Salad Days

by chikelo

Summary

[It is not required to read part 1]

The springtime of Prompto's life is shaping up to be a sticky-sweet one. It is his senior year of high school, and he's finally made a friend he inherently connects to. With Noctis, he laughs freely, speaks candidly, and exists comfortably - all while trying to understand the strange warmth building in his chest. Everything is rose-colored and saccharine.

Nevermind the fact that he's starving himself.

Notes

okay! like I mentioned, part one isn't required reading because I summarize it here. that being said, if you're interested in reading part one, I would do so before beginning this fic, as the main plot points are immediately spoiled.

(part 1 deals with prompto fasting before school starts, so he hasn't met noctis yet. if you wanna get straight into the fluff/angst that is promptis, I'd recommend skipping it.)

for new friends - hello! thank you for taking interest in this little fic. I would like to gently
warn you that this work deals with topics that can be rather triggering, especially to those who struggle/have struggled with food. please read at your own discretion, and do what's best for yourself. <3

for old friends - welcome back to the pain hell zone TM

very very very very special thanks to my amazing beta, TheRegalHarvester! without her, this story would not flow nearly as well as it does, and I'd be a lot less self-assured.

here is a body reference for Prompto as he currently looks in the story.

also! I am on Tumblr, so let's be friends.
Prompto can’t breathe.

Something is choking him. Some *substance*, lodged in his throat. All he can make out, however, is a piercing light above him, a prison-grey ceiling, and cool metal at his back.

He slowly grows aware of a voice at the edges of his perception, commanding him:

*Eat. Eat, Prompto. Eat, or suffer the consequences.*

He wants to obey. He does. But he can’t breathe, can’t even move his mouth. His mind is screaming, black spots begin to invade his vision, and his consciousness is gradually slipping.

*What are you, an idiot? Chew, chew, swallow. It’s simple enough. Even you can do it.*

Prompto thrashes, but mystery hands hold him down hard enough that bones start to snap. He tries to shriek, but he’s still gagging on the mass in his throat. His eyelids flutter.

*You selfish asshole. You think anyone has time for this shit? Just eat like every other goddamn adult. Fucking self-absorbed child. Eat.*

The hands avail him of his shirt and begin to poke at the fleshy substance of his stomach. Cruel laughter bubbles up when Prompto flinches at their sudden pinching, and he feels tears prickle the corners of his eyes. Every wrong decision he’s made is on full display, accentuated by jagged, angry stretch marks.

His vision completely succumbs to the darkness, and his chest heaves one last time as he futilely attempts to deliver breath to his lungs.

*On second thought, maybe you shouldn’t.*

Prompto suddenly jerks violently as his alarm wrenches him into the waking world. For an agonizing moment, he forgets where he is, *who* he is. His entire mind feels like it’s both stopped and simultaneously racing, making for a sickening combination.

He inhales like he’d never tasted oxygen before, frenzied in the wake of being *suffocated* - even if only in his imagination. His hands fly to his cheeks, scrubbing angrily at the tears spotting them.

*Just a dream. Just a dream.*

It takes a solid minute before the hysteria subsides and Prompto’s body stops trembling. He fumbles blindly for his phone to silence the gentle chorus of *kwehs* that had roused him.

Another day, another nightmare.

He pulls a hand through his hair in short, aggravated movements. For the millionth time, he curses the poor luck that resulted in him feeling so distressed and perpetually fearful.

Everything had begun so innocently.
Over the summer he’d been invited to photograph for his friend Vyv’s zine, METEOR. As a budding photographer, the opportunity to build his portfolio with work for an official publication was one he didn’t take lightly. Each member of the team had been wonderfully welcoming towards him, creating a safe space that Prompto wasn’t used to.

He’d been paired with Vyv’s friend Derrick, who he’d only been vague acquaintances with prior. Over time, however, they grew to be friends as they collaborated on analytical political recaps that their few fans adored. Things were normal, and life was pretty optimistic.

Except for the fact that Prompto wasn’t eating.

At the time, he’d been overweight, and thoroughly disgusted with himself - especially with the knowledge that the prince of Lucis would be attending his school that fall. That boy happened to be the same prince of Lucis he’d been inexplicably asked to make friends with years ago, which he’d failed at due to his stature.

So - he stopped eating. And against all expectations, he wasn’t half bad at it.

He managed to make it twenty-six days into his fast before Derrick caught on. When he did, he invited Prompto over, held him down, and wrenched every secret he guarded up to the surface. He then hurled accusations at him, branding Prompto selfish and uncaring for what he’d considered a drawn-out suicide attempt.

As if forcing Prompto to acknowledge his disorder and blaming him for it wasn’t enough, he then forced him to eat as well, threatening him with the fact that if he didn’t comply, he’d call the police and force the blond into inpatient treatment.

It was the most traumatizing experience Prompto had ever lived through. He’d never had much in his life, but he could always count on his right to self-autonomy. That day, however, wrenched away every ounce of the control he held dear, traded for an ultimatum with two shitty outcomes.

And though Derrick was coming from a place of concern, and later felt remorseful for his actions, it didn’t stop how incredibly violated Prompto had felt. Continues to feel.

Hence - the nightmares. Which had begun to take on a sinister tone, evidently.

Wonderful.

Prompto sighs, shuffles into the bathroom, and begins to get ready for the day ahead. The bright fluorescent lights blink a good morning to him, the cold tile briefly shocks his feet, and his worn-down scale simply exists, ominous in the farthest corner of the little room.

Not today, Prompto thinks, as he picks up his toothbrush and begin to scrub.

Things had picked up markedly, at least, after Prompto severed ties with Derrick. His senior year of high school began, and Noctis made his reappearance in the public-school system after years of private tutoring. And, after a month and a half of starvation, Prompto had reached a nearly-normal BMI, resulting in enough self-confidence to introduce himself to the prince.

It was incredible, how quickly they became friends. They could talk about anything almost indefinitely, from video games to books, childhood dreams to future plans, cool outfits to even cooler weapons - whatever was on their minds, really. Once, they talked for an entire hour about ghosts they swore they saw, which somehow ended with plans for a joint Halloween costume.

Now, only three weeks in, Prompto paradoxically felt like he knew Noctis deeply, and didn’t know
him at all. They still carried some residual shyness around each other as they tried to work out the boundaries and nature of their friendship. For Prompto these boundaries were especially nerve-wracking, because he was pretty sure if he accidentally offended the prince he’d be thrown in a dungeon for treason. Or something.

But, so far, Noctis seems to like him enough. Prompto wants to prove his self-worth, so he continues to lose weight - this time, in a much more secretive manner. He allows himself 600 calories a day, and consumes most them around the prince to plant the assumption that he eats normally all the time. He’s also taken to running, pushing himself for a half hour each morning. These things help mitigate the natural upward spike in weight everyone experiences after breaking a fast, so now he's hovering at an unsatisfactory, but stable, 173.2 pounds.

Prompto tends to be happy, generally. Struggling with food is second nature to him, so it no longer has a disheartening effect on his mood - it’s simply his normal state of affairs. Having a genuine friend, though… is unprecedented, and fills him with unbridled joy to think about.

Teeth brushed, face washed, and hair haphazardly styled, Prompto gives himself a final once-over in his bathroom mirror.

*Ugly freckles, pasty complexion, pudgy body, bloated face, and disgusting features. Yep, all here.*

Stopping himself before he can go on enough to dampen his motivation, he quickly bounds out and changes into his running clothes. Before long, he's through the motions of warming-up, and is taking off into the crisp morning air.

By the time he gets to school, Prompto’s smiling ear to ear, on an adrenaline high from his workout. Sun rays filter through the thick tree branches, casting a warm glow on the people underneath it. And there, leaning casually against the school gate and fiddling on his phone, is Noctis. He looks soft and sweet in the glimmering morning, dappled sunlight falling gently on his features and making him look like an Impressionist painting.

Prompto pauses, and blinks. He wonders if it's socially acceptable to think his new friend is sort-of beautiful. He hasn't had very many friends - he doesn't really know what the protocol is.

He can’t help it, though - Noctis is the *definition* of conventionally attractive. His aristocratic features and slightly curved brows give off an air of intimidation, but when he smiles... it's as if all his features come together in the most natural and harmonious way possible.

Not to mention his thin frame. Noctis usually complains that he wants to be beefier, but to Prompto, he’s perfect.

As a direct result of that, if there’s anyone Prompto feels *absolutely worthless* around, it’s Noctis, who outshines him in every conceivable way. Puzzlingly enough, there’s nothing Prompto would rather do than be his friend. The dazzling qualities Noctis unwittingly flaunts are a great motivator for him - he acts as a constant, walking source of inspiration. It makes Prompto want to better himself and *earn* his worth.
“Heya!” Prompto beams, clapping his hand on Noct’s shoulder and causing him to fumble his phone.

“Prompto,” Noctis whines. “I almost beat the boss.”

“Serves you right for playing without me!”

“I’m not. I’m just leveling up so I can better support you.” He grabs at his chest as if deeply offended.

Prompto snorts. “Yeah, right. C’mon, we gotta get to homeroom.”

“Okay, okay.” Noctis pushes off the rusted gate and falls into step with Prompto. “So. What’s up?”

“Not much. I saw a kitten on the way here,” Prompto sighs, fond. “She was so cute! All happy and orange-y and sleepy. She even meowed at me, in like, a friendly way. Pretty sure she was telling me to adopt her.”

“Somehow, I doubt that.”

“No! It’s true! I asked her myself and that’s what she told me,” he insists, earnest. “Other than that, though… nothing interesting. You?”

Noctis grimaces. “I had to get up an hour early for ‘surprise morning training’. Like, what. Waking up for school is impossible, now they wanna throw training into it?”

_Damnit, I’m falling behind. I need to start going for an hour now, not half._


“That’s what I said!”

“And you can’t even function in the morning on normal days. I bet you really sucked!”

“Hey!” Noctis laughs, punching his shoulder lightly as they come to a stop in front of their classroom. “Honestly though, you aren’t even wrong.”

“Nah, nah, I’m kidding. I’m sure you were fine. Don’t be so down on yourself, only I’m allowed to do that,” Prompto teases, reaching out to pinch Noct’s cheek as if he were his great aunt.

“W-What-” Noctis starts, and Prompto escapes any chance at rebuttal by diving into his seat, a mess of broad grins and innocent, bubbly laughter.

The rest of the day passes as it usually does. Prompto had some classes with Noctis, some without: they shared the pleasure of struggling through Calculus, English, History of Eos, and Psychology together, and separated only for Photography and Chemistry on Prompto’s end. Those classes always seemed to take the longest - even when Prompto found himself completely consumed in his hobby.
The pair always ate lunch together under their favorite tree - the one with the curling, weepy branches. Nevermind that Prompto specifically chose that spot because it was farthest from where Derrick and his group ate lunch. Noctis didn’t need to know that.

Prompto always makes a show of eating a lot at lunch. He eats slowly, so the food seems more substantial, and he always picks high-volume, low calorie foods that don’t look too healthy. Keeping up the appearance of being an uncaring teenage boy while restricting is a fine line to walk, but he manages.

Today he has soup in a large thermos while Noctis touts a box of some decadent looking mixture of rice and chicken - no doubt made by a royal chef, or something. In what was probably a small act of rebellion, the prince had also bought a package of greasy, processed Gysahl Chips from a vending machine. Prompto tries not to stare at Noct’s meal for too long, in case he notices and offered to share.

Too late. “Want some?” Noctis asks, aiming the lip of the bag towards Prompto.

“Sure,” he responds casually, delicately extracting a few chips and counting them, planning on looking up the calories as soon as lunch ends.

He never, ever, ever wants Noctis to catch on to the fact that he struggles with food. If that means wasting his daily allotment on unfulfilling snacks and starving as he tries to fall asleep, so be it.

He’d learned the consequences of carelessness the hard way.

Prompto slowly puts a chip in his mouth, and tries not to shudder as the strong, salty flavor and addictive MSGs trigger every neuron in his brain, screaming at him to eat more, to swallow the entire packet, to buy twelve family-sized bags and eat it all.

In a lot of ways, eating is worse than fasting. At least fasting lulls him into a sort of limbo-like state, where he can cope passively. Restricting, however, turns his weight loss into an active battle, where every risky move threatens to push him over the crest and into binge territory. Delicious foods are dangerous, so he does his best to avoid them whenever he can.

“So, how was Photo?” Noctis is asking, snapping Prompto out of his disquiet.

“It was cool. Teacher finally assigned our first project!” Prompto beams, happy for the distraction. “We have to contrast warm and cool color temperatures three times - so six pictures total. I have so many ideas already!”

Prompto launches into his complex thought processes, detailing to Noctis exactly what kind of photos he wants to take - and where - and at what time. Noctis doesn’t seem to mind his rambling; his face glows as he reflects Prompto’s genuine excitement, only interrupting occasionally to ask questions, offer encouragement, and even volunteer his help.

By the time the bells chime to signal the end of the lunch period, Prompto had not only solidified his plans, but improved them considerably by talking through it. He’s also roguishly satisfied to note that he hadn’t even finish half his soup, he’d been rattling on so much.

“Oh gods, I talked your ear off,” Prompto winces. “Sorry!”

“Nah, I liked hearing about it,” Noctis dismisses, authenticity in his voice. His eyes hold fondness within them, making Prompto’s heart feel warm. Like the things he has to say are not only tolerable, but maybe even interesting.
Prompto stands, and holds out his hand to help Noctis struggle to his feet. He also pretends he isn't relishing in the contact as much as he is. “Don’t let me do it again, dude. Seriously, no one cares that much.”

“I do,” Noctis insists, suddenly firm. “And I was serious about modeling for that rooftop picture. Let me know.”

“Okay, okay,” Prompto grins. “See you in English.”

The pair part ways, Prompto headed toward Chemistry and Noctis trudging towards Biology. The farther and farther he gets away from Noctis, the more apprehensive he feels. The air just feels more sinister, somehow.

He takes a deep breath before entering the room. Prompto dreads Chemistry. Not only is he mediocre at the subject, but he doesn't even have Noctis to distract him through the class. Or protect him, as it were.

Because for whatever reason, the trio of guys sitting a few seats in front of Prompto’s desk absolutely hate him. The most they’d done was glare and scoff whenever he shuffles by, but he fears an unwelcome escalation was imminent.

Today, he realizes uneasily, might be the start of that escalation. The group is shooting active daggers at him, almost daring him not to walk past. But Prompto can't avoid it or duck into his seat from a different aisle - he sits against the wall. Besides, he isn't interested in conceding to their scare tactics anyway.

So, he holds his breath and begins to walk down the row, brisk and intent. And he thinks he might've gotten off clear, even, until he hears it: “Here comes the prince’s lapdog,” punctuated with a bitter laugh.

Prompto’s heart sinks. So that’s why they don't like him. Of course. Though King Regis has a remarkably high approval rating, he know there are always dissenting opinions and a small population of anarchists. You can't exactly take your frustrations out on the prince, himself, though. Prompto had become their scapegoat.

It was then, for the first time, that he realizes the true implications of having a friend in power. Instead of being allowed to pass as usual, a hand darts out to grab at his forearm, stilling his movements. Prompto’s head whips towards his assailant, hoping his eyes don't betray the deep-seated fear he feels.

His skin crawls, and he suddenly wants nothing more than to jump out of it, ashamed at how easily he's breaking into a cold sweat from the unwelcome touch.

“What’s the view like from the top, Prompto?” the red-haired one sneers.

“I… I don’t.”

Stop touching me. Stop touching me. Stop touching me.

“Must be nice to not give a single shit about the common folk now that you’ve elevated yourself,” he indicts. “Just remember, asshole. You can’t hide behind those royal fucks forever.” The warning concludes with a sudden, tight squeeze.
Prompto really, really wished Noctis had this class with him.

He yanks himself out of the grip and nearly stumbles on his way to his desk, mind racing. A moment elapses in tense silence before the rest of the class begins shuffling in from lunch, blissfully unaware.

Before long, their teacher begins another lesson on the limitless fun that is the periodic table, and Prompto tries to wrap his head around the surreality of such normalcy immediately following such a menacing encounter.

It takes a full ten minutes before the heat dissipates from his face, and nearly the entire hour before his hands stop shaking. He’d never been the target of outright animosity before; it's a foreign feeling, and a deeply unsettling one at that. For the second time in his young life, Prompto feels inherently unsafe.

Is this what Noct feels like all the time?

At that sobering thought, his nerves steel over. He has to be strong, for Noctis; poor kid has too much to worry about as it was. He’d never know about Prompto's problems with food, with Derrick, with vague threats from these irate agitators. He would keep his problems to himself and be the best friend he could all the while - pure cheerfulness and unconditional support.

He’d be Noctis’s rock.

Still, Prompto’s heart can’t help but jump every time he glances up and accidentally catches narrowed, malicious eyes. The hour drags on as if time is being slowly crystallized in amber, each minute growing inexplicably longer.

The moment the bell rings, Prompto bolts up and makes a beeline for his next class, speed-walking until he's safely within the confines of the room.

The feeling of spotting Noctis at his trademark window seat, sun glinting in his hair and chin in his soft hands, is akin to being able to breathe after an eternity underwater. An aura of comfort and protection seems to emanate from the self-assured prince, and Prompto’s world finally turns right-side up again.

“Hey! Is that Chocobo Knight?” Prompto asks.

Noctis meets his eyes hesitantly. “Yeah… you read it?”

“I’ve read almost all of them!” he responds, animated. “Isn’t that the one where they fight the Chocobo Eater?”

“Uh, yeah,” Noctis stutters, surprise painting his features. “How did you…?”

“I love chocobos, dude. Like, a little too much, probably,” Prompto grins, the accumulated tension melting out of his shoulders. “That comic is definitely somewhere in my top three. Of course I know when they fight the Chocobo Eater.”

Noctis snorts. “And yet, you haven’t even read them all.”

“Hey! Not my fault the special editions are way too expensive,” he pouts, bottom lip jutting out just
the slightest amount.

“I have them,” Noctis responds, nonchalant.

“What!” Prompto nearly shrieks. “You do? How the hell did you afford it?”

Noctis looks at him blankly for a moment. “I’ve got this really well-paying job. It’s called being the prince of Lucis.”

A beat passes in silence before both boys erupt into raucous laughter, startling everyone sitting nearby. Prompto is nearly doubled over and Noctis is wiping tears from his eyes by the time they’ve calmed enough to speak.

“I’m sorry I-” Prompto wheezes. “That… that makes sense, yeah.”

Noctis didn’t need to know he was simultaneously fighting clambering nausea at being reminded of the Prince being able to afford what he pleases, of being spoiled, of Prompto taking advantage, of -

“You… you…” Noctis struggles, breathing heavily. “You dummy.”

They make eye contact and burst into giggles again. When they settle - for real - Noctis shoots him a fond smile, and Prompto manages to quiet his anxieties.

“Well, you can come over and read them if you want,” Noctis offers, the mirth in his voice inexplicably tinged with… nervousness?

“I can?” Prompto gapes. “Yeah, dude! Wait - are you sure?”

Noctis grins openly at that, all teeth, and Prompto isn't sure why his heart jumps, but it does. “Course I’m sure. My apartment’s pretty close to here. We can play video games, too! Iggy’ll make us snacks!”

Prompto’s smile suddenly freezes on his face, brain rapidly calculating. Snacks. Let’s see. Lunch was a quarter of that miso soup. 62 calories. Then Noct gave me those Gysahl chips… exactly six of them was 34 calories. That leaves me with 504 for the day. I could work with that. I have to work with that.

Noctis frowns slightly and ducks his head, and Prompto belatedly realizes he might have been thinking too long. “I mean, it’s okay if you don’t want to…”

“No! Of course I want to! I was just trying to remember who Iggy is,” he reassures hurriedly.

Noct’s face brightens again. “Well, Ignis, technically. He’s my advisor. He comes over to cook and clean and give me work… a little uppity, but he’s alright.”

Their teacher interrupts then, announcing that class is about to start. “Sounds fancy. I’m in,” Prompto says, and Noctis looks visibly relieved. “By the way, you pronounce each ha individually when you laugh like that. Didn’t realize our prince was so adorable.” He waggles his eyebrows mockingly.

Ignoring Noct’s indignant noises, Prompto whips around in his seat and scrambles to copy the first set of notes projected at the front of the room.

Despite everything, today is going to be a good day.
Mum's the Word

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Prompto is secretly starving himself while maintaining a close friendship with Noctis, which is a fine line to walk, especially when Noctis has just invited him over.

Chapter Notes

looks like every title in this just going to come from Shakespeare now, hah
once again, a resounding round of applause for my amazing beta TheRegalHarvester!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

NOCTIS [2:39 PM]: heads up Iggy, my friend Prompto is coming over today
IGNIS [2:44 PM]: What would he like to eat?
NOCTIS [2:49 PM]: he said “something with chickatrice”
IGNIS [2:51 PM]: Very well.

“The sun is high in the sky, mid-afternoon light dappling through trees and creating patterns on their dark uniforms. These roads are quiet, free from the gentle hum of cars that usually permeate the city. Birdsong and echoing footsteps fill the air as the boys make their way through sleepy, overgrown backstreets toward Noct’s apartment.

And Noctis is snorting inwardly, because who wouldn’t like Prompto? The kid is a natural people-pleaser.

Outwardly, he teases, “Dunno. That hair isn’t doing you any favors.”

Prompto’s hands flit to his messy, haphazard, adorable hairstyle, smoothing what was surely the product of careful grooming. “Oh, you’re right. Shoot, I need to-”

“I’m kidding! I’m kidding!” Noctis interjects, grabbing his hands before he could ruin it further. “Your hair is fine. Besides, just wait till you see Iggy. He really isn’t one to talk.”

Prompto lets out a small huff of a laugh, withdraws from the subtle touch. “Don’t scare me like that, dude.”

“He’ll like you. Don’t worry,” Noctis shoots him a half-apologetic, half-wicked look, and they resume walking. “Anyway - what game do you wanna play?”
“Hmm, I dunno. What’re you playing right now?”

“Assassin’s Creed. Brotherhood.”

“No way!” Prompto shouts, nearly skipping. “I love that one! Ezio is so cool!”

Noct’s face breaks out into a gigantic smile, because of course Prompto loves his favorite game of all time. “Hell yeah he is. He’s the assassin of legend!”

And then, as if on cue, they both recite: “Nothing is true. Everything is permitted,” in perfect unison.

A split second passes before they burst into a cacophony of laughter. Prompto is half-squatting, hands on his knees as he cackles. And, for the second time that day, Noct’s cheeks hurt from smiling too much. That is a foreign feeling.

“J… Jinx,” Prompto heaves, in between breaths. “You owe me a hug.”

Noctis stutters to a halt, and would have done a spit-take if he was drinking anything. “Um. Not… a soda?”

Prompto looks absolutely mortified, if his reddening cheeks and subconscious rub of his nape are any indication. “Ah… hah, sorry. My mom and I used to say it like that. Slipped out.”

“No - that’s cute,” Noctis responds, before he can stop himself.

Prompto merely coughs and makes to continue their journey. And - Noctis would have followed, truly, but his body betrays him instead.

Because before he can process his actions, he’s grabbing at Prompto and wrapping his arms around the unsuspecting boy for a brief, butterfly-inducing moment.

And - Prompto is there, and he’s comfy, and safe, and smells like warm vanilla sugar, which Noctis immediately decides is his new favorite scent, and-

“I get it,” Prompto is saying, breaking the embrace too soon. His laughter cuts sharply into the soft mush Noct’s mind had diminished into. “I’m totally lame. Don’t rub it in!”

Noctis blinks twice as his brain catches up to reality, and decides to roll with the free excuse. “Ha, okay, momma’s boy. You did ask for it,” he smirks, hoping he looks even slightly composed.

Why do I want to do that again? For much longer?

Shit.

To say Noctis doesn’t understand his feelings lately would be an understatement: he has no idea what’s going on in his head. But, ever since he’s met Prompto, he’s felt… different. Airier, like at any moment he would float off. Like his heart is as free as a bird.

Which confuses him to no end.

Granted, he has no basis of comparison for friends like Prompto – friends that don’t also have some royal indenture to him. Friends that are normal. Thus, he has no idea if anything he’s feeling is appropriate.

But Prompto is just so… happy. He’s happiness incarnate. And after years of only knowing the weighted seriousness of the Citadel, Noctis finds himself drawn to that radiance. And he isn’t exactly
hard on the eyes, either. *Soft freckles, glowing complexion, toned body, sharp angles, modelesque features.* Ah.

He’s *dazzling.*

Damnit – lots of people think their friends are cute and have a burning desire to hold them, right? It’s just a platonic thing.

Right?

He doesn’t know. Part of him thinks he’s just friendship-starved. Another part thinks -

No. No. That part is wrong and doesn’t deserve addressing. Good, honorable princes aren’t allowed to entertain thoughts like that.

Noctis exhales, dimly aware Prompto is asking who gets to play first. “Me. Duh,” he answers flippantly, with all the entitlement of royalty.

“No fair! I’m your guest!”

“And I’m your prince!”

“Not anymore you aren’t!”

Noctis scoffs, mock-offended. “I could have you thrown in the dungeons for that.”

But instead of looking intimidated, Prompto just looks pleasantly surprised, the little shit. “I *knew* you had dungeons!”

And Noctis is suddenly laughing again, lighthearted and incredibly grateful the mood has settled back into normalcy after that hug. “Maybe I shouldn’t let you play at all, now. How do I know you’re a worthy enough assassin, anyway?”

“I am one! I’ll show you!” Prompto’s eyes widen, and he’s looking at him so *earnestly,* and any sense of emotional control Noctis might have been feeling immediately disappears - like smoke into air.

“Fine,” he concedes, if only to get Prompto to stop looking at him like *that.*

Prompto whoops, and the pair carry on with their trek, engaging in an exhaustive discussion on Assassin’s Creed lore and pointing out cloud-shapes in the limitless sky.

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Ignis liked Prompto. **Of course** Ignis liked Prompto.

Noctis saw it all: the unbounded eagerness of Prompto’s handshake, his enthusiastic greeting, his genuine smile, his immediate compliments on the how delicious the food smells and how intelligent and proper Ignis looks. He was hitting all the social checkmarks of making people like you – and the best part was that Prompto probably wasn’t even *aware* of it.
He was just… pure goodness. Like the sun poking out through the clouds after days and days of rain, unnaturally bright and all-encompassing in its warmth.

How could Ignis resist that gravitational pull? How could anyone?

Noctis considers this as they adjust themselves on the couch, settling in as the geometric silver grids of the game’s loading screen dance before them. Prompto is sitting with his knees up against his chest, and Noctis is leaning against the couch’s arm, legs tucked underneath and to the side.

He might not understand his feelings, might even be deathly afraid of them. But he does know he likes being around Prompto’s energy. And maybe, for now, that admission could be enough. It was better than over-thinking and panicking himself.

He glances over at the boy, eyes intent on the screen and hands trembling around Noct’s custom iridescent controller. Remarkably, with all the nervousness he feels, Prompto’s still grinning ear to ear.

*My own personal sun.* The thought brings a soft smile to Noct’s lips.

“Hey, walk slower if you’re going to assassinate Il Carnefice,” is all he says, though.

Prompto nods, lets go of the X button. He bites his lip as he prepares to strike, studying the pixels of the screen intently.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Noctis interrupts. “Do it from above, it’ll look cooler.”

Prompto rolls his eyes, but grabs a ledge and hauls onto the rooftop anyway. He angles the character, presses square, and a moment later Ezio is standing above a corpse, pressing his hand to its face and muttering a somber ‘requiescat in pace’.

Noctis lets out a low whistle. “So suave. Wish I could do that.”

“You can, Mr. Warp-Strike.”

“Not legally. Anyway, get out of there, they saw you.”

He watches Prompto dart away from Templars with an amused smile, and is surprised when he manages regain anonymity by diving into a pile of hay.

“Even kept your health above one square. Not bad, not bad,” he praises. “And we’re totally being assassins for Halloween now. Forget ghost-cryptids.”

Prompto beams. “Hell yeah!”

Noctis plucks the controller out of Prompto’s hands and takes charge. “My turn.”

He immediately backstabs an unsuspecting Templar, inciting a surprised squeak out of Prompto.

“Noct! Why?”

“I dunno. For fun?” *To impress you.*

He then climbs to the tip of a cathedral with deft, calculated movements. An eagle takes off from the perch he crouches on, the camera pans out onto the sprawling city of Roma, and Ezio synchronizes his surroundings.
Noctis sighs, full of unbridled awe.

“How many times have you warped to the top of the Citadel and done that?” Prompto ribs.

“None…”

“Noct.”

“Fine! Seven!”

“I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that,” Ignis comments just then, walking in from the kitchen with two small plates in hand. “Chickatrice parmesan.”

The smell wafting from the porcelain surfaces could only be described as mouth-watering: the trademark scent of chickatrice mixed with a slew of earthy spices and creamy toppings. It seems to activate something within Noctis, because his stomach growls straight after inhaling the heady aroma.

“Thank gods, I’m so hungry,” he groans, grabbing for his lunch.

Something unreadable passes over Prompto’s expression, too brief for Noctis to decipher, but his smile quickly returns as he takes his plate. “It looks delicious, Iggy, thanks!”

Ignis allows himself a self-pleased expression and settles into the chair adjacent to their couch, crossing his legs. “You’re very welcome. Tell me how you like it.”

And even Noctis postpones his frantic attack on the breaded, saucy, cheesy, delectable meal, because he’s curious to see Prompto’s reaction, too. Even though Ignis’s food – any noble food, really – tastes normal to him at this point, he’s still aware that it’s a long shot from what most people eat. Not that he doesn’t love greasy fast food and processed candy for what they are - he just recognizes that meals from Ignis are a cut above the rest.

All the perspective in the world couldn’t have prepared him for Prompto’s reaction, however.

He eyes Prompto as he cuts a small piece off the chickatrice breast with all the delicacy of a person handling a chocobo egg. He spears the morsel and brings it past his lips slowly, closing his mouth on it in a way that makes Noct’s heart beat a little faster than usual.

And his eyes immediately shoot wide open, naked shock painting his delicate features.

He chews slowly, clearly savoring the myriad flavors that are dancing across his tongue. And then – and then – he fucking moans, and Noct’s heart sets off at a frantic pace and his face suddenly feels very, very warm.

Ignis chuckles. Ignis. “Good, I take it?”

Prompto hurries to swallow his bite, eager to reply, but then tears well up in his eyes before he can open his mouth, and Noctis is left gaping.

*I* Prompto starts, choking on his words as his breath hitches. “I’m sorry. I just… I haven’t. Had food like this in, um. Ever.”

Ignis knits his eyebrows, looking both complacent and concerned. “Come now, it’s nothing special. Surely nothing can top the cooking you grew up with?”
Prompto wipes at his eyes with curled fingers, visibly trying to calm down. “No, my parents never cooked.” Noct’s soul feels heavy. “This is the most flavorful chickatrice I’ve ever had. Really. I didn’t even know this was possible. You’re a genius, Iggy.”

If Prompto hadn’t won him over before, he certainly had now.

Because Ignis – Ignis – is actually smiling as he moves to sit next to Prompto and dry his eyes with a handkerchief. “Well, I appreciate the compliment. And now I can say my artistry has moved someone to tears, which is quite the bragging right.”

Prompto laughs at that, watery, before shoving another bite into his mouth and closing his eyes as he enjoys it. Ignis shoots Noctis a See-You-Should-Definitely-Applciate-Me-More look from his side of the couch, to which he rolls his eyes in response.

But then Prompto moans again, and Noctis decides he does, in fact, appreciate Ignis’s cooking after all.

Ignis left soon after washing the dishes and catching Noctis up on his weekly responsibilities. Surprisingly, Prompto hadn’t managed to entirely finish his meal, though Noctis chalked that up to the sheer richness of Ignis’s cooking. It took time to get used to, even if it was good enough to provoke tears. He had eaten a big lunch at school, too.

The pair spent the next few hours lounging about. Noctis continued playing Assassin’s Creed, and Prompto watched for a while before requesting Chocobo Knight. He settled in to read peacefully, with his back against the sofa’s arm and his knees drawn up halfway in front of him, comic propped up against his thighs.

A distant part of Noct’s traitorous brain wished Prompto would’ve stretched his legs out over his own. But he didn’t, and a comfortable silence fell between them as they immersed themselves in their respective activities, interacting only occasionally (“Prompto, watch me kill this guy.”; “Oh my gods this issue has a BLACK chocobo? Wait – it kinda looks like you, Noct.”).

It’s overwhelming, how right it feels to have Prompto at Noct’s side, simply existing. Selfishly, he’s overcome with a desire to have Prompto over every day, to be with him in all his waking moments. But he squashes the idea because Ignis taught him manners, and he knows it’s impolite to tear Prompto from his family.

Maybe every other day.

Time passes, and soon the sun has lowered enough to filter directly through his windows, casting long umber shadows and glittering vibrantly off Prompto’s golden hair.

Noctis completes a sequence, waits for the checkpoint notification to pop up, and turns off his Playstation. He leans back into the couch and stretches, then punches lightly at Prompto’s shin. “Hey.”

“Hi.”
If you could own a chocobo, what color would she be and what would you name her?”

Prompto lowers his comic onto his lap and ponders for a moment. “Hmm. Yellow. Totino.”

Noctis sputters, “Why, and why?” as he chokes on a laugh.

“Well, because we have to match colors. And I just love Totino’s Pizza Rolls, dude.”

Noctis grins at him, in an oh-my-god-you’re-such-an-endearing-idiot kind of way. “Okay, but I’m not forgetting you said that. No backing out.”

“Sure,” Prompto laughs. “Not like I’ll ever see one, anyway.”

Noctis is floored.

“Wait,” he says, slow and deliberate. “You’ve never actually seen a chocobo?”

He’d figured Prompto’s love must’ve come from nostalgic childhood memories, or some other positive encounter. Hell, Noctis half-imagined that he’d spent this last summer entirely at Wiz’s, the kid’s love was so palpable.

“No… I haven’t really been outside Insomnia.” And bless him, because Prompto looks uneasy and ashamed, like he’s done something wrong somehow.

“Okay, okay,” Noctis interrupts, chuckling with disbelief. “Wow, haven’t seen a chocobo. You’ve at least been to the ocean, right?”

Prompto worries his lip and casts his gaze downward.

“Prom…” he sighs, and realizes he accidentally just nicknamed Prompto only after seeing the boy’s eyebrows lift.

“Noct - it’s fine. I mean I don’t know what I’m missing right? So how can I really miss it?”

Noctis merely hums in response, mind formulating plans.

“Noct? What are you thinki-”

“Nothing,” he says, too fast. “Just. That sucks. And I hope you get to see it all one day.”

Prompto shoots him the softest look he’s ever been shot. “Thanks, buddy. Me too.”

Naturally, Noctis coughs, eager to escape this tender and emotional and extremely vulnerable moment. “Uh, anyway. D’you wanna stay for dinner? We can watch that movie I’ve wanted show you.”

Once again, that unreadable expression flickers across Prompto’s face, just for a fraction of a second. “Ah… I would, but my parents are expecting me. Can’t stay late.” He checks his phone, which elicits an alarmed expression. “Shit, actually - I should’ve left forty-five minutes ago. Woops!”

Noctis supposes that’s fair - their hangout was pretty spontaneous, anyway. Still, it doesn’t stop the
immediate wave of dejection that crashes over him.

But - “Next time,” Prompto vows, and he is placated.

“Okay,” he says, rising with Prompto and walking him to the door, which he takes his time opening. “Next time.”

Prompto hesitates in the doorway, bounces on his feet a little. “This was fun,” he says, quickly and shyly.

“Yeah, it was.”

“Tell Iggy thanks, again.”

“I will,” Noctis promises. His hand darts to grip at Prompto’s school blazer before he can turn to leave. “Wait - text me when you get home safe?”

Prompto’s answering smile is as brilliant as the galaxies over Leide’s desert plains. “Okay! I will!”

“Later, Prom.”

“Cya, Noct!”

The door clicks closed softly and Noctis sighs, because he misses him already. He trudges back to the couch, sitting in Prompto’s spot and relishing in the residual warmth there.

Next time.

He gropes for his phone and immediately drafts a message, because he refuses to focus on why his chest suddenly feels constricted.

NOCTIS [6:27 PM]: so. what'd you think?

IGNIS [6:27 PM]: Noctis, I am trying to focus on these Altissian reports. I suggest you do the same.

NOCTIS [6:28 PM]: Ignis

NOCTIS [6:31 PM]: Ignis Ignis Ignis

NOCTIS [6:33 PM]: Iggggyyyyyyyyyyy omg

NOCTIS [6:34 PM]: Ignis Stupido Scientia. I command thee to respond post-haste, by order of the Crown Prince Noctis Lucis Caelum CXIV.

IGNIS [6:35 PM]: You’re insufferable.

NOCTIS [6:36 PM]: yep :)

IGNIS [6:37 PM]: Fine - Prompto appears to be a kind young man and moral person. I approve of him, for now. Satisfied?

NOCTIS [6:37 PM]: “appears”? “for now”???

IGNIS [6:38 PM]: Noct...

NOCTIS [6:38 PM]: what?
IGNIS [6:40 PM]: I can see you’re excited about your new friend, but… Even the most innocent-looking people could have ill intentions toward you. You mustn’t forget the wealth and power that comes with being Prince, and how enticing that could be to a common citizen.

NOCTIS [6:40 PM]: I can’t believe you!!

IGNIS [6:41 PM]: Noctis. I’m not accusing him of anything, nor do I have any particular reason to believe him of any malicious intent. In fact, I quite like him. I’m simply encouraging you to keep the possibilities in mind, and remain watchful.

NOCTIS [6:42 PM]: ok... I guess...

IGNIS [6:43 PM]: Now, if you’ll excuse me.

Noctis throws his phone down and drapes an arm across his eyes. He hates that Ignis has a point, because he doesn’t want to even consider the thought that Prompto could be using him. It doesn’t seem possible, coming from someone with such raw genuinity.

His phone beeps again.

PROMPTO [6:45 PM]: made it!!! :-) didn’t die rofl

PROMPTO [6:45 PM]: on a scale of 1-10 how much were you expecting me to tho >:(

Noctis smiles. No, Prompto couldn’t be anything except what he was -

*My sun.*

Chapter End Notes

me: make Noct's POV pure fluff
my brain: No. You must.... Give Him Some Internalized Homophobia :) 

what does a chocobo powered ferry ship look like, you ask? [like this, of course](http://example.com)

also: it's the best fucking thing *ever* to me that these guys have a canon favorite game, and it's goddamn Assassin's Creed. like, of course. I love it so much and I'll never get over it.

let me know what ya thought about this chapter! and be my friend on Tumblr?
Break the Ice

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Noctis invited Prompto over to his apartment for the first time, where he met Ignis. And proceeded to cry over his cooking. It was all very endearing.

Chapter Notes

this chapter practically wrote itself! thanks again to my beautiful beta, TheRegalHarvester!

also, an I Fucked Up Announcement: longtime friends will remember that I had originally wrote prompto as 5'10" and "normal" when he meets noct. imagine my surprise (and impish delight) when I found out he's actually 5'8". this doesn't change much of the story, except for the fact that he hasn't quite hit "normal" yet - he's right above it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Prompto isn’t having a good day.

Currently, he’s walking home - alone - because Noctis had been whisked into Ignis’s car for some Official Royal Business right when school ended, leaving Prompto to fend for himself. And suddenly, the twenty-minute trip seemed like it would take hours. It isn’t like he particularly minds the loneliness, really… it’s just been a while since he’s last been subject to it.

He sighs. It’s only appropriate that this trek feels gloomy - it matches the mood of the rest of his day quite accurately.

School had been terrible, in the few snatches of time where he wasn’t around Noctis. In his fifth period, those guys intimidated him again, regardless of him deliberately showing up right before class began.

With a shudder, he remembers pushing past the group - not fast enough. He remembers feeling a hand snake out to grab the back of his shirt, choking him briefly with the strength at which he was pulled. Unbelievably, no one sitting around the trio seemed to notice, too wrapped up in their own idle conversations to pay any mind to their surroundings.

He remembers being pulled down to eye level with the red-haired one. He remembers bad breath, and another somber warning: “You really do need to stop riding His Highness’ coattails, kid. It’s starting to piss some of us off.”

And he remembers shaking in his seat for the rest of the period.

To make matters worse: after bolting up as soon as the bell rang, he ended up knocking into someone
in the hallway in his haste. He had mumbled an apology, looked up, and discovered that he’d crossed paths with none other than Derrick.

Fucking. Derrick. Of all people.

Who had been looking at him with a mixture of concern, surprise, and hopefulness.

But Prompto has just stumbled away as if he’d been burned with a brand, quickly turning and diving back into the throngs of people going towards their respective destinations. The eye contact they’d made had seared into his brain, though, twisting his stomach into knots and reminding him, for the second time that day, that he is a vulnerable target.

Prompto sighs and pulls a hand through his hair as he accelerates his pace, thighs screaming with the effort. Running for an hour every morning had plunged him into a perpetual state of soreness, and it was all he could do to not groan out loud every time he stepped, sat down, got up - put any pressure on his legs at all, really. He just wants to get home and into bed as fast as possible.

Out of nowhere, an unfamiliar series of chimes interrupts his reverie. Perplexed, Prompto glances at his phone screen, failing to recognize both his own ringtone and the number calling him. Nevertheless, swipes a finger across the screen and answers.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Prompto,” a static, accented voice greets.

“Oh, hi, Iggy!”

“I’ve just dropped Noctis off at his afternoon meeting.”

“That’s… good?”

“And I’ve some important matters we need to discuss. Is now a good time for you?”


“Excellent. I will pick you up, then. Where are you located?”

He squints at the nearest signpost, bile rising up in his throat. “Carnation and Village Drive.”

“Be there soon,” Ignis promises, and then promptly hangs up.

This was just the icing on the shit cake, wasn’t it? On top of everything that had already happened that day, Prompto now feels like he can’t breathe because Ignis had sounded so cryptically ominous, like he knows something.

He scratches at his wrist, skin cold with fear.

He doesn’t know why he should be afraid of the neatly marked tattoo there, but he’s always been taught to fear it. Prompto knows he comes from somewhere that isn’t Lucis, and that his tattoo - his brand - would notify anyone of that fact. And though he doesn’t know specifics, he does know it wouldn’t end well. His parents may not have taught him much, but that point they’d always made abundantly clear.

He hopes Ignis doesn’t somehow know about it. He really hopes he isn’t suddenly in some deep, bureaucratic trouble because of it.
Wait - was that his heartbeat he could suddenly hear pounding in his ears?

_Damnit! Get a grip! He sounded casual - so he probably doesn’t know! Stop overreacting!_

But even if he doesn’t, Prompto’s still stressing about having to be one-on-one with the Very Important and Esteemed Advisor to the Crown Prince, especially after that mortifying display last week: the one where he’d cried over his food.

He couldn’t have helped it, though. The dish had been expertly crafted in a way Prompto had never encountered before. He’d had _no idea_ food could taste so good, could elicit such a poignant rush of dopamine. He’s exclusively used to bland, store-made, processed foods (when he allows himself any at all).

And while he’d been marveling how delicious it was, the sobering knowledge that he _wasn’t allowed to finish it_ had brought the tears unbidden.

After all, he’d only had 500 calories left for the day. A large piece of chickatrice is typically 270, combined with the rich sauce and generous amount of cheese and the breaded skin and the sheer amount of _oil_ Ignis must have used? He wasn’t in the business of taking chances. He’d eaten half, and it was the hardest thing he’d ever done.

At least Ignis had seemed satisfied with his emotional display, despite only being partially correct about its origin.

Prompto mulls over this as he loiters on the sidewalk, shifting from foot to foot and trying to will his blush away at the memory. He barely feels the heat starting to disappear from his face when Ignis silently rolls up in the sleekest Mercedes-Benz he’s ever laid eyes on. The windows are tinted to a nearly black shade, so Prompto only sees his own sordid reflection when he tries to peer in.

_Now or never._ His hand grips for the stainless steel handle, and he soon finds himself sitting in the nicest car he’s ever been in the vicinity of. Vaguely, he worries he’ll stain the cherry-colored leather with his low class status, somehow.

“Hi, Ignis,” he says, attempting to sound confident, but it comes out as more of a squeak.

“Prompto,” Ignis greets, poised as ever as he guides the car back into the road. “Happy you could make it.”


“A discussion that is merely a formality. I’ll elaborate once we reach the destination,” Ignis responds, combing through the radio and landing on an inoffensive, background-type of song.

“Oh… okay,” Prompto sighs, accepting that the butterflies in his stomach would continue to root for the indefinite future. “Um… I like your car.”

“Thank you. If you need to adjust your seat, there are a series of buttons you can manipulate on the door.”

Prompto glances to his right, spying a set of three buttons in the shape of a car seat. Experimentally, he presses his finger against the bottom-most one, and the seat inches forward, purring electronically.

“Woah!” he gasps, surprise painting his features. “That’s so cool!”

He catches Ignis smiling in his peripheral, and his nerves are quelled slightly. Whatever is about to
happen, he’s sure it can’t be *that* menacing - not if he’s allowed to mess around with Ignis’s luxury vehicle.

So Prompto continues to fiddle with the buttons, pleased with the distraction, until his seat ends up in a twisted contortion of being both high off the car’s ground and laid almost entirely flat.

“Yep, I’ve found the perfect setting,” he announces, staring directly at the open sunroof and out into the cloudy sky above.

“The perfect setting for receiving a ticket,” Ignis chides, but amusement trickles into his voice anyway.

A moment later Prompto is sitting upright up again, in a much more normal - albeit relaxed - position. “How fast can this baby go, anyway?”

“230 miles per hour,” Ignis states, matter-of-fact and completely oblivious to Prompto’s gaping. “But it will never go past 65, not while I’m driving.”

*Party pooper,* Prompto thinks, but grins anyway. “Wow. This car is an actual beast, you know.”

Ignis chuckles. “Only the best for the Crownguard, or so they say.”

“Makes sense,” Prompto agrees. “What else can it do?”

“A great deal,” Ignis answers. “But I’m afraid I’ll have to tell you all about it at some other point. We’re here.”

Prompto glances up and focuses on their surroundings for the first time as Ignis skillfully backs into a parking spot. They’re in front of a coffee shop of some sort - a subdued one, if the sparse amount of cars is any indication. With a start, he realizes that Ignis probably chose it specifically for its unknown quality.

Suddenly, Prompto feels nervous again.

But he has no time to dwell on it, because Ignis is calmly getting out and turning to head for the shop. Prompto scrambles to catch up, belatedly spotting a manila folder in Ignis’s gloved hand.

A manila folder that’s stamped with the *royal crest,* ink faded yet commanding.

*Don’t have a panic attack. Don’t have a panic attack.* Prompto repeats to himself as he follows Ignis to a secluded booth in the far corner of the store. Despite his efforts, the world swims anyway, and he’s struggling to stay upright. *Calm down! Breathe!*

He’s hardly aware a waitress is present until Ignis has to repeat his name to get his attention. When had he even sat down?

“Prompto? What would you like?”

“Huh? Oh, sorry. Uh, a small black coffee, please.”

“Sure thing,” the waitress responds, chipper. “I’ll be right back with your drinks.”

Ignis settles back, levels a look at Prompto. “Interesting choice. I haven’t encountered many fans of ‘unedited’ coffee, so to speak.”

*Well, it’s 0 calories.* “I just like the taste,” Prompto grins, though he know he looks frazzled.
Ignis studies him for a moment. “Prompto, I know I’m the Prince’s advisor,” he begins. “And this meeting probably appears to be very intimidating. But there is nothing to be nervous about, I can assure you.”

Prompto takes a deep breath, the first one he’s managed since the phone call. “I know. I’m sorry. I’m just new to this royal... stuff,” he explains lamely, waving his hands as if that somehow elaborates his point.

“I understand,” Ignis assures. “However, if you are to be friends with Noctis, certain procedures need to take place. His well-being is exceedingly important.”

“Of course,” Prompto agrees, because he’s right. They can’t just let any old plebe buddy up with the Prince unsupervised.

Nevertheless one that isn’t even from their country.

Fuck.

The waitress comes back with their orders: an iced Ebony for Ignis, and a hot black coffee for Prompto. He immediately wraps his hands around the heated cardboard, hoping the warmth would help settle his apprehension. It doesn’t work.

“No use delaying the inevitable. Let's get to it,” Ignis begins, thumbing open the folder. “The Citadel has run a background check on you.”

Prompto’s heart plummets.

He wonders how much information is in there. He wonders if this means that Ignis knows more about his tattoo than he does, now. He wonders if deportation is imminent. Damnit, he had to go make friends with the Crown Prince, didn’t he? Where’s his sense of self-preservation?

His mother would be disappointed in him. For some reason, that thought is enough to send him spiraling.

The roaring in his ears grows so overpowering he almost misses Ignis saying, “We didn’t find anything especially noteworthy, which is a good sign.”

Wait - what?

“Your file is quite insubstantial, in fact. Kudos to you, for being such an upstanding citizen,” Ignis praises. “Nevertheless, we must go through it. I hope you’re prepared to answer any questions?”

Prompto gulps, but nods eagerly. He’s much less worried now that he knows there’s nothing ‘noteworthy’ in it, though he irrationally fears Immigration barging through the doors and slamming him into a cell at any second.

“Let’s start at the beginning. You were adopted from a Lucian orphanage at six months old, correct?”

“Um, yeah,” Prompto says. “I don’t really remember that, though.”

“Naturally,” Ignis agrees, and Prompto feels dumb. “Your adoptive parents are quite esteemed,” he continues. “One is an ambassador for Accordo and the other is a businesswoman in Altissia.”

“Yeah, that’s right.”
“So it would make sense that they’d have enough money to support you - even remotely, perhaps? Considering their locations?”

Prompto’s stomach twists. *Why does this feel like an interrogation?*

“U-Uh, yes. But they’re home a lot!” He lies, desperately trying to assure Ignis that his life is normal. “They do a lot of work in Insomnia, so they go back and forth pretty often.”

Ignis purses his lips, like he doesn’t quite believe him, but doesn’t press the matter. “And you don’t know your biological parents?”

“No. I don’t. There’s… no record of them.” The reminder picks painfully at Prompto’s past, unearths a time in his life when he’d been obsessed with finding them - only to be devastatingly unsuccessful.

Ignis nods somberly. “Not even the Crown can answer that question for you, unfortunately,” he confirms, and Prompto is grateful for it. At least his secret is safe, for now. For all intents and purposes, he's a Lucian.

“Your grades are impeccable, as is your conduct record,” Ignis resumes abruptly, eyes scanning the documents in front of him. “Noctis might want to learn a thing or two from you,” he adds, throwing Prompto a conspiratorial wink.

The clammy feeling at the back of his neck dies down, considering Ignis had worked through the most suspicious parts of his history without incident. *Maybe this’ll really be okay.* He sips at his coffee, tries not to cringe at the bitter flavor he’s never totally gotten used to.

But then: “As far as your medical records go, you appear to have no physical limitations in the form of disease or allergy. But I’m required to ask - are there any mental issues that we need to be aware of? Do not be afraid to say yes. We know these things tend to go under-reported, and the Citadel only seeks to take care of Noctis’s friends.”

Prompto instantly breaks into a cold sweat again, a small part of his mind realizing that his emotions have flip-flopped way too many times in the past half-hour to be healthy. But he doesn’t believe that ‘take care of’ bullshit for one moment - he knows it’s a trick, designed to keep toxic individuals from troubling the Prince. It has to be.

“Nope, none at all,” he vows, and for once his voice is eerily calm.

It might be pure selfishness, but he wants to stick around Noctis. His mental illnesses can’t be that burdening if Noc’t never finds out about them, right? The resolution grants him tranquility, gives him direction in this nerve-wracking conversation.

“Feel free to come to me if that situation changes,” Ignis says. “Your well-being is assured when you are around royalty. Take advantage of it.”


“Now, I apologize, but I need to ask this. Prompto, do you seek to use Noctis for his wealth, position, or power?” Ignis suddenly looks very, very serious. “If so, I encourage you to back out now, as the repercussions escalate the more he gets hurt by your actions.”

*What?*

“What?”
Ignis merely looks at him.

“Um. No. No, I’m not using him. Does he think I’m using him…?” Prompto struggles to bring memories to the surface, scrabbling to recall points in which he might’ve accidentally misled his friend. His heart rate quickens, along with his breathing. “I’m not! I - don’t tell me he hates me and doesn’t trust me now, oh my gods, did I really give him that impression? I - I didn’t mean to, r-really, I just want to be his friend, I think he’s cool for who he is and, shit, I-”

“Prompto,” Ignis intercedes. “He has no suspicions. Again, this is only a formality.”

“Oh,” Prompto says, but his skin is flushed and dewy, and he knows he looks faint. “Oh. Well, that’s good. Because I don’t have intentions like that. I swear!”

“I believe you, for the time being,” Ignis reassures. “Though it will take time to completely earn my trust. I need to get a complete sense of who you are.”


Ignis frowns. “Prompto, are you alright?”

“Um. I, uh, yeah, sorry,” he responds, shaking his head to try and will the panic away. “Sorry, I. Just got freaked out, I thought he hated me for a sec, and, um. Y-Yeah, sorry.”

“Don’t apologize,” Ignis orders, standing up to go sit next to him. “Here, breathe with me.”

_Damnit. Right after he asks about mental problems, too._

The panic he’d been trying to suppress instantly hits full force. He’s shaking openly now, nearly violent with the distress he’s feeling. His chest feels awfully heavy, like there’s a thousand pound weight crushing him to the ground.

Distantly, he hears Ignis voice in the periphery of his mind: _Breathe in. One, two, three, four. Hold. You’re doing well, Prompto. Now breathe out. One, two…_

After an excruciating few minutes, Prompto’s shoulders finally stop trembling and he’s steady enough to speak. “S-Sorry. This doesn’t usually happen, at all, I promise. It’s just, all of this… stuff … it’s so-”

“The Crown carries a heavy weight,” Ignis supplies. “It affects anyone who chooses to associate with it. Were I not born into this lifestyle, I would’ve had the same reaction. It’s quite natural to be overwhelmed.”

Prompto nods, weak.

“You can imagine how that weight burdens Noct,” Ignis continues. “Which is why I’m glad he has you. He needs a presence like yours.”

_Yes. Yes, Prompto thinks, relieved to have a goal to focus on, his anxious haze dissipating. I have to help Noct. I have to be happy and available and skinny for him. I have to prove my worth. I will prove my worth._

“Thanks, Iggy,” Prompto says, shifting uncomfortably as the panic finally subsides. “I guess I just need time to get used to this. Just like you need time to get used to me, eh?”

Ignis actually laughs at that, though it’s short and mostly breath. “I suppose so.”
He pats Prompto on the shoulder before moving back to the other side of the booth, and Prompto just barely manages to suppress his flinch.

Seems his aversion to touch is getting worse, too. Great.

He sips at his coffee.

“Why don’t we move onto something lighter?” Ignis suggests, packing away the evil manila folder. “What did you do at school today?”

Soon Prompto is launching into an abridged version of his day, brightly exaggerating all the fun moments he had in class with Noctis beside him. And if he spends too long elaborating on the dog they saw at lunchtime, Ignis doesn’t comment on it.

Eventually, Ignis is sharing his own daily activities, explaining the various roles he fulfills as advisor and what he accomplishes while Noct is ‘attempting an education’. Prompto’s both amazed and sympathetic for his busy schedule, and he wonders how Ignis ever manages to keep himself so composed in spite of the stress.

The idle conversation helps calm down Prompto considerably, for which he’s grateful. Learning more about the green-eyed advisor is just an added bonus. He wonders if the two might even become friends in the future.

Forty-five minutes into their conversation, Ignis has to excuse himself, as he has a meeting to attend at the Citadel.

“This was pleasant,” he says. “I only have good impressions of you so far, so don’t be worried. Just keep it up, and try not to plot against Noct,” he jokes dryly - a quality that Prompto is discovering to be his trademark.

Prompto stands with him, and throws his empty cup into the trash. “Thanks, Iggy! I’ll try,” he quips back, thankful for the lightened mood.

Ignis nods, smiling slightly. The pair make it outside, and hesitate in front of the shop. “Well, Prompto. Shall I drop you off at your apartment?”

He considers. “Nah, it’s okay, my place isn’t far from here. And after that coffee I’ve got an urge to move, yanno?”

“Very well. Be careful.”

“I will!”

“Bye!”

Ignis waves and ducks into his vehicle, and Prompto turns to begin walking, a relieved skip in his step.

Because, all things considered, their meeting went a lot better than Prompto had initially expected. Sure, he did have a panic attack, but at this point he’s accepted that Ignis just magically brings out his most embarrassing moments somehow. At least he’s understanding and non-judgemental about it.

He’s about two blocks into his walk when his phone pings in his pocket.
NOCTIS [4:53 PM]: please don’t tell me Ignis talked to you

PROMPTO [4:53 PM]: i would, but that would be lying. and lying is wrong, noct.

NOCTIS [4:54 PM]: uggggggggggggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

NOCTIS [4:54 PM]: I told him not to! I’m sorry :/

PROMPTO [4:55 PM]: hey it’s fine!! wasn’t all that bad :p

NOCTIS [4:55 PM]: did he scare you?

Prompto bites his lip at that, nearly hitting a signpost in his inattention. He doesn’t want to incriminate Ignis, but he can’t exactly lie, either, and -

NOCTIS [4:57 PM]: it’s fine, you don’t have to answer that. just. nothing is as serious as he’s trying to make it seem, okay?

PROMPTO [4:57 PM]: i dunno, noct, it sounded pretty serious to me. i mean, royalty is important right??

NOCTIS [4:58 PM]: :/

NOCTIS [4:58 PM]: yeah, but once you get used to it you realize no one takes it as seriously as Iggy. not even Iggy takes it as seriously as Iggy. like, it’s a lot more casual in real life, y’know?

PROMPTO [4:58 PM]: thank the gods, lmao

NOCTIS [4:59 PM]: hahah. so yeah. please don’t uh... treat me differently, or anything.

PROMPTO [4:59 PM]: noct, all the lectures in the world wouldn’t stop me from treating you like the goober you are

NOCTIS [5:00 PM]: good. :))

NOCTIS [5:00 PM]: hey, do you wanna hang? it’s gonna be golden hour or whatever rn right? you can take those rooftop shots!

PROMPTO [5:00 PM]: hell yeah!!

NOCTIS [5:01 PM]: meet at mine?

PROMPTO [5:01 PM]: okay! i’m already out walking so On my way!

NOCTIS [5:02 PM]: prompto, you can’t keep relying on autocorrect like this. that isn’t even close to grammatically correct.

PROMPTO [5:02 PM]: >:)

When Prompto sees Noctis, standing calm and contemplating on his rooftop, setting sun behind him,
things don't seem so bad anymore.

“Hey!”

Noctis turns around, catches sight of him, and grins. “Prompto!”

And everything that had seemed so crooked and off-balance in Prompto's world suddenly straightens back into place.

“How were your meetings?” He asks, smiling, overjoyed to simply be around his friend again.

“Boring. How was yours?”

“It was…” He scratches at his chin, trying to find the perfect word.

“I know what you mean,” Noctis interjects, waving the question off. “So. How do you want me?”

Prompto’s never felt himself blush so fast. “I… uh… What? I-”

“For the pictures.”

_Duh! Obviously for the pictures! You idiot!_

“O-Oh. Right. Uh, stand against the ledge there, with your back against it,” he instructs, fumbling his camera out of his backpack and desperately wishing his face would cool off.

“What did you thi-”

“Nothing!” Prompto hurries to interrupt. “Yep, right there is good. Thanks for helping, buddy.”

He angles himself so that Noctis appears to be standing directly in front of the sun, which casts a halo of light around his hair. He takes a couple of experimental shots, tweaking the settings after viewing them and eventually landing on the perfect mix.


Noctis does. And - he looks like a _literal angel_ with the sun framing his head like that, and Prompto’s breath gets taken away, because _holy shit he’s ethereal_. He angles his camera and takes a few shots, adjusting positions slightly between each one.

It only takes around five minutes, because Noctis is an obedient model - probably a product of thousands of photo ops he’s been put through in his past. Prompto takes around twenty RAWs, knowing that only a couple of them will come out _really_ good.

“Done!” Prompto announces, and Noctis opens his eyes again. “Wanna take a couple more for fun? You can do whatever you want.”

“I should do my ultimate pose for you,” he responds, excitement in his voice.

“Ultimate pose?” Prompto grins. “Let’s see it!”

And then Noct is splaying his hand in front of his face in the dorkiest way possible, and Prompto is laughing uncontrollably, and every negative weighing on his shoulders melts like ice in the sun.
c'mon iggy, stop freaking our sunshine out >( says me, who wrote it. hehe

this is what the car seat buttons look like, for the curious!

slightly sad news - I'm starting college again this week, so I may not have as much time as usual to write. honestly, it'll depend on how good I am at time management, so we'll see. haha.

your feedback spurs me on, so let me know what you all thought!! <3
and be my friend on Tumblr?
Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Ignis has a chat with Prompto, wherein he goes over his background check and warns him the Citadel doesn’t quite trust him yet. Prompto freaks out about a million times.

Chapter Notes

EDIT: NOW WITH IMPORTANT FANART <3 SEE THE END NOTES :')

happy first day of halloween, everyone!! happy i love my beta day to TheRegalHarvester!!

important info!! so. college has come back in full swing + i've joined organizations (me??) + i've recently acquired a job! how very exciting! ... and time-consuming!
but worry not, my loves (whom i love very much) ((i love you all with my entire heart)),
because i think i've figured out what time management is, so i can reasonably promise you that updates shall occur every Wednesday from now on.
that's right! no more uncertainty, only consistent, hump-day angst from now on!! yay!!

i'd like to stress that this fic is going to be a long ride, too. i've planned out so much Shit, for real. like. 10 pages of outline. it's ridiculous. so... i hope you're ready for seemingly endless pain and suffering. :)

trigger warning: this chapter has a very, very slight reference to non-con said in passing. just be aware of that. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s a Saturday in Insomnia.

Birds are singing, leaves are swaying, breezes are whispering, and Noctis - Noctis is extremely annoyed.

Why? Well, he’s a. slightly hungry, b. more than a little sleepy, and c. just spent an entire morning stuck within the confining walls of the Citadel, listening to hours of boring speeches delivered by boring men for boring reasons. This was supposed to be his day off, damnit.

At least it’s finally over.

Now, he’s walking home, enjoying the pleasant autumn weather (finally starting to lean away from oppressively hot, though the leaves haven’t fallen quite yet). It’s lovely, actually. Noctis drinks in the fresh air, utterly grateful to have escaped.

He emerges from underneath the shade of a large sycamore tree and the sunlight greets him, warming
his face gently. The sweet, subtle feeling reminds him of Prompto, so he fishes his phone out of his pocket.

NOCTIS [1:34 PM]: HEY ASSHOLE

PROMPTO [1:35 PM]: WHAT

NOCTIS [1:35 PM]: I HAVE YOUR TEXTBOOK.

PROMPTO [1:35 PM]: YEA YOU DO >:(

NOCTIS [1:36 PM]: FIGHT ME TO GET IT BACK

PROMPTO [1:36 PM]: YR LIKE 22 LEVELS ABOVE ME?? UNFAIR!!

NOCTIS [1:37 PM]: WAIT CAN WE STOP TALKING LIKE THIS

PROMPTO [1:37 PM]: yes :-)

NOCTIS [1:37 PM]: so, about that fight.

PROMPTO [1:38 PM]: why are you trying to hurt me :-(

NOCTIS [1:38 PM]: I’m just trying to teach you a lesson about the harsh realities of life. theft is a real issue, prom. sometimes you gotta handle things old fashioned way.

NOCTIS [1:41 PM]: prom...?

PROMPTO [1:41 PM]: i’m looking for the bitmoji where i roll my eyes

PROMPTO [1:41 PM]: Sent Img_4591.

NOCTIS [1:42 PM]: omfg

PROMPTO [1:42 PM]: :-)

NOCTIS [1:42 PM]: okaaay but really wya, cause this book is heavy on my aching back :( 

PROMPTO [1:43 PM]: does it look like i care?

NOCTIS [1:43 PM]: PROMPTO

PROMPTO [1:43 PM]: emerald park, by the lake ;-)

NOCTIS [1:44 PM]: be there in 20.

Noctis is not giddy. Princes don’t get giddy. But the thought of seeing Prompto lazing by Emerald Park’s crystal-clear lake, water reflections glinting off his skin and sunflower-blond hair... it spurs him on a little. The mental image just feels so soft, a welcome contrast to the harshness of his morning thus far.
So maybe he gets there eight minutes early because he was speed-walking. And maybe his eyes strain a little too much as they scan the waterfront. And maybe he nearly swoons when he spots Prompto laying down in the tall grass, binoculars pressed against his eyes and staring straight upward.

Wait - what?

Noctis jogs over, gets a closer look at his friend. Prompto has yet to notice his presence, eyes occupied by the contraption held firmly against them. But there, lying face-down and open on his chest, is a small book: *Birds of Insomnia, A Field Guide*.

Holy shit.

“Prompto!”

The unsuspecting boy instantly jolts and lets go of the binoculars, causing the heavy object to hit against his face in a way that makes Noctis sympathy-cringe.

“Sorry,” Noctis apologizes. “Didn’t... mean to do that.”

“I, uh,” Prompto looks bewildered, checks his phone quickly. “Thought you weren’t going to be here until 2:25?”

“Miscalculated,” Noctis shrugs, taking a seat near Prompto’s right arm. “Why? Didn’t want me to find out you’re a secret ornithologist?”

Prompto blushes a scarlet red, turns away, and shoves the incriminating belongings into his bag. “I... just like birds, I dunno. They’re beautiful and interesting and... Yeah, this is embarrassing.” He hides his face behind his hands, refusing to acknowledge the situation any longer.

“Hey,” Noctis says, gentler than he thought his voice was capable of. “It’s not embarrassing. Birds are fuckin’ awesome. I think it’s cool.”

A striking cerulean eye peeks out from behind pale fingers. “Really?”

“Hell yeah!” Noctis beams, a small part of him wanting to add: *I also think you’re ridiculously adorable, so.*

But he can’t even admit that to *himself*, let alone *Prompto*.

“Are you sure?” Prompto still sounds so shy and insecure, and it makes Noctis feel all kinds of guilt.

“Prom, my favorite hobby is *fishing*. Yes, I’m sure.”

Prompto finally smiles then, and Noctis feels floaty. “Okay. You got a point there, buddy.”

Noctis grins, “We’re just a couple of old men disguised as young people, aren’t we?”

“What’s that? Speak up, sonny.”

Noctis giggles in reply and shrugs off his charcoal backpack, placing it between the two. Prompto raises an eyebrow in expectation.

“Anyway. I wasn’t kidding when I said you had to fight for this,” Noctis shrugs nonchalantly, extracting the borrowed Lucian history textbook - enhanced with helpful post-it notes in Prompto’s neat, focused handwriting.
Prompto draws himself up onto his knees, sits back on them. “Noooc,” he whines, head tilting upward. “Ever heard of ‘peace and love’? ‘Sides, I can’t fight. Like. At all.”

“Just try,” Noctis encourages wickedly, holding the book high above his head as if he hadn’t just been complaining about its weight. “Go on, take it from me.”

Predictably, he shoots an arm straight for the book, which Noctis sees coming well ahead of time. He swipes it just out of reach, laughing and repeating the action four more times when Prompto simply follows his hands rather than employing any strategic tactics.

What he doesn’t predict, however, is Prompto launching his entire body at Noctis when the book passes over his front.

With an oomph, Noctis is suddenly pushed flat onto his back, textbook on his chest and Prompto right above it, gripping the object triumphantly.

“I got it!” He cheers, but Noctis can’t focus on that, because -

*Holy shit he’s on top of me.*

Granted, Prompto’s holding himself carefully, hesitant to actually lie on Noctis, but still - he’s closer than he’s ever been before.

He’s propping himself up on his right elbow, forearm placed directly next to Noct’s head. His left hand is wrapped around the textbook’s spine, fingers brushing against Noct’s upper ribcage. And, *Astrals above,* their - their legs are intertwined.

Ummm.

“Yeah, guess you did,” Noctis croaks, flushing when he realizes he can count the freckles on Prompto’s face.

And he has so many of them.

And there’s that vanilla-and-sugar scent again, emanating off his smooth skin.

And - his lips - have they always been that shade of rose-pink? And that glossy?

Noctis subconsciously licks his own, his eyes become half-lidded, and -

Prompto gets back up.

Ah. Moment over.

The oblivious boy simply claims his prize and stuffs it into his slim, mustard-colored backpack. A second later, he’s back to sitting on his knees, shooting a smile at Noctis. Noctis, who has weakly come up onto his elbows - too dumbfounded to get up just yet.

“Guess I can take you on after all, huh?” Prompto teases, totally unaffected by that whole... *situation.*

His blasé disposition snaps Noctis back into reality, and he finally sits up himself. “Please. That wasn’t a fight. More like... a wild goose chase. *Maybe.*”
“Hey,” Prompto pouts. “Not my fault I’ve never had to do it. I’m not a barbarian like you, Noct.”

“Dummy,” he smirks, still lightheaded. “Well... hey! You should come watch me train, then!”

“Huh?”

“Watch and learn, right? Could come in handy one day,” Noctis says, growing excited. “You can meet Gladio, too! He has a thing for nature like you, ‘cept he just grows flowers. You softies would have so much to talk about.”

“‘Ay!’ Prompto objects. “I’m not a softie!”

“Sure thing, birdwatcher.”

“Chocobos are birds! And they can fight! How soft is that, huh?”

“Pretty damn soft,” Noctis grins. “Not like being soft’s a bad thing though. It’s why I li- uh, it’s what makes you unique.”

_Did I just. Almost tell him I...? Why the fuck did that almost come out of my mouth? What? Shit, please tell me he didn’t catch that._

Seems his mind is still preoccupied with those _treasonous_ thoughts, in spite of his best efforts to quickly move on from the... _position_ the two were just in. Great.

Just... great.

Thankfully, Prompto hadn’t noticed the slip-up whatsoever, if his unchanged expression was anything to go by. “Thanks, bro,” he says instead, blissfully unaware of Noct’s inner turmoil. “So when do I get to meet this ‘Gladio’, anyway?”

“Deal,” Prompto says, lying back down and extracting his binoculars once more. “Meanwhile, c’mere. I wanna show you a purple finch.”

Thirty-two minutes later, Noctis is pushing open the wooden doors to the training center - located in the far left wing of the Citadel, and low-key enough that Prompto isn’t forced to go through a security check. Gladio’s inside, all muscle and ink and bravado as he pounds through his his warm-ups.

“Gladio!” Noctis calls, interrupting his crunches. “This is Prompto, he’s gonna watch today.”

Gladio hops up from the mat and ambles over, saying nothing. He merely crosses his arms, biceps bulging, and leers down at the small blond with all the intimidation of a burly man standing at 6’5”.

Which is quite a _lot_ of intimidation.

Thus (and to Noct’s abject horror), Prompto’s arm is _trembling_ as he extends it, stammering out a weak greeting.
“Hi there, Prompto,” Gladio grins, wolfish, and violently accepts the handshake. He’s putting on a show at this point. “I’ve heard so much about you. Haven’t I, Noct?”

“Gladio!” Noctis whines, somewhat in awe of how the man can both embarrass Noctis and scare the living daylights out of Prompto all at once. Fortunately, Prompto doesn’t seem to register the implication that Noctis can’t shut up about his new friend.

“N-Noct,” Prompto stutters instead, eyes wide and fixated on the hand crushing his own. “I... I thought you said he was a softie.”

And suddenly, Gladio’s threatening mask is crumbling at the words, and he’s launching into loud guffaws, clapping Prompto on the back and causing him to stumble a little. After a beat, Prompto cracks a smile himself, clearly realizing how gullible he’d been to the bigger man’s false machismo.

“That’s what you’ve been sayin’ about me?” Gladio grins, turning his attention to Noctis now. “Maybe I should push you extra hard today, since I’ve been going so soft on you.”

“No!” Noctis shouts quickly. “No need for that, really!”

Gladio merely snorts, looks at Prompto again. “If anything I’ve heard about you is even partially true, then you’re alright, kid. Nice to meet ya.”

Prompto perks up visibly. “You too, big guy!”

“There are benches on the sidelines there, s’you can watch. I’ll even give you control of the aux,” Gladio winks, gesturing towards a control panel on the wall. “Just pick something upbeat.”

Prompto nods and skips off to plug his phone into a jack below the small screen, thumbing through his playlists carefully. Meanwhile, Noctis is pushed to the ground, and instructed to do thirty push-ups before moving onto actual stretching. Where the logic in that was, he’d never know.

He’s on his twenty-third rep when hard rock suddenly pours out of the speakers at a comfortable level of background-noise, jarring him with its substance. Noctis immediately stops and sits back, gaping open-mouthed at Prompto.

“This is your music?” he calls across the room.

“Yeah!” Prompto beams, settling onto a bench. “Don’t you love it? Ugh, wait - just listen to that guitar.” He closes his eyes, head nodding in time to the heavy, melodic solo and raw vocals.

Noctis simply stares, shocked beyond words.

This. This is Prompto, right?

Prompto, who cries over homemade food. Prompto, who studies gloster canaries his free time. Prompto, who's afraid of anyone over six foot.

That same Prompto is - against all logic - into hardcore, gritty rock music?

Noct’s heart pangs wildly, incredibly fond.

“’Ey, no slacking,” Gladio barks, pointing firmly at the mat. Noctis sighs and resumes his push-ups, invigorated by the music. Twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six...
Before long, he’s warping all over the workout room, attempting to land hits on Gladio’s muscular form. *Attempting* being the operative word: he doesn’t know how he does it, but Gladio always seems to know exactly where he’s going to strike next. Maybe he’s just as predictable as Prompto was at the park.

It doesn’t help that warping makes him vaguely nauseous, though. The more he does it, the more his head and stomach protest. He’s got a lot of practice to do before it becomes second-nature. So, he grits his teeth and keeps trying.

After a particularly successful attack, Noctis looks over at Prompto, self-satisfied and smug. To his amusement, Prompto is holding up his camera, throwing a thumbs-up over it.

“You look kickass!” He shouts, waving.

Noctis smiles sheepishly and rubs at his nape. “It’s nothing.”

“Tell that to these action shots, dude!”

Noctis laughs, no longer paying attention to the fight, and gets a punch in the stomach for it. Fair. He deserved that one.

Thirty minutes pass, and he’s become utterly exhausted, training shirt clinging to his back and chest heaving with deep breaths. Prompto has spent the time alternating between shouting words of encouragement (“Get him, Noct! On your left!”), taking pictures, and jamming out to his own music.

When Noctis lands a hit after four pathetic minutes of trying, Gladio finally calls for a break, walking off toward his water and looking rather composed, the ass.

“Thank gods,” Noctis groans, collapsing bonelessly onto the mat.

“Cool, innit?” Noctis says, barely finding the energy to turn his head towards his friend.

“Hell yeah! You’re like a real-life videogame character!” Prompto affirms. He opens his mouth to say more, but Gladio returns then.

“You wanna take a crack at somethin’ while you’re here, Prompto?” He asks. “I can teach you some self-defense. Might come in handy, if you’re hanging around this royal danger magnet,” he punctuates the accusation with an exaggerated jerk of his thumb toward Noct’s prone form.

“Hey, I’m not a danger magnet,” Noctis argues half-heartedly. “People’re just silly.”

“Right, Princess. Physical assault is just so silly.”

“Y’know what I mean,” Noctis yawns.

He’s sure Prompto is going to say no, anyway. The guy couldn’t even shake Gladio’s *hand* without freaking out. But to his surprise -

“Yes!” Prompto responds, nodding vigorously. “I wanna learn!”

Gladio huffs a laugh. “See, Noct,” he drawls. “This is what a good pupil looks like.”
“Yeah, yeah,” Noctis mutters, slowly peeling his body off the ground. He’s intrigued now, ready to watch Prompto perform - even if it is just basic defensive moves.

He slinks toward the seat Prompto had been occupying, grateful both for the chance to rest his aching body and to crack his favorite pun - ‘it’s bench time!’ His gaze falls on the pair in the middle of the room, facing each other - one confident, one apprehensive.

“Let’s start with dodging a punch in the face,” Gladio begins, cracking his knuckles. “Try and hit me, first.”

Prompto readies himself, and then goes for a standard shot towards Gladio’s nose. It looks a little comical, given their height difference, but that’s neither here nor there.

Gladio immediately turns sideways, so Prompto’s fist connects with nothing, and shoots a rigid, pointed hand directly at Prompto’s eyes, stopping just before them.

“You always want to go for the eyes first,” Gladio instructs, fingernails still inches from Prompto’s widened pupils. “The goal is to temporarily blind them enough to run. Step away if you see the punch coming, and then use their proximity to your advantage. You try.”

“Okay,” Prompto says, backing into position again.

Gladio gives him a moment, and then sends his own fist flying. To Noct’s extreme surprise, Prompto nails the move, sidestepping gracefully and extending a firm hand towards Gladio’s vulnerable eyes.

“Hey,” Gladio laughs, equally surprised as Noctis. “Not bad at all. Again.”

They practice the move ten more times before moving onto the next one: a quick block of a hooked punch and a retaliation using the elbow. Prompto gets the hang of this one a little bit slower - which has Noctis on edge, worried he might accidentally hurt himself - but he manages to execute it without mishap.

Gladio spends the next twenty minutes guiding Prompto through five basic moves, instructing the eager blond on defending against kicks, shirt-grabbing, and sudden arm holds. That last one had stirred something within Noctis; watching Gladio encase Prompto’s smaller form in a bear hug from behind, even if meant to echo malicious intent, had made him just a little bit jealous.

Not that he wanted to hold Prompto or anything. Of course not. Nope.

“You’ve got a knack for this, kid,” Gladio praises after Prompto manages to struggle out of his hold a third time. “I’m impressed. Time’s up for today, though. I’ve got a thing to get to.”

“Aw, okay,” Prompto says, sounding both bummed out and breathless. He’d really given it his all.

Gladio’s expression softens. “Next time I’ll teach you more, yeah? We’ll even go through my ‘rape escape’ lesson,” he adds, winking cheekily.

Prompto freezes and blushes hard, expression deeply uncomfortable. Noctis follows suit, because he’d immediately pictured Prompto pinned under Gladio, and the mental image was just a little too much on the side of risqué for the shy teen.

“I, uh, I- I don’t think that’s-”

“It is relevant,” Gladio interjects before Prompto can try and argue further. “‘Cause anyone can be a victim. Ya never know. Noct gets the same training at least once a year.”
“Gladio!” Noctis chokes, blushing harder. “Don’t \textit{tell him} that!”

Gladio just laughs loudly in response, obviously satisfied with the image he’s planted into \textit{both} their heads now. “Seeya kids,” he waves, gathering his bag and leaving the most palpable tension Noctis has ever been subject to.

They’re silent for a beat, the acidic sounds of an electric guitar the only thing permeating the room.

“Hah, so.” Prompto caves, scratches his temple. “That was awkward.”

And then Noctis is smiling, because if there’s anything Prompto’s good at, it’s making him comfortable in any circumstance.

“You said it,” Noctis agrees, picking up his own belongings.

Prompto unplugs his phone from the aux and retrieves his own backpack. “This really was fun, though,” he starts. “Didn’t know you had any of that in you.”

“Could say the same for you,” Noctis says, grinning at the blond. “And don’t let Gladio scare you away. You don’t actually have to do that specific... training... if you don’t want to.”

Prompto visibly relaxes. “Thank Shiva,” he laughs, and the pair set off towards Noct’s apartment, eagerly anticipating a long session of gaming, talking, and eating junk food together.

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\texttt{GLADIO [4:07 PM]: you were right}

\texttt{IGNIS [4:13 PM]: About?}

\texttt{GLADIO [4:14 PM]: the poor kid’s smitten}

\texttt{IGNIS [4:14 PM]: I know.}

\texttt{GLADIO [4:14 PM]: Sent Img\_0109.}

\texttt{IGNIS [4:15 PM]: What in the Six’s name is that?}

\texttt{GLADIO [4:16 PM]: it’s a tiny cartoon of me}

\texttt{GLADIO [4:16 PM]: making a face like “ooh la la”}

\texttt{GLADIO [4:16 PM]: get it? cause Noct is head over heels}

\texttt{IGNIS [4:17 PM]: Yes, I get it.}

\texttt{GLADIO [4:17 PM]: so. what are we gonna do about this?}

\texttt{IGNIS [4:18 PM]: Nothing. I doubt Noct even realizes it himself.}

\texttt{GLADIO [4:19 PM]: don’t be boring, iggy}

\texttt{IGNIS [4:20 PM]: Seriously, Gladio. Let him explore this. Try not to tease him, either.}
GLADIO [4:21 PM]: wouldn’t dream of it.

GLADIO [4:21 PM]: Sent IMG_0110.

IGNIS [4:22 PM]: “Wink wink”? Really, Gladio?

GLADIO [4:22 PM]: what can I say, the cartoon emotes better than I do

IGNIS [4:23 PM]: So it seems.

IGNIS [4:24 PM]: Anyway, I have a meeting now. Leave the boys alone, alright?

GLADIO [4:25 PM]: sure thing, stupido

IGNIS [4:25 PM]: Tsk. Don’t tell me Noct got you on that, too.

GLADIO [4:26 PM]: please. I got him on it.

IGNIS [4:27 PM]: Goodbye, Gladio.

GLADIO [4:27 PM]: later ;^)
Cold Comfort

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
The boys had a very gay, fluffy time together - birdwatching and meeting Gladio. Prompto even got self defense lessons. What a guy!

Chapter Notes

now it's time for all of us to stop being happy. enjoy. >:)
seriously though, this story is getting into the gritty reality of having an ED. i really have to stress, again, that this might trigger some people. really. please be careful, friends.

and remember - everything prompto thinks? it's all a product of being delusional. he has a disorder. nothing said here is accurate or reflective of reality.

everyone go hug TheRegalHarvester for me, because she's an amazing beta.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kweh! Kweh! Kweh kweh! Kweh! Kweh!


Eight perfect, cozy minutes.

Kweh! Kweh! Kweh kweh! Kweh! Kweh!

“Damnit,” Prompto mutters, properly retrieving his phone and turning the alarm off.

He curls up in his blankets tightly, and has to hold the device all of five inches from his face without the helpful aid of contacts. He blinks the sleep from his eyes, sighs deeply, and tiredly checks his home screen for any new notifications.

SNAPCHAT \ from Noctagon

SNAPCHAT \ from Noctagon

NEXTDOOR \ Today’s trending post: lost my Dog round 23rd and pinewood, pleas contact w infoirmation 582-193-1029

TAPATALK \ User sylleblosslim replied to your post.

KING’S KNIGHT \ Your gold tokens have refreshed. Spin the wheel?
Okay. He’s definitely ignoring that last one for the time being because fuck, he’d forgotten he’d designated this day to facing his dreaded bathroom scale.

Instead, Prompto happily debates between taking care of his King’s Knight campaign or addressing his friend first, eventually deciding he had to go with the more important and responsible option.

He clicks open the King’s Knight app.

Fifteen minutes and three battles later, he’s finally watching Noct’s snaps, which consisted first of an extreme close-up, an unflattering angle, and the caption - “kill me now”. This is immediately followed with a video of Gladio’s border collie panting happily in front of the training room, screen flipping around to Noct’s sullen face after a moment.

Prompto can’t help but feel sympathetic. It’s a Saturday - only a week after meeting Gladio - and he’s already well aware of how grueling training is for the prince. He’d even joined him twice throughout the past week, watching and practicing self-defense moves after Noctis finished his circuit. He knows how badly Noctis is suffering, especially this early in the morning.

So, naturally, Prompto quickly snaps a photo of himself, blanket covering everything but his eyes and eyebrows, and captions it - “hahaha sucks for you!! lmao”. He even includes a sticker of his bitmoji laughing mockingly, because he’s that cruel.

Smiling, he thumbs to the Tapatalk app, which hosts his favorite eating disorder forum, and checks his notifications. He’s eager when he finds a response to his desperate plea for caloric help.

REPLY ON THREAD - “eating outside?”

sylleblosslim [19:29]: i know dude, it’s super frustrating that kenny’s doesn’t have nutrition facts. :// but tbh i asked how many potatoes they use on a normal fries order once (cuz im crazy lol) + how much oil and calculated it. it’s about 350 a plate. not counting ketchup or anything. hope that helps :) 

Prompto has to admire the dedication, and is relieved to know he finally has a safety option for Noct’s favorite indulgence. 350 calories was pretty steep, but it was a hell of a lot better than having no clue what he was eating. Knowledge is power, after all.

Damn. So far, this is shaping up to be a rather pleasant morning.

He burrows deeper into his bed and browses the forum idly, pointedly ignoring the task he’s been putting off.

Ten minutes pass. Twenty.

Prompto just… he doesn’t want to know. Doesn't want to ruin this peace.

The last time he’d weighed himself, he was 173.2. That was two and a half weeks ago. So. He’d had to have lost since then. Right? He’s pretty sure he’d go crazy if he stepped on the scale, only to find
the number had crept impossibly upwards again.

He’s not illogical. Prompto knows, with the way he’s been eating, it’d take a highly concentrated amount of bad luck for that to happen. But, considering it’s the subject of a fair amount of his recurring nightmares, the irrational fear is there, whether he likes it or not.

His eyes flicker over more inane, pointless threads, procrastinating the inevitable.

‘activity level help?’

‘Fave warm drink and how you take it?’

‘eating before bed = weight gain?’

‘hot cheetos’

‘Not sure where to put this… black period blood? TMI SORRY’

‘So I ran away from the hospital.’

‘What kind of thin looks better for you’

The hospital one looks kind of interesting. His eyes glaze over a shoddily-told story, over vaguely helpful replies.

Fifteen more minutes pass. He keeps scrolling.

Eventually, a thread about a mother’s effect on disordered eating and whatnot has Prompto thinking about his own mom. Particularly, a confrontation with her that had happened that past Tuesday, and the subsequent horror that had followed.

He’d just gotten out of his final class. It was one of those unfortunate days where Noctis wasn’t able to walk with him because of a royal Something or Other, so Prompto was left trudging towards the school gates alone.

He checked his phone blankly, surprised and delighted to find two missed calls from his mom - who had no idea what time Prompto was in school, apparently. Leaning against the wall of the mathematics building, he quickly swiped to call her back.

“Prompto?” Her voice sounded harried and stressed, instantly souring Prompto’s mood. She clearly wasn’t calling to catch up with her son.

“Yeah, mom? What’s up?”

“I’ve been trying to call you all day!”

“Mom, calm down. You tried twice in the last hour. While I was in class.” He hoped he didn’t sound
too sarcastic, uninterested in a fight.

“Excuse me?” And shit, she sounded indignant. “You want to say that again?”

“Uh. No, sorry,” Prompto sighed, giving in. “Look, just - d’ya need something?”

“University of Altissia is having an info session tonight at the private school’s auditorium. 7 PM. You’re going, I already RSVP’d you.”

Now it was Prompto’s turn to sound indignant. “W-What? Mom, you can’t just spring this on me, what if I had plans?”

She snorted. Actually snorted. “Do you?”

“No…” Prompto trailed, hating that he was proving that smug, disembodied voice right. Damn. Roasted by my own mother.

If only she knew he hung out around the prince of Lucis these days, then maybe her opinion of him might elevate. But she’d stopped caring about his personal life sometime in the fifth grade, and Prompto didn’t want to go around touting Noctis like a trophy.

“So, you’re going.” She sounded satisfied, ready to hang up without so much as a how have you been, anyway?

“No,” Prompto swiftly interjected, trying to regain any modicum of control. “That private school is dumb and snotty and I don’t even want to apply to Altissia anywa-”

“You what?” His mom yelled, loud enough to hurt his ears. “Prompto Argentum. I am not even entertaining that comment. You will apply there, and that is non-negotiable. And you will attend that meeting tonight.”

“But-”

“You’re acting like the ungrateful child you were back when you were nine, Prompto. I thought you’d grown up since then,” she bit. “Your father and I have worked too hard for you to throw everything away now. Have I made myself clear?”

And - damnit, his vision had started to swim and his throat was burning, so how the hell was he supposed to even respond?

“Mm-hmm.” His breathing felt tight.

“Good. Goodbye, Prompto.”

“Bye, mom,” he managed to whisper-choke, and she hung up immediately.

He leaned his head back against the cool cement of the building, taking deep, ragged breaths. His eyes were shut and his ears were roaring, so he hadn’t registered that he had company until he heard a familiar, bone-chilling voice.

“ ‘Bye, mom,’” it mocked. “Aw, isn’t he cute?”

His eyes sprung open immediately, taking in the forms of the three tormentors from his chemistry class.

Shit.
He was scared enough of them when he was surrounded by other people. Now, he’d been found alone, and it was the first time they’d ever dared approach him outside of class. The sorrow he was feeling from his mom’s scathing lecture was quickly being swapped for terror.

“Where’s your royal safety blanket?” The red-haired one sneered. He’d taken a step forward, so Prompto took a step back, putting him flush against the wall that had been so comforting a moment prior. Now, it suddenly felt like a trap.

“I-In the bathroom,” Prompto stammered, hands curling reflexively into fists.

“Hmm.” The red-haired one made a show of pantomiming deep thought, finger tapping against his chin. “You know, that’s a little interesting, considering he got into that black money-mobile right when school ended.”

The three stepped closer, surrounding him on all sides.

“What do you want?” Prompto hissed, trying to hide his shaking limbs and at least appear like he could hold his own.

The red-haired one had got close enough to poke a finger into Prompto’s chest, then. “To give you,” - he jabbed the digit in harder - “a final warning. Which is a lot more than you deserve.”

Prompto only grabbed the offending hand and threw it off his body, incensed. “Leave me alone.”

Wrong move.

Immediately, strong hands grabbed at his throat, pressing Prompto up against the wall - enough to force him onto tip-toes.

He flailed wildly, grasping and trying to get the taller boy to quit strangling him, but it was as if he was fighting against solid steel. Gladio hadn’t trained him for this.

“I- hhnf - ah - s… stop…” Prompto choked, voice getting more and more hoarse as his airways closed. The back of head scratched against the jagged cement painfully.

After an agonizing fifteen seconds, he was unceremoniously released, attacker merely scoffing at the image he’d created out of the boy - pathetic and reeling. Prompto simply sagged against the wall, bent forward and massaging his throat as he’d drunk in the air, greedy and audible.

“Don’t ever try and fuck with me like that again,” their leader warned simply. “Just listen carefully, you piece of shit. Stop hanging around the prince, or you’ll have to be taught a lesson about which class you actually belong to. Since you seem to be forgetting. Got it?”

How is this even happening? Prompto remembers thinking. Wasn’t I just talking to my mom? What’s going on?

Prompto had only coughed in response, loud and throaty. The three had shot each other looks, and then walked off as suddenly as they’d come, the red-haired guy deciding to punctuate his retreat with a final shove.

Feeling like his legs were made of jello, Prompto had only sunk unsteadily to the ground, shaken and disturbed to his core.
The memory has Prompto frowning in his bed, staring at the wall now. That really had been a shit day. His neck had ached for ages, and the stupid UofA meeting was just as stifling as he thought it’d be.

Of course, despite how much the trio tried to manipulate him, nothing changed in terms of his behavior around Noctis. It wasn’t as if he was going to stop being his friend. Or tell him about the bullies, and further reinforce the idea that he was completely dependent on the protection of Lucian royalty. What was he supposed to do?

He had tried to lightly suggest that the pair do more activities indoors, eager to limit how much they appeared in public. It hadn’t really worked, though. Not at all. Noctis loves fishing too much.

Prompto sighs, deep and frightened. He’s screwed.

Don’t think about that right now, he tries to console himself. It’s the weekend. You’re fine. For now. Probably.

His lip wobbles.

Don’t think about it don’t think about it don’t think about it don’t think about it don’t think about it -

The scale. Right. The scale!

That was something to focus on. He still needs to weigh himself.

It’s a shitty transition in his thinking, as far as thought-transitions go, but it was better than reflecting on his imminent doom. Instead, it has him reflecting on his body image, which is at least par for the course.

Back to the cyclical argument playing on loop in his mind, then.

So. He’s sure he’s lost weight, he is. But lying there, wrapped up in his sherpa comforter, his brain continues to convince him he’s done anything but.

It flickers over memories of fatty foods he’d been forced to eat with Noctis. Of the couple mornings he’d slept in through his runs. Of how his thighs always look against the school chairs, horribly wide and expansive.

Of what his new friends think of his body.

He recalls comments, passing and flippant, but telling all the same.

Gladio is always the most subtle about it. His perception of body-image is probably the healthiest of the four, considering he subscribes to fitness as the ideal, but he still manages to hurt Prompto indirectly.

Once, during a break in training, Noctis threw his arms up and whined, “This room is so hot, Gladio! I can’t focus!”
“Just take your shirt off,” was all Gladio said, gruff and casual - in fact, his own had disappeared before they’d even begun.

Noctis looked mortified. “Like you? No way.”

“What, too embarrassed to show your scrawny body?” Gladio laughed, inexplicably throwing a pointed, raised-eyebrow look toward Prompto’s general direction.

“Hey!” Noctis stammered, sounding embarrassed. “I got muscle! You… just can’t see it.”

Gladio simply mussed up the blushing prince’s hair, instructing him to get back into position. And if Noctis had refused to make eye contact with Prompto for a solid half-hour, the blond barely registered it.

Because his mind had just kept repeating the word *scrawny*, over and over and over and over.

It felt like the most beautiful word in the universe.

Experimentally, at the next session, Prompto made a comment about being hot before his defense training started. Gladio only barked at Noctis to turn the AC up.

Right. Of course.

He *didn’t* have a scrawny body. He didn’t even have a fit-passing one. That day, he went through the motions half-heartedly, walked straight home, and cried in the shower.

Sometimes Noctis was rude. Prompto knew he didn’t mean it, but coming from the same boy who called him *heavy* all those years ago, he knew he should at least expect it.

It didn’t stop it from hurting, though.

Once, during the week, he’d been on Noct’s couch - routine, at this point. Noctis had been playing Assassin’s Creed, getting excited as the plot started to thicken (despite the fact that this was his twenty-seventh playthrough). Prompto was watching and purposefully giving him bad advice, which, in the heat of the moment, had led to some *very* funny slip-ups and a *very* irate Noctis.

When that got boring, he’d whipped out his camera and started to photograph everything - the view from the large windows, the back of Noct’s head, artsy closeups of a salt shaker. During a loading screen, Prompto had even flipped the camera around to take a selfie of the pair. It was something new he’d started doing, and, while it was scary to breach that boundary, he loved having pictures of the two of them.

He looked at the photo immediately, which was probably a mistake, because Noctis leaned in over his shoulder to look too.


*What?*
“Uh… it’s not fat!” Prompto responded, quick on the ball despite how his entire heart was sinking into his shoes. “Selfies make it look that way!”

Noctis only laughed again and refocused his attention on the game, the entirety of Roma having loaded. It was then that the full impact of his comment hit Prompto.

_Fat. Fat. Fat. Fat. Fat. Fat. Fat. He called me fat. Why is your face so fat. Why are you so fat. Why do you take up this much space. Why. Why. Why, Prompto?_

His throat was burning and his eyes were prickling and his right hand was gripping his pants hard enough to turn the knuckles white. Noctis walked across a ledge, assassinated a Templar from above, and whooped. Prompto felt like he was going to be sick.

Then - he started to lose feeling in his _brain_, as if that was possible, but it was. It _was_. His eyes suddenly couldn’t focus on the TV anymore, and it tickled the space between them a little bit, but that was the least of his issues. He went forty-five seconds without blinking, mind both silent and in utter chaos all at once.

_You can’t disassociate here. Stop. Get up. Move. Astral’s sake - at least BLINK!_

He forcibly re-focused his vision, which actually _hurt_ a little bit, and then got up to go to the bathroom while trying not to stumble. There, he fought off the wave of desolation threatening to crash over him, splashing cold water in his eyes to stop the red rims from growing redder.

Prompto couldn’t afford to think about it. Not now, not with Noctis happily tittering away in the other room. So, he forced his emotional reactions to a distant part of his brain, banishing them from thought.

Feelings sufficiently oppressed, he simply returned to the couch and yelled out _Triangle!_ when Noctis was meant to press square, smile forced onto his face.

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Ignis always cut him the deepest. Prompto supposed that made sense, considering that the man had always been blunt and honest with him in their interactions - but still.

The worst of it had occurred that past Sunday. Noctis hadn’t been able to hang out until nighttime, so, as a result, Prompto hadn’t eaten all day. He’d been saving his calories for when they would, assuming the prince would want to grab dinner.

But, amazingly, he hadn’t suggested eating at all. The pair had simply gone to the movies, and were picked up by Ignis straight after.

“Sorry we couldn’t do more,” Noctis yawned on the drive, next to Prompto in the backseat. “I got homework tonight.”

“Dude, no problem,” Prompto reassured, smile on his face. His stomach was aching, sure, but the heated seats of Ignis’s Benz were really cozy, and he liked seeing his friend happy.

He turned his gaze out the window, humming and watching the world fly by. Nine minutes into their trip, he spotted the familiar mint green and faded red paint of Noct’s favorite establishment, glowing softly in the night.
“Hey, wanna hit up The Crow’s Nest?” Prompto asked immediately, jumping at any opportunity to initiate food, to appear as healthy-minded as possible.

And he was really fucking hungry, at that point.

But he heard no response from Noctis except a light snore. Instead, Ignis merely remarked, “If you wish to put on weight? Certainly.”

Prompto’s limbs turned cold and numb almost instantaneously, and his chest felt like it’d been stabbed clean through. His heart pounded thickly, like he’d been called out for doing something wrong - for being the gigantic monster he is. His skin went cold, then hot, then damp, then cold again. Dimly, a part of his mind felt grateful that at least Noctis hadn’t heard that.

“Well, I know,” he responded, in a tiny and defeated voice.

He knew. Everyone knew. His fat is on display 24/7, a constant reminder to all of society that Prompto Argentum habitually makes extremely poor, unhealthy decisions. And Ignis was probably just trying to help, but fuck if he hadn’t gut Prompto like a fish with that comment.

That time he hadn’t been able to stop the tears. Three lone, solitary drops slipped down his cheeks, hidden by the cover of darkness.

Thankfully, by the time they’d parked to let Prompto out, all evidence of his weak disposition had been long-dried. He simply let out a cheerful bye, guys! and bounced into his apartment, waving them off as he stepped in.

In his bed that night, in the middle of his breakdown, his brain kept replaying the comment over and over and over. It was paired with a different comment -

The comment that occurred every time Noctis sighed about wanting to crash right here, and Ignis gently commanded that he remain awake long enough to eat.

Which only made him cry harder in comparison to what Ignis had told him that night. It was so unfair, yet perfectly warranted. He didn’t deserve food, not like Noctis did.

Prompto had furiously pinched at his thighs until he fell asleep, spent of tears and utterly exhausted. It was only in the morning that he realized he’d accidentally fasted for a day, and the realization hadn’t been an unwelcome one.

It’s time to face the music.

Groaning, nervous, and afraid, Prompto peels himself off his bed and exits the sanctuary of his room. The only sounds he hears are the echoing thumps of footsteps, and shaky, ragged gasps for air.

The scale is there, as it always is. Simply existing, and quietly defining his entire world.

This time he doesn’t dawdle. He rips his clothes off as fast as possible and steps on quickly, unable to take another second of uncertainty.
Prompto lets out a long, drawn-out breath, mind whirring with mental math. 4.1 pounds in two and a half weeks. That’s… normal.

He scrubs at his suddenly-wet eyes, tries to remind himself that losing at a ‘normie rate’ was better than not losing at all. Still, he’s so, so frustrated. When he was fasting, the fat was practically melting clean off his body, as if it was being neatly cut away by a skilled butcher.

Now, his body is adjusting to food again, and his rate has slowed, and he feels like a goddamn pig, and fuck it - he’s going back to bed again.

Where he proceeds to lie for twelve hours straight.

Later, when Noctis asks him how his day went, he tells him all about exciting new photos, a rare bird he saw, and the delicious pasta he made for dinner. It doesn’t feel good to outright lie, but it beats the sordid truth by miles.

So he lies. He lies and he lies and he lies, and he pretends everything is okay, because he needs to masquerade as a happy person for Noctis. For his own sanity. If he gave into the daemons clawing at the edges of his psyche, he wouldn't be Prompto anymore.

There was a time in his life - a very long period, in fact - where he’d had no actual friends and rarely saw anyone. Yet, in this moment, Prompto has never felt quite so alone.

Chapter End Notes

i'm................... sorry............... at least you know the next chapter is noct, and that'll be fluffy, right? (hides on tumblr)

reminder for what prom's body currently looks like, in case ya forgot.
Chapter Summary

_Previously, on Salad Days..._
Prompto's life isn't as happy-go-lucky as it seems. He's arguing with his mom over college options, his bullies have breached the contact boundary, and sometimes the boys make rude comments about his body. _And_ he didn't lose as much weight as he'd wanted to since meeting Noct. Poor kid.

Chapter Notes

i know i promised you pure fluff... but, in classic Me fashion, there's a healthy sprinkle of angst in there as well. sorry ;)
thanks to my cool cat beta TheRegalHarvester as always!


“What?” Comes the hissed response. The boy turns his head back only slightly, careful not to raise the lecturing teacher’s attention. “Stop poking me.”

“New arcade opened up downtown. We’re going,” Noctis whispers back.

Prompto starts smiling despite himself. “Down!” He breathes, enthusiasm somehow leaking into the hushed answer.

A gruff cough from the front interrupts their moment. “Mr. Argentum, you wouldn’t mind telling me the answer to the question I just asked, would you?”

“Seventy-four,” Prompto calls back, over-confident. Noctis chokes on a laugh.

“Not even close,” the old man responds, a lifetime of weariness in his voice. “This is Lucian history. Do _try_ and pay attention.”

Noctis grins as the tips of Prompto’s ears turn pink, and the blond quickly bends over his notes again, nodding sheepishly.

“What’s so special about this arcade, anyway?” Prompto asks after school, lips closing around the straw of his milkshake as the pair walk from The Crow’s Nest to downtown.

Noctis hums, takes a drag of his own shake. “It’s… colorful?”
“Real descriptive,” Prompto chuckles, rolling his eyes. “I’ve clearly got a lot to look forward to.”

“Hey, go easy on me,” Noctis pouts. “Not like I’ve been there yet. But I did hear its got a lot of rarer machines.”

“Ooh,“ Prompto says, bouncing a little. “‘Now that’s something! No offense to Justice Monsters Five, but I was getting a little over it. Yanno?”

Noctis grins. “I hear ya.”

The two bound down the street, growing excited when they see the establishment come into view. Noctis is smugly pleased to find that his colorful description had been especially apt: the arcade, shaped like a rounded dome, is painted an incredibly bright gold. The eye-catching quality of it is further accentuated by icicle lights in various shades of blue, pink, and yellow hanging from the rooftop. It glitters in the sun - like a mirage, like magic.

Prompto’s entire body is practically shaking with anticipation at that point. “Oh my gods, Noct, c’mon! Let’s go!” He urges, pulling at Noct’s sleeve and skipping ahead, swiftly throwing his half-empty shake into a trashcan as he makes for the entrance. Noctis huffs fondly, and does the same.

Before long, they’re both standing in the entryway, in awe of the sheer spectacle of the place; everything is eye-catchingly bright. Moogles make up the dominant theming of the interior, inciting a sense of childish joy within Noctis. A cloying, candy-like scent permeates the room - a far cry from the stale sweat smell of most arcades. The walls alternate between pink and black stripes in one room, and solid deep navy in the next. In the same respect, the tiled floors switch between green and orange, purple and yellow. Colorful, in retrospect, had been too weak a word.

Noctis glances at Prompto, marveling at the rainbow glow the neon lights cast on his pearlescent skin. The blond is taking in everything at once, which is clearly overwhelming, considering his face is frozen in a mask of pure, unadulterated joy.

“This is amazing!” The blond shouts, interrupting Noct’s train of thought before it could plunge off a cliff. “I think we start over there! Let’s go!”

Noctis follows dazedly as Prompto leads him to a machine. Exchange your gil for tokens! it reads, beckoning patrons to spend higher amounts of money for better deals.

Prompto pauses, looking over the printed instructions on the front of the bright green dispenser, mumbling lowly as he reads: “So, we play with tokens, and win Gold Points. Which we can exchange at the counter. Okay, sounds pretty standard.” He reaches back for his wallet, thumbing through hurriedly. “I only have 600 gil on me, how about you?”

Noctis gropes for his own wallet, knowing full well he technically had unlimited gil. But Ignis had imposed a limit on his arcade spending a long time ago, and he wasn’t eager to incite the advisor’s wrath. “900. How many does that get us?”

Prompto stuffs their combined bills into the slot. “Looks like… twenty tokens. That’s not bad!” He’s grinning widely again, shifting from foot to foot as the arcade’s currency clinks into the attached metal tin. “What do we play first?”

Noctis gazes into the pink-and-black room, pondering the variety of options. “Super Dunk?” He offers, intrigued by the promise of showing off his athleticism.
Two minutes later, Noctis is decidedly \textit{not} doing that. He’s struggling to shoot baskets, cursing whoever conceptualized making a simple game so impossibly difficult. It didn’t make sense, he was usually \textit{good} at basketball.

“You have to bend your knees at the right time!” Prompto is yelling from the sidelines, jumping up and down.

“What! Does! That! Mean!” Noctis yells back, pressure rising as the clock timer ticks lower.

“This,” Prompto butts in, grabbing the ball. He appears to gather momentum, bends for a fraction of a second, and immediately releases his grip as he springs back up. He looks a little bit like a wind-up toy, discharged too soon.

Amazingly, the ball sinks softly into the net.

“You look like an idiot,” Noctis laughs. “But keep going!”

Thirty-two seconds later, the boys are in possession of ten Gold Points and one very smug smile on Prompto’s end. Noctis waves off the \textit{I-told-you-so} and the \textit{It’s all about the technique, Noct} as he makes for ‘Wonder Catcher’. The cute crane game promises that every player is a winner, which Noctis can really get behind at this point. Inside the glass case, instead of stuffed animals, are unmarked paper bags.

“Oh, mystery prizes,” Prompto grins. “One turn each?”

“Hell yeah,” Noctis says, eagerly pushing a token into the machine. The crane moves responsively, lets him try multiple times to grasp at an interestingly-shaped bag. \textit{Every player is a winner}, indeed. With a satisfying \textit{whump}, the bag drops to the bottom of the machine, and is retrieved immediately.

“Whatisitwhatisitwhatisit,” Prompto’s chanting, practically hanging off Noct’s arm as he rips at where the paper is stapled back.

“It’s a…” Noctis upends the bag and grimaces. “Potion. Okay.”

Prompto is silent for all but three seconds before he bursts into laughter, heaving things about the \textit{look on your face} and as \textit{if you needed a godsdamn potion, anyway}!

Noctis can’t help but laugh too, sending the curative into the ether of the armiger. “Guess Iggy can’t complain about the ‘frivolity of arcades’ now,” he quips, mimicking the advisor's posh accent. “Your turn, asshole.”

Prompto inserts his own token, concentrates extra hard on getting a half-buried bag in the center. His aim is on point, as it usually is, so it only takes him all of two tries before he unearths his treasure.

“Three Gold Points,” Prompto announces he flips the bag over, pocketing the shiny coins. “You really need to start pulling your weight around here, Noct. Looks like I’m the breadwinner.”

And Noctis can’t even joke back, because he’s too busy suppressing the sparks shooting through his chest at that \textit{marriage} allusion. “Oh, look, arm wrestling!” He hurries, dragging Prompto to the next attraction.

Beating the animatronic sumo-wrestler in a test of strength has Noctis feeling confident again, smirking as the machine pops out five Gold Points. But Prompto’s hardly paying attention, eyes glued to a ‘Crystal Fortune Teller’ in the distance.
“Noct,” Prompto begins, voice weighted with faux-seriousness. “That machine has the answer to my future.”

Noctis rolls his eyes. “Okay, okay, you dummy,” he acquiesces, shoving a token into Prompto’s hand and savoring the brief contact.

Prompto smiles and skips over to the gaudy contraption, follows all the superfluous directions with rapt attention to detail. Which apparently includes inputting one’s star sign, sending a brief prayer to their favorite astral, and -

Running one’s hands over a crystal ball, it seems. “Are you sure that’s necessary?” Noctis snickers, amused as Prompto’s fingers dance over the glowing lavender sphere in the center of the machine.

Prompto looks stricken. “Of course it’s necessary,” he defends. “It needs to read my energy.”

“So. Gullible.” But Noctis smiles anyway.

A moment later, pink and pixelated words are slowly typed out onto the tiny black screen in front of them: A great turning point is near.

Prompto nods sagely as Noctis stifles a giggle into his shirt sleeve. “Happy?”

“Yes,” Prompto grins. “Oh my gods, look at that giant moogle!”

Suddenly, Prompto’s running into the adjacent navy-blue room, towards an adorable, moogle-shaped game called ‘Mog House’. Noctis feels like a grandpa trying to catch up with him because, Shiva, the kid never runs out of energy. The machine's mouth is open wide, and inside of it is a game screen prompting the boys to Please insert two tokens.

“You can play this one,” Noctis allows, melting at the full force of Prompto’s pleading look.

He presses in the tokens, and the screen fades to a tree-shaped house topped with a mushroom cap, sitting peacefully on an emerald hill. An 8-bit tune plays in the background, quaint and homey. This is Mog’s House, a text box reads. It's in Mog Forest on Mt. Mog.

“This is the best game here,” Prompto decides immediately.

“You haven’t even played any of i-” Noctis begins, but is interrupted when a tiny moogle bursts out of the mushroom-home. “Okay, nevermind. You’re right.”

A few scenes later, the boys learn their objective is to feed the moogle enough ‘kupo nuts’ to give him the energy to take off. Don’t overfeed him, the game warns. He won’t be able to fly if he’s too fat.

Prompto’s hands flit over the Ok button on the console, which he hesitatingly presses once. The moogle eats up the treat happily, so Prompto gives him another. And then steps back, seemingly done.

Noctis frowns. “Hey, you didn’t feed him enough. His stomach is still growling.”

“O-Oh. Right.” Prompto gives him another one. “That should be enough, yeah?”

“No,” Noctis says, shoving the boy out of the way and pressing the Ok button twice more. “See, now he’s done. He made a happy noise.”

Prompto lets out an awkward half-chuckle, rubs the back of his nape. “Guess this is the one game
“Hey,” Noctis fights half-heartedly, distracted by the moogle getting ready to take another shot at flying. After a drumroll, the tiny sprite takes off into the forest, flying in joyous circles to victorious music. Then the pair watch as the moogle’s love interest comes into view, and this time Noctis takes over feeding the small animal entirely. He’s successful, the couple unite, and the screen fades to black on the image of one of their baby mogs waving happily to the audience.

“Well, that was cu-- uh.” Noctis takes a look at his friend. “Prom, you’re crying?”

“No!” Prompto sniffs, wiping at his slightly dampened eyes. “It was just - a really nice story! That’s all!”

Adorable, Noctis thinks, and then firmly shoves the notion away, actually getting a little angry this time. Fuckin’ brain. If only the armiger could whisk away his invasive thoughts as well. Things would be a lot easier for him.

“Hey, I’m impressed,” a guy with an atrocious purple belt interrupts from behind them. “Thanks for showing me how to play. Here, take this.”

The man presses thirty Gold Points into Prompto’s free hand and wanders off, seemingly unperturbed by the immense gift he’d given. The pair look after his disappearing form in shock, and then at each other.

“Score!” Prompto grins, all traces of tears gone in the wake of their newfound treasure.

“You said it!” Noctis agrees. “I don’t even care how weird that was.”

“Same here, buddy.”

The two high five, and then make their way to the next game: a player-versus-player fighting game. Noct’s good at this one, naturally, and beats Prompto’s holographic character three times over - much to the blond’s chagrin. It nets them a solid amount of points, at least.

Next is a submarine battle simulator (Noct’s speciality), and then a snowboarding game (Prompto’s speciality). By the time they’re done playing that, it’s been two hours, they’ve racked up 68 Gold Points, and the boys are down to their last token.

They’re wandering around the navy-blue room, poking around corners for cool attractions they might have missed, when they come upon it: the ‘G-Bike.’

“Oh my gods,” Prompto breathes at the same time Noctis utters an excited “Prompto, look!”

There’s someone on the mechanical bike, racing through a city on-screen, dodging and fighting enemies as he rides. The motorcycle bucks and whirs rapidly, replicating the thrill of high speeds and death-defying turns. It looks awesome.

Noctis gapes. “How the hell did we miss this before?”

“I don’t know, but I wanna punch myself for it. Cause, buddy? We… we only have one token left,” Prompto sighs, sounding heartbroken.

“Oh,” Noctis forms, staring longingly at the bike as it actually rises upwards into the air and forces its
rider to grip tighter. “You… should take it.”

“No, that’s not fair,” Prompto insists stubbornly. “I got the last game.”

“But I played the most.”

“But you love driving fast, so you’d have more fun anyway!”

Noctis is in the middle of planning a good counter when an absolutely treacherous thought intrudes out of nowhere, and his mouth moves before he can stop it: “Why don’t we both just get on? It looks like it seats two.”

Prompto doesn’t say anything for a second, which has Noct’s mind screaming all sorts of self-deprecating things at himself about how creepy and untoward he is. After a beat, though, the blond smiles. “You’re a genius.”

So that’s how Noctis finds himself holding onto fake-plastic handlebars with a lot more force than necessary as Prompto - Prompto - wraps his arms around his waist from behind. He barely has time to reflect on how the kid could’ve been holding the back of the bike instead of his torso before the machine kicks to life, purring under their spread legs.

*Damnit,* Noctis thinks, using the handlebar grips to fight the enemy away from attacking his charge, a woman sitting in a tiny pixelated truck. *He’s- he’s actually holding me. For real. This wasn’t a good idea.* His skin starts to turn cold, and clammy, and a coiling sense of shame edges in from the corners of his mind.

Focus focus focus focus focus.

A particularly hard turn has the boys hanging on for dear life as the bike sharply rotates, causing Prompto to squeeze tighter as he erupts in peals of laughter. “This is reckless driving, Noct!” And holy shit, his voice is right in Noct’s ear as he pokes his eyes over the prince’s shoulder. And Noctis is torn between wanting to like it and wanting to die on the spot.

“Nah, this is beyond reckless driving,” Noct laughs back, opting to ignore his swirling thoughts.

Which doesn’t last long. A wave of enemies has him increasing their speed abruptly, causing the bike to jerk and Prompto’s head to bump softly against the nape of his exposed neck. To Noct’s horror and satisfaction, he feels soft lips connect with the skin there, inadvertently kissing him for a fraction of a second.

He isn’t even thinking anymore. His brain has flatlined.

It’s all Noctis can do to focus on the actual game, to make each turn instead of flying directly off the highway. The fast-paced, high-pressure beat spurs him on, helps ground and distract him from the boy pressing maddeningly against his back.

He glances quickly at the timer on the right-hand side of the screen, groans internally when he sees he still has a minute and a half left. *Of course* this is one of the longer games. He’s not sure he can get through it without stepping off as red as a Duscaen sunset.

Not to mention the dizzying effects of the guilt - nearly overwhelming him now.

“Going up,” Noctis warns, voice shaky at this point. The bike tilts itself to a steep 65 degree angle and lifts upwards as Noct’s character drives onto a ramp, and suddenly Prompto is hanging on tighter than he’s had to yet.
“Ahh! Noct, ‘m gonna fall-”

“I’ve got you,” Noctis intervenes quickly, reaching an arm back and wrapping it around his friend, hand directly over his spine.

“Oh - my hero!” Prompto teases, grip still incredibly tight around Noct’s waist despite the machine having righted itself.

I’mnotenjoyingthisI’mnotenjoyingthisI’mnotenjoyingthisI’mnotenjoyingthis-

Thank Shiva for the finish line, because Noctis is probably about to explode. The conflicting emotions battling it out in his mind have reached a crescendo, and it’s all too much for the confused teen to take. Especially here, in the optimistic cheer of the arcade.

Prompto pats his back once for doing a good job, buddy, and hops off gingerly, infuriatingly unaffected by it all. Noctis is suddenly grateful the lights in this place are an atrocious amalgamation of color, because he’s definitely never been this red before.

He peels himself off the bike, feeling buoyant and clammy and choked up and dizzy and incredibly happy and deliriously frightened all at once. And, suddenly, he’s able to place the smell of the establishment.

Lemonade. Old, dried out, nauseating, sugary lemonade. The kind that makes you puke after drinking it at an amusement park in midsummer.

His skin feels prickly. He really wants to go home. He wants to hide his face in a pillow and never make eye contact with anyone ever again. He feels as if he has the word SHAMEFUL stamped directly onto his forehead. The world is swaying.

The sound of the machine clinking out ten Gold Points seems nearly ironic in the wake of that surreal ride. It brings his focus to something that isn’t his own head, though, and for that Noctis is grateful.

“Seventy-eight points!” Prompto crows, adding up the assortment of plastic coins in his hand. “Prizes! Prizes! Prizes! C’mon, Noct!”

Noctis follows the bouncing teen to the counter dazedly, hardly registers the wide assortment of treasures available to them. His back is still warm. His hands are still sweaty. His breath is coming in short, shallow pants.

And then he’s blinking himself to attention, because Prompto is addressing him, and it wouldn’t do well to keep imagining the feeling of said boy’s arms encircling him and what exactly that did or did not mean for Noctis. For Prince Noctis. For Prince Noctis, who would have to marry someday, and produce an heir, and-

“Noct, look at that,” Prompto’s saying, pointing towards a magazine in a display case, the words Viva La Vista! printed on the cover. “That’s like, a super rare photography magazine. I haven’t seen a copy anywhere, not even online!”

“We’ll take that,” Noctis immediately tells the attendant, pointing towards the display and ignoring Prompto’s indignant squawk.

“Noct! It’s like sixty points! What about you?”

Noctis shrugs, and points at a small fish keychain worth fifteen points. “We’ll take that too. There, we both won something.”
“Hardly fair,” Prompto mumbles, but can’t hide the incredibly pleased expression that decorates his face when the glossy publication is pushed his way. He thumbs through it immediately, gasping excitedly at the comprehensive articles. “Wow, I’m gonna learn so much!”

Noctis simply smiles, content in that moment despite himself. Sure, he feels like he’s about to faint, or cry, or some weird combination, but - his best friend is there with him, poring over the object of his passion. The arcade is bright and safe. He isn’t worrying about the state of Insomnia, or his father’s failing health. And despite the confusion Prompto brings, it’s a lot more than he’s ever had before.

By the time they’ve emerged from the golden building, the sun has begun setting and Insomnia feels peaceful. The pair amble lazily down the road, Prompto excitedly reading out interesting DSLR facts and Noctis playing idly with the flashlight on his new keychain, a bright whiteness poking out of the fish’s slate-blue mouth.

Eventually, they part ways, promising each other a text once they’ve reached their respective homes. With Prompto gone, Noctis finally gives into the flurry of emotions he’s feeling, and allows himself to sag as he travels. Too many realizations are aching to push themselves to the forefront of his mind, and it’s exhausting, frankly.

He thinks about other things. Like translating one of his favorite poems into Old Lucian, which thankfully takes up a lot of brainpower.

Fifteen minutes later, he’s stepping into his apartment, mind thoroughly steered away from dangerous subjects and feeling like himself again. He kicks off his shoes and perks up when he sees Ignis had come by and left him dinner. First, though, he whips out his phone -

NOCTIS [6:23 PM]: home af

- and then proceeds to dive right into the meal without bothering to heat it up. It’s a pesto pasta dish, served with tiny slices of tomato Noctis pushes aside. He scrolls social media idly as he eats, watching over his own Snapchat story more than a few times if only to see that picture of Prompto smiling in front of the arcade again, peace sign thrown up with mirth.

He suddenly wishes he had more than just a handful of contacts, his dad included, and briefly toys with the idea of setting the account to public. Just to show all of Insomnia how much fun he’s having these days. It’s a really foreign sensation, being so happy. Instead of doing that, however, he merely taps through his friend’s stories, pleased to be able to keep up with everyone’s lives despite not having seen some of them in a bit.

What was Friday like for everyone else? Well, Iris had went to the mall with her friends, who had all posed happily for a group selfie. Gladio had posted an excessive amount of videos of his dog running around excitedly on expansive, rolling field. Ignis was always artsy with his stories: today, he just had one picture of a cup of coffee next to his black notebook, timestamp hovering above the scene. And his dad… well. Regis touts a two-second image of the top half of his face, captioned “Clarus can you come to my office please thank you”. Noctis giggles at that for an inordinate amount of time, screenshots it, and continues flicking through stories from various glaive members.

After fifteen minutes elapse and the pasta is all but finished, Noctis realizes he still hasn’t been texted
back. That’s… weird.

"NOCTIS [6:39 PM]: don’t tell me you’re too distracted by that magazine to text me >:(

Honestly, he really hopes that’s the case, because an eerie sense of dread has begun to pool in Noct’s gut. He tries to ignore it, tries to focus his attention on whatever antics Nyx had been posting about earlier.

Ten more minutes pass, and yeah, Prompto definitely should’ve been home by now.

"NOCTIS [6:51 PM]: prom? you’re back right?

He gives it until 7:10, nearly an hour after he got in. That’s as long as he can reasonably wait. Once the clock strikes that limit, he quickly pulls his shoes and jacket on, and shoots off a final message.

"NOCTIS [7:12 PM]: I’m going looking now… stay put

He’s halfway down his floor’s hallway when his phone finally beeps in response, and he’s scrambling to extract the device from his back pocket.

"PROMPTO [7:13 PM]: sorry. i’m back. got distracted.

Noctis heaves an immense sigh of relief, though the feeling of dread doesn’t quite disappear. All of a sudden, though, he feels dumb for overreacting. Of course Prompto had got distracted; the kid could barely walk without habitually running into stop signs because he ‘saw a dog’. Noctis heads back for his door, fingers shaking with adrenaline as he types.

"NOCTIS [7:14 PM]: dummy. don’t wait that long again, ok?

In response, Prompto only sends a thumbs-up emoji. Frowning, Noctis attempts to start a conversation by talking about the food Ignis had left, but the response, again, is less than satisfactory.

"PROMPTO [7:19 PM]: if it’s cool w you, i’m just gonna shower and eat and get an early night. i’m rlly tired

"NOCTIS [7:19 PM]: yea, of course. goodnight :)

And again, the blond only replies with an emoji, this time a sleepy face with Z’s coming out of its mouth. Noctis tries not to panic, but that’s hard when everything in his mind is working on overdrive.

Why’s he being so curt? He was so cheerful just a bit ago. Shit, does he feel weird about what happened at the arcade? He probably thought about it and realized it was weird. Fuck. Fuck. I shouldn’t have suggested he get on the bike. It was wrong. It was wrong. I’m wrong. Fuck. Oh my gods, I’m all fucked in the head and now he hates me.

And then Noctis nearly slaps himself, because even he could register when he’s being a tad overdramatic. Prompto was probably just tired from the excitement of the day. Nothing more than that. Hopefully.

He turns on his TV and half-watches it for a while, repeating the affirmation to himself over and over again. Tomorrow morning, he’ll text his best friend, and they’ll spend a lazy Saturday together playing Assassin’s Creed. They would.

Right?
ohhh noo, i wonder what's up with prompto? (innocent whistling)

final fantasy 7 fans have probably realized by now that yes - they were at the Gold Saucer. cause i can't resist referencing the other FF games, apparently.

for those who haven't played:

this is the ridiculousness of Super Dunk. please note that if you did not release the ball *precisely* when the tip of it touched cloud's hair spike, you'd fail. i think i earned 1 GP at best from this in all my attempts. :)

this is mog house!! it's really cute!!

and this is g-bike, the one game i wish existed for real.

let me know what ya thought! and be my pal on tumblr?
Too Much of a Good Thing

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Gay boyz arcade date, and then Prompto suddenly started acting weird over text.

Chapter Notes

thanks, as always, to my beta TheRegalHarvester!

this is a heavy chapter, everyone. do what's best for yourself. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ba ba bum bum ba bum bum bum! What a day!

Prompto skips down the road, humming and paging through his new magazine. The arcade had been exhilarating, both for the new machines and that very intimate bike ride. Thinking about it makes him blush, because damn... He had no clue he’d like holding Noctis that much.

It would have been absolutely perfect had he eaten only at lunch, but Noctis had insisted on The Crow’s Nest. Prompto bites his lip and directs his gaze toward the sky as he thinks, eyes narrowing.

So. Lunch was 82. Not bad, but then... okay. That girl said a regular order of Kenny’s fries was 350. I had half, but let’s round it to 200 to be safe. 282 so far. And then the shake... Fuck, I forgot about that goddamn shake. Probably 800 for the entire thing, but I only had half again. So 400? Total of 682? Damnit.

Prompto’s so wrapped up in his calculations, magazine tucked under his armpit and fingers counting out hundreds, that he fails to notice the shadowy, looming form at the end of the alleyway he’s cutting through. It isn’t until he knocks into the person that Prompto starts, finally registering the presence.

“So...” Prompto begins, but cuts off when he looks up at the figure.

The red-haired guy, from school. The one who’d threatened and choked him.

Oh. Fuck.

“Um,” Prompto breathes, panic rising. “Scuse me. Just passing through.”

The imposing form doesn’t move, though. Prompto pauses, and then attempts to duck around him. But as soon as he takes a step forward, the bully shoves two strong hands at Prompto’s chest, causing him to stumble backwards.

“On second thought,” Prompto laughs unsteadily as he rights himself, “I’ll just go around! Good night.”
The blond takes another couple steps backward before turning around entirely, ready to run out the opposite end and make a break for a safe, crowded street. His breath catches in his throat and his legs stutter in their intent, though.

Because at the other end of the alley are two more forms, slowly making their way towards him.

He’s been herded.

Before Prompto can attempt to register the situation at hand and decide on his next move, an arm snakes around his neck and holds his head firmly in the crook of an elbow.

He’d turned his back on the red-haired one for too long.

Prompto’s hand flies up to the offending limb, attempting to pry it off him - to no success. Dimly, he’s aware of the magazine fluttering to the ground, released from where it’d been pressed between his side and armpit. His throat is lightly squeezed, and the two lackeys finally catch up to the scene.

“Well, well,” the red-haired one begins, voice impish with excitement in Prompto’s ear. “Look who it is, guys! Back from a fun day with our Prince!”

The pair facing Prompto sneer and clap sarcastically, faces contorted with poorly concealed anger. “How very special for him,” one comments, gravelly.

“Let me go,” Prompto wheezes uncomfortably as the arm tightens around him. “I don’t wanna have to fight.”

A sharp bark of laughter, painfully close to his eardrum. “Hah! Hear that? Delusional fuck thinks he can take us.”

The other two join in on the laughter, but Prompto’s barely paying attention. His mind is whirring, running over the maneuvers Gladio had drilled into him. He takes a beat to assess the situation and formulate his plan, and then he’s moving.

“Oof,” the red-haired one gasps when Prompto drives a sharp, strong elbow back into his abdomen. He then throws his head backward, hitting the boy’s face with enough momentum to cause him to lose his grip on Prompto’s neck.

The other two are beginning to take action, but that’s no matter. Quickly pivoting to face the angry redhead, Prompto delivers a swift kick into his groin, effectively downing him. Here’s my chance.

He takes one step, then two, then breaks out into a run, barrelling towards the fading daylight pouring in from the alley’s exit. He grits his teeth as he charges with all of his energy, determined to escape.

What he hadn’t accounted for, however, was the speed at which the perpetrator’s sidekicks could move.

Prompto’s almost free when he feels a hand close around the back of his shirt, instantaneously cutting off his escape and choking him hard enough to burn. He’s dragged backwards unceremoniously, and thrown onto the rough ground in front of the now-standing ringleader.

“You little shit,” he bites, venom lacing his words albeit being clearly winded. “You really shouldn’t have done that.”

Four hands grab at Prompto’s arms, hauling him up and throwing him back against the concrete wall
hard enough to stun him. The red-haired brute is immediately there, face to face with the dazed blond, breath hot and rancid.

Before Prompto can register the new position he’s in and how to flee from it, the incensed schoolmate is punching at him, knocking the wind out of his lungs. Firm hands keep him upright, pinning him to the wall as the painful jabs come from all directions: against his stomach, his chest, his arms, even his cheekbone - that one had stung particularly, and Prompto felt blood trickle down his face. Each crippling hit is punctuated with a malicious admonishment from the redhead and a sharp cry from Prompto.

A harsh knee into his thigh. Royal bootlicker. A ferocious punch at his stomach. Entitled asshole. Smug little servant he’s been, hasn’t he?

And no matter how hard Prompto struggles, he can’t break free from the torture. It doesn’t help that he’s panicked and mildly disassociating, unable to recall the nuances of Gladio’s lessons.

Remain calm. Twist your arm… down and to the right? I think-? AGH, fuck, that hurt! A-Always aim for the… shit… Think! Aim for the - AGH -

He just can’t think! Everything is happening all at once and his mind is short-circuiting and he feels absolutely powerless. It doesn’t help that a portion of his brain has been chanting Stop touching me! Stop touching me! Stop touching me! ever since the unsavory confrontation began.

An eternity later, the vicious grips on his arm finally release. His battered body drops limply to the ground, where he lays face-down against the dirt and gravel. Prompto struggles to move, to pull himself onto his knees, but the weak attempt is squashed by a swift kick to his ribcage.

He’s forced to lay immobile as the cruel teenagers high-five over him. “This is what happens when you forget your place,” the redhead states simply, wiping his bloodied hands against his jeans.

“Wh… Why,” Prompto barely manages to choke out, coughs wracking him.

“Why?” the taller boy echoes, actually sounding surprised. “You seriously asking me why? Why we’re angry the fuckin’ Lucian monarchy -” he grits his teeth against the words- “ignores every commoner except for when that spoiled brat of a prince decides to befriend one?”

Prompto doesn’t say anything, which only seems to spur the guy on.

“He’s so happy to neglect us otherwise, isn’t he? To ignore the housing crisis, the water problem, the homeless rate that keep on fuckin’ rising,” he continues, and Prompto can picture him frothing at the mouth now. “Oh, but when the situation suits ‘im, suddenly he wants to make nice with one of us. He can’t pick and choose what parts of normal society he wants to acknowledge.”

Prompto wants to argue, to defend Noctis, to throw a sarcastic why don’t you fight him then back into the coward’s face - but he can hardly draw a breath in this state. To make matters worse, his oppressor places a heavy boot against the small of his back, shoving the blond further into the cold, jagged asphalt.

“And you,” he accuses, pressing harder against Prompto’s spine. “You just go along with it! You excuse all the shit he and the goddamn king are letting happen. Fucking prick - you don’t just excuse it, you benefit from it. Bet you’re really enjoying those fancy cars and free meals and endless gifts. Makes me sick. You’d have none of that if you weren’t kiss-ass enough to get his attention. You’re nothing, you got that? Nothing!”

And now Prompto’s actually starting to see his point, which sickens him on an entirely new level,
because he’s right. He’s right. Common, unworthy, tattoo’d scum like him don’t deserve a place next to Noctis. Yet here he’s been, hanging off the crown as if he belongs anywhere near it. Prompto’s completely still now, tears trickling out of the corner of his eyes.

“Worthless,” his tormentor spits, concluding his tirade with a final kick against Prompto’s side. “Next time we’ll go a lot harder on you. I wouldn’t let there be a next time.”

Dimly, he hears the sounds of mocking laughter, ripping paper, and retreating footsteps. And then he’s alone - finally, he’s alone.


He hadn’t even been able to fight them. All those lessons... only to discover he’d just been wasting Gladio’s time. He failed him. And - those bullies were right - he has been benefiting from Noct’s position and wealth. Everything Ignis warned him not to do, and another failure to add to the list. *Worthless.*

An indistinct period of time elapses. His phone pings again. The tears haven’t stopped.

He runs through the redhead’s speech over and over and over again, heart plummeting further with every repetition. Prompto’s shaky illusion of the happy life he’s been living has been utterly shattered, replaced with the bleak reality of truth.

Him and Noct’s worlds are light-years apart. He doesn’t belong anywhere near the royal orbit. His entire existence is a burden, a wet blanket on an esteemed society that is far more important than him. And everyone knows it.

*Ping!*

Prompto doesn’t deserve anything from Noctis because he *isn’t* anything. He’s the lowest of the low - he’s not even Lucian, for Shiva’s sake. He’s weak, and untalented, and boring, and hideously fat. What had he been thinking, parading around the goddamn prince like that?

The gravelly asphalt is thoroughly soaked under his cheek now, a mixture of tears and blood. He tries to move, but his legs scream at him, dozens of contact points throbbing at the effort.

*Ping!*

Shit. He hadn’t texted Noctis to tell him he got home. Fear courses through him at the thought of the prince finding him here - like this - and gives him enough adrenaline to grab at his phone and roll onto his back, ignoring the short stabs of pain. *NOCTIS [6:23 PM]: home af*

*NOCTIS [6:39 PM]: don’t tell me you’re too distracted by that magazine to text me >:(*
Prompto glances about him and spots said magazine crumpled a few feet away, glossy pages torn to shreds. Good. He doesn’t deserve it.

NOCTIS [6:51 PM]: prom? you’re back right?

NOCTIS [7:12 PM]: I’m going looking now… stay put

Oh fuck. Prompto’s fingers fly over the screen, every muscle in his body protesting, hoping against all hope Noctis hadn’t gone too far.

PROMPTO [7:13 PM]: sorry. i’m back. got distracted.

A tense minute passes, and Prompto’s eyes stay glued to the three dots indicating Noct’s typing, hands straining with the effort of holding up the small device.

NOCTIS [7:14 PM]: dummy. don’t wait that long again, ok?

Thank gods.

He sends a quick emoji in response and drops the phone against his chest, sighing and finally allowing himself to breathe. That was a close one.

A few minutes pass, Noctis texts again - about food, of all things - and Prompto deftly extracts himself from the conversation. He can’t handle it right now, can’t handle anything. He needs to get away from this place.

Slowly peeling his exhausted body off the ground, Prompto limps for home.

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It’s an odd sensation, waking up with a slew of physical injuries.

Prompto groans as he regains consciousness the next morning, his entire body aching even if he lays perfectly still. As soft morning light dapples in through the curtains, he finally takes inventory of his mottled form.

It’s a sorry sight. His abdomen is littered with blue-black bruises, the most notable being a particularly large, purple-tinted one on his left side. His arms are decorated in a similar way, right forearm sporting an especially long, splotchy discoloration from elbow to wrist. His thighs follow suit - which he’s used to seeing, but those are usually self-inflicted.

He reaches for his phone, ignores the new messages from Noctis, and pulls up his front camera. Fingerprint-shaped bruises mark his neck, and an angry, circular red mark swells on his right cheekbone. He looks like hell, to put it lightly.

Damnit.

That day, he doesn’t do much. He takes a shower until the hot water runs out. He stares at the wall and sobs. He doesn’t answer anything Noctis sends him - a request to hang out, a picture of Gladio’s
dog, a candid of Ignis cooking a pastry, and finally - a slightly dejected okay, i’ll leave you alone.

Prompto feels horrible, but. He just can’t answer him. Can’t be his friend anymore. Noctis doesn’t deserve to deal with him: he’s a failure, a mess of hang-ups, an absolute aberration and incredibly worthless in comparison to skinny, pretty, successful royalty. He was never meant to be his friend in the first place. Noctis probably never liked him, in that case. Probably thought of him as an amusing side-project. A charity friendship.

And, given the way his body currently feels like it’s being run over by an eighteen-wheeler, Prompto really wants to avoid a repeat occurrence of the previous night.

His thoughts spiral and spiral and spiral until he finds himself on the website for his favorite pizza chain, placing an order for a large deep-dish with barbeque sauce, chickatrice, and onion. Fuck it, right? Why did he even have to care about his appearance now that he couldn’t be Noct’s friend?

Impulsively, he adds chickatrice wings, a liter of soda, cinnamon bites, and a small chocolate cake to the order. He’s shopping with his eyes now, suddenly feeling like he’s never been so hungry in his entire life, not even when he was on day twenty-six of fasting. He just wants to eat and eat and eat and eat and eat.

The binge is mindless and harried and over within a half-hour, consumed entirely in front of a forgettable sitcom Prompto had watched with glazed eyes. It’s strange, binging for the first time in months. It’s familiar, and makes him feel strangely safe. It also makes him want to slice open his stomach and watch the entirety of the meal pour out of him.

He hates feeling that painful fullness again, though. It makes every position uncomfortable, makes him wish he was capable of puking.

He presses against his bruises, making them throb and causing him to gasp. Harder. He’s presses with all of his strength, and he’s groaning audibly now, but fuck - he deserves this, he does, because he fucking - he binged, he’s disgusting, he can’t do a single thing right, his stomach is full and his fat is drowning him and he’s unworthy of even being looked at, he’s an affront to people everywhere he’s so offensively disgusting in his appearance and Noctis probably hates him and people definitely make fun of him behind his back and the pizza delivery driver was totally smiling in a judgmental way and assuredly went to go laugh in his car after and fucking shit, he hates himself he hates himself he hates himself he hates himself he hates himself he hates himself he hates himself - ---

He goes back to sleep.

---

Sunday passes in a haze. Prompto takes multiple naps and ignores Noct’s one attempt to text him. He fasts on accident, stomach full enough from the previous day to carry him through comfortably. He thinks he might’ve watched a movie at some point, but he can’t recall specifics. The empty boxes from the binge grate at him, so he burns them in the fireplace. His bruises ache, and only grow deeper in color.
Prompto skips school on Monday. Noctis calls him in the morning, after homeroom, and he doesn’t answer. It hurts to do so, but he can’t. He can’t possibly face the prince, not feeling the way he does.

Noctis tries again at lunch time. And then again in the passing period between the last two classes.

As Prompto’s phone rings for the fourth time - now after school - he figures the repercussions of his silence may end up biting him in the ass. The last thing he wants is Noctis coming around to his place to check on him. No, better to end this now.

A violently shaking finger swipes across the glass screen, accepting the call.

“PROMPTO!” Noctis yells immediately, staticky and concerned.

Prompto bites his lip, nerves firing cold fear across his skin. This is going to be difficult. “H… Hey…”

“Wherewereyoutoday?” comes the immediate response. “And why have you been ignoring me? Did something happen?”

Shit, he sounds wounded, and Prompto can’t imagine why, so he assumes his brain is simply hearing what it wants to hear. He swallows around the thick lump in his throat, mentally steeling himself for what he has to do.

“Um, no. I… I um.”

“What is it?”

Prompto gulps. “I. I don’t think we should be friends anymore. Y-your highness.”

“HIGHNESS?” And Noct’s voice is so piercing that Prompto squeaks and has to move the phone away from his ear, arm smarting with the motion. “What the fuck, dude? Is this about status or something? Are you… embarrassed to be around me? Or did I do something to you? Please, Prompto, what’s going on? I’m really sorry, whatever it is. Just. Please tell me.”

“It’s not you,” Prompto chokes, voice wobbly. “It’s just… It’s just better this way, trust me. Goodbye.”

He hangs up before Noctis can respond, tears flowing freely down his cheeks and chest heaving with his sobs.

There. He’ll never have to burden Noctis again.

A half hour passes in relative silence. Prompto isn’t up to doing much but curling into the crook of his sofa, staring blankly at the world going by his window. It lulls him into a meditative calm, which is harshly interrupted with three quick raps at his front door.

“I know you’re in there. Open,” comes an irate, accented voice. Ignis?

Prompto doesn’t know what to do, so he does nothing. A tense moment elapses.

“Let me put it this way,” Ignis begins again, and yeah, that muffled and disembodied voice is definitely angry. “If you do not open this door, you will have the Citadel’s finest kingsglaive breaking it off its gods-forsaken hinges within the next fifteen minutes.”
Prompto’s blood runs cold, and he realizes that - yet again - he’s trapped. “Give me a minute,” he calls back, nervous. “I’m not decent.”

“Very well.” Curt and short.

He limps into his room as fast as possible, studying his reflection in his full-length mirror with a critical eye. Damnit, he looks bad still - even worse than before, somehow.

No matter. Prompto swaps his sleeping T-shirt for the first long-sleeved one he finds, a bit oversized on him. He covers his boxer-clad legs with plaid pajama pants, hissing at the bending motions required of the movement. A navy-blue scarf wraps around his neck lightly, and at this point Prompto is really hoping Ignis doesn’t question the strange ensemble.

That just leaves the ugly red-and-yellow mark on his cheekbone, which Prompto proceeds to panic about. He doesn’t have any sort of foundation or concealer, nor is it particularly in-vogue to shove a beanie so far down it covers half his face. His eyes scan his desk frantically, until they land on a hasty solution.

A dumb, complimentary sticker sheet from the UofA meeting he’d been forced to go to. The biggest one is a sunflower, of all things, with the college’s initials proudly on display in the center. Good enough. He peels it off, sticks it over the bruise, tries to ignore how ludicrous he looks, and rushes to greet Ignis.

When he finally cracks open the door, the green-eyed advisor gives his appearance nothing more than an appraising glance, expression furious.

“Sit,” Ignis commands, stepping inside and pointing at Prompto’s sofa as if he owns the place.

The ice in his voice is enough to make even the strongest will bend, though. Prompto obediently ambles over, attempting to disguise his hobbling, and sits gingerly.

“I do not even know where to begin with you,” Ignis fumes, pacing in front of the subdued blond. “Within the span of three days, you’ve managed to cause extensive emotional damage to my charge and completely violate my trust in you.”

Prompto bites his wobbling lip, focuses on the spot between his feet on the floor. He didn’t know Ignis trusted him. Had trusted him. “I-”

“Tell me Prompto, what daemonic force spurred you into acting this way?” Ignis cuts in, abrupt and fiery. “Because I see absolutely no shred of human decency behind your actions. So what, for Astral’s sake, were you thinking?”

Prompto hangs his head lower, heart sinking into the heels of his feet. He can’t win, can he? He always fucks up, no matter how hard he tries to do the right thing. His face sinks into his scarf until only his eyes are poking out, dewy with unshed tears.

“Or does some part of your confused mind simply think this is an appropriate way to treat anyone, let alone the Crown Prince? Do you at all understand how you’ve affected Noctis? Do you realize your actions have consequences? Or are these concepts simply too far beyond you?”

And that - that - is what sets Prompto off crying. Not dramatically, at least - just small hiccups that incite a deep, weary sigh from Ignis.

Embarrassed, his hand flies to scrub at his eyes. The motion, however, is too swift - just enough to cause his oversized sleeve to slip down gently.
Ignis draws in a breath, and Prompto prepares himself for more of the scathing lecture. But it never comes.

“Prompto. What is that?” Ignis says instead, all traces of ire eradicated.

And Prompto knits his eyebrows, looks up, and follows the advisor’s line of sight directly to the inky, expansive bruise on his now-exposed forearm.

Oh.

Shit.

Chapter End Notes

tumblr tumblr tumblr

thank you everyone, as always, for your kudos and comments, which inspire me onward like nothing else can. and i really, really appreciate all the amazing people who leave such lovely, beautiful reviews. i read them all like 12 times over, seriously. thank you, thank you, thank you for reading.
A Sorry Sight

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Our angel got beat up and cut things off with Noctis. Angst Town 2k17

Chapter Notes

1 like = 1 prayer for TheRegalHarvester (she's sick) :(  
this past week has absolutely murdered me (and next week will probably be worse) but!  
the show must go on! sooo, without further adieu, enjoy the Longest Chapter Yet™ !!

TW - mention of the q-word in the context of a slur

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Astrals, I do not get paid enough for this.

Ignis lets a long, heavy sigh escape as he takes in the absolute mayhem of Noct’s apartment. The job ahead of him is probably going to take two, possibly three hours, everything is so disorderly. Though a distant part of him is mildly impressed that the prince was able to cause such utter chaos within the span of only three days. Maybe Ignis should start working weekends, to avoid this build-up in the first place.

Come now, he chides himself. He recognizes he’s being unnecessarily harsh, because it isn’t as if Noctis created all of this extra work out of anger or entitlement. Ignis knows better.

He reaches for his phone after throwing one last glance at the bedlam, mentally preparing the order in which he would tackle it. First things first, however -

IGNIS [11:19 AM]: He’s going through another depressive episode.

GLADIO [11:21 AM]: on it. I’ll pick him up today, you handle the apartment.


A few hours later, Ignis is wiping the sweat from his brow and allowing himself a small, self-satisfied smile as he takes in his handiwork: spotless and beautiful.

He’s just through organizing the TV media center when sounds of the front door violently swinging
open grab his attention. Ignis straightens, and turns to acknowledge his prince. Predictably, that prince keeps his eyes trained on the floor, makes a beeline for his room, and shuts himself in it.

“It’s bad,” Gladio sighs, removing his shoes at the entryway and trailing inside after him.

“Appears so.” Ignis pauses for a few minutes as he puts the finishing touches on his work, and waits for the telltale sound of light snoring to escape from Noct’s room. “And he’s been napping more frequently than usual, which is quite the feat, all things considered.”

“Oh?” Gladio calls from the kitchen, apple in hand.

“Yes,” Ignis sighs, running a hand through his hair in self-admonishment, now. “On Saturday, he came over to do his homework and fell asleep twice, and was being quite curt with me. Yet, I brushed it off. Hindsight really is twenty-twenty, isn’t it? I should have noticed the signs earlier.”

“Hey,” Gladio interjects. “Don’t be so hard on yourself, ‘cause I didn’t notice either. Kid was… difficult at his weekend training, but I just thought he was bein’ a dick for no reason.”

Ignis laughs shortly at that, but is composed a moment later. “Now, we just need to figure out why.”

He moves to prepare cups of tea for the two as Gladio settles in on the couch. A few minutes later, both men are contemplatively sipping at their drinks and going over mental timelines, trying to pinpoint what went wrong. They knew full well, however, that nothing concrete needed to have necessarily happened, which made their guessing game that much more complex.

Gladio takes a big, obnoxious bite from his apple. “I got nothing.”

Ignis nods. “Nor do I. Which leads me to believe we weren’t there for it - whatever it was.”

“How? We’re around him all the time,” Gladio snorts.

Ignis taps his chin. “Not all the time. Friday, for instance…”

The two look at each other simultaneously, understanding painting both their faces.

“Prompto,” they sigh, in unison.

“But it looked like they had a lot of fun,” Gladio frowns. “Y’think they had a fight or something? After?”

“It’s possible. Though we’ll have no idea until Noct tells us, which I fear won’t happen anytime soon.”

A few more minutes pass in silence, and then the pair spend a decent span of time spitting ideas at each other. Nothing seems to be adding up - how could someone as happy and kindhearted as Prompto do deliberate damage to Noctis?

“Maybe Noct confessed,” Gladio mumbles. “And it didn’t go so well.”

“No.” Ignis says, putting a halt to that train of thought quickly. “No. He’s only vaguely aware of what he’s feeling, that much is obvious. He couldn’t have, not yet.”

“Guess you’re right,” Gladio concedes. “Can’t confess what ya don’t-”

“HIGHNESS?” Comes a distinct yell from Noct’s bedroom, and the two only spare each other a glance before jumping up and moving closer, ears nearly pressed against the door. “-dude? Is this
about status or something? Are you… embarrassed to be around me? Or did I do something to you? Please, Prompto, what’s going on? I’m really sorry, whatever it is. Just. Please tell me.”

A pause. And then: “Wait-!”

Silence.

Ignis is about to pull away, uninterested in the possibility of Noctis opening the door and discovering them eavesdropping. But more sound catches his attention as he turns, and stops him cold:

Small, hiccuping gasps. Short sniffs. Haggard, audible intakes of breath.

Noctis is crying.

“I’m going over there,” Ignis grits through clenched teeth, quickly moving to gather his keys and jacket. “You take care of his lunch.”

“Yes,” Ignis snaps. “I’m not sure why, but it’s clear what happened. And it’s my job to take care of that what.”

“Damn, okay,” Gladio gives in, hands thrown up. “Just go easy on the kid, yeah?”

“No promises,” Ignis responds curtly, disappearing out the front door with a slam.

Noctis lays curled up in bed for a long time after the call, mind nearly collapsing in on itself as hundreds of self-criticisms wriggle their way in. Everything he’s been working so hard to ignore is forcing itself to the front of his consciousness, revelations pouring out of the recesses like a dam bursting.

He doesn’t want to be my friend anymore, and there’s only one thing that happened between Friday and today.

His mind runs over the memories he’d been previously treasuring, over and over and over. How he came on too strong. How he practically forced Prompto to hold him, how he spent the majority of their points on Prompto’s magazine, how he’d said goodbye with that soft fondness he hadn’t been able to keep out of his voice.

He hates me because he knows about me. He knows. He knows he knows he knows he knows and he’s fucking disgusted - and -

Noctis clenches his hands against the blanket harder, knuckles and finger-pads white, taut. The tears keep coming and fuck, he couldn’t stop them if he tried.

Queer.

He gasps audibly, as if the word hurts him physically.

Queer! Queer! Queer! I’m a fucking queer! And it’s wrong! And now he doesn’t want to be my
friend anymore! And I deserve it! I’m repulsive, offensive… I’m… I’m everything a prince shouldn’t be! Why do I even exist!

He’s ugly-crying now, face buried in his pillow and feeling like he wants to launch himself off the Citadel and ‘forget’ to warp-strike to safety. But all he can do is exist, snotty and tearful and angry at himself as everything he’s buried comes rushing to the surface.

Because the fact of the matter is - Noctis isn’t straight.

And Noctis is the one person in the entire world who isn’t allowed to be deviant in his preferences.

And Noctis likes Prompto.

What a fucking stereotype, right? The gay friend creeping out his straight friend - his sexuality ruining everything.

He bites down on his fist so as not to start screaming, though he’s sure Ignis and Gladio have heard him weeping by now anyway. He doesn’t care.

He pictures his father, pictures his trademark disappointed look - scaled up by a thousand. He pictures getting yelled at, and eventually being disowned.

The king would probably sire another offspring, and continue the line with someone respectable and heterosexual. Noctis would probably be banished to some anonymous town on the outskirts of Lucis, given just enough to survive and nothing more.

A proper outcome for a defective prince.

In a way, he should be grateful Prompto ended this for him, because Astrals know he’s too enamored to have done so himself. It did hurt - it hurt like nothing has ever hurt Noctis before, but. It’d probably blow over. Right?

Don’t kid yourself.

Noctis wipes at his cheeks, forcing himself to calm down. Well. At least, with no more Prompto, there’s no more of those feelings. No more disappointment. He could hide himself from his father, from Ignis, from Gladio, from everyone he knew. He could just go on pretending - it’s not as if he hates women, anyway. He can be straight-passing enough to get by.

He’ll just have to hope Prompto never says anything, though he doubts he will. After all, the blond did do him a kindness by gently nipping things in the bud instead of reporting him to the king.

Resolution in mind, Noctis takes another ten minutes to calm completely and let his eyes dry. Eventually, the smell of sodium and processed food seeps into his room, and his stomach clenches in response, so he tentatively gets up and wanders towards the kitchen.

“‘Morning, Sleeping Beauty,” Gladio teases from the stove, hovering above a pot of three different cup noodles combined. “Though I gotta give you some credit - you didn’t even nap for half an hour.”

“Yeah, about that.” Gladio rummages around in the fridge, pulls out a pack of tortillas, and sighs deeply before beginning. “Look, kid. Iggy and I know something’s up with you and Prompto. He
went over to his apartment to knock some sense into him. Or something. I dunno the details.”

“What?” Noctis yells, springing up quickly. “Gladio, call him and tell him to stop! Please! Or I’ll just - where’s my phone -”

“Hey, hey,” Gladio soothes, moving over and placing a hand down firmly on Noct’s shoulder. “First - there’s no stopping him; guy looked like he was out for blood. But don’t worry, okay? He’s not gonna go prying into the details of your personal life.”

Slowly, Noctis slumps back down, mentally exhausted to the extreme. “Fine, whatever. I guess don’t have a say in the matter anyway.”

Gladio frowns, but doesn’t refute the statement. “I’m making us my special ramen burritos,” he digresses instead, back at the stove. “Iggy probably wanted me to feed you something healthy. So, this is our little secret, okay? But if he asks, we’re carb-loading to feed our muscles and ‘get gains.’” He winks conspiratorially.

Noctis offers a half-smile. “Okay. Thanks, Gladio.”

Seven minutes and half a burrito later, Gladio’s phone rings, the noise shrill and piercing in the comfortable silence between the two.

“Ignis,” Gladio announces.

“Put it on speaker.”

A moment later, Ignis’s voice is echoing through the room, slightly breathless: “Gladio, bring Noctis and come to Prompto’s apartment right away.”

“No need to do that!” Prompto cuts over him, sounding panicked.

Noctis starts a little at the sound of it, raw fear causing his heart to thud heavily against his sternum. The thought of seeing Prompto right now makes him feel sickeningly vulnerable; he can’t take the idea of those brilliant blue eyes fixating on him with understanding.

“I think we should leave him alone,” Noctis blurts before Gladio can respond. “He clearly doesn’t want to be around m-”

“Noct, I frankly don’t have the time for the self-deprecation spiel,” Ignis intervenes, curt. In the background, Noctis can hear sounds of a struggle. “Prompto is injured. I can’t keep him from escaping too long - and not because I’m physically incapable, but because it feels morally wrong to watch him hurt himself in his attempts to flee.”

Noctis gapes at the phone. Gladio chokes a bit on his burrito.

“So kindly get yourselves over here, and quickly. Gladio, bring the first aid kit - it’s in the cabinet above the microwave.” With that, he hangs up.

Gladio and Noctis exchange a look for a fraction of a second, and then spring into action.

The sickening feeling increases each block they get closer to Prompto’s. By the time Gladio is
backing his Jeep into a spot, perfectly parallel to the curb, Noctis feels like he’s about to throw up.

“I’m scared to see him,” Noctis whispers before Gladio can step out. He’s loathe to admit it, but at present, he’s more terrified of Prompto than owning up to weakness.

Gladio nods, places a hand on his shoulder. “It’s okay to be scared,” he soothes, voice low. “I would be too. But that kid needs you right now - and if any of my hunches are correct, I’d say you misinterpreted this situation. I’m 99% sure this fight, or whatever’s goin’ on, has nothing to do with you.”

“Only 99%?” Noctis jokes in return, spirits lifting slightly.

“No guarantees in life,” Gladio smiles in response. “Now come on, go help your friend.”

Noctis nods, and steps out carefully. The two take the elevator to the second floor, and soon Noctis finds himself shaking slightly in front of Prompto’s front door, hand raised to knock.

“Come in!” Ignis calls, harried.

One last look exchanged with Gladio, and Noctis is pushing the door open tentatively. The sight he’s greeted with is enough to make his heart race in fear, worry, and helplessness.

Ignis had evidently managed to wrestle Prompto face-down on the couch, arms twisted and held behind his back. The advisor looks guilty from his seated perch next to the blond, and is clearly trying to be careful, but it’s evident from Prompto’s expression that he’s in a lot of pain. And from the way he’s struggling, he’s only causing himself further damage.

Noctis moves quickly, all traces of fear melting at the sight. “What are you doing?” He shouts, running to kneel down next to Prompto’s head.

“He was trying to escape,” Ignis explains, exasperated.

Noctis turns to look at Prompto, ignores the heat disappearing from his fingertips when he makes eye contact with the downed boy. He looks a like a wounded lamb - the very picture of marred innocence.

“What?” Ignis asks.

“H-Hey, Noct.” Prompto stills his squirming for a moment, but has trouble maintaining eye contact. “I-I’m fine, so you can just go, really…”

“Bullshit,” Gladio accuses, caught up to the scene and surveying Prompto’s exposed forearms.

Noctis follows the shield’s line of sight, hisses audibly at the sight of expansive, blue-black bruises decorating pale skin. “Holy shit, Prom, what happened?”

Prompto merely bites his lip lieu of a reply, and Noctis has to stop himself from screaming because Gods, the kid looks so utterly despondent.

It’s as if Noct’s personal sun has imploded.

Ignis sighs, slackens his grip a little more. “I am going to let you up now, Prompto. I hope the presence of three professional combatants is enough to communicate that running isn’t an option. Please don’t try it anyway, I’m not fond of hurting you.”

Prompto deflates, nodding defeatedly. After a beat, Ignis lets go, hands still hovering in case the boy tries to make a break for it.
But he doesn’t. He merely pushes himself up gingerly, features contorted with the effort, and sits back against the plush cotton of his couch. He then rubs at his upper arms carefully, which causes a guilty look to flicker over Ignis’s features.

Noctis jumps up to the couch, sits facing him. “Prompto,” he starts, “Who did this to you?”

“No one,” the blond replies, too hasty. “I fell.”

“Bullshit,” Gladio accuses again, completing the protective triangle from his seat on the coffee table in front of them.

Prompto ducks his head, eyes fixated on his kneecaps. “Fine, it is bullshit. But still. I… I can’t tell you.”

“If you’re worried about retribution,” Ignis says softly, “Just remember you’ve got the entire Citadel on your side.”

“That surprises Prompto, evidently, given the way his head whips up to face the advisor and his mouth falls open. “The… the Citadel?”

“Of course,” Noctis answers, frustrated now. “What, you thought we wouldn’t protect you? You’re my friend, Prompto - you’re entitled to that.”

For some reason, it’s the wrong thing to have said, because Prompto’s expression immediately sours. “No I’m not,” he mumbles, gaze remaining downcast. “I can’t take advantage of you like that. I don’t… I don’t deserve it.”

“What?” Noctis gapes, open-mouthed. “Prom, I really need you to backtrack here. What the fuck happened?”

Prompto sighs, and something in him seems to shift, because the story starts tumbling out like a waterfall: “It was on my way home, after the arcade. These guys, well. They’ve kinda been harassing me since school started?” Noctis opens his mouth to speak, but Prompto cuts him off quickly. “I know, I know. I didn’t tell you. I’m sorry. But anyway, they cornered me in an alley, and they…”

Prompto shrugs there, holds out his forearms as if to explain.

“Hold on,” Ignis commands. “Prompto, before you continue, I really need to address those injuries. Gladio, hand me the kit.”

“Yep,” Gladio says, passing the equipment over.

“Thank you. Now, if you could remove your shirt,” Ignis requests matter-of-factly, causing Noctis to blush and Prompto to cringe bodily.

“Nah, I’m good…”

Ignis frowns at that. “Don’t force me to-”

“Please don’t,” Prompto insists, voice tiny and hushed. His eyes look markedly wetter, still downcast and ashamed. “Please.”

Noctis is confused, but Ignis seems to have some modicum of understanding, because he merely purses his lips and drops the argument. “Very well. If you would at least push up your sleeves and
remove your scarf?”

Prompto obeys, rolling up the large sleeves to his shoulders, careful and slow. All three observers gasp and frown deeply at each revealed bruise, horrifically dark and widespread. He then carefully peels back the sunflower sticker on his face, exposing a poorly-treated impact wound. Noctis feels sick all over again.

And then - and then - Prompto is removing the scarf, and there are choke marks on his neck, and Noctis sees red.

“I’ll kill them,” he snarls, hands balling into fists at his sides.

“Noct, be reasonable,” Ignis cautions, anger clouding his voice as well. “They’ll have their due trial. And then you’ll kill them.”

The pair exchange a wan smile over Prompto - whose lips have quirked upward a little too, now. Internally, Noctis feels grateful for that shift in atmosphere, because it at least makes this tragedy a bit more addressable.

Ignis then gets to work, pulling supplies out and treating each injury carefully.

“Go on?” Noctis asks gently.

“Okay,” Prompto acquiesces, eyes scrunching up in pain when Ignis dabs at his cheekbone with rubbing alcohol. “Um, so. They did that. And then they… they told me I deserved it. Because someone as common as me dared to talk to royalty. And take advantage of you.”

“Those assholes,” Noctis growls, to which Prompto perks up in response.

“No, don’t you see?” the blond insists. “They were right. What place does someone like me have at your side? I’m nothing. And I have been taking advantage of you, Noct. You buy me things and I get to eat Ignis’s five-star cooking all the time and I get special treatment from everyone now and - and I shouldn’t have any of that.” He turns to face Ignis now, breath hitching. “I’m sorry Iggy. You warned me not to use him but I guess I did anyway, and I’m… I’m so sorry. I’m so, so sorry.”

“Prom-”

“And Gladio,” he continues, voice wobbling. “I swear I tried to fight them, I did, but I couldn’t do anything. I. I couldn’t think. So. I’m sorry I wasted your time with those lessons. I’m useless.” Prompto wipes at his eye, turns again to face Noctis. “You shouldn’t be my friend, Noct. I’m not good enough for you. So just… go, and I’ll never burden you again. I promise.”

Noctis feels like he’s been hit with a train. You fucking idiot! he’s screaming at himself. He isn’t disgusted by you at all - he probably doesn’t have a single damn clue! Next time can you not just think about how YOU feel? This entire time he was in pain!

There’s a long silence, with only Prompto’s slight sniffing to break it. Even Ignis pauses in his ministrations.

Gladio speaks first. “Kid, if you think a few lessons are enough to teach someone how to react in the real world, you’re dead wrong.” He shakes his head. “People need a lot more than basic technique training, blondie.”

“But-”
“You haven’t wasted my time, got that? I’m just sorry this happened to you,” Gladio concludes, expression uncharacteristically soft.

“And,” Ignis picks up on the conversational thread. “If you thinking eating my food and getting a few gifts is taking advantage of Noct, then I truly have nothing to worry about from you.”

“But it is.”

“It isn’t. Taking advantage would be using the prince’s position and power for your own personal gain,” Ignis explains. “Or perhaps even in trying to influence the law. You’ve done none of that. You’ve only been a good friend, Prompto, and your actions in this unfortunate affair makes that all the more evident.”

Prompto bites his wobbling lip. “Really?”

“Really.” Ignis smiles, kind. “You have my absolute trust. I apologize for jumping to conclusions, and failing to instruct you on the proper procedure when it comes to threats involving royalty. We’ll fix that mistake,” he promises, with a wink. And then abruptly goes back to tending Prompto’s upper arm, because the advisor is never able to stay vulnerable for very long.

Before Prompto can react to that, Noctis cuts in, and even dares to grab Prompto’s hand in his earnestness. “And Prom,” he starts, eyes pleading. “You definitely belong at my side, okay? Don’t ever say you’re ‘nothing’ again. You really, really aren’t.” You’re everything to me.

And evidently, this is all too much for the overwhelmed boy, because silent tears begin to spill over those characteristic red eyelids. But he’s smiling - he’s actually smiling - and Shiva, maybe everything will be okay after all. Noctis feels like he’s released a breath he’d been holding for days.

“We’re good?” he whispers, fingers still wrapped around Prompto’s.

Prompto nods. “Yeah. Sorry, for-”

And Noctis shuts him up with a tight hug. “Don’t be,” he sighs, offering a gentle squeeze. Prompto squeezes back, curling into Noct’s arms.

Gladio clears his throat, startling the prince and causing him to withdraw from the warm embrace. “Now that that’s settled,” he begins, “You wanna tell us those fuckers’ names?”

Prompto shrinks in on himself, inciting a tut and a ‘hold still’ from Ignis. “I… don’t know them, actually. They’re in my Chemistry class.”

Gladio nods. “Well, we can pull up school records and you’ll just point out their ugly mugs. Right, Iggy?”

“Yes,” Ignis confirms, massaging at the areas around Prompto’s bruises to increase blood flow. “They’ll be answering to the crown.”

“Then they’re just going to come after me again,” Prompto mumbles, and what shocks Noctis most is how blasé and accepting he sounds about that outcome. “Well. Guess they were gonna do that anyway, seeing as we’re still friends.”

“Wait,” Noctis says, mind whirring. “You think you’re gonna get beaten up again, and you still want to be my friend?”

Everyone stills, and Prompto looks more confused than anything. “Yes…”
Unexpectedly, Ignis laughs, short and hysterical-sounding. “Prompto, my entire life I’ve been around the finest warriors, councilmen, and politicians Lucis has to offer,” he remarks, “and I have yet to see someone as stubbornly loyal as you are.”

“Ya got that right,” Gladio joins in, laughing too now. “Kid, there’ll be no second beating. In fact, those fucks’ll be lucky if they even get to stay in Insomnia.”

Prompto’s looking hesitantly hopeful, now. “But. What if—”

“No ifs,” Gladio butts in. “You’ll never see them again, capische? And if it makes you feel safer, I can teach you offensive training. Real shit.”

And Prompto’s grinning widely at that, and Noctis feels his heart stuttering. “Okay! Yes!”

And his eagerness is so catching that it has everyone laughing, and Noct’s heart feels fluttery, because he’s finally got his sunshine back.

Prompto returns to school the next day. By that time, his oppressors have mysteriously disappeared, never to be heard from again. Noctis brings him a box of Ignis’s famous chickatrice rice for lunch, and sends warning glares towards anyone who gapes at Prompto’s injuries.

And Noctis realizes that he’s lucky, in the end, that the whole affair had nothing to do with his sexuality. Still, he needed that scare, that forced confrontation with his own repressed thoughts.

He decides to stay firmly in the closet and keep all of his newfound revelations to himself. Forever. It’ll be okay; he likes his closet - it’s safe in there. Fancy, too. Has all the latest consoles and a sushi bar.

He’ll hide his identity, quietly get over his stupid crush, marry some woman, and no one will ever know about this shameful period in his life. He’ll be fine.

He has to be.

Two days later, Noctis is crouching behind his sofa in the dark, doing his very best to stifle his nervous giggles.

“Shh,” Gladio flits, waving a hand at him from his own position next to the coffee table.

Ignis merely fixes the two with an amused look, goes to duck behind the kitchen counter.

A tense minute elapses, and then - the slight turning sounds of the front doorknob, and lights being flicked on after a beat.

“Surprise!” the three friends yell, springing up from their hiding spots and causing Prompto to jump a foot in turn.
“What-”

“Happy Birthday!” Noctis grins, hurrying up to the bewildered boy and ushering him in by the small of his back, chanting: “Eighteen! Eighteen! Eighteen!”


Prompto’s simply looking rapidly between the two, wide-eyed and mouth agape.

“Happy birthday,” Ignis smiles then, bringing in the decadent chocolate cake he’d made earlier that day - Prompto’s favorite. “May you have many more to come.”

“Guys,” Prompto starts, voice stilted and emotional. “Y-you… You didn’t have to-”

“Course we did,” Noctis grins, swiping some icing with his finger despite Ignis’s warning glare.

Prompto’s blushing deeply now, but his smile is as wide as the ocean. “I. Wow. No one has ever… done something like this for me before. Ever.”

And then he’s swiping his own lick of icing, laughing, bouncing on his heels, and shouting thank you thank you thank you! over and over again.

And everyone proceeds to celebrate, and Prompto gets cake all over his nose, and Ignis offers amusingly sage advice, and Gladio finally gives in and plays Street Fighter, and Noctis gifts him an entire year’s worth of the destroyed magazine, and everything discordant in the world seems as if its been slotted neatly back into place.

Chapter End Notes

you didn't think I'd forget about what day it is, did you?? ;-) happy birthday to our sunlight <3
i love you guys, & hope you all have great days today :))

let me know what ya thought? and chill out with me on Tumblr!
Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
The boys show up at Prompto's to comfort and reassure the poor beaten kid. Also, it was his birthday. Hurray!

Chapter Notes

\ HAPPY HALLOWEEN!! //</br>
enjoy this chapter - one day early! it is my spooky gift for you all! i'm so hecking giddy oh my god!! thank you to my beta TheRegalHarvester as always!! also,, that episode ignis trailer am i right,,,,,,,,,,

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So the girl’s been sittin’ alone in the car for half an hour, right? And she keeps hearing this tapping noise, but she knows she’s supposed to stay in there…”

“Yeah…?”

“But its been so long since her boyfriend left, and she’s so nervous, and there’s something hitting the top of her car. So she opens the door…”

“And?”

“An’ she looks up... up at the tree she’s parked next to… and she sees…”

“What? What does she see?”

“The boyfriend’s hanging body!” Noctis shouts, suddenly popping up from the floor.

“AHHH!” Prompto screams, scuttling back on the couch as Noctis and Gladio burst into loud guffaws. “You assholes! You didn’t say there’d be jump-scares!”

“Sorry, kid,” Gladio heaves, wiping tears from his eyes. “Shiva’s tits, you shoulda seen your face!”

Noct’s features twists into a contortion of surprise and shock, mocking what he’d seen from Prompto moments before. This sets the pair off laughing again, and Noctis is actually doubled over from the exertion.


“I’ll be waiting,” Gladio smirks, flexing his muscles for effect. Prompto rolls his eyes again.
He settles back into the couch, surveying the scene. It’s after school on Halloween, and everyone is gathered at Noct’s apartment, lazing about and waiting for the day’s activities to begin. Prompto’s personal tormentors/dear friends have been trying (and succeeding) to scare him for the past half hour, and Ignis has been pattering about in the kitchen, whipping together something ‘special’.

“If you three are quite finished harassing each other?” Ignis says then, stepping into Noct’s living room with a tray balanced in his hands. “I’ve prepared us… Rice Krispie Treats.” The words are stilted, pained.

“Hell yeah!” Noctis crows, pumping his fist in the air. “Nice job, Iggy! You should take my suggestions more often!”

“It was not a suggestion that I took,” Ignis snaps, setting the tray down with a bit more force than necessary. “This is a one-time, holiday gift. I take no pride in this. Understood?”

“Right, no pride whatsoever.” Gladio grins, reaching towards the treats. “That’s why you dyed them orange and shaped them into pumpkins.”

There’s silence for a moment, and then the three boys can no longer keep their scrunched-up smiles in, and burst into laughter again. After a beat, Ignis joins in.

“Far be it from me to not get into the ‘spirit’, so to speak,” Ignis chuckles, sitting down next to Prompto. “And I suppose the little buggers are tasty, though far from artisanal.”

“Now you’re getting it,” Noctis throws a thumbs up, bites off a mouthful of the marshmallow-and-rice concoction.

The three continue their bantering, but it goes in one of Prompto’s ears and out the other, because now he’s concentrating hard on the spread in front of him.

Okay. One of these bars is usually 90, but he shaped it, so. No idea how many grams that is. Cool, cool. Great. Uh. Go for the smallest one, call it 120. If Noctis eats two, you eat two.

He can do this. He’s got a plan. Now he just has to reach out, take one, and act naturally.

But Prompto hesitates, his arm rising a half-inch and then falling again.

Because he knows how badly he’s been eating, lately. There was that binge, two Saturdays ago. And the box of chickatrice rice Noctis brought him a few days after. And that chocolate cake, for his birthday.

And now it’s Tuesday, and it’s Halloween, and he’s spending the entire day with Noctis, and everything about this holiday screams sugar, and he’s scared.

“They won’t pop out at you, too,” Gladio teases, snapping Prompto out of his reverie.

“Shut up. I’m just deciding on the best one,” Prompto grins, reaching for a smaller-looking pumpkin on the left of the pan. In his peripheral, he registers Noctis going for a second treat. Damnit.

“Y’got your costume right?” the prince asks him then, mouth full of food. Prompto can see Ignis’s fingers tensing against the couch at the sight, which amuses the blond greatly.

“Yeah,” Prompto nods. “Assassin time, baby!”

“Yeah!” The two high five.
Prompto fondly recalls the Costume Ordering Fiasco, as he’d dubbed it. Which basically consisted of a barrage of last-minute Amazon links on Noct’s end, and threatening messages like *IF WE DON’T ORDER IN THE NEXT 18 MINUTES IT WON’T BE HERE IN TIME!!*

Noctis had really been gunning for the Assassin’s Creed: Brotherhood costume that would reveal half their chests, their calves, and the entirety of their arms, to which Prompto’s first thought had been *No way in hell.* So he’d gently sent a reminder about his still-healing bruises, and Noctis sent a *OH FUCK RIGHT I'M SORRY,* and they’d bought a much more modest version with 4 minutes to spare. Crisis averted.

Though Prompto has to admit he wouldn’t have been impartial to seeing Noctis in that… *revealing* outfit.

The prince is pretty, what can he say?

“And you remember what we’re doing today, right?” Noctis probes, rubbing his sticky fingers against the upholstery. Ignis’s knuckles turn white from tensing.

“Harvest festival, leading the trick-or-treat group, Citadel party,” Prompto recites, counting off their responsibilities on his fingers.

Noctis nods. “Sorry you gotta get dragged into all the PR crap,” he sighs. “But the kids are actually pretty fun, so it isn’t *too* bad. Still, thanks for coming.”

“Hey, I’m happy to be here,” Prompto reassures. “Sides, it’ll be worth it to see what the *king* dresses up as!”

Gladio laughs. “Don’t get your hopes up, kid. He’s a vampire every year.”

Noctis looks somber. “*And* he always puts glitter on his face. Like, what vampire is sparkly? Gods, he’s so weird.”

This sets Prompto off giggling until Ignis is politely clearing his throat. “Correct me if I’m wrong, Prompto,” he begins. “But this will be your first time in the Citadel proper?”

“Oh,” Prompto considers. “Yeah, I guess so.”

Ignis nods. “Remember to conduct yourself respectfully. Address every older individual by *sir* or *ma’am* unless told otherwise. No excessive laughing. No jumping. No street-dancing. No-”

“-fun,” Noctis completes, grumbling. “Iggy, don’t be lame. It’s a *party.* And ‘street-dancing’? What are you, sixty?”

Ignis purses his lips. “Fine,” he acquiesces. “Though you *should* know there’s a frisk before entering. Do take care to not have weapons on your person.”

Prompto’s blood freezes. Someone stranger is going to be touching him, every part of him - *groping,* in fact -


“Sounds manageable,” Prompto smiles easily, neatly storing away that panic for when the time came.

He’s been doing that a lot, lately. Capturing his feelings before they have a chance to develop, pushing them somewhere else in his mind and focusing intently on something else as a distraction.
It’s as if the forced cheer he’s been overexerting in public has started to seep its way into his very core, preventing him from ever being genuine - not even with himself. It’s a weird feeling, kinda like being sick. Like his lungs are congested. But if it works, it works.

Though he knows that dark, festering place where he puts all those negative emotions is in there somewhere, waiting to overwhelm him. Well. That’d just have to be a problem for Future Prompto.

“Excellent,” Ignis says, biting into his own confection gingerly. “We should be changing and heading for the courtyard soon, then. The festival starts in an hour.”

“How ‘bout I see that one a million times.” But Noctis goes anyway.

An hour later, the four assassins are loitering in the expansive courtyard in front of the Citadel, waiting for the festival to open to the public. There are a variety of colorful, carnival-like attractions set-up, and Prompto really wishes they didn’t have to stick to their photo-op station, because he wants to go play games and win a bagged goldfish. Or something.

“You really gotta do this every year?” Prompto asks, loitering next to Ignis at the red velvet rope barrier that boxes the prince in.

“Yeah,” Noctis sighs. “At least it’s only a couple hours. I guess.”

“Thanks for helping,” Noctis smiles at Prompto. “I promise we’ll do cool assassin stuff later.”

And Prompto’s too busy taking the first eager girl’s phone and switching it to camera mode to see Noct’s reddening cheeks and pleased smile.
feet with every step of the routine. He can only imagine how Noctis feels - probably bored, frustrated, and ready to take a nap. But no one would ever be able to tell; the prince acts his part so convincingly, plastered-on smile never fading.

It makes Prompto feel special, because he knows he’s one of the select few that are able to see who Prince Noctis really is. For the millionth time, he wonders how he got lucky enough to be Noct’s friend. And, for the millionth time, he feels that niggling in the back of his mind telling him he doesn’t deserve it.

The two hours pass slowly, but they pass nonetheless. Eventually, a sizeable group of kids are milling next to the station, waiting for the prince to get through the last few festival-goers that survived the line cut-off Ignis imposed.

One of them, Prompto learns, is Talcott Hester - grandson of the Amicitia’s butler. The rest are a happy harmony of all sorts of children: aristocratic, high class, middle class, working class, lower class - it didn’t matter. They were here to have a fun holiday with their prince, and, by the looks of recognition Noctis was throwing them, this seemed to be a long-running tradition in all their lives.

Prompto tries to fight the creeping sense of alienation at the thought, tries not to feel like the outsider he was when he was a kid and obese and always watching Noctis from afar. He’s here now, a part of the group. And he’s getting thinner - he’s almost ‘normal’, even. He’s slowly earning his right to belong in this world.

After he gets through the last of the pictures, Noctis joins the fray to loud squeals and demands that he start warping everywhere. Amusingly, he indulges them at little - again, only when Talcott eventually asks - and warps around their crowd to excited shrieks and hurriedly pivoting bodies. Something in Prompto’s chest feels fluttery, watching Noctis be so good with children.

Meanwhile, Gladio disappears for a minute, presumably meets up with someone, and comes back with his happily-panting border collie.

“Ami!” the kids yell collectively, and all hopes Noctis had of holding their attention dash as they group around the large dog.

“Right. As soon as a dog comes around I’m not important anymore, is it? I feel like cheap, used entertainment,” Noctis huffs, smiling and struggling to catch his breath as he sidles up to Prompto. “Y’ready? We’ll lead the front and Iggy ’n Gladio will take the back. We’re just going to that loop of mansions next to the Citadel… kinda pompous, I know, but it’s the closest residential neighborhood.”

The two begin to walk, kids happily bouncing along behind them. “Nah, it’s not pompous,” Prompto assures. “I mean, it makes sense. Don’t think the prince would be showing up at any old random house, y’know?”

Noctis sighs. “Yeah. But I always wanted to, even when I was small and doing it for fun.”

Prompto sighs wistfully at that, lets slip: “At least you got to trick-or-treat,” and immediately regrets it for the look on Noct’s face.
“You’ve never been trick-or-treating?” Noctis shouts in a contained way, mindful of the children.

Yeah, I’ve never been trick-or-treating because my parents weren’t ever home. Well. Technically, one year I tried to take myself, but it was so sad I stopped before I got to any houses and cried and bought McDonalds. So I don’t think that counts. Anything else?

“My mom bought into the ‘poisoned candy’ hype,” Prompto lies, rolling his eyes for effect.

“Damn. Even I was allowed to eat it,” Noctis laughs, grinning now. “Though they probably screened each person, planned our route specifically, took notes on who gave me what, and ran lab tests anyway. They’re probably doing it now, honestly. Y’know. Just cause.”

“Just cause you’re the prince,” Prompto completes.

Noctis waves him off. “Yeah, yeah. Well. You’re going now!” He beams, jumping a little on his feet, and hey - that’s Prompto’s move. “Hey everyone, it’s Prompto’s first time trick-or-treating!” he yells, turning back to the mass of children following.

And Prompto turns too, sees those tiny smiling faces squealing in encouragement of him - one kid even jumps onto him for an impromptu piggyback ride - and he feels a lot less alienated than before.

Trick-or-treating is amazing fun. Barring the fact that Prompto is actively collecting free calories, of course.

The ritual of it is the fun part. Ring the doorbell, nervously giggle with the kids, watch the door open ever-so-slowly, yell TRICK-OR-TREAT! as loud as possible, run off happy and a little more weighted down. Trade chocolates with unsatisfied kids, or, in Prompto’s case, just give them their desired candy outright. It’s everything he’s dreamt of doing instead of being holed up in his room, watching cheesy Halloween specials rather than experiencing it.

Prompto slowly starts to learn about some of the kids, a few of which are already begging him to come back next year (which absolutely does not set his heart alight, no way). His favorite is the chubbier kid in glasses, walking alongside his best friend and laughing as if he doesn’t have a single burden in the world. He also loves Talcott, of course. Because, well. It’s Talcott. The kid dressed up as a cactuar, for crying out loud.

It isn’t long before the energy has Noctis turning goofy - which is amazing in and of itself, regardless of the things he starts doing. Like launching himself onto Prompto’s back after four kids do it in a row, or getting progressively sillier with his “trick-or-treat” phrasing, and even doing that hugging thing again after the two accidentally say the same thing and call jinx. Prompto feels like he’s on cloud nine, watching his best friend so utterly in his element and happy, and it stirs something inside his chest.

“That sets the kids off practically screaming with laughter, and even the politician or kingsglaive or businessman whoever was at the door laughs too.

But Prompto isn’t laughing. He’s just staring at Noctis with a soft sort of bewilderment, because everything is clicking into place for him and - oh -

He thinks he might like his best friend.
Well. That explains a lot.

Noctis looks at him then, and his heart stutters, and yeah - it really explains a lot.

Okay. Well. Shit. That’s that.

Prompto smiles back at him, completely at ease.

Because it isn’t as if he lives in a universe where he could even pretend Noctis would ever like him back, but that’s okay. He’s used to not getting what he wants, so the realization is hardly a cause for disappointment. It’s just. A nice feeling. It feels familiar, somehow. Like getting into a warm bath at the end of an exhausting day.

It’s nice enough that Prompto initiates contact for the first time since the beating, reaching out and squeezing the prince’s nose in fondness, ignoring his indignant squawking and the encouraging giggles from the kids gathered around them.

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Okay, Prompto, you got this. Just close your eyes and think about chocobos and wait till it’s over.

He’s lined up to get into the main Citadel, knowing his three companions are milling about in the foyer just ahead - obviously, they hadn’t had to go through a security check. Totally unfair. What if the prince tried to assassinate the king? They should really come back out, get frisked, and put more time between Prompto and his turn. Y’know. For the safety of the crown.

But they don’t, obviously, and his hands progressively start to tremble harder, and that dark part of his brain lets some negativity seep out now that Prompto is alone and scared.

At least Ignis had taken his bag of candy and stored it in his car, to be given back only when he got dropped off. That had half expected to do some trading and sorting with Noctis, to be pressured into eating some of it.

Ahead of him, a beautiful woman in a sparkling, glamorous red dress and long purple gloves still manages to look striking as she’s briefly prodded at. All clear. She tosses her head, walks inside with grace.

Next comes a tall, self-assured kingsglaive-zombie, who cracks a few jokes with the guard, and barely seems to register the invasive touches. It’s quick, easy, familiar. Nothing to it.

So why does Prompto feel like he’s going to be sick? Why does he feel phantom hands on him now, prodding at his belly, holding his wrists down, attacking him ferociously?

After the man goes inside, Prompto is up, and he’s sweating as he places his hands on the wall in front of him and spreads his legs apart.

Deep breaths.

“Never seen you before,” the guard comments idly. It’s not as if he has agency to kick him out, though, because Prompto had a legitimate invitation, and was allowed entry just like every other ritzy person here.

“I’m Noct’s friend,” Prompto answers shakily, trying not to shudder when the guard starts squeezing
his sides from behind, traveling from armpit to hip efficiently.

Then the hands start roving over his stomach, which lurches, and -

Chocobos have been domesticated in Lucis for over five centuries. In the past, they were used as forms of transport and as vital players in battles and skirmishes -

“Cool,” the guard answers, and without warning he’s squeezing the front of Prompto’s thighs, and then the back of his calves.

Prompto tries really hard to not gasp in pain from the bruises he’s pressing into. Tries really hard to not think of other things this situation might remind him of. Tries really hard to not imagine how fat the guard must think he is. Tries really hard to remember which king first started using a chocobo-based infantry.

But then it’s over, almost as suddenly as it started, and Prompto’s nearly left with a sense of whiplash. The guard steps away, and the blond removes his shaking hands from the wall and all but launches himself inside the warmth and safety of the Citadel.

“Yay!” Noctis greets him, standing a bit off to the right with Ignis and Gladio. “Welcome to my house!”

His expression immediately sours, however, as does the shield’s and advisor’s. Prompto must not look as cool and collected as he’d been desperately trying to be.

Noctis rushes to his side. “Prom, what happened?”

“Yeah, who do I have to kill?” Gladio adds, and there’s raw anger painting his face.

Damnit. The last thing he needs is their concern. The mere thought of it sparks an adrenaline rush that allows Prompto to quickly school his features together, think on his feet, and settle on delivering a smug-sounding, “Ha! Got ya!”

Which has the two gaping, and Ignis rolling his eyes.

“You ass!” Noctis accuses, punching Prompto in the shoulder. “You can’t emotionally scare us back!”

“And you couldn’t use jump-scares, but you did it anyway!”

Gladio’s laughing. “You got a point there. Well played, kid.”

Prompto chuckles, fighting down the hysteria that’s still threatening to rise. “That’s right. No messing with Prompto Argentum.”

You’re cool you’re cool you’re cool don’t break down now don’t think about it put it away enjoy yourself smile wider hide your hands in your pockets breath slower -

“Take care of Noct, would you?” Ignis asks of Prompto then, and the reprieve from his spiraling thoughts feels akin to drinking ice water after days in a blistering desert.

“Will do,” Prompto grins, breathing haggardly one last time. Good, he’s good. He extracts his now-stilled hands from the deep pockets of his robe, and the two retainers amble off into the open ballroom and begin to mingle.

Noctis appears to visibly brace himself, and then goes into the expanse after them, Prompto trailing
behind dutifully.

It’s stunning. The huge, open hall is decked out in tasteful oranges, blacks, silvers, and golds, glittering vibrantly and overwhelming all of Prompto’s senses in its splendour.

And the people - the people. There isn’t an unattractive soul among them - even the older politicians are refined and trim-looking, elegant in their maturity. Even the people in the most ridiculous costumes look beautiful. Prompto feels a little bit like an oil spill in comparison, but fuck if it isn’t great inspiration. Enough so that the hollow of his stomach feels good, instead of the dull, painful panging it usually feels like.

“There’s my dad. And Clarus. And Drautos.” Noctis murmurs, gesturing towards the long banquet table and the group of hovering vampires. “Ew, so embarrassing.”

The two watch as Regis loudly puts on a show of asking, in an exaggerated accent, if any of the food has garlic in it. He’s met with polite laughter and a couple claps on the back, though Prompto can tell everyone’s heard that joke at least twelve times tonight. And, by Ifrit, the guy has plastic fangs in, a velvet cape, and a pretty hefty layer of cosmetic glitter caked onto his face. Noctis cringes.

It’s a bit surreal, seeing his king for the first time in this context. But still, even with all the lightheartedness, Prompto’s feet feel glued to where he stands, and his heart begins thudding madly.

That’s the king, holy shit! What is this commoner doing in here!

“Let’s ditch,” Noctis whispers then, directly into Prompto’s ear, which causes the boy to jump about an entire foot and all the way out of his skin.

“Noct! Fuck! Warn me next time you decide to pretend to be a disembodied spirit!” Prompto hisses, but he’s so, so grateful he wouldn’t be pushed into meeting the king. Not tonight.

Noctis only giggles. “Had to get my revenge after what you pulled earlier, right?”

“I was the one getting you back,” Prompto sighs. “Effectively cancelling out the- hey!”

Noctis has grabbed his hand, put up his hood, and is briskly weaving them through the crowd and towards the gold elevators, purpose in his step. It isn’t until they’re all the way inside and the doors have closed that he finally lets go, attention focused on manipulating the button pad.

“Where are we going…” Prompto asks, somewhat nervous, somewhat breathless with the way his heart hasn’t stopped pounding against his throat.

“To be assassins,” Noctis grins evilly, turning toward the blond as the elevator begins to move upward.

“Noct, there might be no consequences for you,” Prompto begins, “but I think I’d get like, three lifetimes in jail for manslaughter. Or something.”

“Don’t be silly,” Noctis tuts, waving his hands. “I’d probably get grounded.

The two look at each other for a moment before dissolving into giggles. “Dummy,” Prompto says, sounding fond.

“Hey, that’s my line,” Noctis pouts, but the elevator doors open, depositing them onto the roof of the Citadel’s left spire before they can argue about it.
And Prompto’s struck dumb, because _wow_ - he can see all of Insomnia from here, glowing brilliantly in the night. Lights twinkle from every house, apartment, storefront, Halloween party, everything - the city is so very, very _alive_ and it practically engulfs Prompto in its vastness and _fuck_, he really should have brought his camera.

“It’s beautiful, Noct.” Prompto sighs, leaning his elbows on the four-foot wall blocking him from his untimely death. “Noct…”

Noctis, apparently, has no qualms about untimely deaths, because Prompto spots him perched on an overhang a few feet away, with nothing but air surrounding him.

“Look. I’m an assassin for _real_,” Noctis grins, scanning the city as if he’s Ezio in the middle of a synchronization. And, with his costume, and a bit of squinting, he kinda does look like him.

“Damnit, Prom, you _really_ should have brought your camera.”

“N-Noct! Get down from there!”

“Don’t worry,” Noct waves him off. “I can warp, remember?”

“Are you su-”

“Yes, Prom,” Noct smiles. “I’ve been up here a few times. Just never in _costume_. Fuck, at least take pictures on your phone.”

Prompto laughs, and the two spend the rest of their night up there, talking and laughing and holding impromptu photoshoots over the magnificence of the cool Insomnian night. And for the first time, Prompto thinks he knows what _home_ feels like.

It feels like being around the calm, caring energy that is Noctis Lucis Caelum.

Chapter End Notes

YAY FLUFF AND GAY TIMES YA’LL DESERVED IT AFTER THAT SAD MESS OF THE LAST COUPLE CHAPTERS
I hope everyone has a fun, safe halloween :) <3

let me know what ya thought? and be my friend on Tumblr?

Sad Announcement TM: I'll be taking a week off from this fic :/ I'm sorry guys, school has really been sapping me and this week is going to be one of the worst ones yet. I'll be back two Wednesdays from now <3
Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Halloween antics galore + Prompto realizing he likes Noctis! oh boy!

Chapter Notes

i'm back!! hope you all didn't miss me too much :')
i apologize for giving you another fluffy chapter. i know a lot of you are mostly here for angst, but this was a necessary installment and had no room for sad times in it. haha.
next week, i promise. get ready.

as always, many thanks to TheRegalHarvester for being a wonderful beta. and congratulations on turning a year older, pal <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There’s nothing in the world Noctis loves more than sleep.

Every part of it is bliss. The cozy feeling of soft sherpa blankets against his bare legs, the memory foam he absolutely sinks into, the warmth that carries him all the way into dreamland. Not to mention the colorful worlds Carbuncle likes to craft for him as he dozes, or the feeling of waking up naturally - lazy, calm, and snug.

There’s nothing quite like it.

But on this morning, Noctis loves the idea of Prompto’s first training session a little bit more than sleep, so he’s up bright and early, scrubbing dutifully at his teeth and blinking slowly into consciousness. The light of dawn (who knew it could be so blue?) glows vividly through the blinds, and - Ifrit, his eyes are actually bloodshot. He really shouldn’t be up this early.

His doorbell chimes, interrupting his scrutinizing with its sing-song and light tones. Gladio.

Noctis spits, rinses, and pads through his apartment, shivering a bit at the morning cold as he makes to open the door. Past it, a bewildered Gladio and perky-looking Prompto stand.

“Holy shit. You’re actually awake,” is the first thing the shield says, looking at Noctis like he’s a cryptid.

Noctis just nods. “Take a good look, cause this is the only time it’ll happen.” His voice is gravelly from disuse, and he coughs to clear his throat.

Prompto laughs at that and walks in, clapping Noctis on the back with a “Proud of you, buddy”. Gladio follows suit, still shaking his head in awe.

By the time Noctis finishes his morning ministrations, he’s nearly bouncing in anticipation. His
excitement must be evident in the way he’s talking to Prompto at a rate of a million words a minute, but. He’s just never looked forward to a training session this much before. Then again, he’s never had a training session with Prompto before, either.

Gladio’s coffee needs to finish brewing, already, so they can just go.

In the back of his mind, Noctis knows he shouldn’t be feeding into the exhilaration. He knows he should be actively repelling it instead, because that’s how people get over crushes, right? By ignoring every part of that person that makes them happy?

And yet… he can’t help himself. He likes marvelling in the feeling of adoring someone, and of getting to be close to that person. The endorphin rush is too addicting, despite the fact that it’ll only end up hurting him more in the end.

Oh well.

“Alright, let’s get goin’,” Gladio finally says, scooping up his drink and fishing his keys out of his pocket. A minute later, the boys are piled into his Jeep and are headed towards the Citadel.

And Prompto’s practically vibrating in his seat, a scene that strikes Noctis as both incredibly endearing and amusing. “Hey. You nervous?”

Prompto tenses at the direct address, and then sags. “Kinda,” he admits. “It’s just… what if I’m no good, y’know?”

“Nobody’s good, at first,” Gladio reassures. “In fact, His Highness here used to throw his sword down every time I landed one on his little bean-pole body.”

Noctis only rolls his eyes in response. “Embarrassing anecdote, insult…” he counts off on his fingers. “What, no name-calling today? You’re going soft.”

“Sorry ‘bout that. Won’t happen next time, Princess.” Gladio winks.

“There we go,” Noctis smiles, and then turns back to Prompto. “Really though, he’s right! No one’s expecting you to be perfect, yeah? Just try your best, I’m sure you’ll learn fast.”

Prompto nods, rubs at his nape. “Okay. Okay. I’ll try.”

Noctis shoots him another encouraging look. As nervous as Prompto is, he’s incredibly grateful today is happening - for more reasons than just being able to watch his toned, fit, gorgeous friend engage in some truly… animalistic modes of movement. No, it goes beyond that.

He wants Prompto to feel safe again. The blond would never admit to it, but ever since the attack, he’s seemed to be at a near-constant state of unease. He shakes, slightly, whenever they’re in public - even in broad daylight, and with the knowledge that Noctis can both conjure weapons from nothing and has a discreet panic button on his watch.

Not only that - he accepts rides from Ignis or Gladio every time they’re offered now, which was a rarity in the past. And when they aren’t offered, Noctis always walks him home, preferring the longer route to watching his best friend nearly crumble at the thought of traveling alone.

Noctis hates it more than anything. Hates that the whole thing was essentially his fault, hates that Prompto doesn’t feel secure anymore, hates those sorry assholes for laying a finger on him. So, if offensive training is really the key to helping his friend feel like less of a vulnerable target, he’s all for it.
“We’re here,” Gladio announces, backing smoothly into his reserved parking space adjacent to the training complex.

Noctis all but launches himself out of the car and into the crisp morning air, excitement reaching a crescendo now that they’ve arrived. He bounces straight into their training room, a snorting Gladio and apprehensive Prompto close behind.

“Okay, kid,” Gladio begins, locking the wooden doors behind him with a finality that makes Prompto jump. “Seeing as this is ‘official shit’ now, we gotta go over some ground rules.”

“Uh… okay.”

He beckons the two teens to the center of the floor mats, starts leading them through basic stretches. “First. No actual hits - you always stop your weapon right before it makes contact. That’s probably the most important thing to remember, but we get it if you can’t maintain control sometimes. Accidents happen. Just be careful, got it?”

“Yeah,” Prompto nods, legs straight ahead in front of him, fingers reaching for his toes.

“Second,” Gladio says, moving into a butterfly pose. “Only wooden weapons are allowed in here. Or airsoft guns if you’re doing target practice, and cute little Nerf guns for fighting people. You can do paintball, but not in here. Anyway. That’s mostly irrelevant right now, seein’ as you don’t have access to the armiger yet. But when you do, don’t accidentally pull out something real.”

Prompto pauses. “Wait - I’ll be allowed to use the armiger?”

“Mm,” Noctis hums, interrupting for the first time as he twists to crack his back. “But only when you’re ready. You’ll have your own weapon and everything! So you can defend yourself at any moment.”

He tries to not think about the process of giving Prompto access, because otherwise he’d start blushing furiously.

Prompto’s face breaks out into the first genuine grin Noctis has seen all morning. “Sweet!”

Gladio chuckles. “Thought you’d like that. We had to fight Cor real hard for that one.”

“Cor?”

“Head of the Crownsguard. He made a ‘special exception’ for ya,” Gladio explains with a wink, switching to a bicep pull. “Okay, third. Workout clothes - which you got, so that’s good - and showers are required. There’s stalls in that bathroom,” he punctuates with a pointed finger. “So bring a towel next time, though I got you for today.”

Something unreadable flashes in Prompto’s eyes for a moment, but it’s gone before Noctis can suss out the emotion there. “Cool. Good thing I brought a change of clothes, huh?”

“Great thing,” Gladio nods. “I’d say sorry for not explaining that beforehand, but you prepared for it anyway. Keep that up, and you’ll do fine here.”

“Will do,” Prompto smiles, standing up and shaking off his limbs. “Okay, I’m ready.”
Noctis is going to collapse. No, really. He is.

Because watching Prompto duck, feint, and outright attack is much, much hotter than he thought it would be.

It was self-indulgent, at first, because Gladio led him through basic steps, so Noctis just got to sit around and enjoy his freckled supermodel of a friend work up a sweat. But then...

Then Prompto was up against him, and it took every ounce of willpower Noctis possessed to stay focused. To block each attack and put up enough of a fight that the blond felt challenged, but not overwhelmed. All while ignoring that beautifully furrowed brow, those glistening arms, those *gasp* and *grunts*.

Noctis was going to lose it, he swore he was. Everything about this whole practice was way too suggestive.

It only got worse when Prompto, slowly working his way through each weapon type, found he needed help orienting himself with the airsoft gun. And Gladio, with a smirk on his face, ordered Noctis to guide him through it.

*Great*, Noctis thinks, positioning himself close to his shining friend. *He even smells irresistible. Just. Great.*

“Am I holding it right?” the boy in question asks, worrying his lip.

“Ah, no, you want to hook your thumb in more there,” Noctis directs, hovering his finger over the weapon.

Prompto repositions slightly, still incorrect. “Here?”

*Fuck it.*

“No, just, like *this-*” Noctis instructs, grabbing Prompto’s fingers and positioning them manually. He pretends he doesn’t feel a fluttery surge of electricity shoot through him.

Prompto seems embarrassed, causing anxiety to flare up within Noctis - an effective dampener on his excitement. “Th-Thanks,” he stutters, lifting the gun towards the paper targets suspended ahead of him. “Um. How do I…”

Noctis gulps and moves behind the blond, not even bothering to attempt a verbal explanation on something as complex as aiming and shooting.

*Astrals help me. Please don’t think I’m gay please don’t think I’m gay please don’t think I’m gay please -*

He hooks his arms over Prompto’s, helps lift the sightglass to his eyes, and tries not to melt into a puddle. They haven’t been this *intimately* close since the arcade fiasco, which is unfortunately tinged with negative associations.

That sugary-vanilla scent is especially strong here, in the crook of his neck, and his arms are warm and firm under Noct’s careful touch.

“Can you see the red hatch-marks?” Noctis half-whispers, directly into Prompto’s ear.

“Oh. Um. Yeah,” Prompto breathes back. Is he trembling, or is Noctis imagining things? “Yeah, I
Noctis swallows hard, leans in closer so he can try and see through it too. His cheek grazes against Prompto’s ear, and he barely suppresses a shiver. “We, uh. We want to get the center of the bullseye directly in between those marks. Okay?”

Prompto nods, moves the gun imperceptibly. “Okay. Do I just-”

“Mm.”

The trigger is pulled. Unexpectedly, the recoil sends Prompto shooting back into Noctis, closing the thin gap between their bodies and sending the pair tumbling to the ground.

And then Prompto is lying on top of Noctis again, like he did at the park all those weeks ago, except he’s really pushed against him this time, and holy shit - Noct’s head feels like it’s going to burst like a volcano.

There’s a pregnant pause wherein nothing happens - not until the sharp sound of Gladio’s laughter startles them both, and has Prompto scrambling up and off the poor prince.

“S-Sorry!” he’s saying, darting out a hand to help Noctis up. “I didn’t know guns… did that!”

“Ah. Hah. Yeah. It’s uh, it’s called recoil,” Noctis explains, dazed. “Um. Get used to it, it’s a lot more powerful on a real gun.”

Gladio’s still chortling. “Oh gods. That was just too good.”

Noctis rolls his eyes, brushes off his pants. “Yeah, yeah, laugh it up, you brute.”

“Prom gets a pass, cause he didn’t know, but fuck, Noct! You should have seen that coming!” Gladio continues, nearly gasping for breath. “Gods. I can’t believe-” But he cuts himself off, abrupt and sharp.

“What?” Noctis mocks, looking at the silenced shield. “Puny brain can’t think of another insult?”

“Nah,” Gladio answers, beaming widely now. “Just think we’ve found this kid’s calling.”

And Noctis follows his line of sight all the way to the paper target, eyes settling on the neat hole blown clear through a perfect bullseye.

Prompto trains every day that week, blazing through the crash courses on gun familiarization, operations, and safety as fast as possible. He’s got a knack for it that has Noctis privately swooning, because damn - he’s got a thing for raw talent.

Also, it’s really fun to play paintball with someone as silly as he is.

And as far as moments go, there sadly (thankfully?) aren’t any as intimate as that first one, and Noctis thinks he’s in the clear.

But, at the end of the fifth day, after everyone has showered and the boys are in the middle of gathering their things, Gladio drops a bomb.
“Prompto’s passed his ownership requirements,” he announces, signing off on the last bit of paperwork he’s authorized to handle. “His gun’s in the armiger already. Give him access, would ya, Noct?”

Noctis freezes, in the middle of packing his bag with his towels and water. “Ummm. Right now?”

“Yes, right now,” Gladio tsks. “You’re the one who wanted him to be armed ‘a-s-a-p’, right?”

Prompto, presumably feeding off Noct’s nerves, grows visibly tense. “Uh, is this going to hurt or something?”

Gladio can’t control his snorting. “Tell you what, I’ll wait in the car.”

A moment later, the doors are swinging shut behind his cocky form.

Noctis pauses, then turns to face Prompto. And fuck - he can already feel his face heating up. “It’s uh. It’s not going to hurt. It’s just a little… awkward.”

Prompto nods, looking slightly worried. “What do I have to do?”

Now or never.

“You have to… You have to hold on to… And I have to, um.” Shiva, this is difficult. His eye contact wavers. “Uh. I’ll just show you.”

Noctis steps up to him, smells the clean scent of the body scrub he’d just been using in the shower. He steels himself, trying his best to ignore his heart pounding thickly in his throat...

...and places Prompto’s hands on his hips, two points of fiery contact. He swallows, and lifts his own hands to the sides of the boy’s head, fingers disappearing into Prompto’s damp locks, and then -

And then Noctis is pressing his lips against his forehead, initiating the direct transfer of magic into Prompto’s consciousness. He feels the blond’s mind opening up to it, joining in on the stream of energy the Crystal has made known to the royals of Lucis for centuries.

It’s an ancient tradition, steeped in metaphor and lore and honor and importance and valor and strength and trust and - and Noctis can’t find it in him to reflect on any of that, because he feels his knees going weak, instead. Titan’s sake, he’s just an eighteen-year old kid who's actually kissing his crush. Nevermind the fact that it’s part of some weird magic ritual, and it isn’t exactly on the lips, but. Still.

Agh - he doesn’t even want to know how Prompto might be reacting to this.

A moment later, Noctis feels his friend fully calibrated with his armiger, and with reluctance he peels himself back. “Um, okay. You’re connected, now.”

Prompto looks a little shaky, himself. “That…”

“I know.”

“You had to do that to everyone? Gladio? Iggy?”

Noctis runs a hand through his hair, a short and jerky pull. “Yeah. It’s just. It is what it is.”

Nevermind the fact that he was twelve and had to stand on a chair to reach them, and the experiences were decidedly not as charged as this one had been. He coughs, gruff and self-conscious, ready to move on before things get really embarrassing. “Um, anyway. Try and draw your gun now? You
have to visualize it in your hand, and will it into existence.”

Prompto shakes his head a bit, and then nods. “R-Right. Okay.”

He holds his hand out, furrows his brow, and stares at it. His fingers clench a few times around blue shimmers that fizzle out, but he keeps trying. On his sixth attempt, the gun finally pops into existence.

“Woah!” Prompto yells, marveling at the weapon. “I did it! Ha! Oh man - wow!”

The enthusiasm is infectious, and has Noctis grinning alongside him, all tension melted. “Yeah! Keep practicing and it’ll come more naturally. Try dismissing it now - just will it away.”

Doing so comes a lot more easily to Prompto. With a flick of his wrist, the gun dissolves back into the ether of the Crystal, gone in a literal flash.


“I’m glad you have it, Prom,” Noct responds, soft. “I hope it makes you feel safer.”

“It does,” Prompto says, equally gentle though he’s looking down at his feet. “But, uh. You’re what makes me feel safest. So. Thanks, for being my friend, and looking out for me. And for teaching me how to protect myself. And. For being so cool.” He rubs at his nape, face pinkened.

Noctis is floored. “Ah, uh. Anytime.”

Prompto looks up then, sends him the most endearing smile he’s ever seen. Naturally, the atmosphere feels way too personal and private for Noctis, whose only comfortable skirting around the edges of this whole crush thing.

So he laughs, chokes out a “Let’s go play video games, you dork,” and leads Prompto out the doors, effectively axing the moment before it has a chance to grow.

“Did you make chamomile?” Gladio asks, seated in a posh living room and munching idly on some biscuits.

“Yes,” Ignis sighs, long-suffering, as he brings in a teapot and two porcelain cups. He pours the fragrant beverage out for them both, and then settles back into his chair. “Now. What happened?”

Gladio picks up his cup. “Ha! I’ve literally ‘got the tea’ right now.”

Ignis pushes his glasses up with annoyance. “I’ve told you a thousand times, Gladio - I don’t tolerate memes. Just tell me what you’re so thrilled about.”

“Well,” the shield begins, punctuating his opening with a loud sip. “Prompto definitely likes His Royal Brattiness back.”

Ignis smiles at that, dunking a biscuit into his drink. “You’re sure?”

“It’s as plain as day,” Gladio grins. “I’m tellin’ ya - these past few days have just been moment after moment. And today, I made Noct give him the armiger. I didn’t see it happen cause I would’ve
started *dying* laughing, but man were those two red afterwards."

“Gladio,” Ignis admonishes, though he can’t keep the smile out of his stern tone. “You shouldn’t be trying to embarrass them *on purpose.*” He takes a contemplative sip of his tea. “Though I suppose it *is* a good thing Prompto has access to his weapon.”

“You’re getting fond of the kid, aren’t ya?” Gladio teases, reaching for a cookie.

“I merely wish for him to be able to protect himself, after all that’s happened.”

Gladio levels him with a look.

Ignis sighs. “*And* I suppose he is an enjoyable presence to have around.”

“Now that’s what I like to hear!” Gladio beams.

Ignis just shakes his head and laughs. “Alright. It’s time to stop imitating a pair of clucking hens, we’ve reports to go over.”

“But I love clucking.”

“And I love fulfilling my duties.”

“Fuck that.”

“Gladio.”

“Okay, okay, fine. On it, Stupido.”

“*Gladio!*”

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Chapter End Notes

hope you guys enjoyed :) thanks to you all, again, for being such lovely readers all the time. you all mean so much to me.

let’s be friends on Tumblr?
Previously, on Salad Days...
Prompto started learning offensive training, and got access to a gun.

It’s 12:06 PM on a Friday. No school today, in remembrance of some important historical king, or whatever. Noctis is at the Citadel, engaging in obligatory celebrations. Prompto is in his bed.

He’s been in his bed since he weighed and took his customary mirror photo, three hours prior. He doesn’t know why he’s in his bed, why he can’t bring his body to move. Why he doesn’t feel happy.

He should be happy. He should. This is a milestone he’s wanted for years, now.
But all he sees are those same expansive thighs, rotund stomach, and horrible double chin - as if he still weighs 200 pounds. Either his eyes are broken or he hasn’t actually lost a single pound since then, because no matter what, he can’t stop seeing that Prompto.

_Not good enough not good enough not good enough._

The space behind his eyes feels warm and prickly. It’s hard to breathe past the sticky heaviness of his throat. And when he does breathe, it’s hitched. And yet, he can’t cry.

He doesn’t know what’s going on. He’d usually be bawling at this point, but now it feels as if a giant stopper has been wedged down his throat, preventing any display of emotion. He tries his hardest - he thinks of the saddest things he can imagine, he indulgently feeds into the disordered thinking, hell - he even tries hurting himself.

The tears don’t come. The heat behind his eyes gets hotter, instead, and he feels like he’s going to burst.

He distracts himself by getting down to business, putting the entirety of his focus on trawling the eating disorder forum for his next step. As he does so, the sadness gradually fades away, turning into a sinister, off-kilter version of determination.

His eyes flicker over dozens of different diet plans, testimonials, and before-and-afters. Some are ridiculous - are poorly constructed around fictional characters and designed in MS Paint. Some offer too many calories for Prompto’s taste. A few have merit, though nothing is extreme enough to match the way he’s feeling.

That is - until he finds something called _the ABC diet._

At first glance, it seems like more pretty-dainty-lovely-butterfly-girl shit, because ‘ABC’ literally stands for ‘Ana Boot Camp’. And Prompto hates that sort of thing, because it only fetishizes the disorder and turns it into a look, a lifestyle. It sweeps all the ugliness of starving away, dresses it up as something ideal.

But the diet itself is promising, and the text isn’t on a background of a thin girl holding a cigarette, which is a huge plus. No - it’s just a simple spreadsheet, outlining two months of restrictive eating. He likes it. It’s neat, minimal.

And it’s really, _really_ restrictive.

Perfect.

Prompto settles on only doing the first two weeks, which would lead him right up to Thanksgiving - a holiday that, for some reason, encourages people to eat until their bursting points in order to celebrate the founding of Lucis. He doesn’t really know what he’ll be doing for it. Maybe his parents would come home? Maybe Noctis would invite him to something? Either way, he’s sure he’ll have to do some social eating, and what better way to prepare than to do some of the ABC diet?

His eyes glance over the plan before saving the image onto his phone.

*Week one, calories per day: 500. 500. 300. 400. 100. 200. 300.*

*Week two, calories per day: 400. 500. Fast. 150. 200. 400. 350.*
Doable.

He’ll have to avoid extending his hangouts with Noctis into dinnertime. Even then, all his calories will probably be spent around him - the prince loves eating, especially when it’s right after school and they’re playing King’s Knight.

His school lunches will have to be chicken noodle soup only, as it’s the the most calorie-effective food he knows. On the fast day, he’ll pretend he’s sick and stay home. And if things get desperate otherwise, he’ll just chew the food, and spit it into a napkin while pretending to wipe his mouth.

He can’t go over his limit. That much is fact.

The first three days are uneventful. 500 isn’t too far from his normal boundary, and 300 is uncomfortable, but manageable. He stops his morning runs, to help preserve his energy. However, he still has to go to training on that third day, which he thinks he gets through fine.

Up until he wakes up on the fourth day, stands up, and feels his legs give out.

*Oh.*

He’s on his knees, forehead pressed against the soft fibers of his carpet - a child’s pose. And he’s desperately trying to blink the black spots out of his vision as his thighs scream at him in their soreness.

Training was hard yesterday, but *this* hard? It feels like he worked his legs for eighteen hours straight. It must be the restriction, the lack of energy and protein he’s getting. Wonderful.

An hour later, he’s carefully slipping into his plastic seat, trying not to engage in movements that stress his quads too much. Noct’s head is down on his desk behind him, peering idly out the window.

“Heya, Noct!”

The prince lifts his head, squints blearily at him. “Yer late today,” he slurs.

“I’m actually on time,” Prompto smiles, tapping Noct’s cheek in an effort to rouse him.

Noctis scowls and waves the offending hand off. “You know what I mean,” he yawns. “Y’left me all alone at the gate. Hardest eight minutes of my life.”

Prompto rolls his eyes, grinning. “And somehow, I doubt you were even awake for it.”

“Got me there,” Noctis smiles, putting his head back down and letting his eyes slip close. Just another normal day.

Everything is good. Prompto is definitely *not* gritting his teeth through a dizzy spell as he turns around to focus on their teacher. And he’s definitely *not* thinking about the fact that those extra eight minutes were spent pausing for breaks on his walk, doubled over and willing his thighs to stop burning.
At this rate, there’s no way the soreness he’s feeling will be recovered by Wednesday’s training. He’ll have to call off sick, or something. The thought of Gladio being disappointed in him gives him pause, but it’s preferable to accentuating how ragged he currently feels.

At least he’s back to walking alone, now that he’s got a gun to protect him. Noctis really didn’t need to see how pathetic he looked earlier.

Anyway. Now he has school to focus on, to distract him from his lightheadedness and short-circuiting muscles.

“Okay, class. We’re continuing our unit on mental illness, so open up your books to page 307,” his pysch teacher begins. “Today we’ll be discussing eating disorders,” he explains, clicking open a PowerPoint and taking a sip of his coffee.

*You’re kidding me.*

The title slide switches to a screen full of notes. “Eyes up here, everyone. Listen up. Alright, so - ‘an eating disorder is a psychological disease characterized by abnormal or disturbed eating habits,’” he recites. “What does this mean? Essentially, it’s when a person has an unhealthy relationship with food. The idea of food scares her, and stops her from eating in a normal way.”

Prompto’s grip on his pen tightens. Behind him, Noctis snores lightly.

“Why does this happen?” the teacher continues, reading off his notes. “Well, it has to do with societal expectations of women, and the pressure a lot of them feel to conform to a certain ‘body image’. Women with eating disorders place a lot of importance on their looks.”

Prompto’s hand stutters as he attempts to copy the notes. *What?*

The slide switches again. “There’s two types of eating disorders,” he drones on, sounding bored. “Anorexia and bulimia. These will be on the unit test and final, so pay attention. *Leo.*”

A sheepish boy looks up from his phone, mumbles an ingenuine *sorry*. Prompto, meanwhile, feels like he’s going to be sick. He drops his pen, not even able to fake taking notes. It hurts the part of him that is studious and methodological, but...

How can he seriously sit there, stomach shrunken in on three hundred calories, and copy down misconception after misconception that habitually serves to disclude him?

*There’s way more than two eating disorders. Not only women get them. And it isn’t only because of ‘society’. He’s wrong. Isn’t he?*

“‘Anorexia is an emotional disorder characterized by an obsessive desire to lose weight by refusing to eat,’” comes the next definition. “I am going to show some disturbing images now, so close your eyes if you need to.”

The slide switches to a screen filled with photos of extremely thin women, mostly bone and skin. The entire class gasps, and Prompto hears a multitude of comments exchanged about how ugly, scary, and freaky they are.

He blinks. He thought they looked inspiring, and beautiful. *Freaky?*

“Anorexic girls are dangerously thin, as you can see,” the teacher nods. “They get this way by not eating enough calories - usually eight hundred to a thousand.”
Prompto struggles to hold back a snort while simultaneously attempting to ignore his heart pounding thickly against his ribcage.

“Uh, I don’t get it. Why don’t they just eat?” a boy calls out from the back, inciting a smattering of nervous giggles around him.

Their instructor pauses, considering. “They’re scared of becoming overweight,” he finally responds, gaze flicking back to the images. “Though if I looked like that … I mean, I feel like I could afford a cheeseburger.”

The class erupts with laughter, raucous and loud and judgmental.

And all of a sudden, the tears Prompto had struggled to spill before rise straight to the surface, threatening to brim over.

Noctis chooses that moment to stir to attention, because of course he does. “What’re we doing?” he whispers, yawning.

If Prompto looks back at his friend, he’s sure he’ll start actually crying. “Eating disorders,” he whispers back, turning his head just enough that the sound would travel. The words jumble up in his throat, burn his lips on their way out.

“Girl drama? Boring,” Noctis sighs, settling sounds coming from his direction. “Hmm, ’m going back to sleep.”

*That* does it for Prompto.

He pauses for a moment, blinking hard, and then swiftly stands up and grabs the bathroom pass. No one pays him any mind, which is a blessing, because he’s sure his face is contorted with emotion.

Disappearing into the hallway is like finally being able to breathe again, and Prompto relishes in it for a moment before ducking into the nearest restroom. He checks to make sure no one is in there, locks himself in handicap stall, and gasps out his tears.

There aren’t a lot of them. He knows there are more under the surface - *a lot more* - but he’s grateful a few are finally escaping.

*You were really delusional enough to think you had a disorder, didn’t you?* begins the self-hating tirade. *You don’t. You aren’t a pretty, sad, teenage girl. You don’t feel ‘pressured by society’. You don’t have anorexia or bulimia. And you’re fucking massive, for crying out loud!*

He swipes at his wet cheeks, looks at his hands. His fingers don’t look like his fingers. His hands don’t seem real.

*You just wanted to feel like you were suffering, huh? To finally feel included in at least one group? Well, you aren’t. You just like pretending a few weeks of restrictive eating means you’re ill. Cause you’re dramatic.*

He sags heavily against the tile wall, knees feeling as if they’re going to buckle and bring him all the way down, down, down - all the way through the floor, the piping, the soil, the rock, and into the fiery core of the planet.

*Prompto’s always had nothing. No friends, no parents, no experiences. But he’s always had*
problems with eating - that much he could count on. Synonymizing himself with the phrase eating disorder had become so familiar to him that it was comforting - a crutch he could always fall back on. Now, he didn’t even have that.

He’s never felt so invalidated in his life.

If Noct found out you thought this way, he’d laugh at you. You’re such a fucking joke.

He thinks about the online forum, filled with thousands of girls lamenting about things he’s never been able to relate to. It all seems so obvious now, in hindsight, how little business he had being on there. How did he ever let himself feel like he belonged - he, who was overweight, consistently had trouble restricting, and male?

Prompto allows himself another minute before stepping out, wetting a paper towel, and pressing the coldness to his lids. He slips back into class as the teacher moves onto to bulimia, quietly hangs the bathroom pass back up, and slinks down into his chair.

On the sixth day, he doesn’t cancel training with Gladio. He pushes and pushes himself, gritting his teeth hard and willing himself to become thin enough to have an eating disorder. Maybe, if he was underweight, he’d matter.

They practice tumbling maneuvers while holding a gun. Good cardio. Sweat pours out of Prompto’s skin like a fountain, and his body feels like it’s constantly on the brink of collapse. Still, he presses on, never seeming to lose energy.

Gladio congratulates him for doing a great job, at the end. Noctis just looks at him funny - a weird mix of concern and… awe? Prompto hates the attention, and leaves quickly.

He eats 200 calories.

On the eighth day, he weighs 152.1.

6.7 pounds down.

It isn’t good enough. He isn’t slim enough.

His limit is 400 calories. He eats a salad worth 125, and nothing else.

On the ninth night, he discovers he can’t sleep on his back anymore. His heart pounds too worryingly against his sternum, and he feels like there’s a thousand-ton weight on his chest. So, instead, he curls his body around a pillow.
He doesn’t sleep well. He has nightmare after nightmare, vivid and sinister and imaginative. Each time he wakes up, he feels more and more alone. Each time he goes back to sleep, the dreams get worse.

On the thirteenth day, he begins to seriously flag during training.

He’s exhausted, starving, and achy still, from their previous session. He convinces Gladio he really needs to do shooting practice only, and manages to get away with only having to hold a gun for the hour.

Even holding the eight-pound weight seems impossible. But despite the fire in every fiber of his muscles, he persists.

After they all shower and are packing to leave, Noctis sidles up to him. “Hey Prom, you okay? You look a little... tired.”

Prompto blinks, brain sluggishly processing the words. When it does, he forces a bright smile onto his face, making sure his eyes scrunch up so it seems genuine. “Who isn’t tired after working out with Gladio?”

“True,” Noctis laughs. “But really, if you need to take a session off, or something-”

“I don’t,” Prompto interjects quickly. “Don’t worry about me, I’m fine. I just need more sleep, yanno?”

“I feel that,” Noctis nods, sagely. “Okay. Go nap then, dummy.”

“Good idea,” Prompto responds, yawning for effect. “’Seeya guys.”

He waves the two off, waits until he’s cleared the Citadel, and jogs all the way home.

He eats 400 calories.

On the fourteenth day, Prompto sways and gasps in his small bathroom for two minutes before he’s able to stand up straight. *Pathetic.*

He strips and steps on his scale quickly, too weak to make a ceremony of it.

148.5

Ten pounds lost, in two weeks.

He supposes that’s good. He wishes he weighed 120.

He eats 350 calories.
The fifteenth day is Thanksgiving, and he’s done with the ABC diet. It’s a Thursday morning and he doesn’t have school, so he’s lying in bed idly.

He still doesn’t know what he’s doing today. A small voice in his head tells him he would know if something was happening by now, but he holds onto hope regardless.

First, he tries calling his mom. She doesn’t answer. He tries again.

“What is it, Prompto?” comes that familiar curt voice, after the fifth ring.

He’s struck dumb for a moment, unable to speak. After a pause: “Uh, hi mom. It’s just, it’s Thanksgiving…”

“And?”

“A-And I just thought, maybe, that you and dad might be… Um. Coming home?”

There’s a heavy silence.

“Maybe when you apply to Altissia,” she finally sneers, hanging up abruptly.

Oh.

Prompto stares at his glowing home screen, void of all activity.

Out of nowhere, the emotion he’d been subconsciously storing away bursts to the surface, and Prompto begins to weep.

---

**PROMPTO [10:34]**: whazzup

**NOCTIS [10:34]**: bored as f**k

**PROMPTO [10:34]**: HAHA you censor yourself in text but not in real life??

**NOCTIS [10:35]**: I’m a complicated dude, what can I say

**PROMPTO [10:35]**: oh my god

**PROMPTO [10:35]**: so whatcha doing today

**NOCTIS [10:36]**: glaive + council thanksgiving uggghhhhh. you should see iggy rn omg, he’s so stressed over the cooking it’s HILARIOUS

**NOCTIS [10:36]**: like, he’s got flour in his hair

**NOCTIS [10:36]**: Sent Img_741.
PROMPTO [10:37]: LMAO

NOCTIS [10:37]: so wbu?? family stuff right?

PROMPTO [10:40]: yeah! it’s a lot less stressful tho since there’s only 3 of us haha

NOCTIS [10:40]: LUCKY. can I come over instead

PROMPTO [10:41]: hmm i think i’ll be hung for treason


PROMPTO [10:41]: >:(

NOCTIS [10:42]: :)

Prompto ends up walking to the small corner store a block away from his apartment. He buys a large sandwich, and a pint of ice cream.

He eats. Watches a movie.

He’s still hungry after that, so he orders takeout.

And so he feels full, at the end the day. Contentedly so. Full, satisfied, and alone.

It’s the most disgusting feeling in the universe.

Happy Thanksgiving.

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Chapter End Notes

new reference for what Prompto's body currently looks like.

for all of my readers who are celebrating thanksgiving this week and have trouble with food: remember that it is okay to eat and enjoy this holiday, and that your weight never defines you.

let me know what you thought, and be my friend on Tumblr?
Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Promp... tried his hand at the ABC diet, and had a lonely Thanksgiving. :

Chapter Notes

this... is the longest chapter yet. and it's fluff :) ya'll deserve it.
thank you to my beta, TheRegalHarvester!

“So then in English we got our essays back, and I got an A+! I guess all that tutoring paid off, yeah? And Prompto got an A too! Iggy, he’s so smart. We were gonna play video games to celebrate, but I just had to have an ‘emergency meeting’, huh? This sucks. Maybe after, though? Do you think he’ll be busy? Maybe he—”

“Noct,” Ignis interrupts, hands lax around the steering wheel. “I don’t think you will be free tonight. This is a rather serious meeting.”

“Whaaaat?” Noctis whines, visibly deflating in the passenger seat. “A long meeting? Today? What could possibly be that important?”

Ignis pushes his glasses up. “I’m afraid I don’t know,” he admits. “I suppose we’ll find out, won’t we?”

“Yeah,” Noctis mutters, turning his body towards the window and sulking for the rest of the trip.

The meeting was long. Eight hours long. Noctis would’ve cried, if he was a few years younger and less disciplined.

It was long because Noctis discovered he will be going on a last minute diplomatic trip to Galdin Quay, where the Lucian council would be negotiating the terms of a potential peace treaty with Niflheim officials.

Yeah.

Heavy shit.

So for eight hours, Noctis was subject to extensive debriefings and planning forums. And throughout the upcoming week, things would only get more intense. Strategy meetings, program rundowns, speech practice, press releases, etiquette lessons, tailor appointments, and on and on and on.
He just wants to hang out with Prompto.

“Oof, dude. That sucks,” Prompto whistles lowly into the phone, that night.

By the time Noctis had got home and was done getting ready for bed, he’d been too tired to keep his eyes open in front of an LED screen. So, instead of texting, he lays curled up in bed, eyes closed and Prompto’s voice drifting soothingly from the device in front of him.

“Yes,” Noctis yawns. “Sorry we couldn’t do the King’s Knight tournament today.”

“Don’t worry about it!” comes the immediate response, bright and chipper. “Some other time, right?”

“Yes. Sometime this week?” Noctis muses, playing with a loose thread on his blanket.

“You’re about to go on an important trip,” is all Prompto’s staticky voice says, suddenly grave and serious. “Noct, what if you die, and the last thing you did was play some lousy King’s Knight?”

Noctis smiles into his pillow. “Fuck, you’re right,” he laughs, playing along. “What if I do die?”

“We need to do every cool thing in Insomnia this week,” Prompto announces. “Bucket list time, baby!”

“Yeah!” Noctis grins. “But I might not have a lot of time, I mean, we’ll probably only have a few hours a day, I’m not entirely sure? And-”

“Leave it to me. I can call Iggy and work out the rest of your schedule. And I already know exactly where we should go!”

Noctis opens his eyes and stares at his phone, awestruck for a moment. “Prom, you’re… wow. Thank you.” What did I do to deserve you?

“No sweat,” Prompto laughs, and the sound is so familiar and comforting that Noctis feels like he could cry. The world suddenly seems small, safe, and rose-tinted: a stark contrast to the cold and calculating meetings he’d just sat through. “Get some rest buddy, I can hear how sleepy you are.”

“That obvious?” Noctis smiles, eyes falling shut again. “Goodnight, Prompto. Sleep well.”

“Night!”

The next day is a Saturday, and Noctis sits through six hours of strategy briefings before he’s finally let free. Ignis won’t tell him where Prompto’s planned to take him until they’re at the establishment, the boy in question beaming when he sees them pull up.

And… it’s a cat cafe. An actual cat cafe.

Of course it is.
“Well, you obviously chose this,” Noctis laughs, stepping out of the car and waving Ignis off.

Prompto shoots Ignis a wave himself, before turning to beam at Noctis. “The real question is why we haven’t done this before.”

“Honestly. This is way overdue.”

“That’s right!” Prompto nods, holding the glass door open for Noctis and following him inside.

It’s cozy, the interior. Soft, but not childish, color scheme ranging from browns to beiges to pale yellows.

“Table for two,” Noctis tells the host, heart fluttering involuntarily at the phrase. It’s so… suggestive. Of a date.

Which this obviously isn’t. But if Noctis squints a little, forgets the context, and pretends to not hear a few things, he can pretend it is.

“Right this way,” the employee nods, leading the pair through another set of doors and into the dining area.

It’s set up like a typical eating establishment: chairs and tables and brick and a generally cozy atmosphere. What isn’t typical, of course, are the dozens of free-roaming cats, ranging between calm, sleepy, and hyperactive. Prompto’s bouncing, exultant with expectation and radiating a certain joie de vivre that has Noctis beaming alongside him.

The moment they’re seated at their table and their orders have been taken, the two all but launch themselves onto the soft, carpeted ground.

“Oh my god, Noct, look, look!” Prompto’s singing, from where he’s stretched out onto his back.

Noctis glances over, and feels all the stresses of his morning melt out of him, because Prompto’s got four cats laying on him - eyes squinty, purring happily.

How…? It’s only been a second?

Naturally, Noctis immediately pulls out his phone, and posts the scene to Snapchat. “Okay, this is the best thing I’ve seen. Ever.”

Prompto grins. “Join me!”

Noctis hesitates for a moment, and then carefully extends himself next to Prompto. Close, but not too close. Almost instantly, he’s got two tan-colored cats climbing onto him and curling up on his chest, purring contentedly. One of them starts kneading.

“Prompto,” he whispers. “Can we just come here every day this week? And then for the rest of our lives?”

Prompto laughs, kittens swaying slightly with the movement. “It wouldn’t be the worst way to send you off. But I’ve got a lot more planned, so… nope!”

Noctis turns his head towards the blond to shoot him a petulant look, and abruptly realizes just how close they are. Prompto’s staring back at him, mere inches away, and his face is dewy and his lips are inviting and there are a total of seven cats on them and fuck -

Noctis can’t imagine a better moment for his first kiss.
But then the waiter arrives with their tea, and he’s snapped back into reality, instantly disgusted with himself for even *thinking* about kissing his friend.

Sunday is his day off, so Noctis demands an entire day of fishing. Naturally.

“Nooooc,” Prompto whines, settling down onto the lake’s pier. “We couldn’t do something a little more… exciting?”

They’re at Insomnia’s biggest park - four square miles of forestry, meadows, and glittering lakes. The weather is absolutely beautiful for an autumn day: the sun is shining directly overhead, causing the water’s surface to shimmer like a mirage. Noctis feels at peace.

“This is exciting,” he smiles contentedly. “And I’ve wanted to catch a Boesemani Rainbowfish for *years*, Prom. Doesn’t that sound like bucket list material?”

“I suppose,” Prompto hums, light glinting off his golden strands mesmerizingly. “Okay then, make it look cool! I want action shots!”

Noctis laughs and stands up, to be *really* extra about it. Prompto dances off to his side, camera in hand, chattering on about ‘fishies’ and ‘snapping good shots’ and the prince being his ‘muse’. It’s all Noctis can do to keep his grip steady on the rod, and the blush from his cheeks.

It ends up taking *four hours* to catch a Boesemani Rainbowfish, but the boys hardly notice, wrapped up as they are in the hilarity that is making fishing as dramatic as possible.

“So when Noctis finally pulls up the vibrantly colored fish - decorated with a gradient of blue to teal to green to yellow to red - it comes as more of a delightful, unexpected surprise.

“Wow!” Prompto yells, snapping pictures of the creature, still twitching in mid-air. “Noct, it’s amazing!!”

“Never thought I’d see one in real life…” Noct marvels, breathless. “Look how it reflects the sun, Prom, on its belly.”

Prompto leans in close, makes a *whoa* sound, and Noctis hears the shutter on his camera click six more times, rapid-fire.

“Worth it. Even if it took ages to catch,” Prompto grins.

Noctis nods, starts preparing the ice chest. “Kenny’s to celebrate?”

“You bet!”
Prompto gets his customary fries-and-milkshake order that night, as he always does. What isn’t customary is the speed at which he’s scarfing it down - a sharp contrast to his usual slow, flighty way of eating.

“Hungry?” Noctis laughs, raising an eyebrow.

Prompto looks up, sheepish, and slows his pace considerably. “A little, yeah.”

“Same. It has been a long day,” Noctis affirms, biting into his burger. “Thanks for coming, Prompto.”

“Anytime,” Prompto smiles, dunking a fry into his shake. “It was fun!”

The two spend the rest of the evening tittering on about anything and everything. By the time Ignis comes to pick them up, it’s late, and Prompto must be really tired, because he lets Noctis pick up the bill without argument.

“We’re being delinquents today,” Prompto announces coolly after school, on Monday.

Noctis looks up from texting Ignis with amusement. “Yeah? How so?”

“You’ll see. Trust me, it’ll be great,” the blond digresses, leading the pair out the gates and off in a foreign direction. “C’mon, we’ve only got a couple hours.”

“Don’t remind me,” Noctis scowls, thinking of the endless appointments he’d have to survive through later. “Let’s go.”

It’s… a tunnel.

Not just any tunnel - it’s an abandoned relic of Insomnia’s original subway system, the location later deemed too inefficient to run any trains through. The tracks have rusted over time, and the stairway leads to the underside of a paved road - it’s opening long-covered. They had to sneak in through an ‘alternative route’: a convoluted series of ladders, beginning in an inconspicuous location.

The lights still work, though. Which is good, considering they illuminate the thousands of graffiti pieces that decorate the walls.

And Prompto is reaching into his bag, and pulling out two cans of gold spray paint.

“Prom…” Noctis begins. “I… I don’t know. I am the prince…”

“I think it’s hardly illegal, at this point,” Prompto says, gesturing towards the colorful display exaggeratedly. “‘Sides, don’t you want to do something a little more… edgy?”

“Okay, never use that word again,” Noctis snorts, punching his friend lightly. “But yeah, actually. Gimme that.”
Prompto whoops, tosses the paint over, and skips to a section of wall that is relatively unclaimed. “I’m gonna do a chocobo!”

“You’re going to what a chocobo?”

“Shut up! You know what I mean!”

The boys dissolve into giggles, painting away happily in the limited amount of time they have together. Noctis finds it funny to tag his full name (“It’s perfect, Prompto. No one will believe it, and the best part is that it’s actually me.”) And Prompto decides his signature is a chocobo head, vows to leave one on each wall, and gets an impressive twenty-three of them out of his can.

And if Noct’s fingertips are stained gold at his suit fitting later, the tailor doesn’t comment on it.

“What’s the itinerary?” Noctis asks on Tuesday, already excited for whatever new adventure his friend has in store.

Prompto, turned around in his chair to face Noct’s desk, adopts a serious look. “Well,” he starts, pausing to pick up a pencil he pretends to smoke from. “Today, we’re going to be fine artists.”

Noctis chortles. “Are we?”

“Yes! We’re gonna go see a gallery opening,” Prompto dishes. “Real bohemian stuff. So wear a black turtleneck and buy a pack of Malboros.”

“I’ll pass on the costume,” the prince smiles. “But a gallery sounds interesting. What time?”

“You’re free after six,” Prompto informs. “It’ll be open by then.”

Noctis nods, sighs a breath of relief. “Thanks again, dude, for working all that out-”

“Don’t mention it,” Prompto beams. “It’s been fun. We should keep this up, after…”

“Way ahead of you, buddy. I’m gonna drag you to weird crap for as long as I live.”

“You’re the best.”

The gallery turns out to be a unique affair - it’s hosted at an empty home in the middle of one of Insomnia’s larger parks. And Prompto, bless him, is actually wearing a black turtleneck, black jeans, and Doc Martens when Noctis finds him waiting outside. Best of all - his usual wild hair has been tamed down, save for a small cropping of soft curls at the front.

He looks like he’s walked straight off an Altissian runway. Actual male model status.
“Heya!” the boy in question waves in his usual upbeat fashion, destroying any pretense of the ‘serious artist’ vibe he was going for. Noctis finds he prefers it that way.

“Nice outfit, Promcasso,” Noctis teases, reaching out to poke him.

“W-Well! I gotta look the part!” Prompto squeaks, in defense of himself. “I *am* an artist too, y’know!”

Noctis smiles. “I’m just teasing you. You look good.”

There’s a pause that’s too short to be normal, but not long enough to be *very* awkward.

“Ah, hah. Thanks, buddy. I try,” Prompto blinks, face a mix of shock and... Yeah. Embarrassment.

“YoufuckingcreepyidiotwhywouldyoufuckingsaythatwhatishethinkingholyshitfuckfuckfuckI’msgonnathrowup”

“C’mon, the entrance is that way!” Prompto says abruptly, cutting through Noct’s swirling thoughts like a knife through butter. “And I heard there’s a couple performance artists going on in a few minutes!”

And Prompto’s hand closing around his, dragging him into the house’s main foyer and through throngs of people, is just enough to distract Noctis from his thoughts completely.

They manage to squeeze into a place closer to the front, and gently sink down onto the padded floor once the lights begin to dim. Noctis glances at the seated forms around him, and yes - they’re definitely artist-types. The men wear their hair long, the women line their eyes with thick kohl, and nearly every article of clothing in the vicinity is a deep, midnight black.

Noctis feels at home, oddly enough.

“It’s starting,” Prompto whispers, nudging Noctis excitedly.

In the clearing in front of them, two individuals step quietly into the light. One brandishes a violin, which he begins to play. The other, a ballet dancer, starts dancing to the music, fluid and graceful.

The song is absolutely beautiful, and watching the woman’s svelte movements is mesmerizing. Noctis finds himself lulled into a calm stupor. The atmosphere is soft and calm... sleepy, even...

Until the dancer fumbles a move, and the violin comes to a screeching halt - the sound reverberating in Noct’s ears and causing him to cringe bodily.

“You FAILED. AGAIN,” the musician roars, the impact of it nearly as jarring as his violin, which he continues to manipulate haltingly - producing the most awful noises. “START OVER.”

The lilting melody resumes abruptly, but this time it has a sinister undertone to it. Noctis feels his hair stand on end.

It isn’t long - perhaps thirty more seconds - before the ballerina messes up again. Again, she receives abuse. Again, she resumes dancing, each revolution more unsure, each limb shaking.

After the fourth mistake, the violinist screams: “YOU CAN BE REPLACED. YOU ARE NOTHING TO ME. TRY HARDER.”

And the ballerina begins to cry, and Noctis feels like her fear is palpable in the air, a substance he can grab at. Still, she dances on.
A few minutes and two more mistakes later, she collapses, a lifeless, humanoid form on the floor.

Silence permeates the room like a thick fog.

And then the lights slowly come back on, and the two performers bow, and Noctis hears the sound of dozens of fingers snapping simultaneously. Belatedly, he joins in, wishing he could express how moving that was with more than just a tinny sound.

“That was amazing,” he says after a beat, breathy as he turns to face his friend. “I ca-”

But Prompto isn’t listening, because he’s crying, curled fingers scrubbing angrily at his cheeks.

“Prompto?” Noctis questions, soft. “Uh. You okay there?”

“Y-Yeah,” the blond sniffs. “S-Sorry. That was just. Really good. Sorry, I’m sorry.”

Noctis hesitates for all but half a second before making an executive decision. Another instant later, and he’s got his arms wrapped around Prompto’s shivering form, cradling him gently.

“Hey, what’re you sorry for?” Noctis murmurs into his hair. “That was good. Let it out, you dummy.”

He feels Prompto laugh wetly against his shoulder. “I cry too easily.”

“And I don’t cry enough,” the prince responds, the small statement letting out a vulnerability he’s never put to words before. “I wish I was like you. It’s a good thing, to cry.”

The two stay like that for another couple minutes, mindless to the fact that everyone else has stood up and moved on. Noctis revels in the solid warmth of his crush against him, who gradually manages to still his trembling.

Eventually, Prompto pulls back, and dries his eyes one last time. “Okay, I’m good now. Um... thank you, Noct.”

“Anytime.”

“Let’s... check out the rest of the art?”

“Lead the way, Promcasso.”

Wednesday is absolutely packed for Noctis, so it isn’t until Thursday that he and Prompto are able to continue their little adventures. And even then, the prince only has the space of three hours free.

“This sucks,” he whines, walking alongside Prompto to their next destination: a small, mom-and-pop cinema. “I hate politics and I’m so tired and the council is boring and the hairdresser nicked me today. I could have him banished.”

Prompto snorts. “I can see the headlines now. ‘Corrupt Lucian Monarchy Dooms Innocent, Hard-Working Man To A Life Of Solitude Because He Nicked the Prince.’”

“Ah, shut up,” Noctis pouts, eventually giving into a smile despite himself. “Moral of the story - I’m
Promtio doesn’t say anything for a moment. “If hanging out with me is too much, on top of everything, and you’d rather go nap or something, please-”

“Stop right there,” Noctis dismisses, holding up a hand. “These hangouts are the only thing keeping me sane, Prom. I will drag you out of your apartment by your ankles if you try and back off now.”

Prompto pauses, and then sputters out a laugh. “You’re... so silly when you’re delirious, Noct.”

“Right. Silly,” Noctis says, thoughts combing over a good breaking-and-entering strategy.

Okay, maybe he is a little delirious.

“But I won’t leave your side unless you tell me to, so don’t worry,” Prompto adds, and Noctis decides to put his nefarious plans on hold. He also decides to buy three ice cream sandwiches once they finally reach the theater, but that’s neither here nor there.

He ends up buying Prompto one too, along with a particularly greasy soft pretzel. Again, Prompto didn’t protest Noct’s use of the Royal Credit Card on him. And again, he eats way too quickly, finished before the previews are even over.

**Looks like all those new muscles need to be fed,** Noct thinks, with a decent amount of satisfaction. Watching his crush tone up over the weeks has been both rewarding and titillating, even though each pang in his chest feels more like a painful reminder of his loneliness instead of innocent romantic longing.

The lights finally fade to black, signalling the start of the movie. The pair are at this particular theater because it’s one of the few that show foreign films. In continuing with their ‘artistic exploration’ mood, Prompto decided their short time gap would be best filled with more thought-provoking media. So here they sit, ready to enjoy a piece originating from a small, coastal city in Accordo.

The title card fades into view on-screen. **LOVELESS,** it reads, in crisp letters.

*Me, lmao,* Noctis thinks - humorous, but with an edge nonetheless.

The production ends up being extremely enjoyable, and Noctis finds himself easily swept up in the drama of the valiant quest played out before them. It has a certain sense of purpose to it that revitalizes his intrinsic feeling of duty to his kingdom. In an ironic way, he’s actually excited to get back to his responsibilities once the pair stumble out of the theater.

“I feel more refined,” Prompto’s saying as they loiter outside, waiting on Ignis. “Classier.”

“An artisanal grilled cheese would make you feel more refined, Prom,” Noctis jabs lightheartedly.

“Hey,” Prompto says, sticking his tongue out. “You’re not wrong, though. And now I want grilled cheese.”

“Sorry,” Noctis laughs. “So, what’s tomorrow?”

Prompto raises his eyebrows. “It’s the day before you leave… you aren’t free, dude.”
“Or am I?”

“I mean, unless you wanna hang at like, eleven at night…”

“Yes,” Noctis nods, quickly. “And I already know what to do! I’ll meet you at your place.”

Prompto’s eyebrows are knitting together now, in worry. “Noct, you’re gonna be tired when you leave in the morning.”

“Eh, I’ll nap in the car,” the prince says coolly. “C’mon. I could die, remember? We gotta end this in style.”

After a moment, Prompto grins. “Hell yeah!”

Stealing a Maserati is never easy.

Especially when that Maserati belongs to the King of Lucis, and is locked in a monitored garage at the Citadel.

Noctis manages, though. How he does is a bit of a blur, but it involves a lot of well-told lies, pulled strings, and a tiny bit of power abuse.

Worth it.

Noctis tears through the empty nighttime streets of Insomnia, all regards toward the posted speed limit having flown out the window. Or out the open convertible top, as it were.

Before long, he’s outside Prompto’s apartment, texting him to come outside. A minute later, a shaggy blond head appears around the corner, and Prompto hops quickly into the passenger seat.

“The Regalia?” he gapes, awestruck. “Are you gonna get in trouble for this? Can… can the king accuse his own son of treason? Oh my gods, does this make me an accessory? Noct, you’re too spoiled to survive on your own, and I’m too young to die-”

Noct’s laughing interrupts the spiral. “Hey Prom?”

“Yeah?”

“Have I ever called you a dummy before?”

Prompto’s facade cracks, a smile bursting from his face like sunbeams. “Once or twice.”

“Well, you are. ‘Cause no one’s gonna relocate or kill us,” Noctis reassures, though he isn’t absolutely certain of that himself. “Dummy,” he tacks on, for good measure, and shifts the car into drive.

“Soxxx,” Prompto begins, settling back into the cool leather. “Where are we going?”

“My secret spot,” Noctis says cryptically, merging onto the freeway.

The wind-whipping gets a bit too intense, then, so he puts the top up, and suddenly - things are
startlingly quiet, and the mood feels a lot more comfortable. Prompto lets out a contented sigh, begins humming along with the soft music floating through the speakers.

It isn’t long before Noctis is throwing on his high-beams and shifting onto a mountain road. And it isn’t too long after that the car is parked, settled on Insomnia’s largest peak.

Which isn’t very high up, all mountains in Eos considered, but it gets the job done all the same.

Because when Noctis lowers the top again, a vibrant field of stars make themselves known, twinkling vibrantly in the inky midnight.

“Holy shit…” Prompto breathes, leaning back in his seat, eyes fixated straight above him.

“I know,” Noctis whispers. “Lowest amount of light pollution in Insomnia, right here.”

Prompto doesn’t say anything for a minute, simply staring at the brilliant lights, breath visible in the cool night air.

And then, out of nowhere, he makes an incredulous sound and says, “Noct, you asshole. You didn’t tell me to bring my camera.”

Noctis could smack himself in the forehead. How could he forget the *camera*?

“That’s cause this moment’s for our memories only,” he fibs smoothly, deciding to roll with his mistake.

Prompto laughs. “Oh? And what if I forget?”

And Noctis wants to say *I’ll make sure you don’t*, lean forward, and press his lips to Prompto’s. He wants it so bad his hand twitches briefly - a sad manifestation of all the desires he can never act upon.

“Then I’ll remind you,” he says instead, offering a small, forlorn smile.

They end up talking until one in the morning, a mix of Noct’s lo-fi music with Prompto’s slow rock playing softly in the background, heated seats on maximum intensity. Noct’s never felt so cozy, in those hours, with his best friend and his dad’s car and his sprawling city before them. And yet, that small part of him continues to selfishly wish for more.

It’s a bittersweet ending to an extraordinary week of experiences. Noctis doesn’t know what the future holds - and what could change for him and his country during this trip - but he will always have these moments to cherish and hold dear, for as long as he lives.

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Chapter End Notes

i just love writing these snapshot-type chapters :'}
1. these are Boesemani Rainbowfish, neat, right?

2. graffiti tunnels are equally as cool.

3. this is what a pack of 'Malboros' look like ;) pls validate me, i spent time photoshopping this lmao

4. no one can convince me the regalia isn't a Maserati. i don't wanna hear any Audi rhetoric, not in this house. i mean, look at this, its logo is a almost the exact same as the royal crest, for crying out loud

   alright! i hope you enjoyed that wild ride, haha. i definitely enjoyed thinking it up :) let me know what you thought? and be my friend on Tumblr?
“You’re about to go on an important trip,” is all Prompto’s staticky voice says, suddenly grave and serious. “Noct, what if you die, and the last thing you did was play some lousy King’s Knight?”

“Fuck, you’re right,” Noctis laughs, playing along. “What if I do die?”

“We need to do every cool thing in Insomnia this week,” Prompto announces. “Bucket list time, baby!”
“Yes, something happened,” she responds, pausing for dramatic effect.

“A million things run through Prompto’s mind, from car accidents to bankruptcy to inclement weather to murder to gang activity to -

“University of Altissia’s application is due tomorrow, is what happened.”

Prompto feels all the breath leave him, like a deflating balloon. “Fuck’s sake, mom,” he gasps, voice uneven. “Don’t scare me like that!”

“Watch your language,” his mother responds immediately, completely ignoring the point. “So. Have you got your application in yet?”

Prompto pauses, trying to articulate the fact that he’d never apply in the most gentle way possible. The silence drags on, and evidently becomes weighty enough that his mother cuts back in before he can find the right words.

“Prompto. Tell me the only reason you haven’t submitted yet is because you’re editing your essays for the third time,” she warns, terse.

Prompto swallows. Now or never. “No, mom. I haven’t submitted yet because there is no application, and there never will be.”

The next pause is markedly brief.

“Prompto Argentum!” comes the fiery, wrathful roar, and Prompto flinches away from his speaker instinctively. “How many times must we go over this!”

“I don’t want to go to school there, mom! I like Insomnia, and-”

“And what?” she spits. “You ‘like Insomnia’, is that it? More than being with your own parents? The ones that graciously took you in when no one else would?”

So now you’re my parent? Prompto rages internally, bristling at the hypocrisy behind the attempted guilt-trip. I didn’t see you caring about that shit on Thanksgiving! Or my birthday! Or the past eighteen years before that!

Outwardly, he says: “No, mom. There are just better opportunities here.”

Surprisingly, that seems to derail the tirade, because she only snorts in response. “Prompto, are you simply misinformed? UofA is the best undergraduate business school in Eos.”

Here it is. The moment Prompto had been dreading, despite how much he’d wanted it to stop hanging over his head like an executioner.

“Yeah. The thing is,” he begins, trying to still his racing heart. “... I’m not going into business.”

He actually hears her gasp, and the disappointment in it strikes through him like a bullet.

“What?”

Just say it. Just say it!

“I’m... I’m pursuing photography, mom. And Lucis has the best art university in Eos. So I will be staying here. And. Doing that.”
“You… you…” Prompto realizes he’s never heard his mother at a loss for words before. “What happened to your plans, Prompto? What happened to following in our footsteps?”

And *fuck*, she sounds broken, and somehow that’s even *worse* than getting yelled at.

But that doesn’t change the fact of the matter. “Those were never my plans,” Prompto says, with a strange sense of calm. “I tried to tell you hundreds of times. I tried to make you see who I *actually* am. But you never listened.”

“I was guiding you towards stability!” she fumes, anger suddenly back full force in her defensiveness. “What, you think you can make a living off *photography? You’re delusional!”

The accusation lands like an explosive, breaking down the last of Prompto’s patience in one fell swoop. “I can make a living off photography, thank you very much! You wouldn’t know a thing about it! All you do is waste away in that goddamn *suit* and ignore your only son!”

Shit - maybe that was too far, but Prompto’s too incensed to care, breathing heavily and clenching at the coarse material of his cushions. Surprisingly, it isn’t followed with a retort. Just silence, and the gentle clacking of… a keyboard?

A tense minute later, his mother’s voice comes back on, cold and emotionless. “Well. Considering you’re so *capable* of taking care of yourself, I took the liberty of removing all the money *I’ve given* you from your bank account.”

Prompto’s never felt his heart sink so fast, or his fingers go so numb and cold. “Y-You… you… what?”

“It shouldn’t be a problem, should it? After all, what do I know?” she hisses. “Go ahead. Be a photographer. See how far that takes you.”

Prompto’s shaking so hard he can hardly hold his phone up. He’s - he’s *eighteen*, he’s still in high school! It isn’t as if business majors are supporting themselves at this age, either!

“That’s-!” he starts, groping for the words that would convey how utterly wounded he feels. “That’s so unfair! You can’t do that!”

“You’re lucky I’m not making you pay rent.” And the line abruptly goes dead.

His glowing home screen, set to a bright and cheerful selfie of him and Noct, seems ironic in the wake of that call - that *ultimatum*. Trembling, he taps open his bank app, and yeah - the balance reads *0.00*. Those tiny, unassuming numbers serve to throw Prompto’s remaining sense of normality straight over the edge, and, helpless, the boy bursts into tears.

He weeps until his shakes turn into trembles, until his gasping breaths turn into whimpers, until the angle of the sun streaming through his window lowers by a few degrees.

Until a peppy-sounding reminder goes off on his phone, startling him out of his misery.

*REMINDER [15:20]: cat cafe w noct in half an hour!!*
Oh. Shit. Right.

Immediately, Prompto flies into action, tumbling off the couch and into his room. He throws open his drawer, grabs at his wallet, and finds he has a pathetic 2,000 gil in cash. Frowning, he pulls out his phone, re-consulting the itinerary.

So. He’d need gil for the cat cafe and the movie ticket, but that was it. Spray paint he luckily had already, from his one attempt at exploring more traditional mediums of art-making. And the gallery showing entry was free, with a ‘suggested donation’ of 500 gil. Well. He’d have to hope Noctis would pay that, because he didn’t have any to spare.

The movie would be 1050. If he limited himself to tea and a small dessert at the cat cafe, he’d be good. Would even have a few gil to spare, even. Just in case.

Prompto sighs, relieved, until it hits him that he needs gil for more than just hanging out with Noctis.

He sprints into his kitchen, flinging open his fridge with an energy he’s never directed towards it before. A few soup ingredients, a third of a package of deli meat, and a bottle of mustard line the shelves.

A creeping, sickening feeling crawls up his spine as he checks the cupboards. He only finds vegetable broth and a half loaf of bread, pathetic and droopy in its plastic wrapping.

Prompto’s mind reels, trying to backtrack. When had things gotten this bad? When had he stopped shopping for basic food items? How had his mental health plummeted so dismally without him even noticing?

Don’t panic. Don’t panic. Don’t panic.

This would be fine. Right? It had to be. He had enough food to create some meager, but existent school lunches for the rest of the week. Noctis wouldn’t notice a thing, would go off to Galdin Quay, and Prompto would quietly get a job and be able to feed himself again. Everything would work out.

That night, after hanging out with Noctis and a gang of cats, Prompto wonders just how much things would ‘work out’ after all.

He’s on various companies’ websites, applying for jobs as fast as he can though each form takes an aggravating forty minutes to complete. Worst of all are the ones that demand some sort of personality test at the end, adding precious time and effort. Prompto can practically hear the clock ticking, a steady beat counting off the moments he has left until he runs out of food.

It’s okay, he tries to reassure himself, for the hundredth time. It’s not as if you haven’t fasted before.

He ignores the tinny voice telling him he’d had mineral supplements and electrolytes and most importantly, the desire to fast to help him through it. He ignores the nauseating feeling that crops up at the thought of starving against his will, focusing instead on marketing himself as barista-material in 250 words.
The week somehow seems to be both flying and crawling by, a strange combination that makes it difficult to keep track of time.

The moments without Noctis - those are the ones that are unbearable, that go by so slowly, as if crystallized in amber. Those hours drag because there is absolutely nothing to look forward to in them - no promise of a small, but heartwarming bowl of soup, or a hearty salad, or a tofu stir-fry. There’s nothing but shitty tap water and gradually surmounting fear as the few things left in Prompto’s fridge slowly disappear into school lunches.

He lets Noctis pay for him. He never did, in the past. He’d always been concerned about coming off as using the prince, ever wary of Ignis’s warning all those months ago. Even now, that still prevents him from giving in and asking for a loan.

Besides, he doesn’t want Noctis to know he’s in a bad way - not now, not ever. Guy’s got too much to worry about as it is, and Prompto doesn’t deserve to be worried over. He’s too insignificant.

So he let’s Noctis pick up the tab, despite the eyebrow raises and comments that crop up. It’s all worth it to be able to eat.

And no, the irony of that isn’t lost on Prompto.

But, well - he’s starving, and it’s painful and fear-inducing in a way that he can’t quietly tolerate, because he doesn’t know when he’ll be able to eat again. It adds a sense of desperation that has him clawing for any spare calorie he can get, and still coming up woefully short of how much he should be eating.

It’s much, much different from willful restriction.

But it doesn’t make Noct’s little “Hungry?” comment at the diner sting any less, though.

At any rate - by the time Noctis leaves for Galdin, after the wonderfully cozy night they spent under the stars - Prompto is officially out of food and out of luck.

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He’s bored, mostly. Not having Noctis around creates a bit of a void in his life, and, listless, he mostly spends the weekend watching TV, filling out job applications, and generally trying to make time go by faster.

He’s dizzier than usual. Every time he stands up too fast it’s like trying to beat back a towering inky wave, threatening to overwhelm him at any second.

The nightmares are back, as well, stronger and more vibrant than ever. Prompto’s lost track of the number of times he’s woken up in a cold sweat, confused and scared and desperately trying to whisper reassurances to himself as he squeezes tightly around his pillow.

And the hunger. Oh, the hunger. After all this time, Prompto should be accustomed to being hungry - and he is, but when it’s of his own volition. This forced-starvation brand of hunger? It stabs at him, cutting deeply and twisting, edges laced with a cocktail of raw despair and panic.
Sometimes he feels so empty it makes him nauseous, like he’s about to vomit up whatever’s left of him - water and stomach acid and blood. On more than one occasion, the vicious stomach pangs have actually brought tears to his eyes.

Gods, he just wants something. Anything. A chickatrice sandwich from Subway, with lettuce and tomatoes and pickles and onions and mustard. 620 calories for a ruler’s length of food. That would be more than enough for the day. He’d savor the warmth and comfort of it so gleefully, wouldn’t even mind the feeling of being full, for once.

His stomach growls.

He keeps job-hunting.

By Wednesday evening, he hasn’t even received a single interview let alone a job offer, and things are getting desperate.

He’s been inadvertently fasting for four days now, spending his school lunches lounging on his phone under a weeping tree - silently thankful Noctis isn’t there to see him not eating. Though he supposes if Noctis did see that, he’d offer some of Ignis’s cooking…

Maybe it’d be one of those garula sandwiches, or that mushroom risotto he does, or perhaps - dare he think it - green curry soup?

His empty stomach twitches, a painful reminder that Prompto should really stop feeding into these daydreams.

It’s also a reminder that if he doesn’t eat something soon, he’s sure he might actually start dry-heaving, he feels so ill and anxious.

But what can he do? He has 33 gil left over… which would get him - what - a carrot? He wracks his brain, trying to think of anything his tiny corner shop might sell that would sustain him on such a low amount, and comes up empty.

Unless…

Unless he buys a single-serve Cup Noodle, which are usually 31 gil. He does some quick Googling and calculating, finds that Insomnian sales tax is currently at 8%, and that his final purchase will amount to exactly 33 gil.

He has enough.

He has enough!

The downside is that there’s only one place large enough to sell single-serve Cup Noodles, and it’s a bit far. Prompto can only thank the Astrals he’d invested in a bus pass as he bounds out the door.
Work is slow, as it always is on a random Wednesday night. But money is money, so Derrick continues to smile through it, tapping his fingers against the cash register idly and nodding in time to the store radio.

The customers tend to melt into a disjoint array of faces, on nights like these. Old person, old person, middle-aged lady with a screaming kid, old person, random teenager, old person, Prompto…

Wait.

Prompto?


“U-Uh… hey?” he tries, still aghast at the figure in front of him, whose eyes are downcast and avoidant.

Derrick supposes he deserves that.

That day, in the summertime, when he’d forced Prompto to eat under threat of forced hospitalization… in hindsight, it hadn’t been his proudest moment. Not by a long-shot. But he’d been so panicked - the kid hadn’t eaten in twenty-six days, what was he supposed to do?

At the thought, Derrick runs his eyes over the rest of Prompto’s body, trying to appraise his mental health in one fell swoop.

The results aren’t hopeful.

Prompto’s thin. Really thin. Much thinner, at least, then he’d been just months ago. How little had he been eating, all this time? Fuck, the guy looks like a ghost of his former self, sallow and gaunt and shivering despite being under a hoodie and jeans.

And his face. It’s… haunted, in a way. Kid looks like he hasn’t had a decent night’s sleep in months, his lips are chapped, and he just seems… drained. Like someone sucked all indications of life right out of him.

There’s no way his new royal friends have any idea. Derrick has to believe they wouldn’t let him carry on like this, not knowingly.

When the boy in question finally opens his mouth to return Derrick’s greeting, he sees the worst facet of Prompto’s appearance thus far - that fucking white film on his tongue, a clear sign of fasting.

Derrick’s heart breaks into a million pieces.

“J-Just the Cup Noodle?” he chokes out, voice nearly breaking. He wants to say more, so much more, but he can’t. He’s burned that bridge to the ground. All he can do is watch uselessly.

A pause. And then, in a near-whisper: “Yeah.”

Derrick nods, too quick, and scans the item. “34 gil.”

Prompto holds out a bony hand, skin pale and blue-tinted, and drops a handful of coins in Derrick’s hand.

And… he’s off. By a gil. “Uh, you’re-”

“Oh,” Prompto interrupts, looking at the electronic till for the first time. “Oh, you said 34 gil.”
Derrick closes his hand around the coins. “Yeah, but-”

“Um. S-sorry. G’night then,” Prompto hurries, biting his lip and turning away.

Derrick doesn’t understand. Doesn’t understand why Prompto doesn’t have basic pocket change, why he’s come all this way out for a Cup Noodle, why he looks like he’s about to cry. He doesn’t understand at all, but Astrals smite him if he’s about to keep this boy away from food.

“Please take it,” Derrick calls out quickly, before Prompto can fully leave his register. “We’re allowed to give or take five gil, it isn’t a problem. Please.”

The blond hovers, shifting from foot to foot, clear indecision on his face. In the end though, he mutters a Thanks, swipes the styrofoam package, and speed-walks out the sliding glass doors.

And Derrick tries to pull himself together quickly, because he’s still got two hours left on this shift, and he isn’t allowed a crying-break if he’s the only cashier open.

That was the worst thing that’s ever happened, Prompto thinks, hovering around his kitchen as the microwave slowly buzzes and whirs. The three minutes it takes to cook feels like ten, somehow.

Later, when he’s unceremoniously shoving that first bite into his mouth, he takes it all back. He’s never felt so satisfied in his life.

Suddenly, he feels like sobbing.

On Friday, the coffee shop, the film development center, and the thrift store all call to schedule interviews. Must be a universal hiring day, or something.

It’s a positive sign - things are moving, getting into motion.

But they’re moving so, so slowly.

Even with scheduling his interviews for as soon as possible, he still has to get through them. And wait for another call. And (hopefully) go through the hiring process, which is paperwork on top of paperwork - bureaucracy at its finest. And then he still has to train for the job. Not to mention his first paycheck probably won’t come for two weeks.

It could be a month before Prompto’s able to buy basic necessities again.

This time he isn’t able to stop the panic attack.
On Sunday morning, he gets up.

And passes out.

On Sunday evening, he comes to.

There’s an insistent knocking at his door, firm and weighty and somehow slightly annoyed sounding. Prompto stands incredibly slowly, trying to beat back the nausea and urge to faint again. Gingerly, he makes his way to the threshold, pausing in front of the door.

“Who-” He pauses, coughs, and clears his throat. “Who is it?”

“Ignis.”

Raw fear shoots through him. Why is Ignis here? He combs through his memory, his interactions with Noctis, thinking of where he might’ve fucked up. Shit… was it the graffiti thing? Or did he send an offensive snap at some point during the week? Or…

Or did Regis find out Noctis stole the car, and Ignis was sent here to execute Prompto?

“I need to pick up Noct’s homework,” the accented, disembodied voice supplies.

Oh.

The homework.

Duh.

“Gimme a minute,” Prompto calls, going off to make sure he looks somewhat presentable after having spent the entirety of his day on the floor.

Ignis waits a minute.

Actually, he waits three, but who’s counting?

Eventually, a haggard-looking Prompto is pulling the door open, beaming despite himself. “Hey Iggy! How was Galdin?”

Ignis takes a moment to appraise him. Same old Prompto, but with a bit of an edge. Like the boy’s spent his entire week either sick, or underslept.

Hmm.

“Pleasant,” he quips, stepping inside. “We just got back in. Noctis sends his regards, but he’s too tired to visit himself.” He leans in closer, a bit conspiratorially, and uses the opportunity to study the boy’s purple-tinted eye bags. “Between you and me, he’s in a bit of a sour mood anyway.”
‘Sour mood’ didn’t really cut it. The prince had been downright petulant, but Prompto doesn’t need to be burdened with that.

“Oh, that’s okay,” Prompto grins, heading off to his room to retrieve Noct’s homework.

How much of that would actually get done, Ignis can’t say - though even he must admit that high school busywork seems a little rudimentary in comparison to what just transpired with Nifelheim. Perhaps he could see to getting it excused.

In the meantime, he makes his way into the kitchen, ready to prove useful after a week’s worth of other chefs cooking for him. As many new recipes as that had inspired, he’d missed being the one behind the stove.

“I hope you haven’t had dinner yet,” Ignis calls, rummaging through the cupboards and pulling out various cookware, planning on making something hearty - maybe rice-based?

Prompto’s standing in front of him a second later, breathing heavily and blinking rapidly. “U-Uh - that’s fine! You don’t have to!”

“Nonsense,” Ignis responds, walking towards the fridge. “Believe me, it’s as much for me as it is for y-”

The shelves are empty.

Completely, totally empty, save for a knocked-over bottle of mustard.

Frowning, and attempting to ignore the creeping sensation of dread, Ignis starts pulling open the adjacent cupboards.

Empty, empty, empty.

*Why…?*

“Prompto,” he begins, voice serious. “You’ve hardly been eating.”

“That’s okay!” Prompto hurries, and Ignis can see the moment where he internally smacks himself for it.

Ignis narrows his eyes, and, in the span of twenty seconds, comes up with four viable reasons that Prompto would be ‘okay’ with not eating.

*Knee-jerk response - it is in his nature to be as little a bother as possible. Or he’s been exclusively eating from outside. Perhaps he was planning on going shopping tomorrow - or even tonight. (But who waits until they have nothing left?) Or. He just ran out of food and was planning on asking Noctis for help tomorrow because, for some reason, he doesn’t have money to buy his own. And he was too hesitant to come to me.*

Ignis straightens out, confident in the fact that he’s considered every possibility, and expects the answer will probably be a combination of a few of them. He doesn’t like surprises, so having thought this through will make navigating the topic much easier.

“Prompto,” he starts again, gentle. “Can you tell me why you don’t have any food in your kitchen?”

The blond shifts from foot to foot, staring at the ground. *He’s thinking of a lie.*

“I… ran out?” he starts, voice markedly unsure. “And I was just gonna order a pizza or something
tonight?”

It makes sense. It does. Ignis even thought of it beforehand. And yet, there’s something in those
stilted words, that shaky grin.

“Prompto,” Ignis nearly whispers, coming close. “I just want to help you. Are you sure that’s the
case?”

And maybe there’s something a bit too soft in Ignis’s expression, because tears well up in Prompto’s
eyes, spilling over the edge a moment later.

“Oh,” Ignis says, immediately pulling the blond against his chest, holding him tight. “Oh, Prompto.
What happened?”

“M-m-my-” Prompto tries, choking on his words.

Ignis makes shushing sounds into his hair, lets him cry it out until he’s ready to speak, rubbing
soothing circles into his back. It’s been a while - a few years, even - since Noctis has come to him
like this. It feels nice, in a way, to be able to comfort someone, to feel trusted in a person’s worst
moments.

But this isn’t about him.

“M-my mom,” Prompto finally gasps out.

Ignis’s hand stutters in its motions. “What about her?”

He prays to each Astral - even Ifrit - that nothing bad happened to her. The last thing Prompto needs
is that grief.

“S-she... she...” he struggles to draw in a breath, sniffing audibly. “S-she took all my money away.”

This time, Ignis’s hand stops completely, and he resists the urge to clench his fingers into Prompto’s
shirt. “What?”

“I... I told her I w-wasn’t... going to go into b-business,” Prompto explains in stops and starts,
sobbing harder into Ignis’s chest. “S-she called me... d-delusional and... said I w-would have to...
support m-m-myself. A-and I’m trying to get a job... I r-really am... it just takes s-so long... and...”

Ignis can feel his heart sinking, down down down, into his shoes and out of his body and deep into
the ground.

Ifrit - please let something bad happen to this woman.

“What are you going into?” he interrupts, as kindly as he can.

Prompto tenses against him briefly. “P-Photography... it’s... it’s d-dumb-”

“It isn’t,” Ignis cuts in abruptly, squeezing the boy harder. “You’ll make a fine photographer. And I
would know - I’ve actually seen your work. I’m assuming that woman-” he spits like an expletive “-hasn’t.”

Prompto slowly shakes his head no, hiccuping.

“I’m proud of you, Prompto,” Ignis continues, directly into the boy’s ear. “I’m so proud of you for
pursuing your dreams. The world will be a more colorful place for it.”
And Prompto immediately untangles his arms from where they’re squished up between his and Ignis’s chests, and wraps his arms around him - returning the hug with a force that communicates how desperately he needed to hear that.

“And Prompto,” he goes on, moving his arms more vigorously in an attempt to warm the cold surface of Prompto’s skin. “Understand that what she did to you is child abuse. Were you still seventeen, I’d be pressing for you to take legal action. Unfortunately, you are an adult, and there’s little we can do except move forward.”

“S-she probably knows that,” Prompto sniffs, trembling slowly easing down.

“I imagine she does,” Ignis says, squeezing Prompto one last time before drawing away to place his hands on his shoulders and look directly into his eyes. “Now, listen to me. You will cease contact with those people until you are securely on your path. Do not let them continue to try and poison your mind.”

Prompto bites his lip, nods. His eyes are a worrying shade of red against his pale-blue skin, and his hair is even more haphazard than usual, but for the first time tonight he looks as if a great weight has been lifted off his shoulders.

“And you will accept money from me,” Ignis says, firm. And before Prompto can open his mouth to protest - “It can be a loan, if that’s what you’d prefer. Until you’re back on your feet. But I will not allow you to starve in the interim.”

A variety of expressions crosses over Prompto’s face. In the end, he simply nods his affirmative.

“Excellent,” Ignis says, dropping his hands and reaching into his wallet. “Here, I have 20,000 gil on me. That should last until you start working. Feel free to ask for more, if it doesn’t.”

Prompto gapes at the collection of bills. “Wow. I. Uh-”

“And don’t even try to pay it all back with the entirety of your first paycheck,” Ignis warns. “Learn how to budget, alright? I can teach you.”

Prompto nods vigorously, finally accepts the cash. “Thank you. Thank you so much, Ignis.”

Ignis smiles. “And I’m taking you out to dinner. On me - don’t argue.”

Prompto’s stomach growls audibly at the plan, and Ignis feels something inside himself break. “Okay. Thank you… thank you, thank you, thank you.”

“Don’t mention it,” Ignis says quickly as he pushes out of the kitchen and into the entryway, pinching the bridge of his nose and trying not to tear up himself.

He feels a tug at his elbow. “Um… Ignis?” Prompto starts, and the advisor turns to look. “Please don’t tell Noct about this?”

This boy really is trying to make him cry, isn’t he?

“I won’t,” Ignis promises. “Now come on, you’ve got a lot of meals to catch up on.”

And Prompto smiles, the sight of it like a brilliant dawn after the blackest night. “Yeah.”
IGNIS IS HIS MOM NOW!! it'S CANON!!

i hope this chapter was sufficiently sad enough for you sadists <3
it only gets angstier next week, so strap yourselves in for a Good Time TM

thanks so much for reading, as always <3 let me know what you thought? and perhaps be my friend on Tumblr?

((P.S. I know only like, 6 of you screamed at the derrick mention, but HEY THAT WENT OUT TO YOU OG FANS <3))

((P.P.S. this is novel length now?? oh my goODNESS IT'S NOT EVEN CLOSE TO BEING DONE?? [chanting] long fic! long fic! long fic!)))
Pomp and Circumstance

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Prompto's Shit Mother decided that his lack of conformity means he doesn't deserve money, and by extension, the luxury of eating. Ignis stepped in before things got drastic.

Chapter Notes

a warning;
this chapter deals with internalized homophobia. if this is a sensitive subject for you, i encourage you to make the right decision for yourself. and always remember that we're dealing with an unreliable narrator with very misguided perceptions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Noctis hates suits.

They're restrictive, weigh him down, are prone to overheating, and the tie chokes him just enough to cause light breathing problems the entire time it's on. They're also stuffy, oppressive, a symbol of arbitrary power structures -

Really, they're just absolute shit.

So it makes sense, in the end, that Noctis would receive the worst news of his life while wearing one.

“Ahh,” Noctis sighs, casting his line into the Quay’s crystal-clear shores. “I could live here forever.”

“You better not,” Gladio grumbles, leaning against a wooden post. “‘Cause if I’m stuck shielding your fisherman ass for the rest of my life, I’ll probably end up going rogue and killing you.”

“Can it,” Gladio sighs, rubbing his face for the twentieth time that hour.

Sitting against an adjacent post, Ignis lets out a snort.

“Ha! Iggy found it funny!”

“Ignis,” Gladio gasps, faux-betrayal coloring his features.
The advisor throws his hands up. “It was intellectual humor!”

“Right. You’re both geeks,” Gladio confirms, and then stretches exaggeratedly. “Agh - Noct, my knots have knots. Let’s just call it a day.”

Noctis pouts. “Fiiiine. Nothing’s biting, anyway.” He slowly draws his line back in, hoping something decides to nibble at the last second.

It doesn’t happen. Bummer.

Ignis finishes writing something in his notebook and stands, shaking out his limbs. “Perhaps we can procure some lunch before the last council session?”

Noctis stomach growls at the plan, and he nods eagerly while dismissing the rod. “Hell yeah! No fish, though. They’ll just mock me.”

Gladio laughs. “They’re dead, Noct. They won’t be mocking anything,” he says, clapping Noctis on the back and pushing him back towards the beach. “Let’s get a move on, Princess.”

Noctis gets an alfredo pasta - and when Ignis tries a bite he immediately scribbles the word **ROSEMARY!!** into his little notebook, which is quite amusing. Gladio gets two steaks and asks if there’s such thing as ‘lunch-dessert’ because, well. He’s Gladio. All the while, the glittering water of the sea sways gently beneath their feet, visible through the glass floor of their circular booth.

The softness of the day has Noctis reflecting on the fact that Galdin Quay is an actual paradise, and that he’d just have to take Prompto someday soon. Daydreams of the fun they’d have entertain his thoughts for an hour, causing a rush of innocent happiness to surge through him as he lounges back on the memory foam bed in their suite.

Prompto Prompto Prompto. They’d fish together, have water gun fights, and eat the best seafood money could buy them. At the end of the day, they’d catch the bi-weekly fireworks show, and Prompto would take an excessive amount of pictures, and Noctis would kiss him, because. They’re obviously boyfriends, in this fantasy. Of course.

Noctis bites his lip, tries to stray away from indulging those delusions. Instead, he focuses his thoughts to something more neutral - like, what is Prompto doing in this very moment? And is he down to play King’s Knight?

(A quick text later, Noctis discovers the answers to those questions are nothing, dude and hell yeah!)

And so Noctis passes the time like that for a bit, and that deliriously happy feeling lingers throughout - up until Ignis informs him it’s time to put on that damned suit, because their final meeting is in twenty minutes.

Twenty-one minutes later, Noctis finds himself shuffling into one of the Quayside Cradle’s many conference rooms, taking a begrudging seat next to his father as Ignis and Gladio stand toward the walls - ever watchful.
Niflheim people are boring, but then again, anyone in politics is boring. Despite that, Noctis feels on edge around them, starkly aware they’re still formally considered the enemy. Hopefully, however, things would change. This last meeting was meant to either finalize their terms or... find themselves at an unresolvable disagreement.

Which, at best, would leave things the way they were.

And at worst? War.

Noctis swallows, rearranges the paperwork in front of him for the fourteenth time. He just wants this meeting to start. The creepy way the Niflheim chancellor is looking at him doesn’t help his nerves much, either.

Noctis really doesn’t like that guy. He’s hardly interacted with him, sure, but the red hair and stupid outfit is somehow more unnerving than if he’d adopted a conformative appearance like everyone else.

He also talks like a poet from two centuries ago, but that’s more annoying than anything else.

“Shall we begin?” Regis announces at last, smiling warmly at the variety of people settled around the round conference table. “Council Niflheim - I hope you’ve enjoyed your stay in Lucis, and that the terms of the treaty have been agreeable thus far.”

Emperor Aldercapt clears his throat, the sound snaking its way up with foreboding from the opposite end of the table. “Galdin Quay has been agreeable. And we’ve found the peace treaty to have progressed quite sufficiently during these discussions.”

Though no one on the Lucian end physically expresses it, Noctis is sure each person is inwardly sighing with relief.

“We agree to all of your terms, given you agree to ours,” Aldercapt continues. “Niflheim will relinquish all control of outlying Lucian territories, given the allowance of a continued presence within our bases. This presence, of course, will be purely for the intent of scientific research, and will not be a militaristic occupation.”

“Agreed,” Regis confirms. “The terms of this occupation have been finalized and outlined.” Here, a scribe steps in from the sidelines to hand the Niflheim party a small stack of papers. “It puts our agreements into writing. See that you find it sufficient.”

The council begins reading, and Noctis resists the urge to check his phone or twiddle his thumbs. He does allow one exchanged look with his father - a pensive glance that manages to communicate an important message: *We’re not out of the woods yet, my son. Stay alert.*

The silent message ends up having weight to it, because few minutes later, the chancellor is clearing his throat. For some reason, Noctis is immediately suspicious.

“There is one more term I wish to add,” he drawls, voice syrupy and fingers tracing circles on the sleek cherrywood. “In order to truly symbolize the peace between our nations. I think it only fair, given how much Niflheim is sacrificing.”

Under the table, Regis’s hands clench. “That is certainly open to discussion. What term did you have in mind?”

The chancellor pauses for a moment, building up tension. “A political marriage!” he finally announces, sitting back and tipping his hat with a flourish. “Between Prince Noctis of Lucis and
Lady Lunafreya of Tenebrae, of course. A symbolic union to bridge the gap between our respective territories.”

What?

If the suit was lightly choking him before, it was outright strangling him now. Lunafreya? The girl he hadn’t seen since he was a kid? The girl he sometimes braved scary political boundaries to exchange letters with, only to find they really didn’t have much to say to each other anyway? That Lunafreya?

“Of course, if you don’t find this agreeable,” the chancellor baits, “Niflheim wouldn’t feel justified in signing - you see - and would walk away most unsatisfied. We wouldn’t want that, now, would we?”

Those fucking cowards, giving them an ultimatum at the last possible second. Noctis shouldn’t have expected any less, but the fact that it’s about his entire life makes it much, much worse.

He feels a cold sweat break out at every point on his skin, making him feel faint, and gods - this suit is really, really not helping. And judging by the way the chancellor is looking at him, his shock must be obvious.

“Oh dear,” the chancellor comments idly, smirk on his horrible face. “I haven’t upset the prince now, have I?”

And Noctis is just lucid enough to register the look his father is giving him - subtle, but expressive. Don’t mess this up, Noctis. The kingdom is at stake.

“Oh, the contrary,” Noctis hurries, hoping his voice doesn’t betray his anguish. “I’m overjoyed. Luna is a close and dear person to me, and our marriage would be an important step in overcoming the divide between our nations.”

The carefully-chosen words come out stilted, as if caught up in wax. He tries for a smile, to help drive his point, but it’s wooden.

If the chancellor notices this, he pays it no mind. “Excellent! Of course, given your age, we consider it best to hold off on the ceremony for a couple years yet.”

“Naturally,” Regis supplements, quietly bristling. Noctis knows what he’s thinking - a couple years is still way too soon.

“I’m pleased that could be settled so readily. Have your people draft the final treaty, and we will sign it,” the chancellor grins, and Noctis imagines all his teeth pointed into sharp incisors. “Ah, what a joyous occasion! Let me be the first to offer congratulations on your engagement, Prince Noctis.”

The word engagement on its own, regardless of the oily undertone with which it was delivered, is enough to make Noctis want to puke. “Thank you, Chancellor.”

The rest of the Niflheim party catch up to the conversation, murmuring their quick congratulations as well.

Noctis wants to leave. He needs to leave. His suit feels like it weighs a hundred pounds. He feels like he’s trapped in a heat prison. The back of his thighs are sweaty. The room is blurring at the edges. He can’t breathe. He needs to go.

But he can’t go. He’s stuck quietly swallowing his panic and existing through the rest of the
proceedings - an excruciating two hours of hammering out the verbiage of the treaty.

And when it’s Noct’s turn to sign said treaty, right under the phrase TERM XVII: PRINCE NOCTIS WILL WED LADY LUNAFREYA IN MAY OF M.E. 756, he feels like he’s doing so in his own blood - spurting straight out of an open wound and spilling onto the paper with a finality that nearly overcomes him.

He hardly remembers the celebratory dinner afterwards, save for the fact that it was in the Quayside’s most elegant private dining room and the small amount of food he ate felt cold and alien. The world never stopped tilting.

But he didn’t think about it. He fought back the panic with a greatsword, because he knew if he actually considered what this meant for his entire life, he’d start bawling and begging his father to fix it, like… like a fucking eight year old.

How appropriate, to act the age he was the last time he even saw Luna.

And when Noctis finally, finally finds himself alone, it is only within the shower he immediately dove for. Here he turns the water pressure up to maximum capacity, sits on the floor, and lets himself quietly choke out his sobs - ever mindful of his retainers on the other side of the wall.

It’s decidedly unsatisfying. He wants to openly wail - to cry himself out for three hours and then eventually pass out. But he isn’t allowed the luxury, not until tomorrow night, when he’s finally back in his apartment and, most importantly, alone.

So he beats back his thoughts again, existing in a dark, purgatorial haze until that time comes.

Their return is delayed. It’s nighttime when they finally leave, and the hour-long drive seems like seven to Noctis, at that point. He’s pent up, threatening to burst at any moment.

What makes matters worse is when Ignis follows him into his apartment, heading to the kitchen to presumably make dinner.

“I’m not hungry,” Noctis says instantly, wanting nothing more than his very good friend to fuck right off.

Ignis doesn’t press it. “Very well. I will go retrieve your homework from Prompto. Do you think you’ll be able to get any done tonight?”

Prompto.

Noctis feels like throwing up all over again. “No,” he says, clipped.

“Then I shall give it to you tomorrow,” Ignis nods, and starts to head for the door. He hesitates a little in front of it, like he wants to say something more, but settles on a simple “Goodnight.”

The door clicks shut, and is locked a moment later. Noctis deflates, goes into his room, and locks that door, too. He crawls into bed, draws his comforter up to his chin, breathes a ragged sigh, and promptly bursts into tears.

He knew this would happen someday. He thought he’d felt sufficiently resigned to it, but now that its
been forced on him, he feels he’d rather be crushed by a boulder. Or beheaded by a guillotine. Or burnt at the stake. Whichever.

Noctis just feels so utterly out of control, and it’s a feeling he’s been subject to his entire life, so it only makes sense his romantic life would end up being controlled too. And yet, he’d foolishly believed he’d at least have some freedom of choice in that aspect, like his father had.

He should know by now - his life isn’t supposed to be happy or good. It’s supposed to be a long list of duties, until the day he dies.

Noctis sobs harder, tears slipping sideways down his face and thoroughly wetting his pillow.

It’s bad enough that he could never have Prompto, could never give in to those feelings. But this? Not even having the chance to try and get over it, and maybe fall in love with someone in a more heterosexual manner?

It makes the world feel devoid of all things bright.

Because he knows he could never love Luna, not like that. She’s too analogous to a sister-type figure. The rest of his life, then, is doomed to calculated political acts, false smiles, and empty hearts.

He probably won’t be able to experience romantic love. Not now, not ever. Mother of all irony - this stupid, forbidden crush is the closest he’ll ever get to that sort of happiness.

Noctis is full-on shaking now, wrapped up tight in his blankets and sobbing loud enough to fill the room, tendrils of anguish slithering out and over him, trapping him in his misery.

He hates who he is. He hates how he feels. And he really hates this stupid fucking treaty.

Eventually, his weeping turns to whimpering, lulling him into a restless sleep.

Naturally, the last thing Noctis wants is to go to school the next morning.

Naturally, Ignis doesn’t accept his lame ‘jet-lagged’ joke, and forcibly drags him out of bed.

And so his eyes are still raw from the previous night’s crying jag when Prompto skips up to him at the school gates.

Oh, Prompto. The very image of him - and he looks especially pretty today - stabs into Noct’s chest like a blade through butter. And when said Prompto nearly tackles him with a hug? Well. Something inside Noctis officially breaks.

“Noct! I missed ya, buddy! How was Galdin Quay? How did the treaty go? Did you catch any good fish? What’s the ocean like?”

“It was fine,” is all Noctis responds, gruff and curt.

And he can’t take the hurt that flickers over Prompto’s face, so he quickly turns away and burns a path straight to their homeroom. He then proceeds to bury his face in his arms, teeth tensed tightly against the urge to cry, responding to Prompto with dismissive grunts only.
By lunch, and a full four periods of being ignored, Prompto’s spirit has been positively crushed. Noctis would feel guilty if his own hadn’t been decimated not 48 hours prior.

The blond picks at a box of food that looks suspiciously Ignis-like in its craft, silent and pensive. Noctis doesn’t even bother opening his lunch; he just lays back and watches the sun filter through the leaves of their tree.

“H-hey,” Prompto starts, and then stops, biting his lip.

Noctis closes his eyes and slowly counts to three. “No,” he exhales.

But he is. He is. He’s mad at Prompto for - for being so damn perfect, for making him understand what it’s like to feel tender, and especially for being a Six-damned male. Noctis could have gone his whole life without knowing how special it is to feel such a connection to someone.

Now he’ll always know. Now he’ll always feel that void.

“Then, uh. What’s wrong? You know you can talk to me if you need to, right?” He sounds unsure, but determined to help, and Noctis hates how that makes his heart flutter.

Might as well throw a bone to make him shut up, if anything. “The treaty went to shit at the last minute.”

“No,” Prompto frowns. “But I thought it went through? That’s what Ignis said, at least?”

Noctis wants to punch something. Of course he’s pressing, because he’s Prompto, and he actually gives a shit about - well, anyone, really. He cares so much and gives people 110% of his attention and has a smile during the worst of times and… and it only serves to make the prince feel worse.

“It did,” Noctis responds, pausing again before continuing. “But they added a last minute condition.”

Prompto seems to read his hesitation. “You don’t have to talk about it, if you don’t want t-”

“I’m engaged, Prom. They’re making me marry Luna. When I’m 20.”

Prompto drops his fork, gapes, and there’s complete silence for a moment. Eventually he swallows, and there’s that goddamn smile again, because Prompto has a need to cheer up the entire fucking planet.

“That’s a good thing. Right?” he tries. “She’s a good person and you like her.”

Noctis almost growls. Almost. Because the irony of this whole conversation is much more infuriating than it is amusing. “No. I mean yes. She’s a good person. But I don’t like her. Not like that.”

“Oh. I’m…” Prompto’s eyes rove around, uncertain. “I’m sorry, Noct. I can’t imagine what that must be li-”
“No, you fucking can’t.”

Out of nowhere, Noctis is sitting up, jabbing an accusatory finger at the shocked boy, and wait - where did his patience run off to?

“You have no idea what it feels like. I’ve never felt this bad in my entire life, so excuse me for not wanting to talk about it or for not being in the most chipper of moods today. I’m so fucking sorry.”

Prompto’s sitting back now, subconsciously moving away from the advancing finger. “I didn’t mean it.”

“I don’t give a fuck what you meant!” Noctis yells now, anger fully unleashed, and he knows he’s being irrational. He knows. He can’t stop. “You don’t know what it’s like to feel this horrible! To feel like nothing in your life is under your own goddamn control! You’re - you’re so fucking lucky, you know that? Fuck you!”

Prompto flinches at the expletive and squeezes his eyes shut tightly. When they open again, they’re markedly wet, transfixed on the ground - and Noctis needs to leave. Right. Now. Because if Prompto starts crying, he doesn’t know what will happen next.

“Fuck this shit,” he mutters, mostly to himself. “I shouldn’t even be here right now.”

And then he’s standing and making a beeline for the locked gates, which he warps over. Fifteen minutes later, he’s back in his bed, screaming into his pillow.

---

“Knock knock,” is the first thing Noctis hears upon waking up, and it comes from Ignis standing before his room and gently tapping on his open door.

When had he fallen asleep?

“Go away,” Noctis groans, turning over in his bed and dragging the comforter to his ears. Prick.

“Noct,” Ignis tries, soft. “I just need you to explain a few things and I’ll be gone.”

Gone sounds good. “Fine. What.”

“First - why did I receive a call from your school informing me of unexcused absences in your last two periods? Second - why did Prompto call me to say he had your backpack? Third - when I retrieved it from him, why was he crying?”

Noctis perks up at that one. “Fuck. He was crying?”

“Violently so.”

Astrals, he feels like the most evil person to ever exist. How could he… and to Prompto? Prompto?


Ignis sighs like he knew the answer the whole time, which he probably did. “Noct, look at me.”
And he’s using his most gentle of voices - the kind that always comforted Noctis when he was younger, so the prince finds himself turning back around before he can really process the action.

Glistening eyes meet spectacled ones. “What?”

“I want to help you, Noct. You need to tell me what’s going on.”

Noctis sits up and against the headboard, picks at cotton of his blankets. “I can’t.”

The advisor pauses for a moment, presumably struggling with finding a way to break Noct’s walls down.

In the end, his approach is sickeningly direct.

“Is this about your engagement to Lady Lunafreya? And what that means in regards to Prompto?”

It’s as if Noct’s whole world shatters, in that moment.

“W-what do you,” he stammers, eyes wide and fearful. “What do you mean?”

Ignis seems to realize he’d inadvertently crossed Noct’s most personal boundary. “I simply - I’ve - I’ve noticed…”

And fuck, this must be serious, if Ignis doesn’t have the words for it. Noctis loses feeling in his fingers, and they become staticky and unreachable, and eventually that feeling catches up with his brain because there are two Ignises now, and they’re both looking at Noctis with that understanding he’s always feared, and fuck, fuck, fuck, he feels like the dirtiest oil stain on the bottom of a thirty year old truck, he feels like disgust incarnate, he feels Ignis looking into him, knowing him, judging him, tut-tutting over the sad, unfortunate fact that the prince’s good name is permanently sullied.

Noctis feels like sin itself.

He also can’t feel his head anymore. It’s floated off.

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” Ignis continues, evidently sticking to his guns. His voice sounds distant and warped. “But it appears you’ve taken an interest in Prompto.”

And there it is. He’s officially been outed.

The next few minutes are a blur. He doesn’t know what happened save for the fact that he only becomes lucid again once Ignis squeezes his hand tightly and his sharp voice pierces directly into his ear: “-eathe, Noctis! You have to breathe!”

He’s out. He’s out. He’s out he’s out he’s out he’s out and he never wanted to be out.

This is it.

“What’s - going to - happen - to me?” he manages to gasp, eyes blown wide and focused on his kneecap and refusing to turn away or blink no matter how hard they burn. He’s completely checked out.

“What ever do you mean?” Ignis pleads, fully on the bed now and holding Noctis against him.
“Please, Noct, you’re hyperventilating. Square breathing, remember? In for four. Hold for four. Out for four.”

Ignis matches his breaths to Noct’s panicked ones and then gradually slows them, subconsciously directing the prince’s diaphragm. An indistinct amount of time later, Noctis is finally settled enough to speak.

“Does - does my dad know? When… when am I going to be banished? Do I have to go into isolation?” Noctis heaves, sagging against Ignis’s chest. “J-Just tell me. So I can. Get my things ready.”

Ignis’s hand, which had been sifting gently through the prince’s locks, freezes. “Noct… you think that - oh. I’m afraid I’ve made a terrible mistake.”

They’re silent, for a moment. Ignis catches a tear off Noct’s cheek. When had he started crying?

“I didn’t mean to cause you distress,” Ignis begins explaining, shame clouding his voice. “I was under the assumption you’d accepted yourself and were simply too shy to tell me.”

Noctis stares at the glowing point of red next to his TV’s power button. He doesn’t understand. “So if I accepted m-myself... it would be easier to b-banish me?”

Ignis huffs, short and impatient. “Noct, wherever did you get the idea you would be banished?” Noctis sobs. Ignis holds him tighter.


“Oh, Noctis,” Ignis sighs, and he sounds near tears himself. “I have a lot of explaining to do.”

“Explaining?” Noctis echoes, hardly processing the words - he's still shaky and not-completely-there.

“You need to calm down, first. I will go into the details, later. But understand the gist of it: you are not a failure, and nobody will either judge nor treat you differently because of this.”

The words take a moment to connect. When they do, the tentative relief feels akin to stumbling upon an oasis after days of dehydration.

Noctis doesn’t quite believe it, of course. But for the time being, he’s content to lay against Ignis, stare at that one crack in his wall, and try to come back down to Eos.

Later, over hot chocolate with extra thick marshmallows, Noctis learns. A lot.

He learns of the dozens of monarchs before him that had been LGBT+. He learns of consensual open relationships. He learns of the concept of having a wife ‘in title’, only. He learns of surrogacy.

He learns he’s allowed to exist.

He also learns that only Ignis and Gladio know because they’re around him all the time, and really - it isn’t that obvious to anyone else, he doesn’t have to worry.
Gladio comes over with a supersize Cup Noodle. He learns he makes the funniest expressions when he’s pining, and that Gladio thinks his crush is cute, not revolting.

He learns that the two believe Prompto might even like him back. This he hardly entertains as true.

It feels so warm, nonetheless, to have a conversation about his male romantic interest in a completely normal way.

He also learns he doesn’t have to tell anyone else, if he doesn’t want to.

And he doesn’t think he will. Not yet.

And that’s perfectly fine.

―

“Gladio, it’s kinda gay.”

“Just like you. Take ‘em.”

Noctis studies the bouquet of daisies in his hands - Prompto’s favorite.

“They’re from my personal garden,” Gladio nags. “It’s a big sacrifice for me. So, no refusing.”

“It’s - it’s late. What if he isn’t even up?”

Ignis chimes in with a short laugh. “If you two ever slept this early, my life would be much, much easier.”

Noctis rolls his eyes. “Fine. I need a ride.”

“As you wish.”

―

Loitering in the overly bright hallway of Prompto’s apartment complex, Noctis feels like he’s about to throw up.

He doesn’t want to do this. He needs to do this. He wish Ignis came with him.

Before he can change his mind, he knocks - one, two, three. Firm but polite.

A beat later - “Who is it?” And Prompto’s voice sounds scratchy and raw, and Noct’s sense of nausea reaches a crescendo.

“It’s - it’s me.”

Nothing happens for a bit. He deserves that.

He’s turning to leave when the door slowly creaks open, and Prompto peeks out from behind it. Noctis really feels like throwing up.
Because - fuck - the kid looks haggard. His eyes are a puffy, angry red behind his thick-framed glasses. His lips are chapped and bloody - probably from being bit at. His hair is a haphazard mess, and there are nervous scratch marks on his forearms.

Noctis doesn’t know what to do, how to address the magnitude of his mistake. So he shoves the bouquet into Prompto’s chest, and the two stand there in silence.

“Um, thank you?” Prompto eventually says, and the adorable fuck actually pauses to sniff them. “If that’s all…”

“I’m sorry!” Noctis rushes, and the words start tumbling out like a cascading waterfall. “I’m so, so sorry, Prompto. I didn’t mean a single thing I said to you. I don’t know what I was thinking - I. I was just frustrated, and I took it out on you, and you didn’t deserve that, and I’m a shit person. You’re my best friend, and I never wanted to belittle you. You’re amazing and a wonderful human and I’m so sorry. I’m-”

“Noct,” Prompto says, the name curling out on a smile. “I understand. You’re forgiven.”

Noctis stares. “W-What? Just like that?”

The blond rubs at the side of his nose. “Well, the flowers helped.”

Noctis breathes in audibly, incredulous. “No, Prompto, you need to - you need to hit me, or something-”

“Nah,” the blond replies, grinning fully now. “Never did believe in corporal punishment.”

Noctis doesn’t understand. At all. “Why are you so…?”

“All I needed to know was that you didn’t mean it,” Prompto explains, picking at the brilliant white petals of the daisies. “Look. Everyone has bad days, and from what it sounds like, yours was especially shitty. I get why you snapped. But you didn’t mean it, so I forgive you.”

And Noctis is so overcome by the absolute awe he feels for the person in front of him - so selfless, understanding, and inherently kind. How does a person like Prompto even exist?

Before he can register his actions, he’s pulling said ethereality into his arms, hugging the boy tightly and whispering a thousand sorrys and thank yous all at once, intermingled together.

And for the first time in months, Noctis doesn’t feel a thousand-ton weight on his shoulders, doesn’t hear the voice telling him to stop being touchy in his head. In that moment, he feels limitless.

“You’re - you’re crushing the flowers,” Prompto giggles into his ear.

And Noctis just smiles, nods, and holds him tighter.

Chapter End Notes
if you guys feel like burning me at the stake or something, well. i humbly accept. please end the perpetual suffering i put these poor boys through. ;(

(i promise the next two will be fluff. we will all have happy holidays, damnit!)

in the meantime, hang out with me on Tumblr?
Sweets to the Sweet

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Noct learns he has to marry Luna. Cue emotional breakdown, cue exploding at Prompto, cue Ignis accidentally outing him, cue a wonderful comfort session, cue gay apologizes with flowers.

Chapter Notes

okay, I know the context of today's chapter title within the actual Hamlet play is pretty melancholic, but. let's just pretend it's as cute as it sounds. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Prompto stares at his scale for a long, long time.

It’s Saturday morning – only five days after Prompto got access to food again. Since then, his eating habits have taken a bit of a strange turn.

Strange here meaning normal. Because the voice in his head that counts every calorie that slips past his lips, that dictates every decision he makes, that affects his every waking moment? Well, it’s been MIA for the past five days.

For the first time in a long while, Prompto is able to look at a filling meal and see the food for what it is – a delicious source of nutrients to keep him strong and healthy and happy.

He knows it has to do with the trauma of losing it for two weeks. He knows it’s just a product of associating hunger with genuine fear. He does. Even still, he wants to hang onto the feeling.

And if he steps on that scale… the numbers may just serve to kick him right back into the negative mindset he’d been enshrouded in before. Because despite how horrible that period without money had been, he knows his mind is prone to romanticizing the hunger eventually.

Prompto’s not sure he wants that.

He stares a bit longer. And then longer still, burning holes into the tile floor underneath the janky device. Finally, he sighs, turns, and walks out of the bathroom. Not today.

He doesn’t know where the voice went, but he likes that it’s gone. He’ll try to keep it that way, despite how invalidating it feels to do so.

Ping!

Prompto pulls out his phone as he steps into the kitchen, excited at the idea of being able to eat a small breakfast without any guilt. His fridge is wonderfully stocked, and, nudging a few items aside, he manages to extract a couple of large eggs with one hand.
Prompto smiles, sets the eggs on the counter, and shoots cooking spray onto his pan.

**NOCTIS [11:33]: NEW ASSCREED DLC YOU WANNA COME OVER N PLAY OR WHAT**

Prompto laughs, cracks the eggs, and prepares his food with a bounce in his step and a smile plastered on his face.

They’re four hours into their gaming session when the day’s light drizzle turns into an outright downpour, smattering continuously against Noct’s large windows.

“Hmm,” Noctis hums. “Cozy.”

“Yes,” Prompto agrees, nestling deeper into the couch he’s laying on, head turned to the side and focused on the TV. His legs drape across Noct’s, who is sitting upright, controller in hand.

It’s a new position Prompto decided to just go for, spur-of-the-moment style. Usually, the idea of laying any part of him on anyone else would freak him out— but his weight isn’t worrying him of late. He was pleased when Noctis didn’t protest; he just shifted a bit and used Prompto’s shins as an elbow rest. He feels free, and light-hearted.

“Y’know what would make it cozier?” Noctis asks, in the middle of an assassination.

“What?”

“Homemade dessert,” he sighs, making his character run around in small circles as he talks. “Like puff pastries, or cookies, or cake. With hot chocolate - mmm.”

The boys burst into giggles for a bit. “Let’s do it,” Noctis eventually says, pausing the game entirely and setting his controller to the side.

“Really?” Prompto lifts his legs up and moves to sit up.

“Yes, why not?” Noctis smiles, standing up and stretching. “We can get takeout for dinner and make it for dessert.”
Takeout, banana bread, and a rainstorm sounds like the perfect evening to Prompto.

Gods, does he love this feeling. The world seems so marvelously safe; the air itself seems to be wrapping him in a comforting hug. He can eat. He’s allowed to eat, and the act of doing so isn’t coated with a viscous, sludge-like mixture of dread.

He smiles back and wanders off into the kitchen. “One thing,” he calls behind him, peering into the cupboards. “You don’t have any bananas. Or hot chocolate mix.”

Noctis appears by the entryway. “Wanna brave the storm?” he asks in a dramatic voice, raising his eyebrows comically.

Prompto laughs. “I dunno, dude. We might not make it out alive!”

Noctis nods gravely. “That’s a risk I’m willing to take.”

“Aw, Noct, just for me? I’m flattered,” Prompto winks.

An awfully strange look passes over Noct’s face – almost enough to reintroduce the twisting knife of anxiety to Prompto’s gut. But it passes quickly, and Noctis merely smiles and nods, turning to head towards the coat rack by the door.

A beat later, the boys are huddled together under one large umbrella, laughing and trying to coordinate how to hop over puddles simultaneously. This results in lot of stumbling, slipping, and generally falling into each other. Prompto doesn’t mind.

He knows he could never have Noctis – not just for the fact that the prince would never be attracted to him like that – but for the fact that he’s engaged. Though saddening, he’s come to terms with it, content to relish being around Noct’s presence for as long as he can.

The shop they stumble into is small and homely, and a family-owned affair judging by the pre-teen manning the register. Noctis quickly ducks his head down so as to not be recognized, and the two make a beeline for the back of the store, sniggering together like deviant children as they hide out amongst the deli meats.

Prompto takes Noct’s hand – another risky move – and guides him towards the produce. “We need bananas, Noct, or did you want meat bread?”

“Yum, meat bread,” Noctis giggles, letting himself get dragged along. “Sounds saucy.”

“Saucy?”

The pair start cackling loudly, nearly falling over each other in their mirth. Prompto isn’t sure why it’s so funny. Why everything is so funny.

The kid at the register does not look impressed. Somehow, that makes it even funnier.

“Bananas, Prompto! Remember the mission!” Noctis finally gasps out between breaths, rubbing tears from his eyes. “It is of the upmost importance!”

And – fuck – Prompto’s sides are hurting now, because that Ignis impression was spot on.
They continue laugh for another solid minute, to the point where Prompto is outright hanging onto Noct’s shoulder to keep upright and Noctis is clutching to his back for a similar reason and everything feels so damn delightful.

What interrupts it, finally, is the sound of Prompto’s ringtone going off, a chorus of kwehs resounding through the cozy little shop. He pulls back to check the caller I.D., and –

“Oh, shit, I gotta take this,” he says. “It’s the film place!”

“Go, go,” Noctis urges. “I’ll get the stuff!”

Prompto slips into a private corner, hurriedly swiping and answering the call. “Hello?”

“Prompto Argentum?” And he recognizes the voice of the old man who’d interviewed him just a couple days prior.

“How are you?”

“Great – yourself?”

“I’m doing just fine. Listen – I’ve been considering a lot of applications over the past few days—” and here, Prompto’s heart starts to sink instinctively as he prepares for disappointment – “and you’re the best applicant I had, by far. I’m extending you the position of assistant film developer, if you’re still interested.”

“What?”

“Prompto chirps, unable to keep the merriment out of his voice, still coming off the high that is being around Noctis.

“What?”

The old man laughs kind-heartedly. “Do you want the job, Prompto?”

Prompto’s barely aware that he’s staring at a donut display case, open-mouthed and frozen. Never in a million years would he have expected this, considering he had no actual experience, and he felt way in over his head during the interview. Best applicant by far?

“Yes! Yes!” Prompto stutters, coming to himself. “Of course I do! Thank you so much!”

“Far out,” the old man laughs again. “Training starts Monday at 1. See you then.”

“Yes!” Prompto says again, feeling like a broken record. “I’ll uh – I’ll be there!”

“Cool. Have a good weekend, kid.”

“Y-Yeah! You too!” And the line goes dead, and Prompto is staring at the donuts still, smile slowly creeping up onto his face and dominating all of his features.

Ha! Fuck you, mom! I can make a living off this!

Prompto locks his phone and all but skips to where he spots Noct’s spiky head bobbing above the short aisles. “Noct! Noct! Noct!”

“What! What! What!” Noctis responds, peering between two different brands of hot chocolate, a banana bunch tucked into the crook of his elbow.

“Hey kid! You want the job, ya?”
Prompto rocks back and forth on his heels a bit, building suspense. “I…”

“Yeaaaah?”

“… Got the job!”

Noctis nearly drops everything in his excitement, and soon the two are nearly screaming together as they let out celebratory whoops – and yeah, that poor register kid looks like he’s about ready to commit treason.

Prompto’s barely processing things when Noctis pulls him in for a tight hug, and it hits him a moment into it – that the prince is hugging him, and this time it isn’t for a sad reason or because they called jinx and he still likes to tease Prompto about that first time. It’s because Noctis feels happy.

It’s because he genuinely wants to.

Prompto’s on cloud nine. Complete and utter bliss.

“We gotta get candles, now,” Noctis announces, carving a path toward the appropriate aisle. “To celebrate!”


“Good thing we’re not making cake, then,” Noctis quips, waggling his eyebrows.

“You’re-” Prompto starts, staring with unbridled fondness. “You’re so silly.”

“Shh. Don’t tell anyone,” Noctis winks, grabbing a small pack of birthday candles. “Okay, let’s go!”

They order curry for dinner and watch a hilariously bad movie over it. It tastes so good to Prompto’s deprived tastebuds – all warmth and spice and softness and contentedness. His stomach feels warm with it, afterwards. It’s one of the safest feelings he’s ever known.

Making the banana bread goes much less smoothly. It’s not as if they’re bad at baking… they’re just extraordinarily messy. And, okay, maybe that could have been avoided if they hadn’t started throwing handfuls of flour at each other, but it was just too fun.

Before long they’re sitting across from each other at the dining table, and their small loaf has exactly 25 candles stuck into it haphazardly, at every conceivable angle. Outside, the downpour turns torrential, beating constantly against Noct’s windows.

“No, this is ridiculous,” Noctis says, and then abruptly produces a small flame that hovers over the tip of his finger. One by one, he lights the candles.

Prompto starts laughing outright. “I forgot you can do stuff like that.”

Noctis merely grins in response, and then pushes the platter forward. It looks utterly absurd, this tiny slab of bread absolutely littered with flame. “Happy job-day to you! Happy job-day to you!”

“Noct, you don’t have to si-”
“Happy job-day, dear Prompto! Happy job-day to you!”

Prompto fixes him with a faux-annoyed look, but he quickly loses the battle against suppressing his smile.

Noctis only beams wider. “Make a wish!”

And for the first time since Prompto was seven, he doesn’t think the words I wish I was skinny. Instead, he wishes he’s able to stay by Noct’s side for as long as humanly possible, and then spends a comical half minute blowing out each candle individually.

They each eat a slice of their creation, candle-holes littering the crust. It’s deliciously thick, and rich, and moist, and Prompto maybe moans a bit, and Noctis maybe ducks his head at that and awkwardly laughs it off with a semi-sarcastic comment – but none of that matters, because Prompto’s actually enjoying his food. He’s savoring it, letting each flavor dance across his tongue and alight his senses with pure happiness.

He’d forgotten what it was like, to actually appreciate food for what it is. For the past few years, all he’s known is the unsatisfactory feeling of hunger or the dull mindlessness of binging. It’s so alien to him, to associate food with gratification.

Prompto decides he loves the feeling.

They end up couch co-oping the console version of King’s Knight for a long time after that, getting wrapped up in an intense campaign that elicits a lot of screaming, frazzled nerves, and exaggerated sighs of relief once their team wins.

It also takes time.

“Shit – it’s midnight,” Prompto says suddenly, dropping his controller and staring at his phone.

“Uh-”

Just then, a flash of bright white floods the apartment, and a booming thunderclap follows soon after.

“Yeah, I’m not letting you walk home,” Noctis frowns, acknowledging the pouring rain for the first time in hours.

“Cabs are gonna be expensive in this weather,” Prompto sighs, staring wistfully out the window. He’s been trying to conserve the gil Ignis gave him, but sometimes unavoidable expenditures pop up out of nowhere. Like tonight. “Oh well, I gue-”

“Why don’t you just stayover?”

Prompto looks up. “Huh? Can you repeat that, buddy?”

Noctis is sitting up against the corner of the sofa now, unable to make eye contact. He clears his throat. “Um, just. You can spend the night, y’know.”

Prompto’s heart feels full. “Really?”

Noctis looks up, offers a tentative smile. “Yeah, ‘course. Why not?”
The solution seems so simple that Prompto’s wondered why they’d never done it before. “Thanks, dude! But – uh, wait, you don’t happen to have contact solution, do you?”

To his surprise, Noctis nods, though he looks sheepish. “Yeah… I got a bottle, and a case. I can give you something to wear, too. And I have a spare toothbrush. You’re set.”

Prompto grins a little wickedly, because he isn’t one to pass up an opportunity to tease. “Why do you have contact stuff, Noct? Experimenting, huh?”

Noctis blushes. “I just – Gladio kept saying my eyes turn purple when I do a lot of magic, and I just wanted to see-”

Prompto starts laughing, feeling so incredibly affectionate towards the stammering boy in front of him.

Oh, how he wishes things were different.

“Hey, no judgment here. Now lead the way!”

He ends up taking the bathroom first while Noctis sets out some clothes, a reality that makes him panic all throughout brushing his teeth, because what if he doesn’t fit? Noctis is so slender, and he’s still so fat.

“Oi, it’s ready for you,” Noctis calls as Prompto’s gently pinching the last contact off his iris. Here goes nothing.

Noctis disappears into the bathroom after, leaving Prompto alone in his room and staring at the spread of clothing on the bed, dorkily arranged into the shape of a person running. But – thank Shiva – they look stretchy and comfortable. Pajamas fit for a prince.

Prompto quickly pulls on the oversized black t-shirt and dark blue flannel pants, ever wary of Noctis coming back out mid-change. He’s happy to find that they fit him perfectly, a realization that makes him both proud and a bit hot around the neck, because, fuck, he’s wearing his crush’s clothing.

He dares pulling up the collar to sniff it, and yeah, it’s definitely a favorite of Noct’s, because it smells strongly of him – eucalyptus and teakwood. It feels so intimate, like the prince is constantly giving him a hug, holding him close –

The bathroom door opens and Prompto quickly spins around, offering a shaky smile and hiding his hands behind his back, as if he was doing something wrong.

Noctis is simply blinking at him, and Prompto starts growing self-conscious, because what if he doesn’t quite wear these clothes as well as he thinks he does? What if they usually hang off Noctis, and he looks like a fucking balloon, filling them out so thoroughly –

“Nice outfit,” the prince finally says, though it comes out more choked than playfully sarcastic. Prompto’s not sure why, but at least he isn’t making fun of him.

“Thanks. Got it on sale. 100% off,” he quips back.

Noctis laughs shakily, goes to grab a bag from his nightstand, and then disappears into the bathroom
again. This time, the door is left open, and Prompto settles on sitting on the edge of the bed and
passing the time with more King’s Knight.

That is, until twenty minutes pass, and Prompto’s grown thoroughly confused with what Noctis
could possibly be doing in there. Eventually, curiosity gets the best of him, and hey – the door is
open, anyway. He peers inside.

Noct’s hair is clipped back, which is unfairly cute. His hands and face are covered in a white foam
he’s scrubbing carefully into his skin. A dozen different products line the counter.

“Noct?” Prompto asks, causing the prince to jump.

He stares at him. Prompto stares back.

“What is this, a twelve-step program?” Prompto giggles, eyeing each bottle’s label. Mizon Emulsifier.
Skinfood Oil Cleanser. Dr. Jart’s Gel Cream Moisturizer. Snail Recovery Gel?

“I prefer to call it a twelve-step routine,” Noctis clarifies, trying to look as dignified as he can with a
thick lather of product on his face.

They stare at each other, again, for another long moment. Almost simultaneously, they burst into
laughter. And wow – they’ve been doing that a lot today, haven’t they? Prompto feels floaty.

“Oh, okay, it’s extra,” Noctis acknowledges, washing the cleanser off. “But, y’know, the prince
can’t get a pimple or it’ll be a national issue of the highest degree. Or something. Whatever Iggy says
when he gives me more of this shit.”

“I dig it,” Prompto says, and Noctis looks relieved. Which is perplexing, because the blond never
figured that he actually cares what anyone – nevertheless a plebe – thought about him. “I should take
better care of my own skin, honestly.”

Noctis perks up. “I can show you some of my stuff! What’s your skin type?”

“Uh – oily? I guess?” Prompto responds as Noctis rummages around for more hair clips.

“Mine too! Here, we’ll start with the first cleanser; wet your face and scrub it in with small circles…”

They end up playing with skincare products for another twenty minutes, and by the time Prompto’s
feeling clean and fresh-faced, it’s well into the AM. He lets out a yawn, and starts heading for the
couch.

“Prom? Where’r’you going?” Noctis calls after him, sleep in his voice.

“To sleep?” the blond answers, hovering in the doorway.

Noctis sits down on his bed. “Yer gonna sleep on a leather couch that’s more decorative than not?”
he yawns, eyes slipping closed. “You’ll hurt your back. C’mon, this bed is king-sized. Sleep with
me.”

Prompto’s mouth falls open. Noctis apparently realizes what he’s just said, because his droopy eyes
spring open wide, and his skin turns a bright tomato-red.
Prompto makes the executive decision to roll with it, because if he gets awkward about it, his attraction would be entirely too obvious. “Yeah, okay buddy, I'll sleep with you,” he winks, climbing onto the opposite side of the bed.

Noctis just groans, and Prompto laughs. Back to normal.

He settles down, and - Astrals, he’s never felt so incredibly comfortable, face thoroughly cleaned and sinking into linens fit for royalty. Within minutes, he’s fast asleep.

Prompto wakens to the gentle feeling of diffuse light hitting his face. He cracks an eye open from where he’s curled up, and peeks out the window. It’s cloudy, a bit drizzly, and just cold enough to be perfectly cozy, and wait – where is he?

He closes his eyes again as the memories of the previous day rush back to him, feeling like a dream in their perfection. He’d actually fallen asleep at Noct’s apartment. That really happened. Holy shit. His first sleepover.

And just as he makes to stretch, it registers that the heavy object draped across his torso is not a pillow.

It’s Noctis.

Noctis, curled up against his back, arms holding him in his sleep.

Prompto just about explodes. He's never been held like this in... well, ever. He thinks it might be the best feeling in the entire universe.

He’s also not sure what he did to deserve such a perfect weekend, but he thanks every Astral he knows – yes, even Ifrit – and revels in the feeling a little longer to the gentle pitter-patter of the rain. And if he goes a little fuzzy with his memory, he’s able to pretend this is just another normal day waking up next to his boyfriend.

Ah. What a lovely word that is.

But life hasn't quite worked out that way, and, trying not to feel crestfallen, Prompto extracts himself stealthily and slips into the kitchen to prepare breakfast.

He might not have it all, but in the small moments he gets with his prince – his best friend – his crush – he’s determined to make the best of it.

Chapter End Notes

this was so fun and sweet to think up :') i hope you guys enjoyed it too, and smiled even half as much as I did writing it.
next week's chapter will come out on Monday (aka Christmas) instead of Wednesday, as a little gift for you all! if you aren't too busy, give it a glance, I think it'll make your holidays a little more sweeter. ;)

let me know what you thought? and be my friend on Tumblr?
Chapter Summary

*Previously, on Salad Days...*

The boys have an unofficial date, baking banana bread and falling asleep together. Prompto gets a job and sticks it to his mother. Good times all around.

Chapter Notes

what's that? three POVs for the price of one?
round of applause for my beta, TheRegalHarvester!

It’s a typical night for Ignis. He prepared everyone’s dinner, cleaned up around the apartment, went over a few political documents, patiently sat through a half hour of annotated video game commentary, and is now driving Prompto home.

The night is frigid, but inside Ignis’s car, things are cozy. He hums along quietly to his soft shoegaze music, basking in the feeling of the heater slowly warming up his stiff fingers. Prompto is mostly silent in the passenger seat, staring out the window and occasionally commenting on what he sees.

A thought occurs to Ignis as he muses. “Prompto,” he says, coming to a stop in front of the apartment complex. “Christmas is soon. Can I venture to ask of your plans?”

The blond glances at him apprehensively, biting his lip, hand stilled on the door handle. “Uh… probably nothing.”

Ignis sighs. He suspected as much, but the confirmation hurts all the same. And the fact that if he hadn’t brought it up, Prompto probably wouldn’t have said anything at all.

Another thought strikes him like lightning. “What did you do on Thanksgiving?”

Prompto removes his hand from the door handle entirely and shifts in his seat, head bent and staring down at the green lid of his Tupperware. “Nothing. Was alone.”

Ignis closes his eyes and breathes in slowly. “And I’m assuming you’ll be alone again for
“Christmas?”

“Yeah,” the blond mumbles. “They aren’t coming.”

The muted, orchestral sounds of Ignis’s music is the only thing that permeates the air as he struggles to respond. But before he can formulate the words, the boy seated next to him curls up in on himself, and begins to shake.

“Prom-”

“Why don’t they love me?” Prompto whispers, voice wobbling like a novice skater on fresh ice. A lone tear slides down his cheek and drips onto the plastic lid below.

Ignis feels like he’s been impaled through the chest. “They’re imbeciles, and failed parents,” is all he’s able to say, though he wants to let out a litany of words that are very un-Ignis-like. “If it’s any consolation, we all care for you very, very much.”

“Thanks, Iggy.” Prompto tries for a smile as he quickly wipes at his eyes and breathes in deeply, evidently hurrying to mask his emotional display.

Ignis frowns at that, but presses on regardless. “The Citadel hosts a relatively small party every year for the council, the Glaive, the Crownguard, and their families. Would you like to come?”

Prompto looks at him for the first time, mouth hanging open. “But I’m just –”


Prompto seems to be at a loss for what to say. He opens and closes his mouth a few times, and then finally settles on a weak, but hopeful, “What time?”

The next day, when Ignis is hanging out with Noctis and idly preparing a salad that will surely go untouched, he brings up the subject.

“I’ve invited Prompto to the Christmas party,” he says, as if it’s the most usual thing in the world. “I hope that is all right with you.”

He can’t help but snort, internally. As if it wouldn’t be okay with him.

“What!” Noctis exclaims, jumping up from the couch. “Iggy, you’re a godsend!”

“Obviously,” the advisor smiles.

Noctis wanders into the kitchen and leans against the counter. “But, wait. Isn’t he with his own family?”

Ignis remembers Prompto urging him to *please not tell Noct*, and his mood drops a little bit. “They can’t make it,” he bluffs smoothly. “Work emergency.”

Noctis doesn’t notice the subtle melancholic undertone, thankfully. “That sucks. Good thing for me, though,” he crows. “Ah, Ignis, I can’t wait!”

“It will be qui-”
“Oh my gods, we could do something in the morning! The party isn’t even until six!” Noctis hurries to interrupt, rocking on his heel with excitement.

“Perhaps we cou-”

“Ah! I know exactly what we should do! Clear your schedule, Ignis!”

“I did not eve-”

“Wait, I should text Prompto and make sure he’s free!”

And Ignis is left staring at the prince’s hurriedly retreating form, huffing and feeling indignant, yet wearing a fond smile all the same.

On Christmas morning, Prompto is kidnapped.

Of course, when the perpetrators drive a very nice car and happen to be your best friends, the whole affair isn’t as bad as all the movies make it seem.

“Where are we going?” Prompto bounces, sitting in the backseat alongside a cool and casual Noctis. “I dunno,” said Noctis responds, sliding on a pair of sunglasses as they merge onto the freeway.

Lucis doesn’t really have white Christmases. The country tends to err on the warmer side, and this year’s holiday is no exception – though the air is frigid, the sun is still shining, offering a bit of a reprieve from the cold.

“Liar,” Prompto pouts, punching the prince’s arm slightly. Noctis sticks out his tongue in response.

They travel for a few more miles before Prompto actually takes note of where they are. “Hey, why’re we headed towards the Insomnian border?” “Exiting the city?” Prompto echoes, ignoring the sarcasm and turning towards Noctis. “Really?” “I know!” Noctis beams, mirroring Prompto’s excitement. “Just wait till we get there!” “Get where?” “There!” Prompto pinches his lips. “You’re insufferable, mate.” “Yep,” Noctis responds, settling back, smile still plastered to his face.
It’s so, so big.

Much bigger than Prompto ever imagined.

The horizon stretches out until forever, with no houses, stores, parking garages, offices – nothing to block the fact that the world is, in fact, colossal.

And even though the barren landscape has little to offer except a certain aesthetic charm, Prompto is captivated nonetheless. He feels smaller than he’s ever felt, and, in turn, this makes him feel limitless. He wants nothing more than to pull over, hop out, and extend his arms toward the sky, as if embracing the sheer beauty of its vastness.

He’s content to simply take out his camera and photograph dozens of different angles, shutter speed set high to account for their moving vehicle. He desperately wishes he had a wide-angle lens, and vows to come back as soon as he does. The rest of the group don’t seem to notice their surroundings, which attests to their familiarity with it. Prompto can’t imagine ever becoming familiar with such raw greatness, but to each their own.

They’re hardly ten minutes outside of Insomnia when they pass a sign advertising a rest stop called Hammerhead, complete with a mechanic that apparently specializes in exotic vehicles.

Noct’s gaze evidently fixated on the word mini-mart, however, because he immediately starts chanting: “Road trip snacks! Road trip snacks! Road trip snacks!”

And Prompto’s just giddy enough to join in. “Road trip snacks! Road trip snacks!”

Ignis’s hand tightens on the wheel, and the advisor steadfastly ignores them.

That is, until Gladio joins in, too. “Yeah, Iggy! Road trip snacks! Road trip snacks!”

Ignis sighs and rubs a hand through his hair. “Okay, fine, fine. We will acquire road trip snacks, you absolute children.” The rest of the passengers dissolve into various whoops and cheers. “Though I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention that an hour-long drive is not a ‘road trip.’”

“Eh, you say tomato,” Noctis dismisses, waving his hand. “I say nothing, cause fuck tomatoes.”

Prompto snorts. Gladio snorts.

After a moment, Ignis snorts, and they all dissolve into laughter.

Ten minutes later, they’ve pulled up into Hammerhead, parked in the lot in front of the massive garage. Noctis immediately stumbles out, stretching and groaning as if they’ve been traveling for hours. Prompto finds it so very endearing.

He’s following his friend toward the market when he spots her, and stops dead in his tracks.

She’s leaning over the popped hood of a classic car, inspecting its contents while talking to the old man scrutinizing the tires. Her hair is a golden blonde, peeking out from under a red cap, and the
outfit she’s wearing is way too skimpy for this weather. And all of a sudden, Prompto hears her laugh carry over, the sound of it like bells chiming in the wind.

She’s perfect.

And, okay. Prompto isn’t a weird guy, or, at least, he thinks he isn’t. But after years of wanting to be stick-thin, he’s come to learn that his desires are a little... unusual.

Simply put? Society grooms men into wanting to look a little more like... well, Gladio.

And that kind of image does absolutely nothing for the blond. He wants to be lithe, to have limbs that seem to stretch on forever and a body that can fit into any space. He wants to lay down and see the details of his anatomy – the jut of his hipbones, the curves of his ribs, the neat lines of his clavicles. He wants a slight hollow to his stomach. He wants legs that he can fold over easily, thighs he can wrap his hands around completely.

He’s yet to find a photo of a man who looks like that.

But women?

Everywhere.

Prompto’s seen so much “thinspo” nothing really shocks him, at this point. Countless amounts of underweight girls showcasing the straight lines of their legs, the flatness of their bellies, the elegant slimmness of their long necks. Over the years, he’s learned to associate them with his ideal image, despite the fact that he’ll look markedly different once he reaches those weights.

And that woman straight ahead, pulling out the oil dipstick on that car? She’s the living embodiment of Prompto’s goals. He’s never seen a waist so delicate in real life, no less on full display like that.

“Keep staring, maybe she’ll ask you out,” Gladio snickers, clapping Prompto on the back and effectively snapping him out of his trance.

“I wasn’t-!”

But the shield is already out of earshot, still laughing to himself as he walks into the market. Prompto tries to will the heat away from his face and makes to catch up with Noctis, a few paces ahead and loitering as he waits for his friend.

Said Noctis is frowning at Prompto, and then turning back toward Gladio’s retreating form and frowning at that, and then frowning back at Prompto, and so on and so forth. Prompto feels like he’s missing some important subtext here, but he’s too embarrassed to analyze it, and instead skips ahead with a C’mon, buddy!

Forty-five minutes later, Noctis launches himself across the backseat to wrap his hands around Prompto’s eyes.

“Hey!” Prompto exclaims, reaching up and halfheartedly tugging at the offending appendages. “What gives?”

“I want it to be a complete surprise.” There’s mirth in the prince’s voice. “No spoiling it by looking
“Weirdo,” Prompto smiles, but uses the opportunity to settle back into Noct’s chest, enjoying the imposed darkness much more than he should be. “It can’t be that great, can it?”

“Trust me, kid, for you? It’s paradise,” Gladio chuckles, his gravelly voice smooth around the edges.

Five minutes later, Prompto feels the smooth ride turn bumpy as the car slowly drifts off-road. A moment after that, they settle to a stop, and Noct’s fingers tense around Prompto’s eyes briefly.

“Ready?” he implores, voice dripping with anticipation.

“As I’ll ever be,” Prompto responds, and he can’t help but grin too, skin stretching underneath Noct’s. A moment later, the prince lifts his hands.

For a second, Prompto’s left a little blinded in the sudden onslaught of light. When his eyes adjust, however, he sees… trees. Really big, green, magnificent trees, filtering the light gently and casting gentle shadows.

Huh. So this is what it’s like to be in a forest.

He’s about to tell Noctis it’s pretty cool, when he catches a flash of yellow in his peripheral. Instantly, his head whips to chase the color… and…

It’s a chocobo.

“Holy shit!” Prompto screams, launching himself out the open convertible top, electing to ignore the door entirely. He turns fully, and sees that they’re at a small ranch of sorts, and there are dozens of the creatures wandering around. “Chocobos! Chocobos! Noct, Noct, they’re chocobos!”

“Yeah!” Noctis laughs, coming up to stand next to the bouncing blond. “In real life!”

Prompto runs up to the closest one he sees, a stately bird standing at attention in her pen. “Wow, she’s taller than me!”

“Not an impressive feat, shortie,” Gladio teases, walking past the pair and towards the main shop.

Prompto sticks out his tongue, and then turns his attention back to the chocobo, who lets out a kweh. “Ahhh! Can I – can I touch her?”

“Only if I can take a pic,” Noctis smiles, holding up his phone.

Tentatively, Prompto reaches out a hand for her neck, and gently scratches at the feathers there. And – Six – are they soft. “I think I’ve died and gone to heaven, Noct. Bury my body amongst the flowers.”

Noctis snorts. “Aw, died before you even got to ride them. What a tragedy.”

Prompto perks up, whips his head toward the smirking prince. “We’ll get to-? Uh, hold on, I think I have a Phoenix Down!”

The prince merely laughs, and joins in on pampering the cooing chocobo before them. “Thought you might.”
Prompto falls completely in love. Everything about the chocobo ranch lives up to his highest expectations: the kindly old man running the place, the chocobos themselves, the thrill of riding them at high speeds, even the smell – a paradoxical scent that is both bad and good, and permeates the vicinity.

They race. A lot. Prompto loses a lot, too, but he has fun. Everyone does. Even Ignis seems to be enjoying himself, given the way he starts standing up on his mount, earning boos from the boys and cheers from interested onlookers.

They even explore a little, taking their chocobos through an expansive and glistening lake, over tricky rock formations, and even off small cliffs. Prompto especially enjoys that – he loves feeling his bird’s wings puff out as they glide gently down to the surface, loves feeling the weightlessness of being suspended in air.

Wiz makes them his specialty sandwiches for lunch, and, as usual, Prompto only eats enough to be convincing. He still has the image of that woman stuck in his mind, and how impossibly small she was.

Thankfully, that negative, vitriolic voice in his head is still missing, so he can at least enjoy what he does eat.

The sun is low in the sky when Ignis calls it a day, gently reminding the prince that they do have a party to get to.

With a heavy heart, Prompto leads his bird back to the pen, hugging her and whispering promises to come back. Suddenly, he feels a hand thump his back, and he nearly stumbles to the ground.

“Hey,” he turns, and discovers Noctis, looking extra pleased with himself. “What’s up?”

“Oh, nothing,” the prince whistles, trying and failing to look innocent. “I just need your signature on this form, is all.”

He extends a paper and pen towards the confused blond, barely containing his smile. Prompto takes it suspiciously, and then focuses his eyes on the header.

ADOPTION FORM.

“Noct!” Prompto beams, jumping. “What!”

“Yeah!” Noctis responds, grinning openly now. “I mean, she has to stay here and she can still be ridden by other customers but you’ll have priority and I just adopted mine and his name is Gustavo and-”

“Noct! This is the best thing ever!”

“I know!”

Prompto hurriedly uncaps the pen, and motions for Noctis to bend his back so he can use it as a
writing surface. He quickly fills out the remaining blanks, gives his chocobo a final kiss, and the pair bound off to turn in the form to Wiz.

“So! What’d you name her?” Noctis asks, bounce in his step.

Prompto smiles, and fixes his eyes on the pure beauty that is Noctis Lucis Caelum, inside and out. He recalls the conversation they had all those months ago, and his heart pangs with a concentrated sense of fondness.

“Well, Totino, of course.”

This is shaping up to be one of Noct’s top three Christmases ever. Really, it is. It’s nearly perfect.

He got to spend the entire day riding chocobos, avoiding boring political events, and, best of all, hanging with Prompto.

Now, at the casual dinner in one of the Citadel’s smaller dining halls, Noctis can’t help but look at the blond with naked adoration. It’s almost as if there’s a spotlight on him, illuminating his golden head and tuning out the rest of the party – a collection of boisterous guards, reserved council members, and everyone in between.

He hadn’t even stuttered through meeting his dad, no matter how much he warned Noctis he would. When it comes down to it, Prompto can pull anything off. It’s really attractive.

*Prompto’s really attractive.*

Fuck.

Noctis shakes his head, spears a bite of garula meat, and shoves it into his mouth. His thoughts have been going crazy ever since Prompto got caught staring at that girl... it’s only served to remind Noctis that he isn’t entitled to anything, and the possibility of Prompto finding someone else is very, very real.

Gladio’s been nudging him and mouthing the words *make a move* all day. Even Ignis has been dropping subtle hints. But Noctis is scared, because what if Prompto isn’t even interested in guys? What if he destroys a really important friendship?

He wishes he could magically know somehow. He eyes the tacky mistletoe hanging in the eastern doorframe for a fraction of a second before shaking his head, laughing under his breath. *Too public.*

“Something funny?” the object of Noct’s affections asks, cocking his head to the side.

“Nah. Just happy you’re here.”

Prompto offers a warm smile, and there’s something a bit sacred in it. “Me too.”

Noctis smiles back, and the moment is so tender - the eye in the storm that is Christmas festivities. He doesn’t know what Prompto’s feeling, sure, but maybe there’s some hope in the whole endeavor after all.
The party runs into the early hours of the morning, as most tend to do. There may be no rain excuse this time, but Noctis asks if Prompto wants to stay in his childhood room with him anyway. He accepts.

His old bed is even nicer (and bigger, unfortunately) than the one at his apartment. The two finally settle in sometime around two in the morning, and a pensive silence settles between them.

Noct’s thoughts are running a thousand miles a minute. The space between their bodies is far too large, too alienating.

Finally, he whispers a “Hey,” turning onto his side to face the blond.

Prompto mirrors the action, and suddenly, the act of sharing a bed seems much more intimate than it did the first time. “Hey.”

“That was the funnest Christmas ever,” Noctis says, because he doesn’t really know what to say.

Prompto purses his lips. “‘Funnest’ isn’t a word, Highness.”

The two snicker a bit. “Not bad,” Noctis praises. “But Iggy would say ‘is not’ instead of ‘isn’t.’”

“Damn,” Prompto responds, smiling.

A quiet settles over them again, but this time, they’re staring directly into each other’s eyes. The distance between them that seemed so large before seems crushingly small now, and Noctis finds himself feeling horribly vulnerable.

So he averts his eyes and destroys the moment, because that’s what he does when he feels awkward. “Forgot to give you your present...” he muses, for lack of better things to muse about.

Prompto rolls with it, because he rolls with everything and pleases everyone. “Me too.”

“Tomorrow?”

“Okay.”

Silence, again. Shit. That conversation did not take off like Noctis had hoped it would, and now the weight of what was going unsaid seemed to be hanging tangibly in the air.

His mind is desperately trying to search for something else to talk about, because Shiva, he doesn’t know if he’s ready to address this... this softness between them. The entire atmosphere of it seems sacred.

They continue looking into each other’s eyes, Prompto’s slipping halfway closed. For some ungodly reason, the thought of Ignis saying Rather sultry pops into mind at the image, and, okay, Noctis really doesn’t need to be thinking about Ignis right now.

“Iwannatellyousomething,” Noct’s mouth says before Noct’s brain can approve, and Prompto’s eyes widen a bit.

“What is it?”

Noctis swallows, and tries really hard to not think of the millions of potential implications of what he’s doing. He focuses on Gladio’s encouragement. On Ignis telling him to not be ashamed of
himself. On that smile Prompto gave him over dinner.

On the image of Prompto right now, curled up and giving him one hundred percent of his attention.

*If you don’t do this now, you never will.*

“I’m, uh. I’m bisexual.” Noctis can’t help but wince as his mouth curls around the word, and he hates himself for it, but, well. At least he could get it out there. “I wanted you to know.”

Prompto looks at him for a bit, and his expression is completely undecipherable. Slowly, Noctis feels his heart begin to sink, down down down, until the boy responds with a flippant “Me too.”

Noctis can’t help but inhale a bit sharply, so utterly caught by surprise. He’d been preparing for the worst, but this… is the exact opposite of that. “Really?”

“Uh, yeah,” Prompto laughs, eyes crinkling. “I mean, I kinda have a secret theory that *most* people are bisexual, honestly. It’s totally cool.”

Noctis blinks a few times before his lips curl on a sly grin. “Do you?”

“Yep. Even got empirical evidence and everything.”

Noctis giggles under his breath. “Well… I’m glad you’re okay with it.”

“Of course I am,” Prompto reassures, and that damn silence settles over them once again.

*Just do it, you coward! You're the Crown Prince of Lucis! Act like it!*

“Um, that wasn’t all I wanted to say,” Noctis finally gets out, trying to ignore how his voice wobbles with pure fear.

Prompto must pick up on that nervousness, naturally, because his tone is incredibly gentle when he implores with a “Yeah?”

Noctis closes his eyes for a short while, and then opens them with a renewed sense of determination. “Listen, Prom,” he begins, willing himself to keep going before he can psych himself out. “I’m really sorry if this ruins our entire friendship, but I can’t keep hiding this anymore. It isn’t fair to you, it’s… it’s… you deserve to know, okay?”

Prompto looks scared, now. Maybe that wasn’t the best opening.

Noctis plows on anyway, taking a deep breath before he drops the bomb. “I like you, alright? I *really* like you. Romantically. I’m sorry. I know I shouldn’t because it’ll fuck up everything, and I probably shouldn’t tell you *at all*, but it’s worse to keep thinking these things while you have no idea… and I just… I don’t want to continue keeping secrets. So. There. I like you. I’m sorry. I’m – I’m *so* sorry, I get if you don’t want to be friends anymore, but I needed to get that out.”

His face is burning, and he’s so dizzy his vision can’t focus on anything in front of him, and – holy fuck – did he just confess to Prompto?

“Uh – fuck – nevermind – forget I – just pretend that never-”

“I like you too.”

Noct’s swirling vision finally settles on the figure in front of him. Prompto looks equally as nervous, but sure of himself. “What?”
“I like you too, Noct. A whole lot,” Prompto whispers, and the two finally make eye contact again.

The moment they do, it feels like Noctis is falling off a cliff, blindfolded and with his hands tied behind him. This is completely new territory, a set of feelings the young prince has never felt before, a situation with no established protocol.

“What?”

“Yes, really,” Prompto insists, sounding breathless. “I just don’t understand why you like me. I’m really confused right now.”

A pregnant pause.

“Okay,” Prompto finally breathes. “Kiss me, Noct.”

And Noctis does.

He’s never done it before, so it’s no surprise that he has no idea where to put his hands and – well, his entire body, actually. All he knows is that the feeling of Prompto’s incredibly soft lips against his feels akin to wielding potent thunder magic - concentrated not in his fingertips, but in the press of skin on skin. They move together, breathing, tasting, sighing, connecting. The vulnerability Noctis had been feeling so strongly before is squashed with the blond’s eager reciprocation, and he simply feels safe.

His mind takes off, flying out into a surreal world where the mountains occasionally change colors, there’s always a funky guitar riff playing in the background, and important moments like these are felt rather than processed. One second he was here, the next, there. Time enters a warp, which is absolutely fine by the prince.

And so Noctis ends up mostly on top of Prompto, and the two continue to feel, kissing until the blond eventually succumbs to the exhaustion of the day, mumbling sweet nothings as he loses the fight against his closing eyes.

In the morning, Noctis will be able to digest the gravity of the situation. For now, he’s pleased with lying his head against his beloved’s chest, the words Best. Christmas. Ever. swirling through his mind in a happy, contented loop.

Chapter End Notes

well. i told you i wouldn't disappoint, didn't i? :^))

YES. IT HAPPENED. SIXTEEN GODDAMN CHAPTERS LATER. HOPE IT WAS WORTH THE SLOW BURN, MY LOVES!! HAHA I AM SO
GIDDY!!!!!!!!!!!!

ahem. anyway. merry christmas / happy holidays to all <3 if you don't celebrate anything, i hope you have a nice week and many sweet dreams. <3

ALSO!! no chapter next wednesday, i'm sorry, loves. winter break is too busy for me, i've got a lot to accomplish in very little time. hope this is alright!! i'll be back the week after with your regularly scheduled angst. in the meanwhile, sit with the happy imagery of these kissing boys :')

and come scream with me on Tumblr?

P.S. iggy's favorite band is Beach House. look 'em up, they sound like a cathedral would if it could somehow record albums in 2017. (if you couldn't tell already, i get into imagining these boy's music tastes. i love music very much.)
Prompto just had a wonderful dream.

He dreamt he got to spend Christmas with Noctis and company, and the night culminated with some spectacular confessions and some even more spectacular kissing.

It was the stuff of his usual fantasies, honestly, but this time the recollection feels a lot more vivid. Vivid enough that he imagines he can feel Noct’s weight on his chest right now, curled up and tangled with him in sleep, and… hold on, did that weight just shift?

Prompto’s eyes shoot wide open. All he sees is a mass of black hair, taking up the vast majority of his visual field.

It’s Noctis.

Noctis is sleeping on him.

And from what he can see, they’re in the Citadel. Which - which means -

Last night wasn’t a dream.

Oh. Fuck.

Prompto can’t help it - he starts shaking and breathing much faster than normal, chest heaving with the effort.

Noctis must feel him panicking, because for the first time in recorded history, he willingly rouses to inspect the source of the disturbance. Prompto watches with a strange mix of both horror and awe as his friend (lover?) slowly comes to, eventually looking up to meet Prompto’s eyes.
It’s unfair, how utterly perfect Noctis looks in the morning, with his eyes all sleepy and that half-smile painting his features. It only makes the words that fall out of his mouth feel all the more heart-wrenching.

“Morning, beautiful.”

Prompto can’t help it - he squeaks - and his expression must be doing a good job of communicating his terror, because Noctis quickly knits his eyebrows and rolls off him.

“Uh - morning!” Prompto stutters, and then, in the most suave way possible, tumbles off the bed and makes a beeline for the bathroom.

He knows he’s made a mistake as soon as he hears the slam of the door behind him, but. He needs a second. Multiple seconds. A few minutes, one could say.

With nothing better to do, Prompto begins going through his morning routine, trying to extend the act of brushing his teeth into a full five minutes so he can have a moment to think.

Unsurprisingly, he can’t think. His mind feels like a whirlpool, whisking away all his potential thoughts into an indistinguishable stream. The only thing that’s coherent are his emotions, which are overwhelming in their manifestation: fear, intimidation, and the sickening sensation of being horribly out of one’s element.

Astrals, he does not have the confidence for this. Or maybe he does - he certainly seemed to have it last night. So, logically, shouldn’t he be fine despite the thousands of doubts threatening to bury him?

Shit - he’s probably overreacting and ruining everything right now, isn’t he? But shouldn’t he be entitled to his natural feelings?

He doesn’t know. He doesn’t know he doesn’t know he doesn’t know.

The bathroom door creaks quietly as Prompto eases it open, fully expecting to face Noctis. Said Noctis doesn’t even look at him, though - he simply glides into the bathroom, locking the phone he’d been furiously typing on and shoving it into his pocket.

Prompto feels horrible.

He hates this. He hates himself for ruining a perfectly good morning, for letting his stupid insecurities get in the way of everything, and for causing Noctis unnecessary pain. Sighing, he slips back into bed, and tries to organize his thoughts.

Noctis takes considerably longer than he did, and the sound of the sink turning on and off makes Prompto smile as he remembers the prince’s fondness for skincare.

Damnit - why is this so difficult? Why can’t he just let go of his reservations? He likes Noctis, this should be a dream come true.

Noctis eventually emerges, and then seems to hesitate a moment before slinking into the bed alongside Prompto. For a long minute, both boys lay there, staring up at the prince’s ornately tiled ceiling.

It’s Noctis who gives in first. “Look, if you were just indulging me last night-”

“No!” Prompto hurries to interrupt. “No! It’s not like that! I’m - I’m sorry, Noct, I don’t really know what I’m doing right now.”
Prompto feels Noctis shift to face him, so he does the same, and then they’re staring directly at each other. Which, in a strange way, quells Prompto’s anxieties immediately.

Because in the end, it’s just them. Noctis and Prompto. That’s all it’s ever been.

“Okay, fine. It’s just. I’m just - scared. I feel that I don’t deserve you, and that’s scary, Noct. You’re gonna realize I’m not good enough for you and it’s going to end badly.” Noctis opens his mouth to respond, but Prompto quickly presses on. “And what about Luna?”

“Prompto-”

“Look - just - just, I really want you to think about this, because you might be making a huge mistake and I don’t want you to regret it la-”

That precise moment is when Noctis evidently decides Prompto needs to stop talking, and streamlines that result by swooping in to press their lips together.

“Mm,” Prompto says, which translates to Oh. I see. Well, you make a compelling point.

“Listen, you absolute dummy,” Noctis murmurs against Prompto’s mouth. “You’re the best person I’ve ever met, you got that? I know exactly what I’m doing.”

A blush rises to Prompto’s face almost instantaneously. He doesn’t believe in those words, naturally, but if Noctis does... well, maybe that could be enough to skate by on.

But. “Luna?”

“Is not an issue,” Noctis explains, moving back enough to stare into Prompto’s eyes. “Turns out there’s a lot of loopholes to this kind of thing. I already wrote to her, she’s completely cool with keeping it to titles only.”

Prompto’s eyes widen. “Oh.”

“Yeah. So. No more doubting this, okay? I want you, and that’s not going to change any time soon.” Noctis’s smile suddenly falters. “Unless, of course, you’re not interested... You know you can always-”

This time Prompto interrupts by way of tugging down on prince’s neck, and bringing their lips together once again. They exchange soft kisses for an indistinguishable amount of time, the only sound echoing throughout the room being their quiet sighs and the muted lilt of morning’s birdsong.

Noctis eventually pulls back, giving the blond an incredibly endearing look as he hovers above him. Prompto can’t help it - his lips curl into a pleased smile, and he’s suddenly giggling.

“I’m kissing my best friend,” he announces, and the statement just makes him laugh more.

“Yes,” Noctis tries to keep a straight face, but it lasts all of one second before he dissolves into giggles himself, dropping his head into the crook of Prompto’s neck. “Ha, this is weird, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Prompto echoes, the word coming out sing-song and light. “Super weird. And great.”

Noctis pokes his head back up. “And great,” he agrees, moving in to gently press their lips together one more time.
They spend the day together, because of course they do. Noctis gives him an *original* Polaroid camera for Christmas - “You know, cause your new job is with film!” - and Prompto tries to not cry on the spot (which he fails at). In return, the blond presents a bomber jacket he Photoshopped a graphic of Noct’s favorite monster onto - a Behemoth.

Prompto *loves* highly customized fashion pieces - his collection of strange patches and the equally strange jackets they went on said as much. He was scared the prince wouldn’t like it, though, because he knows not everyone is into that kind of thing. To his great joy, however, Noctis throws it on immediately, thanks him profusely, and kisses him just a little excessively.

The pair bound out for the arcade like that - new camera clutched in Prompto’s hand, new jacket fluttering off Noct’s back in the breeze. They play; they laugh; they simply enjoy existing around each other.

Prompto also eats a lot. He doesn’t really think about it, not when it involves the one person that makes him feel like he can fly.

They finally part ways that night, after a full two days together, though neither of them really want to. It’s for the best, though, for the sake of keeping their budding romance a secret - apart from telling Ignis and Gladio. Prompto respects Noct’s wishes to wait until he’s ready to tell his father, and the prince promises they’ll hang out the following day anyway.

Prompto doesn’t really know what they *are* - they haven’t really discussed labels, yet - but he thinks it’s safe to say that they’re totally enamored with each other. So when he falls asleep that night, it’s with a smile plastered onto his face, heart full with contentment.

The next morning, that smile is nowhere to be seen.

Because Prompto is staring down at the scale beneath his feet - his horrible, bloated, disgusting feet - at the tiny LED numbers spelling out 156.6.

*This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening.*

Amidst the world spinning sickeningly, Prompto stumbles off the scale and back, back, back, until he’s hitting the bathroom door and sinking slowly to the ground. The lights are too bright. His hands are out of focus.

He’s almost *ten pounds* heavier than when he last checked, and that was *with* an inadvertent, week-long fast in-between weighing. He knew he’d been eating poorly lately, but *this* poorly?

Prompto can’t help it - he starts to panic. Tears brim up and over immediately, which he swipes at with violently trembling fingers. His breathing quickens and becomes audible, his heart feels like it belongs to a hummingbird.

And then he remembers - *Noctis.*

Noctis.
“FUCK!” Prompto yells into his empty bathroom in his empty apartment, and then wraps his arms around his knees and continues to scream into the meaty substance of them.

His heart completely plummets, and he’s left feeling as if the tenderness of it hit bare concrete at a thousand miles per hour and exploded out into an uncountable amount of pieces.

Because - Prompto hardly felt worthy of being the prince’s friend back when he thought he weighed 148, nevertheless his boyfriend - or whatever they are. Now? At 156.6? Now he knows he isn’t worthy.

He snorts, suddenly, and it comes out sounding darker than he intended. This is probably why Noctis didn’t want to establish formal boundaries. Prompto’s too obese for him, and he didn’t want to feel tied down to that. He’s probably just bored and lonely right now, looking for something inconsequential to fill in the spaces until he finds someone better.

Prompto’s tears reach a crescendo, escalating to the point where every breath is a series of gasps and he’s openly wailing, the sound of his anguish filling the room and pressing in on him. Dimly, he’s grateful he can at least be alone in this moment.

This is what he gets, he realizes, for ever thinking it was okay to eat freely. He deserves this.

Fat. Fucking. Failure. That’s all I am.

He cries, and cries, and cries.

I can’t believe people can even stand to look at you. I guess they manage by avoiding your problem areas - AKA, your entire body. Your thick ass arms. Your flabby, convex stomach. Those slabs of meat you call thighs. You’re so offensively disgusting. People feel worse just standing next to you.

So much of his progress was destroyed - and for what? Candy bars? Ignis’s cooking? Noct’s favorite pizza? He doesn’t even remember the taste. All he knows is the shame he feels now.
‘Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels’, right? Or, in your case - ‘everything tastes good, fuck looking even a bit decent.’ Was it worth it, you fucking slob?

He pulls his gun from the armiger and quickly unloads it before putting it to use. With a heightened sense of urgency, he uses the solid metal weight against himself, striking the flesh of his legs and stomach hard enough to bruise.

Aww, look at that, you upgraded from pinching. Guess one good thing came out of that training. It only took looking like a pathetic, vague mass of a person as you went through it. Bet they secretly laughed at you for even trying to be athletic.

Prompto imagines… accidents. He imagines someone pushing him off a cliff. He imagines falling into the machinery of an escalator, his body being ground up and torn apart. He imagines being in a car going a hundred miles per hour. He imagines that car crashing, his body flying out the window, and his head scraping against the asphalt. He imagines bone being sanded away - his brain falling out as soon as he tries to stand.

It isn’t quite suicidal ideation, but. It’s close.

Meanwhile, he hits at himself harder - and harder - and harder. The muscles of his thighs are sore, now, and burning. His abdomen is throbbing painfully. He keeps going, hiccuping through the violent sobs wracking his body.

Hah - remember when you thought you had an eating disorder? Oh, fuck, that was rich.

It’s a long time before his head is clear enough to think.

By this time, he’s thoroughly beat himself - every movement of his legs is agony, and he avoids breathing too deeply. His gun had been neatly reloaded and whisked away before he had the chance to potentially muse about it’s other functions.

He lets out a long, shaky sigh, and then steels himself with a sense of newfound determination. He might have just had his worst episode in a long while, but, in the end, he’s still Prompto Argentum. A guy that, despite everything, finds a way to ultimately stay optimistic.

So his thoughts naturally redirect from punishment to planning. He begins to think of his body scientifically, distancing himself from his emotional state and focusing on how to get the weight back off as fast as possible.

And so Prompto’s mind flickers over his arsenal of strategies.

Though he toys with cutting out food completely again, he knows it’s impossible now that he’s around people on a regular basis. Besides, the thought reminds him of when he couldn’t afford to eat, which fills him with a sort of dread that instantly makes him feel nauseous.

No, fasting isn’t on the table - at least for his current circumstances.

It’s up to the tried and true concept of heavy restriction, which he’d been doing before his little… lapse. This time, though, he needs to be stricter. Much, much stricter. He literally has no time to spare - him and Noctis are already a thing, for crying out loud.
He’s playing with the fibers of his blanket when it hits him - the ABC diet.

It’s the perfect solution. Prompto had been able to complete two weeks before that pathetic excuse for a Thanksgiving, despite being around Noctis constantly. Besides, having a structured plan in answer to this chaos would do wonders for his panic. And if he could carry out the full two months… well. He could lose a lot.

He would lose a lot.

Smiling for the first time that morning, Prompto quickly looks up the diet plan, saves the image onto his phone, and adds it to his favorites.

After two hours into hanging out with Noctis, it becomes crushingly apparent that Prompto’s little plan isn’t going to pan out - at least, not yet.

They’re still on break for the holidays and Noctis wants to hang out with nearly every waking moment he has, which is incredibly endearing regardless of how much Prompto doubts his motives. Thus, he has no choice but to wait until the week they go back to school to start his diet, which would provide enough distraction that they’d only share two meals together max on a day to day basis.

And if Prompto has a lot of conveniently timed shifts at work - well - he might just get away with only getting to see Noctis after dinner. The prince would see him eating enough at school otherwise, and naturally assume the rest of his day follows that benchmark.

Happily, training is a non-issue: a stark contrast to Prompto’s first try at the ABC. With his newfound job, Gladio has now limited him to once a week, and sessions are now skills-focused. All Prompto has to do is hold an eight-pound weight steady.

He can probably do that.

In the meantime, though, he’s stuck in holiday-inflicted limbo.

“We should get moogle shakes,” Noctis decrees, passing a pair of binoculars back to Prompto. “Have you heard of them? They’re like, a milkshake… on steroids. It spills over the mug and they put a bunch of cookies and brownies and candy on top and oh my gods, Prompto, I’m really hungry now, let’s go let’s go let’s go!”

Yeah - unsurprisingly, being around his… romantic interest is exactly how it always is, with the added bonus of stolen kisses in secluded areas.

Prompto masks his natural grimace by shoving the binoculars over his eyes and peering at a white-winged lark, flitting happily in the trees. Hmm. Pretty.

“That sounds amazing,” Prompto lies, forcing a grin and hoping his voice doesn’t sound strained.

*Who hasn’t heard of them, they look like diabetes in a cup - Wow, this lark’s wings are so speckled - It’ll probably be two thousand damn calories just for one drink - Oh, the pattern makes it look exactly like a fawn!* - Noctis is going to see me eating that much and get disgusted and it’s not even
“Prom?”

“Huh?” Prompto blinks, snapping out of his chaotic thoughts.

“Was just asking if you wanna go now, or later.”

He hears Noctis shift beside him, and a second later the binoculars are slowly lifted off his face. He’s met with the image of his prince propped up on his elbows, staring directly into his eyes.

“Oh, uh,” Prompto stutters, at a momentary loss for words. “Now’s good?”

“Mm, okay.” Noctis smiles, and the expression looks perfectly gentle on him. “I want to kiss you,” he whispers, dropping his head onto the grass.

“At a park?” Prompto’s eyebrows shoot up. “Kinda public, Noct.”

“I know. I know. I won’t, but I want to,” comes the mumbled reply.

Prompto grins at the dejected, slumped form in front of him. “Hey.”

Noctis pokes his head back up. “What?”

“You’re cute.”

Noct’s face breaks out into a full-fledged beam. “You’re cute. Now c’mon, let’s go.”

I’m not, Prompto thinks, but makes to stand anyway (an incredibly difficult process, given how painfully his legs are aching). Despite his doubts and suspicions, he’s utterly grateful to have this - even when it will certainly end up in heartbreak.

Yes - the day Noctis realizes his worth and moves on will crush Prompto, but at least he can have this in the interim.

The lead-up to New Year’s is an emotional rollercoaster, to put things lightly. Every day he’s around Noctis, Prompto’s heart feels like it’s soaring. Every time the pair eats, he feels like that same heart just got shot out of the sky.

The prince still avoids bringing up the ‘what are we’ talk - a sore point for Prompto, whose thoroughly convinced this is because he’s too fat to be a ‘boyfriend’. He grapples for other terms, though, needing some sort of definition in this situation.

‘Romantic interest’? ‘Friends with benefits’? ‘Kiss buddies’? ‘Not-so-significant other’?

In the end, he decides they are friendsluts, because at least that term makes him laugh rather than filling him with dread. Yeah, he and Noct are friendsluts. It’s totally cool, and not at all disheartening.
On New Year’s Eve, he and his friends are together, naturally, vowing to spend the majority of the day finding out as many Citadel secrets as possible. Prompto is extremely anxious about this until he finds out there actually aren’t any dungeons to be thrown into (for snooping around said dungeons in the first place, of course.)

There’s also another elaborate dinner, wherein Ignis outdoes himself. Prompto wishes he could purge.

Their tiny party - again, just close friends and family to the Crown - migrate outside to join the mass of people in the courtyard at an hour to midnight. They’re all hanging out in a protected viewing area, anticipating the ball drop the Citadel hosts every year.

“Thirty seconds!” Gladio yells, and everyone’s jumping up and facing the sinking glass ball, grins on every face present.

In the excitement and fervor of people counting down, Noct’s hand manages to find Prompto’s, subtly threading their fingers together.

“Ten! Nine! Eight!”

_I promise I’ll restrict._

“Seven! Six! Five!”

_I promise to never take this for granted._

“Four! Three! Two!”

_I promise to strive for perfection._

“One!”

The pair immediately turn to each other and embrace - as close as they can get to a New Year’s kiss.

“Happy New Year,” Noctis whispers into Prompto’s ear, holding him tight as the confetti flies.

“Happy New Year,” Prompto responds, eyes fluttering closed.

_I promise to become worthy of you._

Chapter End Notes

¯\_(ツ)_/¯ ¯\_(ツ)_/¯ ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

i’m not even sorry this time. FUCK IT
(come yell at me on Tumblr <3)
Previously, on Salad Days...
Prompto & Noctis are so gay for each other it's tooth-rotting. Oh, and Prompto finds out he gained ten pounds, proceeds to hurt himself, and and decides to start the ABC diet again. Happy new year.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Thanks again, Ignis.”

“Of course.”

The two are hanging out in Noct’s kitchen, prince seated at his breakfast bar, advisor flitting about and preparing dinner.

“And it’s not that I don’t want to see him, it’s just-”

“I understand.”

Noctis rests his head on folded arms and sighs. “… Sorry you had to cancel your meeti-”

“Noctis.” Ignis’ voice is firm. “Like I said, it’s quite alright.”

The way the kitchen light dances on the granite countertop hypnotizes Noctis for a bit, eyes inches away from the surface.

“Although.”

*Here it is.*

“You can’t avoid your father forever.”

Noctis lets out a long exhale. “I know. But. I feel weird around him, with the whole… Prompto thing.”

Ignis rummages around a cupboard, produces a bag of rice. “*He* doesn’t know that. All he knows is his son has inexplicably become distant, and skipping dinner tonight didn’t help matters.”

He must sound the right amount of pathetic, because Ignis sighs and drops the subject. “Well. How are you and Prompto, anyway?”

At that, Noctis visibly perks up, raising his head to meet Ignis’s eyes. “Amazing, Iggy! Did you see what he got me for Christmas?”

Ignis smiles, closed-lipped but fond. “You’ve only worn it every day since. So, yes.”

Noctis laughs. “And the other day, after school, two cats came up to him and started purring! It was so cute! I think he’s magic.”

“Actually, Noct, you’re magic. Quite literally.”

“Eh,” Noctis tut-tuts the notion off. “Not as good. Just - he’s so bright, Ignis. He makes the world glow.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, oh.” Noctis sticks his tongue out. “He’s like a beacon, or something. One-hundred percent sunshine. I don’t know how he does it.”

Ignis purses his lips, adjusts the heat underneath a boiling pot. “Not to play devil’s advocate, but perhaps he isn’t - perhaps he’s simply learned to hide the more negative aspects of his life.”

Noct’s eyebrows quirk up. “Hm? What makes you think that?”

Ignis waves a hand noncommittally. “Simply musing. No person can truly be ‘one-hundred percent sunshine’, Noct.”

Noctis frowns. “But wouldn’t he just tell me about that stuff?”

Ignis shrugs. “Some people aren’t comfortable bringing those things up - yes, even with their significant other. So keep your eyes open, but do not pry.”


“Anytime,” Ignis says. “And I’m happy you’re happy, Noct. You deserve as much.”

Noctis melts into a grin, and his heart feels like it’s being squeezed. “I’m so happy, Iggy.”

At this, Ignis smiles, expression notably soft.

“It’s just, like, wow,” Noctis continues. “I can’t believe I have an actual boyfriend. It makes me feel so… special, you know? It’s the best. But, uh…”

Ignis catches the prince’s eye. “But?”

Noctis picks at the cork of the coaster in front of him. “It’s weird - when I’m with him, I feel like I can be anything I fuckin’ want. But as soon as he leaves, all this guilt comes crashing down, and I just feel dirty and wrong, like I did before you found out. It’s… um. It’s hard to stay comfortable with the idea when I have time to think about it alone, I guess? I don’t know how to explain it. Uh, anyway. I’m trying to ignore that, and focus on the happy parts.”

“An excellent plan,” Ignis says, walking over to pat Noctis on the shoulder. “Ingrained emotional responses take more than a few weeks to unlearn, Noct. You’ve done spectacularly, all things considered. And let me reassure you, again, that you’ve nothing to feel guilty about.”
Noctis smiles up at his advisor. “Thanks, Iggy. I hope so.”

Ignis collects a glass off the coaster. “Why don’t you try affirming yourself every day, if only to myself and Gladio? It could help you become more comfortable with the label.”

“Uh - okay,” Noctis responds, and then takes a deep breath. “Um. Ignis, I’m bisexual.”

“Hm? Come again?” Ignis teases from back at the sink, water running.

Noct’s smile stretches wider, and his hands fly up to cup around the edges of it. “I said I’m bisexual!”

Ignis turns around at the outburst, returns Noct’s wide beam fully. “Yes, you are.”

Noctis can’t help it - his throat closes up a little. “Yeah,” he breathes, long and audible. “Yeah, I am.”

They continue with their idle chatter for a while, until the sound of three light raps on the door catch Noct’s attention.

“It’s Prompto,” he sings, hopping off the barstool and hurrying to let the boy in, kissing him on the cheek as he walks inside.

“Heya,” Prompto giggles, making a show of wiping at his face in mock-disgust. “So I was thinking we play-”

He rounds the corner, the image of Ignis in the kitchen evidently cutting him off.

“Oh - uh - hey, Iggy! I thought you had a meeting today?”

“Cancelled,” Ignis explains, exchanging a conspiratorial glance with Noctis. “Now I have the absolute pleasure of cooking His Highness dinner.”

Noctis scoffs. “Oh now you’re all sarcastic about it, but as soon as I offer to cook for myself-”

“Ordering burritos isn’t cooking for yourself.”

The two bicker lightheartedly, trading jabs and throwing around threats. That is, until Noctis glances over at Prompto, and notices the blond looking pale as he stares into the distance, not paying any attention to the two whatsoever.

“Prom?”

“Huh? Um, sorry.” He looks a little sheepish. “Hey, isn’t it a little late for dinner?”

Noctis shrugs. “Never too late for Iggy’s cooking.”

Ignis snorts, turning back to the stove. “However, I’m afraid it is too late for you to kiss up to me, Noct. In fact, I think I’ll make a bean dish.”

“Igniiiiiiiiiiiiiiis!”
Later, the boys are seated in front of Noct’s entertainment system, Mother & Child bowls on the coffee table in front of them. Ignis took his leave after making the prince’s favorite - which he’d planned to do all along, of course - bidding the two a good night.

Noctis has already scarfed his food down, and his eyes are completely fixated on the screen as he races through the streets of Lestallum in a stolen BMW, doing his best to avoid cops and dead-ends.

At the last second, he makes a sharp right into a parking garage, effectively hiding his character from the police’s line of visibility. With a growing smile on his face, he watches as the red-and-blue lights fade into the distance, deeming him safe.

“Did you see that!” Noctis crows, directing his avatar to get out of the car and jump up and down. “Gods, that was intense!”

He looks over at Prompto for the first time, but the blond isn’t paying attention. He’s frowning at his full bowl of food, using his fork to push the chickatrice back and forth rather than eating it.

“What, you don’t like Iggy’s food now?” Noctis jokes - a little too loudly, apparently, because Prompto jumps.

“Uh… hah… no, I do. It’s just. My stomach has been hurting all day, that’s all. Don’t think I can eat,” he explains, sounding a little unsure of himself.

Noctis immediately pauses the game and turns to face his boyfriend. “Aw, Prom, why didn’t you say something?”

Prompto drops his fork and mirrors the action. “I… um… I thought it would be fine? I didn’t want to worry you. But it kinda isn’t fine after all.” He punctuates the explanation with a sudden grimace, and Noctis feels sympathetic - he knows that type of pain well.

He also frowns, his earlier conversation with Ignis coming to mind. “Hey, y’know you can tell me anything, right?”

Prompto shifts a little, looking decidedly more uncomfortable. Shit. Maybe that wasn’t the right approach. “Yeah, Noct,” he assures, though it’s wooden and lacking conviction. “I’m sorry.”

And dammit, how did Prompto end up apologizing for having abdominal pain? “No, no, I didn’t mean-” Noctis hurries. “You have nothing to be sorry about. I just wanted to make sure you knew that.”

Prompto offers him a small smile. “I appreciate it.”

Noctis leans in to kiss him gently, feeling warmth bloom across his chest as he does so. He’ll never get tired of doing that. “Now! I’m gonna take care of you!”

“Huh?”

“Ibuprofen, tea, and your favorite movie. That’s what you need. I think I have a heating pad somewhere, too,” Noctis rattles off, standing up and stretching.

Prompto looks up at him with wide eyes. “Noct, it’s okay-”
“Let me help,” Noctis pleads, sounding a tad bit desperate. The guilt he’s feeling at not noticing before is overwhelming him. “Please? I want you to feel better.”

Slowly, Prompto’s face softens. “Alright,” he half-whispers. “Thank you.”

Thus, the two spend the rest of their evening cuddled up together, watching a children’s film about a brave chocobo and exchanging intermittent, chai-flavored kisses.

Two nights later, Noctis is in one of the Citadel’s dining rooms, making good on his word to attend one of his dad’s ‘family dinners’. The usual folk are present - Clarus, Gladio, and Iris, Ignis and his uncle, Cor, Drautous, and Monica. They’re eating the finest cut of garula steak money can buy, but Noctis isn’t able to focus on it.

This is awkward, he thinks, but is isn’t. It really isn’t. Everyone is laughing and having a good time, as they usually do - it’s just him who feels out of place.

He’s slightly sweaty, cannot find a comfortable position in his seat, and his face has felt like it’s been on fire since he greeted his dad. All he can focus on are those horrific feelings of identity-related dread, creeping their way to the front of his consciousness and dominating everything.

Damnit, why is this so easy to forget about when I’m with Prompto?

He feels like the words CORRUPT and LIAR are tattooed across his forehead, and everyone can see it and judge him for it. He doesn’t know what business he has feeling that way, either. He knows it’s okay to be bisexual. He knows.

He still can’t shake the feeling.

Ironically, as Noctis loses himself in these thoughts, the topic of conversation around him drifts to Luna.

“And what does the young prince think of the whole affair?” Clarus is saying, and it takes Noctis a beat to realize he’s talking to him.

“Hm? Sorry, which affair?” Noctis asks, sheepish at getting caught drifting.

Clarus only laughs, good-natured as he is. “The engagement.”

“I think it’s dumb,” Iris butts in, with all the self-imposed dignity of a thirteen-year old girl. “Marriage shouldn’t be the answer to war!”

Gladio snorts, ribs her with his elbow. “That sounds like your crush talkin’.”

“I do not-!”

“It is what it is,” Noctis says quickly, before the siblings can start fighting. “I mean, Luna’s cool. And it seems like the easiest way to get Niflheim to back off, all things considered.”

“Spoken like a future king,” Drautous chimes in. “You’ll perform your part for the good of your
people. Now let’s just hope he’ll be able to perform in other aspects, eh?” he jokes, causing the older men of the table to burst into raucous laughter.

Noctis’s face grows even hotter, which he didn’t think possible.

What is that supposed to mean? What’s he trying to say? Was that a gay joke? Oh gods, do they know? Is that what’s funny here? Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck oh fuckfuckfuck

“Aw, look at him Drautous, you made him turn red,” Clarus says, laughter petering off into chuckling.

Noctis lifts a hand up, needing water, but quickly puts it back down when he notices his fingers are shaking.

What did that mean? What did that mean? What did that mean

“Apologizes, Highness,” Drautous snorts, mock-bowing in his seat.

Noctis has just enough presence of mind to play along, despite how much he needs to duck off to go puke. “All in good fun, Drautous. And I don’t think there’ll be any issues there,” he adds on a wink, the words nearly getting caught in his throat and choking him.

“Okay! Okay! That’s enough of that discussion!” Regis cuts in quickly, expression switching from amusement to general parental horror. “Spare me!”

Everyone dissolves into laughter again, and Noctis uses the distraction to glance around the table. Though Ignis and Gladio are politely smiling along, they each meet Noct’s eye, sending looks that are both knowing and concerning.

Noctis widens his eyes at Ignis and raises his eyebrows. Ignis nods. Message clear.

“On that note,” the advisor says, voice cool in the aftermath of the group’s collective mirth. “Noctis should really get started on those reports tonight. Majesty, if you would excuse us?”

“Go, go,” Regis waves, eyes still crinkled up on a smile.

Thank Shiva for Ignis.

Noctis bolts up quickly - maybe a little too quickly, but he’s about three seconds from a breakdown, so all things considered he’s doing fine. Gladio and Ignis follow suit, and Noctis quickly makes his way around the table to hug his father goodbye.

The three glide out of the dining room, the door closing heavily behind them and abruptly cutting off Clarus’s next topic of conversation.

The sudden silence is deafening.

Noctis doesn’t fill it, though, opting to charge as fast as he can towards the parking garage, retainers trailing behind him. It takes much longer than he would’ve liked, and features a quiet elevator ride he never wants to repeat, but eventually Ignis’s Benz is in sight and Noctis feels like he can breathe.

It is until the doors are closed and the engine has sparked to life does the tension leave Noct’s body. With a sigh, he quite literally wilts, sagging against Gladio in the backseat.

No one talks as Ignis gently directs his car out of the gated lot. No one talks as he merges onto the street, turn signal clicking loudly. No one talks until he’s well on his way to the apartment.
It’s Gladio that makes the effort. “Hey, that could’ve been worse…?”

It’s almost amusing, how Noctis and Ignis sigh at the exact same moment for the exact same amount of time.

“Not helping, Gladio,” Ignis supplies.

Gladio throws his free arm up. “Ey, can't blame a guy for tryin’!”

“It’s fine,” Noctis mumbles, staring at the ground in a distant way. “Hey, do you think he meant that as like - a gay thing -”

“No,” Gladio cuts in instantly. “No. That’s just how his type are. Classic ‘bro joke’. He doesn’t have a fuckin’ clue, I can tell you that.”

For the first time since the incident, Noctis’s heart stops thudding like it’s about to explode. “Okay. Good.”

There’s silence for a few more minutes, until Noctis gives in and elaborates.

“I just don’t know why this is so fucking hard,” he breathes raggedly. “I mean, realistically, he probably wouldn’t even care. So why do I still feel like absolute shit? Why do I feel so fucking dirty?”

“Socialization,” Ignis begins, hands tense on the wheel. And Noctis really isn’t in the mood for one of his lectures, but it’s better than being subject to his own thoughts. “You’re correct in that it’s generally acceptable, but that doesn’t mean society is anywhere near perfect in how they accept it. The popular perception of non-straight people is, unfortunately, a demeaning one.”

“Yeah,” Noctis half-whispers.

“But let me reassure you that anyone who feeds into that is ignorant, Noctis. Believing that might take you a while, but try and keep it in mind. You aren’t ‘dirty’, or wrong in any way.”

Noctis exhales shakily. “Yeah. Yeah, okay. I hope so.”

“I know so.”

It’s silent for a few more minutes as Ignis weaves through backstreets, ever the discreet and wary advisor.

“I kinda hate Drautous,” Noctis announces.

At this, Gladio snorts. “I’m kinda with you there, kid.”

“Come now,” Ignis chides. “He’s the captain.”

Another silence - this time, only lasting a few moments.

“Though at the moment I may be inclined toward those more, ah, negative inclinations myself,” Ignis admits.

At that, the three laugh softly, and the disquiet Noctis feels is replaced with something more safe and familial. He stares out the window, watching the lights of the city and listening to the gentle purr of the engine.
“Gladio?” he asks after a time, leaning more heavily against the shield as his eyes slip closed.

“Yeah, Noct?”

“... I’m bisexual.”

Gladio reaches around to squeeze the prince tighter to him. “Yeah, you are,” he says, voice kind and comforting. “Don’t you forget it.”

And Noctis melts into the comforting embrace, smiling softly. “Okay.”

Chapter End Notes

sorry it was a tad shorter this time, I promise to make up for it on wednesday. <3
let me know what you thought, and be my friend on Tumblr?
Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Noctis is still having trouble reconciling his sexuality with himself, but he's getting there despite a few dips in the road.

Chapter Notes

a trillion claps for my patient and wonderful beta, TheRegalHarvester!
some very light gore, again, in the beginning part. skip the first segment of text if you'd rather not read that~

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Prompto doesn’t know where he is, but it looks like a school of some sort.
He’s running - he doesn’t know precisely why - he just senses a danger that has him frantic. Up staircases, through hallways, into service stairwells - anything, so long as he keeps moving.

This school has an interesting color scheme. Pale blue and beige, with some pink overtones-

He hears it, then.
Metal clacking, steady and consistent, like a person running with steel boots on.

*Clack clack clack.*

Prompto pushes himself to go faster, jumping down the last three steps of the staircase he’s on and bolting for the next set of buildings.

*Clack clack clack.*

He just has to lose whatever’s chasing him, and hide out until the coast is clear. Erratically, he ducks between a pair of classrooms, hoping the sharp right is enough to confuse the runner.

It better be - he’s reached a dead end.

*Clack clack clack clack clack clack clack clack!*

Evidently, it wasn’t enough.

With absolute fear and an imposing sense of doom, Prompto slowly turns around, and faces his pursuer.

And it’s… a machine? A humanoid one?
No - wait - these are MTs - he’s seen them on the news -

Suddenly, without warning, the MT raises a sword, and Prompto feels rooted to the spot. He watches in horror as the tip of it connects with his face, slashing haphazardly as if it’s slicing up an onion.

He stumbles back, and watches the parts of his face fall to the ground, piece by bloody piece.

Suddenly, Prompto’s gasping awake, eyes shooting open and frantically trying to focus on anything in the pitch blackness.

His thoughts are a jumble of nothing and everything for a long moment as he tries to reconcile where he is. His heart is pounding madly, he can’t stop gasping, and his eyes continue roaming wildly. Eventually, though, he recognizes the tiny red light of his TV’s power button, and starts to come back down to Eos.

He’s in his bedroom. Safe.

Instinctively, he grabs at his body pillow and wraps himself around it, clinging desperately. He wishes Noctis were there with him - even if the prince was dead asleep, his presence would be miles more comforting than the fleece he’s currently hanging onto.

Instead, he’s alone, and has to do his best to comfort himself in the wake of that nightmare. He’s not the best at it, so the phrase Just a dream ends up swirling around in his mind on loop.

When his fingers stop shaking, he fumbles around until he’s extracting his phone from under a pillow. The sudden assault of light as the screen comes alive makes him squint, but he reads the numbers all the same -

4:32 AM.

He sighs. He’s isn’t supposed to be up for another two hours, and something tells him that trying to drift off again will be futile.

He ends up being correct on that front. At 5:22, Prompto stops trying to fall asleep, pulls out his phone once more, and browses the eating disorder forum.

At precisely 6:37, he finally slinks out of bed. Standing upright has him blinking against black spots for a solid half minute, and then he’s making his way to the bathroom.

Once there, Prompto applies a healthy amount of toothpaste to the bristles of his brush.

That’s a lot. What is that, 2 calories? 3? We’ll call it 5. You’re at 5 calories so far, don’t forget it.

Not this shit again.

He begins to scrub at the surface of his teeth, building up a lather and feeling withered against the sudden onslaught of his intrusive thoughts. After a hesitant moment, he glances up, meeting his eyes in the mirror.
Bloodshot eyes, check. Dehydrated skin, check. Ugly as fuck, check.

Frowning, he quickly looks away, and focuses on the stainless steel of his faucet for the next minute. It mesmerizes him, how the light bounces and curves off of it. He doesn’t blink.

Until he does, and then he’s rinsing, and quickly washing his face.

There’s another moment, when he’s putting his contacts in, that forces him to look at his reflection. It’s almost enough to send him back to bed for the day. Instead, he pads over to the kitchen, and slowly opens his fridge door.


He can have 100 for lunch, with 95 left in case he gets caught up in some other social situation, i.e. Noctis. He extracts various vegetables and a package of tofu, getting ready to prepare a low-cal miso soup that would appear substantial to the untrained eye.

It’s with slow, zombie-like movements that he chops the chard and green onion - exactly a quarter cup of each - into tiny pieces.

Cut your thumb off. Do it.

Prompto blinks, squeezes his eyes shut, and blinks again.

He resumes chopping, speed markedly slower and more careful.

Coward. Do it. Do it!

He drops the knife and stares at his hands in horror. They don’t look like his hands, and the world suddenly looks desaturated.

Then - there’s a faint beeping noise, tinny and continuous. It bugs his left ear.

The chard and green onion are swirling, mixing together with the wood of the cutting board. Why are they doing that?

Why don’t his hands look like his hands?

And where did all the colors go?

Prompto sinks down to the floor, sits against the cupboard, and wraps his arms around his legs. He buries his face into his knees, counts down slowly from ten, and focuses on keeping his breathing regulated.

He thinks he can hear his heart pounding.

Ten... nine... eight... seven...six...five...four...three...two...  

Ten... nine... eight...

It takes him a minute. A few minutes. Seven? Ten? He doesn’t know, but eventually he’s blinking back to what must be reality, because everything looks normal and the beeping stops.

Hurriedly, he checks his hands. They look like his, thank Shiva. And all his fingers are present and
accounted for.

He lets out an exasperated huff, half-incredulous, half-terrified. *What the fuck was that?*

The last thing he wants to do is get up and finish the miso soup. But he needs to, because he has nothing else to eat, and he better hurry - he’s probably late, now.

*Don’t want to keep your ‘friendslut’ waiting, right? Hah. You’re pathetic.*

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After school, the boys are playing the new SSX together, each doing their best to beat the other snowboarder.

“Ha!” Noctis crows as his character lands a high jump that Prompto fumbled, putting him in the lead.

“No fair! Cheating!”

“I am *not* cheating!”

Prompto watches in dismay as Noctis pulls off something tricky with his aerials, landing at an impossible angle. “You so are! That’s *so* cheating!”

“Oh, I’ll *show* you cheating.”

“What-”

Noctis suddenly drops his remote and pounces on the unsuspecting blond, pinning him against the couch and planting sweet, chaste kisses all over his face.

“H-Hey,” Prompto giggles, game all but forgotten.

Noctis finally reaches his lips, pressing his own against them. “Hey yourself,” he says, and then proceeds to deepen the kiss.

“Mm,” Prompto hums after a moment, when they part. “Definitely a cheater.”

“I can live with that,” Noctis smiles, and leans back in again.

They make out for the better part of fifteen minutes, simply relishing in each other’s existence. It’s only during times like these that Prompto feels *truly* happy, heart alight with the tenderness of it all.

“Hey,” Noctis asks eventually, breathing somewhat heavy. “Wanna get dinner?”

And suddenly, Prompto’s right back in reality.

He has difficulty swallowing, for a moment, as he always does when he’s put in these situations. It’s as if the guilt finds a way to physically manifest itself, settling like a stone in his throat. “Ah, I would… but my mom’s cooking tonight. I’m sorry.”
The answer is starting to fray from overuse, and it makes him anxious, but what else is he going to do? He already had 53 calories worth of gysahl chips while they were playing. He can’t eat a whole dinner with the 42 he has left.

_That’s right, fatass. You can’t. Better take the long way when you walk home, too._

His eyes widen.

That horrible, vitriolic voice in his head _usually_ does a good job of leaving him alone when he’s around Noctis. But now…?

“That’s okay,” Noctis is saying, and it snaps him back into the moment. “Next time.”

“Yeah!” Prompto agrees, offering one of his widest smiles. It makes him feel like he’s made of plastic.

Noctis swoops in to press another kiss to his lips, short and sweet. “I’m just so happy you’re here, Prom. I can’t believe I get to call you my boyfriend.”

Prompto’s breath comes out a little more staccato, and he interrupts the next kiss Noctis attempts to give him. “W-Wait - did you just say _boyfriend_?”

Noctis knits his eyebrows together and quickly sits up. “Um… yes? Is that - do you not want to be-”

“No!” Prompto hurries, already seeing where he went wrong. “I mean! It’s great! I just, I didn’t _know_ we were-”

Noctis frowns. “I just figured it was implied-”

_Ha ha ha ha ha ha! You fucking idiot! Duh!_

Prompto feels his face heating up, embarrassed now rather than flushed. “Sorry, yeah, that makes sense, I’m dumb-”

“No, no, I shouldn’t have assumed-”

_Oh my gods! And you’ve been acting so pathetic over this shit, too! What a loser!_

“But it was so obvious-”

“No, I mean I can see where you got confused-”

“Okay,” Prompto says, putting a stop to their frantic, hurried explanations. “We’re both dummies. Boyfriends?”

Noctis grins, wide and impish. “Hell yeah.”

And then, with a mischievous flash in his eye, he lunges at Prompto again, and his lips gradually travel towards the blond’s neck.

And if Prompto’s head is tipped a little too far back, he pretends it’s to relish in the sensations more keenly, and not for fear of Noctis kissing into a double chin.
At what is considered a conventional dinner time, Prompto finally takes his leave. He walks the long way home, and then some, finding himself inadvertently over-exercising.

Yeah, keep walking, fuckhead. You ate too much today.

His hands are shoved into his jacket pockets and he’s shivering in the cool night air, but he doesn’t want to go home just yet. He wants to clear his head of these thoughts, first, or else he’ll end up doing something stupid - like hurting himself in his room, alone and hungry while his boyfriend is off eating a lavish meal.

Yeah, keep walking, fuckhead. You ate too much today.

Astrals know his mind’s in the right place for it, now that he’s no longer around Noct’s comforting aura. It’s been building up all day, ever since he woke up.

His hands are shoved into his jacket pockets and he’s shivering in the cool night air, but he doesn’t want to go home just yet. He wants to clear his head of these thoughts, first, or else he’ll end up doing something stupid - like hurting himself in his room, alone and hungry while his boyfriend is off eating a lavish meal.

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So, desperately, he fills his head with anything to distract himself. This results in a lot of repetition of math equations - an unexpected study session.

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It only works for the length of a street.

What good will integrals and derivatives do when you’re a poor, unsuccessful photographer?

Prompto shakes his head, quick and frustrated. He’s tired of this; his bones feel weary with it. What a gift it was - to simply not think. He misses it dearly.

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In the end, it takes an entire hour for his thoughts to calm down. By the time he’s all but dragging his body back indoors, his hands have lost feeling, there are tear tracks running down his face, and he’s never felt so emotionally exhausted.

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Prompto waves it off, but the hand doing so is trembling, fingernails slightly tinged blue.

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And Noctis immediately gives him his jacket, which the blond accepts sheepishly.

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He really shouldn’t be so careless about hiding his symptoms.

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That night, as he hunches over in the darkroom at work, carefully pouring developer onto film, Prompto nearly breaks down.

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It hits him all at once - what his life is. How he picked up this shift specifically to avoid being with his boyfriend because he’s afraid of eating with him. How he’s gone through this day on a grand total of 400 calories. How effective food is at utterly dominating his life.

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It makes him sad.

It makes him sad.

His face feels like a caricature of the emotion as he stands there, bathed in dramatic red lighting. He
imagines his eyebrows coming together at dramatic, sloped angles. He imagines his eyes wide, his eyelashes fluttering, his lips pinched. He imagines large, cartoon-like tears travelling uncontrollably down his cheeks, down down down down continuously. He imagines his entire body melting into a puddle of it.

In reality, his face is impassive, betraying no emotion regardless of the fact that he’s alone.

He’s gotten quite good at that.

---

What Prompto’s body needs most, these days, is an abundance of sleep. The energy his body gets from oversleeping counteracts the absence of energy he’s experiencing from restriction.

What Prompto’s lacking most, these days, is exactly that.

Between the frequent nightmares, the increasing shifts at work, schoolwork, training, and actually hanging out with his boyfriend, Prompto’s sleep quality has taken an absolute nosedive.

It’s no surprise, then, that he would fall asleep to the old sitcom Noctis puts on after school the following day.

“Prom?” He hears, distant and intermingled with a canned laugh track. “Proooooompto?”

He feels a hand on his upper arm, shaking gently but firmly.

“Hmm.” Prompto purrs, opening his eyes slowly. “Huh? No-oct?”

“Yeah, dummy.”

Prompto blinks a few times, willing his contacts to start working again. After a moment, he’s able to focus on the shoulder he’s leaning against.

It belongs to a very handsome prince. That’s nice.

“You slept like the dead, Prom. It took like, ten minutes of shaking you.”

Prompto pouts. “Did not.”

“Fine, maybe like, three. But still,” Noctis laughs, but there’s a concerned edge to it that makes Prompto panic a little.

He goes for casual and nonchalant, his usual tactic. “Maybe my body’s trying to tell me to go into hibernation,” he says, trying for a lame joke.

It doesn’t land. “Seriously, are you okay?” Noctis asks, and his eyes are too searching for Prompto’s tastes. “Like, even I’m easier to wake up than that. Are you getting sick or something? You do kinda look exhausted, no offense.”

Prompto frowns. “I’m fine. I’ve just been working a lot, that’s all. I should catch up on sleep this weekend.”
Noctis considers this for a moment. “Okay…” he says eventually, evidently accepting the bluff though he still looks somewhat uncertain. “Wanna nap together? I’m always down for that.”

It actually sounds like a wonderful idea. “Fuck yes,” Prompto answers quickly, and Noctis smiles at the response.

He takes Prompto’s hand and leads him to the bedroom, where the two settle into Noct’s masterful construction of a bed. After a few sweet murmurings to each other, both boys slip into a doze, cuddled up against each other.

And holding Noct’s hand to sleep must give Prompto the prince’s dreams, because his usual nightmares are replaced with colorful lights, festival games, and a spirited little fox that encourages him every step of the way.

Chapter End Notes

oh no, prommy's getting worse,,
again, this chapter was a tad shorter than i would prefer, but you know what they say about beating dead horses and all that.

special shoutout to... YOU GUYS!! i feel like i don't thank you all enough. it truly means so much to me, to get such lovely encouragement from such lovely people. thank you thank you thank you <3

lets hang out on Tumblr?
Heart's Content

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Prompto's mental health is taking a nosedive. He's not sleeping enough and certainly not eating enough, to the point where he's taken up intentionally avoiding Noctis around mealtimes. + a sprinkle of body horror.

Chapter Notes

i am so, so, so sorry this is late. life is wack!
BIG thanks to my wonderful beta, TheRegalHarvester, for putting up with my last-minute self. <3

“Respool the lure!”

“What-” Noctis starts, struggling to maintain his grip on the rod through his sudden laughter. “That’s not the right-”

The sharp, short snap of the line breaking is all that follows, and Noctis is left frowning at the wispy remains of it floating gently on the breeze.

Prompto knocks their arms together, seated next to Noctis on the edge of their secluded pier. “Told you.”

“More like ‘trolled you’,” Noctis pouts. “Could have you banished for that.”

Prompto only laughs and gently rests his head on Noct’s shoulder, who sighs contentedly. He can’t help but think about how peaceful and freeing it feels to be physically affectionate in public - even if no one else is around to see it.

Naturally, that feeds directly into more daydreams - his political marriage being called off completely, coming out to Insomnia during a dramatic and televised event, kissing Prompto at a busy park and no one caring -

“Eos. To. Noct.” Prompto’s upright now, bright blue eyes cutting straight through his thoughts. “You gonna respool that lure or just keep staring at it?”

The sun beats softly on Noct’s skin, and he decides he doesn’t feel like fishing anymore. He’s content to just sit, and bask. “Nah. And I swear, if you say ‘respool the lure’ one more time-”

“Respool the lu-”

Prompto’s immediately cut off with a kiss, which is quickly becoming Noct’s favorite thing to do. It’s brief, though, because he quickly pulls away to dart his eyes around and triple-check that they’re
truly alone in the small meadow. By the time he looks back at Prompto, the boy is smirking at him, eyebrows raised with amusement.

Noctis rubs the back of his neck. “Sorry… that’s probably annoying.”

Prompto, bless him, appears unfazed. “Not at all.”

Noctis always feels guilty at the need for secrecy, like he’s holding back the relationship in a way, but he doesn’t have much of a choice. Niflheim would freak out, war might erupt… and his father would find out before he could work up the nerve to come out properly. Prompto never seems to mind, though.

_I don’t deserve him._

Noctis cups his boyfriend’s neck and leans in for a real kiss. It’s soft and delicate; saccharine-sweetness in the warmth of the afternoon sun. When he pulls away, he notices Prompto’s legs swinging happily from where they’re dangling off the pier - his endearing way of expressing joy.

It’s in that precise moment, there, with the water glittering brilliantly, the cheerful sound of birdsong in the air, and the sunlight bathing the two with comfort, that Noctis realizes he’s in love with Prompto.

_Oh._

That’s.

Okay. That’s that.

Noctis smiles.

“What’s with the dopey look?” Prompto giggles then, poking him in the cheek.

“I-” Love you. Love you. Love you so so much. Love love love love love you.

Noctis chews at his lip. It’s too soon. Way too soon.

“I’m just really happy.”

Prompto smiles back at him, the very picture of radiance. “I’m happy too.”

Noctis chuckles a little, breaking off the eye contact before he accidentally blurts out what he’s thinking. His body must be absolutely **buzzing** with the revelation, however, because his head and hands suddenly starts moving of their own volition, grabbing at Prompto’s shoulders and planting frantic kisses all over his face and neck.

“H-Hey!” Prompto exclaims in the midst of the onslaught, eyes squeezed shut and mouth stretched wide on a smile.


His heart feels like it’s about to explode out of his chest, it’s so full.

“Sorry. Had to. You looked too cute,” Noctis grins when he pulls back, and he _knows_ how goofy he must look, but he doesn’t care. “Hey. Will you be my valentine?”

Prompto’s abrupt laugh makes Noctis laugh in tandem. “Yeah, you dummy. Thought that went
“I like saying it.” Noctis sticks his tongue out. He can’t stop smiling. “Fuck. You’re just. You’re - Gods!”

“What!” Prompto grins. It appears they both can’t stop smiling.

“You’re just! So!” Incredible! Beautiful! Perfect! Everything! I love you! I love you so fucking much!

“So!” Prompto parrots.

“So good!”

They both crack up then, dissolving into deep belly-laughs that only communicate a modicum of the pure joy Noctis is feeling. He’s never felt so happy to be alive.

“C’mon, we only have the car for a little bit. Let’s just drive!” Noctis says, springing up and reaching a hand out for Prompto. He wants to do something - to channel this energy somewhere.

Prompto grabs his hand and pulls himself up. Noctis is about to let go when Prompto suddenly starts swaying, listing to the side like he’s going to fall.

“Steady,” Noctis smiles, holding his other arm out to stabilize the boy.

Prompto blinks rapidly for a moment and then settles, grin still plastered on his face. “Woops, got dehydrated!”

Noctis laughs, already skipping towards the Regalia his father so-graciously lent him. “I’m gonna make you drink three water bottles. In the car, though, let’s go! I wanna speed!”

“You’re so hyper right now,” Prompto teases, stumbling after him.

“Yep! C’mon!”

“Coming!”

Two days later, Noctis is shooing a smirking Ignis and Gladio out of his apartment while simultaneously dialing Prompto on FaceTime.

“What’s uuuuuup,” Prompto says as soon as he answers, pixelated face filling Noct’s phone screen.

“Just planned the perfect Valentine’s date,” Noctis winks, looking suave up until the moment he knocks into his coffee table.

Prompto snorts.

“Shut up,” Noctis mock-glares, pointing a finger at his camera. “Anyway. Hope you’re ready for one good ass surprise.”

For a moment, Prompto looks strangely anxious. But then he breaks out into a wide beam, and Noctis wonders if it was just the camera lag playing tricks on him.
“I can’t wait!” And there’s that excited-Prompto-voice Noctis loves so much. “You’re so sweet for planning everything, Noct, thank you.”

Noctis grins back, visibly aware of how dorky he looks. “I wanted to. Now are you coming over or what? I’m fuckin’ hungry."

“On my way,” Prompto responds after a beat, and Noctis smiles at the resultant screen shake as the blond hauls himself off the couch. “Kenny’s or...?”

“Eh, I don’t wanna go out.” I wanna hold and kiss you for three hours, minimum. “Pizza and video games?”

“Heck yeah. Order it, I’m coming. Peace!”

“Bye!” Love you!

“Fuck you!”

Prompto purses his lips, clearly trying to hold back a smile. Three seconds later, he’s outright cackling. “Someone’s a sore loser.”

“Yeah, and it’s me, bitch,” Noctis frowns, staring at the blocky, orange K.O. on the screen. “Tekken sucks.”

“Or maybe you suck.”

“Hey!”

Prompto waggles his eyebrows, reaching for another slice of pizza. “Wanna play something else then?”

Noctis lets out a long, contemplatory hum. “Nah. What do you wanna do?”

Now it’s Prompto’s turn to hum. “You know what sounds bomb?” he begins, “A frappe. And a muffin. And a brownie. Like, every pastry Stella’s has to offer. You know?”

A warm coffee shop and pigging out on sweets sounds like the perfect night to Noctis, and, besides, he’s gotten his fill of holding his boyfriend for the time being.

He stretches, groaning comically before standing. “Stella’s it is.”

The two end up staying for an hour and a half, holed up in their corner booth, a spread of confections laid out between them. Prompto loves the double chocolate chip cookies so much he buys two, and Noctis finds it endearing enough that he immediately buys five more to send home with the blond. They talk. They laugh. They eat - quite a bit.

Noctis feels like he’s in a dream. He never imagined his life could be quite so warm.
That night, Prompto decides to sleep over, and the pair are making out in Noct’s bed. Noctis is lying three-fourths of the way on top of Prompto, close yet chaste, exchanging deep kisses and idle whispers. It’s a usual sleepover, for the two.

Usual save for the fact that Noctis has something different in mind for tonight, something he’s been itching to try out. It’s not his fault, really - Gladio put the idea in his head - but ever since he did, Noctis hasn’t been able to stop thinking about it.

“You just gotta go for it,” Gladio’s voice echoes around in his mind, confident as ever. “Somethin’ tells me blondie isn’t the type to initiate.”

In light of the lovely night they just had, Valentine’s day approaching, and Noct’s newfound revelation, it seems like the optimal time to make a move. And with Prompto so pliable and earnest with him now, the idea doesn’t seem quite so insurmountable.

Thus, and with an extreme sense of nervousness, Noctis slips a slightly shaky hand under Prompto’s shirt, splaying his fingers over the boy’s warm stomach. His heart jumps at the contact - so bold and exploratory compared to their usual touches.

“They’re very sensitive spots, trust me,” he recalls Gladio saying. Noctis had pretended to be affronted at the time, but underneath his objectionary demeanor, he was listening.

So - he slowly starts inching his hand up Prompto’s defined torso, relishing in the sensation of feeling much more closer to him than he’s ever felt before. His skin is so smooth here - soft yet taut, moving in tandem with his breaths. Noct’s caresses feel almost sacred in perspective of everything they’ve been through, and how deeply he cares for Prompto. Each touch is positive laden with it, emotionally charged and meaningful, causing his heart to flutter wildly.

Love, love, love.

Distantly, in the more blunt and objective area of Noct’s head, he muses about the fact that he hasn’t even seen his boyfriend topless. Yet here he is, feeling him up as they exchange heady kisses -

And in that precise moment, Noctis suddenly realizes Prompto isn’t reciprocating anymore. In fact, the lips underneath his have gone absolutely slack-still. Noctis knits his eyebrows together and pauses his hand just underneath the boy’s rib cage, registering, for the first time, an incredible amount of tension emanating from the muscles underneath his fingers.

And before Noctis has a chance to process any of this, Prompto is choking out the most panic-laden “Wait - stop-” he’s ever heard.

It hits Noctis square in the chest, and a millisecond later he’s withdrawn completely, sitting up and back onto his ankles. “Fuck, fuck, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have-”

Prompto’s quickly shaking his head, looking flushed and embarrassed from where he’s splayed out underneath him. “No, it’s fine,” he stutters, and Astrals, he sounds so breathless and positively frightened. “It’s just-”

“It’s too soon, isn’t it? I’m so stupid.” Noctis runs a hand through his hair, short and distressed pulls channeling his instant regret. He feels like a monster.
Fucking Gladio.

“Noct,” Prompto starts, voice firm. “It’s not your fault, okay? It’s - it’s me, I’m just not ready for… that.”

“Of course,” Noctis nods, blushing fiercely now, head turned away and eyes downcast. “I shouldn’t have sprung that on you.”

So much for ‘taking it to the next level’, genius. Ever heard of communication?

Noctis really hates himself, in that moment. His heart, so fluttery and free only minutes before, feels like it’s plummeting off a cliff.

“Don’t worry about it, really,” Prompto hurries, always so quick to reassure. “I’m sorry I’m not at that poi-”

“Don’t you even think about apologizing,” Noctis interjects, adamant. “Just - um - let me know? What’s okay?”

That isn’t too much to ask for, right? Noctis doesn’t know - he’s barely cognizant, head swimming with shame not unlike the type he usually feels in regards to his sexuality. He feels creepy, like a predator exploiting an innocent prey, taking what he wants, selfish and hedonistic. How could he just… assume?

Fucking. Gladio. This is a mess. I’m asking Iggy next time.

“I can see you thinking,” Prompto squints up at him, punctuating the remark with a poke in Noct’s side. “Everything else has been okay, I promise. I would’ve said something if it wasn’t. I just, uh... I’m not really comfortable with a lot of stuff. Not yet, anyway. I’ll keep you updated.”

Noctis lets out a breath, shoulders sagging in. He doesn’t quite understand Prompto’s vague explanation, but he’s bent on making sure the blond is comfortable regardless. It’s not his place to pry, anyway. Not unless Prompto wants to share, which he’s obviously skirting around.

Noctis just hopes nothing bad happened to him, in the past.

He rubs at his nape. “Are you sure? Cause - Prom - I really don’t want to accidentally-”

“I’m sure,” Prompto smiles. “And I enjoyed the other stuff, so. Don’t you dare stop now.”

Noctis tentatively returns the smile. “Okay. So why don’t we just… go back to what we were doing, then?”

Prompto grins wider and visibly relaxes, sinking into the mattress as the rigidity melts from his body. “That sounds nice.”

A hesitant moment later, and Noctis has sunk back down, punctuating the move with a soft and slow kiss, which they proceed to exchange for an indeterminate amount of time.

Noctis may not know everything there is to know about Prompto, but at least he’s aware that something - or things - are lurking under the surface. There’s an opportunity for mutual growth there that excites him; after all, Noctis hasn’t revealed every deep and dark facet to his person either.

He looks forward to developing with Prompto, resolving to always do anything he possibly can for the person he irrevocably loves.
Chapter End Notes

sooo the coffee shop name is totally a reference to Affogato, by moonside, ya'll, check this fic out, it's fucking cute.

i know this was short and that's lame and i apologize. life's been way too busy and i am d y i n g yanno? but i promise drama is on the way, we are just in those darned "in-between" parts of a story. (not that i'm putting those parts down, i quite love the fluff!!)

thank you for your patience <3

lets hang out on Tumblr?
I Would Not Wish Any Companion in the World but You

Chapter Summary

*Previously, on Salad Days...*
Noctis realizes he's in love with Prompto. But when he tries to take things to the next level, Prompto doesn't respond too well.

Chapter Notes

((sorry this is a little late))
big thanks, as always, to my amazing beta TheRegalHarvester!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Prompto is not okay.

Ever since Noctis winked at him with a, “*Just planned the perfect Valentine’s date,*” something has happened to his normally impeccable sense of self-control.

He keeps binging. He can’t stop binging. Only a couple weeks into the ABC, and he’s already binged his progress away.

Everytime he tries to stop, to get some of that control back, to eat sensibly - the inevitability of Valentine’s day fucking up his streak ruins his motivation. And then he’s back to binging, inhaling food like he’s never seen it before.

To be fair, he hasn’t seen a lot of these foods in a long, long time.

Every restart doesn’t “feel right”, not until the holiday has passed and the assumed food-related date Noctis planned has passed along with it. Usually, in the past, he’d fast or eat less than usual in light of the event. Now? Now it feels impossible or pointless to do so, like some sort of eating-related executive dysfunction is developing within him.

He’s never wished he could purge more than he does during this time. He tries a couple times anyway - hours wasted in front of the toilet, fingers down his throat, tears pricking the corners of his eyes. It never works.

Thus, Prompto goes through the binge-and-attempted-restriction cycle for a week, and it’s probably the most emotionally frustrating time of his life. When he’s alone - and especially when he’s eating while alone - he’s constantly on the verge of crying. When he eats with Noctis, all he can think about is how badly the prince must be judging him.

He wishes, more than anything, that he could fast. He wants to disappear for a month, refrain from eating a single thing, and come back to society perfect. Then maybe he would stop feeling so fucking bad all the time.
On February 14th, Prompto is hanging outside the school gates, waiting on Noctis to finish his meeting with their math teacher. Princes, as it turns out, are *not* exempt from normal academic expectations, so Noctis is stuck in a review session for a test he bombed.

Which, allegedly, would only take twenty minutes. Prompto is fine with waiting, especially considering the holiday. Thus, he’s leaning against the gate, scrolling through his phone, and whistling to himself as time passes.

He can’t wait until this day is over. Don’t get him wrong - he’s looking forward to spending a romantic day with his boyfriend - but he’s been binging so much it makes him want to constantly scream. Besides, he’s tired of the bruises on his legs causing him to hiss every other step. He can’t wait until this weird mental block, or whatever it is, is finally lifted.

In the middle of his musings, he suddenly hears an accent he’d nearly forgotten.

“Prompto Argentum?”

The blond’s head whips upwards immediately, making eye contact with none other than Dino Ghiranze - a guy who’d gone to school with Prompto up until he graduated the previous year. They’d been on friendly enough terms through Vyv, their mutual friend, but never really talked too much.

Now, Dino is giving him one hundred percent of his attention, regarding Prompto with a look that immediately has him on edge.

“Well, you’ve definitely changed.” And his voice is laden with suggestion.

It’s almost funny - how fast Prompto can go from feeling bored to excruciatingly uncomfortable. Almost immediately, he breaks out in a cold sweat, feeling rapidly departing from his fingertips and leaving staticky, white-noise trembling in return.

He’s never felt so exposed.

“Oh - hey, Dino! Long time no see!” His voice wobbles only a little bit, which is better than he’d expected.

*Don’t mention my weight. Please. Please. Please don’t mention my weight.*

Distantly, it registers that this his very first encounter with someone who knows what he looked like before, and now after, but not in-between. The difference must be *substantial* to Dino, jarring in its manifestation.

Prompto gulps. He’s used to being sly about the weight loss, whittling down gradually in front of his new friends while hiding behind oversized shirts and the excuse of his training regimen. After all, they have *no idea* what he used to look like back at his highest weight. Noctis hadn’t been in school a year ago.

He’d learned his lesson after the whole Derrick incident, after all.

Thankfully, however, Dino doesn’t comment past that, opting to conclude the observation with a
slow once-over and a smirk. “What’re you doing out here, all alone?”

“Uh, just waiting on a f-friend,” Prompto gets out, struggling to act natural while his mind panics. “What about you? Didn’t you end up leaving Insomnia for college?”

“Yeah, I’m up at the Lestallum school for journalism, but seeing as I got an extended winter break I figured I’d come back, y’know, check out how you kids are doing.” There’s vague amusement in his voice, like he’s getting some sense of joy out of Prompto’s clear discomfort.

“Oh, cool,” Prompto stutters, feeling increasingly out of his element. “Journalism’s - ah - cool. That’s cool. You were always, um. Great. On the school paper.”

Gods, as if he couldn’t sound more nervous. He can’t help it, though - he can’t stop thinking about what Dino must be thinking. He feels like he weighs two hundred pounds all over again.

“It’s outstanding,” Dino responds, all smooth confidence that makes Prompto feel even lamer in comparison. “Would be even more outstanding with a real big scoop to report - you know, to establish me and all that - but I still got time.”

“Oh, uh, yeah,” Prompto laughs, not quite processing every detail. “I’m sure you’ll do great.”

“With the right amount of luck, I will,” Dino winks, crossing his fingers. “How about you, Prompto? Do you know where you’re going yet?”

He notices, for the first time, that he’s scratching at his wrist. When did he start doing that? And why won’t that uneasy feeling go away?

“Photography, eh? Beautiful and creative - you’ve got it all, don’t you?”

Prompto laughs, awkward and sudden. “Uh. What?”

_Did he just - What?_

_Is this actually happening?_

Well, that explains the looks. And the proximity. And the name-dropping. And the unease he’s been feeling since Dino showed up.

Well.

At least Prompto’s not thinking about his weight anymore.

Instead of being deterred by Prompto’s sudden confusion, Dino, evidently, is invigorated by it, as he moves even closer. Subconsciously, Prompto starts backing up - up until the point where he can’t anymore, because his back hits the gate.

“You’ve got a boyfriend or girlfriend or what, Prompto?” He’s saying, hands caressing Prompto’s upper arms.

_Don’t touch me don’t touch me don’t touch me don’t touch me-

“N-no,” Prompto stammers, the small word burning a path through his throat as he says it.
But what else can he say? Yes, Dino, and his name is Noctis Lucis Caelum. Please don’t write about it? I mean, you’ll probably graduate immediately and land a job as head reporter somewhere, but please don’t do it anyway?

He thinks about the consequences that would have for the Niflheim deal. He thinks about Noct’s hesitancy to come out. He thinks the time he got beat up just for being the prince’s friend.

Yeah, no thanks.

Dino’s smiling widely now, and then a hand is reaching up to trace Prompto’s jawline. He feels nauseous.

“Now how’d that happen?” Dino murmurs, sounding far too sultry and intrigued. His eyes are locked on Prompto’s lips.

“What - uh - do you mean?” Prompto wants to escape so badly, but he’s boxed in and extremely hesitant about causing a scene. After all, this is just innocent flirting, right? Does he really want to look that over-reactive?

“You’re too hot to be single. Lucky for me though, eh?” And the hand that had been holding Prompto’s upper arm travels down, settling on the blond’s hip.

*Don’t - fucking - touch - me -*

Prompto’s skin feels both cold and numb, and he can’t gauge whether his heart has stopped beating out of fear, or if it’s actually racing. What he does know is that he cannot stand the hands on his body, groping at his fleshy problem areas and discovering the truth he hides behind cotton and polyester. He needs to get out of this situation, but he doesn’t know how to do so without angering the older male. He’s never been hit on before.

He tries for a gentle exit. “U-um. It was great talking to you, but I should get goin-”

“Going where?” Dino smirks. “I can’t leave you all alone on Valentine’s day, can I? Come on, get coffee with me. We need to catch up.” With this, he winks, and Prompto can practically feel himself being mentally undressed.

Fuck. He can’t say he’s going to hang out with Noctis - he’s definitely not in the right state to pull it off nonchalantly. Responding with discomfort towards flirtatious advances and then running off to be with the only person he’s ever around on Valentine’s Day? Their secret would be as good as gone.

“I have an essay due tomorro-”

“Aww, you can’t spare an hour?” Dino’s eyes flutter a bit, and okay, gross. “C’mon, it’ll be fun.”

It’s ironic, in a way, that this is happening. Prompto remembers hundreds of moments from the not-so-distant past where he’d dreamt of anyone expressing interest in him. He recalls counting the genuine compliments he’d received on one hand, treasuring them like lifesavers in the storm of his insecurity.

And now? When the validation he’d craved is literally right up against him? It just makes him feel like throwing up. Contrary to what he had imagined, it does not make him feel desirable and attractive - it makes him feel like an object, and that is an inherently unsafe thing to experience.

A large part of him resents that this is happening only after he’s lost all that weight. It seems that no matter how progressive society pretends to be, people will still act in a very distinct way.
Suddenly, the hand on his hip moves to his lower back, rubbing small circles through his shirt. Prompto’s skin immediately runs ice-cold, as if he’s been unceremoniously thrown into an arctic tundra. All he can think of are the rolls that Dino must be feeling right at that very second.

“Look,” Prompto says firmly, the excessive breach of personal space pushing him over the edge of polite to incensed. He grabs at Dino’s upper arms and pushes the white-haired male back and off him. “I’m not interested. I’m sorry.”

Dino laughs, and Prompto decides it’s the most infuriating response he could receive. “Y’sure about that, blondie? I don’t know if I believe you.”

Is this guy for real?

Before he has a second to process what to do, Dino’s leaning back in again, cupping his cheek and locking his eyes back on Prompto’s lips. “C’mon, you know you want to give it a chance.”

Prompto freezes for only a moment before he’s jerking away violently. His head hits the gate painfully, sending resounding vibrations through the structure, and then he’s finally able to sidestep and put some distance between them. “I said I’m not interested!”

Dino frowns, and Prompto is genuinely frightened about what the taller, stronger-looking individual might do. But then he’s throwing a hand up, waving passively. “Fine. You’re making a huge mistake here, but fine. Catch you later.”

And then he’s finally, finally walking away, as cool and collected as when he’d first shown up. As soon as he rounds the corner, Prompto sags against the cool metal bars, hands shaking from where they’re balled up against his thighs.

He wonders if he deserved that, for not being more adamant and clear earlier on in the conversation. He’d been as friendly and polite as any other person would be, sure, but he also didn’t make any moves to stop the flirtation before it escalated. So was he leading the older boy on? Did he deserve that? He did, didn’t he? You reap what you sow, and all that. He should’ve—

“Prompto.”

He jumps. Noctis is standing a ways off, arms crossed, tension radiating off him.

Fuck. He saw.

“All of a sudden, Noctis is hugging him fiercely, and the blond softens and sinks into it. That wasn’t what he expected - but hey, he’ll take it.

“I know,” Noctis murmurs into his skin. “I know. I’m so sorry.”

Prompto lets out a small, incredulous laugh. “Sorry? Why?”

“Because that happened. I keep forcing you to keep this a secret when it shouldn’t be one. And I couldn’t do anything in the moment because of it. I’m so sorry.” His voice sounds pained and laden with regret, and Prompto feels his heart melting at the raw emotion there.

“Don’t be sorry,” he half-whispers back. “I know what I signed up for. That wasn’t your fault.”
After a beat, Noctis nods into his neck, tightens his hold. They stay like that for only a second longer, and then they’re parting, ever mindful of their public appearance. It only takes a few moments after that for Prompto to break the ice, and then they’re laughing like normal, headed towards Noct’s apartment and the promise of a lovely evening ahead of them.

“Close your eyes!” Noctis is commanding through those short, cute giggles Prompto adores.

The blond obliges, and allows a hand on his wrist to guide him the rest of the way through the hallway and into Noct’s apartment. Once the door closes behind the pair, he hears a long, nervous exhale, and then a tentative “Open.”

Prompto does, and… it’s Noct’s apartment, looking like it always does.

“You’re giving me your apartment?” Prompto jokes. “Aww, Noct, you shouldn’t have.”

He gets a light punch in the shoulder for that. “No, dummy. I thought we’d just spend a day in. And I’m gonna cook you dinner! Not Iggy! Of course, I’d prefer to book Insomnia’s fanciest restaurant, you deserve that, but…”

“I know,” Prompto smiles, heart feeling full. “That is so sweet, Noct. I love it.”

Noct’s eyes widen a bit at that, and then he’s clearing his throat and guiding Prompto towards his room. “Wanna pick up where we left off on X-Files and cuddle?”

“Yes.”

Their Valentine’s day ends up being quiet, soft, and beautiful. They watch TV, play video games, take photos, hold each other - really, it isn’t that much different from their usual days, but there’s an undercurrent of raw affection to it that makes the day all the more sweet.

Noct’s green curry soup is, surprisingly, almost as good as Ignis’s. When Prompto learns that he practiced eight different times with the advisor, he feels like his heart is going to float off and never come back. For the first time in a week, he eats something with love rather than resentment. For those few hours, he forgets everything there is to hate about himself.

Prompto gives Noctis a collage of photos, hung up in a row on twine string. It’s in chronological order, deliberately picked to represent the growth of their relationship - from shy, polite selfies of the two in the beginning to photos of them cuddling at the end. Noctis hangs it above his bed immediately. Later, they drift off to sleep under it.

Prompto couldn’t have imagined a better way to spend the day.
The next day, after school, Prompto is “at work” - AKA, alone in his apartment and avoiding lunch with Noctis. His stomach is rumbling, and the feeling of it makes him smile.

He finally feels like he’s able to restrict again. It hit him as soon as he woke up: the stark sense of purpose, the will to control himself, the *eagerness* he felt in regards to starving. He restarted the ABC diet as soon as he realized the motivation was there again.

The scale tells him he weighs 147 pounds, putting his BMI at 22.4. It’s not great, but it’s a net loss, and in light of all the binging Prompto is extremely grateful for it.

He’s ready to prove his worth.

Whistling, Prompto pulls on his running shoes, and bounds out the door.

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**Chapter End Notes**

what, you expected the valentine's chapter to be 3000 words of fluff? really? in THIS fic? :-(

those of you who hang out with me on Tumblr will definitely see where i pulled the inspiration for the dino scene from. (hint: my own gottam life and the annoying ass people in it lmao)

i hope you all have a nice valentine's day. i will be in class until 9, and then i'll probably go home, eat some pretzels, and fall asleep. i can't wait. <3

**IMPORTANT EDIT**: there will be no update for the next two weeks. i mentioned this on my tumblr as well, but just in case you don't see it there... here it is. sorry guys :-( my life is a hellzone atm and i will be losing all of my sleep to my millions of upcoming projects; i simply do not have the time to give this fic what it deserves. hold out for the next chapter, though, i know you guys will love it.
Knock, Knock! Who's There?

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Prompto has a weird binge-restrict cycle until Valentine's day finally passes. After that, he restarts the ABC diet. Oh, and he gets hit on by Dino. It's creepy.

Chapter Notes

HI EVERYONE! holy fuck, it feels like it's been forever!! i hope you guys didn't miss me too much!! or my amazing beta TheRegalHarvester too much!!

me? i'm exhausted, getting sick, and my room's a MESS, but none of that matters, because i am at least - finally - stable!! things are still monumentally busy, but at least i have a grasp on life now.

anyway.

without further adieu, i present to thee.... ~chapter 22!!~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Did I tell you I saw Ferris on the way over here?”
“Prompto,” Noctis starts, amusement clouding his voice. “I’m not sure which is worse, you regularly interacting with a street cat, or you giving said cat a human name.”

“I’d call it a tie,” Prompto grins, and then immediately pulls at some grass to flick at Noctis.

“Hey!” Noctis exclaims, holding his arms high above himself. “Watch the curry!”

“Only when you watch your hater vibes, bro.”

“‘Hater’? ‘Vibes’? ‘Bro?’”

The two can’t hold it in then, and simultaneously burst into laughter, doubled over under their tree. It’s lunchtime at school, there’s only two periods to go, and Noctis is feeling giddy.

“Hey, wanna get lunch after school?”
Prompto snorts. “We’re at lunch. Right now.”

“Lunch Two, duh.” Noctis sticks his tongue out. “And then we can play the new Resident Evil! I just got it.”

“Sorry,” Prompto sighs, picking forlornly at the grass now. “I got scheduled to work after school.”
Noctis pouts. He wonders, not for the first time, if he could somehow bribe Prompto’s boss into giving him less hours. And a raise. “Okaaaay. Dinner, then?”

“Can’t. Working ‘till nine,” Prompto frowns. “But tomorrow’s Saturday, and I have whole the day off!”

“Deal,” Noctis grins, reaching out to squeeze Prompto’s nose. The blond bats at his hand, but he’s still smiling all the same, and the image of it is just too heart-wrenchingly adorable.

Damn. Noctis really wishes he could be holding and kissing his boyfriend for hours after school; he’s feeling particularly affectionate today. Maybe a bribe isn’t totally out of the question, if he phrased it as more of a business contract-

“Noct!”

“Huh?” he blinks.

“You were spacing out,” Prompto informs, biting into a pretzel stick.

Noctis smiles, then drops his voice a couple octaves. “Sorry. Just thinking about how much I like you.”

And he decides that the particular shade of red Prompto turns, at that, is the most endearing thing he’s ever seen.

Little did he know how much he’d look back on this moment with a bittersweet longing, lamenting the day that everything changed.

Noctis is left walking home alone after school, choosing to relish in the contemplative aspect of a solitary walk rather than call for Ignis to drive him. His advisor has enough on his plate as it is, and anyway - the weather is really nice, and he’s grown to like spending time outside. It’s calming, gentle, and fun to listen for birdsong (ever since Prompto taught him how to differentiate between chirps, of course).

He’s just passing his favorite willow tree when, suddenly, he feels a tap on his shoulder. Instinctively, he whips around, dagger materializing in his hand.

And… he’s met with another teenager. A teenager with soft curls, hazel eyes, olive-colored skin, and the most terrified expression Noctis has ever seen on a person.

Sheepishly, he dismisses his weapon, and the boy in front of him visibly relaxes.

“Sorry,” Noctis offers, hand rubbing the back of his neck. He should be angrier, less apologetic, but the breeze feels good and he’s in a mellow mood. “Caught me by surprise.”

The teen offers a shaky laugh. “Uh, no, that’s okay, I shouldn’t have snuck up on you.”
Noctis agrees, but he isn’t the type of person to rub these things in people’s faces. Unlike a certain Ignis he knows. “Did you need something, or…?”

The boy casts a furtive glance around them. “Are you alone today?”

Noctis snorts. “Geez, maybe I do need a weapon out for this.”

He tries not to get too amused at the sight of the stranger’s eyebrows shooting upwards, hands thrown up in the universal sign for surrender. “No I - I didn’t mean - I just want a chance to talk to you alone. Without Prompto.”

Now Noctis is intrigued. Usually (and thankfully), Prompto’s existence is ignored by the people who are after Noctis - paparazzi and journalists and the like - so to hear him specifically being named is foreign. But why would this kid want to avoid the blond?

He bites his lip, unsure. “That’s… kinda creepy, dude.”

The boy looks like he’s internally slapping himself, but, to his credit, he doesn’t back down. “No! It’s - it’s cause I want to talk to you about Prompto.”

Noctis’s heart skips a beat.

What would this kid have to say about Prompto, other than ‘I have photographic evidence of your secret gay relationship and my silence can only be bought with one million gil’?

“Who are you?” Noctis demands, mouth set in a hard line.

*Keep it cool. Don’t panic yet.*

The teen’s eyes widen, evidently catching onto Noctis’s sudden mood shift. “Uh! A friend! Of Prompto’s!”

“A friend?” Noctis cocks an eyebrow.

“Yeah, uh,” the boy shifts on his feet. “We used to work together on METEOR, the zine. He’d take photos for my articles.”

Noctis knows he looks openly incredulous, but he can’t help it. None of this sounds familiar to him, and he knows quite a bit about Prompto. Other friends and commitments would’ve come up by now, wouldn’t it?

Suddenly, Noctis feels a tiny amount of betrayal. And a large amount of pathetic.

“What’s your name?” he clarifies, quickly trying to get to the point of this conversation before he thinks too hard about Prompto keeping things from him.

An open hand shoots out between the two, and Noctis tentatively shakes it.

“Derrick,” the kid says. “Pleased to meet you.”
The brick walls are cozier than Noctis imagined they’d be, now that he’s inside the cafe.

“This is my favorite spot,” Derrick explains, settling into the seat across from Noctis at their secluded corner table.

The two are at Stories, a teahouse Derrick all but dragged the prince to, with promises of ‘important news’. Normally, Noctis wouldn’t have indulged the strange kid, but his paranoia won out over his good sense.

Because if this guy knows about his secret relationship, Noctis better be the first one informed.

At the thought, Noct’s hands are clenching against his thigh, tense and stiff. “Is it?”

“No! No! Don’t do that! I’m sorry, I promise you this is important, I’m-”

“Mm,” Derrick hums as he sips from his mug. “And I figured you might wanna be sitting down. Y’know, for the important news.”

Noctis snaps. “Yeah, dude, you’ve said ‘important news’ about twenty times now,” he fumes, waving his hands about angrily. “I’m this close to calling bullshit and reporting you for harassment. So you better get talking quick, and it better be worth my time.”

Derrick’s eyes go wide. “Okay, okay,” Derrick sighs, throwing his hands up in defeat. “Beating around the bush obviously isn’t helping, so I’ll stop. But you need to calm down, bro.”

If there’s anything Noctis hates most in this world, it’s being told to calm down. But he’s been dealing with all sorts of people for the entirety of his life, and he realizes Derrick is the type of person who won’t make any progress until he’s felt like he’s won a few battles.

“Okay,” Noctis breathes, slow and careful. He even throws in a smile. “I’m calm. Now. What is this about?”

Derrick smiles back, but it has a hint of smugness to it, like he’s pleased with himself for getting one-up on the prince. Whatever. Let Derrick think what he wants to think - Noctis is only here to potentially protect himself and his boyfriend.

“Well,” Derrick drawls, dragging his finger along the rim of the porcelain mug. “I’d say it all started last summer, when Prompto and I got close. You know - while working on METEOR.”

If there’s anything else Noctis hates, it’s a person who drops random details into a story without explanation. And the little flare up of jealousy he felt at that particular detail really isn’t helping Derrick’s case, either. “Yeah, I don’t know what the fuck ‘METEOR’ is. Bro.”

Derrick evidently gets the message, because his bravado is instantly replaced with sheepishness. “Yeah, sorry. It’s an underground zine my friend Vyv started. He’s a year older than us.”

Noctis nods. “And Prompto took pictures for it? Sorry, but he’s never mentioned that - or you - to me. I’m finding this hard to believe.”

Derrick averts his eyes, somewhat… shamefaced? “Yeah, he wasn’t with us long,” he mumbles.
“Which was probably - no, definitely my fault. Prompto wasn’t very happy with me.”

Noct’s irritation fades away at that, turning into outright curiosity. Because in what universe is Prompto angry with anyone? The guy’s like a sunbeam, casting his warmth on everyone he comes across indiscriminately.

Thinking of Prompto calms the prince even further. “Alright,” he says, voice mellow. “What’d you do?”

“Well,” Derrick says. “We’d hang out a lot. And the more we hung out, the more I started to notice… things.”

Noctis quirks an eyebrow. “‘Notice things?’”

“Look,” Derrick sighs, running a hand through his hair. “I don’t know how to say this delicately, and you obviously don’t know what I’m talking about, so I’m just going to say it.”

Here they are - finally - at the point of this conversation. Noct’s heart starts pounding, suddenly hyper-aware of the fact that the next sentence out of Derrick’s mouth could potentially start a war.

So intent is he on listening for confirmation of his bisexuality, he almost misses the life-altering words that tumble from Derrick’s lips.

“Prompto has an eating disorder.”

Noctis doesn’t believe him, at first. In fact, he outright snorts.

Which turns into scattered chuckling.

And then, out of nowhere - deep, powerful belly-laughs.

Laughs so loud they border on frantic, hysteria seeping in at the edges.

Derrick just waits until he’s finished, patiently sipping at his tea, understanding painted on his face. For some reason, the image of it makes Noctis infuriated, and his amusement turns on its heel quickly, morphing into defensive, angry panic.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” he insists, because he doesn’t know what else to do except vehemently deny it. So that’s what he’ll do - he’ll deny it with every modicum of energy he has.

Deny deny deny, until the statement leaves his head forever, until he’s thoroughly convinced himself it can’t be true.

“I know it’s hard to-”

“No,” Noctis interrupts. “No. You don’t know what you’re talking about. Prompto literally eats all the time.”

He’s - he’s seen him eating. Stuffing his face with junk right alongside Noctis every time they hang
out. How could - how could that translate into…

“Explain the weight loss, then,” Derrick says calmly, cutting into Noctis’s train of thought. The fucker looks sympathetic, like he’s pitying the prince, and for some reason that only makes Noctis angrier.

“He’s been training,” he explains, trying to muster up a confidence that’s quickly slipping through his fingers. “With one of Insomnia’s finest warriors. He’s gaining muscle and toning up, is that what’s confusing you?”

Derrick visibly steels himself. “No. Listen. In the summer, he didn’t eat for twenty-six days straight. I called him out on it and he admitted everything to me, okay? And then I… convinced him to eat, and he cut me off after that. So yeah, I know what I’m fucking talking about.” He breathes in, shaky and audible. “And all year I’ve been watching him get worse and worse, and I can’t… I can’t keep sitting around silently.”

Noctis is stunned into silence. His brain stops thinking - he doesn’t even know where to begin with that.

He needs evidence. Without it, he refuses to process any of what he just heard. “Fine. Let’s say I might be giving this some fuckin’ consideration. What proof do you have?”

Suddenly, Derrick is scrambling for his phone, mumbling a quick “hold on” while he taps through it. Twenty seconds later, the screen is turned around, and Noctis is faced with a surprising image.

It’s them. Derrick and Prompto, on a couch in some living room, posing for a selfie. They both look happy, peace signs thrown up into the air and smiles bright. That isn’t what shocks Noctis.

What’s shocking is Prompto’s appearance.

It’s him, that part is indisputable, but it’s a version of him that’s markedly softer around the edges. The sharp V of his jaw is rounded out, his cheeks are absolutely pinchable, and his eyes look smaller than normal. He’s undeniably chubby, and it’s not a look Noctis is used to seeing on his boyfriend.

Not that it’s bad… just. Different.

Different enough to feel like a deliberate secret, kept purposely from him, and dammit if Noctis doesn’t feel a sharp sting of betrayal at the thought. He thought they knew everything about each other. He thought… he thought Prompto trusted him.

And here he is, now, sitting in a strange cafe, in front of a strange kid, learning about a version of Prompto he had no clue existed.

Why didn’t he tell me?

Derrick’s fingers tap the image, and a date immediately comes into view at the top. August 8.

Noctis gapes at it for a moment, quick mental math whirring through his mind. “This was… this was only six months ago?”

He might not be an expert on nutrition, sure, but he knows weight loss isn’t supposed to be that rapid. The blond went from objectively overweight to downright skinny, and Noctis hadn’t even registered it. He’d been writing it off this whole time, subconscious and assuming and selfish, not even considering that his best friend - his boyfriend - could have been suffering.

Suddenly, he feels like he’s going to be sick.
Noct’s eyes unfocus, and the phone in front of him becomes two blurry phones, dancing and trading places with each other. He dimly registers Derrick gesturing at someone behind him, crooking his fingers in a ‘come here’ motion. His mind feels like it’s floating off.

An indeterminate amount of time later, there’s suddenly a woman at their table, old and kindly. “Yes, Derrick? Do you need a refi- oh! Your highness!”

Noctis blinks a couple times, wills himself to focus on the woman and act like a goddamn prince. “Uh. Hi?”

Well, he tried.

Derrick clears his throat. “Mary, this is Noctis. Noctis, this is Mary. She owns this place.”

Noctis nods, dazed. He doesn’t know where this is going - he’s still stuck on that picture.

“Mary, can you tell him? About that incident with Prompto?”

Now Noctis perks up. He understands now, why Derrick specifically brought him here. He was prepared to offer the burden of proof, and evidently this woman holds a first-hand account of the issue at hand.

Mary looks just as dumbstruck as anyone would be, were they told to suddenly recount an old story in front of the prince of their country. To her credit, she recovers quickly, and jumps right in.

“Prompto,” she sighs, wistful. “I assume you’re talking about the fainting?”

“Fainting?” Noctis echoes, incredulous.

Mary shifts her weight, visibly uncomfortable. “Yes, highness. One night… oh, it must have been months ago, now, when Prompto was spending a lot of time here. Anyway, the poor kid - he stood up from his seat and fainted. His head just missed the table, thank Shiva. I saw the whole thing from the counter.”

Noctis must be making a face, because she knits her eyebrows and quickly hurries on. “He woke up a half minute later, I assure you, and insisted he was fine. I offered him some food - on the house, of course - and he declined.”

“And why did he do that?” Derrick probes gently, hands folded underneath his chin.

Noctis just stares, feeling cold and numb. “Yeah, why?”

Mary frowns. “I’m not sure if it’s my place-”

“Tell me,” Noctis pleads, desperate.

He gets a long sigh in return. “Well, I don’t know him personally, but the signs are pretty obvious after you’ve been through it yourself,” she explains. “For whatever reason, that boy hadn’t been eating enough. And it was definitely on purpose.”

Noctis lets out a choked sob.

“That’s, uh, that’s all, Mary,” Derrick hurries. “Thanks.”

The old woman gets the point quickly, pausing to excuse herself with a short bow. After a beat, Noctis pulls himself together, and lets out a ragged sigh.
“I don’t understand,” he says, stumbling through his words. “Why didn’t I see this before?”

Derrick smiles, but it’s grim and hollow. “I said the same thing, when Mary first told me to watch out for Prompto’s eating habits,” he offers. “Hindsight is 20/20, right? I guess it’s not the first thing people consider, for guys. Even though there are so many signs… you have to be open to the possibility before you can recognize them, you know?”

Noctis runs a hand through his bangs, and then ends up leaning heavily into his hand. “I always… I always thought this was a ‘girl thing’. Fuck,” he starts, eyes shooting open. “I fucking told him that, too! I… we were learning about this in class, and I said it was a girl thing and fell asleep. Oh my god. Fuck! I fucking-”

“Hey, hey,” Derrick cuts in. “I’m sure he doesn’t hold that against you. I mean - I thought the same shit at first, too. Everyone does.”


A silence falls over the pair. Noctis stares, unfocused, at the dark wood grain of the table, mind running over a hundred memories.

All the stupid jokes he told at Prompto’s expense. All the moments the boy had stood up and tilted like he was going to fall. All the times he’d politely declined food. All the skipped plans -

Fuck, he was skipping at this very moment, wasn’t he? Noctis tried to get lunch with him and he ran off to work, and - Astrals - just how many times had he done that, now?

And how many times did Noctis accept it, refusing to put the pieces together - refusing to see the commonality between each instance?

“Gods,” Noctis whispers.

“Look,” Derrick says. “I only told you because I know it’s impossible to notice until things get really, really bad. And I wanted you to know before it gets to that point.” He pauses, scratches nervously at his arm. “He’s going downhill fast, Noctis. You didn’t know him before, so you don’t have that point of reference… but trust me when I say he’s a ghost of his former self these days. You have to help him.”

Noctis nods and swallows hard, trying his best not to cry. “Why do you even care so much?”

“Because he was a good friend.” Derrick bites his lip. “And, maybe I, uh. Liked him. A lot. Still do, if I’m being honest.”

Noctis blinks.

“I see,” he says, careful to keep his tone neutral. “Well. Thanks, uh, for telling me.”

Derrick coughs. “Um. Yeah. Um - hey - be careful about this, yeah? Don’t… don’t attack him for his illness. Learn from my mistake.”

Noctis nods quickly, already making to stand. “Yeah, I’ll…. tread lightly. I guess.”

Derrick stands up after him. “And um, let him know? I’m still thinking and worrying about him? And that I’m really sorry about everything? Please. I know I probably don’t have a chance, anymore, but. Yeah.”
In light of everything Noctis just learned, that bit of dramatic irony is a relief. It has him suppressing a smile now, rather than suppressing a sob. “Okay, yeah. I’ll let him know. Who knows, you might get lucky,” he adds on a wink, feeling hollow.

Derrick blushes a bit, and, honestly, Noctis can’t get angry at that - he knows the feeling. “Thanks, man. And thanks for hearing me out.”

“I’m glad I did,” Noctis sighs. “I have a lot of research to do.”

“Smart,” Derrick says. “Be gentle with him.”

“I will,” Noctis nods. “I will.”

Noctis rests his forehead on his desk, the Google page open on his laptop mocking him at this point. His eyes are red and raw from crying, and he feels absolutely ragged, like he’s been dragged through every machine in a factory assembly line.

His emotions are running wild, completely out of sync and haphazard. Every time he thinks he might be stabilizing, that he can finally think with a clear head, he reads a new detail and bursts into tears once again.

He just can’t wrap his head around Prompto - _his_ Prompto - going through any of this. When he thinks of Prompto, he thinks of sunlight. Happiness. Wide, stretched-out smiles. Pure joy.

But everything he’s reading? It’s soaked in misery, it’s absolutely laden with it. All along, his sun was dying, and he was completely blind to it.
Why didn’t he tell me?

Noctis likes to think he’s trustworthy. Even if he isn’t, shouldn’t his own boyfriend, at the very least, trust him? Aren’t they supposed to be a team?

What are they really doing here?

The thought sends Noct’s already poor mood plummeting, and before he can register his actions, he’s curled up in bed and bawling.

The boy I love can’t even talk to me. Some boyfriend I am.

He sobs harder, tears streaking down his face and into his pillow.

I had to find out from a stranger. A stranger!

Choking gasps, hitched breaths, loud wails.

Do I even know him?

… At all?

He has to tell Prompto he knows. He has to.

Although he’s tempted to brush it all under the rug, he knows that would make him a hypocrite. Besides, he wants to help the boy he loves, and he can’t do that if he masquerades as oblivious.

So, the next morning, when Prompto comes over, he does his best to make the atmosphere feel comfortable. They talk, play video games, kiss a bit - the usual, but there’s an undercurrent to it that Noctis feels heavily.

It isn’t until noon that Noctis goes to stand by the window, looking out across Insomnia, contemplative.

“Whats up, buddy?” Prompto asks, joining him.

Noctis snorts, but there’s no amusement in it. “You know how much hate you calling me ‘buddy.’”

“That’s why I do it,” Prompto teases, knocking their shoulders together. When Noctis doesn’t respond, he knits his eyebrows and frowns. “Seriously, Noct, everything okay?”

“I, uh…” he starts, and then stops. “Um.” He sighs, runs a quick and frustrated hand through his hair, and leans heavily against the window. “Look. There’s no easy way to say this.”

Now Prompto’s looking positively terrified, and Noctis desperately wishes the next words out of his mouth could be happy ones.

But wishes are not reality, and Noctis has a responsibility to help and protect the boy standing in
front of him.

“Prompto... I know about your eating disorder.”

Chapter End Notes

HAHA OH MY GOD I'M SO GIDDY HAHAHAHAHAHA YESSS FOLX THAT'S RIGHT, THE MOMENT WE'VE LITERALLY ALL BEEN WAITING FOR

FUCK YEAH

I'M SO!!

WOOOOOOOO

WHAT'D YOU THINK????

TUMBLR
Naked Truth

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Derrick comes out of nowhere, and tells Noctis the truth about Prompto's ED. Noctis is torn up about it, and eventually decides to tell Prompto he knows.

Chapter Notes

here it is. the chapter you guys have been waiting for since september. gosh, i feel a little emotional. thank you all so much for sticking out this slow, slow burn.

i'm so sorry i'm posting this later than i promised. but it's twice as long as a normal chapter, so i hope that makes up for it <3

and one big ass round of applause for my beta TheRegalHarvester, who continues to prove how absolutely selfless she is when it comes to putting her hectic life on hold to give me wonderful advice & help. i can never thank her enough.

i wrote this with Vanille's theme on loop (though i've never actually played ff13, oops) and it kinda made me cry a bit, writing and listening to this song at the same time?? so for the Ultimate Reading Experience, i highly recommend you read this with that in the background, but start playing it at the second page break. there. that's your listening guide, haha. trust me, you'll Feel Things. enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I, uh... Um. Look. There’s no easy way to say this.”

White noise buzzing in his head. Skin going cold and clammy with fear. Nausea rising in his throat.

“Prompto... I know about your eating disorder.”

Just like that - Prompto’s carefully constructed world bursting into millions of fragments.

He starts backing away, frame shaking. “Are you - are you gonna make me eat?” His voice sounds utterly hysterical, even to him.

Confusion furrows on Noct’s brow. “Make you-?”

“Please, please don’t make me-” Prompto’s hardly aware of the panicky tears streaming down his face, slipping over his cheeks and coating his words with desperation. “Please. Please. I’ll do anything. Just don’t-”

“Prompto!” Noctis shouts as the blond trips on a stack of school books, landing hard. When Noctis bends down towards him, he recoils from the approach, quickly scooting backwards until he hits the wall.
And then he bursts into loud, heavy sobs, the force of it wracking his entire body.

“Prom,” Noctis gasps, frozen in place. “Please, it’s okay-”

But Prompto can’t hear him. He can only hear the sounds of his wails reverberating through his skull, the choppy quality of his quick and shallow breaths, and the blood rushing away from his head, leaving him dizzy.

“-Prompto, I’m not-” He knows. He knows. He knows.

“-Listen, please-” He knows. He knows he knows he knows.

“-You’re hyperventilating-!” HeknowsHeknowsHeknowsHeknows.
There’s a warmth.

It’s at his side and around his shoulders, cradling him, steady and strong.

It’s talking.

“Prompto? Prompto?” says the warmth. It sounds scared. “Prom, please, wake up. Please, I-”

“Mm,” Prompto responds, lazy and slow.

“Thank gods,” the warmth sighs, and Prompto’s now cognizant enough to place the voice to Noctis. But why is Noctis here, and why does he sound so frightened, and - come to think of it - where is
Prompto tries opening his eyes. He discovers he’s at ground level, in Noct’s apartment.

“Hm,” he says, at that. “Mmm.”


Prompto follows along for an indeterminate amount of time, focused on nothing but the sound of Noct’s voice. His chest slowly starts to feel more free, like a thousand-ton weight is gradually lifting off with each breath.

“Okay,” Noctis says, after a bit. “Okay, good.”

The counting ends. Prompto has nothing to focus on anymore.

So he stares at the ground, and tries to figure out what’s going on.

“Um,” he starts. “What ha-”

And then it all comes back to him.

Noctis, standing at the window with a pained look on his face.

Noctis, turning towards him and sighing, running his hands through his hair.

Noctis, telling him he knows about his eating disorder.


“Breathe! Remember!” Noctis hurries. “Or you’ll just pass out again!”

Prompto nods quickly, controlling his diaphragm as best he can. He’s shaking like a leaf and feeling unreal, but the panic isn’t manifesting as strongly as it did before.

He supposes that fainting will do that to a person.

And so another indistinct period of time passes like that, cradled against Noctis on the floor as the shock washes over him.

“Oh,” Prompto chokes out, and it sounds thin and unstable, but it’s there. “Explain.”

Noctis quickly rearranges himself so that he’s in front of the blond, sitting on his ankles and maintaining eye contact. “First of all, I’m not going to ‘make you eat’, got that?”

Tension melts out of Prompto’s shoulders like molten wax. He nods once, and then squeezes his eyes against the barrage of images that sentence invoked. Derrick, looming over him, holding him down, threatening him, forcing him to-

“I’m only here to help you, Prom. Whichever way you need it.”

-to eat, to eat so much food all at once, to eat or else he’d be handed over to the police, and then the nearest inpatient ward-

“I had no idea this would affect you so much, I’m so sorry.”
“How’d you find out?” Prompto interrupts, shaking his head as if erasing the memories from the forefront of his mind.

Noctis pauses. “I didn’t figure it out myself, or anything,” he starts, eventually. “I had no idea. Um. Someone told me, said he knew you…”

“Who?”

“Uh. Derrick?”

Of course. Speak of the devil.

A cold wave washes over Prompto, numbing him, replacing the panic with the somber calm of acceptance.

“And he said I have an eating disorder?” he asks, voice strangely even. This is territory he hates, sure, but at least it’s familiar.

“Uh, yeah,” Noctis confirms, averting his eyes. “That’s what he said.”


“Prom…” Noctis trails, and his disbelief is clear on his face.

Prompto sighs. He knows there’s no use hiding behind technicalities, especially given his earlier reaction.


He just admitted it. He just admitted it.

To Noctis.

His chest feels tight.

But he has no time to dwell on the significance of that, because pain is flashing across Noct’s face, visceral enough to make Prompto’s heart jump. “Well, whatever it is, I just want you to know-”

“Can you tell me everything he told you?” Prompto suddenly demands, delaying the real conversation at hand as much as possible. At any rate, he’s curious.

“Um, okay,” Noctis blinks. “But are you okay? Like, I just want to reassure you that-”


Noctis stares at him for a hard, long moment. “Well, it was yesterday, after school, when I was walking home,” he begins, finally going with it. “This stranger came up to me and said he wanted to talk to me. About you.”

Prompto’s protective instincts kick in. “Wait, what if it was a trap?”

Noctis snorts, though there isn’t much mirth behind it. “I thought the same thing and pulled a knife on him. But then he looked genuinely scared,” he shrugs, “and our age, so I figured he was harmless.”
Prompto clenches his fingers into a fist, to stop them from trembling. “Then what?”

“Then he took me to this tea place, Stories?” At that, Prompto shudders against long-dormant memories. “And he, well... he told me there.”

“How?”


Silver linings, Prompto thinks. At least his careful starvation had been as hidden as he hoped it was.

“But you obviously believe him now,” Prompto says. It isn’t a question.

“Yes.” Noctis rubs the back of his nape, suddenly shamefaced. “I... asked him to prove it.”

Prompto stares.

It’s a long moment before he utters a soft “Did he?”

Noctis swallows hard, nods. “He got the owner to come over, and she said you fainted once. And he, uh. Showed me a picture. From August.”

Prompto feels the world drop out from underneath him.

Noctis saw. Noctis saw.

Inadvertently, a strangled whine escapes his throat, and his eyes unfocus and go blurry.

“Prom, it’s not a big deal-”

Oh, it’s a big deal. It’s a big big big big big big big big big big big big big deal. It’s a fat deal. It’s a heavy monster of a deal. It’s a two-hundred-pound deal.

“You-” Prompto starts, channeling his limitless shame into raw anger. “You- you went behind my back, you betrayed my trust-”

Noctis’s eyes go wide. “No! I didn’t mean to-”

“You gossiped about me to a stranger!” Prompto yells, scrambling up quickly, blinking quick against the resultant black dots. “You completely invaded my privacy- you didn’t even think to ask me!”

Noctis rises after him. “I-!”

“I’ve always respected YOUR secrets!” Prompto seethes. “Our entire relationship is a secret, and I’ve only supported that!”

Noctis looks struck for a moment, and then his mouth settles into a hard line. “At least you know my secrets!” he’s suddenly yelling back, out of nowhere, and Prompto is momentarily silenced by it.

“How do you think I feel? I had to hear out some weird kid just to find out what I should’ve known all along - that my boyfriend has been suffering!”
Prompto gapes.

The two stare at each other for a tense moment, breathing heavily.

“I’m leaving,” Prompto spits, and then abruptly turns and tears through the apartment.

“Prom-” he hears Noctis start, but the door slams shut, cutting him off with a resounding thud.

Though he doesn’t have a destination in mind, Prompto inevitably finds himself at his favorite park regardless.

This is how he usually relieves stress, anyway - curled up under his favorite tree, watching the birds, feeling the breeze - and this is probably the most stress he’s been under ever, so. It feels appropriate, that he’d be here.

He doesn’t do much. Mostly, he picks at the grass with jerky movements, clumping his victims into small balls which he hurls into the air.

*It’s like sad confetti,* Prompto thinks, one corner of his mouth upturned in a hollow attempt at a smile.

He yanks out more grass.

_Screw fucking Derrick. Stupid fucking Noctis. Stupid fucking everything._

He doesn’t feel real. All the months of careful planning, careful speaking, careful _existing_ - all to be erased in the span of a conversation? The juxtaposition of pre-meditation versus spontaneity has Prompto feeling sick and disoriented, like someone who hasn’t yet found their sea-legs.

He literally can’t wrap his mind around it. Yesterday, his reality consisted of routine and control. Today, that reality got tossed into a rampaging flame, with absolutely no regard to how he felt about it.

And tomorrow? Who knows.

Prompto sighs, shaky and long, clenching his hands into the soil. He might not feel _prepared_ for this, but one thing is for certain - he does know how _angry_ he is. It simmers underneath his skin, threatening to lash out and unleash an inferno at the slightest offense.

It’s probably for the best, then, that he’s isolating himself at the moment.

Slowly, time starts to pass.
Prompto finds himself drifting, eventually, in the unreality of the entire situation. As a result, what was outrage slowly dissipates, traded for apathy and indifference.

Through glassy eyes, he watches tiny birds hop around in front of him - hop hop hop - carefree and innocent and happy. It’s only when the scene blurs does he realize he’s crying.

He wants to be a kid again.

Hop hop hop.

His heart feels heavy with it, longing for a time before he let the daemons in his brain consume him.

Hop hop hop.

He wants it so badly. He’s never wanted something so badly.

He - he -

He can taste his tears, now. He’s sobbing. His breathing is sporadic and jumpy. He can’t stop.

Hop hop hop.

He misses his parents. He misses those nights, when he was really small, when they would make him hot chocolate and read to him. Before they started making snide comments on the size of his thighs - or his stomach - or his arms, before the extended absences, before the final push and move to Altissia -

Before they stopped loving him.

Hop hop hop -

The birds fly away.

Prompto takes one, two, three long breaths, wipes his eyes on his sleeves, and shakes his head.

It’s getting dark.

On unsteady legs, Prompto rises, shoves his hands into his jacket pockets, and starts to make his way home as the last vestiges of sunlight wane on the horizon.

He’s moving on autopilot - mind and body both blank. As a result, it isn’t much of a surprise when he suddenly snaps back into reality and realizes he’s lost.

He must have taken a wrong turn somewhere, because he’s never seen this “Peargrove Ave” before in his life. Gods - where had the last half-hour gone? He felt like he just left the park a moment ago.

He’s not sure what’s more frightening - the lack of memories, or the fact that he doesn’t care about their absence.

The sun’s almost set now, bathing the world in a deep cobalt blue that the streetlights glow brilliantly
against. Prompto sighs. He’s always loved the color of dusk - no matter how elusive it can be when it comes to being photographed - and has always felt safe in the liminal space between day and night. In this moment, however, he feels nothing.

He keeps ambling along, hoping he can somehow land back on a main street and work his way home from there. As time passes and night officially falls, however, he finds himself thoroughly lost within a maze of unfamiliarity.

At least he’s paying attention now.

Another ten or so minutes pass before Prompto feels something small splatter against his forehead. And then another - and another - and before he can process it, it’s raining hard.

“Great,” he mutters, and quickly makes for the nearest bus stop.

Sheltered under the stop’s small metal roof, staring at foreign houses across the street, and shivering, Prompto hesitantly pulls out his phone.

MESSENGER | You have 19 new messages from Noctis.

PHONE | Missed call from Noctis.

PHONE | Missed call from Noctis.

MESSENGER | You have 3 new messages from Ignis.

PHONE | Missed call from Noctis.

PHONE | Missed call from Noctis.

PHONE | Missed call from Noctis.

PHONE | Missed call from Noctis.

His phone also has 2% of the battery left. Prompto bites his lip, closed his eyes, and listens to the sound of raindrops falling heavily against the metal, loud and rattling and intimidating.

He doesn’t have a choice. Before he can change his mind, he quickly unlocks his phone and sends Noctis his location and a brief “i’m lost”.

It isn’t as if he has money - or battery life - for an uber. Or other friends to turn to. Or parents.

Noctis had quickly become his everything, and in that moment, it’s infuriating.

Prompto isn’t sure how long he waits, but it’s long enough that he mistakes a few cars for Noctis and leaves his shelter prematurely, only to be passed by. As a result, he’s absolutely soaking by the time
Noctis does arrive - in Gladio’s Jeep, no less.

He isn’t sure if he’s relieved or annoyed to find that it’s just Noctis in there when he opens the door, but nevertheless he climbs in, excruciatingly aware of the water dripping off him and onto the expensive interior.

He feels so ashamed to need Noctis - to even *exist* in front of him. He can feel the eyes looking over his body, appraising him, *understanding* him. It’s only made worse by the rainwater - he can’t even curl up and hide in his jacket; every part of him is embarrassing in that moment.

It’s excruciating.

“Hey…” Noctis tries, voice tinny, once Prompto closes the door.

Prompto doesn’t answer. He turns away, towards the window, and tries to make himself as small as possible. After a beat, he hears a sigh, and then the car purring as it starts to move.

Now that he doesn’t need to be paying attention to anything, Prompto lets his mind slip away again, falling comfortably into the dissociative state that got him lost in the first place. His eyes glaze over as he looks out the window, seeing but not processing.

He’s somewhat aware of Noctis saying a few things, but he doesn’t bother listening to them. It’s far more rewarding to watch city lights expand into huge orbs as his eyes unfocus and refocus in rapid succession.

“At least tell me where I’m going,” Noctis eventually demands, and his tone is sharp enough to startle Prompto into the moment.

“My place,” he croaks in response. He hasn’t used his voice in hours, save for the crying.

Noctis lets out a frustrated huff through his nose. “Okay.”

A few more minutes pass in silence.

“Prompto, we really should talk-”

“Did you tell anyone else?” Prompto interrupts, quick and frantic as he suddenly processes the fact that he’d missed calls from *Ignis*.

Noctis makes an indignant noise. “No! Of course not! I wouldn’t-”

“Good.” It’s curt, and brooks no room for elaboration.

Silence, again. Raindrops on the hood of the car. Heated seats and defrosters on high. Tension, thick and palpable in the air.

Time, passing.

“We’re here,” Noctis eventually mumbles, and Prompto refocuses his eyes and recognizes his apartment complex beyond the window.

*Finally.*

As soon as the car comes to a stop, he flings the door open, ignoring Noct’s hasty “At least take an umbrel-!”
He doesn’t hear the car leave until he’s well inside the building’s corridor, trembling and dripping anew.

The next day is spent in a haze of depression, self-loathing, and mindless binging. He doesn’t really recall the details of it. All he remembers is dropping gil he doesn’t have on junk food at the corner shop, and ordering take-out after that. Twice. What he ate, exactly, is irrelevant.

Strangely, he doesn’t feel guilty about it. He doesn’t feel much at all, now that he knows he’s lost the one good thing he had.

“Hhnf,” Prompto groans, blinking against the bright light of day as he rouses.

His glasses are askew on his face, so he straightens them out and takes stock. He’s on his sofa, surrounded by wrappers and half-empty takeout boxes. The TV is still on from the night before, though the screen is frozen on Netflix’s “Are you still watching?” message. His shirt is off, and he doesn’t remember why until he looks down and discovers new self-inflicted bruises.

He doesn’t remember falling asleep, though it had to have been sometime in the early morning. Because the only way he would’ve been able to knock out, in this state, is through sheer exhaustion.

He rubs at his eyes, blearily trying to come to reality. He let his phone die yesterday after too many calls and texts from Noctis, so he has no idea what time it is. Judging by the angle of the sun, however, he’d guess that it’s at least noon.

“Hmm,” Prompto whines against the loud, banging noise that he now realizes is coming from his front door.

He squeezes his eyes shut and cringes at each thud, properly scared into alertness now. Gingerly, he stands, tip-toeing through the foyer and standing just before the beaten door, gun materializing in his
hand.

He aligns his eye with the peephole, careful not to knock his glasses against it.

And… it’s Noctis. One arm raising a phone to his ear, the other arm raised to pound against his poor door.

Prompto sighs, and then wilts against the adjacent wall. He is not in the mood for this.

So he lets it go on for a bit, hoping the prince will eventually just give up and leave. After a few more minutes, though, Noctis evidently gets off the phone, because he starts yelling.

“Prompto! It’s Noctis! Please open up!” he calls.

Prompto shrinks in on himself. The pounding continues for another minute.

“I just need to know you’re alive!” Noctis screams, voice cracking on the last word. “I’ll force my way in if I have to!”

“Ifrit,” Prompto mutters. And then, louder: “Fine, I’m alive! Go away!”

The pounding stops. Prompto sags with relief, releasing a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding.

“Please. Talk to me,” Noctis utters, voice far more defeated now.

Prompto hears a small sob. Astrals.

“F...Fine,” he says, biting his own quivering lip. “Hold on.”

He steps away from the foyer and turns around, appraising the state of his apartment.

It’s a nightmare, but at least it’s easily manageable. As quickly as he can, Prompto scoops up the sordid remains of his binge, gathering every styrofoam box, candy wrapper, ice-cream pint, and chip bag strewn about the living room. Within minutes, they’re all hidden in his trash can, and his home no longer reflects the fat monster he truly is.

All that’s left is pulling on his shirt - retrieved from in-between the couch cushions. After a hesitant moment, Prompto braces himself, pulls the article on, and promptly squeezes his eyes against the pain of stretching out his battered abdomen.

He turns back to the door.

Now or never.

With shaking hands, he unlocks it, moves the latch off, and gingerly opens it.

The first thing he thinks, upon seeing Noctis, is Wow, he looks like shit.

Because, well. He does. Prompto’s never seen him so haggard. His hair is unstyled and haphazard, his skin looks papery and dehydrated, and his eyes are rimmed with dark circles.

They’re also red, presumably from crying, as there are fresh tear tracks staining his cheeks.

“Hi,” Prompto mumbles, averting his gaze and feeling awkward in his skin. He doesn’t know how to carry himself anymore - not in front of a pair of knowing, judging eyes.
Noctis sniffs. “Hi...”

Prompto turns to the side, and tries not to cringe at the thought of Noctis seeing the outline of his large stomach. “Come in?”

Noctis takes a visible breath and then walks in past him. It’s only then that Prompto notices he’s holding something - some sort of cloth bag - but he has no time to speculate, because he soon finds himself seated next to Noctis on his sofa.

Noctis, who is currently worrying his lip and looking straight at the ground, fingers curled in where his hands rest against his knees.

“I don’t know where to start,” he admits eventually, on a hollow huff of a laugh. “This felt a lot easier in my head.”

Prompto doesn’t say anything. A half minute later, Noctis breathes in, and draws himself up.

“I guess the main point is that I’m so, so sorry, Prompto.” The words tumble out like a cascading waterfall, reckless and jumbled. “I shouldn’t have listened to some random kid tell me your secrets. I was just... I was worried, you know, that he might’ve found out. About our relationship. I was getting ready to get blackmailed, and he said all that instead.”

Noctis draws in a shaky breath, eyes still trained on the ground.

“And, about that. I’m sorry this relationship is a secret in the first place,” he continues. “I never asked how you felt about that. I just. Assumed it was okay. As usual. And you’ve been hurt the whole time because of it.”

Here Noctis takes his longest pause, and his curled fingers tighten into fists.

“S-so... if you... if you want to break up with me...” His voice starts wavering. “I’d... I’d understand. But. C-can you at least... let me know?”

Noct’s eyes close on the last word, a tear spilling out along with it, traveling down down down and landing on his lap.

Prompto stares.

“Noct.” His voice sounds just as broken. “Look at me.”

Slowly, Noctis blinks open his eyes, and turns to face Prompto for the first time. Said eyes are absolutely brimming with tears, like he’s a moment away from bursting. Prompto knows the feeling well.

“I thought,” Prompto starts, choked. “I thought... you were going to break up with me.”

Now it’s Noct’s turn to stare.

“Why would I ever- What would make you think-” he stutters, confusion evident in his voice. “What?”

Prompto casts his gaze away, focusing on his nails. “I’m- I’m damaged goods, after all. No one wants to deal with tha- aa- at!”

The air is knocked out of him on that last word as Noctis all but attacks him with a hug. Prompto slumps into it on instinct, sighing as the familiar scent of eucalyptus envelops him.
“Don’t you ever think, for one second, that this would drive me away,” he whispers into his ear, commanding and earnest. “I’m here to support you, Prom. I’m sorry I’ve done such a shit job of it so far.”

Prompto’s incredulous, to say the least. He doesn’t say anything, instead choosing to lean more heavily into the embrace.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” Noctis says suddenly, drawing back and pulling out the cloth bag, which Prompto can see a distinct jar-shaped outline in. “Um, here. I made you that curry you like. Uh, you don’t have to eat it, but… I don’t know. It was probably dumb. I’m sorry.”

Prompto stares, dumbfounded.

*You don’t have to eat it.*

He’s being given an option.

Prompto realizes, in that moment, that Noctis really isn’t out to hurt him.

That this is nothing like the first time his eating problem was brought to light against his will. It’s nothing like that - even if it stars the same Derrick.

*You don’t have to eat it.*

His vision goes blurry.

“Shit,” Noctis says, eyes going wide. “I knew it was a bad-”

“Thank you,” Prompto whispers, one hand flying to wipe at his tears as the other accepts the bag. “Thank you, Noct.”

He should’ve known better. Noctis would never judge him, would never try to take command of his life and force him into a botched version of recovery.

He *truly* wants to support Prompto.

He feels his heart softening, and he sighs. “I’m sorry I overreacted,” he offers. “I was scared. And I jumped to conclusions that aren’t fair to you. I just haven’t had a good experience with this, in the past.”


Prompto nods, and then scratches nervously at his arm. “Well. What did Derrick tell you? About us?”

Noctis hums for a bit, recalling. “Um, I think he said you didn’t eat for a while? In the summer? And that he found out and convinced you to eat?”

Prompto snorts, disbelieving. “Yeah, that wasn’t the full story.”

Noctis raises his eyebrows.

“He…” Prompto pauses, trying to push against the pain these memories bring up. “He forced me to eat. He - he threatened me. He said if I didn’t eat, he would call the police, which would’ve landed me in inpatient treatment against my will, because I was still a minor at the time.”

“No, not really-”

“What do you mean, ‘not really’?”

Prompto shifts, uncomfortable. “Well, he bruised my wrists when he was holding them-?”

“He restrained you?”

Prompto bites his lip, hesitantly makes eye contact with Noctis, and nods.

“I can’t believe I was in the same room as that… that fuck!” Noctis spits, eyebrows knitted with anger. “Prompto, I’m so sorry-”


Noctis buries his head in his hands. “I’m an idiot.”

“No-”

“Yeah, I am-”

“No.” Prompto’s voice is firm. “No. As long as you promise that you won’t try and make me recover, then you’re not an idiot.”

Noctis looks hesitant. “O… kay. I mean. Obviously, I don’t want to force you to do anything, but don’t think this means I agree with what you’re doing.”

Prompto releases breath, tension melting out of his shoulders. “That’s all I ask. And that you, uh. Keep it a secret?”

“So of course,” Noctis agrees, though he looks super uneasy. “But please be honest with me? From here on out?”

Prompto nods. “I can do that.”

There’s a silence, long and weighty.

“Boyfriends?” Noctis asks, mouth quirked up in a soft smile. And just like that, the mood is lifted.

Prompto smiles back - the first genuine smile he’s had in over a day - and sighs happily.

“Boyfriends.”

Noctis throws his arms around him again, punctuating it with a kiss this time. “I have a lot of questions, you know,” he murmurs into Prompto’s neck. “This isn’t over.”

Prompto relishes the affectionate touches. “Yeah, I know. But can we just watch TV or something right now? I just wanna feel normal for a bit.”

“That sounds like a great idea.”

They settle back, cuddled up together, and Prompto finally feels okay again.

“Heat up the curry?” he asks, and Noctis breaks out into a grin.
“You bet.”

Chapter End Notes

:)

though this fic is still far from over, i’d really like to take a moment to thank you all for being here with me so far. your love & support has gotten me through my roughest days. i honestly don’t know where i’d be without this fic and the friends i’ve made from it. tbh, life sucks a lot and i feel alienated most of the time, but this community really helps alleviate that. it’s a home to return to after the long hours of studying, working, and putting up with people. i cherish you all so much. thank you for being there.

tumbleroni
Under the Greenwood Tree

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...

Chapter Notes

remember on tumblr when i said there wouldn't be a chapter this week? well..... APRIL FOOLS!! :^))

amazing special thanks to my beta TheRegalHarvester, who is literally getting married in like A WEEK and still INSISTED on helping out with this chapter even though i finished at the literal last minute. i am just. in awe. thank you so much, my love <3

That night, the pair end up watching soap operas until they both drift off, snuggled up together on Prompto’s shabby, yet comfortable, sofa. By the time Noctis rouses, nose buried in Prompto’s vanilla scented hair, the sun has slipped completely under the horizon and the hot doctor they’d been cheering on is now in a coma.

“Prom,” Noctis whispers, blinking against the harsh blue light of the television in the pitch black room. “Prommy.”

“Mmn,” the blond hums, coming to.

“It’s late,” Noctis yawns, extracting his arm from where it’s draped around Prompto’s neck. It falls limply to his side, and he grimaces against the staticky feeling of blood rushing back to it.

Prompto stretches and yawns in tandem, hissing a little bit with the move.

“Nope!” Prompto instantly responds, and it’s a little too cheerful for the sleepy atmosphere.

Noctis raises an eyebrow.

“Fine... you got me,” Prompto pouts. “But can I tell you about it later? I don’t wanna be serious yet.”

“Okay,” Noctis concedes, and with his newly-acquired arm function, checks his phone. “Damn, it’s already seven.”

Prompto whistles. “I still have homework.”

“Me too,” Noctis sighs.
For a moment they both say nothing, propped up against each other's shoulders and idly listening to a young nurse accuse her boyfriend of having an affair. Noctis stares listlessly as the characters’ quick movements cast interesting light displays on Prompto’s face.

“Pick up where we left off tomorrow?” he says eventually, giving in to his laziness. “With the whole. Eating disorder talk. Thing.”

Prompto grimaces. “I guess.”

Noctis slips his hand into Prompto’s, rubbing small circles into the smooth skin with his thumb. “Hey, I know this sucks, but... we can’t avoid talking about it.”


“I thought you loved me, Rodrigo-!”

“I never loved you!”

“I should get going,” Noctis says. “Stats is gonna take me at least an hour.”


“Tfī,” Noctis spells out, lips quirked on a sly grin.

Prompto bursts into giggles. “Really? Am I dating a fuckboy now?”

“Yes. Courtesy of Gladio Amicitia, royal shield and serial womanizer,” Noctis informs, waggling his eyebrows. "He's been teaching me."

The two chuckle against each other, and Noct’s heart finally feels full again, patched up after the worst weekend he’s ever lived through. Those overwhelming feelings of love and contentment are back, and this time they aren’t tinged with the raw pain of feeling like he’s lost his beloved.

The thought inspires the prince to lean in and plant a long kiss on Prompto’s lips, slow and full of meaning. When he finally pulls away, the blond is left a little bit breathless, staring at him wide eyes, lips parted softly.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” Noctis whispers, and then leans in once again.

The next morning, when Prompto shows up at the school gates, it’s with a glare as icy as Niflheim’s permanent winter, and it’s directed right at Noctis.

Who immediately panics, pushing off the cool metal bars he’d been leaning against and rushing up to meet him. “Hey, what happened? Are you mad at m-”

Prompto suddenly bursts into a grin that has Noctis stopping in his tracks. “Hah! April Fools!”
Noctis gapes.

“You... you complete dummy!” he accuses, willing his pounding heart to calm down. “Gods, that got me. Shiva!”

Prompto snorts, and then dissolves into laughter, and Noctis can’t help but join in. “Sorry, dude. The opportunity was too good to pass up.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Noctis waves, and the pair start walking to class. “Torture your poor boyfriend, why not-“

Prompto flicks him in the cheek. “Drama queen.”

Noctis flicks him back. “Asshole.”

They’re absolutely *insufferable* in class, that day.

In their second period, Prompto passes about a dozen notes to him, filled with stupid jokes Noctis tries his best not to laugh out loud at. (*How do you find a missing Noctis?’ - ‘You follow his foot prince!’*)

Each message is punctuated with a tiny ‘*april fools! :)*’ that leaves Noctis glowing with fondness. His one rebuttal is to rip off a corner of notebook paper and fold it as many times as possible, passing it back with a sly flick of his wrist.

Noctis has never grit his teeth against laughter so hard than in that moment, listening to Prompto carefully unfold that minuscule square for an entire half-minute - only to find a blank note with a whispered “Oh my god. Seriously.”

He gets a poke in the back for that. When he turns around, Prompto’s staring intently at the blackboard, eyebrows raised and face contorted as he tries not to smile.

Which lasts all of twenty seconds before the two dissolve into muted, suppressed giggles.

“Boys, honestly,” their teacher sighs, and it’s all Noctis can do to not burst into uproarious cackling.

Absolutely. Insufferable.

---

By the time lunch rolls around, the two are thoroughly tired out from acting like wretched children, and sit across from each other with amused, dopey smiles on their faces.

Noctis pays attention, for the first time, to what Prompto is eating. The miso soup he gingerly sips at suddenly seems much more dismal than it used to appear. It’s a stark reminder of the darkness lurking in the periphery of their mirth that soberes up the moment pretty quickly.
“Hey Prom,” Noctis says, picking nervously at his chickatrice rice. “I have a few questions, about - you know.”

To his surprise, Prompto doesn’t immediately deflate. “Okay,” he responds, and Noctis figures their good mood had helped ease him into this talk. “Ask away. I want you to know everything, strangely enough.”

“Uh - alright,” Noctis says, taken aback by the easy acceptance and suddenly unsure of where to begin. “Um. What - uh. What kind of-”

“What kind of disordered eating?” Prompto finishes, looking vaguely entertained.

“Well, at least he isn’t crying. “Yeah.”

“It’s kind of a mix of everything?” the blond muses, tapping his chin. “Mostly I just restrict. Sometimes I... binge.” The admission is clearly hard for him, and Noctis can’t even imagine how difficult it must be to talk about something so personal. “And purge, but - uh - through exercise, not throwing up. I can’t puke. Physically.”

Noctis recalls the article he’d read on the extensive medical risks that come with self-induced vomiting, and silently thanks the Astrals Prompto isn’t putting himself through that. “Could you elaborate on the restricting? Like... how many calories do you eat?”

Prompto bites his lip, staring into the depths of his soup. “It varies...”

“Ballpark it.”

He rubs the back of his neck, clearly nervous, and then appears to steel himself. “Um... right now, it’s usually 300 to 600. Give or take.”

Noctis feels his blood run cold. “Tell me this is another April Fool’s joke.”

Prompto shrinks on himself. “Not this time... I’m sorry.”

Idiot! Don’t shame him!

“No, I didn’t mean it like - I’m uh - I’m just surprised, that’s all,” Noctis hurries. Surprised being an understatement, to say the least. “What do you eat? Usually?”

Prompto perks up a bit. “Well, this,” he begins, gesturing towards his soup. “And mostly other low-calorie foods. Fruits, vegetables-” Noctis tries not to grimace. “-those sugar-free caramel candies, pretzels, jello, oatmeal... you know. Oh, and a lot of salads.”

Noctis nods, trying not to let this information visibly rattle him. “Good to know, good to know. Ummm. So. When did this all... start?”

Prompto rests his knees on his elbows and holds his head in his hands, eyes squinted as he considers. “I don’t really know. I’ve felt weird about food for as long as I can remember, really? Like, when I was a kid, my parents wouldn’t ever cook for me. They just bought fast food and, surprise surprise, I got chubby.” Here, Prompto hides his eyes in the palms of his hands. “And then they would make me feel bad about my weight. Really bad. I can’t remember the last time I ate something and didn’t feel guilty about it.”

Noctis feels his heart plummeting. He can’t imagine living with such a negative relationship to the very thing that should nourish a person. And for so long, too.
“After I stopped getting taller,” Prompto continues. “I gained and lost the same twenty pounds over and over and over. Everything I restricted away I would just binge back. It was an awful cycle that literally lasted years, and I never felt good or healthy.”

“But…” Noctis murmurs.

“But I obviously figured it out eventually, right?” Prompto states on a humorless laugh. “Yeah, so. This past summer some sort of switch flipped, I guess. And now I’m kinda normal looking.”

“Dude, what? You’re skinny!” Noctis interjects before his brain can catch up to his mouth. “Uh - sorry. I just mean.”

Prompto smiles, slow and syrupy. “Huh. Wow.”

“Wow, what?”

“That’s the first time I’ve ever heard someone say that,” he says, and his grin stretches wider. “You really think I’m skinny?”

Noctis realizes, too late, what a massive effect his words can have. That there’s something even worse than offending Prompto - he could accidently encourage him.

“I just - objectively think-” he scrambles, trying to stay neutral. “-that you’re - uh - a little thinner than - most people?”

Prompto still has that self-satisfied smile plastered on his face, and Noctis feels the warmth leave his extremities, numbness taking over instead. “So, uh, what changed? In the summer?” he hurries, trying to take Prompto’s mind off the comment.

It works, because Prompto suddenly averts his eyes and goes back to frowning. “I dunno, really... Guess I just got fed up with the whole cycle? And finally worked myself out of it?”

It doesn’t sound like the full truth, but Prompto’s cheeks are dusted pink and he still won’t look at Noctis, so he decides not to push it. “I’m just sorry I didn’t notice this before. I feel like a selfish jerk.”

Prompto smiles, wistful. “The only reason you didn’t notice was because I didn’t want you to notice,” he soothes. “Don’t blame yourself.”

Noctis sighs, and goes silent. He thinks about Prompto suffering quietly this whole time, taking care to make sure Noctis never caught on to the habits he’d maintained for years…

Suddenly, Noctis tenses.

“Oh my gods,” he gasps. “I… when we were kids-”

“Wait-” Prompto starts, looking wide-eyed and scared.

“I... didn’t I - in the yard behind the school-”

“Noct, please-”

“Didn’t I call you heavy?” Noctis cries. “Oh Ifrit, I fucking-”

“N-”
“Please, Prompto,” Noctis hurries, panic evident in his voice. “You have to believe me - I didn’t mean it like that!”

Prompto just stares at him, blushing hard now.

“And I’ve been making those stupid jokes!” he continues, getting hysterical now. “And I brushed off eating disorders right in front of you! Prompto, I’m so so sor-”

“It’s okay!” Prompto cuts in, positively red. “Please, don’t mention it, I understood then and I understand now, please.” He rubs at his nape. “I just don’t want to think about those things, okay? It’s embarrassing.”

“No, it’s alright,” Prompto assures. “You had no idea. It’s really okay.”

Noctis wants the ground to swallow him up, in that moment. All this time, he’d been tormenting Prompto, embarrassing him instead of helping him. “I’m sorry if I made things worse.”

The two fall silent, each staring off into different spots pensively. The shrill sound of the bell ringing makes them both jump, but it also serves to break the seriousness as they laugh at each other’s fright.

Noctis watches with dismay as Prompto screws his thermos lid on. “Man, I ruined the mood and didn’t give you time to eat.”

Prompto tut-tuts, waving his hands. “I’ll finish it in Photo.”

Noctis rises and offers his hand, hauling Prompto up with a startling amount of ease. “Promise?”

“Promise,” Prompto salutes.

They go to Noct’s apartment after school to play Assassin’s Creed, and everything almost feels normal again. Save for the fact that Prompto politely declined the leftover pasta Noctis offered him, opting instead to have a bowl of exactly twelve strawberries.

“I have to admit,” he’d said as he’d stood at the kitchen counter, carefully chopping them. “It’s a relief to not have to eat whatever you give me - uh, no offense.”

Noctis had only laughed it off, but inside he felt all kinds of guilt twisting at his innards. That guilt is still persistent even now, an hour later, as he scales buildings and kills random templars to Prompto’s cheering.

How much of his actions are understanding, and how much of them are enabling? He doesn’t know where to draw the line between what his boyfriend wants, and what he needs.

Well. At least Prompto had finished that soup.

“Go left! Into that alley! They’re coming!” the boy in question hurries, snapping Noctis back into the moment.
Noctis quickly follows his advice, ducking into a haystack and holding his breath until the coast is officially clear. The two sag against each other in relief once the danger passes, and Noctis idly spins the camera stick in wide circles, zooming in and out on Ezio.

“You know,” Noctis snorts, making the assassin jump up and down continuously now, “I’m surprised Iggy hasn’t figured it out yet.”

Prompto shrugs. “Nah. If he noticed me losing weight, he’d think it’s because I don’t have money for food.”

The jumping and camera panning stop abruptly. “What?”

Prompto bites his lip. “Shit. Oops…”

Noctis sighs, feeling ragged, and runs a harried hand through his hair. “Care to explain?”

Prompto shrinks a bit, scrunching his shoulders up and sinking deeper into the couch. “Um… you know how I’m going to art school?”

“Yeah?”


Noctis knits his eyebrows together. “Wait, what? They live in Altissia?”

“Yeah…” Prompto gulps, audible. “I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to worry you and-”

“No,” Noctis chokes. “I understand.”

“Hey, hey, slow down.”

Prompto shrinks even more. “I lied to you. I let you believe they lived here because it was easier to go with that than admit my parents are shitheads who left me alone as soon as I started middle school.”

Noctis’s mouth falls open.

“A-and it was easier to get out of dinner when you thought I was eating with them,” he admits. “I’m sorry. It was selfish.”

Prompto stares at his folded hands. “When I told my mom I wasn’t going into business, she got mad. And. She…” His breathing clips, and his next words tumble out unsteadily. “S-she took all my money away. I didn’t have enough to buy food. A-and it sucked, ironically,” Prompto laughs, but tears fall out with it.

“Prom…” Noctis whispers, his own eyes wet.

“I-it was when you left on that trip,” Prompto continues. “When you guys finally came back, Iggy came over to get your homework and tried to cook dinner. A-and found nothing in the fridge, obviously.”

Noctis remembers. He remembers how devastated he’d been about the arranged marriage that night. How quickly he’d sent Ignis away, how self-centered he’d been in his anguish. All the while, Prompto had been hurting more than he could ever fathom, and - Astrals - he’d even yelled at him the next day.
All of a sudden, Noctis realizes an important truth -

He’s never met anyone as strong as Prompto Argentum, and he never will.

“I’m so sorry,” Noctis sobs, enveloping the poor blond in his arms. “Gods, Prompto, you don’t deserve any of this shit.”

“You asked why I was hurting.”

Noctis tenses, readying himself for the next blow. “Just tell me.”

Prompto draws back and pauses, closing his eyes and breathing in deeply. With violently shaking hands, he grips the hem of his shirt, and slowly drags the garment upwards.

And Noctis immediately cries out, shock and pain and anger and confusion and sadness flickering across his mind all at once.

Because Prompto’s torso - that elusive patch of skin he’s never even seen before - is absolutely littered with bruises. Some are large, blue-black and fresh and angry. Others are more faded - purples, yellows, browns, and greens all displaying different timelines of continuous abdominal injury.

“Who-?” Noctis starts, voice broken.

“Me,” Prompto whimpers. “It was me, alright? I self-harm. Sometimes I get so... low... that it just... happens. I don't know. S-so,” he pauses, dragging in a slow breath. “Now you officially know everything about me.”

Noct’s eyes roam over the extensive damage, and he ghosts his fingers above them. “Prompto...”

He’s never felt so crestfallen before. He doesn’t even know how to begin helping his love, and the thought of being so useless scares him.

Prompto drags his shirt back down and stares at his knees. “Still wanna be boyfriend with... that?” he spits bitterly, gesturing towards his stomach.

Noctis doesn’t even hesitate - he grabs Prompto fiercely, holding him tighter than he ever has before. “That’s not even a question,” he says into the blond’s ear, voice laden with emotion. “I’m here for you, Prompto. You. No matter what.”

Prompto nods against him, trembling and weeping slightly. “Thank you, Noct. That means so much.”

Noctis squeezes him tighter in response, and rubs at his back. They sit like that for a bit, holding each other until the wave of emotion passes over them both, leaving them wilted and exhausted.

“Yeesh. I need some water after that,” Prompto mumbles, extracting himself. “Want some?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Ice?”

“A couple,” Noctis says absentmindedly, laying back and running a tired hand over his eyes.

He can’t help but focus on how devastated he is - how many hits his seemingly-perfect world has taken in just a few days. He feels as if he’s drowning in sorrow, with no lifeguard in sight.
A glass he barely registers is pressed into his hand, and, subconsciously, he drinks. The coolness feels good on his raw throat, and helps ease the burning lump lodged in it.

He doesn’t know the first thing about supporting such deep-seated misery, nevertheless helping someone heal from it. Is this destined to end as badly as Prompto insisted it would, way back when they first got together? Is his lack of experience in these matters only going to make everything worse for them? Is-

Is Prompto giggling?

“What’s so funny?” Noctis asks over the lip of his glass, snapping back into the moment.

The blond is absolutely trying not burst into laughter, hand covering his mouth and eyes darting back and forth between Noct’s own and the water he’s holding.

Noctis raises his eyebrows. “Eh? What’d you do to my drink?”

Prompto’s almost lost it, at this point. “You asked for a couple of ice cubes, and I only gave you one!”

Noctis stares. Prompto stares.

“April Fools!” he exclaims, and the bubbly laughter Noctis knows and loves so well comes spilling out of him like a cascading waterfall.

And suddenly, they’re both laughing so hard they can’t stop, to the point where it starts hurting Noct’s back with the effort of it, but it doesn’t matter - nothing matters, in that moment - because everything seems so utterly joyous, so damn funny it doesn’t make sense, and Astrals does he need this after all the heaviness.

It feels just like how they always feel together. Comfortable, safe, and happy.

So what if Noctis doesn’t know the first thing about helping someone with such deep-seated mental illnesses? The boy in front of him - laughing even as his eyes are still red-rimmed from sobbing - is more resilient than he could ever imagine, and he realizes they might not be as lost as he’d feared.

Because it’s always been just them - Noctis and Prompto - and as long as they have that, they can get through anything.

Chapter End Notes

soooo. i think i should say an obligatory 'happy easter' as well, for those who are celebrating it <3 i hope this chapter wasn't too rough. i tried to sprinkle in some fluff to lessen the sadness ;-;

let's hang out on Tumblr?
The Instruments of Darkness Tell Us Truths

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
April Fools shenanigans + Prompto being completely transparent to Noctis about his habits, his self-harming, and his parents.

Chapter Notes

HELLO EVERYONE! IT IS I, BACK FROM THE DEAD. :) HOPE YOU DIDN'T MISS ME TOO MUCH <3

as a peace offering, allow me to serve up a healthy dollop of prime ED angst. haha. enjoy. and please thank my beautiful beta TheRegalHarvester, who not only got MARRIED recently (!!!) but COMMISSIONED FANART FOR ME. WHAT!!

please enjoy this lovely, beautiful, calming, amazing image of noctis and prompto going birdwatching by the talented mightyb013!! :)))) i am absolutely over the moon about this piece!! thank you thank you thank you!!

okay - now, without further ado - enjoy the pain :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

139.6 pounds. A BMI of 21.2.

Prompto grins, lets out a breathy laugh that’s equal parts disbelief and awe, and hops off his scale.

Now that Noctis knows about his habits, he’s eating better than he’s ever done before. It's so much stricter and cleaner than usual, which is clearly reflecting itself in his measurements.

He poses in his bedroom mirror for his customary body check photo, smiling, for the first time, at what he sees. It’s as if his body dysmorphia fades away for a moment, revealing the thinness in him rather than outlining the remaining fat on his body. He notices the straight lines over the pudgy curves, his small thighs over his slight belly protrusion, the cut of his cheekbones and jawline over the slight persistence of a double chin.

Shiva - he looks normal, finally blending in with the rest of society. The idea that he’d no longer be hyper-aware of the difference between him and everyone else makes his heart flutter.

He’s done so well.
Until a few days later, when he suddenly stops doing so well.

He’s at home. It’s a school night, he’s eaten all his calories for the day, and he’s about to do his homework and go to bed.

He’s walking through his living room when it hits him: a deep-rooted, instinctual, **primal** hunger that consumes him like a fire. In that moment, his body turns on autopilot, shutting down all active cognition in order to accomplish its goal.

He doesn’t remember ordering the food. He doesn’t process eating it.

It just happens.

When he comes to, the voice inside his head is practically **screaming** at him.

*You fat piece of absolute shit - you were literally THERE - you putrid, vile mess - you’ve fucked up again for the ten thousandth time - you complete fucking whale - you’re horrific in every way - how can anyone stand to LOOK at you - gods just look at the fat on your fucking face - it devours all the rest of your features - it SWALLOWS you in its filthy evidence of your worthlessness - you’re so utterly disgusting - life was better when you were empty - now look at you - you’re a swollen Thing lying helpless on your couch - you unhealthy, foul beast -*

A thought strikes Prompto like lightning.

He can see an object, in his mind’s eye - a tiny, unassuming, white box in the back corner of his medicine cabinet. He’d bought it a year ago, after a particularly bad episode, but couldn’t convince himself to actually make use of it. He’d heard too many horror stories. Even now, he’s apprehensive, but also feeling low enough to just **go** for it.

Laxatives.

Prompto isn’t illogical - he knows they won’t make him lose *actual* weight. But in this moment, he just wants to feel lighter, and he’s willing to use any means necessary. At any rate, his low food intake has caused quite a bit of constipation, so maybe it wouldn’t be the *worst* thing in the world considering he actually needs them.

Prompto jumps up quickly, before the cautious part of his brain can chime in and talk him out of it. He makes a beeline for the medicine cabinet, locates the dusty box, and slips his fingernail underneath the cardboard flap. Out slips a grey blister packet organized into four neat rows of rose-pink pills. Prompto bites his lip.

*Just do it.*

The directions tell him he should take two, so he punches out eight. And before he can stop himself, he’s dry-swallowed all of them.

There. It’s done. They’re in him. And...

He doesn’t feel anything. No movement, no urges, nothing.
Prompto reads the box again. *This product generally produces bowel movement in 9 to 12 hours.*

He sighs, and sags against his kitchen counter. What an anticlimax.

With a frustrated, yet anticipatory heart, he walks off and begins getting ready for bed.

The next morning, all hell breaks loose.

He wakes up two hours before his alarm with the most excruciating cramps he’s ever experienced in his life. It feels as if a creature with razor-sharp claws is reaching straight through his abdomen and into his guts, grabbing, puncturing, and twisting, causing him to cry out from where he’s curled around his pillow.

There’s sweat pooled in his neck, on his forehead, in the cupid’s bow above his lips, everywhere. His body feels both hot and cold at the same time, and it’s all he can do to get himself upright and into the bathroom.

By the time his alarm *does* go off, he’s dizzy from the agony his body has been putting him through, which has been coming and going in waves. He ignores the blaring tone, and the rest of the school day is spent going between his bed and the bathroom.

Noctis texts him sometime around two.

*NOCTIS [14:03]:* r you ok hunny

Prompto can’t help but smile through his tears and lightheadedness. It takes all the energy he has to respond, his hands are shaking so violently.

*PROMPTO [14:07]:* yes, hunny (lmao). just feeling a little sick today <:( but it's nothing sleep can’t fix!!

*NOCTIS [14:07]:* aww, feel better soon <3 imy

*PROMPTO [14:09]:* i will, imy too <3

He smiles, soft and slow and content. And then he feels that horrible twisting and mangling in his gut, and he’s right back to scrunching up his eyes, gritting his teeth, and crying through the shooting,
In between the sickness, the dizziness, and the intolerable agony, he has a lot of time to reflect on exactly what got him to this point. And he realizes something pretty significant:

His entire life has always revolved around food.

It wasn’t always negative. In fact, in the beginning, when he was really small and subsequently small _er_, food was downright positive. Some of his happiest memories include running out to his mother’s car at the end of a long eight hours in daycare, the Kit-Kat he won for answering a question clutched in his hand. It was a sweet trophy that told him he was smart, useful - it always made the deadness of night and the coldness of his parent’s abandonment feel so much warmer.

He remembers his sixth birthday. It was the one time his parents threw him a party, and it felt like _everyone_ showed up. He met distant family members (“Look, Prompto! Auntie Sefa came all the way from Altissia!”) and family friends that all smiled at him, ruffled his hair, kissed his cheeks. He remembers eating cake with a paper crown on his head; it tasted of safety, security, and love.

He never saw any of those people again. Not long after, his weight problems began, spurred on by his parents’ extended absences, and food became his vice. It was a source of comfort when his parents were away, and then a source of contention as soon as they’d come back. Prompto remembers being yelled at, being slapped, being denied dinner only to be left alone with a large sum of cash again. He remembers both fearing food and finding solace in it - the beginning of the infamous love-hate relationship.

He remembers wondering - over and over again throughout his development - if they would’ve loved him more if he was skinny. For Prompto, the answer has always been yes, and nothing _but_ yes, because what he remembers most clearly is that the moment they stopped caring about his weight was the same moment they stopped caring about _him_.

By the time the worst of it has passed, it’s been hours, and his body has weakened to a shell of its former self.

He’s severely dehydrated, to the point where moving his fingers hurts because the skin there is so tight and papery. His lips are as cracked as an old work glove in the middle of a sandstorm, and no matter how much chapstick he piles on them, they still burn with every pull of his mouth.

He can hardly move, too. Each gesture is agonizingly slow and painful - and that’s when he’s lying down. Every time he stands, black spots invade his vision with considerable force, causing him to stumble until he knocks into a wall. Or his desk. Or back into bed. With the spots come rampant pain and a sharp flare-up of his perpetual headache, causing him to hiss and gasp in desperation.

Despite his weakened state, Prompto hasn’t been hydrating well. He feels too lethargic to bring water...
to his lips, and the thought of having any intake - be it food or drink - has his stomach churning with nausea.

How ironic, that he finally feels like puking is a very real possibility now, when he’s never been able to purge before.

It doesn’t help that he has a Lucian history test tomorrow and homework to catch up on. But when he tries to tackle any of it, he finds he can’t even sit at his desk without feeling as if he’s about to faint. Just holding himself upright is too much of a monumental task for him, so he ends up swaying and groaning until he eventually gives up, and crawls back to bed.

*Just a nap*, he thinks, settling into the blankets and setting an alarm for 9:30 PM. *I’ll do my homework after.*

---

When Prompto wakes up, the world is dark, and he is incredibly confused. It takes him a solid minute to remember where he is, why he feels so bad, and the work he has to do.

It’s cruel, really, to recover from disorientation only to be launched back into it, as Prompto is when he checks his phone and discovers it’s 4:23 AM. It takes him a long moment to work out that he’s overslept, and his alarm either failed to go off or he was sleeping too deeply to hear it.

*Fuck.*

It isn’t all bad. He still has a few hours before school starts - not enough time to study effectively and do good work, but enough to do *something.*

But as soon as he sits up, he passes right back out.

*Kweh! Kweh! Kweh! Kweh!*

Prompto cracks one eye open. It takes him a solid minute to remember where he is, why he feels so bad, and the work he has to do.

Except when he checks his phone this time, he discovers the alarm blaring off is not the one he set for 9:30 PM last night.

It’s 7:12 AM, and he’s already running late for school.
“Dammit,” he whispers, and then tacks on another “Dammit” when he remembers he woke up a few hours prior and still failed to do any of his homework or study for that test.

And when he stands and discovers he’s both unbelievably nauseous and dizzy, he lets out one last “Dammit”, grits his teeth, and starts getting ready.

He just barely makes it on time, and that’s with pushing his body to its limits.

“Prompto!” Noctis smiles when he slips into the seat in front of him, pure joy and excitement. “How you feelin’?”

Prompto stares at him for a moment, blank. His breathing is coming out hard, his heart is pounding wildly - he feels like he just ran a marathon, and now he has to answer questions?

“I feel... okayer than I was before... like... kind of? Kind of... yeah... maybe...”

Nailed it.

“What?” Noctis replies, eyebrows knitting together.

Before Prompto’s nutrient-deprived brain can try and carve out a jumbled answer to that one, their teacher starts talking, relieving him of further embarrassment.

The entire school day marches slowly onwards in a similar manner. He feels like a ghost of himself as he trudges through the motions, with hardly the energy to move, let alone smile and be his usual self. Every time Noctis addresses him, he’s slow to respond and his replies are mostly incoherent, clipped off, and insubstantial.

He bombs the Lucian history test, to put it lightly. When he’d stare at the questions too hard, the words would begin to dance and float off the page. And while those hallucinations were entertaining, sure, they were also incredibly unhelpful when it came to actually understanding the material in front of him.

And his untouched homework? That had earned him an awful public scolding in his statistics class.

“Just because you’re absent doesn’t mean you have an extra day, Mr. Argentum! We’re two-thirds into this school year, you know this!”

He’d felt so frustrated, beaten down, and humiliated in front of his boyfriend and his peers. All he could do was sit there silently, try not to cry, and nod his aching head.

By the time lunch rolls around, he’s genuinely amazed at the fact that he hasn’t fainted yet. He supposes his body was holding out to get to this exact moment, because as soon as he lays down under their tree and closes his eyes, he feels the most blissed out he’s ever felt in his life.
He vaguely registers Noctis settling down next to him and pulling out his lunch. Prompto doesn’t have any - he’d been in too much of a rush to prepare anything, and he feels too worn out and nauseous to eat anyway.

He *should* be drinking water, at least - his mouth is parched and his body is thoroughly dehydrated - but the thought makes him feel repulsed. So he continues to lie there, grimacing at moments the sun moves past the clouds and shines too brightly, and sighing when it dips back behind them.

“Prom, you’re really sick,” Noctis states after a few minutes, worry evident in his voice.

Prompto opens his eyes and winces against the onslaught of light. “Hmmm. Mymffm.”

“What?” Noctis says, exasperated and visibly distressed. “Are you sure you should have come to school today? What’s this illness anyway? I can ask Iggy-”

“Nooooo,” Prompto interrupts on a low, pitiful whine. “I’m fine... just... exhausted. Y’know?”

Noctis purses his lips. “At least eat something. Please.”

The prince carefully spreads out his lunch on the grass adjacent to Prompto’s form, as if making a sacrificial offering. A plastic bowl of strawberries. Garula steak over rice. One banana. One chocolate bar.

Prompto’s stomach turns.

“Can’t,” he says, vaguely waving a hand at the offending objects and shaking his head *no.*

“Nauseous.”

Noctis frowns, bites his lip, but doesn’t fight him on it. Instead, he casts a quick glance around, and then smooths a hand over Prompto’s forehead, gently moving his bangs out of his eyes.

Prompto sighs and his eyes slip shut again, and the rest of his lunchtime is spent listening to Noctis tell him silly stories, peppered with the occasional soft and soothing caress.

---

After school, Prompto does not go and play video games with his boyfriend. He does not go work a shift at the film shop, nor does he practice his marksmanship with Gladio.

Prompto sits in a bleak classroom with a smattering of students, in detention because of his unexcused absence. It’s an unavoidable consequence he’s grown accustomed to, considering his parents refusal to excuse him. He wonders if they even get calls from the school anymore, or if they’ve simply disconnected that line to avoid receiving reminders about his existence.

The ticking of the classroom’s standard-issue clock seems unbearably loud in the silence, making his head throb in tandem with each passing second. It’s also way too cold, and Prompto finds himself staring longingly at the thermostat as he shivers, willing the kid sitting next to it to reach over and turn the AC off. After a bit, the nausea settles like a stone in his throat, ready to explode forward at any second.

*This is what hell must feel like*, Prompto muses.
He gives it his best effort, he really does, but after fifteen minutes he gives up and lays his head down on the desk, unable to hold it together any longer. The relief he feels is akin to the feeling of taking off an uncomfortable suit after a long day, and he nearly moans at the sensation.

It doesn’t last long. Five minutes later, he hears the sharp bang of a ruler hitting his desk. He startles upright, and just barely manages to register the face of their proctor through the black dots rushing to swarm his vision.

“How detention is not much of a punishment if you use it to take a nap, now is it?” the proctor growls. “Get back to work.”

Prompto can’t handle it that time. He ends up spending the rest of the hour silently scratching out math problems, struggling to hold himself up, and letting tears roll freely down his face. They land haphazardly on the paper, warping the stark, industrial ink with the shameful evidence of his weak humanity.

No one notices.

By the time Prompto manages to make it home, he’s acutely aware that he needs food or else he’s very likely to pass out. It comes as a crushing disappointment when he opens his fridge door and discovers all his fresh produce has started rotting, and everything else in there makes him feel too ill just thinking about.

Defeated, he collapses in his bed, waiting out the wild beating of his heart from the exertion of walking so much. It’s in that moment, breathing heavily and feeling as if he’s on the verge of a full-blown cardiac episode, when he realizes he really can’t get through this alone.

Prompto [16:33]: can you pls bring me some fruit and rice and a LOT of coconut water and maybe some bread :(

Noctis [16:34]: omw

Before long, thank Shiva, his doorbell is ringing, and Prompto feels the tension in his shoulders start to ebb away just from hearing the sound of Noct’s arrival. He rises and stumbles for the entrance, ignoring the black spots as best he can.

He pulls it open and finds his boyfriend there, looking anxious and hesitant, with a cloth bag filled to the brim with food in one hand. Prompto only has a second to smile at the scene before the black spots overwhelm him.

That’s when he collapses.

“Prompto!” Noctis screams, surging forward to catch the blond before he hits the pavement.

Prompto’s blinking hard, but his vision has almost completely blacked out and his head is throbbing and everything is way too hot and cold and hot and cold and his mouth is still so dry and his fingers are shaking and he thinks he’s moving - yes - he’s moving - Noctis is dragging him - his heart is pounding like a heavy drum - THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. - and the nausea rises up until he’s tasting bile in the back of his mouth, and -
“Prom? What do you need first?” Noctis is demanding, clear panic cutting through the haze, and Prompto realizes he’s on his couch now. “Do I need to call an ambulance?”


He hears Noctis fumbling through the bag, and hesitantly opens his eyes. It’s a liter of Prompto’s favorite coconut water, and he’s never felt so excited to see that familiar cardboard packaging. Noctis hands it to him, but as soon as he lets go, it slips through Prompto’s curled fingers and lands with a dull thud on the couch.

“…Good thing it wasn’t open, I guess,” Noctis deadpans. “Be right back.”

Soon he’s back with a straw, which he inserts into the drink and holds up to Prompto’s lips. Prompto feels like an absolute child in that moment, but he can’t stay focused on that for too long, because the water is so hydrating and soothing on his parched throat. He realizes, sheepishly, that he hasn’t had anything to drink in over a day, and that’s after the laxatives took effect.


Prompto does. The electrolytes in the coconut water make the substance even softer on his throat and stomach than normal water would be, and he’s so fiercely grateful to Noctis for bringing it to him. It isn’t long before he’s reached the bottom of the carton.

“You’re shaking,” Noctis tuts, reaching to pull a quilt around Prompto’s shoulders. “The rice is still warm. Want some?”

Prompto nods, feeling like a selfish monster. Here is Noctis, undoubtedly being pulled away from some important royal Thing just to take care of his loser boyfriend. His loser boyfriend who can’t even hydrate himself, or have the foresight to see that overdosing on laxatives is a bad idea in the first place.

If Noctis is bothered, though, he doesn’t show it. He simply hums an affirmative, takes the aluminum foil off a bowl, and brings a spoonful of rice to Prompto’s lips.

“I feel like a kid…” Prompto mutters between bites. “Mmm, it’s good though.”

Noctis makes an exasperated huff of a sound, and Prompto is pleased to detect fondness in it. “You’re a complete dummy, you know. You should’ve said it was serious before-”

“I’m sorry.”

Noctis tsks. “Just ask for help sooner rather than later next time, alright?”

Prompto nods and accepts another bite of rice. “Thank you.”

There’s a weighty silence. Prompto tries to focus on nourishing himself, happy to find himself feeling more and more energized with each spoonful, all while hoping the elephant in the room continues to go ignored.
It doesn’t.

“So you’re not gonna tell me what caused this?” Noctis eventually prompts, giving in.

Prompto shrinks back into his quilt, hunching in on himself and trying to hide. “I’d rather not.”

Noctis bites his lip, looking uneasy. “Prom... you said you’d be honest with me.”

*That* hits Prompto right in the gut. Noctis is here, doing so much for him that he doesn’t deserve, and he can’t give him anything?


“Prom, what thing-”

“I really don’t want to go into detail,” Prompto interrupts. “Please. I won’t do it again, I promise.”

Noctis knits his eyebrows together, looking pained. “Prom, what am I supposed to think when you tell me something like that - what am I supposed to do-”


Noctis looks even more pained than before, and his eyes are starting to look glassy. Prompto gulps, trying to swallow his guilt down and stick to his guns. Because he *needs* this. He needs control. He needs that autonomy more than he needs *anything else* in his life. That part is non-negotiable.

It hits him, then. He needs his eating habits more than he needs Noctis.

This isn’t just about being skinny for the prince anymore - it’s gone far past that. What was once a chaotic mindset spurred on by a shallow goal has now morphed into a monster of a thing that has taken over his entire life. He can’t imagine what he’d do - what he’d *be* - without it.

Noctis looks away, then, swallows hard, and scratches the nape of his neck. “O-okay. Okay, Prom. Please be careful.”

Prompto nods, and there’s another heavy silence between the two.

The clink of the spoon reaching the bottom of the bowl reverberates through the apartment. Noct clears his throat. “No more rice. Want something else? Eating more would help you feel better faster, you know.”

Prom grimaces. ‘*Eating more*’ is what got him into this mess. But Noctis is right, and he doesn’t feel like letting his boyfriend down any more today. “Yeah.”

Noct’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise. “Wait, really? Okay! Want me to get you something a little more dense?”

“Please,” Prompto says, hating how happy and excited Noctis looks over something that *should* be a normal occurrence. It’s in moments like these that Prompto regrets him finding out the most - ignorance really is bliss, and Noctis doesn’t deserve to worry over him.

Noctis, sweetheart he is, doesn’t seem to care about any of that - at least not outwardly. He just sits back, humming and tapping on his phone as he places their order.
“Chickatrice wraps with pita chips and hummus on the side,” he declares triumphantly. “It’s a lot, but it’s health food... is that an okay compromise?”

Prompto shifts, leaning heavily against his shoulder now and smiling faintly. “Yeah. Thank you, Noct.”

Noctis wraps an arm around him, bringing him closer. “Anytime, love.”

Prompto sighs happily and settles in. He feels so much better - it’s amazing, how much of an effect water can have on the body. And the rice really helped his stomach settle, easing those cramps, and -

“Wait, did you just say?” Prompto starts, eyes popping open wide.


“I love you too,” Prompto interjects, and as soon as the words are out there he knows it’s true. He does love Noctis. He loves him so, so much - his heart is full with it, soaring with it.

It’s too bad he loves his disorder more.

Prompto feels Noctis melting back into their embrace, and looks up and sees him blushing harder than he’s ever done before. But he’s also grinning, and it’s radiating genuine joy. It’s unbearably cute.

“I love you, Prompto,” he half-whispers, pressing a kiss to the crown of Prompto’s head. “I love you so much.”

And Prompto smiles, lets his eyes slip closed, and basks in the safety that is Noct’s strong and loving presence. He may be struggling against something far beyond the scope of his control, but knowing he has the kindest boy in Lucis at his side makes it seem all the more surmountable.

Chapter End Notes

obligatory BODY UPDATE PHOTO for you guys. this is what prompto looks like now!

alright. hope that was sufficiently angsty enough for you sadists ;-) thank you for joining me on Yet Another ED Adventure, i promise some long overdue fluff is up next haha

be my friendski on tumblerskis?
Love is Blind

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Prompto reacted to a binge by overdosing on laxatives, and nearly hospitalized himself for it. Noctis to the rescue, yay.

Chapter Notes

as always, i’m so sorry i’m late on this chapter. i’ve honestly... not been having the easiest time of it lately. i know that's hardly an excuse, i just hope it helps explain my behavior a little bit. :(

as always, the biggest thanks to my sweet and understanding and thoughtful and amazing beta, TheRegalHarvester!

TW: this chapter contains the f-word. and not the fun f-word. the homophobic one. proceed with caution; if you do not want to see it, skip the italicized lines that start with Just do it.

Beep beep beep beep beep beep beep-
Noctis groans.

Beep beep beep beep beep beep beep-
“Shut up,” he grumbles, fumbling his hand towards the source of the noise blindly.

He realizes he’s groping at a hard surface. That’s strange.

Noctis peers one eye open blearily, blinking slowly as he registers his surroundings. He’s… at his desk, apparently, judging by the keyboard he’s face-to-face with.

Beep beep beep beep beep beep beep-

“Gods,” Noctis sighs when he finally reaches his phone and silences it.

With a grunt, he sits upright in his chair, wincing against the many pinpricks of pain making themselves known across his back. His neck is sore too, from being stretched out so strangely overnight. Why had he fallen asleep here, anyway?

He wiggles the mouse, prompting his monitor to light up. The brightness assaults him at first, but when he manages to adjust to it and see the page he’s left it on, he sighs with remembrance.

The National Association of Anorexia - “How to Help a Loved One”
All of a sudden, the previous day comes flooding back to him. He recalls seeing Prompto look so awfully weak and helpless, and the image strikes at him, waking him fully. His heart never beat so fast as when Prompto’s eyes had fluttered and he’d collapsed like a rag doll, and Noctis can’t help but picture what would’ve happened if he wasn’t there to catch him.

As always, his mind is full of questions he’s too afraid to ask. Like - does me knowing make things worse? Is Prompto telling me everything? Why doesn’t he want to get better? Am I going about this the wrong way?

Noctis sighs, eyes flickering to the “Dos and Don’ts” column filling his screen.

“DON’T: Let your fear of upsetting them prevent you from speaking up; communicate.”

His head plops back down again, cushioned against his forearms. He’s really out of his element here. He doesn’t know what to do, and he’s too hesitant to make any major moves for fear of alienating the love of his life. He needs someone more equipped for this, damnit.

His eyes peer up at the imposing screen.

“DON’T: Gossip about what they share.”

“Uggghh.” Noctis has never felt so lost, alone, and out of ideas. He’s been raised to be a leader, to always have some answer in every situation. Now, though? Now he’s clueless and afraid.

And about to be late for school.

Noctis stands up slowly and stretches, feeling his body pop and crack satisfyingly as it recovers from last night’s impromptu sleeping position. With a heart that’s still weighs heavily in his chest, he turns to get ready for the long day ahead.

While at school, Noctis nurses a thought.

It’s a scary one. It makes him feel too vulnerable and exposed just considering it, but it’s something he’s wanted for a while. And - even better - it’s a way to keep Prompto close to him as they transition from their high school bubble to the real world, giving him more time to figure all this eating disorder stuff out.

Hmmm.

“Whatcha thinking about?” Prompto asks over the rim of his thermos, amusement sparkling in his eyes.

“You,” Noctis answers honestly.

“Good stuff, I hope?”

Noctis looks up at him from where he’s lying in the grass. The sun glows at the tips of Prompto’s hair, framing him and bathing his features in a soft light that makes him sigh. The expression the boy is shooting at him is nothing short of loving, and, with a surge in his chest, Noctis decides to go
through with his idea.

“Always good stuff, love.”

“Up! Left! No - wait - go up! Oh my gods!” Noctis yells as he runs out of his bedroom, flopping onto the couch next to his boyfriend. “Right! Go right! Holy fuck!”

“Noct,” Prompto starts. “I’m on the name input screen.”

The two laugh against each other, settling in for a long session of gaming and cuddling. Noctis feels so free and comfortable like this, holding his boyfriend closely while they go about their daily routines.

It’s happens when Prompto is going through the second level of the side-scroller he’s focused on. Noctis is leaning against him, one arm wrapped around him and lazily running fingers through his golden locks, when he blurs his musings out loud.

“I want to come out to my dad.”

Prompto stops moving his character. There’s a heavy pause.

“And… I want you to be there for it.”

The blond tenses against him, fingers gripping the controller so tightly they turn white around the edges. “Noct… are you sure?”

Noctis sighs. “Yeah, I just. I feel ready, now. I really want him to know. I hate feeling like a coward.”

“You’re not a coward,” Prompto mumbles, and Noctis feels him slowly easing out of his rigidity. “I’m really proud of you. And really scared, not gonna lie.”

Noctis laughs, glad the tension is easing somewhat. “Trust me, you’re not the only one.”

Prompto grins. “Well, at least we’ll go down together?”

“Yeah,” Noctis smiles, leaning in to kiss him. “That’s all that matters.”

His father’s rooms have never felt so alienating.
Noctis is sweating already, sat next to Prompto while the three of them drink tea and catch up. His father had been confused, at first, seeing Prompto show up to their weekly chat, but had taken it in stride.

Noctis wonders how gracefully he’ll be able to handle the actual news.

“So I tell Clarus to hand me the file, right,” Regis is smiling as he dunks a biscuit into his tea, “And the absolute madman - he hands me a potion! A potion, Noctis! I asked for the Altissian report, not a potion!”

Noctis can hardly manage a grin at that, but Prompto - bless him - is much better at this than he is, and bursts out into joyful peals of laughter. “Where did he even-?”

“I don’t know! I wish I did!” Regis is wiping tears from the corner of his eye, now.

Noctis chews on the inside of his cheek. Is he just the only one who doesn’t get it? Maybe his mind is too preoccupied for his dad’s humor. Preoccupied with thoughts of abandonment, disappointment, failing as a son and a prince-

“That reminds me of this one time Noct was buying chips-”

Realization dawns on Noctis. “Prom, no-”

“And he goes up to pay, but instead of taking out his card - he -” Prompto can hardly contain himself. “He takes out his greatsword! That poor lady’s life probably flashed before her eyes!”

Both Regis and Prompto double over cackling, chests heaving with the effort.

Noctis rolls his eyes. “Yeah, yeah. That was the last time I tried using the armiger for my wallet, alright? Lesson learned.”

“Alright, alright,” Regis chuckles, gradually calming down. “Catch me up on things, Noctis.”

“Well-” Noctis starts.

“Have you been keeping up with training well? How were those Niflheim intelligence reports Ignis asked you to look over - were they too challenging? You’re keeping your apartment tidy, right? And your budgeting? And your grades? How is school, anyway? Any girl catch your eye yet?” Regis concludes on a wink.

Noctis and Prompto exchange a sidelong glance, and the mood between them immediately drops.

“Oh, come now, you know I’m kidding,” Regis smiles. “You’ve got Luna, and thank the Astrals for her. You could’ve been betrothed to some Nif!”

Noctis lets out a shaky laugh at that, and clears his throat. “Right, dad. Um. Uh. Well. Training is fine. The reports weren’t that difficult. I’m trying my best on the apartment and my budget, and my grades are okay. School is school.”

Regis raises his eyebrows. “Something the matter, son?”

Noctis can feel his hands turn cold and damp, can feel his heart pounding so heavily it might actually give out. The colors in the room seem to pulsate a bit, making him dizzy and sick to his stomach.

“Actually, I wanted to talk to you about the… Luna. Thing. Kind of.”
It’s like all the air gets sucked out through a vacuum. Regis frowns, settles back, and crosses his legs expectedly. “What about it? And - pardon me - why does Prompto have to be here for this talk?”

Prompto shifts uncomfortably, but doesn’t say anything. Message received - this is Noct’s show.

Noctis blinks slowly, trying to stop tears from forming before he has a chance to begin his point. “W-well,” he carves out, around lump in his throat. “I’ll get to that. But, uh, anyway. S-so. I was talking with Ignis. And he was telling me that sometimes, in marriages like these, it’s okay to only keep things to titles.”

Regis nods. “That’s certainly true.”

“And, well. I just. Me and Luna - we thought it was fair to give each other a chance at finding actual love,” he continues. “I-I mean I like her, don’t get me wrong! But I just - we don’t-”

“I get it,” Regis interrupts. “You don’t love her like you should love a wife.”

“Yeah,” Noctis sighs. “We already wrote to each other and agreed to keep it. Um. Formal.”

“Well, I don’t see a problem with that,” Regis smiles. “Believe me, Noctis, I want you to spend your life with the woman you truly love. I was lucky enough to have that - for the brief period I did, anyway.”

Noctis nods, and then averts his eyes, acutely aware of how blurry his vision is becoming. “I-” he tries, and then breaks off on a sob.

“Noctis?” Regis says at the same time Prompto squeaks out a “Noct!”

He buries his face in his hands, crying unabashedly. He feels it. He feels, with every fiber of his being, how much he’s about to disappoint his father. It takes root in his core, cold tendrils snaking their way around his heart and throat, suffocating him.

There’s a hand on his shoulder, rubbing gentle circles. Prompto.


Prompto - who’s there with him, in that very moment, utterly prepared to take the plunge with Noctis. Prompto, who, no matter what will always be there with him.

It’s just him and Prompto. That’s all it’s ever been.

“What’s the matter, Noctis?” Regis is saying, and Noctis peers up between his fingers and sees his dad bent forward, concern painting his features.

“I need to say something,” Noctis chokes out. “I- I-”

No one speaks as Noctis struggles to catch his breath, to form the damning words around the hot stone in his throat.

“Dad. I’m.”

An inhale - long, slow, and steadying.

“I’m bisexual.”

A sob. And another. And another. Noctis can’t stop weeping.
“Noctis…” Regis trails, and fuck - Noctis has never heard him sound like that before.

“I’m bisexual,” he repeats, needing to get everything out before he loses steam. “And Prompto is my boyfriend. I want him to join the crownsguard. I want him to always be beside me. I love him,” he concludes, voice breaking pathetically on the last word.

The hand on his shoulder stutters a bit, and Noctis feels a little guilty for springing the crownsguard stuff on him here - but honestly, it’d been in the back of his mind for a long time. He just wants Prompto to be by his side forever, and there’s no other feasible way to accomplish that.

At any rate, he can hardly care about social niceties at present - he’s still sobbing pathetically into his hands, dread growing in the pit of his stomach with each passing second of silence.

“My son…” Regis eventually says, and Noctis finally look up.

Everything about the king’s posture suggests shock, defeat, and, worst of all - sadness. He draws a hand over his forehead and settles silently back into the couch, saying nothing.

It hits Noctis like a semi truck.

_I knew it I knew it I knew it -_

Tears spill hotly down his cheeks, etching paths of shame and embarrassment across his face. He balls his hands against his knees and prepares himself to spring up, grab Prompto, and run to safety.

_Just do it. Just tell me you can’t have a faggot for a son - tell me I’m a disappointment to the crown and all of Lucis - tell me I’m going to be banished - tell me you don’t love me anymore -_

Noctis starts charting out the room and the halls beyond in his mind, considering their escape plan and where they will go after. Gods, he should’ve thought this through before he came in here.

He almost doesn’t hear Regis speak. “I can’t say I’m not surprised, Noctis.”

Noctis angrily swipes at his tears, eyes still firmly fixated on the ground, hands still tense, feet still bouncing and ready to spring up and flee.

“But if you think this changes anything, or makes me love you any less, you’d be dead wrong.”

What?

“What?”

Noctis looks up. Regis is looking at him firmly, but there’s a kindness that softens his eyes.

“I can’t say this is what I imagined for you,” he continues. “But that is my error. I failed to have a more active imagination.”

Noctis lets out a sound that is halfway between a sob and a laugh.

“Noctis,” Regis soothes, inching close enough to reach forward and clasp their hands together. “You are my son. My only son. I love you without condition.”

With his free hand, Noctis rubs at his eyes, crying and nodding and smiling and shaking.

“And I have to say, I approve of choice you’ve made,” Regis winks, tilting his head towards Prompto. “He’s a fine young man, and would make an excellent addition to your guard.”
Noctis chances a glance at the blond in question, and discovers he’s crying too. But he’s also smiling.

And Noctis is smiling.

And Regis is smiling.

And maybe everything would turn out okay, after all.

Chapter End Notes

sorry it's a wee bit shorter than usual... i hope you liked it anyway ♡

please let me know what you thought? and be my friend on Tumblr?
Clothes Make the Man

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Noctis comes out to his father, who, against all of his expectations, is immediately accepting of it. He requests that Prompto join the crownsguard in order to ensure he's able to stay beside him.

Chapter Notes

i do not deserve my wonderful beta TheRegalHarvester, guys. she is too good to me ♡

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So. Crownsguard, huh?”

Noctis lets out a laugh that sounds both apprehensive and relieved. He and Prompto hanging out together at his apartment, glowing in the aftermath of the prince’s successful coming out.

“Yeah,” Noctis responds, rubbing the back of his neck abashedly. “Sorry I kinda sprung that on you back there. But, uh… do you want to?”

“Nah, that’s alright. Of course I want to!”

“Yeah, really!” Prompto says, and can’t help but lean in to kiss that beaming smile.

Both boys get caught up in exchanging slow, soft kisses, and Prompto’s heart feels full to bursting with affection. He can’t pinpoint exactly how seeing the king’s approval had changed his love for Noctis - but it definitely added depth to it.

After all, he’d been downright terrified of the possible repercussions of this relationship since he agreed to it. And how couldn’t he have been? Commoners dating royalty is already dicey enough when it’s heterosexual. Their circumstances could have literally led to Prompto’s death if they were in a less progressive society.

Now, Prompto feels like he can love freely. His heart literally flutters with the thought, like a caged animal experiencing a world beyond captivity for the first time. It is a love that is no longer tinged with a latent anxiety, and he couldn’t be gladder for it.

“Hey,” Noctis whispers, breaking their embrace. “About the crownsguard thing.”

Prompto had forgotten all about it, caught up as he was in his own reflections. “Hm?”

Noctis pulls back, looking suddenly serious. “I don’t want to force you to do anything, of course, but being a crownsguard is pretty physically demanding.” He averts his eyes, then, and shifts
uncomfortably. “So… maybe you could eat a little bit more? At least on days when we train?”

Prompto blinks against the immediate onslaught of vitriol: courtesy of his brain.

No. No. No. Don’t even think about considering that, you fat fucking slob. He knows about you, now. You have to be stricter than ever, or else he’ll realize you’re a failure who can’t even restrict properly.

He takes a deep breath, bites his lip, and refocuses his eyes back on Noctis. When the next words come out, he knows they’re a lie.

“I’ll try, Noct.”

But Noctis doesn’t know what he’s thinking, of course, so his face blooms into a smile. “Gods, Prom, I’m so happy to hear that!”

Prompto tries to ignore the overwhelming guilt he feels by leaning in to brush their lips together again. No better distraction than this, after all.

Noctis starts kissing back with a different energy than he’s used to. In contrast to his usual gentleness, he’s taking charge now, capturing Prompto’s lips with a confident insistence that leaves him reeling.

Before Prompto can fully process what’s going on, he’s on his back, cushioned against the couch with a fervent Noctis pushing against him.

“Gods. I’m so happy we get to be together.” Noctis whispers, moving to peck at different parts of Prompto’s face - his cheeks, his forehead, his neck. “Love you, love you, love you,” he sighs with each kiss.

“N-” Prompto starts, but is interrupted with a tongue in his mouth, taking rather than giving, claiming rather than sharing.

Everything is progressing so much faster than usual.

He feels fingers skirting along his sides - over his shirt, at least - but they are undoubtedly suggestive in touch, massaging instead of caressing. And Noctis has a slotted a leg between his own, pressing against -

“Noct!” Prompto finally gets out.

“Hm?” Noctis hums, then proceeds to mouth at Prompto’s neck while his fingers trace circles into his sensitive waist.

“I- what-” Prompto scrambles, at a sudden loss for words. All he can register is the small pit of dread blooming within him, spreading icily through his veins, freezing him in place.

“I love you, Prompto,” Noctis repeats, soft and slow. “I want to show you. Could we…?”

All Prompto can see, in his mind’s eye, is Noctis finally getting a look at his body and immediately turning away to vomit. He sees himself, stretched out like an extra large tarp, torso rolling and dimpling with gelatinous flesh. He sees his legs, swollen and bruised like a hospital patient, intertwining with Noct’s slim and sleek ones. Most of all, he sees complete, raw disgust, present in every corner of his imagination.

Noctis stills immediately, drawing himself up onto his hands and hovering above Prompto. His face looks stricken. “Sor-”


He scoots out from underneath Noctis, who sits back onto his calves, looking incredibly uncertain.

“I’m the messed up person here, okay?” Prompto reiterates, after taking a long moment to calm his breathing. “Not you.”

“You’re not mes-”

“Normal people aren’t scared of their bodies,” Prompto interrupts, voice cracking on the last word. “Normal people *like* being intimate with their boyfriends. Normal people trust each other. Normal pe-”

“Prom,” Noctis cuts in sharply. “There’s no ‘normal’ anything. You’re not different or wrong, okay? I shouldn’t have pushed.” He averts his eyes. “I just thought, maybe, it might’ve been different now. I thought… I didn’t think.”

Prompto tries to formulate a response, but the stone in his throat grows hot, and his breath hitches, and, all of a sudden, he begins to weep.

“Gods,” Noctis says, moving to crush Prompto against his chest. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s not you,” Prompto mumbles, hand coming up between their bodies to swipe at his eyes. “I’m m-mad at my. M-myself.”

“Shh,” Noctis soothes, running a hand through Prompto’s hair. “Mad for what? Having body issues? That’s hardly fair, is it?”

Prompto doesn’t respond, opting to let himself cry it all out against his boyfriend. By the time his sobs ease into hiccups, Noct’s shirt has been thoroughly doused with tears.

“This is why I didn’t wanna tell you,” Prompto mumbles. “Ever since you found out, everything has been about *me*. Taking care of *me*, walking on eggshells around *me*, making excuses for *me*. You deserve better.”

His heart aches with longing for the times where their relationship was just Noctis and Prompto. Now it’s Noctis and Prompto and Prompto’s Food Thing, and he hates how that dynamic has shifted.

*Fucking Derrick.*

“Enough of that talk,” Noctis reprimands. “If I honestly believed I deserved better, would I be here right now?”

Prompto sniffs and shakes his head *no*.

“See? And anyway, I’m hardly perfect,” Noctis continues. “I… really don’t know what I’m doing. Like. All the time. I feel like I mess up constantly around you, like I did just now.”

Somehow, that gets Prompto to let out a short breath of a laugh. “We’re both just struggling through this blindly, aren’t we?”
“Yep,” Noctis agrees, smile tugging at the edges of his mouth. They make eye contact, and it only takes a fraction of a second after that before the two are laughing together. It’s as if the severity of it all has reached a tipping point, and, in that moment, everything seems utterly ridiculous to them.

“You don’t ‘mess up constantly’, by the way; you’ve been doing really well,” Prompto assures as they calm, wiping happy tears from his eyes. “I love you. So much, Noctis.”

Noctis grins, and then pulls him in for a tight hug. “I love you too, you dummy.”

A lot of things happen over the next few weeks, all at rapid speed.

First, Prompto meets Cor, Clarus, Drautous, Monica - pretty much every important person in the upper echelons of the Lucian military hierarchy. They give him a lot of lectures about responsibility, the importance of his role, the people who are watching his every action closely now, the things that are at stake should anything happen to Noctis…

Essentially, they manage to thoroughly scare Prompto, and that’s about it.

At least Clarus seems to have picked up on that effect, as he takes Prompto aside afterwards to “talk more in-depth.”

“Listen, Prompto,” he begins, and Prompto can’t help but cower internally at the full force of Clarus’s presence. “I know this is overwhelming for you, especially given the fact that you’re only doing this for your relationship with the prince.”

Prompto’s eyes pop wide open. “Wait, how do y-”

Clarus chuckles good-naturedly. “Calm down, calm down. I’m the only one who knows, and that’s just as a security protocol. It’s important that intel is not just kept to one person, even if it is… sensitive.”

Prompto feels his face grow hot, and he looks at his feet, squirming under the attention of a knowing eye. “W-well. Um. Yeah. It’s, uh. It’s a little overwhelming.”

A hand comes to rest on his shoulder and he starts, looking up and meeting Clarus’s eye. “You’ll get through this,” Clarus says, firm and confident. “I’ve seen a lot of soldiers in my lifetime, and I can tell you’ve got a strength to you, kid. Keep your head held high.”
A few days later, as Prompto is struggling along with fifteen other recruits to pass the physical fitness test, he finds it hard to keep Clarus’s encouragement in mind.

“Shiva,” he huffs as he crosses the finish line on an obstacle course, leaning over to rest his hands on his knees. Sweat is pouring down his entire body in rivulets, and he only has a minute-long break before the next challenge. Somehow, he feels like he’s going to puke and faint at the same time, and he tries quickly quell that through raggedy, shallow breaths.

He looks up at the rest of the recruitment group, sighing at how easily they’re overcoming each hurdle. He’s just a poser among actual fit people, starving himself to look the part without having any of the aptitude.

It’s a good thing Noctis can’t physically feel exactly how hard this is for him, or he’d never let him join. This is Prompto’s pain, and his alone. He’ll mask it with a smile and get through it quietly, like he’s always done before.

“Argentum!”

“Coming,” he pants, jogging off to the next test.

Before long, he’s become a full-fledged member of the crownguard. Which doesn’t change much about his day-to-day life, incidentally, considering how he’s been tagging along to training sessions for the past few months anyway, and already has access to the armiger. Those sessions just get bumped up to twice per week, and the intensity and time frame increases by a reasonable amount.

He develops a routine. He allocates his largest-calorie days to the ones where he trains, eats all of those calories a half-hour before each session, and prays that the burst in energy carries him through the exercises.

Regardless of those efforts, Prompto still feels like he can barely survive each one, and wilts as soon Gladio calls for everyone to stop fighting and take a shower. The days after are defined by a minimal amount of effort as he tries to recover as much as possible before the next session.

It’s a solid schedule that lasts a few weeks, until, one day, Prompto is thrown for a loop.

The boys are hanging out in Noct’s apartment, as usual. Prompto is draped over the couch, trying to pretend the rampant soreness in his arms and legs aren’t actually there.

“Ey,” Noctis says, coming to sit in the adjacent sofa-chair. “We gotta fill out this personality test thing. For our fatigues.”

Prompto cracks an eye open. “Fatigues?”
“The, uh, outfits we wear. When we’re out on official missions.”

“Oooh,” Prompto whistles. “That’s cool. But why do they need to know our personalities for it?”

“Lucis likes to be extra,” Noctis explains, rolling his eyes. “They want us to look cohesive but still unique to ourselves.”

Prompto grins. “Sounds like fun.”

“Then let’s do it!” Noctis produces two forms and sets them on the coffee table, sliding one over towards Prompto.

Prompto tries not to groan as he shifts himself to lean towards the table. He uncaps the pen Noctis hands him, and starts to fill out the basics - his name, his age, his height, his eye and hair color, and so on.

Some of the questions are fun. Like - What music do you listen to? or What are your favorite movies?

Others are hard-hitting. Do you make friends easily? Are you easily intimidated? Are you afraid of making mistakes?

And then some are just plain dumb.

“If you were an emoji, which emoji would you be?” Prompto reads, and Noctis bursts into laughter.

“Hey, it’s a serious question!” Prompto continues, trying to hide his smile. “Looks like you’re the crying-laughing guy.”


“Put yourself down for skeleton head, then,” Prompto winks. “I think I’m the yellow moon with the creepy face.”

Noctis laughs even harder, and Prompto has to give in and join him.

It’s mostly fun and games after that, and a lot of stupid answers to stupid questions, until Prompto reaches the very last portion of the form.

Choose a date and time to have your measurements taken. Please arrive at Lucian Couture at least 10 minutes prior to your appointment.

“Measurements?” Prompto mumbles, feeling the warmth leave his fingers.

Last time he checked, he weighed 134.4 pounds. A BMI of 20.4. His mind flickers over those numbers, obsessing over the shape and implication of them. He imagines being trapped in a set of clothes that define him at THAT weight - not even close to perfect.

Noctis hums. “Yeah, I think I can go on Fri- oh.”

They look at each other blankly for a bit.


“Prom, if you’d rather hold off-”
He has visions of Noctis drifting away because he’s too fragile to even have clothes tailored to him, and the crownsguard thing never gets to happen.

“No,” Prompto states firmly. “No, I don’t want to waste any more time. I want to start protecting you.”

With that resolution in mind, he checks off the last date and time available from the predetermined list, giving him a full week to improve.

He looks up to find Noctis looking dopey. “You want to protect me, huh?” he grins, jumping up from the chair and pouncing on Prompto. “You’re so cute, you know that?”

Prompto’s pen drops to the floor, but he can hardly care about that, given how much he’s giggling and smiling as Noctis smatters kisses all over his face.

The next morning, Prompto begins fasting again.

He only has a week, which isn’t ideal, but it’s enough to make some difference if he buckles down and maximizes that time. So, in conjunction with the fast and his usual training sessions, he takes up starting his days with an hour-long run.

It’s hard to get it past Noctis, especially considering the fact that he knows about Prompto’s issues. But Prompto uses that to his advantage, making flimsy excuses like, “I’m trying out IF right now, and eating all my calories before I sleep” or “I’m fine, I’m just tired from all that homework last night.”

To say it takes everything out of him is a bit of an understatement, and Prompto often gets through it on adrenaline alone. It’s a system that gets him about halfway through the week before the chip in his armor begins to crack.

“... And that’s how I broke my arm at six years old,” Prompto concludes, taking a long sip of his tea. “Crazy, huh?”

“Damn, that’s wild,” Noctis agrees, eyebrows raised. “I still don’t understand the part with the wasp nest and the paper airplane.”

“Neither do I,” Prompto laughs.
The two are at their favorite coffee shop - a humble establishment with ample privacy in the form of small, secluded booths. It’s a cozy rainy afternoon, and Prompto finds his perpetual chill somewhat soothed by the warmth of the place.

“So, anyway…” Noctis begins innocently, fidgeting with the sleeve on his cup. “How’s it been going lately? Eating-wise?”

Prompto affects a flippant air. “Oh, you know, the usual. Nothing to report, really.”

“Is that right?” Noctis murmurs, and the movement of his fingers against the cardboard seem jerkier. Prompto swallows thickly at the sight.

_Calm down. There’s no way he knows about the fast._

“Uh, yeah,” Prompto insists, trying and failing to sound casual. He feels that coldness seeping back in at the edges, filling him with anxiety at the way Noctis is probing at his lies.

“Prompto,” Noctis sighs, burying his head in his hands. “Why aren’t you telling me the truth? We talked about this.”

“I don’t know w-”

“You’re tongue.” Noctis lifts his eyes to peer straight into his, and the effect is paralyzing. “It’s white.”

Prompto feels all the heat leave his body, and his heart withers and falls like a cut flower. He feels so childish, being exposed in a lie - as if he’s been caught cheating on a test in elementary school. All he can do is gape, at a complete loss for words.

_That fucking white tongue._ He scrubs at that opaque film for a full minute every morning, but it always reforms by midday, gleaming and letting everyone know his business.

“Well?” Noctis prods. “You’ve been fasting, haven’t you?”

He has a sickening sense of deja vu right then, and, for a moment, he sees Derrick in place of Noctis. Derrick, volleying accusations at him, pointing out how obvious his behavior is, forcing him to eat. It freaks him out a little bit.

“I’m sorry,” Prompto half-whispers. “I don’t know what to say. I just... I was worried you’d overreact. I don’t know.”

Noctis sighs deeply, and runs a ragged hand over his eyes. Prompto bites his lip and looks away, and they sit in silence for a long moment.

“Look, I understand,” Noctis starts eventually. “Old habits die hard. But if we’re going to make this work you **have** to be honest with me, Prom. It’s all we’ve got.” His voice wavers as he says that last sentence, and Prompto looks up and meets glistening eyes.

“Okay,” he breathes. “I’m sorry. I - I **have** been fasting. It’s only been four days, though.”

Noctis looks visibly shocked. “‘Only’? Prom-”

“Ah,” Prompto interrupts, wagging a finger. “No overreacting.”

“Fine,” Noctis pouts, then takes a long sip of his coffee. “But you can’t expect me to say **nothing**, dude, not when you have crownsguard shit now-”
Realization dawns on his face.

“This isn’t because of the fitting, is it?” he questions.

Prompto considers denying it, but considering the conversation they just had, it doesn’t feel appropriate. “It… it is. But it’s okay! I’ll be fine, I’ve done this before. It’s really not that dangerous, I swear. Fitness people do it all the time.”

His boyfriend does not look convinced.

“Just, please. Trust me,” Prompto begs, feeling nearly hysterical. “I need to do this. Just three more days.”

After an excruciating beat, Noctis finally nods.

On the morning of the fitting, Prompto weighs 129.2 pounds. This puts his BMI at 19.6 - out of the twenties for the first time in his adult life. He feels rather ambivalent about it. So, instead of taking time to consider the implications of that number, he quickly rushes through the body check photo and his morning routine, already running late.

The bus ride to Lucian Couture is filled with all the anxiety of a young student headed towards their first day of school. He feels a vague sense of nausea settle in his stomach that grows with each passing stop, until, eventually, he’s arrived at his own.

The imposing quality of the building does not help whatsoever. It has all the markings of a high-end tailor - the elaborate facade, the wildly expensive clothing in the window, the - oh, Shiva - the actual celebrity walking out of it right this moment. Prompto swallows hard, feeling completely out of his element.

But it’s nearly his appointment time, and the last thing he wants to be is late.

“Can I help you?” is the first thing he hears upon entering, and it comes from a woman that sounds both bored and condescending at once.

Prompto approaches her desk and silently thanks the Astrals for the shop’s powerful air conditioner, or he’d be otherwise sweating up a storm. “U-um. I have an appointment? For Prompto Argentum?”

The woman takes a long pause to size him up before turning to check the system, and that communicates all Prompto needs to know: You clearly don’t belong here.

That sentiment is confirmed as soon as she finds his name and her eyebrows raise in subtle surprise. “Well. I guess you can go in through there. Strip to your underwear, please. Theo will be right with you.”

Prompto feels his blood run cold and his vision blur. It’s a good thing his feet take him into the appropriate room of their own accord, because all he can do is repeat the words Strip to your underwear, please in his head over and over and over again.

When the door closes behind him, it’s as if he’s sealed off the entrance to his own tomb.
“Okay,” he whispers to himself - a subtle encouragement meant to ground him. “Okay. Okay.”

It would just be him and Theo. Theo has seen many people’s bodies, at this point. Theo wouldn’t remember the details of Prompto's body. He could get through this.

*Do it for Noctis.*

Shaking hands start peeling off his garments, slowly and carefully. Before long he’s standing in just his briefs, feeling more vulnerable and exposed than he’s ever felt before. The chill he’d been so appreciative just minutes before seems to mock him now, settling deep in his bones and inciting goosebumps all over his arms. And the fact that this place looks like an actual castle in its elaborate decoration doesn't help matters.

When the door behind him squeaks open, he nearly jumps all the way out of his skin.

“Argentum?” a thin, fashionable man questions, clipboard in hand and measuring tape hanging over his shoulder. “Here for a fitting?”

This must be Theo.

Prompto doesn’t breathe until he hears the door close again. “Uh, yeah. That’s right.”

“Stand on the platform, there,” Theo directs, matter-of-fact.

Prompto scrambles to obey, incredibly grateful for Theo’s blasé attitude. It makes the whole process a lot more mechanical, which is something he can process a lot easier.

That is, until Theo takes a moment to just look at him as Prompto stands there, arms crossed, clipboard still clutched in one hand.

“Got in some sort of accident? Or perhaps something a little more intimate?” he winks, eyes hovering over the sporadic bruising on Prompto's thighs.

_Gods - does he think these are from sex?_

“Something like that,” Prompto responds, trying to act coy. It actually draws a smile out of Theo, and Prompto feels the tension in his shoulders ebb with it.

“Well, Mr. Argentum. Let’s get you on your way, then.”

He sets down the clipboard and removes the tape around his neck. The first few measurements are harmless enough - the circumference of his neck and chest, the length of his arm, the span of his shoulders. Theo’s touches are either light or nonexistent, and Prompto feels like he just might be able to relax.

Until Theo moves on to his lower half.

“Looks like we have a little more to work with here,” Theo murmurs as he pulls the tape tightly around his waist. “Breathe out, please. Thank you. 31 inches.”

Prompto feels his face run hot. He knows his stomach is a problem area, but to have it pointed out so bluntly...

*Did he really just say that? How am I supposed to respond to that?*

Evidently Theo doesn’t need a response, because he continues regardless, pulling the tape over the
widest part of Prompto’s bottom. He fights the urge to fidget, feeling incredibly inexperienced with anyone paying attention to that area.

The sound of Theo clicking his tongue is, perhaps, one of the worst ones he’s ever heard. “Seems we won’t be able to get you into that smaller concept piece. Ah, no matter.”

Prompto can’t help it - he sways. He feels as if he’s about to faint.

“Hold still,” Theo scolds. “I’ll have to retake this.” A tense minute passes, and Prompto feels as if his entire body must be bright red by now. “Alright, now for the inseam. Spread your legs.”

Theo moves between them, holding the tape directly under his crotch and letting it trail to the floor. Prompto feels the nausea jump up into his throat.

This might be the worst combination of things Prompto could ever experience. Uncomfortable touches in invasive areas, only being in his underwear, and having his body commented on by a professional.

“Stretch marks?” Theo notes absentmindedly, inspecting his outer thigh. “Interesting.”

Gods, just kill me now.

The last few measurements are, thankfully, much less intimate and pass quickly as Prompto stands there in a daze, trying not to faint or puke or both.

“Okay,” Theo eventually says, stepping back, and Prompto feels like he can finally exhale again. “That’s all. Your fatigues will be ready as soon as possible. Thank you for coming in, Mr. Argentum.”

Prompto nods, unable to speak in fear of bursting into tears on the spot. Theo doesn’t seem to mind, considering the way he briskly turns on his heel and walks out the door.

As soon as it clicks behind him, Prompto sags dramatically, to the point where he ends up sitting on the pedestal, head between his knees and arms protectively covering his hair.

Don’t cry. Don’t cry. Don’t cry.

He knows he needs to get up soon and leave, because the last thing he needs after that experience is that woman walking in on him sobbing while nearly naked. The thought is so repulsive that he springs up immediately, throwing on his outfit with a relief he’s never felt so keenly at the feeling of his clothes.

Prompto makes eye contact with the ground only as he briskly exists the shop and makes a beeline for the transit center. It isn’t until he’s on the bus home that he allows a few tears to slip down his cheeks, which he hides by retreating into his hoodie.

One thing is for certain - Theo knew what he was talking about. And it was just the sort of kick in the pants that Prompto needed. He’d been growing too complacent and comfortable in his routines, allowing himself to exist at unacceptable weights for far too long.

If anything, Prompto should be grateful for that dose of reality - delivered by a haute couture fashion designer, no less. He finally has an unbiased analysis of where he’s currently at, and where he should strive to be.

I’ll get there, he resolves, hope blooming in his chest. I’ll prove my worth.
aaand we're right back to angst ;) owwie ouch ow

also wow guys!! we've officially reached 100,000 words!! thank you for staying with me along the way♡ let me know what you thought? and be my friend on Tumblr?
Eaten Out of House and Home

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Prompto officially joins the crownguard, which proves to be taxing, but manageable. When he learns he needs to get fitted for his fatigues, he starts fasting - only to face hurtful comments from the designer anyway.

Chapter Notes

hello! I apologize for being a day late - I'd more or less finished this on time, but it was around 3 am when I did... and I was just. too tired to stay awake and edit. so here's a much better version than the one you would've got then. enjoy, it's long ;)

as always, a very big thank you to my beta TheRegalHarvester, who is not only killing it at being an amazing friend, but is killing it at LIFE! she's a businessowner now, ya'll. truly amazing!!

alright - onto the angst!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Insomnia, 3 AM:

Cold - not in a biting way, but more of a subdued chill that seeps into his bones. Calm. So calm, even the air seems to hang suspended, as if holding its breath in preparation for the day ahead. Devoid of activity, but still twinkling with city lights.

Noctis is trying to appreciate what he can of the late night as he sits on his balcony, knees drawn up towards his chest. He’s shivering in his thin pajamas, but somehow that doesn’t seem to matter.

He can’t stop thinking about Prompto.

Noct’s mind keeps replaying every word the blond had said to him - every shallow platitude about being safe and careful even when his face betrayed his inner turmoil. He keeps thinking about what he should do, and how painfully unequipped he is to deal with this.

He sighs, and runs a heavy hand over his forehead.

Months ago, when thinking about Prompto used to keep him awake, it was because of his massive crush and the chaotic feelings that went along with it. Now, every time he closes his eyes, all Noctis can see are images of skeletal people in hospital beds.

The city lights he’d been transfixed with blur out of focus. It isn’t until he feels the tears running down his cheeks does he realize he’s crying.
That night, when Noctis finally gets to sleep, he dreams of a tall, white cliff. Prompto dances along the edges of it with a bright smile stretching his features, the epitome of beauty and elegance -

Until his foot slips, and he disappears off the edge.

The next day, Noctis finds himself staring at the angles of Prompto’s lean form as they warm up to train. He’s definitely lost weight in the past week, that much is clear, but it’s manifesting itself in a sickly way. Prompto looks gaunt - his eyes have sunken in, the hollow of his cheeks are severe, and his skin seems sallow.

Noctis tries not to look openly concerned. He doesn’t want to tip off Gladio, who, for some unfathomable reason, sees nothing wrong with Prompto’s shrinking form. Then again, Noctis was of the same mindset before it was literally spelled out for him. Appearances, evidently, can be so easily deceiving.

They’re doing sit-ups next to each other on the room’s navy training mats, Noctis swallowing hard at the small noises of effort escaping Prompto with each movement.

“Hey,” Noctis breathes out between reps, voice low. “You’re done fasting now, right?”

Prompto doesn’t stop moving, nor does he turn to meet Noct’s eye. Something in his face gets harder, though, and more defensive.

“No,” he grunts. He’s sweating harder than he has any right to be, and his mouth is pinched like he’s in pain.

Noctis pauses on the uptake, arms crossed over his chest and mouth gaping. “Prom, you said-”

“Noct!” Gladio calls from across the room, voice booming. “If you’re not gonna do the warm-up you might as well get over here and start sparring!”

Noctis looks at him, and then back at Prompto, panicking internally as he tries to process the information he just learned.

“Now, princess!”

“Fine! Coming,” Noctis yells back, trying and failing at sounding composed.

He glances at Prompto one last time before getting up, but the blond is staring straight ahead,
determination painted on his features as he continues to push through the sit-ups.

“This isn’t over,” Noctis promises, and then jogs off to join Gladio.

He spends the next hour putting up an amateur fight while casting frequent glances towards Prompto.

All the blond has to do is hold up a lightweight air gun, and he’s only surviving by the skin of his teeth; Noctis can see his arms shaking from the other side of the training room. He also sees the frequent breaks Prompto keeps taking, and his chest heaving as he struggles to catch his breath.

Suddenly, Noctis feels a sharp strike in his abdomen.

“Pay attention!” Gladio barks, retreating his wooden greatsword. “Jeez, what is with you today?”

“Just distracted,” Noctis mumbles, rubbing at the contact point. “Sorry.”

Gladio raises an eyebrow, and then his expression softens. “Guess there’s no getting around that,” he sighs, though it isn’t without some measure of fondness. “Alright, you put up enough of an effort. You’re dismissed.”

Noctis sags and dismisses his wooden blade, wondering just how pathetic he must’ve looked. “Thanks.”

Gladio smirks and extends a rough hand, mussing up Noct’s hair. “I better not see this next time, though!”

“Agh - alright! Alright!”

Gladio’s resultant laughter is booming, and it manages to bring some warmth back to Noct’s anxious heart. The shield turns away from him, then, and directs his attention toward Prompto - unflaggingly focused on his paper targets.

Noctis sighs. Prompto usually would’ve run over as soon as Gladio laughed, demanding to be in on the joke with a brilliant smile on his face. Now, he’s wrapped up in his own world, and Noctis can feel a visceral coldness emanating from it.

What happened to him?

“Hey kid, you can go too,” Gladio calls. “You two should have a date night or something,” he adds on a wink.

Noctis rolls his eyes and waves his hand as if physically brushing off the teasing. He does want to get Prompto alone, though. Maybe he can convince him to eat.

But Prompto doesn’t lower his gun. “Nah, I wanna keep going,” he yells over his shoulder, back still facing them.

Gladio’s laugh is more amused than anything. “See, Noct? That’s the kind of spirit we need in here.”

Noctis barely registers the words, too focused on the feeling of his heart sinking into the core of the planet.
The image of Prompto continuing to struggle through the most simple exertions flares up like a brand in his mind. Intertwined with them are those skeletal people in hospital beds again, haunting him every time he closes his eyes.

Noctis is a wreck. This entire situation is both tragic and officially far beyond him.

_Enough is enough._

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_Pens and pencils, check. Notepad, check. Laptop for cross-referencing, check. Sticky notes, check. Coffee and biscuits, check. And, of course, the Altissian reports - check._

Ignis sits back and surveys the highly-organized spread in front of him with self-contained pride. It is one of his better productivity set-ups; he especially appreciates how the angles fit together to make one cohesive, aesthetically-pleasing whole.

It’s too bad Noctis would probably mess up the order of it as soon as he sat down at the table, but that was no matter. Getting him to sit down would be the crowning achievement of Ignis’s day.

He hears the rustling of a key in the doorknob, and schools his face into his best _Oh? You thought you could avoid me?_ expression. A moment later, Noctis is stumbling through the door, and promptly groaning upon seeing Ignis.

“How did you even know I’d be here?”

“I know everything,” Ignis remarks, nonchalant.

Noctis sighs. “Fine, whatever. Just let me change first.”

The prince stomps past him, and it’s all Ignis can do to stifle his smile. Really, is it all that shocking that his advisor would know of his training schedule and where he might be because of it? After all, the boys had taken to post-workout relaxation in Noct’s old rooms _months_ ago, as soon as Prompto’s citadel-related anxiety had quelled.

“Ignis starts preparing the first report, which he’d already looked over and annotated beforehand. It isn’t long before Noctis is pulling out a chair and sullenly joining him, freshly clad in one of his usual all-black outfits.

“How, Noctis. Did you have a productive workout?” Ignis asks politely, after the prince doesn’t offer up anything in the way of a greeting.

But Noctis doesn’t even acknowledge him. He stares absently at a spot on the table, slumped in on himself.
“Noctis?”

If Noctis hears it, it definitely doesn’t register on his face. Ignis frowns.

“What’s the matter?”

*That* gets a response. Noctis slowly turns his head toward him. As soon as they make eye contact, his face crumples, and he bursts into tears.

“Noct-!”

“I don’t know what to do anymore, Iggy,” Noctis sobs, hiding his face in his hands.

Ignis scoots his chair as close as he can get, and draws the crying boy into his arms. “Shh, shh. What do you mean?”

“I… I…” Noctis hiccups. “I’m s-so stupid.”

“Hush. You are not stupid.”

“But I am,” Noctis weeps, and Ignis can feel a dampness growing against his shirt. “I don’t know w-what to do anymore. I-I’m supposed to… supposed to…” he sniffs. “I’m s-supposed to have an answer, aren’t I?”

“Noct,” Ignis begins, rubbing soothing circles into the trembling prince’s back. “I’m afraid you aren’t making much sense. What happened?”

“I- I can’t-” Noctis chokes. “I shouldn’t-”

His crying reaches a crescendo, and it’s all Ignis can do to not burst into tears himself. He hates seeing his charge like this, and he hates the idea that something has evidently been troubling Noctis for so long while he sat by, oblivious.

“You can tell me anything,” Ignis soothes. “I am here for you, Noct, whatever it is.”

Noctis doesn’t answer for a bit, opting to cry against Ignis’s shirt, hands still pressed up between his eyes and Ignis’s chest.

It’s a long time before he lets out a muffled, “It’s Prompto.”

Immediately, Ignis’s mind runs over every possible thing Prompto could’ve done to hurt him. He should’ve known this might’ve come at some point, but they’ve always been so attached to each other. Gods, he really should’ve been more prepared for the possibility of their relationship not ending well. He’s already failed as an advisor-

“H-he’s in trouble. I d-don’t know what to do, Iggy,” Noctis sniffs, voice cracking on his advisor’s name. Ignis feels his heart break in tandem.

*So it isn’t Prompto’s fault*, Ignis affirms, choosing to only engage in the analytical part of his mind lest his emotions get the better of him.

“Define ‘trouble’,” Ignis prompts. “Is it his parents? Or bullying again? Or does he just need another loan? These are solvable issues, Noct, it will be okay.”

Rather than having a soothing effect, the words seem to make Noctis even worse. His crying becomes nearly violent, and Ignis can hardly keep a steady hold on the shaking boy.

Ignis is growing just a bit exasperated. “For Ramuh’s sake, Noct. What is going on, then?”

“He’s.” Noctis pauses, and swallows audibly. “H-he…”

Ignis smooths down his hair, and gives him a few moments. “He…?”

“He’s not eating!” Noctis bursts out.

Ignis knits his eyebrows together and releases the prince, holding him at arm’s length to look into his eyes. “What do you mean? He needs groceries? Or—”

“No!” Noctis yells, struggling to maintain eye contact through his tears. “Y-you’re not… I mean, can’t you see it? It’s s-so obvious—”

“Noct, I’m afraid I don’t understa—”

“He has an eating disorder, Igns!” Noctis bawls, and buries his face in his hands once again. “He’s choosing not to eat!”

Ignis feels the ground drop out from underneath him.

*What? Astrals above… why didn’t I know about this?*

“I- when- how long? How long have you known?” Ignis stutters, uncharacteristically at a loss for words.

“I don’t know. A couple months?” Noctis sobs, wiping at his eyes with the sleeve of his shirt. “He’s had it for ages, Iggy. But it’s been bad lately. Really bad.”

Ignis thinks about Prompto’s image. How he’d gradually been losing weight, which the advisor had naively attested to training and not being fed enough by his parents.

How could he have been so blind? And why didn’t Noctis say something sooner?

“How bad?”

“… He’s been fasting,” Noctis admits after a long pause, voice wavering. “It’s been over a week, now, and he said he was just doing it until he got his measurements for the fatigues, but then that happened and we were just at training and I asked him if he was going to stop fasting and he said no and Iggy, he looks so weak, he could barely hold his gun up and he was shaking a lot and I don’t know what to do anymore, gods, I shouldn’t have told you, he’s going to hate me, but I really feel like this is getting dangerous and I don’t have an answer for this and I feel so fucking stupid and I just—”

“Calm,” Ignis interjects, before the boy develops a full-on panic attack.

Noctis sucks in a deep breath. “I need help, Igns. I don’t know what to do.”

Ignis realizes that what Noctis needs most, in this moment, is for him to play the part of advisor rather than friend. So he proceeds to do what he always does in a crisis situation: he distances himself emotionally, pauses to take stock, and begins formulating a plan of action.

Given Prompto’s involvement both romantically and officially with Noctis, the solution seems crystal clear. It’s literally embedded in Ignis’s job description - protect the people invested in the prince,
even if it’s from themselves.

“Well-” Ignis begins, and that’s as far as he gets before Noct’s door is kicked open.

Ignis jumps at the violent sound of it, looks up, and nearly screams.

Gladio is standing in the doorway, fear evident on his usually-composed features. Because hanging limply off his shoulder is Prompto, identified only by the shock of blond hair bobbing against Gladio’s chest. His arms dangle lifelessly from where he’s suspended, as if he's nothing more than a ragdoll. He looks, for all the world, like he’s dead.

“Oh gods!” Noctis cries, jumping up from the table and rushing forward.

“I just looked over and he was on the ground!” Gladio explains, panic in his voice. “He’s breathing but his pulse is weak, I don’t-”

Breathing. Thank the six.

“Put him on the couch,” Ignis instructs, refusing to listen to the million different things running through his mind.


Noctis would be devastated.

Gladio strides over, careful not to jostle the unconscious boy too much, and gingerly deposits him onto the couch. When he begins to list to the side like he’s going to fall over, Gladio quickly rearranges him to be leaning against his shoulder.

Ignis tries not to focus on how pallid and grey Prompto’s face is, and how small and fragile he looks against Gladio’s healthy form. He knows full well how valuable a focused mind is at present.

So he moves to join the two and starts taking Prompto’s vitals. “Noctis just told me he hasn’t been eating,” he informs Gladio while he works, clearing his throat awkwardly.

Heart rate at 52 beats per minute. Low.

In his peripheral, he registers Gladio going through the same confusion he did. “What? Like he skipped breakfast or something?”

Ignis sighs, heart heavy as he recalls everything Noctis told him. “No. Evidently, our Prompto has developed an eating disorder that has recently taken a turn for the worse. He has hardly been eating on the best of days, and, for the past week, has taken to fasting.”

Body temperature slightly elevated. Surface skin damp with sweat.

Gladio, to his credit, processes this faster than he did. Unfortunately, he does so with anger.

“And you let him TRAIN?” he barks towards Noctis, who is hovering around the scene with all the helplessness of a frightened child.

Ignis doesn’t have time to reign in Gladio’s severity. He lets the shield continue berating Noctis as he springs up, hurrying towards the fridge and pulling out a bowl of chickatrice and rice leftovers. It isn’t the best recovery food, but at least it’s full of protein.
As the microwave whirs, Ignis crosses his arms, bites his lip, and taps his foot. He’s calling on all the medical training he’s ever received, trying to determine whether or not an ambulance is the best course of action for Prompto at present. In the background, Gladio’s scolding grows vicious in tone, and Ignis vaguely registers the sounds of Noctis crying again.

As soon as the timer hits zero, Ignis pulls out the dish and brings it back to the couch, where Gladio is now attempting to gently shake the blond awake.

“If he doesn’t wake up in the next minute…” Ignis murmurs, fingering the edges of the bowl anxiously, “The complication risk will grow markedly higher.”

Astrals, help us.

Gladio nods. “Okay. Sixty seconds, and then we’ll call the paramedics.” Dimly, Ignis appreciates Gladio’s knack for being able to catch up to his frame of mind so quickly.

It’s the most excruciating minute he’s ever experienced. Prompto’s face is completely slack and unresponsive to everything the retainers try, and the image of it is terrifying. Ignis can’t even imagine how Noctis feels, watching his boyfriend this slumped over and unanimated.

Ignis is about ready to call it when Prompto’s lip twitches, and his eyebrows briefly furrow together.

Thank Shiva.

“He’s waking up,” he reports, getting the first spoonful of food ready. Behind him, he hears Noctis sigh in relief.

Prompto’s eyes flutter open and closed a few times, distant. As soon as his mouth opens the slightest bit, Ignis shoves the first spoonful of rice into it.

That brings him to consciousness. Prompto reflexively closes his mouth around the food, and Ignis withdraws the spoon. A second later, the boy seems to register what he’s been given, and looks like he’s about to spit it out.

Gladio catches on quickly, and clamps a hand over Prompto’s mouth.

Good. If he doesn’t get his blood sugar up as soon as possible, his heart might start palpitating abnormally.

In the background, Noctis pipes up. “Wait, don’t do that!”

Ignis doesn’t pay him any mind, completely focused on de-escalating the situation at hand. The fainting is already a very bad sign. The boy needs food, and he needs it immediately.

Thus, Ignis ignores the wide-eyed and scared look Prompto is shooting him. “Chew and swallow,” he commands, tone severe and brooking no argument.

It seems his voice was harsh enough to frighten the blond into submission, as he starts following the order immediately, mouth moving slowly under Gladio’s hand. A moment later, Ignis sees his throat bobbing up and down.

Good. Now we need to-

He suddenly feels a hand grabbing tightly at his arm, and tunes back into the hum of Noct’s voice. “-really can’t do that, Iggy, this isn’t the right-”
“Stop, Noctis!” Ignis bites. “He could potentially be facing congestive heart failure. He’s already passed out once. He NEEDS to eat.”

If Prompto looked scared before, he looks downright terrified now.

“You WILL eat the rest of this, or we’ll be forced to call an ambulance and have them insert a feeding tube in you. Is that what you want?”

Prompto’s eyes flicker to Noct’s, appearing to be pleading for help from his boyfriend. Ignis is not amused. The enabling dynamic of their relationship that got them this far is suddenly very apparent.

Noctis tries anyway, and it only serves to frustrate Ignis. “You can’t just force him to-”

“Acute malnutrition is a medical emergency, and we are doing what we are duty-bound to do in order to protect a member of the crownguard from serious harm.” Ignis sounds nearly robotic at this point, intent as he is on rapidly restoring Prompto’s health.

Out of nowhere, his mind recalls the story of the runway model living off Diet Coke and lettuce only to faint and subsequently die as soon as she got off the catwalk. He blinks to clear the memory, refusing to associate it with the wilted boy in front of him, and sighs.

“You need to emphasize more.

“Prompto,” Ignis starts, going for a softer approach. “I truly cannot imagine how you must be feeling right now. But you need to understand that this is for the sake of your immediate health. You were unconscious for an abnormal amount of time. You were performing strenuous activity. You appear to be close to underweight, if not there already. Prompto, if you don’t eat something right now, you could face irreversible complications.”

The boy’s eyes turn glassy, but, at long last, he nods.

“Release him,” Ignis orders, and the hand on his mouth slips to his shoulders. Ignis pushes the bowl towards the boy. “Eat.”

Prompto looks at it for a long moment, but eventually accepts it with a defeated exhale. He begins to bring small spoonfuls to his mouth, slow and measured.

Ignis watches him warily, thinking of all the times he noticed an increasing angularity to the boy and brushed it off. Or all the times he’d skipped out on dinner, deceiving Noctis into thinking he had food waiting for him from parents that weren’t actually there. Ignis recalls the many surplus meals he’d cooked him after learning that fact - how much of that had ended up in the trash, he wonders.

How couldn’t he have put the pieces together sooner? Isn’t he the supposed to be the observant one?

You know why, the chastising part of his mind thinks. You thought this was something only women developed. You were close-minded.

Ignis chews the inside of his cheek. Watching Prompto now, in one of the worst conditions he’s ever seen, is lesson enough. He’d never let his biases get in the way again.

When all is said and done, Prompto shoves the empty dish back at him and shrinks in on himself, tears rolling silently down his face.

Ignis tries not to get emotional himself as he takes stock of how pitifully weak and helpless Prompto looks. His bones jut out from underneath his skin, his shirt hangs off of him, and his breath is
stuttered and haphazard. In the end, it’s the tremble in his skinny fingers that push him to make an executive decision.

He stands up. “Noctis, pack his bags for an overnight stay. He’s a little more stable now, but he clearly needs much more rehabilitation than we can provide-”

“No!” Prompto yells, voice crackly from disuse. He manages to wrestle himself out of Gladio’s hold and springs up. “You said you wouldn’t if I ate! You- you lied!”

The blond stumbles a bit, blinking hard, and starts sprinting for the door. Gladio only hesitates a moment before responding, but it’s just enough time for Prompto to escape. The sound of the door slamming behind the shield’s chasing form sucks all the air out from the room.

*Did... that just happen?*

“Astrals,” Ignis swears under his breath before sitting down, taking off his glasses, and massaging his temples. “This is a nightmare.”

He does feel guilty about lying, but it wasn’t intentional. Prompto NEEDS to visit a hospital - Ignis just hadn’t come to that conclusion until he saw how frail the boy was, struggling to eat one small bowl of rice and chickatrice.

*He needs inpatient treatment yesterday. If only his parents were decent people.*

Noctis lets out a strangled noise, interrupting his thoughts. “He’s going to hate me.”

Ignis sighs. He doesn’t want to sugarcoat things, which makes his next words even harder. “If he does, it won’t last for long, I promise you.”

Silent tears roll down Noct’s cheek, and he slowly sinks onto the couch, joining Ignis.

“Noct. He might not understand why you made this decision, not at first,” Ignis consoles, “But he will come to appreciate it in time. Especially considering the fact that he’ll still be *alive* to appreciate it.”

Noctis nods, wiping at his tears with a jerky hand. “I feel like I betrayed him.”

“Oh on the contrary, you were protecting him.”

Suddenly, Ignis feels a weight at his side. Noctis has slung his arms around his chest, holding him like he used to when he was a child, after waking up from a bad dream. Ignis doesn’t hesitate - he draws his arms around his charge, bringing him closer.

So much pain that could’ve been avoided. Ignis remembers that day - so many months ago - when he’d first interviewed Prompto. He’d asked him if he had any physical or mental issues, and the blond had just smiled and said *no*.

Of course he would’ve said no.

If only they had they caught on earlier, and hadn't readily accepted everything at face-value. Prompto could’ve been well on his way to recovery by now, not out in Insomnia, *literally* running away from it.

Eventually, the sound of the door softly clicking open has Ignis glancing up, disappointed to find Gladio walking in alone.
“That kid is fast, I’ll give him that,” Gladio mutters, plopping down on the adjacent sofa. “He didn’t go straight for his apartment - he lost me somewhere in the streets. We’ll give it some time. He’s gotta go home at some point, right?”

From underneath Ignis’s arm, Noctis lets out a small sob.

“You!” Gladio starts. “I can’t believe you let this go on! Do you not realize how serious this shit is?”

Noctis buries himself deeper in Ignis’s side, as if trying to disappear into his shirt.

“Gladio…” Ignis warns.

“No, he needs to hear this,” Gladio dictates. “Noct. Your friend - your boyfriend - was walking around one step away from a heart attack. And you just let it happen-”

“I didn’t know what to do!” Noctis explodes, finally turning his face towards Gladio. “He kept saying it was under control, that he’s done this for so long, that he knows what he’s doing. I trusted him. And anyway, I didn’t want to betray the person I love! But I guess it doesn’t even matter anymore, because he probably hates me.”

His voice cracks pitifully on that last point, enough to make even Gladio shut up. The three sit in silence for a while, Ignis considering, for the first time, exactly the stress Noctis must’ve been under.

“I don’t envy your position,” Ignis murmurs eventually. “It was an impossible choice to make.”

Noctis sniffs wetly, face pressed against Ignis’s side once again.

“We’ll fix this,” Ignis assures, though he has no idea if they can manage it. “We’ll get him help.”

_You fucked up. You fucked up. You fucked up. You fucked up._

Noctis shakes his head, as if trying to physically dismiss the negative thoughts that keep playing on loop, like a mantra. It doesn’t really work.

He had no idea how dangerous this situation was. Prompto had been so good at hiding the ugliest parts of it, even when Noctis supposedly knew everything.

_You fucked up. You fucked up. You fucked up. You fucked up._

The prickling sound of rain hitting the roof of Ignis’s car disguises the tiny, gasping tears escaping Noctis. Gladio, perceptive as he is, notices them anyway.
“Hey, it’s gonna be alright,” he soothes, and Noctis is infinitely grateful he’s moved on from yelling at him.

“I hope so,” Noctis breathes out raggedly, and turns to rest his head against the window.

They arrive on Prompto’s block entirely too soon for Noct’s liking. Gladio and Ignis start preparing to exit, grabbing their umbrellas, but Noctis remains frozen in his seat, eyes affixed on one particular point on the car door.

His head feels spacey. His eyes unfocus, getting lost in the feeling of floating away. He inadvertently begins to hold his breath.


Noctis blinks for the first time in a minute, and it’s almost painful. “Uh - sorry.”

He looks up, and finds his two retainers staring blankly at him.

“I’m… ready?” he tries again, when they don’t say anything.

“No, you aren’t,” Ignis answers, pushing up his glasses as he pinches the bridge of his nose. “But I’m afraid we can’t stall any longer. This must be done now.”

Noctis bites his lip nervously.

“Listen, Noctis, whatever happens…” Ignis trails off. “Just… remember your long history together.”

“Yeah,” Gladio adds. “Things will be okay in the end - trust me, kid.”

Noctis looks at both of them, not quite understanding what they’re hinting at, and not really wanting to know regardless. He just nods, and tries to ignore the sense of doom settling in his throat.

He doesn’t remember stepping out into the pouring rain, or the silent walk up to Prompto’s apartment, or the hesitant moment just before things went underway. He only remembers the awfully invasive sound of Gladio pounding on Prompto’s door, and how it seemed to go on for hours.

Eventually, it provokes a response.

“Leave me alone!” they hear Prompto call from somewhere inside, and all three of them exchange a look before Ignis takes the mantle.

“Prompto,” the advisor begins, adopting the voice he reserves for the most important of matters. “We come here as official representatives of the crown. Failure to comply may result in aggressive action. Open the door.”

Thankfully, Prompto doesn’t wait very long before slowly pulling his door open. Noctis bites his lip at the sight of him - he’s obviously miserable, if the bright red rims around his eyes are anything to go by. It makes Noctis feel guiltier than ever, so he hides himself behind his retainers, letting them take the lead.

“What do you want.” Prompto’s voice sounds scratchy and raw.

“Prompto Argentum,” Ignis continues smoothly, and Noctis wonders how he manages to maintain his poise in every conceivable situation. “When you agreed to become a member of the prince’s guard, you agreed to sacrifice some aspects of your personal autonomy to meet the goal of being an effective retainer.”
Prompto looks confused. “What are you talking about?”

“You don’t have a choice in the matter, Prompto,” Ignis reiterates, plain and simple. “Your health and safety come before your personal desires. The crown is committed to preserving and protecting its forces - it is literally what you signed up for.”

Prompto’s eyes pop open, wide and incredulous. “I don’t- I’m an adult, you can’t just-”

“You’re an adult with a contract,” Ignis insists, firm. “And we are legally required to take you to a hospital before things get critical. We are allowed to use force, but I don’t think anyone wants to see it come down to that.”

Noctis feels his heart sinking. He can see how awful this is for Prompto to hear - he knows how important having a choice is for him. But Ignis is right, and Noctis is secretly glad for it. He wants to see his boyfriend recovering, not continuing to punish himself.

“What, so just because I’m a crownguard-” the word comes out on a sneer- “I don’t have control over my own body?”

Noctis feels something inside him break. “Prom, please-”

“I’m saying I fucking quit!” Prompto yells, looking much fiercer than Noctis ever thought possible. “No more crownguard, no more anything. I can’t - I can’t do this if you guys are gonna force me into something I don’t want!”

Noctis feels something inside him break. “Prom, please-”

“Don’t call me that,” Prompto spits.

Noctis feels his heart racing and his fingers trembling and gods, he’s developing a full-on panic attack.

“You’re over, Noctis.” Prompto says, firm and cold as the rain beating hard against the roof. “We’re over. I can’t believe I ever trusted you.”

The last thing Noctis sees is the door slamming shut.
MWA HA HA. THE CHAPTER YOU'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR (○_○)(○__○) (○_○)(○__○)
I'M SO EXCITED! WOW!! NEARLY A YEAR IN THE MAKING AND WE'RE FINALLY HERE!!
THANK YOU ALL FOR BEING HERE WITH ME, YOU MASOCHISTS♡

as always, here's what prompto's body currently looks like.
(ooo didn't expect that one did you)

anyway! please let me know what you thought! and be my friend on Tumblr!

P.S. the model who died off the runway is a true story. Her name was Luisel Ramos.
And I am Struck with Sorrow

Chapter Summary

_Previously, on Salad Days..._
After receiving negative comments at his fitting, Prompto continues fasting, causing him to faint while training. Noctis catches Ignis and Gladio up to speed, and the two proceed to force-feed Prompto as soon as he regains consciousness in an effort to avoid medical complications. Prompto runs off as soon as he learns of their plans to put him in inpatient treatment. Later, at his apartment, he quits the crownsguard and breaks up with Noctis.

Chapter Notes

as always, a huge round of applause for my amazing beta, TheRegalHarvester!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TGI Fridays sells frozen mozzarella sticks in nearly every grocery store across Lucis.

These boxes are labelled as ‘snack size’, and come with eight sticks. Each stick is worth 100 calories, making the entire box worth 800 calories. Prompto had always laughed at how ironic that had seemed.

Now, he isn’t laughing. He’s standing at a self-checkout, piling three of these boxes into a bag alongside a package of Oreos, a pint of ice cream, and a family-sized bag of chips.

After careful consideration, he decides to throw in a few candy bars. For good measure.

“Three thousand, two-hundred gil,” the machine recites in a robotic, vaguely feminine voice.

Prompto sucks in a breath. That’s the entirety of his food budget for the week.

His stomach suddenly cramps then, fierce and angry and demanding. He can still taste Ignis’s food on the back of his tongue.

With glazed-over eyes, he inserts his card and pays for it all.

“Hey, dude. This is the last bus of the day, so I won’t be coming back around here. Just letting you know.”

“Yeah, that’s fine.”

Prompto moves to sit directly behind the driver, hiding from the rearview mirror. After a cursory look
around, he discovers he’s the only one riding the bus.

*Perfect.*

With slow, careful fingers, he reaches into his plastic bag and pulls open the Oreos. He then proceeds to shovel them into his mouth, one by one, throughout the entire ride home.

**PRODUCT NOT INTENDED FOR MICROWAVE PREPARATION.**

“Says you,” Prompto snorts, ignoring the box’s printed warning and placing his plate of mozzarella sticks into the microwave.

He bounces around the living room as he waits, getting the latest episode of his favorite comedy ready on the TV. Those Oreos gave him a burst of energy he forgot he was capable of. Regardless, he’s still so hungry. And he’s about to eat.

Prompto pauses.

He’s hungry *and* he’s about to eat.

In that moment, he feels *euphoric*. His binge-brain has taken over, bathing everything in rose-colored light. Noct’s betrayal is at the very back of his mind - all he can think about is how far he’ll be able to pull those mozzarella sticks apart before the cheese snaps.

An hour later, Prompto lies curled up on his couch, in more pain than he ever thought possible.

He doesn’t even *remember* eating. He just remembers making the food, watching something, and ending up like this somewhere along the way.

“Fuck,” he swears under his breath.

Existing hurts. His stomach throbs painfully with every miniscule shift, distended and swollen. The voice in his head is yelling bloody murder. And now, with no distractions, he can’t stop thinking about what happened earlier in the day.

*A few hours ago, you were skinny and pretty. You fainted, and it was absolutely lovely - the very image of elegance. Now look at you. Single, friendless, and wallowing in your own corpulence.*

Prompto hates that he starts crying, because even the smallest movements of his diaphragm send pain shooting through his stomach. But he can’t help it, try as he might.

*The worst part is that you feel better after this. Idiotic child. When will you learn that being empty is the greatest state you can be in?*

He’s never self-loathing so keenly. He can’t believe he ate, how *much* he ate. It’s as if he proved Noctis right somehow, and that makes his anger feel unjustified.

Prompto spends the rest of the night berating himself and sobbing, until he eventually falls asleep.
Noctis skips school the following day - a Friday - and spends the weekend in bed.

He hasn’t felt this depressed in a long time. When he isn’t actively sobbing, which can go on for hours, he’s staring at a spot in the white wall across from his bed. When he’s through with that, he usually falls asleep. It’s an awful routine, but with it comes a sense of familiarity that comforts him. After all, he’s been through this before.

What is unfamiliar is the horrible, gut-wrenching sensation of heartbreak. It’s one of the worst feelings he’s ever had the misfortune to discover. It’s as if a giant hole has opened up in his chest, leaving him a hollow shell of his former self. The pain almost feels real - it eats at him in a tangible way, and weighs on his shoulders like a thousand-ton weight.

For the first time, Noctis understands how people have managed to die from such a thing.

He considers calling and texting Prompto, but he knows being actively ignored would only make him feel worse. He knows there’s nothing he can say, or do, that could ease the fire that had been in Prompto’s eyes, or the vitriol that had spilled from his mouth.

Prompto had made his point. All Noctis can do is try to keep the fragile pieces of his heart together.

His retainers try their best to help, but it only serves to sour Noct’s mood further. He doesn’t want to be doted on; he wants to be left alone. Some time that Saturday night, he ends up screaming this point at Ignis.

It works. They leave him alone. Ignis only slips in to quietly cook and clean, and Noctis cannot find it in himself to feel guilty about it.

What he does feel guilty about, however, is the multiple missed calls from his father. On Sunday morning, he finally picks up the phone.

“Noctis,” his father breathes, as if in disbelief that the call actually went through.

“Hi, dad,” Noctis mumbles, voice gravelly. “What’s up?”

“What’s up?” his father parrots. “‘What’s up?’ You tell me, Noctis. What happened to you? Why haven’t you been returning my calls?”

Noctis furrows his brow. “Uh. Didn’t Iggy tell you, or something?”
“No,” Regis sighs. “He insisted on protecting your privacy, which I respect. He told me enough to know that you are well, and that sending a troupe of glaives over would’ve been an overreaction.”

Noctis cringes at the thought of the glaives seeing him like this. “I- yeah. Sorry.”

There’s a heavy pause.

“So?” Regis eventually prompts, and Noctis feels himself withering under the weight of what he’s about to verbalize.

He can’t avoid telling his father the truth forever, unfortunately.

“Prompto broke up with me.” The words tumble forward like molten lava, and Noctis bites his quivering lip hard. “It’s… it’s a long s-story. I don’t- I can’t-”

“Say no more,” Regis interrupts, voice considerably gentler. “You don’t have to explain right now. I’m so sorry this happened.”

Noctis sniffs, and hates himself for it. “Y-yeah. Thanks.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

Noctis pinches at the point between his eyebrows in a futile attempt to ease the burning in his throat. “I just need time. Please. No responsibilities or sacred duties or whatever.”

“Noctis…” Regis begins, affecting the voice he reserves for his most serious of lectures. “A king cannot stand still in any circumstance. You know this. When your mother-”


He must sound sufficiently broken, because Regis sighs. “Very well. I will give you a couple weeks. That’s the most I can do before the council would see it fit to involve themselves.”

Two weeks. It feels like both nothing, and everything, at the same time. “Thanks dad.”

“Of course. Alright, I will stop impeding on the healing process and take my leave. I love you, son. Stay strong.”

“Okay. Love you too.”

School is awkward.

Prompto doesn’t sit by Noctis anymore, in what used to be their corner of the room. Instead, he sits as far away as possible - at the front, right by the door. He tries his best not to look towards Noctis,
but sometimes, as he enters, it’s unavoidable. All he ever sees, in that passing glance, is either an empty seat or a black head of hair pillowed on folded arms.

He knows people are speculating about the sudden divide, but he can’t bring himself to care. In no time, he’ll have graduated from high school and all its encompassing drama, and won’t ever have to be lumped in with Noctis again.

He tries to ignore how the thought makes his heart ache.

During lunchtimes, Prompto stays in the photography classroom’s computer lab with a handful of other overachievers.

It’s a nice little haven. Usually, someone plays music off the main speakers - something lo-fi and noninvasive - and the group all work on photoshopping their images peacefully. No questions are asked, no judgment is apparent on the other students’ faces, and everyone is too wrapped up in their own work to notice him skipping lunch.

It’s the only part of Prompto’s school day that feels safe.

Noctis ditches a lot of school.

On the days he does go, it’s usually due to something important, like a test or essay. The effort he pours into these things is minimal, but thankfully, no questions are asked and his teachers go even easier on him than they usually do. He suspects Ignis’s influence behind this, and is silently grateful for it.

No amount of leniency can change how much he absolutely hates school, though. It’s sad, lonely, and excruciating. Just seeing the back of Prompto’s head makes him feel like someone is digging a knife into his wound and twisting it. Sitting alone at lunch, under their tree, and fantasizing about Prompto showing up the entire time is even worse.

At least it’s an opportunity for Noctis to confirm Prompto is still alive and managing himself, though the blond keeps whittling down with each passing day. It makes Noctis feel absolutely helpless, guilty, and afraid all at once.

In his peripheral, he constantly sees the other kids side-eyeing him, openly whispering about what might have happened. A couple of them even try to introduce themselves, taking advantage of the apparent opportunity.

Noctis reverts back to what he used to do as a child - to stare blankly into space until either they left, or he did. It reminds him of why he hated elementary school so much, and had begged to be homeschooled. It’s an alienating feeling.
Prompto had been protecting him from that feeling this entire time, and he hadn’t even realized it. Now Noctis is alone, depressed, and completely vulnerable.

ethereal; adj

[ih-theer-ee-ul]

1. extremely delicate and light in a way that seems too perfect for this world.

Prompto is starting to embody ethereality again, and it makes him feel as if he’s floating.

Try as he might to avoid it, Ignis’s voice rang clear in his head every time he tried to get back onto his fast. Each attempt had ended around twenty-four hours with a small snack, regret, and a promise to restart.

After too many of these attempts, Prompto gave in and started to eat regularly again, limiting himself to 400 calories a day. He continues to go on his morning runs to try and mitigate the impact of how much he’s eating.

Every pound lost spurs him on more. He reaches 125 pounds, a BMI of 19.0, and nearly sobs with disbelief. He’s never been so small. And he can still get even smaller.

Most of his free time is spent between hanging out on the eating disorder forum, self-harming, and working out. The rush of endorphins he feels every time he steps on the scale and sees a drop is the only thing worth thinking about now.

When thoughts of Noctis worm his way into his brain despite that, he forces himself to only feel angry and victimized. Anytime the truth threatens to come to the forefront of his mind - that he might actually miss Noctis - he uses his habits as a quick distraction.

He funnels his pain into productivity, and the results are everything he’s ever hoped for and more.
Noct’s first meeting, back at the citadel, nearly takes everything out of him.

He’s feeling too low to even pretend to pay attention, and he gets chastised by four different council members for it. He’d usually brush those comments off, were he in a more confident state, but now he has to excuse himself to go cry in the bathroom nearly every time it happens. At least Ignis and his dad send him sympathetic looks. It helps to not feel completely alone.

When he finally gets back to his apartment, he immediately slinks into bed.

“Noct? At least stay awake for lunch? I’m finally making that beef bourguignon,” Ignis calls.

“Not hungry,” Noctis replies weakly, settling into his carefully-arranged mess of blankets and pillows.

A moment later, Ignis is in the doorway, and Noctis has to fight off a scowl. “You’ve been begging me to make this for months, Noct. I thought you deserved it after today. Are you sure?”

“I just want to sleep. Sorry.”

He doesn’t mention how he doesn’t have any appetite at all these days, because it makes him feel even guiltier. After all the shit he gave Prompto about starving, here he is, repeating the same bad habits. It might not be for the same motivation, sure, but the hypocrisy is still apparent: he is being as unhealthy as he’d begged Prompto not to be.

“Very well.”

The red light of the darkroom makes Prompto dizzy. It’s all he can do to keep himself upright as he stumbles through the final steps of the photo development process.

“Hey, you okay?” his boss asks when he reappears at the front desk, fresh prints in hand.

“Mmmmmhmm. Here’s the… the Gibson order… s’ready fer pickup.” Prompto tries to paste a smile on his face, but it comes out as more of a grimace.

“Kid, you look one step away from passing out,” his boss frowns. “Seriously, go home. Get some sleep. You got finals or somethin?”

Finals. Sure, why not.
“Uhhhyeah. Finals.” Prompto sways so hard he has to catch himself on the counter. “Oops.”

“That’s it, I’m driving you home.”

“But... the shop...?”

“Can survive a twenty-minute break. Come on.”

Prompto’s never been so happy to hear the sound of keys jangling as he staggers after his boss. Ten minutes later, he’s fast asleep on his couch, too worn out to have made it to the bed.

“Dude! What is that?”

“What is what?”

“That!” Prompto grins, pointing toward the sky. “Doesn’t look like any old plane to me.”

“Oh?” Noctis smirks. “What does it look like, then?”

“It’s clearly a UFO! Don’t you see the spinning lights and the secret hatch underneath? Oh gods, Noct, we’re gonna be abducted!”

“More like you’re gonna be abducted. I can warp away, dummy.”

Prompto grabs at his chest in faux-pain. “My own boyfriend, leaving me to the whims of horrible space aliens-”

“That’s right,” Noctis laughs. “Hope you’ve got a towel.”

“Hah. Nerd.”

“Yeah? I’ll show you ‘nerd’.”

“Huh? Wha- ahh- mmmm, Noct-”

“-is! Noctis Caelum!”

Noctis jumps in his seat, whipping his head away from the window and towards his statistics teacher, who has evidently decided to materialize next to him.

“Honestly, if you aren’t going to even try to pay attention, why come to school?” his teacher presses, resentment clear in his voice. It seems not all of his instructors are content to keep up with his apathy.

Everyone is looking at him, in that moment, even...
Even Prompto.

“Um,” Noctis begins eloquently.


“Just having one of those weeks,” he offers lamely. At least his eyes hadn’t welled up. Small victories.

There’s a tense pause before his teacher releases a breath, seemingly tired of berating his monarch. “Try and pay attention, Noctis. It’s important.”

“Of course, sir. My apologies.”

The instructor turns away, along with most of the heads staring at him. Noctis focuses his eyes firmly on the board, and spends the rest of the period actively keeping up with the lecture. It’s one of the most exhausting school days he’s had since he was a child.

When he finally makes it home, he quickly hops into bed and begins to weep.

He feels as if the entire world is against him. He’s fragile, like spun glass, and every look - every comment - every teacher’s admonishment - is leaving thin cracks in his delicate facade. Soon enough, he’ll shatter entirely.

The biggest crack in that facade comes purely from the raw loneliness he feels. He misses Prompto so much his body aches with it, as if it’s physically longing to hold and be held. There’s an absence not only inside him, but all around him, too. He wishes he could disappear into it.

When the tears finally subside, Noctis tries to fall asleep. When that doesn’t work, he takes a large dosage of NyQuil, and knocks himself out for the next few hours.

sunbathe [10:24]: scared as fuck to weigh-in this morning, guys. don’t think i can handle any bad news.

pintsize [10:26]: u got this! whatever happens, you’re amazing and u’ll reach ur goals eventually!

xmah [10:27]: You’ve been doing well. I don’t think you have anything to be scared of. <3

highznbrg [10:29]: sending you good vibes!
Prompto stands before his wretched, horrible scale.

He recalls a time, so relatively recent yet also so long ago, where he’d stood before this scale and had hardly been able to see his own feet. Now, his body is much more lithe and slim; he’s come a long way - that much is undeniable. Never again will he exist in an obese prison, and that is something he feels infinitely grateful for.

With nervousness shaking him to his core, Prompto slowly steps onto the scale.

An excruciating moment later, the readout tells him everything he’s ever dreamt of since that fateful summer day, when he’d finally decided to turn his life around.

120 lbs.

A BMI of 18.2.

Underweight.

Prompto releases a shaky breath. His vision goes a bit starry and blurred as he processes the gravity of the tiny LED numbers beneath his feet.

Because according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Orders, the DSM-5, which he holds himself so accountable towards -

He is finally allowed to call himself anorexic.

Chapter End Notes

awful times, indeed. prompto's romanticizing his now "valid" disorder, and noctis is falling deeper into depression. i am just the worst, aren't i? ;)

good news - expect the next chapter to be up sooner than next wednesday! i'm not quite sure when, but i'm aiming for this weekend.

let me know your thoughts? and be my frienderoni on Tumblr?
As Luck Would Have It

Chapter Summary

Previously, on Salad Days...
Prompto escapes from Ignis and Gladio's force-feeding, only to binge later that night. Both boys are in their own form of hell. Noctis is thrown into severe depression, and disregards school and royal responsibilities. Prompto's ED gets worse, unchecked as it is, until he reaches 120 pounds - an underweight BMI for the first time in his life. Now, he feels as if he can call himself anorexic.

Chapter Notes

alright, gotta start off with an apology. I told you guys I'd be posting the next chapter soon... and then nearly three weeks passed. :(

those of you who’ve checked my tumblr already know by now, but i’ve been having a hard time lately. finals + applications for things hit me like a truck - a solid two weeks were spent severely underslept and wrung out. i’m happy to say that school is finally over, though! and i seemed to have done well, so that effort was worth it.

other than finals, i’ve honestly just been feeling too low to write. i wasn't in the best of places. the chapter you’re about to read is about 2/3 the length of a normal chapter, in fact, so i apologize for that. it was the best i could do. now i’m feeling marginally better, though, so hopefully things continue to pick up.

thank you all for understanding. and thanks, as always, to my wonderful beta TheRegalHarvester♡

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Prompto has just reached 120 pounds.

For most of his adult life, he’s defined this number as his ‘ultimate goal weight’. And now he is standing in front of a mirror at that exact weight, finally able to admire the fruits of his labor.

He feels like perfection incarnate.

He lifts his shirt and marvels at the way the skin of his chest pulls around his ribcage, revealing each and every elegant swoop of bone. His collarbones strike out in a similar way, sharp and demanding. His cheekbones have never looked so cut, his jawline has finally shrunk into the perfect V he used to feel for, and his thighs. He can wrap both his hands around them and have the fingers touch.

Everything about his body is finally where he wanted it to be.

And suddenly, it isn’t enough.
The inspiring, thin image in the mirror seems to bleed away. Prompto starts noticing the edges of his form, moving his critical eye over the unsavory parts he’d been subconsciously avoiding.

He realizes what the reality of the situation is: even at 120 pounds, he is still horrendously large.

Prompto stares at himself, picking apart every aspect of his body until he feels like breaking down and crying. His eyes rove over his thick calves, his convex stomach, and - worst of all - his broad shoulders and meaty arms. He feels like a walking abomination, disgusting from every conceivable angle.

You should be under 100 pounds.

Yes - that’s what he needs. He needs to be under 100 pounds. He can be better. He will be better. He just needs to keep going, and eventually he’ll reach perfection.

Prompto stops eating again. Inexplicably, it’s harder to fast than it had been in the past, but the thought of his reflection pushes him onwards.

That, and cheesy platitudes like ‘nothing tastes as good as skinny feels’ or ‘hunger hurts but starving works’. It’s dorky and it makes him feel like a butterfly - a ‘wannarexic’ - but he repeats them like a mantra regardless. Sometimes he takes a pen and scratches them into the skin on his stomach, inner thighs, and upper arms. He traces and retraces each sentence until it stings.

The days seem to both crawl by excruciatingly and blend together all at once. He doesn’t remember the details of them, just the fact that they are long and are made even longer by the hunger aching in his stomach.

Every part of his existence, even while in public and going about his responsibilities, are undercut by his disorder. Every time he passes a reflective surface, he checks to see if he looks any better. Every time he smells food - which he can do from much greater distances, now - he closes his eyes and inhales deeply, as if he can somehow taste it through its scent. Every time his stomach growls in class or while helping a customer, he coughs to cover up the noise, and then promptly shrinks in on himself, as if holding his abdomen tight could be enough to silence its pleas.

Prompto’s hair gets thinner, so he stops trying to style it and lets it flop uselessly over the sides of his face. His fingers develop a permanent blue tinge, which only worries him briefly before he realizes he doesn’t care all that much. His skin is sallow, dry, and yellowed, like a towel that has been wrung out to dry and left in the sun too long.

It’s three in the morning. Prompto is awake.

He hasn’t been sleeping all that much, lately. His body is too achy and his mind is too hyperactive. Insomnia has, ironically, become a defining factor in his recent life.
Every time his abdomen twists in pain, he lets out a low whimper, feeling sorry for himself. He can’t stop replaying all the painful memories of his life on loop.

Most feature his parents letting him down. The times his mom forgot to pick him up in elementary school, and the awful sense of dread he felt as he stood in the school office, Ms. Advokat holding his hand and patiently dialing her number. Or the rare occasions his dad would attempt to take him out to do something fun, only to inevitably get an important call halfway through and cut it short.

These memories are old, and easier to swallow. It’s the more fresh wounds that really cause him pain. Like how his very first close friendship, with Derrick, had led to betrayal and trust issues. Or how his very first relationship had resulted in the exact same thing. He can still see Noctis standing there, watching while all of his well-protected secrets tumbled from Ignis’s lips.

His stomach twists again, and this time he cries out, alone and miserable in his empty apartment.

“Oy, Prompto! How are the Henderson exposures coming? Were the negatives damaged after all?”

“No. It’s fine.” His voice sounds monotone, and he doesn’t bother trying to school his features into something softer than the stony expression he’s wearing.

“Great! How about ole Marsha? She pick up her prints this morning? I tell ya, that woman can talk your ear off for hours, but as soon as she whips up those brownies of hers it’s like none of that even ma-”

“Yes. She did.”

His boss regards him with a long look. “Yeesh, kid, what crawled up your ass and died today?”

Prompto raises an eyebrow. Usually, he would feel guilty about being so flippant and dismissive. Right now, though, he just feels flat, and vaguely annoyed.

“Sorry. Bad mood, I guess.”

There’s a long pause that Prompto would typically find uncomfortable. It doesn’t bother him now that he’s too hollow to care about social niceties.

“Alright, well. No fightin’ that. You - uh - you take care of yourself, okay? If you need anything, let me know.”

His boss disappears into his office and closes the door behind him for the first time since Prompto began working at the little shop. He doesn’t emerge for the remainder of the shift.

He can’t find it in himself to miss the warm, sage company.

He can’t find it in himself to miss anything at all, for that matter.

If he does, his carefully built facade might crumble entirely.
“Well, well, well. Look who decided to join us today. Late, no less.”

Prompto looks up from the tiny circles he’d been doodling on the edge of his notes, and has to stop himself from gasping. Because Noctis is standing just a few feet from him, hovering in the classroom’s doorway coolly.

He tries - and fails - to quell the sudden and rapid pounding of his heart.

“So, Mr. Caelum. What’s your excuse this time?” their teacher drawls, leaning forward to rest his chin on his intertwined fingers.

Just drop it, you bitter old man. Let him sit down. Please.

Prompto shrinks back into his seat, trying to both make himself small and add some tiny measure of distance between himself and Noctis. In retrospect, choosing the seat next to the door might not have been his most foolproof idea.

“Whatever you want to hear,” Noctis retorts, and the edge of Prompto’s mouth reflexively twitches on a hint of a smile.

Their teacher doesn’t find it as amusing. “Mr. Caelum, I do not tolerate insubordination in my classroom. Even if it is from royalty.”

A murmur rolls through the class. Prompto spies a student discreetly taking out her phone in his periphery, and aiming it towards the scene.

Noctis must notice the same thing, hardwired as he is to avoiding scandal, because he sags, shuffles his feet, and pastes on a remorseful expression.

“My sincerest apologies. That was disrespectful of me.” His diplomatic voice is smooth like honey, and Prompto wants to reach out and taste it.

Instead, his stomach cramps, and the voice inside his head firmly reminds him of everything Noctis had done to hurt him. It quashes all of Prompto’s budding emotions before they have the chance to form.

Meanwhile, the stare-down between each respective form of authority reaches an anticlimactic ending.

“Try to be on time,” their teacher sighs, sitting back in his seat and clicking to the next presentation slide. “Punctuality might be beneficial in your future, after all.”

“Noted,” Noctis mutters insincerely, and then finally, finally makes his way into the room.

Prompto doesn’t breathe again until he hears him sit down, as far away as he can possibly be.

A few days later, Prompto weighs in at 116 pounds. Closer, but still so incredibly far from what he wants to weigh.

As he’s analyzing his body, he notices a soft, downy blond hair on his arms that hadn’t been there before. His eye follows it, discovering that it travels all across his body - onto his back, his stomach, his thighs, his calves. Places where he’s never grown hair before now sport it, so small it might not
have gone noticed if he wasn’t looking for it.

He’s heard about this from his ED forums. Lanugo. Tiny hairs that are the body’s last ditch attempt to insulate itself as his fat stores deplete to miniscule amounts.

Cool, he thinks.

That night, Prompto is in line at the grocery store, dinner in hand.

He was a bit foolish for coming around at peak hour, because it seems as if everyone in Insomnia is here, grabbing last-minute ingredients for their lavish suppers. As a result, the line is long, extending deep into the aisles, and Prompto is swaying on his feet more than usual.

Gods, it's so cold in here.

The plastic Diet Coke bottle he’s holding is freezing from sitting in the fridge all day, and that’s making him shiver even harder. No one else seems to mind the temperature, so he bites his lip and draws his jacket in tighter around himself.

He’s looking forward to tonight. He’ll sip his Coke from a straw while watching the newest episode of his favorite show, curled up and cozy on his couch. His thin fingers will peek out from the sleeves of his oversized hoodie, wrapped around the bottle delicately. He will look beautiful and fragile even while doing something as mundane as having dinner.

Prompto blinks. It’s been an entire minute since he began fantasizing, and the line still hasn’t budged.

There’s a sudden darkness at the edge of his vision, though. He blinks again. It doesn’t go away.

He starts swaying even harder, to the point where he has to catch himself before he stumbles to the side.

The black spots grow larger, crawling in from the edges and landing in the center of his field of view.

His breath is coming out short and stilted. His skin is running both hot and cold at the same time. And - most unfamiliar of all - his heart feels strange, like it’s skipping every other beat.

He feels his eyes rolling upwards. A moment later, he’s on the ground. He hears, rather than feels, the thud of his body landing hard against the linoleum.

“Oh my gods-!”

“Hey! Are you alright?”

He feels his heart thumping erratically in his ears, making his temples throb. Everyone around him is yelling, making the ache amplify. He feels invasive fingers, pressing against the junction of his neck and jaw.

“His heart’s beating like crazy.”

“Ramuh-”
“Call 911!”

He tries opening his eyes but the warehouse lights assault him, and they flutter back closed. It’s getting harder to breathe. His chest feels constricted and tight.

“Oh wise and forgiving Shiva, give us this day your healing blessi-”

“Stay with us. Please.”

“Gods, look how skinny he is. You think he’s homeless?”

“Nah, he doesn’t look like it. Probably living in poverty, though, poor kid.”

“Hey! Everyone! Paramedics are on their way-”

“Good! Now stop crowding him! Make some room, people!”

One by one, the lights dancing behind Prompto’s eyelids fade away.

A moment later, the inky abyss overtakes him, and everything goes black.

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Chapter End Notes

UH OH (° °)

okay, time to make you guys hate me even more. this fic needs to go on hiatus for a month and a half, because i’m going on vacation!!

I KNOW, I KNOW. I PAUSED IN THE WORST POSSIBLE SPOT. forgive me♡

so, uh... see you guys then? i feel evil, lmao.
be friends w this evil witch on [on Tumblr](https://example.com)?
To Sleep, Perchance to Dream

Chapter Summary

Previously, on the last few Salad Days...
Prompto fasted for a week in order to be as small as possible before the fitting for his fatigues. After the fitting, he decided to keep fasting, a decision which scared Noctis and prompted him to confide in Ignis. At the same time, Prompto passed out during training, causing Ignis and Gladio to overreact, force-feed him, and attempt to take him to the hospital. Prompto decided he'd rather have no friends, no boyfriend, and no crownguard title if it meant he could retain his independence and right to keep restricting. He broke up with Noctis, throwing the other boy into depression, and continued doing his disordered thing. Prompto managed to maintain this for only a little while, until one night, while standing in line at the grocery store, he passes out in front of the rush-hour crowd.

Chapter Notes

hello everyone! I'm back!! did you miss me? ♡
I had an amazing time exploring europe for the past month or so, but I'm not gonna lie - I'm really happy to be back to my usual routine. which, of course, includes writing this fic and finally resolving that cliffhanger I left you all on! ;)
as always, HUGE thanks to my ever-patient beta, TheRegalHarvester! love you babe!! and now, onto the long awaited angst...!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Dispatch to unit 4120.”
Fumbling hands grasp for a radio, and press hard against its PTT switch.

“Go ahead.”
The speaker, a paramedic named Ida, whips toward her EMT-in-training partner.

“Start it,” she hisses. A moment later, their ambulance purrs to life, quickly exits their parking lot, and joins the flow of traffic.

The crackly voice of the dispatcher comes back in, filling in the tiny space. “Report to Sabes Grocery on Mont street. A young man lost consciousness while standing in line at the fourth register. This towards the right-hand side of the store as you enter. He is around 18-20 and blond. He has no visible physical injuries.”
The GPS flickers as the operator inputs their new destination, and Ida reaches out to flip a switch on
Noctis is in bed.

He’s usually in bed around this time, though he knows Ignis would prefer him to be anywhere else. With vague amusement, he recalls the advisor pacing around his room, pulling at his hair, and blurting, “I don’t even care if you decide to play video games! Just try and get up, Noctis, please.”

And, alright - Ignis does have a point. If Noctis doesn’t even try to fight his depression, he’ll only slip deeper into it. But the thought of getting up and doing anything seems pointless, especially when the weight of his sadness is crushing him so forcefully.

The same questions play on loop in his mind.

Why did he do that to himself? Why wasn’t I enough? Was what I did even that wrong? Was I really all that important to him? Did he… did he ever even love me?

He releases a long breath, and swipes at a tear forming in the corner of his eye. He doesn’t need to keep crying today. His chest already aches from earlier.

Gentle tapping drifts in, coming from the direction of his door. “Noct?” Ignis’s muffled voice inquires. “I’ve made mother and child bowls. Would you like some?”

And just because he knows it would make the advisor happy, Noctis calls back a weak, but steady, “Sure.”

*Gods, he’s so frail.*

Ida can’t help but repeat that to herself as she checks the skeletal boy’s vitals, hovering above his stretcher in the back of the shaking, speeding ambulance.

She notices a concave stomach as she checks his breathing, sunken-in cheeks as she takes his temperature, and one of the boniest upper-arms she’s come across as she reads his too-high blood pressure. Worst of all - her fingers overlap around his wrist as she measures his pulse. And as much as Ida doesn’t want to think about what story his body might be telling, she knows she can’t rule out the evidence completely.
Gods. You better just have a crazy fast metabolism, kid.

Thankfully he’d already started waking up before they got to the scene, so there’s little risk in the way of permanent brain damage. He’s in bad shape, though - he can’t focus on Ida long enough to tell her his name, he might have a concussion, and his heart rhythm has been abnormal since they found him.

Ida bites her lip as the boy’s head lolls to the side, eyes slipping closed. “Hey,” she commands gently, shaking his shoulder. “Look at me.”

The blond focuses his eyes on her for a fraction of a second before they flutter and roll upwards. A beat later, his features go slack.

Fuck.

Ida deftly moves to the boys legs, bending them upwards and positioning them above his heart. She tries not to focus on how easy it is to manhandle his limbs, light as they are. A tense minute later, the boy’s eyes flit back open.

“Good,” she says, more to herself than anything. “Good. Stay with me, kid.”

Ignis has never felt so helpless.

His job is look out for Noctis, to be able to provide some guidance for him in any situation. In the past, he’s done a decent job of it. Depressive episodes were inevitable, but he’d always have some sort of handle on it.

But this? It’s completely out of his grasp. Noctis is inundated not only with heartbreak, but with the pain of seeing someone he loves continue to destroy himself, and Ignis has no idea how to help. It is officially out of his depth.

In his weakest moments, Ignis wonders if he even approached Prompto’s situation correctly. He’s usually self-assured in his actions, so feeling as if he might’ve made a mistake is foreign, and a bit crippling to his confidence as an advisor.

But what else could he have done? Prompto had fainted, and it’s Ignis’s first responsibility to prevent the prince’s associates from, well… dying. Surely his actions weren’t too rash, given the severity of the moment. If only Prompto had come to him in a different context - they could’ve worked through his illness in a much less abrasive way.

But he hadn’t approached Ignis, and that’s something else that eats at the advisor. Hadn’t he communicated that he’d be there for Prompto? Hadn’t he proven himself useful and supportive in the past?

Ignis sighs, runs a hand through his hair, and idly stirs the simmering pot he’s been slaving over for the past hour or so. Mother and child bowls are one of his more complex recipes in terms of getting
the flavors correct, but the tediousness of the task is a welcome distraction in light of everything. And Noctis had agreed to eat it, so it wasn’t all for naught tonight.

As if being summoned by his rambling thoughts, said Noctis appears in the kitchen, finally roused from his bed. “Sup.”

Ignis turns and takes a moment to survey his charge, pursing his lips. He’s got bags under his eyes, his hair is a mess, and he’s definitely been falling behind on his skincare, but it isn’t all bad. Compared to how he was before, Noctis is actually improving - if only somewhat.

“Happy to see you up and about,” Ignis smiles, putting up a warm front he doesn’t actually feel. “Ready to eat?”

“Sure,” Noctis responds, voice mellow and apathetic as he takes a seat at the kitchen island.

Ignis doles out two bowls, and sits down to join him. “Feeling better today?”

Noctis stirs his food. “Uhhh. Not… really?”

“Anything I can d-”


Ignis chews the inside of his lip. “Very well.”

The two lapse into silence, punctuated only by the clinking of forks against porcelain.

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“Pulling in!”

Ida’s never felt so relieved to hear her partner’s voice coming in from the driver’s seat. She looks down at the unresponsive and feeble boy she’s come to grow so protective of over the past seven minutes.

“Almost there,” she relays, though she knows it falls on deaf ears.

Moments later, the vehicle comes to abrupt stop and the doors swing open, bathing the two in the golden light of setting sun.

“Condition?” the receiving physician demands as Ida scrambles to help lower the stretcher.

“No great,” she hurries. “His heart rate is elevated and skipping. His blood pressure is abnormally high. Temperature and respiration are okay.”

The doctor nods. “Any other information?”

“He took a nasty fall. He’s slipping in and out of consciousness and probably has a concussion. He isn’t very responsive.”
“Thank you,” the doctor nods. “We’ll take it from here.”

Ida watches as the stretcher is rushed into the emergency department, feeling her heart sink as the boy disappears through the doors.

*Take care of him.*

Something Noctis does, at least a handful of times a day, is load up Facebook messenger. Not because he’s got people to talk to, but because he likes to check when Prompto was “last seen” on the app. It’s his only way of keeping tabs on the boy, and, unhealthy as it is, he can’t stop doing it. It’s comforting for him.

But when Noctis is finally curled up in bed again, after hours of struggling through homework, it comes as no comfort to open the app and tap Prompto’s profile.

*Last seen: 4 hours ago.*

Noct’s eyebrows knit together. It isn’t typical of Prompto to spend so long away from Facebook; the blond loves keeping up with all those games, after all - especially the chocobo themed ones.

*Dummy.* The thought makes Noctis feel fond, which only serves to cause a twinge of pain a moment later. Even his happy memories hurt.

He sighs, locks his phone screen, and turns onto his back, attempting to ignore the unease settling in his gut. He tries to tell himself that Prompto’s online activity doesn’t mean anything.

*What could I do anyway? Call him? Yeah, right.*

Ida picks at a tupperware of pasta, feeling distant in the stark lights of the hospital cafeteria.

“Okay, what’s on your mind?”

She looks up, meeting the eyes of her coworker and close friend. “That obvious, huh?”

“Yes,” her friend smiles. “Now spill.”

“Okay. Well. I processed this kid earlier…” Ida begins, averting her eyes.

“Ouch. Young?”
“Nah, teenage. Probably 17 or 18.” She twirls a noodle around her fork, stalling. “He fainted at the grocery store. Hardly the worst thing I’ve seen, and not that big a deal, all things considered.”

Her friend sees right through it. “But…?”

“But,” Ida exhales. “He was skinny. Like, anorexic skinny. And his heart was skipping all over the place. I don’t know, I just… I feel worried. Maternal instincts, I guess.”

Her friend releases a long breath. “Shit, yeah. That’s tough. Hope he ends up okay.”

“Me too.”

“But you gotta stop dwelling on it,” she continues, voice slightly chastising. “It’ll drive you crazy.”

Ida bites her lip. “I know,” she half-whispers.

She does know. It’s been a long time since she let patients affect her emotionally, and she’s been a much more stable and happier person for it. A healthy amount of emotional detachment makes the job easier, after all.

She can’t stop thinking about him anyway.

It’s late. Too late, at least, to be training.

But Gladio finds himself in the empty citadel gym regardless, meticulously squatting out dozens of reps in a fruitless attempt to get his mind off things. It’s cold, empty, and alienating in the quiet space, but he finds he doesn’t notice or particularly care.

Noct’s depression has affected him a lot. Gladio hasn’t seen the kid smile in weeks, and its made him feel as if he’s failed as a shield and a friend. After all, his entire job is to protect Noctis from both physical and emotional damage.

And yet, he still let that little shit weasel his way in-

Gladio shakes his head, readjusts the weight on his shoulder, and lets out a long sigh, stopping himself before his internal rant gets too nasty. He tries to remind himself that he shouldn’t just blame Prompto, but Shiva is it hard to understand the blond’s perspective.

But then again, Gladio knows he tends to be a little short-sighted when it comes to understanding mental illness. He’d heard more than enough lectures from Ignis on the importance of being empathetic and trusting, back before he fully understood Noct’s depression. He knows this issue Prompto has is similar to that, despite how little he understands why the kid is doing what he does.

At any rate, Gladio doesn’t think he’s being too unreasonable in his anger. Prompto practically destroyed Noctis - does having an eating disorder really absolve him of all that? But then again - is it fair to hold Prompto responsible for Noct’s emotional reactions?
A part of Gladio thinks yes, because Prompto had been heavily invested in the prince’s life, and had no place acting so self-centered and calloused. Another part of him doesn’t really know what to think.

So he just does what he always does - he grits his teeth, chalks his hands, and continues pushing the limits of his body.

Ida is standing in an empty hallway halfway between the ER and front desk, slowly clocking herself out on the monitor affixed to the wall there.

Throughout the rest of her shift, she hadn’t been able to stop thinking about that boy. Wondering if he’s okay, if he’s actually anorexic, if his family is worried about him and knows about his current condition.

She finishes clocking out and sighs, then rests her head against the wall. Her job could be so hard sometimes, especially without any form of closure.

A moment passes, and then another. Ida stares at the white tiled floor, biting her lip and deliberating.

Oh, fuck it.

She suddenly turns and makes her way back towards the emergency department, resolve emanating with each step. She doesn’t usually do this, because it almost never ends well, but she’d kick herself if she let this go forever.

She wanders through the ward and quickly locates a coworker she knows. After a short conversation, she snakes through the open rooms, determination in her stride.


Relief floods her heart when she sees that familiar shock of blond hair shooting out from underneath the wires and machinery. A stately nurse is hovering around said machinery, seemingly in the middle of connecting an IV drip.

“Petra?”

The nurse looks up, recognition flashing over her face. “Ida! How’ve you been?”

“Good, good,” Ida murmurs, approaching the bed. “I, uh… processed this kid, actually. Wanted to check up on him.”

“Oh,” Petra nods, looking down at the boy. “Yeah. He gave us all a scare, this one. But his heart rate is steady now, so that’s a relief. And he just managed to give us his name, so we’ll be able to get in contact with his family as soon as the rest of his body stabilizes. It’s Prompto, by the way,” Petra winks. “I knew you were curious.”

“You know me well,” Ida smiles, wan. “Prompto, huh.”
She turns the name around in her head as she stares down at him, taking in his sallow and gaunt appearance for the second time that day. He looks so youthful and innocent in his sleep, making his emaciated features all the more heartbreaking in contrast.

“Concussion?” Ida asks, watching his eyelids flutter in his sleep.

“Thankfully, no. Shiva took some mercy on him, I suppose,” Petra laughs, though it comes out a bit humorless. “That would’ve been hard to deal with on top of everything else he’s got going on, eh? I’m about to put a feeding tube in him right now, actually.”


Petra purses her lips. “The head physician said his attack was probably the result of anorexia complications. Although,” she continues. “I don’t think you need a doctorate to see that. Look at him.”

Ida feels herself wither at the affirmation, though she saw this coming since she first laid eyes on him. After all, she’d dealt with something similar in her own deep and dark past. She knows the symptoms well.

“Yeah,” she whispers. “Guess I just hoped it wasn’t as bad as it looked. Naive of me, wasn’t it?”

A warm hand comes to rest on her back. “Hey. He’ll be okay,” Petra soothes.

“For now, he will,” Ida nods. “Just hope he makes the right decisions when he gets discharged.”

“You and me both,” Petra sighs. “You and me both.”

---

Last seen: 15 hours ago.

Noctis lets out a shaky exhale and plops back against his mattress, letting go of his phone to rub the sleep from his eyes.

It’s eight in the morning, and Noctis is usually never up this early. But he could hardly sleep - he’d drifted off sometime around three, eyes burning from watching the number on Prompto’s “last seen” crawl higher and higher. And now he’s been rudely awoken, just five hours later, by a graphic nightmare that he’d prefer to forget.

So he lies in bed, sweaty, tired, breathing hard, and once again disappointed by Facebook Messenger.

*What an exciting start to the weekend. Not at all pathetic. Nope.*

Noctis rolls his eyes and runs a hand through his messy hair, trying to focus on breathing deeply and evenly. After a minute, he curls around his pillow and tries to slip back to sleep. He might as well take advantage of his one day off, after all.
He’s okay. He’s okay. You’re just overreacting. He’s fine. Maybe he was out having fun. Maybe you’re the only one affected by this. As long as he’s okay...

Unsurprisingly, Noctis can’t sleep.

Rather, he goes into a strange feverish limbo that consists of dozing for twenty minutes before inevitably having a nightmare, waking up, and having to repeat the process from the beginning. Each time he wakes up, it’s as if he can physically feel the bags under his eyes growing heavier and heavier.

He manages to properly drift off at some point, only to be abruptly woken by a harsh, rhythmic pounding noise.

Noctis twitches and starts, confused and not entirely sure what’s real and what isn’t. After an agonizing moment, he finally processes that the pounding is coming from the other side of his locked room door, which is definitely seated in reality.

He quickly falls out of bed and scrambles to throw it open, coming face to face with a panicked-looking Ignis.

“Noctis, get dressed. Now.”

And it must be serious, because Ignis isn’t even apologizing for letting himself in while Noctis was unaware.

Noctis nods and doesn’t waste a moment, running back into his room and throwing on dirty clothes haphazardly. He rushes through rudimentary skincare and haircare, and quickly checks his phone as he brushes his teeth.

10:28 AM.

With shaky fingers, he unlocks the device, tapping the app that has pretty much defined the last few weeks of his life.

*Last seen: 17 hours ago.*

Noct’s heart plummets. He doesn’t know how, but he can feel something is very, very wrong with Prompto.

He locks the phone, spits, rinses, and dashes into the living room. “Ready! What’s going on?”

Ignis looks up from his own phone and quickly grabs the prince’s arm, hurriedly leading him out the door and ignoring his questions. They speed down the complex stairs and into the parking garage, where Gladio’s car is already running.

In no time, the three of them are peeling away from the building, rushing down the quiet streets of mid-morning Insomnia.

“What’s going on?” Noctis demands for what feels like the millionth time, desperation tinging his voice.

And Ignis finally turns around, looks him in the eye, and draws a deep breath.
“Prompto’s been hospitalized.”

Chapter End Notes

dun... dun... DUN!! what will happen next for our dear sweet prompto? and our poor hurt noctis? tune in next wednesday and find out ;)

ALSO!! we need some Prompto body updates up in here! apologizes for not having just one photo to show you - it's hard to find a full body shot at this weight.

**warning:** these images might be upsetting for some people. make good decisions for yourself, please.

[upper body]
[legs]
[lying down]

there you have it. poor prommy. :'( 

aww, anyway. i really missed writing this and interacting with you all. i’m so giddy right now!! it's so fun to be back! ♡ ♡ ♡ come hang out some more on Tumblr?
Previously, on Salad Days...
Various looks into the emergency event that is Prompto's fainting spell. The nurse who processed him and felt maternal, Noctis checking FB and growing more and more concerned, and what Ignis and Gladio think of the whole situation. At the very end, Noctis discovers what happened to Prompto, and is rushed to the hospital.

Chapter Notes

okay, so... i’ve got a lot of apologies to make.

first off, i’m so sorry this is so horrendously late, especially considering that i promised you guys a sooner update. from now on... i need to stop making that guarantee. this fic will update as soon as i can get to it, rather than on a schedule. (i think it’d be easier on all of us. sorry guys. i really liked having a consistent, weekly thing, but lately i’ve been stretched out far too thin for that. i mean, right now it’s 2:30 am for me - hopefully that says enough, lmao.

second, i’m very sorry i haven't responded to all of your lovely comments yet. i’ve read them all about 300 times, but haven't had a window of time to just sit and tell you all how much i adore you. i promise i’ll give them the response they deserve soon, thank you for being so patient with me.

third, i’m sorry my beta TheRegalHarvester is the best person ever!! o wait no i’m NOT ♡

okay enjoy this angsty shit i know ya'll are ready for a rollercoaster of emotion >:)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Prompto isn’t sure of two things.

First - where he is, because his eyes are still closed. Second - why he’s in so much pain.

Tentatively, he braces himself, and then lets his eyelids slowly flutter open. As expected, the bright fluorescent lights assault him, making his head throb even harder than it had been a moment ago. He takes in his surroundings superficially, seeing but not processing. He’s too confused to register anything beyond the pain and discomfort.

Groggily, Prompto brings a hand up to rub at his eyes. When he touches his face, however, all he feels is pillowy fabric.

What?
Prompto blinks hard, awakening fully now. He looks down at his hands and only sees white circular mitts. They’re firmly secured at the wrist, preventing him from taking them off and having access to his fingers.

His heart jumps when he realizes whoever put these on definitely saw his barcode. At least the straps are covering it now, but still.

*Where am I? Who did this?*

Hurriedly, he tries to sit up, and is instantly halted by sudden shooting pains in his chest and face. He lets out a gasp, falling back against the bed gracelessly.

Prompto’s heart pounds madly against his sternum. He’s confused, aching, and feeling as if he’s definitely missing some important memories right now.

He moves his head from side to side, grimacing at the sensation of a rubber tube stretching with the action. It feels as if it’s disappearing into his nose - that’s where the bulk of the pain is concentrated, anyway. His eyes move down his body, and locates another tube puncturing the space on the inside of his elbow. This is connected to a bag with clear liquid, hung on metal stand next to his bed.

*An IV?*

Prompto feels himself panicking.

He’s obviously in a hospital, but why? What happened? He can’t remember anything - he’s not even sure what he’d been doing last.

His eyes dart around haphazardly, taking in exactly how sterile and alienating the place is while his head protests the rapid movement. The furnishings make him feel cold and alone, heightening his anxiety until he can feel his heart thudding in his ears.

As if reading his mind, a kind-looking nurse enters through the propped open door. She’s looking at a clipboard and humming to herself, and doesn’t notice Prompto until she glances up at him.

“Ah, you’re awake!” she beams. “How are you feeling?”

Prompto blinks at her. He tries to say, “What’s going on?” but his voice comes out too scratchy and hoarse, turning the inquiry into a pathetic whine.

“Don’t strain yourself,” the nurse chastises. “You fainted last night. Took quite the spill, poor thing.”

*Fainted?* Prompto wracks his memory. Last night, last night...

Right. He was at the store, getting dinner. He remembers feeling weird, and… well, that’s probably when everything went to shit.

“You heart was skipping all over the place,” the nurse continues. “You’re lucky you didn’t have a full-blown heart attack. Anyway. We were able to stabilize you, though you still need a little more time to make a full recovery. Sorry, dear.”

Prompto clears his throat this time, before letting out a small, “Oh.”

He looks down at his mitten-clad hands, feeling strangely ashamed of himself. It’s as if he’s an elementary school kid again, caught in the middle of doing something wrong.

He used to *dream* of getting hospitalized - the ultimate form of validation, as far as the ED
community was concerned. He would imagine how dainty and angelic he’d look while lying in a hospital bed and still refusing to eat.

But now that it’s actually happened? He feels none of that. He feels like a joke, a burden, a naive kid caught up in a serious game. There is nothing beautiful about this situation.

Prompto coughs a bit, feeling a stark coldness at the back of his throat. The tube sits painfully behind his nose and in his esophagus, making him feel as if he’s lightly being choked.

“Um - is this… thing supposed to hurt?” he groans.

“The feeding tube?” the nurse responds. “Yes, unfortunately it will feel a little uncomfortable. If it feels too painful, let us know, and we’ll try reinserting it.”

The thought of consciously getting a tube forced down his throat makes Prompto shiver. “N-no, it’s not that bad. But why do I have it? Is hospital food really that gross?”

The joke doesn’t land. Instead, the nurse fixes him with a knowing look, and Prompto suddenly feels like his heart is about to jump out of his chest.

“Honey,” she starts, soft but firm. “I think we both know this is the only way to guarantee your body gets the nutrition it needs.”

Prompto’s face burns, and he’s sure he’s turned a wonderfully mortifying shade of red at this point. Still, the thought of being force-fed thousands of calories is enough to spur him on. “I don’t know what you’re tal-”

“Come on, kid.”

He looks up - watery meeting eyes meeting patient ones.

“Now, I may not know your story,” the nurse says. “But your physician determined your deteriorating health was most likely the cause of anorexia nervosa. And when we get that diagnosis, this is the protocol we have to take.”

Prompto bites his lip and averts his gaze, trying not to cry.

“So until you’re discharged from our care, this is how we’ll be guaranteeing you get the calories you need to heal.”

She looks sympathetic, which somehow makes Prompto feel worse. He doesn’t want pity.

“It’s also why you’re rocking the boxer gloves,” she continues, trying for a smile. “Can’t have you pulling the tubes out, can we?”

Prompto feels his heart sink. So he’s being restrained - effectively, punished - for the way he’s treated himself. “I understand,” he whispers, defeated.

“I know it sucks, kiddo,” she sighs. “I don’t like it either, trust me. It’s a sorry sight.”

Prompto can’t help it any longer. A tear rolls down his cheek, then another, and another, and before he knows it, he’s shaking and sniffing and quietly sobbing.

“S-sorry,” he whimpers. He forgets he has the mittens on for just enough time to try and wipe his tears with them - a futile effort that only makes him cry harder.
“Oh, honey.” The nurse comes up to him, pulls a tissue out of her smock, and gently pats his face. “This is probably not a good time to talk about your primary contact, but I’m afraid I can’t move on until I’ve informed you.”

“M-my what? Huh?”

“You primary contact, on your emergency information card. We didn’t find an insurance card on your person, so we needed to get in touch with someone who’d have that information.” She sighs, remorse evident in her features. “Emile Argentum. I just got off the phone with her.”

“My mom,” Prompto exhales, squeezing his eyes shut as if preparing for a physical blow. “And?”

Her features drop, sorrow evident in her face. “Unfortunately, she is too involved in an unfolding business deal over in Altissia, and can’t make it to Lucis anytime soon. She also informed me that she’d… well.”

“What?”

Now the nurse looks like she’s about to get emotional. “She had you removed you from her health insurance plan a while ago. Said you were responsible for yourself, and that maintaining a Lucian plan while living in abroad was getting too expensive.”

Prompto feels his entire body go cold.

He didn’t have insurance, which meant…

Which meant he’d be responsible for fronting thousands of gil for everything - the ambulance, the treatment, the oversized traction socks on his feet. He’d be solely responsible for the consequences of his mental illness, at the tender age of eighteen.

“I don’t… I don’t have insurance? I-”

“This is why I didn’t want to tell you.” The nurse worries her lip. “Try not to think about it for now, you’ll make yourself panic.”

But Prompto can’t not think about it. He can barely afford the necessities as it is. And he wouldn’t be surprised if he found himself homeless as soon as he graduated high school, expectations of renting his own apartment placed on his shoulders from the coldest, most vindictive people he’s ever known.

So here he is, alone, scared, and suddenly in massive debt while lying in a cold and unfamiliar hospital bed. He doesn’t have anything - not even his own hands.

*This is what rock bottom feels like, isn’t it?*

“What’s important is that you’re stable now, okay?” the nurse is saying, interrupting his darkening thoughts. “Have hope. We’re going to try your secondary contact as soon as we can, and hopefully the details will work itself out. These things have a way of…”

Prompto tunes her out, too anxious to keep listening, because he knows his secondary contact is his dad. There’s no point in hoping.

Eventually she leaves, and he’s finally alone.

And Prompto just manages to wait until she rounds the doorway before bursting into pained tears, choking out sobs until he tires himself out and eventually falls asleep.
The hospital lobby looks like a relic from twenty years ago. Corduroy sofa-chairs fill the open space between the door and front desk, disrupted only by CRT TVs playing reruns of the morning news. Health and lifestyle magazines litter most of the other open surfaces. Green palm fronds, made entirely of plastic, shoot out from clay pots.

Strangely, the fine layer of dust coating the artificial leaves is what heightens Noct’s anxiety the most.

“Prompto Argentum,” Ignis is saying, at the desk. “Last name A-R-G-E…”

A youthful, brown-haired girl is nodding along, eyes scanning the boxy computer in front of her. Noctis feels like he’s in a dream as he stands there, hardly able to process anything happening in front of his eyes.

“You good?” Gladio mumbles out of the corner of his mouth, discreet as ever in the public setting.

Noctis looks at him quickly, then has to catch himself from swaying. “Yeah.”

He tunes back into the conversation at the front desk. “You’re going to take the hallway down the left here,” the girl is explaining. “There’s an elevator at the end of it. Take that to the third floor and you’ll get to the DOU.”

“Thank you,” Ignis nods. He turns to distribute visitor’s stickers to Noctis and Gladio, and then all three make to leave.

“Wait,” the girl hurries, voice nervous. “You’re, uh - you’re the prince, aren’t you?”

Noctis blinks back into reality. “Umm, yeah. Yeah, that’s me.”

“Woah,” she responds, and clears her throat. “Well, uh. I hope everything’s okay, your highness. I’ll pray for you.”

Gladio subtly pushes him forward, most likely sensing an oncoming breakdown. As they walk off, Noctis hears Ignis murmuring to the girl about the legal consequences of sharing what she saw with any news outlets or social media.

Right. Back to cold exteriors, royal business, and needlessly scaring high school volunteers. This whole thing might as well be another chore on the retainer’s to-do list.

By the time the elevator dings open, Ignis has caught up with them, and the three shuffle inside. The moment the doors slot closed, it feels as if the air inside has grown ten times heavier.

“You guys could at least pretend to care about this,” Noctis mumbles after a beat, leaning against the plush back wall.
Ignis and Gladio exchange a look.

“We care,” Ignis begins. “We’ve just been trained to process crisis situations in a certain way.”

“Ah, cut the bullshit,” Gladio sighs. “Look kid, we do care. Really. But we’ve also seen how much Prompto has affected you. We’re worried about your health, too, y’know? Just thinkin’ about how you’re gonna handle this.”

Noctis feels anger flare up inside him. “That’s not-!”

The elevator stops, settles, and opens, and Noct’s jaw snaps shut before he’s caught yelling in public. Ignis offers him a gentle squeeze on his shoulder before abruptly turning and striding out, professional exterior back in place.

Something inside of Noctis deflates as he realizes he’s getting angry at his retainers for doing the same thing he always does, too - protecting the image of the crown. He has no idea how they’re actually feeling, and it isn’t fair of him to lash out at them for keeping themselves composed.

He’s so caught up in feeling sheepish that the elevator almost closes before he can walk out. Thankfully, Gladio looks back in time and kicks his leg out, opening the doors again and offering a soft, “Let’s go, Noct.”

“Thanks,” Noctis near-whispers. “I’m sorry I-”

“Don’t mention it,” Gladio winks. “Now come on.”

The Definitive Observation Unit lobby is markedly smaller and, thankfully, more modernized. Ignis once again takes the reigns, standing at the front desk with all the confidence of an accomplished advisor.

“Good morning,” he begins. “We were contacted by Cor Leonis, the head of the Lucian royal military, on behalf of crownsguard Prompto Argentum.”

Oh, Noctis thinks, with a hint of suspicion. *Guess no one processed his termination paperwork yet.*

He can’t stop fidgeting, anxious as he is to see Prompto. A nurse exits the brown double doors of the unit, and Noctis immediately tries to peer into the hallway, as if the answer to his burning questions are hidden in the pale linoleum floors and fluorescent lights beyond them.

“Ah!” the man at the desk answers, recognition lighting his features. “You must be Ignis Scientia. And you have Mr. Argentum’s insurance information?”

*Hurry up, hurry up...*

“Yes,” Ignis answers, producing a white card from his wallet. “We’d like to visit him, too.”

“Of course,” the secretary responds as he types up the information on the card. “One moment...”

“Is he okay?” Noctis blurts, unable to hold it in any longer. He registers, and ignores, Ignis’s warning glare in his periphery.

The man’s eyes flicker to the computer screen in front of him, slight amusement decorating his features. “He’s in stable condition, your highness.”

Noctis can’t find it in himself to be embarrassed - not when he finally feels like he can *breathe* again. “Thank you,” he sighs, relief evident in his voice.
“My pleasure.” The man types for another eternity, then hands the card back to Ignis. “He’s in room 407. To your right, here.”

Ignis nods as Noctis pushes ahead, hardly able to stop himself from warp-striking down the hallway. His eyes rapidly scan each room number, finally landing on the neatly-displayed numbers of Prompto’s room.

It’s almost funny - with all his rushing to get there, Noctis finds himself hesitating in front of the open door. As much as he wants to see Prompto, the treachery of his actions on that fateful day, and the weeks of ensuing depression, weigh heavy on his shoulders.

Now or never. Noctis takes a deep breath, and quietly enters the room.

And his heart proceeds to jump out of his chest.

Because there he is - his Prompto - looking like a ghost of himself. For a terrifying moment, Noctis even thinks he’s dead.

But he steadfastly reminds himself of the secretary’s words, and approaches the bed.

And - yes, thank Shiva - he’s breathing. Frail, emaciated, and sallow, but breathing. Noct’s eyes trail over the various tubes disappearing into Prompto’s nose and arm, and the confusing mass of puffy white fabric encapsulating both of his hands.

Noctis feels as if he could sink into the core of the planet. Everything about the scene drags at him, crushing his spirit and offering a somber reminder of Prompto’s reality. At least the blond looks somewhat peaceful in his slumber (even if the heavy dark circles under his eyes scream that he doesn’t get enough of it).

Noctis sighs, and softly brushes the back of his fingers over the boy’s cheekbones. He hears an exaggerated cough from somewhere behind him, causing him to flush with embarrassment as he turns toward the noise.

“We’re, uh...” Gladio begins, stance emanating more machismo than usual. “We’re gonna get breakfast, aren’t we Iggy?”

“Yes.” Ignis pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose. “We’ll be back in an hour or so.”

Noctis hears them pulling out the privacy curtain, stepping into the hallway, and letting the door click close behind them.

“Thanks, guys,” he whispers, eyes locked on his beloved.

When Prompto wakes for the second time, he doesn’t remember anything about where he is. His eyes peer at the tiles of the ceiling with confusion for a few moments, and then it all comes back to him - the accident, the insurance issue, and the crushing sense of hopelessness.
“Ugh,” he grunts, trying to sit up. He might as well make the most of his very expensive stay. Maybe they’ve got magazines in-

“Prompto!” a voice interrupts suddenly, loud and startling in his ear.

His head whips toward the source, causing a dizzy spell that has him momentarily reeling. When his eyes finally refocus, and settle on Noctis Lucis Caelum, his entire world stops spinning.

*Oh my gods.*

Prompto hasn’t seen Noctis this close-up in what seems like ages, and the effect it has on him is visceral. He’s so glad that the TV cliche isn’t true, because he’d be mortified if a monitor was next to his bed, loudly declaring how fast is heart is beating right now.

“Noct?” he scratches out. “What-”

He doesn’t get any farther before a pair of wonderfully familiar lips crash against his own, communicating so much love and reassurance that Prompto feels he might actually experience heart palpitations.

He kisses back more eagerly than he probably should, overwhelmed as he is with emotion. He can’t even remember *why* he’s supposed to be angry in that moment - all he knows is how utterly overjoyed he feels.

“Gods, don’t ever do that to me again,” Noctis is murmuring against his lips. He pulls away, leveling Prompto with a serious look. “Really, Prom. I... I can’t live without you.”

“Noct... you’re really here.” Prompto whispers, voice breaking, and then suddenly they’re kissing again - except this time there’s tears.

“I love you,” Noctis whispers. “I’m so sorry, Prompto. I never should’ve done that to you.”

And all of Prompto’s walls finally break, like a dam bursting open. “I love you too, I- I-” he hiccups, voice laden with emotion.


“Me t-”

A knocking sound comes from the direction of the door, interrupting them. “Nurse! Can I come in?”

The two pause for a heavy moment, then exchange one last kiss. Noctis draws away to wipe at his eyes, and Prompto awkwardly rubs his dampened cheeks against his shoulder.

“Yeah,” Prompto calls weakly, while Noctis draws back the curtain and moves to sit on a nearby chair.

A beat later, the kind-looking woman is striding into the room, clipboard in hand. If she registers any residual emotion on the boy’s faces, she doesn’t show it. Like a practiced expert, she gets straight to business.

“So obviously, we were able to notify your secondary contact of your condition. Nice to meet you, your highness,” she begins, nodding towards the prince. She turns back towards Prompto, and her smile grows impish. “Quite an upgrade, eh? Well done.”

Prompto lets out a breathy laugh. “Totally.”
“I’m so glad you’re all covered now,” she continues. “I’ll be honest, that was stressing me out a little.”

Prompto knits his eyebrows. “What do you mean?”

The nurse gives him a confused look. “You know, with the… situation?”

Prompto blinks at her.

“Oh,” the nurse says, grin stretching impossibly wider. “Well. You’ve got insurance, hon. Benefits to being a crownguard, isn’t there? Well done on that too, by the way.”

Prompto gapes. Relief floods him like a current, and he carefully refrains himself from blurting out the fact that he’d quit weeks ago.

Instead, he silently thanks whichever astral is looking out for him, and offers a watery smile to the nurse. “That’s… wow. Gods, you have no idea how good that is to hear.”

“I think I have an idea,” the nurse laughs lightly. She turns back towards her clipboard. “Alright, I just need to check up on a few things and then we can discuss next steps. Is that okay?”

Prompto nods, and the nurse starts flitting around him, adjusting cords, adding to his IV, measuring his temperature - all of which comes as a slight embarrassment, given he has to be taken care of in front of Noctis.

At one point, she lifts each wrist to ensure the tight straps holding each mitten are in place, and Prompto nearly has a heart attack. Thankfully, his barcode stays firmly under the cloth.

“Okay! Looks like you’re doing well,” she praises, stepping back. “Much better than yesterday, let me tell you.”

Somehow, that blunt observation makes Prompto crack a smile, and all the residual tension melts out of the room. “I knew I’d be hitting a come-up soon.”

From the corner, Noctis lets out a snort, and something in Prompto’s heart feels fluttery.

“So,” the nurse continues. “At this rate, we can get you out of here in the next couple days. Just don’t strain yourself - you should make a full recovery.”

“Cool. When can I take this out?” Prompto questions, vaguely gesturing at the tube disappearing into his nose. “It hurts. And I miss my hands.” He tries for a small laugh, not wanting to make obvious how important this request is to him.

Something in the nurse’s expression shifts. “I’m sorry. The doctor will have to discuss that with you,” she says, voice much gentler than before. “He should be in soon.”


“Let me know if you need anything else,” the nurse smiles. A moment later, she’s left the room, leaving an elephant in her place.

Neither boy says anything for a long minute, and Prompto firmly keeps his eyes fixed downwards. Finally, Noctis clears his throat, stands, and slowly approaches the bed again.

“It hurts?” he murmurs softly, smoothing Prompto’s bangs out of his eyes.
Prompto feels utterly worthless as he looks up at Noctis from his hospital bed. He hates everything about this situation. Too much of the focus is on him, and his dumb mistake of a life.

But all he says is, “Yeah,” on a shaky breath - he’s not sure if that comes from the embarrassment, or the electric shocks he feels every time Noctis touches him. “A little.”

“I’m sorry,” Noctis whispers. “I wish this wasn’t happening to you.”

Prompto bites his lip. “Me too.”

A silent moment passes, heavy with potential.

“Should we… talk? Or something?” Prompto hazards.


Relief washes over Prompto. “Okay.”

Prompto scowls at the mittens. “Supposedly it stops me from pulling out the feeding tube.”

“Yeah.” Prompto whimpers, hating how pathetic his voice sounds.

“H-hold me anyway?” Prompto sighs, hating how pathetic his voice sounds.

“Gods, of course,” Noctis breathes. “Scooch over.”

It takes a lot of delicate maneuvering, but eventually Noctis slots himself against Prompto’s side, well out of the way of any tubing. He wraps his arms around bony shoulders, enveloping Prompto in the comforting embrace he’d missed for so long.

It’s all officially too much for the overwhelmed boy.

“Thank you,” Prompto chokes, fully crying now. “I’m so happy you’re here. But I’m sorry I made this happen in the - in the -” he swallows thickly. “First pla-”

“Hey,” Noctis soothes, rubbing his shoulder. “Don’t worry about that, yeah? I love you. Of course I’m here.”

Prompto turns his head and sobs into the other boy’s neck, feeling utterly exhausted by everything that’s happened to him. “I love you too.”

“This shit sucks,” Gladio declares, allowing his fork to drop with an anticlimactic thud.
Ignis squints at his own dish - pasta, of some sort. “I’m inclined to agree.”

“I knew hospital food was supposed to be bad, but this is a whole new level,” Gladio grimaces. “Hey, Iggy. Go back there and make something, would ya?”

Ignis snorts. “Would if I could, Gladio.”

The two smile at each other, though Ignis knows they don’t have their hearts in it. The atmosphere is too tense, too uncertain.

They pick at their respective dishes for a while, until Gladio evidently gets bored, and settles back with a gruff exhale. “Okay, you go first.”

Ignis folds his hands, and rests his forehead against his fingers. “I haven’t the faintest idea what to do with these children,” he sighs, mostly to himself. “This could either make them happy again, or plunge Noctis deeper into his depression. I’m nervous.”

“Yeah, same here,” Gladio agrees. “Really though, would you even want Prompto back in the picture anyway? Cause between you and me, I’m not too fond of the kid right now.”

“Come now, Gladio, it’s not as if this is Prompto’s fault.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Gladio mutters. “Look, all I’m sayin’ is that he could’ve reacted better. Especially towards his own boyfriend. I mean - you saw what it did to Noct. Kid’s a wreck.”

The reminder seems to humble the shield, because the stiffness in his shoulders relax somewhat. “Fine, fine,” he mumbles. “That little shit better be really sick.”

Ignis cracks a smile. “You’re so horrible.”

Gladio smiles back at him, wicked and playful, and suddenly the both of them are laughing, and the situation doesn’t seem quite so drastic anymore.

“Knock knock,” Ignis interrupts while he enters the room, eyebrows raising ever-so-slightly at the scene in front of him. “Oh. Glad to see you… awake, Prompto.”

Gladio trails in a step behind the advisor, sporting what Prompto can only define as a shit-eating grin. He lets out a wolf whistle, and Prompto’s face immediately turns red.

Noctis quickly untangles himself, and sits up in the bed. “Ignis! We, uh- we were just catching up-”
Gladio snorts, and Prompto feels his blush deepening. “Yeah, we can see that.”

Now Noctis is blushing, too. He ducks his chin and hurriedly climbs out of the bed, evidently going for a less scandalous position as he sinks into the nearby chair. “Okay, okay, you had your fun,” he pouts. “Welcome back, assholes.”

“Thanks,” Ignis smiles, then turns back to Prompto. “Honestly, I am glad to see you awake. How are you feeling?”

“Oh, uh…” Prompto’s eyes flit everywhere, feeling too awkward to maintain contact. “Alright, I guess. The tubes kinda hurt a little.”

“But okay, are you two good or what?” Gladio abruptly interjects, earning a glare from Ignis.


“Yeah, me too,” Prompto breathes, heart bursting with love.

Ignis coughs, ruining the moment. “Excellent. Has the doctor seen you yet?”

Prompto finally tears his eyes away from Noctis. “Uh, no. But they said he’s coming soon.”


Prompto lets out a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding. Explaining his own irresponsible actions was not something he’d been looking forward to. “Thanks, Iggy.”

Ignis smiles at that, and the anxiety that feels like a stone in Prompto’s chest eases even more. He’d missed being surrounded by these people - his lover, his friends - and feeling as if he belonged to something warm and familial.

The four sit around for a while, making idle conversation about light topics, and making light of heavy topics, like the mittens firmly strapped to Prompto’s wrists. In what feels like no time, a tall man is striding into the room, white coat flapping behind him with a flourish.

“Prompto Argentum?” the man reads off his clipboard. When Prompto nods, he continues, “Nice to meet you. I’m Dr. Avez, and I’m here to discuss your current condition and what I think is the best direction for you, moving forward.”

Prompto nods again, feeling intimidated by the doctor’s no-nonsense attitude. His professionalism is admirable, though - if the man even registers he’s in the presence of royalty, he does nothing to show it.

“Let’s review what happened yesterday evening,” Dr. Avez begins, eyes scanning the page in front of him. “You lost consciousness in a grocery store. Your symptoms included erratic heart palpitations, low blood sugar, and a lack of responsiveness.”

Prompto stares at his mitten-clad hands, trying not to feel like a child getting lectured.

“We managed to stabilize you, and expect a full recovery within the next few days,” the doctor continues. “Your blood work shows multiple vitamin deficiencies as well as an uncharacteristically low count of red blood cells. From this, I’ve diagnosed you with anemia, which can be extremely
dangerous if left untreated. We are actively replenishing these nutrients through IV and nasogastric tube.”

Prompto blinks at him, mind reeling.

He’s anemic? Logically, it makes sense, considering how much he’s been depriving his body. But emotionally, all Prompto feels is an irrational, deep-rooted sense of denial. He’d never expected to go far enough to develop an actual, physical disease from this.

How naive he’d been, to think extreme restriction wouldn’t come with tangible consequences.

“Now, judging by other factors…” the doctor says, voice trailing as he flips the page on the clipboard. “Such as your low weight, the lanugo on your body, and no disease history otherwise, I made the decision to employ the security mitts. Typically we use this for patients with dementia, who are more likely to pull out their tubes due to confusion. Based on your symptoms, however, I suspected an eating disorder, and felt the mitts necessary for obvious reasons pertaining to that. Tell me - have you ever been diagnosed with anorexia nervosa?”

It’s as if all the air gets sucked out of the room. Prompto gapes a little bit, so jarred is he by the blunt manner in which the doctor is discussing something so incredibly personal.

“U-uh, no?” he fumbles, trying to ignore the four sets of eyes boring into him. “Not officially?”

His cheeks are absolutely burning. He hates talking about this, and this entire setup maximizes how uncomfortable the topic is.

Dr. Avez looks up from the clipboard, and raises an eyebrow. “But unofficially?”


It doesn’t feel like the victory he’d always expected it to be. No - it feels like sin. Like a blight on his life, his friend’s lives, and the lives of anyone else who has to put up with him.

“Then upon your discharge I will be referring you to a psychiatrist. I highly recommend you go and get treatment. You don’t want to end up back here.” The doctor writes a few things on his clipboard, then nods to himself. “Alright. Any questions?”

Prompto stares at his mittens, all hope of having his hands free dashed considering his willful admission of an eating disorder. So, instead of asking, he just murmurs a tinny, “No.”

Dr. Avez gives him a sympathetic look, and Prompto is floored more by that than anything. “We’ll take care of you in there, but out there? The onus is on you. Hang in there, Prompto. Prioritize your health.”

Prompto suddenly feels his throat tightening up, and the all too familiar sensation of heat behind his eyes. “Th-thanks,” he gasps out. “I’ll try.”

The doctor nods at him, then at everyone else in the room, and makes a swift exit. Onto more important things, and more deserving people, Prompto thinks, bitter about his situation.

For an excruciating moment, everything is silent.

It isn’t until Prompto starts choking out sobs that the three jump up and surround him. Noctis runs a hand through his hair while Ignis murmurs comforting platitudes, Gladio grunting along in affirmation.
“I’m s-sorry,” Prompto whimpers. “I’m s-so pathetic.”

“Shh,” Ignis hushes. “You cannot blame yourself for having a mental illness.”

“Yeah,” Gladio agrees, exchanging an understanding look with Ignis. “This isn’t your fault, kid.”

Noctis wipes at Prompto’s cheeks for him, which the blond greatly appreciates in light of the fact that he can’t do it himself. “We’re here for you, Prommy.”

Prompto weeps harder at that, feeling incredibly undeserving of so much raw, unconditional support. It’s that exact realization - that people truly love, depend on, and care for him - that pushes him to make a decision.

“Guys,” he sniffs. “I don’t want to be like this anymore.”

Chapter End Notes

these are what the hospital mittens look like! you guys should also know that i modeled the Lucian healthcare system after the lovely (read: atrocious) American system, so if any of you are horrified by the insurance thing please encourage your American friends to go vote lmao. and if you’re already American... VOTE!!

anyway!! if you had a thought about this chapter, please let me hear it. i crave your feedback. ;-; and be my friend on Tumblr while you’re at it?

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!