“So...I should just act totally normal and not overcomplicate things,” Adrien decided. “That makes this whole thing a lot less nerve-wracking, too. I guess the worst-case scenario is if goes just like a platonic date with friends and I don’t learn anything about my feelings for Marinette.”

“Well, no, the worst-case scenario would be if you completely lost your head and turned your date into a...’one-night-stand’ it’s called, right?”

“When did you start watching those kinds of shows?” Adrien asked, snickering. “I don’t know if I like the idea of you learning about one-night stands and all that stuff!”
“While you’re in heat, I’m forced to be your guide in all matters of love and seduction whether I like it or not!” Plagg said loftily. “If you know of better ways to research methods of human matchmaking, let me know!”

“One-night stands tend to happen with unfaithful lovers cheating on each other with mysterious strangers,” Adrien explained, patting Plagg on the head. “I’d like to avoid that little facet of human romance!”

“Even with Ladybug?” Plagg asked, crossing his arms.

“Well--! I’d be afraid of making things awkward between us later,” Adrien said, blushing. “So...it’d be better if we agreed to date exclusively first!”

“What you say…” Plagg shrugged. “If I were you, though...I’d prepare for the possibility that you two might not be able to resist the urge!”

“Come on, Plagg, have a little faith in me!” Adrien admonished. “Our solidarity as a team is too important to risk shaking up with anything we might regret later! And I will not be a slave to my urges!”

“You’re not wrong, but the thing is, the mating cycle isn’t meant to damage your team dynamic!” Plagg pointed out. “It’s meant to bring you two closer...in every way possible!”

“What, are you saying that because we are both feeling attracted to each other...we’re guaranteed not to fall out because of anything we do as a result?” Adrien frowned doubtfully. “Would our symptoms not get worse if it meant hurting our relationship? That sounds way too convenient...and…” Adrien’s brow furrowed suddenly. “…If that’s how it really worked, you could have told me this a lot sooner, when I first starting worrying about it!”

Plagg just stared at Adrien for a moment, appearing to deliberate what to say next.

“Every Ladybug and Black Cat are different, and their relationships have all been different,” Plagg finally said. “Not all of them fought evil together long enough to go into heat...and of those who did, not all of them ended up having sex...but, of those who did, none of them ended up losing their friendships because of it. Now, I never saw a Black Cat go into heat when it was time for his mating cycle, but I can’t know for sure if that was because he and Ladybug would break up if he did, or just because it doesn’t work that way, like you say. Ladybug’s kwami and I know everything we know about the mating cycles from what we’ve learned in our past experiences. We weren’t born knowing everything about it, and seeing how strangely your mating cycle is developing, it’s pretty obvious we still don’t.”

Adrien stared back at Plagg as he processed this.

“Well...then that tells us it is possible that our partnership might not survive if we ended up...sleeping together and either of us regretted it later…” The thought that either of them ever could regret making love was a painful one to dwell on, but it was a possibility he could not afford to forget. “...Which means we can’t afford to let our feelings overwhelm us, no matter how...real and irresistible they seem…” Adrien hung his head sadly, only to jerk it back as Plagg smacked him on the nose.

“Ow! What was that for?!” It hadn’t actually hurt; Adrien was just completely shocked and baffled by Plagg’s inexplicably-emotional reaction.

“Separating the physical feelings of lust from your emotional feelings of love is tough, I know!”
Plagg granted shortly. “And you and Ladybug can’t afford to lose each other’s partnership, it’s true! But no matter how good a team you already are, your mating cycles will try to bring you two even closer—In every possible way! No matter how far away you are from each other, your mating cycles will draw you closer together, because you’ll start missing each other more and more! You’re already partners in fighting evil together, but if you could become partners in other ways…!” Plagg paused and seemed to hesitate. He took a deep breath and appeared to calm down somewhat. “Because you two are supposed to keep your identities secret, no matter what, the safest thing to do would be to never let yourselves become any closer than partners and friends, but...if you fell in love anyway, then what? What if love could strengthen your partnership? Ladybugs and Black Cats before you two have asked this question, and we never had any better answers than to stick to the rules to protect yourselves...but we’d still wonder, ‘What’s the point of the mating cycle, then?’ Is it just to get you to pass on offspring that might make good superheroes in your place if you ever lost? That seemed like the answer that made the most sense, but there are holes in the theory: What if one of you died in childbirth? What if you died before the children could fend for themselves? What if the children were turned against their parents? What if the Ladybug and Black Cat just couldn’t raise offspring?! There are so many ways it could go wrong...but…” Plagg shrugged hopelessly. “The only other explanation we could ever think of was that it was just to bring Ladybug and Black Cat closer together so that they could become stronger together...but obviously, that could go wrong in a lot of ways, too.”

“So you really have no idea why my mating cycle is so unusual, either, huh?” Adrien smiled ruefully. “I was kind of afraid of that. I guess we have to just take it as it comes?”

“Afraid so,” Plagg admitted.

“I didn’t know you felt so strongly about it, though,” said Adrien, scooping Plagg up into his hands.

“We kwami kind of go through our own share of stuff during your mating cycle,” Plagg admitted. “We aren’t animals, so we don’t feel the urge to mate, but...it gets harder than usual to not empathize with what you’re going through, in our own ways. It’s hard to explain…”

Adrien smiled.

“Well, thanks for telling me all of that. Even if it doesn’t help me figure out my situation, it’s...still nice to know more, you know? Whatever the reason, it helps to remember that our mating cycles are meant to make us stronger, right?”

“Yes; that’s one thing we know for sure,” Plagg said, nodding.

“Next time I see Ladybug, I’ll talk to her about it and see how she feels. It might help to hear how much her kwami has shared with her, and if she’s had any ideas we haven’t. Communication is still key, right?”

“Yup.”

*He can’t know about the “soulmate hypothesis,” or he’ll just fixate on Ladybug even more and never look at Marinette seriously,* Plagg reminded himself. *But whether it’s true or not, their mating cycles are going to make it harder and harder to keep their identities secret from each other; there’s no way to keep these two apart when they share a classroom!*

~ ~

“So, if I start ogling Adrien like a pervert, you promise to distract me, right? Or distract him, whichever works?”
“Yes, Marinette, now calm down, already!” Alya said bracingly over her shoulder.

They were in the lobby paying for their admission to the aquatic center, with swimsuits, towels, and goggles in their duffel. Nino had already texted them both to say that he had both already arrived and would be changing in the locker rooms, and that Adrien was on his way. Marinette was still finding ways to freak out over the fact that she was very likely going to see Adrien shirtless in the very near future.

Alya pulled Marinette by the hand through the glass double-doors, and Marinette’s senses were deluged by the smell of chlorine and the sounds of splashing water and voices shouting with excitement everywhere. Alya turned and grabbed Marinette by the shoulders to get her attention.

“Listen, you’ve seen Nino shirtless when we all went to the pool two months ago. He may not look exactly like Adrien does under his shirt, but aside from the difference in skin tone, it’ll be pretty darn close. Adrien may play two or three different sports, but he does not work out, and he’s still just a teenager, so he’s not going to be ripped, okay? He might not even look quite as gorgeous as his own photos in the magazines, because they always photoshop those, right? You have nothing to freak out about!”

“Except that it’s Adrien and I want him to marry me and take me to a tropical island for our honeymoon and make sweet sweet love to me every night!”

Alya laughed.

“Geez, are you even gonna last until your honeymoon?” Gurl, you thirsty as hell!”

“I didn’t say we’d have our first time during our honeymoon…” Marinette said impishly, letting her tongue peek out between her lips.

“Well, lucky for you, even a sheltered goody-two-shoes like Adrien is going to have a hard time keeping it in his pants that long with you, too; I still say you two will be banging before graduation!”

“Thanks for your vote of confidence, but right now, I can’t afford to get lost in my fantasies!” Marinette fretted, following Alya to the locker room. “This date is about making sure Adrien can enjoy opening up and having fun with me, and I need to be my normal self for that, not my horny self!”

~ ~ ~

As they pulled up in front of the aquatic center, Adrien leaned forward in his seat to speak to his bodyguard.

“If you follow me in...people are probably going to stare, and they’ll be much more likely to recognize me,” he hedged, grinning nervously. “I’m not wearing anything from that photoshoot, so if I go in alone, I’m much less likely to get mobbed...and if I do, the lifeguards will be all over it!”

His bodyguard made a grudging noise of consent.

“Thanks!” Adrien scrambled out of the car and headed on in.

Admission to the aquatic center was more expensive than for the pool, as was the cost for a locker, which came as no surprise given how much more extensive the facilities were. Adrien had to stop and stare for a moment to take in the sight of all the different pools before he went to the locker room to take off his tee shirt and stash it away.
Adrien met up with Nino in the lobby.

“Dude! Glad you made it!” Nino exchanged a fist bump with Adrien. “Alya and Marinette are changing in the locker rooms; we can meet them outside the restrooms. Oh, man! Any particular pool you’re looking forward to the most?”

“It all sounds cool to me!” Adrien replied, following Nino back through the main doors. “If we can hit each one, I’ll be thrilled!”

“Definitely! I’ve been eyeballing the wave pool and the whirlpool river. Unfortunately, we can’t go on the playground in the kiddie pool; we’re all above the maximum height limit!” He chuckled.

“Where’s that?” Nino pointed to the far right, where Adrien saw a smaller, very shallow pool with a series of brightly-colored pipes stood a formation of columns and archways spraying water in just about every way possible that could be contained in the pool: A waterfall-like curtain of water, rain-like streams of water from a giant shower head, small fountains and sprinklers, and even simple knobs and buttons for the kids to turn certain features on and off as they wanted. There were also steps to a bridge and a tiny waterslide, and a rubbery dolphin with a saddle on it. Many of this pool’s patrons wore life-jackets or water-wings.

“A toddler’s wet paradise,” Adrien agreed with a laugh. “I’m guessing that’s the wave pool?” He pointed to by far the largest-looking pool, featuring endless small waves coming from the back to lap at the edge of the slope leading into it. Dozens of people swam lazily around or lounged in donut floats on the bobbing water.

To the left, Adrien saw a couple of hot tubs as well as a pool with a dive board for swimming laps. A trio of waterslides towered over it all, while behind the wave pool, Adrien could see the bobbing heads of people floating around in a donut-shaped pool with a whirlpool hidden in the middle.

“And that’s the whirlpool-slash-river one? That’s really cool! I didn’t even know that existed!”

“I know, right?” Nino agreed. They approached a hallway that lead to the restrooms, showers, and locker rooms.

“The girls should on their way out right about now…”

“Hey there, boys!” Alya appeared, waving, with Marinette in tow, wearing her socially-awkward grin.

Alya’s swimsuit was a one-piece with revealing cut-outs on the sides to show off her curves. The golden-yellow-orange color patterned with tropical flowers and jungle-green ferns also complimented her skin tone and brought out the gold in her brown eyes.

“Uh, yo!” Adrien glanced at Nino and caught him blushing and looking suddenly nervous and slightly stiff. Adrien struggled not to smirk.

“It’s okay, boys, you can say it: We look amazing!” Alya said saucily, striking a pose and smiling at Nino in a way that told Adrien that she definitely noticed her boyfriend was ogling her.

“Oh, uh, thanks! In that case…” Nino gave Alya a double-thumbs-up. “Yeah, you girls look great!”

Alya snorted, and Marinette giggled.

Poor Nino…she’s not pulling any punches! Adrien thought, struggling not to laugh at the sight of
Nino unable to keep his eyes from wandering.

But then his eyes caught sight of Marinette--

--and he began to realize how very screwed he was.

Marinette’s one-piece was blossom-pink, patterned with tiny white blossoms, and accented with a double-row of small frills along the neckline and low around her hips.

...Those frills are JUST low enough to let the contours of her boobs peek over...

...Oh my god, did I SERIOUSLY just think that?! Fuck! Say something, you pervert! Stop staring!

“UH! Y-yeah! Um! Excellent selection, Alya! A-and great work--amazing work, Marinette! It, uh…*suits* you perfectly!”

“Was that a *pun*?” Alya asked incredulously.

What the actual fuck is even happening right now…?! Marinette wondered.

“No! I mean, maybe? It could be, if you want it to be!” Adrien stammered, doing his damn best to avert his traitorous eyes. “But, seriously, it looks professionally made! It’s…very *you*, Marinette!”

“Oh, thanks!” Marinette stared curiously at him, her cheeks slightly pink. “Hmm…You’re…kinda looking everywhere *but* at my swimsuit, though…”

“Well, um…!!” Adrien scrambled for an excuse but could only come up the pathetic truth. “I…don’t want to seem like I’m staring rudely!” He grinned apologetically.

“It’s okay…” She smiled bashfully. “I…do like knowing my work is appreciated, so…you can stare a little bit, I don’t mind!” As nervous as she was, she did want her swimsuit to catch his attention...

Adrien let his gaze rove over her as if hypnotized.

“W-well, then…don’t mind if I do…?” It was impossible not to admire and appreciate how Marinette’s swimsuit flattered her slender and dainty curves in all the right places…she looked absolutely adorable, but nowhere near cutesy enough to not also look unfairly sexy. And the way she was looking at him only made it worse…hopeful and inviting.

Adrien thought he saw her eyes drift lower before they snapped back up to his face, and she definitely blushed harder.

...*did she just…?*

STOP STARING AT HIS CHEST!! Marinette berated herself. *AGH, it’s not fair how gorgeous he is…!*

He was every bit as glorious as he was in the magazine spread, and endlessly more devastating to behold in real life, standing barely more than an arm’s length away from her. Just one, maybe two steps, and she could reach out and *touch* him, *feel* those toned arms and shoulders and that lean waist and those mouth-watering *pecs*…!

“Well! Shall we get a move-on?” Alya asked. “The day’s a-wastin’, so let’s all go get *wet* already! Where to first?”

She looked very pointedly at Marinette as she asked this, and Marinette realized she was already
expected to take the lead.

“Uh…!” She looked around, taking in all the attractions as quickly as possible. *Quick, just pick one!* Uh...the water slides? Yeah, the water slides! How about the water slides, does that sound good to everybody…?”

“Sounds great!” Adrien said cheerfully. “Let’s go!”

~

*Well, this is one way to minimize my exposure to the sight of shirtless Adrien, Marinette reflected as she led the way up the stairs to the waterslides. If I stay at the front of the group, I can’t see him, so I won’t get distracted...but as long as I am here, why should I deny myself the view?* Unable to help herself, she glanced over her shoulder, and there he was, that beautiful, beautiful boy, craning his neck this way and that to take in the view of the aquatic center from up high. God, what she wouldn’t give to put her hands all over that, to press kisses all over that lovely neck of his…!

“Marinette?”

Marinette jumped; Adrien had noticed she had stopped going up the stairs, and he was looking up at her questioningly. She quickly fixed what she hoped was a not-weird-looking smile on her face.

“Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee! Sorry, I just, uh...spaced out!” she stammered.

“It’s okay!” Adrien smiled at her reassuringly. “Goodness knows, I’ve sure been spacing out a lot recently!” He glanced down shyly.

Hesitantly, Marinette started climbing again, but slowly, her eyes still on Adrien. She smiled back at him. “We can be spacey together, then!” She thought back to her conversation with Alya and Nino about Adrien’s mysterious troubles, and wondered if Adrien knew any better why he’d been feeling and acting the way he’d been. She wondered if she’d get the chance to ask him about it...would he feel comfortable talking to her about it?

*Now’s not the place or the time for that! she reminded herself. *Stay focused on this date, Marinette!* Once they reached the top, Marinette chose a water slide and sat on the rim ready to slide down as soon as the lifeguard gave her the o-kay.

“They all end up in the same pool,” she informed Adrien, “So I’ll see you at the bottom!”

The lifeguard gave her the go-ahead nod, and she pushed herself forward and slid down out of sight. Adrien walked over to the guard rails and leaned forward to look down and locate the pool where the waterslides ended. Sure enough, Marinette came sailing out of one of them into the water about thirty seconds later. He watched her get out of the water and then she turned to look up...and waved at him with a big smile on her face! The sight filled him with a bubbly giddiness that caught him a little off-guard with its intensity. He couldn’t help but grin and wave back.

“You gonna go down the slide or what?” Nino asked him from behind, chuckling.

“Whoops!” Adrien laughed sheepishly and hurriedly got back at the front of the line.

~

“So! Live up to your expectations?” Alya asked Adrien as they headed for the wave pool.
“Awesome!” Adrien gushed. “I would’ve loved for them to be faster, but I get they need to be safe for almost-all ages!”

“You speak for all of us, dude!” Nino said, nodding enthusiastically.

“You’ll like the river rapids and whirlpool even more, then!” Marinette piped up. “If you let yourself float, the water will push you down the river—kinda slowly, compared to the water slides—but you can swim with the current to go faster.”

“That sounds so cool, I can’t wait!” Adrien said with a grin.

Marinette giggled and beamed at him. *It feels great to see him happy and having fun with us,* she thought. *Maybe I can actually get this date to work out the way we hoped!*

As Marinette’s feet touched the beginning of the gradual slope down into the water, she stumbled slightly; Adrien’s hands were there instantly to steady her.

“Careful!” He held her hands as she slowly straightened out her posture, her eyes fixed on him as if hypnotized. “You good?”

“Yeah...thanks…” she managed to utter, with a smile. It was a miracle she managed to say anything; her heart was currently doing death-defying gymnastics in her chest.

Adrien had almost forgotten his earlier worries about getting all up in Marinette’s personal space, and now, all of a sudden...it felt natural— it felt right—to stay close to her, and instead of worrying about whether he might be intruding on her personal space or touching her too easily, he only caught himself wishing he and Marinette could be alone together...and he wasn’t even sure why.

*I just feel drawn to her...* he thought. *Could it really be okay for me to feel anything like this for her, while I still love Ladybug? Am I really just overcomplicating things in my head the way Plagg thinks I am? “Love” may be the only word I can think of use to label this feeling, too, but it all still seems so complicated whenever I stop to think about it...*

If he could only have heard the thoughts going through Marinette’s head, the poor boy might have actually been relieved by how uncomplicated hers were.

*PLEASE feel free to touch me more often from now on, Adrien, HOWEVER you want...or kiss me, you could do that, too!*

Predictably, her eyes wandered to his lips, and while she knew how incredibly weird it would be to start making out in the middle of a public pool of all places, she wanted to throw her arms around him and kiss him senseless!

*SPLASH*

Marinette and Adrien both jumped as they had their legs splashed. They both turned and immediately identified Alya as the perpetrator by her sly smirk and raised eyebrows.

“Hate to ruin the moment, but you two are gonna gather an audience if you start kissing in the middle of the pool! Get in the water, losers!”

“ALYA!” Marinette wailed, aghast. She looked about as shell shocked and embarrassed as he felt, and he was definitely as red in the face as she was.

“You’re not helping by calling attention to them, Alya!” Nino hissed. “Remember, Adrien’s a
model! If people recognize him here, we’ll have to cut this date short so he can escape the swarming fans!”

“Thank you, Nino!” Adrien said with an awkward chuckle.

“Ooh, sorry, Adrien!” Alya said, wincing. “I wasn’t thinking!”

“It’s okay, I think we’re safe,” Adrien said, glancing around.

Marinette stomped forward into the wave pool and grabbed Alya by the shoulders, scowling accusingly.

“We were not about to start kissing!” she hissed, still blushing. “And whose side are you on, anyway?! Was this date not supposed to be for getting Adrien to fall for me?!”

“Yeah, fall for you, not make out with you!” Alya whispered back. “We gotta get you two alone together for that! Preferably with better atmosphere and a soft and cushioned, horizontal piece of furniture…”

“Hush!”

While Adrien couldn’t hear the exchange between Marinette and Alya, he could guess it had something to do with Alya’s and Nino’s matchmaking scheme. He hoped, again, that they knew to not take things too far and risk ruining the mood of their outing. Glancing around, he noticed for the first time that there were donut floats interspersed here and there among the waders and lazy swimmers, bobbing up and down on the waves. He hadn’t noticed them before because they were see-through except for the black hand-holds. He located a spare one nearby and started wading towards it.

“Hey, Marinette, are these free to use while we’re here, or do we have to rent them separately?”

“Huh? Oh, those!” She turned away from Alya and Nino and followed him. “They’re free to take, there’s a couple huge racks of them against the walls, and the lifeguards collect them if there are too many left floating around.”

“Cool!” He tried to hoist himself up onto it, but it only flipped up onto its edge and deposited him right back down were he’d been standing. He tried again, putting a bit more hop into it; the float wobbled under him and tossed him back into the water with a splash.

Marinette was holding her breath trying not to laugh.

Adrien whipped the water out of his bangs, grinning and apparently unphased by his clumsy failures.

“Is there an easier way to get into this thing?” Adrien asked, grabbing the float again.

“Well, you can try from inside the middle, and just throw your arms over the sides, but if you actually want to sit in it on top of the water…it’ll take some practice!”

“Show me how you get into it,” Adrien offered, pushing the float over to her. Marinette simply hoisted it over her head, jumping to get her arms over the edges.

“No, I meant on top of it!” Adrien laughed. “I could have done that, without jumping!”

Marinette laughed and pulled the float up over her head and pushed it back to Adrien. “I can try to hold it steady for you while you try to get up onto it...maybe your weight won’t matter much since
we’re in the water…?”

“Sure, let’s try it!” Adrien agreed excitedly.

Marinette grasped the float by the handles and walked back toward the shallow end until the water came just up to her waist; here, she could stand with her back straight and hold the float in place with her arms out straight. She stood firmly with her feet shoulder-width apart, and then gave Adrien an encouraging nod and smile.

“Oh, so now you hold onto the handles; I’ll hold it still!” she said, wrapping her arms around the float.

“Don’t let me knock you over!” Adrien warned. “I don’t want to end up hurting you if I can’t keep my balance on this thing!”

“I’ll try to let you fall past me into the water, then!” Marinette laughed. “Don’t worry, though; even if you do knock me over, I think the water will keep me from breaking anything!”

“Let’s hope so!” Adrien chuckled.

He grabbed the handles and made to heave himself up with a little hop, but he leaned too far forward and ended up toppled over…

...draped over the float with his feet in the air and face-planted into Marinette’s boobs.

To Adrien’s credit, his first (internal) reaction was the equivalent of a fire alarm going off, because he had hoped to avoid situations like this at all costs! He was spared the need to attempt an escape from said situation by Marinette pushing him back upright by the shoulders. He ended up sitting on his feet with his knees crammed into the float, but he was kind of where he had been trying to end up, and Marinette didn’t look like she had just been scarred for life--

Boobs! his brain chimed in helpfully.

Yes, Marinette has boobs, most women do, but now is not the time to admire them! he scolded himself.

“You okay?” Marinette asked.

“Am I okay, what about you?” Adrien asked, rearranging himself on the float as it wobbled on the water, partially because it gave him an excuse to avert his gaze from Marinette’s...assets.

“I’m fine, you didn’t hurt me, I promise!” Marinette assured him. “And, hey, look, you’re on the float!”

“After a long and arduous struggle!” he joked, finally managing to recline properly on the float. The resulting image was one that Marinette would have loved to add to her ever-growing collection of photos of Adrien, but this was Adrien in real life, and the sight of Adrien’s real thing was wreaking havoc on her hormone-addled brain; there were a lot of things she wanted to do to Adrien, especially now that so much of his skin was on display, but the urge to climb onto that float and right into his lap was at the top of the list.

“Hmm...I think I’d rather stay in the water after all,” Adrien mused. “Do you want this?”

“Oh! No thanks, I’ll enjoy the water with you!” Marinette said, smiling. “Want to head for the deep end?”
“Sure!” Adrien followed her as she waded deeper into the wave pool, grinning excitedly as the waves gently buffeted them. It was charming to see him so excited about something most people their age took for granted...and his family was rich enough to give Adrien his own private wave pool if they wanted.

“You know, this seems even better than swimming in the ocean,” Adrien remarked, spreading his arms wide on the surface of the water to maximize contact with the waves. “The water’s not too cold, there’s no sand clouding the water, and you can walk deep enough to swim under the surface without losing sight of the beach!”

“I agree! A public pool could never compare with a beach for the scenery and the ambience, though; I don’t think I could get much artistic inspiration from sitting by the pool!”

“Couldn’t agree more!” Adrien said, chuckling. Marinette couldn’t help but beam back at him; his smile was blinding, and contagious...and it made her want...things.

If I had known I would have such a hard time keeping my head out of the DEEP END of the gutter around Adrien, I would have suggested we go somewhere else for this double-date...really, ANYWHERE else, because on a date anywhere else, he would have been FULLY CLOTHED, and I wouldn’t be able to see his NAKED TORSO!! Adrien, I swear, I love you for you, not just for how hot you are!

“Marinette?”

Snapping back to the present, she realized Adrien must have caught her spacing out, or worse, blearily staring at him.

“Oh! Sorry, I…I was just...thinking about the river rapids! I... wanna make sure we all get to spend some time on everything here, so--!”

“Ah, good point!” Adrien nodded thoughtfully. “It would be easy to lose track of time in here, but we can always come back later after we’ve checked out everything else, right?”

“Yeah, yeah, exactly!” She nodded enthusiastically. “Shall we...go ask Nino and Alya if they’re ready to move on?”

“Sure!”

Inwardly breathing a sigh of relief, Marinette picked out Alya and Nino among the patrons; Nino was reclined atop his own donut float holding onto the hand-holds for dear life as Alya spun him around and around.

“Hey, you guys!” she called, wading her way towards them. “Are we all ready to move on to the river rapids?”

“Huh? Oh, sure!” Alya called back, steadying Nino’s float. “You want to bring the float?” she asked Nino.

“Yeah!” Nino slid off the float into the water and started dragging it behind him as they all headed for the shallow end. “Actually, let’s bring two or three of ‘em,” he added, turning to Adrien. “You can use ‘em to float down the river; it’s even cooler than riding the waves in the wave pool!”

“This is so cool!!” Adrien cheered. Marinette laughed; the joy in his voice was contagious.
Just ahead of Adrien, Alya (in a float) bumped into Nino (in a float).

“Traffic jam!” she hollered. “Honk honk!” Nino laughed and pushed off the bottom with his feet to pull ahead of Alya, who chased after him and rammed him like they were riding bumper cars.

“It’s a good thing those two can always have fun together without being all flirty and embarrassing,” Marinette remarked. “At least when they’re hanging out with us!”

Adrien chuckled.

“Oh, here’s one of the detours to the whirlpool!” Marinette steered her float into the central section, where the jets pushed the water to flow in a circle. Alya and Nino were already riding the whirlpool, pushing with their feet against the bottom to propel themselves around faster.

“Oh no! The endlessly-flushing toilet has claimed another victim!” Alya called out with a laugh. “We’re all going to the sewers!”

Adrien and Marinette both laughed.

“I was going to draw a reference to Charybdis, the giant whirlpool from *The Odyssey*, but a giant toilet works too, I suppose!” Adrien chuckled.

“A literary reference sounds a lot cooler than the mental image of people being flushed down a giant toilet!” said Marinette. “Aren’t those the kind of jokes grade-schoolers make?”

“Well, *most* people our age haven’t read the *The Odyssey*!” Alya shot back. “Jeez, I can only *imagine* how brain-numbingly boring that would be!”

“I *haven’t* read it, I just know my basic Classical Greek mythology!” Adrien said smugly.

“I wonder if Hawk Moth knows anything about any ancient mythologies?” Alya wondered. “You think that might be where he gets some of his inspiration from? For what kinds of supervillains to turn people into?”

“Nah, I’m pretty sure people turn into supervillains that have abilities to change whatever made them upset or punish whoever hurt them,” said Adrien. “Although, the Pharaoh had powers inspired by ancient Egyptian gods, so maybe that counts?”

“No, I totally agree with you, Adrien,” Alya said, nodding pensively. “I’ve noticed the pattern almost since the beginning, and it makes sense: if Hawk Moth didn’t give you the power you’d want to do whatever you wish you could do, then why make a deal with him and let him turn you evil?”

“I don’t think his victims are really given a choice to become evil or not,” Marinette pointed out seriously. “He turns people evil so that they *will* make a deal with him. If, say, Chloe stuck gum in my hair and I had to cut it out, I wouldn’t make a deal with Hawk Moth just to, I dunno...bury her alive in a giant ball of gum--”

Alya and Nino both snickered at the visual. Adrien grinned awkwardly, not sure how to feel or react.

“My point is, I’d be really mad, and upset, but I wouldn’t want to do evil things to Chloe and fight Ladybug and Chat Noir just to punish her. I’d just want her to punished by a teacher or the school for bullying me, and for her to *not* have her father bail her out just because he’s the mayor and he *can.*”
“Amen to that,” Nino said, raising an invisible glass for a toast.

“Has Chloe ever had to face any kind of punishment?” Alya wondered, frowning. “I feel like she just gets away with everything, am I wrong?”

“Nope,” Marinette said dully. “Story of my education.”

Adrien never enjoyed reminders of Chloe’s reputation as a rich, spoiled daddy’s girl and a bully; he knew how self-centered and selfish she could be, but that was because he had known her since they were both toddlers, and she had been his only friend for all those years all the way up until the year he finally started going to school. Once in the school setting, he saw how she treated other people on a regular basis, and those other people were now his friends! It was an uncomfortable situation that to this day he still hadn’t figured out how to handle...and in moments like this, he felt he needed to say...something.

“I...don’t think I’ll ever understand why Chloe treats other people the way she does...she could make more friends if she was nicer to everyone...”

Marinette immediately felt awkward for bringing up Chloe and tried to think of a way to change the subject. Luckily, Alya saved her the struggle.

“Meh...Why is bullying even a thing at all?” she asked. “It’s her loss! We’ll all just have to enjoy the power of friendship without her! Or at least until she grows out of it!”

“I sure hope she does,” said Adrien. “I know she could, if she really wanted to.”

*I’ll believe it only when I see it...* Marinette thought.

~ ~ ~

After the river rapids and whirlpool, the party decided the next stop would be the hot tubs, with the swimming lanes and diving board being the last stop if they had the time afterward. They only had to wait a couple of minutes before a jacuzzi opened up for the four of them to share.

Alya hopped in with a bit too much excitement and leapt right back out with a shriek two seconds later with scalded feet. Nino tested the water with a hand first, then started edging his way in at a snail’s pace. Adrien sat on the edge and dipped his feet in, while Marinette nervously tested the waters with her toes.

By the time she had made it all the way in with the water up to her waist, Adrien was already seated and immersed.

“Dude, do you turn your water to boiling every time you take a shower?!?” Nino demanded incredulously. “Do you take your baths in devil’s tears?!”

“Huh? No, just...on the warmer side!” said Adrien, grinning.

“‘Warmer,’ my ass!” Alya grumped. “You could boil pasta in this!”

“‘Well, better get used it!’” Adrien teased. “Or I’ll turn into a lonely golden raisin all by myself!”

“Two raisins!” Marinette corrected, giggling. “I made it in!”

Adrien laughed, and Marinette felt like she was glowing on the inside, basking in the radiance of his blinding smile...bravely, she sat next to him and tried to appear as carefree as possible, but she
couldn’t keep herself from admiring how effortlessly sexy he looked (for the hundredth time).

It was getting so hard to keep her head out of the gutter that it was downright embarrassing. She had a few mitigating factors in her defense: Firstly, that Adrien was a beautiful human being, and was currently shirtless; secondly, that she was a teenager and couldn’t help that she was buzzing with hormones; and thirdly, that the Rated-18 dream she had had about Adrien and/or Chat Noir that morning was still rather fresh on her mind. On the other hand...

...Agh, this is NOT what this date was supposed to be about! This was just supposed to be about having fun with Adrien so that he’ll...fall even more in love with me? Argh! Now I can’t even remember the mission objective!! Now how am I supposed to handle this…?

And things got even more complicated when she brought Chat Noir into the mix, because now she was in love with two boys, and she still hadn’t figured out what to do about it…

“You know, it’s a bit of a bummer we’re all too tall to play in the little kids’ pool,” Alya said as she kept working her way into the hot tub (she was currently only ankle deep, standing on the ledge meant for sitting on). “It might get boring pretty quickly, but...I dunno, I’m still kinda jealous of the little wigglers! I’d love to chase the twins around in there!”

Marinette watched the little kids scampering around squealing with excitement and giggled.

“You’re right, that’s exactly the kind of thing they’d like!” she agreed.

“What little kid doesn’t like goofing off in a bunch of fountains and sprinklers?” Nino laughed. “Even Chris would’ve gone nuts, before he started trying way too hard to be a big kid who’s too cool to play with ‘babies’.” He rolled his eyes, chuckling.

Adrien watched and listened to all of the little kids having the time of their lives and wondered if he had ever been allowed to have that much fun and laugh as loudly as he wanted...It felt almost like watching a group of tiny people ascend to a higher state of existence that he could never hope to experience...The closest he ever got to being so utterly carefree and unashamed was when he was Chat Noir, but being a superhero came with its own restrictions...

*If only Ladybug and I could spend time together whenever we wanted*... he thought wistfully. *How amazing would it be if we could just meet up and hang out and chat like normal friends, or go out on dates under the stars and just...let ourselves be in love without having to worry about secret identities and stuff...Why can’t we share everything with each other? We could support each other better that way, all the time, and not feel so weighed down by all these secrets...*

Something touched his hand under the roiling water; startled, he looked over and saw Marinette watching him, looking concerned.

“Adrien?” She leaned toward him and spoke softly, as if to help him save face in front of Alya and Nino--very considerate of her, but all four of them were sitting in the same hot tub; there was no way they hadn’t noticed Marinette speaking to him.

“Oh, sorry!” he said hurriedly. “Did I space out again?” He grinned light-heartedly, but Marinette looked unconvinced.

She was positive she hadn’t imagined the melancholy expression that had crossed Adrien’s face as he watched the little kids playing; *something* was bothering him, she just didn’t know what.

“You looked kind of sad for a second...” she hedged gently. “Are you feeling okay?”
“No, no! I’m fine!” he rushed to assure her, waving a hand. “My mind just started wandering…but there’s nothing bothering me, I swear!” he added for good measure.

Somewhat reassured, Marinette’s expression relaxed…

…but she wasn’t completely convinced; she remembered her conversation with him over the phone and wondered if some of those worries he had shared with her were distracting him again.

We’re all sharing this hot tub, though—it’s not just the two of us alone together, she thought. I even sat close next to HIM, not the other way around, and he’s not touching me, or anything! And honestly, if he still thinks I mind him being so close to me or touching me or whatever, I might have to give him another talking-to about it! Or… I guess once I tell him how I feel about him, he’ll realize how much I DON’T mind him being…extremely friendly with me…but even if I felt brave enough, I can’t do it here with Alya and Nino with us!! Geeze, having them come along was supposed to make this date easier, not hold me back! Maybe I should make our next date just the two of us…

“Aah, I feel like a boiling egg!” Alya groaned. She climbed out, catching Marinette and Adrien off-guard.

“Do you want to move on?” Adrien asked, but Alya shook her head and made a careless hand movement as if to wave him off.

“Nah, don’t ditch the jacuzzi on my account, you two are enjoying yourselves! I need to use the restroom anyway.”

“Uh, me too!” Nino announced, also standing up. “We’ll meet you two back here, or at the wave pool!”

Before they could even fathom what had just happened, Adrien and Marinette found themselves alone in the hot tub, watching Nino follow Alya to…the restrooms?

“Did they just…?” Adrien was too bewildered to even finish his thought, but it was more than enough to confirm what Marinette had already realized.

“They just ditched us!” she blurted. “They ditched us, and--!” It was part of their plan! she realized. Alya must have PLANNED this!! WITH NINO!! So they could BOTH sneak off and leave me alone with Adrien!! What the hell does she expect me to do, I can’t confess to him in the middle of a crowded aquatic center; we AGREED on this!!

“I… didn’t think those two were the type to sneak off to go make out somewhere…” Adrien said, oblivious to Marinette’s internal nervous breakdown. He seemed almost dazed, still staring blankly after their two (traitorous) best friends.

He still doesn’t realize what this date was for, bless him…and I don’t even know if that’s a good thing anymore…

“I… didn’t either!” Marinette said, deciding purely out of habit to play dumb and wing it. “I know they’re not into PDA, at least…and where would they even sneak off to?”

“Now that I think about it, though,” Adrien mused, “Even when it’s just the two of them hanging out, they would have a hard time finding some place to be alone together for…that kind of thing. Nino’s got his little brother at home, and Alya’s got three sisters at her place!”

“Wow, you’re right!” Marinette laughed, her moment of panic momentarily forgotten. “Nora’s
super-protective, and the twins do barge into Alya’s room when they’re bored! With Chris, though… I feel like the last thing he’d want would be to catch his big brother doing lovey-dovey stuff with a girlfriend… maybe Nino’s room is where all that happens!” She giggled, and Adrien laughed. “Either way,” she continued, “I’m glad Alya doesn’t overshare that stuff with me. I’d rather not hear all the dirty details, even though they make a cute couple!”

“They do!” Adrien agreed. “I can’t help but envy them…”

He said it off-handedly, but Marinette could help but frown at him.

*I’m right here, you oblivious buttercup!* she raged. *If you want your soulmate, then take me and make me yours, already!*

Chapter End Notes

Oh, look, what’s that down there?
Yes, there’s ANOTHER NEW CHAPTER! Read on, my lovelies!
Every Time We Touch

Chapter Summary

Plagg and Tikki hold an impromptu conference, hoping they can figure out why their owners' mating cycles are advancing so quickly. Meanwhile, Marinette and Adrien try VERY hard to act NORMAL while sharing a HOT TUB, only for Alya and Nino to throw a curve ball into the plan and abandon their charges! How will the two keep their cool while in hot water?!

Chapter Notes

New Chapter 2 of 2! Go back and read Chapter 15 if you haven't already before reading this one!

Thursday

Tikki gasped.

“Plagg, what are you doing here? You should stay where your owner can find you!” she scolded.

“Relax, Sugercube!” Plagg drawled. “If a supervillain turned up, we’d hear it coming from a mile away, this place echoes so loudly!”

“I know, but Master Fu gave us rules for a good reason!” Tikki said patiently. She sighed. “This had better be important!”

“It’s our owners--Our owners and their mating cycles!” Plagg groaned, throwing his paws in air. “Agh, where do I even start?! They’re barely two weeks into the mating cycle, but my owner’s symptoms are practically stage three! He’s only had to team up with Ladybug twice since they both went into heat, and, sure, they may have hung around afterward to smooch for a little while, but they haven’t run into each other at all, otherwise! But still…! Still, his body’s already starving for her touch, AND he’s being drawn to Marinette, too!! I haven’t even told him that he’s started writhing and caterwauling in his sleep!”

“I knew your owner had to be suffering, too, with how bad my owner’s symptoms have gotten,” Tikki said sympathetically.

“What the heck is going on with these two?! Plagg ranted, gesturing wildly with his arms. “This is utter madness!”

“I’m not sure…” Tikki said seriously. “At first, I thought it was just because they were just so unusually compatible with each other, but that just doesn’t seem like enough to explain everything… Now I’m wondering if it’s because they spend so much time together during school. We always assumed that even when they were out of costume, close proximity between them could still affect their mating cycles, but maybe the effect is a lot stronger than we thought…maybe it doesn’t even
make a difference whether they’re in costume or not! That would explain a lot.”

“Well, I’ve definitely seen the pheromones affecting my owner whether or not they’re in costume,” Plagg said with a nod. “Even when his nose loses its enhanced capabilities, he’s still drawn to his girl’s scent when it hits him.”

“I think my owner must be being affected, too; she just hasn’t realized it because she’s already had a crush on Adrien the whole time. You know…” Tikki smiled. “I’ve actually been pleasantly surprised by how open she’s been to the idea of falling in love with Chat Noir! It’s just too bad I have to insist on keeping their identities secret…”

“Oh, well, good for you!” Plagg grumped, rolling his eyes. “My owner just can’t stop making a big old fuss about it all! ‘But I love Laadybuug! Marinette’s just a frieeeend!’” Plagg imitated Adrien with a dramatic whine. “‘I can’t possibly be in love with another girl if I’m already in love with Laadybuug!’ Meanwhile, poor little old me has to make him feel better without telling him that the two girls he’s attracted are one and the same!!”

“I know it’s frustrating,” Tikki said, “Especially when the truth could put all their worries to rest…and they seem just perfect for each other, too…” she sighed wistfully.

“So, then…What about the soulmate hypothesis?” Plagg asked, getting more serious.

“It’s a romantic theory…but I don’t think it alone explains why their mating cycle is accelerating,” Tikki said thoughtfully. “It might explain some of the dreams, but—“

“No, no,” Plagg interuppted, waving his paws. “I mean the part about why Ladybug and Chat Noir went into heat in the first place; the producing-heirs theory has a bunch of holes in it, so maybe it works more like…like a Lucky Charm for their destinies, just to bring them closer together because they’re supposed to be soulmates.”

“It’s possible…and I’d sure like to believe it!” Tikki responded cheerfully. “But it doesn’t justify breaking the rules Master Fu gave us, because there’s no way to prove it.”

“I’m not usually one to romanticize things,” Plagg said, “But in this case, I think it makes way more sense. The Miraculous are magical jewels, designed to do magical things! Why would they put spells on Ladybugs and Black Cats just to help Mother Nature along? Humans don’t need magical help to procreate, they have hormones for that!”

“That does make a lot of sense, when you put it that way,” Tikki mused. She brought a paw to her very-round chin thoughtfully. “Following that idea…the Ladybug and Black Cat miraculouses symbolize the forces of Yin and Yang, and soulmates are based on the same idea: Two halves that make a whole. One could argue, then, that every Ladybug and Black Cat should, ideally, be soulmates, to perfectly compliment and balance each other. The existence of soulmates would be an argument for the existence of destiny, too, which my Lucky Charm already serves as evidence for! The future may not be set in stone, but the Lucky Charm always works, as long as it’s used at the right time.” She glanced back at Plagg and tilted her head to the side curiously. “But even if we were right…how would it help us help our owners?”

Plagg thought for a moment, his brow furrowing with concentration.

“If we told our owners that their partners are their destined soulmates, then your Chat Noir might think he should give up on his feelings for my owner’s true identity because Ladybug is the only one he’s meant to be with…” Tikki pointed out. “And my owner would still be torn, maybe even more than she already is…”
Plagg’s eye twitched; he looked like he was trying not to have a brain aneurism.

“And even they both just started seeing each other exclusively in-costume, then what?” Tikki added. “They would still have to keep their identities secret, so what would be the point?”

“I don’t know!” Plagg hollered, shaking his paws at the heavens. “Maybe this whole secret-identities rule is stupid and pointless?! If their mating cycles keep developing at the rate they’re going, they won’t be able to make it through the next two weeks without revealing everything! We could say ‘absolutely no lingering or loitering before or after missions, emergency missions only, no check-ins or patrols,’ but Hawkmoth isn’t going to stop sending supervillains after them, and they’re going to be sharing a classroom almost every day!! We’re doomed!”

Tikki sagged, unable to refute Plagg’s logic, however pessimistic it sounded.

“…We still have to urge them to follow the rules, as long as it’s at all possible,” she finally said. “If things get any more complicated, though…we may have to ask Master Fu for advice, as a last resort.”

“Shouldn’t we see him as soon as possible? Aren’t things complicated enough already?!”

“Leave that decision to me,” Tikki urged Plagg. “Your owner hasn’t even met Master Fu yet, and Master Fu might decide he wants it to stay that way, at least for now.”

Plagg heaved an enormous sigh.

“Fine…I’ll just keep playing dumb, then…” He turned and left through the material of Marinette’s bag to return to wherever his owner had stashed him.

Tikki did her best to remain positive as she composed herself.

*I have to have faith in Marinette… Even while in her’s heat, I know she’ll try to be responsible, as long as I’m there for her…*

What worried Tikki was the possibility that Marinette’s heat might keep intensifying so quickly that she would become less and less able to think with a clear head. She was still green to the new intensity of everything she was feeling, and it would all only keep growing. Tikki knew Marinette was already starting to struggle with it all…what if it overwhelmed her?

~ ~ ~

“So…I saw your latest photospread…” Marinette said slowly, deciding to be brave. “Was…the photoshoot fun?”

“Not really,” Adrien said, shrugging. “They’re usually long and boring anyway, and this one wasn’t even on-site.”

“You mean, you didn’t even go to the beach for the shoot?” Marinette asked.

“There were too many ‘concerns’: Me getting sunburned, hazards on the beach, attracting a rowdy crowd, unpredictable winds…so it was all done in a studio. Easier and more efficient that way…although, the photographer wasn’t happy about it!” He chuckled. “He’s passionate about scenery and natural lighting, so the whole thing probably felt like a tragic missed opportunity!”

Marinette laughed.
“This photographer wouldn’t happen to be that Italian one who took our class photos last year, would he?” she guessed.

“Yep, that’s the one!” Adrien confirmed, chuckling. “He’s a bit much, but he’s great at what he does!”

Marinette considered it nothing short of a miracle that she was able to continue holding a conversation with Adrien feeling as horny as she was. Try as she might, it was impossible to keep from fidgeting against the familiar ache between her legs. It also didn’t help that the jets in the hot tub felt like they would be just perfect for the orgasm she was currently craving, but of course, this was a public place, and she wasn’t alone…she glanced at Adrien and couldn’t help but conjure a mental compilation of the many fantasies she had had of Adrien getting her off and immediately flushed; being already extremely warm and flushed from the hot water, she now felt positively feverish.

“Marinette? Are you feeling okay?” Adrien leaned in slightly and reached out as if to touch her shoulder but stopped himself before he actually made contact. “You looked a little faint for a second there…your body temperature might be getting a little too high.”

Hmm, body…Adrien has a very nice body…Ack! Snap out of it!

“Huh…maybe you’re right…” She really didn’t want her private time with Adrien to come to an end, but she had to admit Adrien was probably being the responsible one in this instance; she was feeling a little bit woozy.

“Let’s make our way to the wave pool,” Adrien suggested. “We can see if Alya and Nino are there, and the water will be nice and cool.”

“Okay…”

Adrien stood and held out a hand; Marinette took it with a shy smile. Adrien returned the smile as he helped her climb out, only for his eyes to stray down to her décolletage before he could stop himself.

Oh my GOD, WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME?!! he thought, shocked and horrified at himself. Goddammit, Adrien, you’re supposed to be BETTER than this!! He blinked and focused on keeping his eyes fixed on Marinette’s forehead instead, desperately hoping she hadn’t noticed his transgression upon her honor.

Marinette tilted her head at Adrien curiously. He had glanced down for just a second, and now he was staring fixedly at her while somehow failing to make proper eye-contact. One minute, he had been fine, and now he seemed suddenly tense.

How can he still be so mysterious and hard to read even when he ISN’T perfectly composed? she wondered.

“What’s the matter?” she asked. “Is…something wrong?”

“Hm?! Nothing! Nothing’s wrong!” Adrien bleated automatically. “Am I acting weird again? Sorry, ha-ha-ha…!” He grinned nervously and scratched the back of his back of his neck.

Marinette was briefly distracted by the sight of Adrien’s flexed bicep, but still couldn’t miss all of Adrien’s nervous vibes. She had easily seen more awkwardness from him in the last two weeks than the whole year before, and it wasn’t the Adrien she was used to.

“Uh, It’s…okay, I was just wondering what…surprised you or made you uncomfortable…” she
smiled at him reassuringly and shrugged her shoulders. “But if you’re fine, I’m fine!” If he glances
down again—at me, if I’m guessing right—maybe I can catch him at it…

“Yeah, no worries!” Adrien smiled back and seemed to relax somewhat. “Uh, shall we move on?”

“Yes, let’s go find those two lovebirds!” she said cheerfully.

Adrien chuckled and lead the way toward the wave pool. Marinette indulged herself with an
unobscured view of every contour of Adrien’s bare back…

…he has a very nice ass, too…Mmm!

“I don’t see them in the wave pool…” said Adrien. “Do you think they went to the river rapids? Or
the water slide?”

Marinette squinted up at the top of the water slide tower, and then watched the mouths of the
waterslides to see if Alya and Nino would come out…

“I don’t see them at the water slides…Let’s check the river rapids, and then the long pool with the
lanes and diving board. If we still can’t find them after that, then…”

“Do you think they could actually be hiding in the locker rooms making out?!” Adrien asked, his
eyes wide.

“I don’t know, that’s a good question!” Marinette laughed. “Do you want to try to catch them?”

“Ooh, that’s a tough one…!” Adrien stroked his chin like a scheming supervillain. “Normally, I’m
not one to ruin a romantic moment…but, this was supposed to be a double-date, and they ditched us,
so…”

“I’d say, it’d be a shame not to turn this into a teachable moment!” Marinette said with a smirk.
“And I think I have a good idea how…”

~ ~ ~

“You realize Marinette’s gonna kill you for this, right?” Nino said seriously.

“Kill us both,” Alya corrected cheerfully. “You’re an accomplice to my crime.”

They were both hiding behind one of the equipment racks, with pool noodles, kickboards, water
weights, and donut floats obscuring them from view. While Alya’s only regret was not being able to
spy on Marinette and Adrien, Nino felt that this was taking their matchmaking operation a little too
far.

“Alya, I’m serious!” he said. “You promised Marinette we wouldn’t leave her hanging, but now
we’re ditching them just to give them some more ‘alone time,’ and it’s totally pointless! A public
pool is not a place where heartfelt confessions of love happen!”

“I told you already, Nino: I’m not waiting for any confessions, I’m just giving them more ‘alone
time’ just so that they can open up to each other without us distracting them!”

“Marinette’s just gonna get even more nervous!” Nino shot back. “And Adrien, too! This whole
thing’s gonna backfire on us because you want something big to happen!”

“Marinette’s been crushing on Adrien for over a year, now, and the only reason they’re just now
starting to see each other as potential lovers is because we stepped in!” Alya said, exasperated. “If
“Alya, we can’t set up their love-lives for them,” Nino said seriously. “It’s gotta be up to them to make it work. I think we’re putting too much pressure on them…”

Alya frowned, turning Nino’s words over in her head.

“It’s just so frustrating sometimes…” she said. “Of course, I want to help Marinette out, I know how important this is to her! But she still hasn’t managed to tell him how she feels…it’s not always her fault, of course—things go wrong even for the best of plans, and stuff just gets in the way sometimes—but it’s been over a year! She’s had so much time, so many chances…!”

“It’s Marinette’s love-life; you shouldn’t have to hold her hand the whole time,” Nino pointed out gently. “Why don’t you just…take a break from matchmaking for a while? I mean, you could still give her advice when she asks for it, but just…let her decide how she wants to go after Adrien.”

“…I guess a change of pace might be worth trying,” Alya finally admitted. “Marinette can come up with grand plans to win Adrien’s heart just fine on her own when she wants to; it’s just confidence she has trouble with sometimes, and that’s the part I can’t do much to help her with, anyway.” She smiled resignedly, then turned to Nino and beamed at him. “Thanks, Nino…I’m glad we’ve gotten our love-life figured out at least!”

“Me, too…” Nino smiled back. And the only help WE needed was for Ladybug to lock us up together one time!

They both leaned in, almost unconsciously, and recognized the heat in each other’s eyes for what it was…finally, the moment they had been waiting for had finally come where no annoying siblings or parents could ruin the mood…

“ATTENTION! ATTENTION! WOULD…ALYA AND NINO PLEASE MEET YOUR PARTY AT THE FRONT DESK! REPEAT: ALYA AND NINO, PLEASE MEET YOUR PARTY AT THE FRONT DESK! THANK YOU!”

Shit!

Foiled once again…

~ ~ ~

“There you are, you two!” Marinette cooed, batting her eyelashes. “What have you been up to? Did you sneak off for some alone time?”

“Here we thought a public pool was no place for any stolen moments of passion!” Adrien chimed in, sporting a devilish grin. “Where would you even hide for some good old-fashioned necking? You two need to share your secrets with us!”

“Why didn’t you just tell us you two were feeling horny?” Marinette drawled, before Alya or Nino could get a word in. “We would understand if you just wanted it to be the two of you, ALLLLLL alone together someplace dark and quiet—!”

“Stoooop, we get it, we get it!” Alya whined. “It’s just--! It seemed like you two were enjoying each other’s company so much it was like you in your own little world, and we didn’t want to make things awkward--!”

“This was supposed to be a double-date!” Marinette scolded, dropping the act.
“We know, we’re sorry!” Nino said hurriedly, clapping Alya on the back pointedly. “We apologize! We won’t do it again! Right, Alya?”

“Yes! We’re really sorry, you guys,” Alya said sincerely. “…Forgive us?”

“I think they’ve learned their lesson, Marinette,” Adrien said. “It’s probably about time we all get going, anyway.”

Marinette sighed. Alya’s still getting a talking-to later, she thought. Maybe Nino, too. “All right… We forgive you. Let’s all head for the showers…”

…Wait…are the showers here co-ed?! They are!

“Boys together, girls together, though!” She added quickly.

“Yes, ma’am!” chorused Alya and Nino. Adrien chuckled and followed Nino, while Alya and Marinette trailed behind.

“Why would the showers be co-ed!?” Marinette hissed privately to Alya as they headed for the locker rooms. “This place was supposed to big and roomy and fancy!”

“Relax…there’ll still be separate stalls,” Alya whispered back.

Like the rest of the facility, the showers were spacious and modern in design. The curtains were heavy, and the tile and plumbing were all sparkling clean and new.

“I wonder if the water pressure and temperature are better than the other place,” Nino wondered aloud as got into a shower stall. “Damn, it’s still just a push-button…please don’t be boiling or freezing…or feel like needles…”

“You brought soap and shampoo?” Alya asked incredulously when caught sight of Adrien rifling through his locker. “You know they only need us to rinse, right?”

“Chlorine can do bad things to blonde hair,” Adrien explained. “And I think I’ll feel better knowing all the public-pool water’s been washed off of me, anyway.”

“Fair enough!” Alya shrugged good-humoredly and then got into her own shower. Marinette took her time getting into a shower as she watched Adrien get into his before sweeping the curtain closed.

Adrien is taking a full shower just two stalls over, Marinette thought as she pushed the button for water. He’ll probably pull his swim briefs down so he doesn’t miss a spot…!

She tried, and failed, to not visualize exactly what pulling his swim briefs down would reveal, and what he would be washing there…Her face was so red she could have fried an egg on it, but she just couldn’t shake the images…

What would it be like to take hold of him? It wasn’t the first time she had considered this by a long shot, but Adrien himself had never been nearby while she fantasized about his manhood, and it was simultaneously nerve-wracking and exhilarating…

“My hair’s probably been totally safe the whole time under my cap, though…” Adrien mused aloud, making Marinette jump. “…Yep! It’s totally dry! I would hope so; it was a struggle getting it on right!”

“You think you had a hard time?!” Alya demanded on Marinette’s other side. “I had to fight my hair
so hard for so long to get it in my cap!”

“It doesn’t look like you struggled, though, don’t worry!” Nino assured her.

Marinette wasn’t even paying attention anymore. Thinking about Adrien’s male anatomy was driving her own downstairs equipment into a frenzy. She almost whimpered aloud from the throbbing and aching between her thighs. If she were in the shower at home, alone, she would have taken care of herself immediately, but she wasn’t sure she could get herself off here even if she tried; her friends wouldn’t whip the curtain open on her, but she couldn’t completely block out their presence nearby, and that kept her from relaxing completely…

…But even as she thought this, she find herself undoing her swimsuit and slowly and carefully peeling it down her body as if in a trance. She could feel her heartbeat in her throat and butterflies fluttering in her stomach as she let her swimsuit pool at her feet. Tilting her head back, she let the water run down her exposed chest torso as she massaged her breasts; her nipples were puckering up with arousal and exposure to the open air and streaming water, and her pussy throbbed with need.

Her body felt too empty…it wanted to be filled, gently stretched to make room for something that fit inside just right…!

Stifling a groan, she brought a hand to her crotch and swept two fingers between her lips; there, she felt slippery slickness that wasn’t water, and remembered Tikki’s warnings that she would get wetter than usual now until the end of her heat…and when she was near Chat Noir…

…He’ll be able to smell it… It had been a mortifying thought before, but she found it didn’t bother her now, at least not in her current mood. All she wanted right now was relief…Could she make it until she got home?

She vaguely registered the sound of Nino getting out of the shower on her immediate right and going back to his locker. She heard him open it to grab his towel, while Alya got out of the shower on her left and also headed for the lockers. They obviously hadn’t gotten out of their suits and likely planned to change clothes after they were dry and hidden from each other’s view.

Adrien, on the hand, was almost surely as naked as she was, washing all traces of chlorinated water from his skin two showers down…

The only one stuck with a raging lady-boner, though? Her, of course…

AGH, fuck it!! I can’t take it anymore!!

Marinette turned around and leaned against the shower wall. Heart pounding, she worked one finger into herself and started searching for her g-spot. As soon as she could feel she’d had found it, she pushed another digit inside and started finger-fucking herself with as much gusto as she could without making more noise than could be blocked out by the sound of rushing water…

…Until the water shut off automatically…because of course it did; she hadn’t pushed the button again!

Cursing silently, Marinette fumbled behind her and started the water again without thinking.

~

Adrien was feeling restless and antsy.

After rinsing the suds of his body wash off and pulling his briefs back on, he find his attention inexplicably drawn two showers to his left, where Marinette was rinsing off. He hadn’t heard any
strange sounds or noticed anything that suggested something was amiss, and yet, his heart was beating harder and faster than it had been a minute ago, and his skin felt too tight in spite of his moisturizing body wash and the warm water of the shower. It was like his intuition was nagging him even though he couldn’t recall anything he might have forgotten or needed to worry about.

He closed his eyes and strained his ears for the slightest sound he might be hearing only subconsciously, ignoring the sounds of Nino and Alya getting their towels out of their lockers. He heard Marinette’s feet move around a bit in her shower…then, something—it was so quiet he could have merely been imagining it—something he couldn’t put his finger on…maybe it was her hands sweeping water over her skin as she rinsed? It was the only thing he could think of, but it didn’t seem to match…

*It doesn’t matter…* he told himself. *There’s nothing remarkable Marinette could be doing in there, not even taking a full shower, like you did! Just forget about it…*

He couldn’t even imagine any reason to be interested in precisely how Marinette went about rinsing off in the shower…and yet, *he really wanted to know exactly* what she was doing in there…he needed to know…!

*What the hell is happening to me?* Adrien wondered, shocked and bewildered.

For whatever bizarre reason, his subconscious brain was nagging at him to go to her…go to her…as if he would find something good in there…

*Like what?!* he demanded of no one. *What reason could I POSSIBLY have to look in on a girl in the shower?! First of all, that’s SO MANY kinds of WRONG! Second, I’ve heard nothing to suggest she’s slipped and fallen, and it’s impossible to drown in these, so she’s NOT in any danger! And third, YOU’RE acting weird, too, because you’re done showering and you STILL haven’t gotten out!! Actually…why hasn’t Marinette gotten out yet if all she’s doing is rinsing?*

Marinette’s shower head shut off, and he thought he heard something…again, it was too subtle to identify, but his heart skipped a beat as if it meant something important. Then her shower started up again…apparently, she wasn’t done in there, whatever she was doing…

*We all have those times where we zone out in the shower…* Adrien tried to assure himself. *Nothing weird about that…*

His own shower shut off right then. After a moment’s hesitation, he gave himself a little shake and got out. Nino was whispering something in Alya’s ear, his eyes on Marinette’s shower curtain and a quizzical look on his face. Guessing Nino was also wondering about Marinette, Adrien caught Alya’s eye and pointed questioningly at the shower, his eyebrows knitting. Alya shrugged as if to say she had no idea, but she didn’t seem worried, either. Adrien forced himself to get his towel out of his locker, determined to get a grip, and started drying off. None of them said anything…

Then, he heard it: a little whimper from inside Marientte’s shower. The effect was like a static shock; Adrien jumped, all senses on high alert, and in a flash, he was right there, just outside the shower before Alya and Nino could move.

“Marinette! Are you okay?!” he called.

He thought he heard a stifled squeak before she responded.

“…I-I’m fine!” He voice sounded higher pitched than usual, and slightly shaky and constricted… was she upset about something? Was she *in tears?!*
“Sorry!” Marinette continued, sounding closer to normal. “I, uh, zoned out for a bit! I’ll be right out you guys!”

“Okay!” Alya called back. “We’ll all start getting dressed now, but we stick around until you’re ready to go, too, okay?”

“Okay!”

There, see? She’s fine! You can stop freaking out, now! Adrien forced himself to breathe deep, calming breaths.

As Alya and Nino took their changes of clothes with them into a bathroom stall each, Adrien finished drying off and took out his own change of clothes. As he carried them to a stall for himself, he heard the unmistakable sound of damp, clingy swimsuit being stretched and tugged over a naked body. Images of Marinette’s naked body immediately overran his brain in a rapid-fire barrage of camera shots from different angles like a teaser trailer. Hurriedly shutting himself in the bathroom stall, Adrien forced himself to work on getting into his change of clothes, even as his mind kept sliding down the gutter.

Either Marinette had been stripping before getting out of the shower—unlikely—or she had gotten naked in the shower and then pulled it back on before getting out. She could have simply wanted to rinse off her entire body without her swimsuit getting in the way…but then, why had whimpered as if in distress? Why had she sounded…upset?

Stop it! You’re overthinking all of this! If it’s anything you need to worry about, she’ll tell you; otherwise, it’s none of your business! More importantly…you need to figure out…something, something about Marinette…I can’t even remember what I was supposed to figure out…Why am I such a mess?

~ ~ ~

By the time Marinette had finished getting dressed, the other three were all packed up and ready to go. Though she had calmed down a good deal, all it took was one look at Adrien to make her blush again. Interestingly, he seemed suddenly too shy to maintain eye-contact as well.

“Well, this was quite the adventure!” Adrien said, glancing between them all. “Thanks again for inviting me, you three! I hope you had as much fun as I did!”

“We all had a blast!” Alya said, nodding enthusiastically.

“Actually, we had so much fun, I feel like I need a nap when I get home!” Nino chuckled.

Adrien’s bodyguard pulled up to the curb and gave a polite honk.

“Looks like my ride’s here,” Adrien observed. “I’ll see you all at school tomorrow!” He gave a wave, smiling to each of them and feeling himself blush slightly as Marinette managed to meet his gaze and smile shyly back.

“Yeah, see you!”

“Later, dude!”

“S-see you, too! Tomorrow, I mean!” Marinette said, waving.

Adrien watched them fondly until the car reached the end of the block. Then, he heaved a great sigh
and let his head flop backward against the seat. Closing his eyes, he slowly started working on untangling his thoughts.

There was something going on between him and Marinette: some type of chemistry, some form of attraction that was new to him. Using the word “friend” to classify his relationship with Marinette didn’t feel like it captured everything she was to him anymore, and all these new and confusing feelings he was struggling with…but he couldn’t think of a better word to use, either. At the very least, she was a special friend…but was that all?

“Dinner should already be ready to be served,” Nathalie said as they pulled in through the gate. “So be sure to come right back down to the dining room after you put your things away.”

“Can I bring my tray up to my room and eat it there?” Adrien asked.

“Yes, that should be fine,” she said. “I believe Mr. Agreste will be dining in his office.”

*Good, I can talk to Plagg as soon as I get upstairs, Adrien thought. I've got so much to figure out...*

End Notes

At the time I published this story, season 2 hadn't started to air yet, and though we've started to see episodes come out since then, I want to avoid introducing certain head-canons about major future plot developments, as that would likely result in contradicting important details that might be revealed in episodes to come (an example of this would be exactly what happened to Adrien's mother or what happened immediately following the events of "Volpina"). I don't want to end up having to retcon too many important details of my story because I couldn't stand to leave the inconsistencies, but I might fix some little tidbits here and there if the edit doesn't force me to alter plot events.

For example, it turns out Marinette was only 13 at the beginning of the school year, and turns 14 in an episode of season 2, so I've edited this story's beginning notes to reflect this.

*Please drop by the archive and comment* to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!